

Ego Mbutu Phenomenon: Towards A Rediscovery of Igbo Philosophy of Wealth

Cyril Chibuzo Ezeani

Department of Philosophy
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka
zanibuzo_cy@yahoo.com

Abstract

The work is concerned with ego mbutu phenomenon that is preponderant among the contemporary generation of young Igbos. Using the method of hermeneutics, it x-rays the nature of this phenomenon and its attraction. It further elucidates on its characteristic features. It discovers that the fundamental feature is the absolutization of wealth and materialism. An interesting feature includes also ritualization and spiritualization of economic space. Given the danger which this absolutization portends and the plethora of social ills it engenders, the work moves for a displacement of ego mbutu ideology using the Igbo philosophy of wealth. In the articulation of this philosophy, the work digs into the goldmine of Igbo proverbs and names which are shown to be reservoirs of principles and values of Ndi Igbo. It shows that this philosophy while specially valuing wealth, does not absolutize it. It rather subjects wealth to hierarchy of values, moral and communalist principles, all of which constrain one against all forms of social ills and ultra-individualism in the quest for quick money and wealth. Employing a hermeneutics of metaphysics of Ikenga, a symbol of drive for power and success in Igbo cosmology, the work discovers that economic success Igbo worldview while having the possibility of being a predetermined reality is nevertheless and importantly predicated on toil, endurance, struggle, diligence and discipline. It is the concatenation of these values implicit in Igbo philosophy of wealth that is embodied in the elegance and regally exuded by the 'ogalanya' as the morphological analysis of the word shows, otherwise there is a degeneration into empty exhibitionism of the contemporary ego mbutu phenomenon.

Introduction

"Ego mbutu," "ego igwe," "igbu ozu," among others constitute a potpourri of contemporary colloquial expressions popular among the younger generation, employed to designate massive quantum of wealth. One hears such expressions as "the guy egbu ozu," "the guy pa ike," "the guy don hammer," "the guy don blow." These contemporary catchphrases in English, a certain linguistic 'haemaphroditism' that marks the modern Igbo, are few of exuberant and flamboyant renditions in which the new reality of affluence is emblazoned. They are at once both descriptive of an overwhelming and outstanding affluence on the one hand, and projection of an intense desire and craving for such phenomenal fortune on the other hand. Both of these features can always be gleaned from the exciting manner in which a discussion around the topic is held especially when there is a nouveau riche in town. Even a careless observer would notice the relish and delight, the pleasure with which the news is shared which betrays a seething desire to be like the one being talked about: the repetition, the rhythmic stretch of words, the emphasis, the enthusiasm, the high spirit, the excitement with which the tales are told. All these are indicative of the preponderance of ego mbutu consciousness and disposition as well as how phenomenal the attraction of this phenomenon is, especially among the youth and indeed the general permissive and uncritical populace.

Here comes the objective of the present piece: what is the nature of this phenomenon and why is this phenomenal attraction towards it? These questions would engage the researcher in the first segment of the work. It engages with one of its key features, namely the ritualization and spiritualization of the economic space, which will be shown to be rooted in the traditional epistemologies and worldview. What is unsettling for the researcher is its absolutization of wealth and materialism that even brings rituals and spiritual power at its beck and call and in the logic of anything goes provided that the purported absolute value that is wealth is got. The assumptions, the underlying principles and logic of ego mbute, no doubt flies in the face of Igbo philosophy of wealth which the work projects as valid for the displacement of the phenomenon and the ideology that fuels it. In trying to espouse the Igbo philosophy of wealth, the work uses the goldmine of Igbo proverbs and names which form reservoirs of principles and values of the Igbo people. It highlights that this philosophy while specially valuing wealth, does not absolutize it. It rather subjects wealth to hierarchy of values, moral and communalist principles, all of which constrain one against all forms of social ills and ultra-individualism in the quest for quick money and wealth. It recognizes that economic success while having the possibility of being a predetermined reality is nevertheless and importantly predicated on toil, endurance, struggle, diligence and discipline. It is the concatenation of these that actually makes for the elegance and regality of ‘ogalanya’ as would be shown in the morphological analysis of the word, otherwise it degenerates into empty ‘showism’ of the contemporary ego mbute phenomenon. Thus, among other things, Igbo philosophy of wealth is projected in the work as a valid candidate for the urgent reorientation and revaluation that is needed to displace the sweeping tide of ego mbute phenomenon that is prevalent among especially Igbo youth.

