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**A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF AUTHORITY
IN THOMAS HOBBS AND IGALA
POLITICAL THOUGHT**

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**DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY
UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA, NSUKKA**

TITLE PAGE

**A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF AUTHORITY IN THOMAS
HOBBS AND IGALA POLITICAL THOUGHT**

**A DISSERTATION PRESENTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF
PHILOSOPHY, UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA, NSUKKA, IN
PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE AWARD OF MASTER OF ARTS
(M.A) DEGREE IN PHILOSOPHY**

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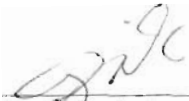


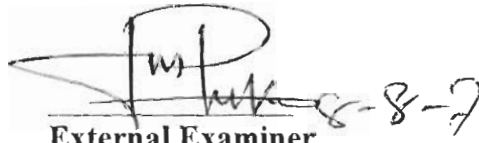
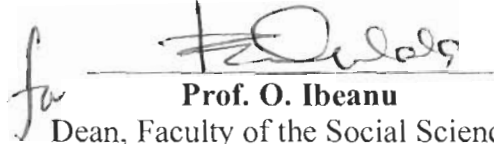
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AUGUST, 2007

APPROVAL

This dissertation has been approved for the Department of Philosophy, University of Nigeria, Nsukka for the award of Master of Arts (M.A) Degree in Philosophy.

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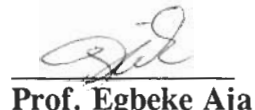
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CERTIFICATION

Ocheje, David Unekwu, a Master of Arts student in the Department of Philosophy, Faculty of the Social Sciences, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, with Registration Number: PG/MA/03/34581, has satisfactorily completed the requirements, (course work and dissertation) for the award of Master of Arts (M.A) degree in Philosophy.

The work in this dissertation is original and has not been submitted in part or in full for any other degree of this or any other University.


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DEDICATION

To the memory of Anthony, Sabina and James Ocheje with love.

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ABSTRACT

The concept “authority” raises basic questions, namely: who should exercise the authority of the State? Under what conditions should authority be exercised and within what limits? Thomas Hobbes holds that, in all government the sovereign authority must be absolute, unlimited and irrevocable, to be able to maintain peace and security in the State. His choice of an absolute sovereign authority strictly follows from his notion of human nature, his theory of the state of nature and the social contract. Whereas in traditional Igala political thought “*Onu n’oja k’oja n’onu*” – which translates to “the sovereign authority owns the subjects as the subjects own the sovereign authority”. Hence, although the authority of the sovereign (e.g. *Ata Igala*) holds a unique position in the community, he is in no way divorced from his people neither is his authority absolute. All decisions are by consensus.

This study compares authority in Thomas Hobbes’s political philosophy with authority in the traditional Igala political thought, with a view to investigating the similarities and dissimilarities between them and therefore deduces lessons for contemporary Nigeria. The work argues that the authority of the State need not be absolute to be able to provide peace and security as advocated by Hobbes in his political theory. The study also establishes that authority at all level in traditional Igalà society is not absolute, but constitutional and limited. And that Igala kingdom enjoys peace and harmony because their system of government is grounded on their theory of reality.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

Hobbes's political philosophy takes as its starting point a pessimistic view of man's nature. For Hobbes, the basic motivation of mankind is "a perpetual and restless desire of power after power, that ceaseth only in death."¹ Given the universality of this desire for power, life in the state of nature, before the imposition of civil laws backed by sovereign force, must be a perpetual struggle for possessions, supremacy and glory.

Thus, the outcome of man's productive effort is always uncertain, and life is "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short."² To avoid this intolerable situation conjectured Hobbes, men following the dictates of natural law, seeking peace, renounced some of their rights or freedoms to a single sovereign authority, by entering into a social contract or covenant thereby creating an artificial man, that great *Leviathan*, called a commonwealth or State.

