

Cultural Views of Wealth in Traditional and Contemporary Igbo Society: Perspectives from Maduekwe's "Ego na-ekwu"

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Abstract

Wealth is a social capital pursued by people in order to boost their status or enhance their livelihood in virtually every human society. However, wealth has the tendency of becoming a tool of power and control in society. Many Igbo writers have written on cultural conflict, as a result of colonialism, but the contributory impact of wealth to such cultural conflict has not been fully explored. Consequently, the present study examines the values attached to wealth in traditional Igbo world in contrast to the contemporary period. This is with a view to evaluating the attitudes and behavior of the wealthy coupled with the influences they exert in the society. The study is guided by Social Power Theory, one of the Marxist theories of social conflict, by Max Weber (1922). Maduekwe's poem titled "Ego na-ekwu" was purposively selected from *Utara Nti*, an anthology of Igbo poems edited by Nolue Emenanjo. The result shows that, in traditional Igbo society, grey-haired elders, the custodians of Igbo culture, were venerated, as they upheld truth and other virtues that promote growth and development of society. In contrast, in the contemporary period, the erstwhile elders have been displaced by a class of wealthy few who are now the objects of reverence and adoration. This displacement has brought about social and cultural dislocation in the Igbo society as evidenced in greed, criminal acts, prostitution, lawlessness, fraud, falsehood, restiveness, and other social vices. The poet opines that the pursuit of the white man's wealth has upset the balance of power and Igbo socio-communal order to the point that wealth is literally in control of the society, and those possessing the material god are the wielders of power in contemporary times. It is the poet's tacit conclusion that, a society controlled by the nouveau riche rather than cultural sages and judicious intellectuals is doomed.

Keywords: Igbo culture, wealth, power, Maduekwe, leadership, Ego na-ekwu

Introduction

All through the world, people, groups and societies are in pursuit of wealth for reasons of economic progress, social development and political power. In traditional Igbo society, wealth is perceived as a resource that positively impacts an individual's socio-political status. The drive to create and amass wealth is equated primarily with the plethora of needs and challenges confronting individuals and societies, and secondarily by other social and political considerations. Depending on the society, wealth is accumulated resources in the form of money or products. In traditional Igbo world, wealth is the totality of the goods or crops owned by an individual, such as yam seedlings, cocoyam, corn, and economic trees such as palm tree, breadfruit tree, and domestic animals such as goats and chickens. As a matter of fact, the Igbo see the palm tree as a wealth generating tree that produces money due to the economic benefits of the component parts of the palm tree. Additionally, Igbo regard the yam as the king of all crops due to the value attached to it, coupled with the myth surrounding it in the society. Thus, any man who has his barn bursting with yam is regarded as wealthy. In Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, it was the possession of hordes of yam that earned the protagonist Okonkwo a place of respect in Umuofia kindred. In reverse, it was the lack of such economic goods that reduced his (Okonkwo) father, Unoka to the unenviable position of a poor chronic debtor.

Undeniably, money is a sensitive resource among the Igbo; it is cherished to the point that, in modern times, other ethnic groups associate Igbo with quest for money. That wealth is good and loved is simply stating the obvious; some Igbo bear the nickname *aku di uto* "wealth is sweet". The benefits of wealth are couched and enshrined in such Igbo fundamental principles as *aku na-esi obi ike* "wealth makes one confident", *aku karia o rutu umunna* "when wealth multiplies, it reaches the kinsmen". It is for this purpose that Igbo are known for industry, and sometimes crude adventures in the quest to acquire

wealth. The enterprising nature of the Igbo person has its root in not only acquiring wealth, but using it to service personal, family and group needs, and also deploying the resource to the use of the society, in terms of developmental projects, be it social or political. However, irrespective of the value of wealth, Igbo also acknowledge the fact that wealth is not on top of the value chain with the maxim *ndu ka aku* “life is more valuable than wealth” and *ndu ka ihe e ji azu ya* “life is more valuable than that (wealth) used to sustain it”. In other words, wealth is not life but a resource that sustains life and living. Even when the Igbo aver that, *ndu bu ego* “life is money”, the metaphor is not used to equate money with life but to suggest the relative value of money in the life of individuals.

Beyond value and money’s subordinate position to life, the Igbo also understand the power held and exercised by holders of wealth in the society. The Igbo proverb *okwu baa n’ego nwa mgbenye e sere onu ya* “when matters reach the point of money, the poor man ceases to talk” is suggestive of the power wielded by the wealthy in the society. During times of need, it is the wealthy people that bail out the society and, in this situation, the poor people are relegated, or the poor relegate themselves because they have no funds to contribute. This is not to say that the Igbo society operate a social class system stratified along the gamut of upper, middle, and working/lower classes. In the Igbo world, wealth is not the exclusive prerogative of any family or group. It is a capitalist society where everyone has equal chances of exploring and exploiting opportunities for growth and success. Nevertheless, there are still rich and poor families. But it is notable that, in the traditional Igbo agrarian economy, there was hardly any poor person; this social fact is attributable to the fact that, every individual had ancestral lands and resources such as economic trees, and everyone cultivated their lands and had harvests of food and cash crops. The poor were the infinitesimal few who were rich in land and trees, but who were not able to exploit their resources. Poverty was actually introduced into Igbo society during colonial and post-colonial Igbo society, with the advent of money economy. Based on the foregoing, this study seeks to examine the place of wealth and power in the Igbo society from the perspective of a modern Igbo poet. This is with a view to estimating traditional and contemporary realities on the issue of wealth and power and the value attached to them in Igbo society.

