



The Urhobo Traditional Consensus System of Government: A Conceptual Analysis

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ABSTRACT

The other model of government apart from the traditional ones which include the parliamentary and presidential is the consensus option as advocated by Kwasi Wiredu. The aim of this paper is to examine whether the model is applicable to the Urhobo system of government. The paper finds that the model applies both to the Urhobo traditional and modern systems of government. The paper concludes that the consensus principle which is understood to mean the common agreement on the need of the Urhobo people to move the Urhobo traditional society forward, that is, the overall commitment on the part of everyone to promote the common good or happiness of the whole community on all matters and actions that confront them, is an important feature of the cultural and democratic heritage of the Urhobo people.

INTRODUCTION

The publication of Kwasi Wiredu's celebrated article, "Democracy and censuses in African Traditional Politics: A plea for a Non-party Politics" opens window of research for scholars to look for the relevance of the doctrine of "consensus" as a model of governance in other cultures apart from the Akan society of Ghana. This paper therefore seeks to examine such relevance in the Urhobo traditional political system of government.

Brief History of the Origin of the Urhobo People

Urhobo was the name of an ancient hero who must have migrated from across the Benin River (Otite, 1982). Speaking on the same vein, Umukoro Ukere is of the view that the Urhobo people are those who currently speak the Urhobo language with slight variations in all the clans of the Urhobo kingdom. The account of the history of the origin of the Urhobo people is

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faced with difficulties due largely to the absence of documentary evidence. According to Onigu Otite (1982);

An historical account of the Urhobo has been hampered by the absence of archeological and palynologica work based on the exccaralish of those socio – political and socio – economic sites, recurrent in oral tradition.

Thus the main source of the account of the origin of the Urhobo people is oral tradition.

The historical accounts of the origin of the Urhobos are almost unanimous in broad outline: they only vary in their narrative details. According to Onigu Otite the Urhobo tradition can be broken down into four accounts or theories.

Oral traditions among some of the urhobos assert that the urhobos did not migrate from anywhere before settling in their present location. Otite embraces this traditional school of thought. According to him, “there is an oral tradition of the urhobos as indigenous people in their present territory” (Otite, 1982). This implies that the Urhobos are the original owners and dwellers of their present location or territory. On the people’s origin, Otite puts this in the right perspective when he said:

These autochthonous people were believed to be Urhobo with no known history of migration from anywhere else. They were the aborigines coming from no where but living in their territories from time immemorial (Otite, 1982).

Alfred Okotete also supports this position. According to him, “*Oghene ma iwlio Lu’rhoho vbi yasa La ye vba Lē ñonena. Aye naso fa rẹẹ*”, meaning “it was God who made and located the Urhobo people in the place they are today. They did not migrate from anywhere” (Otite, 1982). As pointed out earlier, this theory is basically sourced from oral traditional accounts of the people and is not backed up with archaeological or documentary evidence. Yet it is a tradition that is very familiar with the people. These “autochtons” were later joined by other migrants from contiguous and far areas. This theory of “autochthony” can be criticized. Why is it that the identities of the original dwellers were not preserved till today like those of the native Indians of America? Okotete believes that they could have been absorbed by the latter migrants and as a result, they lost their identity in the process. This sounds unconvincing as the identities of “aborigines” in some other countries with similar historical experiences are preserved till today as strong distinguishing features from other settlers.

Another account of origin of the Urhobo people has it that they migrated from Benin particularly during the Ogiso and Egbeka dynasty. According to Otite (1982) “the Urhobo people originated from a common territory of the Edo – speaking people”. As pointed out earlier, Umukoro Ukere believes that Urhobo people migrated from “across the Benin River”. It should be noted however, that it is not all the clans that are unanimous on this account of origin. For example, while Olomu, Agbon and Abraka clans claim to have migrated from Benin, others such as Ughelli and Ewu clans believe they have come from the Ijo – speaking people of Delta State (Otite, 1982).

Corroborating this view, Otite said that the Urhobos were not Bini people who turned to be Urhobo on reaching their territories. Instead, they assert that they were already Urhobo before they left Benin” (Otite, 1982). This belief that the Urhobos migrated from Benin is probably hinged on the observed linguistic, political, social and cultural similarities between the Binis and the Urhobos.

