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RELIGION, CULTISM AND INORDINATE QUEST FOR WEALTH: THE PHENOMENON OF *EGO MBUTE* AMONG IGBO YOUTHS

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Abstract

Work is integral to societal development. Christianity advocates for hard work and dignity of labour. The indigenous value of hard work permeates the lives of the Igbo people. An Igbo youth who imbibes this value will not be lazy but proactive, engaging in meaningful occupations to pursue a better life. Most Igbo youths are not lazy. This is because they engage in various work to make quick money. Becoming rich at a young age is not evil; the source of the wealth matters. Things have fallen apart as some Igbo youths embrace the ideology of Ego Mbute, which is the inordinate quest for wealth. This has made some of them involved in illegal activities such as cultism, money ritual (Igwo Ogwuogo), armed robbery, internet fraud (yahoo business), kidnapping, prostitution, drug trafficking, and human trafficking, amongst other ills which are against indigenous value system. The causes of the inordinate quest for wealth among youths include poverty, youth unemployment, and corruption, the decline in observance of indigenous values, materialism, cultural ideology, parental pressure, and so forth. The implications are death and neglect of the value of the sacredness of life, economic loss, imprisonment and so forth. Measures to curb the inordinate quest for wealth among youths include preaching morality, teaching hard work and dignity of labour, church and human capital development, and adequate agricultural investment. The research concludes that the church, in partnership with the government, civil societies and well-meaning citizens, could ameliorate the situation.

Keywords: *Ego Mbute*, Quest, Youth, Church

Introduction

Young age is a delicate and vital stage in human life. It is a period where youths should make effective use of their talents, gifts and potential to better their future. Becoming rich at a young age is not evil, but the source of the wealth is what matters. It is worthwhile that youths engage in various meaningful occupations in order to help them or propel them to achieve good success in life. It is said that success is not found on a platter of gold nor on a bed of roses. This means that one must be disciplined, patient, diligent, hardworking, resourceful and able to properly manage limited resources at one's disposal in order to overcome various life challenges and to achieve good success in life.

During the civilian administration of the immediate past President, Muhammad Buhari, in his opinion, Nigerian youths are lazy. However, this research is of the opinion that many Igbo youths are not lazy, as they engage themselves in one human endeavour or the other in order to become successful in life.

In Igbo society, it is expected that youths should engage in decent occupations in order to become wealthy, take good care of their family members, and start up their own family lives. This is the philosophy behind the value of hard work and the dignity of labour. This is affirmed in some Igbo proverbs and idioms: *aka aja aja na-ebute onu mmanu mmanu* (he who works with his hands, makes profit), *onye ruo o rie* (he who works, eats). All these refer to one main point, which is a person must engage in meaningful activity, occupation

or venture in order to be successful in life. Contemporarily, many Igbo youths want to achieve success and become wealthy, but without the required hard work, diligence, discipline, resourcefulness, and proper management of time and resources. This is based on the ideology of *Ego Mbute* (inordinate quest for wealth).

The above viewpoint was vividly captured by Onowu Ugonabo in one of his traditional highlife music pieces, titled *Ego Mbute* (inordinate quest to get rich quick). The song highlighted how some Igbo youths want to make quick money or get rich quickly without the required hard work, dignity of labour, proper management of resources and good planning. Thus, they seek a shortcut to wealth, which has led many youths to engage in various illegal activities that are detrimental to societal peace and progress.

The Church, as the moral conscience of society, has to rise to this challenge because youths are future leaders, and she has a positive impact on the youths so that they can be useful and contribute to societal development. Diara (cited by Anagwu, 2018) asserts that it is a binding responsibility of the Church to offer the youth lots of challenging opportunities to develop their divine potential and talents that can be used to affect lives positively. The church could work hand in glove with the government and other civil societies in order to curb youths from cultism and inordinate quest for wealth.