The Igbo Society

Igbo is one of the three major Nigerian ethnic groups; the other two are Hausa and Yoruba. The speakers of the language are also referred to as Igbo people. Igbo is the dominant tribe in Eastern Nigeria and the only ethnic group in the present South-East region of the country. Igbo people are also found in the South-South region in States such as Rivers, Delta and Akwa Ibom. The core Igbo States are: Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo. The Igbo society is an egalitarian and republican society. The Igbo Society is highly segmented into small towns and villages; each being close-knit, independent and exclusive – a situation that might be responsible for the high number of dialects in the language. The Igbo people had a republican administrative pattern where every kin had freedom to express themselves in matters of the community. The society was governed along the axis of clan, with the *umunna* “kinsmen” constituting the general assembly or congress, while the *ndiichie* “council of elders” constituted the apex of the leadership. In the contemporary world, the Igbo people are found in all continents of the world and in fairly large numbers.

Related studies

Scholars have veered into the place of wealth in societies, especially the adverse effects of chasing wealth, and the degree to which wealth has stratified the society. Nnyigide (2014) examined a philosophical poem in *Akpa Uche* titled “Akwukwo Oru Ego”. The author deduced from the content of the poem that money is the principal cause of people’s problem in the world. The poem evaluates the feelings and perspective of the poet toward money, represented by the currency note. In the sight of the poet, money has no reasonable value. Therefore, it does not worth leading people to all sorts of crime and shameful acts they engage in. In other words, he does not have any regard for money. The currency note was extensively personified to show the degree to which many people are enslaved to money. The language used in the poem reveals the extent to which the people who have been negatively influenced by money can go, such as committing suicide because of money; a woman abandoning her husband for an outcast because of money; money pushing the blind and lame to steal, Indian’s selling their children

because of money, and a clergyman being imprisoned because of money. These, as observed by the poet goes to show the power of money in the society, and how easily people are influenced by money and those who have it.

Ngeh et al, (2014) examined the poems written by Doh and Osundare based on the issues of claustrophobia and agoraphobia and the search for social space in African poetry. In Osundare's poem titled "Siren", the poet portrays the political situation in Nigeria where politicians use the masses for their own interest. In the poem, a politician in the bid to canvass for votes for upcoming elections, visits his constituency after a long time and the poor suffering masses troop out to welcome him, despite their precarious conditions. The title "siren" is repeated seven times in the poem to symbolize the coming of this politician, who is seen as a "very important personality (VIP)". Meanwhile, the politician is the main cause of their privations. The poet bemoans the naivety and ignorance of the masses, as well as the exploitative tendencies of politicians, who derive pleasure in exploiting and depriving the masses of basic social amenities.

The politician moves in a heavily guarded police escort detached from the less privileged of the society. The emphasis in this poem is that, although this politician has more social space than the poor masses, his existence is claustrophobic; that is, he is only choking in a small place, like a cell in prison. The poet ironically describes the politician as a "worthy ruler" against the fact that that he has impoverished his constituency for a very long time. The masses are deprived of social amenities such as good roads, schools, water and hospitals. The stratification is evident as this politician sits in a chauffeur driven Mercedes, while the masses stand under the scorching sun clapping for their oppressor, as seen in their "kwashiorkor children waving tattered flags in the baking sun." These kwashiorkor babies symbolize poverty, lack and penury in this society. Ironically, these malnourished babies are supposed to be the future leaders. In spite of the presence of the politicians or "their Excellencies" in this society, the vile (in)human conditions persist because it is not their (politicians') preoccupation. The leaders ignore and pay no attention to the poor state of the roads: "Even on highways where potholes nail the Jaguar, they manage not to see a land disemboweled by erosion. The politicians' stance depicting that their 'Excellencies are not here for the begging bickering' means that this leader has not come to talk about developmental projects, but to impose his will on the people. He has not come to solicit for their votes either because their (masses) votes do not count.