Ego Mbute Phenomenon: Basic Understanding and Briefs on Causal Factors

For one well versed in Igbo lexicology and semantics, ego mbute phenomenon projects an incredible amount of money which one “carries” and appropriates. Ego mbute phenomenon evokes a situation where in one makes a stupendous volume of money and wealth in a relatively instantaneous moment. There is in this category, a certain bracketing and denigration of any genuine struggles that ought to accompany wealth creation. These do not count, for they are rather perceived as stumbling block on the way to humongous accumulation of wealth or a cog in the wheel of financial success and so constitutes a waste of time to an impatient generation. Gradual and oscillating progress is out of the purview of ego mbute consciousness and operation. No wonder there is dearth of candidates to be tutored in the apprenticeship system({gbabo}) that had generated many Igbo wealthy in the past. There is also decline in the attraction to skill driven jobs. This kind of jobs, for many young people cannot bring the sort of much admired and fancied affluence which is afforded by the logic of ego mbute. For the record it is good to point out that this phenomenon much as it is more popular today is not purely a contemporary reality. It has roots that stretches in the long past especially in the post war era. There were money doublers (wayo people); 419ers, advanced free fraudsters, ogwu ego etc., all of which are symptomatic of emerging ego mbute consciousness and orientation. One can recall the story of Emmanuel Nwude who sold an imaginary airport to a Brazilian bank, Banco Noroeste Brazil for 242 million dollars (N86 billion). Today however, the attraction of ego mbute phenomenon as has been noted has become phenomenal. 419ers persist, money doubling persist, there are many young people who engage in various forms of cyber-criminality (yahoo yahoo, yahoo yahoo plus etc), drug peddling, betting

systems such as Bet9ja, engagement in Ponzi schemes, to mention but a few. These have captivated the fancies of the young in their quest for quick and easy money. To be sure this is not an exclusive Igbo experience. It is rather a pan experience as Nigeria is concerned. There is no doubt that the ineptitude of the Government over the years have made such a phenomenon not only an attraction but also an imperative: the outrageous unemployment rate, the agonizing poverty level, the continued decay and absence of critical infrastructure and the economic failure of the Nigerian state; Not to mention the dearth of a critical society that should continually raise the value question, a situation that has precipitated invasion of value system and permissive culture. The Igbo question and predicament; their continued marginalization almost in all national space continues to reinforce this: the structural imbalance, the spatial plan injustice, political exclusion, the economic sabotage. All these leave many with some sense of hopelessness and all the more deepen the pragmatic attraction of ego mbutu phenomenon because one has got to survive! Not a few have blamed the ego mbutu phenomenon on the preponderance of such scenes in Nigerian movies where a young boy is instantaneously catapulted to a new life of wealth after perhaps many years of suffering, the longtime of suffering being vividly shown and understood while his ‘making it’ is presented in such a short while if not just instantaneously without any reference to the preceding struggles. Many a time occultic powers were revealed to be at the root of sudden transformation. The current accentuation on prosperity gospel is also within the scope of causal chain of the preponderance and the alluring influence of the ego mbutu phenomenon for here in the gospel which should subordinate all other worldly values is seen to prioritize and eulogize money and wealth, an unfortunate incidence of a degenerate transvaluation.