The third historical account of the traditional origin of the urhobos holds the view that the Urhobos migrated from Ile – Ife territory in the western part of Nigeria. This belief is based on the view that there is a large concentration of Urhobos in and around Ile – Ife today. As Otite puts it:

Spots pointed to by the Urhobo in Ile – Ife as being the places from where the Urhobo migrated a to a place regarded as centres of Urhobo concentrations within living memory. Admittedly, there are a large number of Urhobo in and around Ile – Ife...(Otite, 1982).

But a closer examination of their organization and social structure reveals that they look like people who migrated to Ile – Ife rather than as original settlers or autochthons (Otite, 1982).

And lastly, is the more tenuous tradition which holds that, “the earliest inhabitants of the Urhobo territory migrated from Sudan and Egypt like the Yoruba and Edo – speaking peoples” (Otite, 1982). According to A.O. Erhueh (1987) “the Urhobo for the first time came from Egypt, left some of their people on the shore of lake Chad, halted for a time at Ile – Ife, had a permanent abode at Benin and finally were driven to the swamp of the Niger – Delta. Arawore buttressing this position stated that the Urhobo traditions of origin from Sudan and Egypt were confirmed by travelers and respondents who observed similarities in the archeological findings and place names in Egypt and such parts of Urhoboland as Okpara and Uhwokori in Agbon. But could this not have been as a result of mere accident of history?

From the above analysis, it appears that the theory that the Urhobos migrated from Benin is more plausible than the others because of the linguistic and cultural similarities between the two ethnic groups. In spite of the differences in the various accounts of the Urhobo tradition of origin, there are characteristic features which account for the real existence and culture of the Urhobo people.

Wilson Ometan, identifies certain elements of cultures and traditions of the Urhobo people as follows:

The Urhobo are a special breed; we are, because we a tribe of various groups, we are, because we have a territory we call our own, we are, because we have a language of our own, we are, because we are industrious, we are, because we have our religion, we are, because we have a common ancestry, we are, because we have skills, we are, because the creator made us to be so (www.urhobo.world.org, 2009).

Thus, some of the characteristic features which distinguish the Urhobo people are their geographical location, their religion and peculiar mode of worship and their kinship and political system of government.

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The Geographical Location of the Urhobo people.

According to D. Rhianela (1968), “the Urhobo native is situated within Latitude 6⁰ and 5⁰, 15⁰ North and Longitudes 5⁰, 40⁰ and 6⁰ 25⁰ East, in the present Delta state of Nigeria. It occupies a large expanse of territory of about 1,417 square miles consisting of evergreen rain forests. According to O. Ikime and O. Awolowo, the Isokos are their neighbours to the South East, to the West are the Isekiris, to the North are the Binis, the Ijos are to the South and the Ukwanis are to the North East (Awolowo, 1968). It is a tribe of about 120 million people and it is the seventh largest in Nigeria (www.urhobo.world.org, 2009). It also consists of about twenty – two social units or kingdoms, who inhabit the hinterland of the lower reaches of the Niger – Delta (Ekili, 2005).

The Niger – Delta is always flooded especially a greater part of Urhobo land: This is vividly captured by Ikime (1977) when he stated that:

Situated in Niger – Delta as it is, a great part of Urhobo land is flooded during the raining season as are also Ewu, Ewvreni and Uwherun clans in the Urhobo speaking section. There are in fact no months in the year which are completely rainless. The Niger floods overflow into the Asse River in undating the Owhe and Bethel swamps. The Ewu River and the forcados River flowing through Sapele and part of Avwraka, also receive the effects of the Niger floods and water in the surrounding areas.

The Urhobos are mostly farmers and fishermen by occupation. This is dictated largely by their geographical location. Most of them, especially those from the flooded areas are fishermen, and arable farming happens only on the drier sections of Olomu and Agbon clans and this is more for subsistence living or local consumption than for commercial purposes (Ekili, 2005). Among the Uwherun, Ewu and other clans bordering on the riverine areas, fishing is the major seasonal occupation. In fact, “It will be found that the people of these clans are nearly as competent fishermen as are the Ijo and Isekiri (Ikime, 1977). There are other clans that engage in canoe – making, hunting of various kinds of animals and palm trees tapping which makes the Urhobos to be one of the greatest producers of palm oil and kernels in the Niger Delta as a whole. From the foregoing it could be seen that there is diversity of occupational pursuits among the people. This is “interesting as it indicates that mutual interdependence was a basic factor in the economic and social relations of the Urhobo clans” (Ikime, 1977).