Concept of *Ego Mbute* (Inordinate Quest for Wealth)

Many Igbo youth live with big dreams; of course, every reasonable youth should have a dream of what his/her future will look like. Some youth with big dreams are unwilling to work to actualize it. Rather, they want their dreams fulfilled on a gold platter. Therefore, they decide to achieve those dreams through a cut, which is based on the ideology of *Ego Mbute* (get rich quick syndrome). The term *Ego Mbute*, meaning *inordinate quest for wealth or get rich quick syndrome*, could be considered as acquiring wealth or achieving success through illegal means. Without the required hard work and dignity of labour that are accompanying it. Tamunotonye (2019) opines that quick money syndrome is a name given to every attempt to make riches (wealth) without much stress but with atrocious desire. The unhealthy quest for riches has today given birth to moral decadence, pushing youths into cultism, armed robbery, yahoo business, rituals, kidnapping, prostitution, drug trafficking, human trafficking or selling of different body parts, amongst other ills which are against the indigenous value system. The above viewpoint covers comprehensive aspects that could be associated with unhealthy or unlawful means that youths engage in so that they can get rich quickly. Based on the above viewpoint, it could be concluded that an inordinate quest for wealth is conceptualized as an illegal means of acquiring wealth or an uncontrollable desire to generate fast cash, gain material success or other personal benefits without the required hard work and apply the principle of dignity of labour.

Some Activities Igbo Youths Engage in to Get Rich Quickly

Many Igbo youths, in their quest to get rich quickly, are involved in various illegal activities. Some of the activities will be discussed below:

Cultism, Money Ritual and Arm Robbery

Cultism is not new to traditional Igbo society. In traditional Igbo society, there existed secret societies such as *Okonko* and *Ekpe*, among others, which were for the good of the society. The members were men of good repute and helped to enforce peace, harmony and

sustainable development in the traditional society. It is regrettable that nowadays, modern-day cultism and its activities actively participated by youths have brought societal disharmony and are not development-oriented. Money rituals involve the use of human parts with other diabolical practices to make quick money. In Igbo society, it is called *Igwo Ogwuego*. In the words of Okpalike and Ugah (2021), *the Igwo Ogwuego money-making ritual is perceived to be a means by which money is made extraordinarily easily and hidden way without any conventional socio-economic or scientific means open to the common folk.*

Nnatuanya (2022) affirms that the quest for quick wealth among the Igbo youths in contemporary times has led many to various acts that are contrary to Igbo values and customs. One such act is the rise in Oke-ite rituals, which many youths venture into in order to accumulate fast wealth without much labour. Nnatuanya (2022) further describes the Oke-ite ritual as a charm prepared with different animals, including dogs, elephants, and monkeys and often times human parts may be involved. The preparation involves the use of different types of herbs, roots, and other ritual materials, as well as a combination of different kinds of drinks. It is believed that it draws unlimited wealth to one who engages in it. Hence, the *Oke-ite* ritual could be likened to *Igwo Ogwuego* (money ritual).

Drug Trafficking

Trafficking of hard drugs such as cocaine, marijuana, cannabis, sativa, heroin, and other hard substances is a trending business among Igbo youths despite the fact that hard drugs are contraband goods in Nigeria and other nations. They are involved in the business because they want to get *Ego Mbute* (quick money). Many Igbo youths sell hard drugs within and outside the country just to get rich quickly. Nwaozuru (2020) observes that most African drug peddlers to Europe and America are Nigerian citizens, mainly youths; most of these youths are from the Igbo extraction who risk their lives to carry hard drugs overseas to earn fast cash. Many of them run out of luck as they are arrested by law enforcement agencies before or after arriving at their destination points. There are many reported cases in national dailies where many Igbo youths have been caught in airports with hard drugs like cocaine and so on.

Kidnapping

Kidnapping activities are among the nefarious activities Igbo youths perpetrate to get quick money. Adibe (2008) explains kidnapping as the taking away of a person against the person's will, usually for ransom or in furtherance of another crime. Some Igbo youths have recently ventured into the kidnapping business to make quick money. This is because either the victims' families pay a ransom, or the victims could be sold to human traffickers or to ritualists. Hence, Nwaozuru (2018) states that the equation of kidnapping could be seen as **Victim + Ransom = Fast Cash**. The above viewpoint shows that kidnapping could be seen as an avenue to earn quick money.