Ego Mbutu: The Appeal of Attendant Exhibitionism and Exceptionalism

Beyond these, the key attraction of ego mbutu is the glitz and glamour, the exhibitionism that is consciously and regally projected. This seems to find anchorage in the Igbo saying that “*ogaranya bxiomumeomume*,” a view that exhibitionism, opulence cannot be divested from wealth: It has to be shown; it has to be displayed; it has to be noised about. Wealth cannot be silent! It must be accompanied by sirens, a retinue of security men, a barrage of cars and SUVs, intermittent gunshots, ceremonies that simply turn hoi polloi into conspicuous consumerists, money spray and today in bundles, a rather wasteful spending that are meant to convey the sense of “*ego rie ns*” (let money eat shit), “*mee ego ife*” (deal with money). Such exhibitionism both in spending and celebrations attract a retinue of followers and praise singers because “*onyebuigukaewuna-eso*.” (it is he who carries the palm frond that the goat follows) Besides, “*onyenwee ego o nweexmxnna*,” (he has kit and kin who is wealthy). Those are part of the opulence of wealth, they are essential to it. It is this that makes the phenomenon tick as the latter projects the view of a certain wealth made easy, which the young are eager to identify with.

Perhaps, the special and splendid recognition that the society accords to these is part of the attraction. You can imagine how the young would have felt in the days of, for instance, praise singers such as Oliver De Coque in whose album the rich are brazenly celebrated and wealth epitomized to the exclusion of any other value. This is especially when it is known that the art of the praise singing is critical to the existence and reproduction of society: “the celebration of success, the fostering and legitimization of ideals that people should devote themselves to. Praise songs provide the channel for social mobilization and education.” (Nwankwo, 2016, p.27) What is being harped is that the exhibitionism with the attendant superb recognition merely increase the

allurement among the young people in such a way that they become keenly concerned with the source of the wealth. Such concern is not really a critical one which casts a philosophical eye on the source of the wealth but simply the inquisitiveness to know the way with the decision already made to follow it in order “to make it.” The concern is propelled by the aesthetics of ‘showmanship’ displayed by the money bag. But it is much more than that. The presence of the money bag elicits such statement as “Nnaa, the guy sozin’ifeanaeme,” depicting that the rich person has become important as to become counted and is seen as influential. This highlights immediately the potency that wealth is seen to give to the holder in a way that it appears to order all things according to his whims and caprice in what has become a permissive community and society at large. Lawrence Nwankwo captures this in his analysis of one of the tracks in Oliver De Coque’s album, namely, “Ana-enweobodoenwe.” In that critical work, Nwankwo in both diachronic and synchronic reading of the track notes that it captures and portrays a certain cultural shift in which money economy gives the holder a social capital which in turn causes a certain reconfiguration such that the affluent constitute themselves patrons of the community—nnukwummanwx (the big masquerade). According to him, “in the changed socio-cultural context, titles such as qnwanaetiriqha (the moon that shines for the community), ogbunaechendo (the qgbx tree that provides shade for the community) acquire a different meaning. They represent a patron-client relationship in which the wealthy individual is the patron of members of the community.” (Nwankwo, 2016, p.33) What is witnessed in this atmosphere is a certain asymmetry, unilateralism, exceptionalism in which the money bag constitutes himself into untouchable who could act with impunity because oji ego naekwu (he who has money decides). They are transformed into deities, institutions who are simply self-referential with many arsenals of social connections that can always be activated as and when due to his advantage, even if in some cases, it is undue.

Undergirding Ritualization and Spiritualization of the Economic Space

A major characteristic feature of the instantaneous money and wealth acquisition is the leveraging of spiritual powers in wealth accumulation, the spiritualization of the economic space. The online space is replete with ritual events like: people bathing naked on the rivers in the full glare of the world; people eating fecal output; dealing brutally but ritually with animals of sorts; going naked on the street; running mad on the streets sometimes immediately they are dropped from cars; what about has popularly been termed okeite ritual? The present author could recall the viral video of a boy barking like a dog which was assumed to have been posted by his friends in Ijebu, Ode, Ogun state. To continue to maintain his entitlement and status as big boy, it was explained he must bark like a dog for 24 hours once a month. One of the areas in which tapping of spiritual resources is employed for the accumulation of wealth is the cyberspace. This has been variously termed digital spiritualization, cyber-spiritualism. Defining the term, while building on Melvin and Ayotunde (2010), Tade writes that cyber-spiritualism is “a cybercrime strategy which blends spiritual elements with internet surfing to enhance victimization rates on the web. Cyber spiritualism involves the procurement and use of mystical, spiritual, and supernatural powers by yahoo yahoo to cast a spell on their victims. Through this method, victims become hypnotized and, without objection, offer their treasures (products and money) to the fraudsters.” (Tade 2013, p.690) Such spiritual forces include such practices as putting spells on victims’ photographs in shrines and communicating with them via telephone through words-of-power or oratory postulations