Social relations among the Urhobos and their neighbours are cemented in their trade practices. According to Wilson Ometan (www.urhobo.world.org); The Urhobos, Ijos and Itsekiris have been trade neighbours who inter married and will continue to do so. These communities have been trading since their history began using the medium or currency of trade by barter and cowries and thereafter came the ages of Iron and copper. I grow up in the 20th century to see trade by barter still practiced in our markets with products exchanged as fish, palm fruits, wood – works, cola – nuts, tapioca, garri. There is the

ugly story of these communities also engaging in domestic human trade, the Ijos sold to the Urhobo and vice – versa, the Itsekiris sells to the Urhobos and vice – versa.

The Urhobo Concept of Morality

Foundations in the metaphysics of communalism are the intended philosophy here. Moral values or codes exist from one society to another for the regulation of social and political behaviours. Nwala (2004) identifies three levels of the development of morality: (a) the level of instinct, in which the conduct that appears right to the agent is the conduct determined by his fundamental needs and instincts; (b) the level of custom, in which the conduct that appears right to the agent is conduct in accordance with the customs of the group to which he belongs; (c) the level of conscience, in which the conduct that appears right to the agent is that approved by his own individual judgment of what is right and wrong. Nwala further observes that “the customary level is more predominant in traditional African societies. However, the level of conscience is also a part of the ethical system. This explains why the consciousness and actions of an average Urhobo man is centred on the customs and norms of the community, his political actions inclusive. Thus the Urhobo norms may be regarded as standards or rules for the regulation of the shared behaviour of the people.

It should be noted that the norms or moral codes vary from one Urhobo clan to another even though there are elements of commonality among them. As Chief Okobia puts it, “*Irhi ri sue ekuoto lu Urhobo ejobi aye dio vuo vwo, Omofene vevuraye*” (interview with Edward Okobia, 10th Oct., 2005). This means that the moral codes of the Urhobo people are not the same. There are slight variations. This implies that there are no commonly accepted moral codes which cut across.

The origin of the Urhobo morality is traceable to God (*oghene*). According to Erivwo (1991) “life coming from God flows in hierarchical order”. At the peak are the ancestors, who are followed by elders of the community, and these, including the father and mother of the family, the clan – head, and the chief or king (Erivwo, 1991). There is a strong belief in the divine and the supernatural. In fact all actions are linked to the two. This is what influenced Erivwo to say that in Urhoboland, who “despises the ancestors and elders, and rejects the community laws and statutes established by them, chooses death instead of life”. Thus, the Urhobo moral precepts are rooted in the divine and belief in the supernatural influences B. Idowu’s to say that for “any society (African society) to flourish, bring about positive changes, improves its conditions for conducive living or achieving its self – identity and freedom, the people must be submissive to the dictates of the supersensible power – God, divinities and the ancestors” (Idowu, 1969).

The Urhobo morality aims at the maintenance and sustenance of the level of ontological relationship between the people, the divine and the supernatural. Corroborating this statement, Anyanwu and Ruch says (1989):

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Breaking a taboo is seen as endangering the equilibrium of the group: the perfect harmony which ought to exist between the physical, social and religious dimensions of life and which constitutes the ontological locus of a man's conscience is overshadowed by the impact which his act will have on the existential harmony of the group.

Thus, any breach or distortion of the ontological order or balance is viewed seriously. Such an offender is visited with grave consequences. The punishment may even extend to the whole community. S. Enomah (1999) states:

Any grave violation of the moral order (i.e. ontological balance) has serious social consequences. Not only on the individual offender, but the whole community polluted by such a grave violation of the moral order.

In the life of the Urhobo man, care is taken not to breach this moral order. All actions are aimed towards its promotion. This is discernable in the political system of the Urhobos.

The Urhobo Socio – Political System

The Urhobo traditional socio – political system is a reflection of the moral and religious beliefs of the people. The end or goal of politics, to the Urhobos, is the promotion of the good life of the people. All political actions are geared towards the balancing of the moral or ontological order. According to Aristotle in his politics, every man is a political animal in the sense that man lives in groups or in communities with a view to providing security and good governance. The Urhobos are no exception to this clarion call.

Urhobo Political Institutions

According to Tal Cott (1958) an institution is a system of patterned expectations which defines the proper behaviour of person playing certain roles enforced both by the incumbent's own positive motives for conformity and by the sanctions of others. Similarly, Peter Blau (1964) defines institutions as formalized procedures that perpetuate organizing principle of social life from generation to generation.