Hobbes's account does not point to any single form of government. But he does insist, however, that whatever form the sovereign body takes, its authority must be absolute, unlimited and irrevocable. Hobbes's theory of absolute sovereignty was presented to us as a fiat, meant to be a general theory for all human society, but in Igala political thought, "*Onu n'oja k'oja n'onu*" – which means "the sovereign authority owns the subjects as the subjects own the sovereign

authority". Hence, power and authority belong to all. But by virtue of seniority and ontological status, knowledge, moral and spiritual qualities, some individuals namely, the *Ata Igala*, the *Onus* (chiefs) and elders exercise greater power, authority and influence than any other individual of the Igala political community. The authority of these individuals, like the *Ata Igala*, is not absolute, arbitrary or unrestricted, but constitutional and limited. The *Ata Igala* has to consult with his council before decisions are taken which must also be in line with the customs and traditions of the land.

The influence exercised by *Ata Igala* (and other Igala chiefs) over the people is one supported by the rules and norms underlined in solid order that is ontological and customary. A type of authority in consonance with what Max Weber defined as "the authority of the external yesterday, unimaginable ancient recognition and habitual orientation to conform."³ This is because he is at the head of a traditional system, whose legitimacy rests on an established belief in the sanctity of "immemorial traditions and on the need to obey leaders who exercise their authority according to traditions."⁴

Statement of the Problem(s)

Thomas Hobbes holds that, in all government the power of the sovereign authority must be absolute, unlimited and irrevocable, to be able to maintain peace and security in the State. But there is peace and security in the traditional Igala society. Are these as a result of the presence of an absolute authority?

The Igala community had also been called 'kingdom'- that is a community or political unit that is ruled by a king or monarch. Is Igala monarchy the same as Hobbes's? How is power and authority exercised in this monarchial community?

The Purpose of the Study

This research makes a critical study of the concept "authority" in Hobbes's political philosophy and Igala political thought. The research also studies the theoretical and practical implications of authority within the context of social and political philosophy.

This study makes a comparative study of authority in Hobbes and Igala political thought, to investigate the similarities and dissimilarities between them and therefore deduces lessons for contemporary Nigeria.

The Significance of the Study

In spite of Hobbes's belief that his political doctrines would resolve conflicts, his work aroused immediate opposition and has given rise to unending controversy. In this work a critical contrast would be made between Hobbes' and Igala political thought on the concept of authority to enable us gain a more profound understanding of Hobbesian conception of authority in his political philosophy. The study also enables us and more particularly the Igala people gain a firm grasp of some basic political ideas and beliefs among the traditional Igala people.

The study of authority in the traditional political system of Igala people is a contribution to an attempt to show the true nature of traditional Nigerian political systems.

The Scope of the Study

This research is concerned with the philosophical exposition of the meaning, nature, and problems of authority with special reference to Hobbes's political philosophy and Igala political thought. This work also compares authority in Hobbes political philosophy and Igala political thought in order to ascertain the extent to which the sovereign can exercise State authority in the two political systems.

The scope of this study is limited to an analysis of the nature, source and exercise of authority in the Igala traditional political system and Hobbes political philosophy.

Research Methodology

First, our approach in this research is analytical. We examine the main concepts, doctrines, and issues involved in this study so as to clarify our understanding and put the study in the right perspective. The research also adopts a historical approach. This enables us to understand the vital underlying social and political forces, which influenced Hobbes's and Igala conception of authority. We also adopted a comparative analysis. This enables us compare authority in Hobbes's political philosophy with Igala political thought.

This is basically a documentary research in which *Ata* is sourced from books, journals, periodicals and biographies. These sources are supplemented with interviews granted to traditional chiefs, priests and elderly men and women of Igala in order to get at the authentic conception of authority in the Igala political thought.

Clarification of Concepts

It is important to be clear about the key concepts used in this work. Hence, the following concepts would be defined and explained for the sake of clarification.

Democracy: A form of government in which every member of the community participates in decision-making as a right and can contest for any office in the State. When a member participates through representatives, the system is designated representation or indirect democracy.

Ata Igala: The *Ata Igala* is the traditional paramount king of the Igala kingdom. 'Ata' as the name implies, is the father and custodian of the Igala people's culture.

Idah: Is the cultural center or headquarter of the Igala kingdom. This is where *Ata* resides and from where he cares for the entire kingdom.

Ojo k'dojale: Is God in heaven for the Igala people, the supreme deity or God.

Okwute: Is the staff of ancestral cult symbol. It is a symbol of authority.