depending on the purpose, with the aim of unlocking cosmic forces that can make the spiritual manifest itself in the physical realm. For instance, in Lazarus and Okolorie (2019, p.24) which interviewed 40 Economic and Financial Crimes Commission agents, it was shown that one of ritual practices some engage in for the purposes of hoodwinking their victims is

“to put a victim’s picture under the laptop [that is] after the spiritualist (native doctor) might have “worked on” the picture (cast a spell on it possibly in his/her shrine). It is then necessary and sufficient for fraudsters to simply place the photograph under the computer while chatting/messaging the victims of fraud. Also, in the words of one respondent, “fraudsters also talk to the [victims’] pictures repeatedly” which represent the words-of-power (“do as I say” rhetoric) (Lazarus and Okolorie 2019, p.24)

There seems to be the underlining belief that all aspects of life are reflective of the spiritual world and determined by it. This presupposes the spiritual realm to be the substructure upon which rests the superstructure comprising of other realms of life including wealth acquisition and the economy. This is obviously an inversion of Karl Marx material dialectics in which the material (economy) is the substructure that holds other components of the superstructure which include religion among others. Suleman Lazarus (2019) however is opposed to the negativization of spirituality in the virtual world. According to him such negativization dislocates cyber-spiritualism from the well-established indigenous worldview from which it emerged and portends a certain chronocentrism. According to him digital spiritualization is reflective of the past that created it and to this extent is an old reality. It is consistent with the indigenous epistemologies and worldview. Thus the spiritualization of economic space is not just a contemporary phenomenon. I do think, however, that what is contemporary about it is the degree and the boldness with which many indulge in it perhaps thanks to the internet age. Though the power could be termed occultic, it seems that the secrecy that used to surround it is becoming unveiled given that it is carried out in the full glare of the world. The audacity of the postmodern times marked by daring autonomy is astonishing. This may have been fuelled by the deplorable economic situation of the country as well as the emergence of cyberspace that has created more openings as well as more means of publicization.

Predating cyber-spiritualism and other forms of contemporary ritualization and spiritualization of economic space is *ogwū ego* money making ritual. *Ogwū ego* has been defined as “a means by which money is made in an extraordinary manner; easy and hidden way without any conventional socio-economic or scientific means open to the common folk.” (Okpalike, 2021, pp130-131) The problem here is that many of the mental constructs we have about this phenomenon is derived from the Nigerian movie which already casts doubt to its reality especially given the mechanical picture it usually paints of it. Okpalike for instance questions the mental picture painted by Nigerian movies in which there is a rain of bank notes after ritualized formula have been completed on the conviction that these notes cannot but be counterfeit as the Central Bank of every country is the institution in charge of minting money and regulate the amount of notes in circulation. Again the authenticity of the so called *ogwū ego* is put into question given that those who claim to be holders of the secret powers to wealth are themselves poor. Thus he questions: How could a *dibia* who knows the secret power of wealth be poor and in many cases depend upon the sacrifice of their client to be rich? Again, he questions how the carcass of the human being used for the ritual could

be preserved without pungent odour and infection while seeming to conclude that it could be engagement in body part business, a thriving lucrative which actually does the purported magic. From his studies, Okpalike (2021) hypothetically concludes especially given the dearth of any ritual performer who fitted into the common narrative of the everyday Igbo about *ogwu ego* that “*Ogwu ego* is a figurative expression which has nothing to do with magical money-spinning. It is rather a metaphor to express those visible, tangible, physical, ethical, social or even religious actions and discipline which necessarily generate wealth. *Ogwu ego* rituals are mere symbolizations of those actions necessary for the creation of wealth.”

