



## A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ANYIAM OSIGWE'S GROUP MIND AND THE NOTION OF GENERAL WILL IN J. J ROUSSEAU'S SOCIAL CONTRACT

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### ABSTRACT

*Emerging trends in socio-political discourses in recent times have dwelt largely on the comparative study of parallel frameworks and political theories in the works of Western and African scholars with the aim of identifying seemingly familiar grounds that can be adopted in forging a common ground. The central idea is to attempt a canonization of theories that are considerably compatible in resolving common political problems across the divide. This paper therefore, attempts a comparative study of Anyiam Osigwe's idea of the 'group mind' and J.J Rousseau's notion of the 'general will' as identical frameworks with different orientations. The paper concludes that there are familiar grounds in the operation of both theories and consequently submits that they are practical tools that can be employed universally in the search for socio-political development.*

**Keywords:** Group mind, General will, Socio-political development, Politics , State.

### INTRODUCTION

The conception of the Group mind as put forward by Anyiam Osigwe is an off-shoot of the metaphysical discourse on the human mind, advocating that the mind is the centre of all

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activity from which all bodily actions evolve and are coordinated. The mind benefits from and depends upon the individual activities of the sub-organs, the totality of which defines the human beings'<sup>1</sup>. For him this represents a kind of communistic living which incorporates and recognizes the individuals whose minds are the components of a larger mind, but sees the group mind as representing and championing the course of the collective.

This paper attempts a holistic examination of the concept of the group mind as an ingenious tool of national development on one hand, it also attempts to see if there exists any similarity between this notion as put forward by Emmanuel Onyechere Osigwe Anyiam Osigwe and the concept of general will in Jean-Jacque Rousseau's Social contract on the other hand with the ultimate end of proposing a meeting point. Where the two concepts can be said to converge.

## **THE NOTION OF A GROUP MIND**

To understand the notion of the group mind as put forward by Chief Emmanuel Onyechere Osigwe Anyiam- Osigwe we must trace its formulation to the roots from where it was developed. The concept of group mind was borrowed from the Igbo metaphysics from where most of his ideology emanated. For instance, the group mind can be likened to what has been severally described as the "kwenu-kwenu" spirit. The particular attribute or trait had hitherto been identified as part of the daily existence of the Igbos, depicting their communitarian outlook to life.

By kwenu-kwenu the Igbos meant to advocate a kind of we feeling characterized by a communitarian outlook which places emphasis on the fact that human endeavours can only be fruitful or successful when it is borne out of a joint effort where all and sundry pool their resources together, both material and intellectual, in the pursuit of a single goal and purpose from which all will benefit. This Igbo ideology can be likened to concepts such as 'Aro' in the Yoruba setting where the emphasis is on the need for a kind of joint effort in the improvement and development of the society and the people therein. The Aro system thrives on supposition that members of the same society share a common bond which should ordinarily encourage them to help one another when the need arises., these systems worked essentially because of the feelings of brotherhood from which it emanated.

We can go on to define the Group Mind as "an expansive resource, a wellspring of ideas and thought process created when a group of people collate ideas, knowledge, inspiration and any other positive contribution in search of national development".

The group mind concept of Anyiam Osigwe exemplifies an organic conception of a state in which each and every individual is conceived and seen as parts of a thriving body. For Osigwe the force generated by a common focus is more powerful than the total sum of individual minds in a society. This position as held by him typifies a communitarian conception of the state thereby placing a higher premium on the importance of communal existence as against the individualistic colouration of the capitalist view.