Internet Fraud (Yahoo Yahoo) or Cybercrime

Presently, internet fraud or cyber crime, popularly called Yahoo Yahoo or Yahoo Plus, seems to be a hot cake business for many Igbo youths as some are rushing into it with the aim of getting *Ego Mbute* (quick money). In Igbo society, Yahoo is the popular name for internet scammers who access the internet and utilize Information and Communication Technology (ICT) gadgets like computers and smartphones, among others, to scam people,

mostly foreigners. However, with time, as people became aware of internet fraudsters and their tactics, some Igbo youths started engaging in cult-related activities like the Oke-ite ritual, where charms are prepared for them to hypnotize and defraud their victims. This is now the *Yahoo* plus.

Some Nigerians, especially those who have bank accounts, are at risk of being victims of cybercrime. Some internet fraudsters try to steal people's SIM cards (which a person used to open a bank account or to perform other online banking services), Automatic Teller Machine (ATM) Cards, and other digital devices used by bank customers to hack into their bank accounts and withdraw their money online.

Prostitution

Some Igbo youths, especially females, are engaged in prostitution. In recent times, prostitution has been baptized and renamed as “runs or hook-up”. Contemporarily, Igbo society is engulfed in the “Sugar Daddy and Sugar Mummy saga. Both at home and abroad, some Igbo youths are seen hawking themselves for a fee to the highest bidder like commodities. Some Igbo youths consider such engagement to be a source of quick money. Hence, they are involved in it.

Causes of Inordinate Quest for Wealth

There are various causes of the inordinate quest for wealth, such as poverty, youth unemployment, corruption, the decline in observance of indigenous values, materialism, cultural ideology, and parental pressure, among others. However, this research will explain the few below:

Decline in Observance of Indigenous Values

One of the reasons that motivate Igbo youths to desire to get rich quickly is a decline in their observance of indigenous values. Indigenous values promote the development and progress of the society. Sogolo, cited in Ekei (2016), writes that African values may be taken to mean a set of institutionalized ideals which guide and direct the patterns of life of Africans. These values that make life meaningful and worth living for the Africans as they remain an indispensable asset and motivation in the lives and existence of Nigeria. Indigenous values perform the role of piloting, monitoring and humanizing African culture.

It is appalling that the advent of globalization, the influence of Western culture and the imitation of Western lifestyle by the youths in this 21st century has led to the collapse of indigenous moral values. There is a palpable decline in the morality of the people as selfishness, materialism, greed, and unbridled quest to make quick money held sway. Many Igbo youths now jettison the indigenous value system and have since increased the drive to get rich quick mindset; hence, youths engage in illegal means to make quick wealth.

Cultural Ideology and Parental Pressure

It could be said that another reason that motivates youths to pursue an inordinate quest for wealth is the Igbo cultural ideology about the young age. According to Nwaozuru (2020):

In some cultures, male youths are looked upon by their parents to work or be involved in one business or another, make money, take good care of their parents and their siblings, build a house, and marry. After marriage, they are to continue to care for their immediate family and their parents as well. This role is expected of

every male youth to fulfil, and any male youth who fails to fulfil this role, other family members will not be happy with him. This is seen in Igbo culture. Therefore, in order to fulfil this role, youths are involved in many activities to make quick money. (pp.1-2).

Some parents go on to mount pressure on their children at a young age to do whatever it takes to acquire wealth and become like their peers who have achieved success. It is suppressing that parents who should shun such ideas or rebuke their children from participating in such heinous crimes sometimes advise and pressure their children to join in this illegal business in order to get fast cash. Therefore, such parental pressure could lead youths into an inordinate quest for wealth.

Materialism

In truth, materialism has engulfed the mindset of many Igbo youths. In the present dispensation, the only convincing logic that is significant and universally accepted by most Igbo youths is that of excessive material acquisitions and consumerism. The mentality of making money and becoming somebody (the richest man) through corrupt means of acquisition of money and material wealth has invaded and permeated the lives of Igbo youths. Many Igbo youths are now interested in flamboyant living. It is worrisome that the spirit of materialism engulfs many Igbo youths; all that matters to them is to make quick money either by crook or by means.