One of the main issues derived from the above definitions is that institutions have a tendency towards normative behaviour or account of their "fairly permanent" character. For Nwanunobi (1992) this implies that they have the capacity to outlast the individuals "who at any given time comprise the role players within them. From the foregoing, political institutions refer to the system of patterned expectations while defining the behaviour of persons in any given society.

Politics is about the use and exercise of political power to attain certain goals, including the maintenance of the groups' integrity. Thus, government and politics are means rather than ends for controlling society. The traditional urhobo society has a well entrenched system of political institutions. The goal here is to show that the political and social institutions exist mainly to

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promote and reinforce the uniting bond of communalism in the society. They also represent the frame work, from which government of the urhobo traditional society is erected.

Gerontocracy

Gerontocracy can be defined as government mainly by elders. It is based on the age grade organization. Among the Urhobos, women and men are separately organized. Men are organized into four major age – grades: *Ekpako, Ivwraghwa, Otuorere and Imitete*.

The Ekpako Age Grade

The *Ekpako* (Elders) age grade is made up of men of about 60 years and above. They are saddled with the day to day administration of the Urhobo nation. They are the trustees and custodians of their history and culture.

The Ivwraghwa Age Grade

The age grade consists of men between thirty and sixty years, who form the largest work force, and are of the age required in pre – colonial societies as warrior and executors of orders which emanate from the elders’s council.

The Otuorere Age Grade

This age grade assists the older age grades in doing heavy jobs such as building of community, shrines, houses and wooden bridges.

The Imitele Age Grade

This group is made up of children of circumcision age. They are usually of the age ranging from 6 to 15 or 20 years. They assist the older age – grades in doing minor jobs and going on errands, such as cleaning of the towns, clearing of bushes, sweeping the streets and compound and acting as town criers. Apart from the men who are organized into four main groups, women are also organized but in three major grades, namely, *Ekwokweya, cals, Emetogbe* – women who are divorcees and widows who returned from their marital homes to settle in their home town or village. They are usually between 40 to 50 years of age. Some of them are very old and have passed menopause. They don’t have leaders with a fixed tenure; rather their leaders are elected on ad-hoc basis. Same for their *Otota* who is usually elected “during crises to present petitions and suggestion to the town or state council especially in ritual affairs (Otite, 1973).

The Eghweya Age Grade: The grade which is between 30 to 50 years old from within and outside the town or village. Like the *Ekwokweya* Age Grade, they elect their leaders and spokesmen on adhoc basis who perform certain

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duties on their behalf. Such duties include rites of propitiation and guarding against the destruction of economic crops by goats, cows and pigs.

The *Emete* Age Grade Group: This consists of unmarried young girls who are usually uncircumcised. They perform mainly domestic duties such as cooking and fetching of water from the rivers and lakes.

It is important to note here that the age grades may have specific names in some of the clans or towns. Also, the age delimitation varies and transition from one grade to another is a function of one's maturity. Gerontocracy has strong roots in *Orogun, Udu, Ephron – Oto and Ughwerun* clans probably because of their sizes and simple social and political interest.

Plutocracies

This is made up of plutocrats – the rich and wealthy in the society. Thus, it is the government of the rich, powerful and wealthy. Example of towns or clans where plutocracy is practiced is Agbaro and Olomo. The plutocrats attain their positions either by virtue of being the first among the order of title – holders or by the acquisition of enormous wealth, power and dignity unequalled by others. A good example is the *Owhorode* of Olomu clan.

0Political Kingdoms

This will be discussed under the rubric of age and probable link with Benin. In traditional Urhobo political system, there are kingdoms dating back to time immemorial. Among the various clans, it is not clear which one is the older. But records have it that the kingship institutions in Okpe, Ogo, Agbarha and Ughelli are very old, while others are of recent development. This can be found in Agbon, Uvwie, Abraka and Oghara clans and towns.

In addition to the above, some Urhobo clans such as that of Agbarha, Ewvreni, Ogo and Ughelli clan claim to have royal links to the Bini royal Lineage. This explains why they seek and perform pre – recognition rites in Benin during moments of succession to a new throne.

1Traditional Government of the Urhobos

The aforementioned social and political structures represent the framework from which the Government of the Urhobos is erected. Two main levels of Government can be identified namely the town (village) and kingdom (clan).