This view is further elucidated thus:

Anyiam-Osigwe's group Mind Principle gives fundamental expression to the oneness of all humanity and the brotherhood of all men, which is the aphorism of all religions. In spite of the all-pervading social miasma bordering on the caste sectarianism, religious fractionalization, fanaticism,.....we are all one. The Group mind principle re-awakens human consciousness to the necessary and inherent benefits that will accrue if all humanity will exist with the sense of a family...and enhance the sum total of output from the sweat of the brow by the collectiveness of attributes and potentialities.<sup>2</sup>

His postulation of the Group Mind can be effectively identified as the basis for his holistic approach to development. 'When carefully analyzed, it is not an attempt to seek transcendental foundation for development, but a bold effort to promote the realization that no development process is sustainable that is not anchored in certain core human values'<sup>3</sup>, of which cooperation and collective mental concentration are core ingredients. The group mind engenders feelings of confidence, empowerment, inclusion and love for the expression of innovative ideas<sup>4</sup> in the quest for sustainable development which would help enhance the well being of the people in particular and the state in general.

The potency of the Group Mind resides in the fact that every human congregation presupposes the fact that that man is condemned to live in a society as supported by Aristotle's

conception of man as essentially a social being, he must therefore forge a systemic and harmonious relationship with his fellow beings, first in his immediate surroundings and consequently in his remote environment. Anyiam-Osigwe concludes that ‘anytime two or more creatures come together for a shared purpose, the Group Mind is in process. It is a psychic structure that embodies the totality of the common thoughts, attitudes, worldviews and banks of ideation of members of a given group<sup>5</sup>. For him the Group Mind appears to be a “given” feature of all human existence, given in the sense that it is a pre-condition for all human societies especially in their drive for development.

A major point that should not be left unconsidered however, is the fact that the Group Mind can be somewhat manipulated. The psychic alignment of minds can sometimes be perverted to serve the selfish interest of an individual or a tiny collection of individuals in this large group. This position is apparent in the political permutations in operation in the present day Africa. The crises in the African state is as a result of the willful manipulation of the citizens by the ruling class. The political class, through lofty ideals and programmes, cajole the populace into forming a synergy that propels them to power but eventually renege on the promises they had hitherto made once they have got to their set goal.

The group mind can be conceptualized as an ideal, but its practicability, especially in this contemporary time, epitomizes a gap between theory and praxis. Happenings in the present day society gravitates more towards the encouragement of individualism which leaves proponents of such positions as the group mind, in a tight position as to the practicability of their positions, this however is not to say that they are totally inept, rather we should fashion out ways by which we can make such theories fit into whatever form the society decides to take on in the course of time. This problem would lead us into the examination of Jean-Jacque Rousseau’s General Will.

## **J.J ROUSSEAU’S GENERAL WILL**

General Will popularized by the 18th-century French political philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau. In his book *The Social Contract* (1762), Rousseau defines the *general will* (*volonté générale*) as the civic impulses of citizens seeking to pursue the common good within their community<sup>6</sup>. He contrasts the general will with the *particular will* of individuals seeking only their personal good in accordance with the Group Mind thesis of Anyiam Osigwe. The notion of

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the general Will plays a significant role in his social contract where the people residing in a particular environment come together to create a formidable society and also put in office a ruler who represents their collective interests. He argues that the general will of the people, not the individual will of a king or the particular wills of nobility or clergy, should produce the laws that govern that community. The concept of the General Will exerted enormous influence during the French Revolution (1789-1799), which led to the overthrow of the French monarchy and aristocracy.

In *The Social Contract*, Rousseau states that individuals in a democracy possess two wills, two contrary inclinations as to how to act politically, socially, and morally. The particular will of individuals represents their selfish impulses, the urge to satisfy personal interests and desires with little regard for the community to which they belong. But according to Rousseau, individuals also possess a general will. They possess a public identity as citizens, a civic capacity to associate their own interests with those of their community. For example, some citizens of a country sometimes default in tax payment. However, they want the government to provide services that benefit everyone, such as schools and police protection. The tension between these two impulses demonstrates the conflict between the particular and the general will of individuals, but in most cases the individual will appears to take prominence over and above the General will, this is easily explained from the perspective of social deviants.