Implications of *Ego Mbut* (Inordinate Quest for Wealth)

i. Death and Neglect of the Value of Sacredness of Life

In Igbo culture, it is believed that life is supreme (*Ndu bu ise*). Life is God-given. Hence, no man should destroy it. Ekei (2016) states that although every society values life, Africans have a profound regard for human life; life for Africans is a value of no mean magnitude. Despite this value of the sacredness of human life, many youths, in their quest to make quick wealth, have violated it. Some Igbo youths have taken to kidnapping to make quick cash since victims pay the ransom or sell the victims to human traffickers with the sole aim of profit-making. Nwaozuru (2018) points out that many kidnapped victims are killed due to the following: failure of the victim's relation to meet the demanded ransom, when the victim wants to escape or as a result of a gun battle between the kidnappers and the security agents. Youths who engage in the prostitution business are prone to Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs), which could lead to death. Therefore, the inordinate quest for wealth sometimes leads to death, which neglects the Igbo value of the sacredness of human life and also contravenes the Nigerian Constitution, which stipulates the right to life.

ii. Inordinate Quest for Wealth Dents the Image of the Igbo Nation

The high level of illegal activities perpetrated by Igbo youths has created a negative picture of the Igbo nation to the rest of the world. It could be observed that the image of the Igbo nation on the global scene is dented as a result of the level of immoralities perpetrated by her youths both at home and abroad. It could be said that everywhere in the world, Igbo youths are generally feared as dogs, dreaded like criminals, cautiously approached like snakes and avoided as lepers. It could be viewed that the Igbo nation has earned an extremely negative reputation internationally due to the vices her youths are involved. This has caused embarrassment to the nation to the extent that people worldwide relate with many

Igbo people with caution. They embarrass Igbo people at the point of entry into most American, Asian and European countries because most Igbo youths are considered as suspects.

iii. Imprisonment

One of the punishments meted out to crime offenders is imprisonment. Perpetrators of violent crimes upon arrest by security officials are prosecuted by law and sent to prison. Any youth who is imprisoned as a result of involvement in violent crimes has automatically lost his/her vision for a brighter future.

iv. Economic Loss

It has also led to monetary losses. Violent crimes like armed robbery, cybercrime, and kidnapping lead to the loss of intellectual property and the closure of companies, among others. Violent crime reduces foreign investment in places where it is prevalent while some foreign companies could relocate out of crime prone areas, which could result to economic loss.

Measures to Curb Inordinate Quest for Wealth among Igbo Youths

i. Church and her Mandate for the Youths

The Church, as the body of Christ, has a very important role to play in the life of the youths. Diara, cited in Anagwu (2018), asserts that it is a binding responsibility upon the Church to offer the youth many challenging opportunities to develop their divine potentials and talents that can affect lives positively. Youths are the live wire of the church. Thus, the church cannot neglect to fulfil its mandate on them. The church should train, teach, provide, nurture, control and discipline through proper Christian education via seminars, entrepreneurship schemes, scholarship schemes and so forth to better the lives of the youths.

The church could partner with the government, civil societies, and wealthy citizens to ameliorate this situation.

ii. Preaching on Morality, Teaching on Hard Work and Dignity of Labour

There is a need for clergymen to preach on the negative effects and dangers of the inordinate quest for wealth. As spiritual parents of the youths, clergymen should teach the youths the need for hard work, diligence, discipline, patience, and proper management of resources and time. Many Igbo youths profess the Christian faith. Christianity rejects laziness and upholds the dignity of labour. Christianity condemns the desire to become rich quickly through dishonest business deals. There are scriptural principles and ways to apply and follow to make money and create wealth. Money is to be acquired through diligence, hard work, discipline, and proper management of time, energy and resources. Njoku, Chukwuma and Obiorah (2021) observe that the inordinate desire to be rich quickly usually makes it difficult for people to consider the credibility of business activities before they engage in them.