2The Village and Clan or Town Administration

The village is the basic and most effective political unit of government at the local level. When we consider the urhobo speaking people as a whole, in

what sense are they to be regarded as a unit? As shown earlier in this thesis the urhobo people occupies a common territory. They also speak a common language though with many dialectical variations. The Okpe and Effurun dialects are some examples of these variations. With a few exceptions, the variations appear to be mutually intelligible without undue difficulty at least to those who are accustomed to travelling. The existence of common language which makes for effective communication is potentially a strong unifying factor in the process of reaching consensus on a proposed course of action or in decision making in the traditional society (Greene, 1964). Language also brings about sense of oneness or identity among the people. As a result, the people see themselves as one people belonging to a particular village or clan and recognize other neighboring villagers as people with whom they trade and marry.

In addition to the linguistic bond between members of the group there is in the economic sphere another bond which holds members of the village together. There is the possession of a central market which is usually held in every four days or in every three days in rare cases. Among the people, trade is second only to agriculture as a means of livelihood and is one of their ruling passions. For the people, markets are important event of the week and arrangements largely revolve around them. All the villages have paths leading to the central market place, and once a year on the same day the villages clear their paths.

This simultaneous acts performed at the season of the annual festivals, is felt to be a symbol of unity among the people. They talk about it and insisted every member of the group must participate. The market is the affair of the whole village and a source not only for economic gains, but for pride, prestige and a matter for much earnest thought. The markets are one of the main features of the lives of the urhobo people. They provide a meeting point for the dissemination of news. They are social events where the spice of gossip, the recreation of dances and the zest of a bargain relieve the almost continuous toil of hoeing, planting, weeding and harvesting throughout the year (Greene, 1964). In fact, trading is regarded as the breath of life, particularly to the women folks, and the vigour with which bargaining and haggling are conducted is evidence of the prestige which is attached to a successful commercial enterprise.

Another important feature of the village administration is the bond of communal feeling among the people. Most social and political activities are done by communal efforts. For example, in agriculture, the household (man, his wives and children) form the basic unit which co-operates for the production of food crops namely yam, cassava, coco-yam, banana and vegetables. The *oshare* (man or husband) clears the bush at the beginning of the farming season and do the hoeing. But he may often call on some members of his kinsmen to help him for a day or two and will give them food in return. Each member of the band will then be helped in return and will provide food for the rest also. For the purpose of carrying out communal activities, men and boys are divided into age groups or grades. All the boys

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who have done the initiation rites at the same time are grouped into the same age grade. For example, the communal clearing of village bush paths and carrying of corpses to burial sites are done by this age grade (Greene, 1964). There are occasions when the voices of this age grade are heard in the running of village affairs. However, the age-grades are largely social and convivial in their activities and concerned mainly with the interest of the community. As for their convivial side, for example, a man who co-habits with a woman for a considerable long period of time without marrying her could be laughed at by members of his age-grade. It is this discerning bond of common interest, brotherhood and love for one another rather than any specific activity that the significance of the age-grade would appear to be situated.

The urhobo people are divided into small more or less independent social units, the largest being in many cases, the village-groups or clan. This is a collection of villages bound together by certain ties which include that of kinship. But each one, at any rate, largely manages its own affairs. According to Winick Charles as noted by Onyeka Nwanunobi (1992) kinship is the social recognition and expression of genealogical relationships; both consanguineal and affinal which may include socially recognized relationships based on supposed as well as actual genealogical ties. Also, for Robin Fox as quoted by Nwanunobi (1992) kinship is defined as the relationship between “kins”, that is, persons related by real, putative or fictive consanguinity.” The bond of communality, love, common interest, solidarity patriotism and kinship which characterize the traditional urhobo society are replicated in the village and town administrations.

The village administration is managed by a council of elders headed by the *Okalorho* (the oldest of the elders). The venue of such meetings is the *Ogwa* (hut or building) built for such purpose. The council usually meets on market days to handle legislative and judicial matters brought before it by the people. However, the bulk of the village administration consists mainly of judicial matters. The council’s duty lies in the maintenance of social equilibrium. Through adjudication and restitution of materials misappropriated or stolen, reconciliation of individuals and group of people, and the reconstruction of the society is infected (Andah, 1993).

In other words, the council in “making or administering laws, is mainly concerned with social control and the maintenance of social order. (*Some Nigerian People*, 1993) The actions, activities and decisions of the council are carried out with a view to reaching a consensus. In order to find solutions to matters brought before it, the question often ask, is, does the actions, activities and decisions capable of promoting the common good of the community?. This is true of Aristotle’s statement that all human actions are performed in order to attain some end (Omeregbe 1991).