The second poem titled "Fear-fear King" written by Doh is a satirical poem on the unpredictability of a contemporary African leader. These four-stanza poem is a highlight of what happens in a society where the ruler devises strategies to keep the people enslaved while he (the king) enjoys the resources of the state, at the expense of the suffering masses. His leadership is replete with telling lies, rumors and manipulations, as strategies to keep the masses enslaved in his country. There is no trust-worthy statement from this king; that is to say that the king has no integrity and cannot be trusted by the masses. The society resonates with greed and all sorts of evil, lust and deceit resulting in a depraved human society where the weak masses are dominated by the powerful few. According to the poet/persona the lies are fabricated at the whims of the leadership for the purpose of manipulating people's mind and consciousness, so that they will remain slaves without any attempt to resist their own oppression. The author is of the opinion that, in the two poems, the leaders are living in claustrophobic spaces, as a result of distancing themselves from the people they should be serving.

Agwuna, (2017) examined two poems written by two poets on the theme of money and society. The first is the Igbo poem titled "Achomoru", written by Onuoha, J in the Igbo medium. It is a lamentation about the state of the society on the lack of employment which leads to lack of money and the outcome in society. The poet laments the frustrations and agonies associated with joblessness and its effect in the society such as high blood pressure, loss of personal identity and eventually death. The poet establishes that jobs are needed to support and sustain people, by having a home, putting food on the table, using decent clothing, having access to a doctor, and having a sense of pride and self-worth, as human beings. Unfortunately, many people, including graduates and secondary school leavers, are without jobs because there are none. In this highly stressful situation, the job-hunters opt for anything

available to do such as trading or other businesses in order to eke out a living. The poet also posits that joblessness and lack of money can push unemployed youth to take jobs they are not naturally inclined to do, or do not fit their natural skills. Consequently, some of these unemployed graduates go to the extent of consulting native doctors or joining armed robbery gangs in order to make money and survive. The poet observed that jobs exist only for the privileged few - the sons and daughters of the elites and politicians who are in positions of power in the society. These rich classes of people use their high connections to secure good-paying jobs for their children and wards. But the main victims of unemployment are the poor masses who know no one in positions of power. This happens in a stratified society where the powerful rich members of the society enjoy the resources of the state while poor people are left to their horrible fate.

The second poem is a satirical poem titled “Obodo Onicha”, written by Okediadi in the Igbo medium. The poet condemns the quest for money in the city of Onitsha in The South East, Nigeria. In this city’s market, is a gory mixture of the good, the bad and ugly; people often encounter pick pockets, handset snatchers and armed robbers who rob them at gun point. The poet laments that, on a daily basis, people lose their money and other valuables in the market. Some of these sets of people have metamorphosed to criminals who rob people day and night. The poet traces the cause of this malaise to poverty in the society and lack of meaningful livelihood, which naturally lead to frustrations, and as a result people devise get-rich-quick systems to make ends meet. The poet also painted a picture of the different styles criminals use to carry out their nefarious activities in Onitsha. Criminals disguise as revenue collectors, or NEPA marketers chasing, harassing poor people, and intimidating the helpless masses in the streets and at home to make money. These dishonest cheats put on police uniforms, carry guns, and extort money from them. The suffering poor people of this city continue to toil only for their resources to be stolen while the leaders whose job it is to protect the helpless masses do nothing but sit back and watch. The critic associates this experience with the sociological theory of Karl Marx which emphasizes class struggle in society and draws attention to the unfair and exploitative conditions, with a view to reversing the system and entrusting a greater portion of society’s wealth in the hands of its producers. Although poets, including Igbo poets have written verses centered on wealth and its power in the society, there are quite a number of Igbo poets writing in the Igbo language medium, whose works have not been analysed. One of them is J.C.Maduekwe, and this is the gap this study intends to fill. Additionally, perceptual considerations account for the reason behind the in-depth analysis of this poem.

Theoretical Framework

The approach adopted as a guide in this study is the theory of Social Power, propounded by Max Weber (1922). The theory states that power is a resource that is evident in inter-personal relationship in a given society. According to Wolfe and McGinn (2005), social power is derived from one’s relationships to others, meaning that one cannot have social power in the absence of other people. In this view, power is a truly relational construct. It is an outcome of relationship involving people of different classes, or same class, where people influence others either because they are higher in the social order, or, even if they are in the same social class, they are higher in other social indices. In the literature, social power is differentiated from personal power. Personal power is the degree to which holders of power are capable of acting with agency or of exerting influence in the environment (Overbeck & Park, 2001; Van Dijke & Poppe, 2006) in addition to “power over oneself and freedom from the influence of others” (Lammers, Stoker, & Stapel, 2009: 1544). This is a suggestion that social power operates, particularly in a system where personal power is weak or where personal power is subdued by circumstances.

In social psychology, social power is perceived as the (potential) ability to influence others’ behavior (Andersen & Berdahl, 2002). However, Fiske and Dépret (1996) questioned the system of equating power with (potential) influence. In this power-as influence perspective, power is an outcome of social interactions rather than a structural feature and thus cannot be manipulated as an independent variable. The second issue with this view is that it confounds the power of the agent with the weakness of the target (Fiske & Berdahl, 2007). Consequently, it is presently more common to define social power in

terms of control over the outcomes for someone else (e.g., Andersen & Berdahl, 2002; Galinsky et al., 2003; Keltner et al., 2003).