Hence, Clergymen should continuously preach on hard work, dignity of labour, and proper management of resources and time, which will help to inculcate and stimulate entrepreneurial spirit in the youths to be hard working, manage their resources and plan well to achieve success. Just as Njoku et al (2021) unequivocally submits that:

Hard work is pivotal to wealth generation, whilst worthless pursuit and desire for quick riches result in poverty. The place of hard work cannot be overemphasised, being the bedrock for both individual and societal sustainable development. God initiated work and mandated his human creatures through the first human parents (Adam and Eve) to embrace this divine attribute. Work builds character, promotes dignity and gives one control over one's life. Work culminates to success, promotes happiness and engenders prosperity. The reverse approach reduces confidence, promotes dependence, robs individuals of their personal dignity and results in poverty. (p.28).

Preaching on morality, teaching on hard work and dignity of labour, will help youths to avoid inordinate quest for wealth.

ii. Church and Human Capital Development

Human capital development is among the greatest investments that can be made in society. According to De Temple (2012), development indeed has a background based on Church principles and these principles promote and shape our present-day world. Kariuki (2018) elucidates that the Church should focus on capacity building where the community can develop skills and competencies needed by the community in order to have better control of their lives. This can be achieved through human capital development. Iheanacho (2020) explains that human capital development is the transformation of natural endowments of individuals seen in the formation or articulation of ideas, production of goods and services, and conversion and utilization of natural resources at the person's disposal.

Human capital development is one of the great contributions made by Christian missionaries in the development of modern Igbo society. The Christian missionaries, upon their arrival, saw that the socioeconomic standard of living of the indigenous people was a deplorable state. According to Asadu (2021), the missionaries were concerned about the emancipation of the poor Africans, who were the reason they established industrial schools to train them on various skills. The present church should continue to champion human capital development in society through the establishment of skill acquisition centres, organising entrepreneurship programmes, offering loan grants to start up small-scale businesses and donating vehicles and tricycles to youths.

iii. Adequate Investment in Agriculture

Before the discovery of oil, Igbo society survived mainly through agriculture and other enterprises. Before the 1966 military coup, the Eastern region, dominated by Igbo people, had the fastest-growing economy in Nigeria. This was mainly through adequate investment in agriculture. The European Christian missionaries introduced mechanized agriculture in Igbo territory through the implementation of the Bible and the Plough missionary policy. The Christian missionaries brought exotic crops to Igboland. Modern farm equipment was brought, which necessitated the need to train indigenous converts on how to use them. This led to the establishment of the Onitsha Industrial Mission. Mgbemena and Egwuonwu (2019) observe that the missionaries' concern for the development of agricultural skills of the Igbo people, exemplified by including rural science as a subject on the primary school curriculum, is an indication of their concern to uplift the people from primitive subsistence and ignorant scratching of their soil to higher and more enlightened ways of using it. Hence,



mechanized agriculture led to greater agricultural product output by the indigenous farmers, which they commercialised and made more profits than before.

Since the discovery of oil, there has been a great decline in massive investment in the agricultural sector, as all eyes are fixed on the proceeds from oil revenue. Thus, there is a need for the church to invest in the agricultural sector. It is worth noting that some churches in various states in Igbo land have keyed into investment in the agricultural sector to generate employment for the youths. For instance, in Anambra State, Nwokolo (2018) confirms that Anglican Communion Diocese on the Niger (DON) Women's Ministry has acquired about 51 hectares of land for rice and cassava production for commercial purposes. The Women's Ministry is also in partnership with Anambra State (FADAMA 111 AF) to boost the industry as well as employ more youths. Ezechukwu, cited in Onuorah (2019), points out that the Catholic Church Awka Diocese invests in agriculture and has built fish farms at Urum and Umunze. Such ventures generate employment for the youth.

Conclusion

Youths have dreams, but fulfilling them is what matters. For youths to fulfil their dreams, they need to keep to the value of hard work and abide by the principle of dignity of labour. It is not a crime for youths to achieve success at a young age, as many rich people in the world today became successful at a young age. The problem with today's Igbo youths is that they are engulfed by the spirit of materialism, Ego *Mbute* (inordinate quest for wealth). The idea of get-rich-quick syndrome has deviated the minds of many youths from engaging in decent occupations to illegal businesses and activities as shortcuts to wealth. This has led to economic loss, death and imprisonment for those who are caught in one illegal business or the other. The government, church, wealthy citizens and parents have vital roles to play in ameliorating this situation in society.

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