In trying to reach a decision on an issue, such a matter is discussed at length. Members are allowed to freely and rationally express themselves. The experiences about the history of the people are exchanged and the interests of the living and the dead are taken into consideration. This may result in

prolonged and painstaking deliberations but at the end, agreement is reached by consensus. Consensus here means agreement on a particular discourse or issue for the sake of the well-being of the whole community, while keeping one's opinions. It does not include giving up or changing one's opinions about issues or matters. It does not mean unanimity of opinions where complete agreement is possible. Agreement is also about the reconciliation of divergent interests by the people for the sake of the "happiness" of the community. Reconciliation of opposing interests is possible if the people share a common interest as part of their heritage.

Such a consensus is possible because the interest in the harmony, solidarity and belief in common interests by the people gives room for everybody to formulate his or her interest and to look for solutions which might, at the end of the day, be capable of promoting the over all interest and "happiness" of the community. Example of such common interest is the survival of the community. It should be noted that the village council has priority over any individual and extreme individualism is not encouraged by town customs and traditions (Andah, 1993). According to Claude Ake (1996) "the emphasis is on the collectivity rather than the individual, on co-operation rather than competition and concrete rather than the abstract universal." According to T.T Erumevba (1990) the characteristic feature of this concept of brotherhood is that in seeking after what is considered desirable for the collective there is no concern for the liberties or pleasures of individuals. In fact individual "brothers" are naturally expected to subordinate their own individual interests to the over all interest of the community.

Thus the household and the village administrations embrace the principle of consensus in the running of the affairs of the state. The concept as discussed here, offers a practical basis for peaceful resolution of different opinions based mainly on the twin pillars of communication and reconciliation.

The kingdoms are made up of clans which are composed of villages or towns. This means that each kingdom is made up of various towns. Each kingdom is ruled by a central council (made up of chiefs) with different titles and presided over by the *Ovie* who is the King. He is the symbol of the central administration and his predecessors and rules in council unless he commits some unpardonable atrocity as regarding his culturally defined roles (Andah, 1993). The *Ovie* is not a *leviathan*. He is expected to enjoy the respect of his subjects as long as he respects the culture of the people he rules. He is expected to rule for life and his inauguration is usually marked with pomp and pageantry throughout the kingdom. He is being assisted by his palace chiefs such as the *Otota* the *Ohovwoven* and *Okakuro*.

The *Otota* is the official spokesman of the kingdom and is "chosen as a result of his wisdom, logical reasoning, influence and prestige" (Andah, 1993). His main function is to speak and present official matters for and on behalf of the entire kingdom. The next chiefs are the *Ohovworen* and *Okakuro*.

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The *Ohovworen* and *Okakuro* titles are usually reserved for the males in some kingdoms. They are the *Ovie's* counselors who can affect opinion, correct, sanction and change some people's behaviour by symbolically putting their staff of office in some designated places.

The *Oloroguns* govern the kingdom with the *Ovie*. It should be noted that the various arms of government namely the judicial, executive, the political and administration, are fused because they are performed by the *Ovie* in council. Before decisions are taken by the council, wide consultations are made at various levels which include pressure groups. These are occasions where mass meeting of the people are called before major decisions are taken. This means that the traditional government is open with mass participation where "spectators who care to listen, watch and react with open comments or even shouts of approval or disapproval of speeches and decisions (Andah, 1993). Bassey W. Anda captures this again when he said that traditional Urhobo Government:

Entails open participation, sometimes with committee work involving, the king, the spokeman, the chiefs, the elders and the age – grade leaders and their organization (Andah, 1993).

Thus, decisions which emanate from civil and criminal matters are not those of the *Ovie* and his council alone, but partly the contributions of everybody in one way or the other in the kingdom. This ensures that there is no miscarriage of justice, executive and judicial rascality. Therefore, to ensure that there is good government in the Kingdom.

The plutocratic characteristics and values inherent in the kinship and chieftaincy institutions must combine and interact with government procedures and processes enjoined by gerontocracy in appropriate spheres and at different points in the social structure (Oтите, 1973).

In conclusion, it is important to point out that under the Urhobo traditional political system as adumbrated above is democratic since everybody is given equal opportunity to express or canvass his or her own views about the town and kingdom. Another issue of importance revolves around the consent theory of governments as prescribed by John Locke.