In the study of social power, several related concepts are encountered such as status, authority, dominance, and leadership, which require clarification. According to Sonja (2019), status, in a broad sense produces differences in respect and prominence (Keltner et al., 2003); but more narrowly defined, status can result from the power an individual possesses as a result of social group membership (Schmid, 2010). Consequently, it is possible to have status without power (example, Mother Teresa) and power without status (example, a corrupt politician). Authority can be defined as power derived from institutionalized roles (example, director, foreman, manager), which is also termed position power or structural power. Dominance includes personality dominance and dominant behavior. Personality dominance can be understood as an individual difference variable describing the extent to which an individual has the desire to influence or control others (Schmid, 2010); dominant behavior is any behavior used with the intention to gain or maintain power over other people (Keltner et al., 2003).

The social distance theory (Magee & Smith, 2013) posits an interpersonal and cognitive account to explain the effects of social power. It is based on the assumption that differences in control over valued resources cause differences in dependence and is factored on two basic propositions. The first is that unequal dependence between two individuals (high-power and low-power) produces unequal experiences of social distance, i.e., the experience of distance from others, with the high-power individual feeling more subjective distance than the low-power individual. Magee and Smith contend that unequal social distance results from a combination of an individual's motives for affiliation and their expectations of affiliation from the other party. Because of their outcome dependency, low-power individuals are motivated to affiliate while expecting only little affiliation within the relationship, whereas high-power individuals, who are less dependent on their low-power counterparts, have less motivation to affiliate with their low-power counterparts while expecting high affiliation within the relationship, (Lammers, Galinsky, Gordijn, & Otten, 2012).

Mooney et al, (2007) opined that, there is a conflict perspective to social power. As against the functionalist perspective that views society as composed of different parts working together, the conflict perspective views society as composed of different groups and interests competing for power and resources. The conflict perspective explains various aspects of our social world by identifying which groups have power and benefit from a particular social arrangement. For instance, feminist theory argues that society is patriarchal and controlled by men for the interest of men. In this study, the theory of Social Power will serve as a mirror in the analysis and discussion of wealth and power in the Igbo world.

Methodology

An Igbo poem in the Igbo language medium was purposively sampled from *Utara Nti* an anthology of modern Igbo verse edited by Nolue Emenanjo. Out of a total of 47 poems in the collection based on variegated topics, social, cultural and political, a poem titled "Ego na-Ekwu" written by J.C. Maduekwe was selected. The poem was selected due to the fact that it provides a full account of the subject of wealth and the exercise of power by the wealthy in Igbo society. A second reason for the choice of this poem is that its subject matter is still relevant in the contemporary period. The reason for choosing a single poem in this study is constraints of space; the nature of analysis (content) may not leave sufficient space for the treatment of another poem.

The Cultural View of Wealth in Contemporary and Traditional Igbo Society

The poem "Ego na-ekwu" is divided into four stanzas of equal length; each stanza in the poem has eight lines.

*Oge di mgbe anyi no n'amamihe ndi okenye,
Mgbe Diokpa katara isi ocha n'ogbako,
Mgbe isi awo guzoro inye ndumodu,
Mgbe oka okwu noro, achota ya idu obodo,
Mgbe aka putara chikwa mba n'ihidi ike,*

*Mgbe oji ofo no na nsopuru n'ibu isi ala;
Oge ndi ahụ di, ma ugbua, ha alaala!
Obodo huziri ya na ego na-ekwu kpomkwem.*

Time was when we dwelt in the wisdom of the elders,
When a grey-haired man controlled events in meetings,
When grey-hair stood to proffer advice,
When the orator was sought to lead the community,
When a strong hand came out to rule the community,
When holder of ofo is honoured to be a leader;
Those times were, but now, they have ceased!
The community sees it that money is speaking exactly.