Ata Ayegba Om'Idoko: It is strongly believed that *Ayegba Om'Idoko* was the one that actually won "political" independence for the Igala kingdom. He is said to have fought and defeated the *Jukun* in the war, which ensued in the late seventeenth century. He could therefore be rightly referred to as the first sovereign *Ata Igala*. The contemporary ruling lineages began their family tree from *Ayegba Oma-Idoko* the founder of *Ayegba* dynasty.

Notes

- ¹. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Edited with an Introduction by C. B. Macpherson, (Great Britain: Bpcc Hazell Books, 1985), p. 185.
- ². Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 186
- ³. Mill Curtis, *The Great Political Theories*, Vol. 2, (New York: Avon Books, 1961), p. 427.
- ⁴. John Plamenatz, *Man and Society, Political and Social Theories from Machiavelli to Marx*, (London: Longman, 1992), p. 175.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept “authority” has raised perennial questions among political philosophers. The basic questions which the concept raises are; Who should exercise the authority of the State? Under what conditions should authority be exercised and within what limits?

Plato (428 – 347 BC) in his work, *The Republic*, believes in the ideal State in which supreme authority resides in the wisdom and virtue of the philosopher-king. He therefore formulated a conception of political leadership in which authority and knowledge are appropriately combined. Plato had concluded that as in the case of a ship where the pilot’s authority rest upon his knowledge of navigation, so also the ship of the State should be piloted by one who has adequate knowledge of the State. For Plato, competence should be the qualification for authority. The ruler of the State should be the one who has the peculiar abilities to fulfill the functions of a leader.

The ruler, according to Plato, should be one who has been fully educated. One who understands the difference between the visible world and the intelligible world, between the realm of opinion and the realm of knowledge, between appearance and reality. He has to be one he called the “philosopher-king”. The philosopher-king is one whose education has led him up step by step through the

ascending degrees of knowledge of the divided line until at last he has known of the Good. In other words, the philosopher-king is not occupied by mundane values, instead he pursues such lofty values as honour and integrity, having subdued his passion and desire or drive for material goods through discipline and education.

Plato recommended a philosopher-king because he believed that “correct philosophy affords a vantage point from which we can discern in all cases what is just for communities and for individuals”.¹ Hence, he asserted that the human race will not be free of evils until either the stock of those who rightly follow philosophy acquire political authority, or the class who have authority in the cities be led by some dispensation of providence to become real philosophers. Thus, he says that “until philosophers are king or kings and princesses of the world have the spirit and power of philosophy... cities will never have rest from evil.”²

Rulership of the State, for him, should be in the hands of those with the special talent and training for it. But in his other work, *The Law*, Plato talks about the second best State. Here he shares Aristotle’s view that supreme authority of the State resides in the law or constitution and not in any person whatsoever.

Aristotle’s (384 – 322 BC) contribution in his work, *Politics*, to the question of who should have the authority of the State is contemporarily relevant. He viewed the State as the agency for enabling men to achieve their ultimate goals as human beings. For him, the highest good for man is perfect development and activity of all the powers that are in him through the association of his fellow within the State.

Whether a State produces the good life depends upon how its rulers behave: the good authority governs for the common good of all the people, to produce good life for all its citizens. Aristotle opined that supreme authority of a State resides in the law or constitution, and not in any particular person whatsoever, as advocated by Plato in *The Republic*. He believes that both the ruler of the State and individuals in the State are subject to the same law and morality. Hence, rulers should govern the State in accordance with the law. He vested the sovereignty in the law.

Thomas Aquinas (1225 - 1274) in his book, *Summa Theologica*, holds that the State rules the behaviour of its citizens through the agency of the laws but the State is itself limited by the requirements of just laws. The State is the source of human law and each government is faced with the task of fashioning specific statutes to regulate the behaviours of its citizens under the particular circumstances of its own time and place. Lawmaking, however must not be an arbitrary act but must be done under the influence of the natural law, which according to Aquinas is man's participation in God's eternal law.

For Aquinas, any positive human law that violates the natural law loses its character as law, it is a "perversion of law" and it therefore loses its binding force in the consciences of men. The lawmaker has his authority to legislate from God, the source of all authority, and to God he is responsible. If the sovereign decrees an unjust law by violating God's divine law, such a law, says Aquinas, must not be observed.