Rousseau envisioned a direct democracy where citizens would meet in public assemblies and pass laws reflecting the interests and goals of the community. In this sense, the function of government for Rousseau was not simply to protect the private rights of individuals, as it was for liberal political theorists, such as John Locke and Thomas Jefferson. Rousseau's democratic theory emphasized the obligation of citizens to create a moral community where the general good triumphs over the particular will and personal interests. He identified the general will with a public conception of freedom, in which participation in the common life of a community liberates citizens from the chains of a narrow, selfish individualism<sup>7</sup>.

In democratic nations, efforts to extend and to improve the quality of civic participation in public life depicts a vivid representation of the general will. Rousseau's ideas have also influenced contemporary political philosophers. 'For example, American political scientist Michael Sandel calls on society to acknowledge how communities sustain people and help shape them as individuals through the utilization of the general will. He denies that democracy

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concerns merely the particular interests and personal rights of individuals. Instead, he links democracy with individual action that embodies the higher aims of the community, with each man contributing to the pool of resources through which the feelings of the whole society is represented. A twist which occurs in the notion of the general will as against the Group mind is the advocacy of coercion as a means of making the general will work. This is seen in Maximilien Robespierre's translation of the concept 'that the freedom of citizens required obedience to the general will'<sup>8</sup> such that failure to be in alliance with it evokes sanctions. In this light it is correct to argue in line with Dr Chris Agulanna, that the general will of Rousseau presupposes a the fact that the individual is compelled as against the Group Mind as put forward by Anyiam –Osigwe

Maximilien Robespierre interpretation of Rousseau's notion of the general will illustrates the controversial history of the idea. In the last 200 years, political leaders have enlisted the ideal of the general will to serve liberating and humane ends as well as repressive and totalitarian schemes, thereby giving it a dual colouration. In nations that experienced violent revolutions, such as the Soviet Union, abstract ideas about the common good prevailed over the concrete needs and basic rights of individuals, and such can be justified as a judicious application of the General Will especially as it reflects the will or opinion of the majority. 'In the Soviet Union, for example, government officials and Communist Party leaders defended limits on the freedom of speech of individuals as the necessary price Soviet citizens must pay for political unity'<sup>8</sup>.

## **ANALYSIS**

The fact that an obvious similarity exists between these two notions is undeniable. Both concepts propagate the need for the contribution of ideas and knowledge towards the attainment of a better society. The general will on one hand represents a major treatise in the formation or restructuring of a state as put forward by Rousseau. It epitomizes the strength of combining efforts towards the achievement of set goals, while the Group Mind in its own unique way advocates the utility of communal strength in national development with special focus on the African enigma. His focus is deliberately placed on the 'coalescing of various groups into a larger entity ...the manifestation of the modern state. The State is a group of much the same characteristics as the community. Since it promotes the collective good of the group and satisfies

the yearnings and needs of the various individuals, it therefore engenders the same degree of solidarity, commitment and patriotism...’<sup>9</sup>.

This position as stated above signifies the nature of the intrinsic similitude that exists between the two positions, especially when we look at it from the point of view which propagates the necessity of cooperation in the search for development. A major point of difference exist in the methods by which this cooperation is achieved. For Anyiam Osigwe, Group Mind is attained not by force, but through deliberate and willful submission by all concerned. Professor Olusegun Oladipo posits that the Group Mind ‘recognises the brotherhood of man (which) means creating a social environment in which it is possible for all minds to be at work and all hands on deck to make development a reality’<sup>10</sup> without any form of coercion. Professor Oladipo goes further to strengthen the point that the coming into being of the Group mind is a natural tendency, innate in all human society. Although Rousseau accepts that human beings can only exist within a society but ‘the general will should reflect the real common interest of the social body’<sup>11</sup> as against the forced notion of cooperation which is not necessarily founded on the genuine will of the people.

## CONCLUSION

In all, we must understand the fact that asides this major difference, these two concepts generally advocate the same measures for the attainment of development. In any cursory examination of the two ideologies it is evident that without collective efforts and genuine, undivided cooperation the society cannot progress especially in the light of current occurrences in the making of a ‘global village’ where the boundaries which exist between different nations are gradually melting down to create a seamless interaction between all kindred from all walks of life

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