In the first stanza of the poem, the poet makes reference to the time past when the Igbo cultural system was still being practiced; that is, when Igbo culture was untainted by western civilization. This is to say that, the poem is a comparative observation about pre-colonial Igbo society and post-colonial Igbo society. According to the poet, in line 1, there was once a time when the society operated on the basis of the wisdom of the elders, *Oge di mgbe anyi no n'amamihe ndi okenye*, suggesting that the Igbo society was ruled and governed by elders. In traditional Igbo society, it is the council of elders that formed the core of the leadership; these are elders that are the custodians of the culture and experienced in matters relating to religion, land disputes, family relationships, and other variegated nuances of the culture. Although the *umunna* (kinsmen) are not discounted in the administration of the community, the *ndiichie* constituted the apex of the leadership hierarchy and so were in full control of the community. The poet went ahead to outline five features of the administration of the elders; incidentally, all the features are positive. Firstly, it was a period when experienced men dominated community meetings during matters, as seen in the second line, *mgbe Diokpa katara isi ocha n'ogbakọ; isi ocha* "grey hair" is used as a symbol for experience, for Igbo believe in the value of experience. This is seen in the saying *onye buru uzo luo nwaanyi na-aka enwe mkpomkpo oku* "He who married earlier has more marital experience". Secondly, it was time when offering good advice was the prerogative of the experienced elders, as seen in the third line, *mgbe isi awọ guzoro inye ndumọdu*; here *isi awọ* "grey hair" (synonymous with *isi ocha*) is used as symbol of experience. Thirdly, when the orator was highly sought after when the community required leadership, as seen in line four, *mgbe oka okwu noro, achota ya idu obodo*; the orators are those who were masters in the constructive use of proverbs, idioms, anecdotes during speeches. These verbal agencies (proverbs et al) comprised the knowledge, philosophy and ideological base of the Igbo; it is a pool of knowledge from which the elders and all tapped to embellish and strengthen their expressions. It is uncommon for an Igbo, who is Igbo indeed, to address a gathering without using proverbs, hence Achebe (1958) says that proverb is the oil with which Igbo eat words. It is believed that, these orators, versed in the communal ethos are philosophers or wise men, and so were entrusted with leadership when occasion demands. Fourthly, a period when those who ruled the community were strong men, as seen in line five, *mgbe aka putara chiwa mba n'ih ike; aka* "hand" is a metonymy for the leader. The strong leader portrayed here is not one who is physically strong, but a morally strong character, a man of integrity whose virtues and sterling qualities are not in doubt. When Igbo say that *nwata kwookw aka o soro ndi okenye rie nri* "when the child washes his hands, he joins the elders to eat", it implies that, the elders are sacred, clean cult, and to join them demands washing off dirt and impurities. Fifthly, a period when the land is administered by those elders who speak the truth, as seen in line six, *mgbe oji ofo no na nsopuru n'ibu isi ala*. The idea of moral excellence in line five is amplified in line six with reference to *oji ofo* "holder of ofo"; in traditional Igbo society, the *aka ji ofo* "hands that hold ofo" are elders who have taken an oath to always say the truth. The *ofo* is a wood carved from a tree of same name and used as a symbol of truth and honesty; those who hold *ofo* are men of high moral disposition, and it is expected that they speak the truth at all times. The poet identified these five features as some of the features of the golden age of Igbo civilization. Unfortunately, those times existed but they are no more, as seen in line seven *Oge ndi ahụ di, ma ugbua, ha alaala!*; *ugbua* "now" meaning, in contemporary times. The apostrophe used at the end of line seven is used to show the feelings of the poet about the evolution in Igbo culture. The poet is not happy that, Igbo pristine,

epochal administrative system has ceased to exist. In its place is a new system where money is in control of the society, as seen in line eight *Obodo huziri ya na ego na-ekwu kpomkwem*; the word *kpomkwem* “exactly” is used to emphasise the veracity of the proposition that money is now the ruler of the society.

*Oji ego katara isi ocha na nzuko obodo,
Oji ego bu onye oma n'etiti ndi obodo,
Naani ndi bjara ya nso huru ya ntupo,
N'obodo, aha ya na-ewu n'ihia aku o dowere;
Ego ya zutaara ya nsopuru, zutara ya ugwu;
O mere ya diala karija nna muru ya n'obodo;
O buchaghi ugha na ego ya soro jide ya ndu.
Ego emeela ihe di oji o ocha n'elu uwa!*

Holders of money are superior to grey hairs in communal meetings,
Holder of money is the favourite in the community,
Only those who are close to him see their fault,
In the community, he is famous due to his wealth;
His money bought him respect, bought him honour;
It made him rooted in the community more than his father;
It is not altogether untrue that his money is one reason he is alive.
Money has turned dark to white in the world!