The *Ovie* and his council are not leviathans as pointed out earlier. They are expected to seek the consent of the people before major decisions that affect their lives are taken. Thus the principle of government among the Urhobos has a Lockean tinge. The government at both levels operates effectively for the common good of the people. However, this system of Government can be criticized. This will form the main focus of the concluding chapter.

Functions of the Government

In this section we shall examine the functions expected to be carried out by the kingdom in general. We shall rely on the model of analysis by Jacobsen and Lipman. According to this model, the functions of a state can be divided

into three major categories namely, essentially, service and business functions (Andah, 1993).

(i) Essential Functions

Like in the Plato's *Republic*, there are people in the state saddled with the responsibility for the protection of the state against internal and external aggression. This function includes defence, law and order, collection of taxes and record keeping.

The Urhobo traditional system of Government as it were, was based on the *Ovie* (ship). He and his chiefs make laws for the kingdom and are expected to be obeyed by the subjects. Under the system, there is no separation of powers as in the presidential system of government. Legislative, executive and judicial powers are fused together and performed by the same organ of government, as practiced under parliamentary system. This shows that legislative powers reside with the *Ovie*.

In the days of inter tribal wars, the defence of the kingdom is the responsibility of the whole kingdom. Although there are small bodies of *Arualans* (giants) constituted by the *Ovie* – in – council for the protection of the kingdom in times of external aggression, the direct responsibility for the defence of the kingdom lies with the state (Andah, 1993). The *Ovie* is assisted in the day to day administration of the kingdom by the *Ekpako* and the *Invwraghwa* age grade as pointed out earlier.

(ii) Service Functions

This includes activities aimed at the promotion and attainment of the common good for the people. This also includes general functions such as building of roads, general sanitation, care for the needy and poor and provision of educational facilities.

This duty is carried out by the *Imitete* age grade assisted by other age grades. They clear bushes, sweep the streets and compounds, act as town criers, deliver messages for the *Ovie* and his chiefs, build bridges and canoes and perform burial rites on behalf of the Kingdom. They also help to perform religious duties on behalf of the kingdom. Religious calendars are well observed from year to year. Such a calendar of religious and social events range from ancestral worship to the worships of deities and the gods (Andah, 1993). The moral equilibrium, peace and the promotion of the common good is achieved and maintained through propitiations and performance of rituals by the *Ovie* or *Oka – orho*, to the gods. For example, the *Echuo'oko* festival at Eku is held annually between September and October of every year on a date decided by the *Oka – orho* and his chiefs with close consultations with the gods and other deities. Here various forms of rituals are performed to appease the gods for peace and the general welfare of the citizens' writ – large. But the attitude of the *Ovieship* to the plight of the poor and the handicapped can be criticized. The welfares of these category of persons

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were regarded as their own problems rather than that of the town or kingdom. Besides, the average problem of the individual is that of the extended family before it will ever becomes that of the kingdom. From the foregoing, it is clear that some of the service functions are neglected by the town or kingdom since they are taken as individual responsibilities. It should be noted that the service functions that are carried out by the *Imitete* age grade are usually done without compensation.

(iii) Business Functions

There are certain functions that the state would not be able to carry out on profit basis. These are then left to private organizations and individuals to carry out with a view to making profits.

In the town or kingdom, the welfare of the people is promoted through Agriculture and commerce. It is in the area of commerce that the *ovieship* contributions are most felt. In those days, there were frequent and intra tribal wars. The *Ovie* or *Oka – orho* usually send escorts to guard traders to and from long markets areas. This was the era of trade by barter. Urhobo traders “barter” their wares for salt and other times. Some of them even travel as far as koko (Andah, 1993).

The question one may ask here is: is the *ovieship* duty bound to perform these duties? The answer to the question is that he is not under obligation to perform these duties but he is expected to carry them out for the promotion of the general welfare of the people. This is a cardinal principle of his government. Besides, he seems to be under no obligation whatsoever because he is not accountable to his subjects.

CONCLUSION

We have examined the consensus option of governance as it relates to the Urhobo traditional system of government. We have also showed that the model applies to both the Urhobo traditional and modern system of government. We therefore conclude that the principle of consensus which is generally understood to mean the overall commitment on the part of everyone to promote the common good and happiness on any issue or action that confront the Urhobo people irrespective of differences which many exist among them is an important feature of the Urhobo’s democratic practice and heritage.

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