In the second stanza, the poet catalogues the new dispensation where the wealthy people have hijacked the administration of the community due to the power they hold over others. This stanza is actually a lamentation of the current state of affairs where people who are not suitable for leadership have taken over power. In line 9, the poet states that the wealthy is more important than the grey-haired elders in community meetings *oji ego katara isi ocha na nzuko obodo*; this is against the traditional system where the elders held sway in meetings to address matters in the community. As a result of their wealth, the community accords them more respect during meetings. Additionally, the wealthy people are seen as good people in the eyes of the kinsmen, as seen in line 10, *oji ego bu onye oma n'etiti ndi obodo*; this skewed view of the community is in contrast with the traditional system where men of integrity are acknowledged as good people. These rich kin are so widely celebrated that, it takes only a close and critical observation to see their faults, as evidenced in line 11, *naani ndi bjara ya nso huru ya ntupo*; aside the few who are privileged to come close to the rich, the other kinsmen see him as a saint. Furthermore, the rich people are famous in the community as a result of their wealth, and nothing more, as seen in line 12, *n'obodo, aha ya na-ewu n'ihia aku o dowere*; the poet subtly suggests that there is no strong basis for the popularity of the rich leader. This is to say that he lacks the other more important ingredients of good leadership, such as integrity and moral standing. In line 13, the poet goes further to say that the rich man's wealth bought him respect and honour, *ego ya zutaara ya nsopuru, zutara ya ugwu*; the verb *zutaara* “bought” indicates that rich people use their money to influence the opinion of people about them. He earned honour via transient material things rather than spiritual and moral values. This is also in contrast with the traditional system where men of honour and those with character and virtue are respected. The Igbo believe that *ezi aha ka ego* “good name is better than money” which implies that character, which gives a person a good name is overrated over wealth. The poet goes on to say that his wealth made him to be more connected to the community than even his own father, as seen in line 14, *o mere ya diala karija nna muru ya n'obodo*; *diala* “son of the soil” is suggestive that, this rich person is more rooted to the culture symbolized by ala “soil” than his father. This is an obvious irony because Igbo people do not subscribe to the view that a person can be greater than his father, especially in matters of culture. Igbo people believe that *nnwa anaghi aka nna* “child is never greater than father”, and *okwuru anaghi aka onye kuru ya* “okro plant can never grow taller than the person that planted it”. These sayings are used to state that, the act of giving birth to a child accords the father rights and power over him. No matter how great a child becomes, in terms of achievement and attainment, he is still subsumed under the father; he still bows before the father as a mark of respect to mark his subordinate position in relation to the father. In other to underline the ties between the rich

man and money, the poet indicates that, the rich is alive partly due to his money, as shown in line 15, *o buchaghị ụgha na ego ya soro jide ya ndu*; this is to say that, without money, the rich man may not survive. The fact that money keeps him alive shows his level of dependence on money, more than the Supreme Being who is the custodian of life. The Igbo believe that Chi ji ndu “God is the holder of life” but in this instance, money is a significant part of what keeps the fellow alive. In line 16, the poet bemoans the fact that money has turned things upside down in the society *ego emeela ihe dī oji o dī ocha n’elu ụwa*; the use of oji “dark” and ocha “white” is not accidental. Oji is symbolic of evil while ocha is symbolic of good; therefore, the poet is suggesting that, money has made evil to become good in the world.

Ego na-ekwu!

*Ma olu okwu ya adighi ada mma mma mgbe dum
Okwu ya adighi ebute ahụ idị mma mgbe niile,
Olu ya na-ezuru dimkpa ohi anya ocha n’abali;
Nwa amadi ipua gho mpurum bu ego gwara ya,
Olu ego na-akuzi ikpo asi na nghogbu n’uwa;
Aka di ocha adighikwa n’ihe ego siri, nwee m!
Ala adighi mma n’ihi olu ego a na-ada ebe dum!*

Money is speaking!

But it’s tone does not sound good all the time

It’s tone does not bring good health all the time,

It’s voice leads a man go and steal in the night;

A man goes out to snatch things from people was led by money,

The voice of money teaches hate and deceit in the world;

Clean hand is not a product of money!

The land is not good due to the voice of money everywhere!

In the third stanza, the poet outlines the various things money do in the society; the strategy used to achieve this is personification. The poet personifies money and puts it in a position where it speaks, as seen in line 17, *Ego na-ekwu!* “Money speaks!”; the apostrophe used at the end of the expression serves to emphasise the point that money speaks. In the subsequent lines, the poet describes the voice of money and the various suggestions it makes to people. In line 18, the poet says that, the voice of money is not always good *ma olu okwu ya adighi ada mma mma mgbe dum*, coupled with the fact that, moneys expression does not always engender good health and wellbeing, as seen in line 19, *okwu ya adighi ebute ahụ idị mma mgbe niile*; implicit in these lines is the fact that, money has side effects that are not palatable to the society. In lines 20 and 21, the poet goes into specifics by saying that the voice of money resonates in stealing and robbery in night and day *olu ya na-ezuru dimkpa ohi anya ocha n’abali; nwa amadi ipua gho mpurum bu ego gwara ya*; it is money that tells or entices a young man to go and steal at night, and also entices a young man to go out in the day to snatch things from people. Additionally, the poet says that the voice of money encourages hate and fraud in the world, as seen in line 22, *olu ego na-akuzi ikpo asi na nghogbu n’uwa*; the verb kuzi “teach” shows that money is like a teacher that guides pupils and leads them into unethical behavior. In other words, money is a bad teacher. In the last two lines of the stanza (23-24), the poet uses negation to say the things that money does not do, *aka di ocha adighikwa n’ihe ego siri; aka di ocha* “clean hands” is a symbol of honesty and good conduct. When the Igbo man says that *aka m di ocha* “my hand is clean” it is used to declare that one is not involved in an evil act. In the context of this poem, it implies that money does not promote the virtues of righteousness and the good. In addition, the poet laments that the land is not good due to the voice of money everywhere, *ala adighi mma n’ihi olu ego a na-ada ebe dum*; the implication is that, there is so much evil in the land as a result of the quest for money by the kinsfolk.

Agbogho aruchaala n’ihi ego siri ha, choo m!

Oku ego kporo anapula ndikom ibi ezi ndu,

Ego a gwara onye nwere ya, GAA GBAJIE OBERE AKA

*Mere ndi o fee mmiri fee anyim jiri biawa Afrika
Jide aghugho, jide mmegbu wee kwado akpiri ego
Ego wuru obodo, ma ego metoro iwu obodo.
Ego na-ekwu, o kwadoro oke ochicho na ajo omume,
Bia nye iwu si: CHUFUONU EZUMIKE! CHUFUONU EZI NDU*

Maidens are defiled because of lust for money!
The call of money has deprived men of the good life,
Money told its owner, GO BREAK THE HAND OF THE WEAK
That motivated migrants from the river and anyim to visit Afrika
With deceit, with oppression and promoted greed
Money built the city, but money damaged the law of the land,
Money is speaking, it supports greed and evil behavior,
And gave a law saying: DRIVE AWAY REST! DRIVE AWAY THE GOOD LIFE

In the last stanza, the poem continues to state the adverse effects of the voice of money in the world, and thereafter traces the origin of money to the colonial period. In lines 25-26, the poet bemoans the rate of immorality in the land among maidens and men as a result of pecuniary indulgence and gratification, *agbogho aruchaala n'ih i ego siri ha, choro m!*; the young girl has committed abomination for yielding to promptings from money. Such abominations typified by *ru* "void/upset" in *aruchaala* could be associated with sex outside marriage or abortion. In addition the call of money has deprived men of leading a good life, *oku ego kporo anapula ndikom ibi ezi ndu*; the key word here is *ezi ndu* "good life" which is emphasized in the last line. The good life in Igbo world view is to obey established rules of behavior and morality enunciated by the culture. Such rules include how to relate with the weak, as seen in line 27, *ego a gwara onye nwere ya, GAA GBAJIE OBERE AKA*; *obere* "small" is symbolic of the weak in the society. That money tells the owner to go and break the hands of a weak person shows that money had created a class of new powerful people who use what they have to oppress the weak or the less privileged. The poet proceeds from here to connect the act of oppression to the colonial masters who came from overseas to Africa, as seen in line 28, *mere ndi o fee mmiri fee anyim jiri biawa Afrika*; *mmiri* "river" and *anyim* "popular name of river" indicate that, the white man covered both small and big rivers or seas to reach the shores of Africa. However, the poet laments that, the white man came with deceit and oppression to the land of Africa, as seen in line 29 *jide aghugho, jide mmegbu wee kwado akpiri ego*; the white colonial masters used the tools of deceit and oppression to promote greed and lust for money among Africans. However, the poet admits the importance of money in nation building and development but also its demerits, as shown in line 30, *ego wuru obodo, ma ego metoro iwu obodo*; on one hand money is used to build, while on the other hand money destroys the law of the state. In line 31, the poet repeats the fact that, money speaks; that is, money is in control and also restates the fact that money promotes avarice and bad behavior, *ego na-ekwu, o kwadoro oke ochicho na ajo omume*; the repetition serves to intensify the conclusion about the adverse effects of money, in spite of its usefulness. In the last line (32), it is made apparent that money rules the society *bia nye iwu si: CHUFUONU EZUMIKE! CHUFUONU EZI NDU*; the law of money is, drive away rest and drive away good life. This is to aver that, the pursuit of money leads to a cessation of rest and the good life marked by simplicity and modesty. In sum, the poem is a critic of a society controlled and manipulated by money and the wealthy class.

The analysis of the poem "Ego na-ekwu" shows that the evolution of money economy, as epitomized by colonial administration in Africa negatively impacted traditional Igbo administrative paradigm, as well as changing the economic landscape of the Igbo society. It led to a new administrative system where the wealthy, rather than wise elders, were in control. The new wealthy class used their money to influence and control the kinsfolk. Igbo say that *onye ji igu ka ewu na-eso* "the person who holds the palm frond is the one followed by goats" the palm frond stands for resources and goat stand for people, thus implying that, the person who has resources attracts followers who need those resources. In this way, the rich exercise social power by controlling the kinsmen through the resources they own; that the rich people are able to snatch power from the elders is an index of the power of wealth. This experience

is similar to the situation in Osundare's "siren" (explained by Ngeh, 2014) where the politicians use their power to manipulate the masses for their own economic interest, as well as the 'king' in Doh's "Fear-Fear King". The way the poor masses throng after the absentee politician representing them is akin to the way the kinfolk in "Ego na-ekwu" honour the wealthy in their midst, as well as the devotion of the citizens to the King in Doh's account. In these cases, it is obvious that the masses have lost their mind, as a result of a system that keeps them enslaved and dependent on the crumbs that fall from their leaders' table. The only difference is that whereas Osundare's politician was 'elected' by the same people he abandoned, Doh's King is a dictator of sorts who put himself in power, without the peoples' mandate, Maduekwe's 'holders of money' are those that subtly became leaders by virtue of their wealth. In both instances, the principals are those who have power without status according to Schmid, (2010).

The picture painted is that of irresponsible leaders bereft of integrity, but who possess a basic means of social power (economic) through which they control the common gullible masses and exercise power over them. In both cases also, the people involved share a relationship that is asymmetrical; an unequal relationship where the rich enjoy high-power and expect nothing but loyalty from the citizens who have low-power but expect economic benefits from the rich. Thus, responsible leadership is lacking in the social and political space, on account of unalloyed acquiescence to the influence of wealth and ceding of power (by design or default) to amoral and unscrupulous characters. There is no doubt that, irresponsible leadership is the bane of underdevelopment and economic backwardness in Africa. Pless (2007:451) defines responsible leadership as "...the art of building and sustaining social and moral relationships between business leaders and different stakeholders (followers), based on a sense of justice, a sense of recognition, a sense of care, and a sense of accountability for a wide range of economic, ecological, social, political, and human responsibilities". Similarly, Voegtlin (2011:59) evaluates responsible leadership as "awareness and consideration of the consequences of one's actions for all stakeholders, as well as the exertion of influence by enabling the involvement of the affected stakeholders and by engaging in an active stakeholder dialogue...". In both definitions, it is apparent that leadership is an intentional act of positively influencing and impacting the community with the resources that are available to the leaders. It is a situation where the interest and welfare of the generality of people (leaders and followers) are taken into consideration; in other words, leadership is for the common good.

In terms of altering the shape of society's socio-economic life, it is not an overstatement that money, as a resource is an object of worship in Igbo society, as it is in so many climes. It is like a god at whose golden feet members of society prostrate and make sacrifices. In the poem under analysis, the quest for money has led to unquantifiable evil in the society, such as fraud, robbery, immorality, deceit and oppression. In Nnyigide's (2014) analysis of "Akwukwo oru ego", money is portrayed as an evil agency that drives people into all sorts of crime and anti-social activities. This is also the case in Agwuna's (2017) analysis of "Achomoru" where the unemployed resort to crime and rituals to make ends meet. Also in "Obodo Onicha", the bursting city is notorious for crime such as stealing, armed robbery, fraud, etc. The thread that ties these experiences together is the lust for material possessions in the society. People are driven to extremes of crime for several reasons; in "Ego na-ekwu", and "Obodo Onicha", citizens are pushed into crime and immoralities due to greed; but in "Achomoru" it is joblessness that makes people vulnerable to crime. Irrespective of the reason for this lamentable state of affairs, it is apparent that, the basic motivation is the unequal stratification of society, where there are 'haves' and 'have nots'. In this situation, the poor people are not comfortable with their lot, and so strive to bridge the economic gap between them and the rich. The poor people are aware and conscious of the power wielded by the rich, and would not mind wielding such powers themselves. This is especially based on the understanding that, ours is a free society or market economy where everybody has (even though unequal) access to success. Unlike the situation in Marx's Europe where the bourgeoisie (owners of the means of production), always exploit the proletariat or the common workers, the situation in most of Africa is that poor and rich people own means of production such as farms, factories, businesses (although in varying degrees) and so the poor can aspire and pull themselves out of the noose of poverty and, more importantly, out of the hold of the rich. This is the reason for the desperation of the masses;

it is an outcome of conflict between two bipolar economic classes, where different groups compete for power and resources, as attested by Mooney (2017).

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has demonstrated the folly of dependence on wealth and money in this contemporary times rather than the traditional value system of dependence on the wise counsel of the elders. This study has examined an Igbo poem based on the question of wealth and the exercise of power in the Igbo society. Evidently, unlike the traditional Igbo society where the elders controlled the community, in contemporary times, the elders are relegated, and a new crop of leaders have emerged. These are moneybags who have no integrity but who muscle their way to leadership on account of their material wealth, which they use to influence the rest of the people. This situation is occasioned by the fact that, money has become a resource that is over-valued and therefore seen as an end in itself, rather than a means to an end. The fact that money is speaking, as aptly captured by the title of the poem, is an attestation that, wealth and the wealthy are in control of the society. Consequently, the society is riddled with vices, crime and all forms of immorality. The present decadence is traceable to the relegation of the elders in the past; these elders are the philosophers of the time, who were the custodians of the Igbo culture. They were men of integrity and honour who administered the community with probity and transparency. They ensured that things are done in the way and manner prescribed by the culture, and the society thrived in terms of peace, order, and morality. It is the position of this paper that, money is important for the sake of building the society, but money should be put in its place. It should be dethroned and replaced by the truth championed by credible people who are amenable to the rule of law. The socio-political system needs an overhaul to ensure that only men and women of probity, accountability, and morality are in positions of power. Only then can we have a sane and humane society where there is order and where all citizens have opportunities to lead the good life.

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