Okpalike’s observations though valid are not problems insurmountable. If corpse can generally be preserved today, one cannot exclude the possibility that the Igbo do have the local content and solution for such. The question of the *dibia* (the medicine man) being poor as he himself reckoned could be a ritual requirement for efficacy of the ritual process. While I would agree that there could be a difficulty in the operations of such especially given the secrecy that surrounds it, given also that none could divulge to non-initiate the researcher inclusive, I do think it is too simplistic to dismiss such as simply a metaphor. Why have some people who had been suspected to have indulged in such ritual killings been met with tragic ending? Why it is that sometimes their behavior could be queer? There is this story of one man who built a filling station, furnished it and never sold a litter of fuel there nor did he ever lease it to anyone? This is not in any way to validate the potency and reality of the phenomenon; it is rather to place a caveat on the outright dismissal of such as a metaphor. The mechanical picture of an automatic emission and rain of notes were projections of early Nigerian movies and not recent ones. There seems to be an understanding of presence of cosmic energy that could be tapped into. This is in spite of the philosophical of the repugnancy of action from a distance. Reality, I think is larger than the empiricist model or logical positivist projections.

In African worldview, the classification between the visible and invisible world, the material and spiritual is simply made for the convenience of analysis. African worldview is such that sees no dichotomy between these realms. There is no clear cut opposition between the visible and the invisible, the material and spiritual, the temporal and non-temporal, the sacred and profane. There is interaction, overlap and a sense of cosmic oneness. Placid Tempels conceptualization of being as force shows that being could be influenced in such a way as to increase or decrease its vital force. Though there is a certain East African that the existence of “a kind of universal energy, diffused through nature invisible, imponderable, active, which can be harnessed and put to some use good or evil. This is akin to what Dogon in Mali refers to as *Nyama* which is translated by Griaule and Dieterien as *force vitale* but unlike Tempels is “an energy...impersonal, unconscious, and distributed in all animals, vegetables, in supernatural beings, in things of nature.” (Ikenga-Metuh, 1987, p.77) Whether in Tempels’ framing or latter framing, these show the possibility and capacity for manipulation. This is unlike bifurcations that generally attend the Greco-Christian epistemologies.

Beyond the *ogwu ego* phenomenon, many have however questioned the efficacy of any such black magic on any form of criminal acquisition of wealth. For these, the black magic are mere placebo. The misgiving arises from the question of why tracking technology work on such people; why juju could not prevent them from being detected, yet in many cases internet fraudster, kidnappers etc

are arrested and paraded with their charms and their charm makers. For many others, such dastard feat of Emmanuel Nwude who sold an imaginary airport to a Brazilian bank for 242 million dollars (N86 billion) could not have happened without some extraordinary and paranormal assistance. In any case the occultic power has never been presented as omnipotent though it may have been presented as being very powerful and efficacious. The Igbo worldview believes that such power can be expiratory or demobilized (Qgwuna-alxalx)

In any case, the purview of the work is not to prove that the purported ritual power is real or imagined, it is rather concerned with the main characteristic feature of the contemporary ego mbute phenomenon. Even if one is not ready to acquiesce to the potency of such paranormal and occultic activities, one could at least accept that the belief in the presence of such power have become really a bulwark for the initiates to dare in any activity. And that include such illegal and criminal activities such as kidnapping, drug peddling, money doubling, advanced free fraud, robbery etc, all of which boycott and denigrate long years of apprenticeship and with promises of instant acquisition of wealth accompanied by invincible power. And speaking of apprenticeship system, there is already noted decline in that initiative that helped to tremendously revamp the post war economic fortunes of Ndi Igbo, creating millionaires and billionaires but not without its logic of toil, pain and endurance that opens unto wealth. And this is thanks to the crave for fast money among other factors. A research by UNIZIK Business School titled “Reinvigorating Igbo Enterpreneural Behaviour via Enhanced Apprenticeship in Onitsha Markets Anambra” blamed the decline on the devaluation of family values and unbridled quest for materialism.

A Rediscovery of Igbo Philosophy Wealth

Igbo philosophy of wealth could be quarried from the goldmine of Igbo proverbs, Igbo names among others. The basic presupposition here is that proverbs are laden with ancient wisdom, beliefs and accumulated experiences of past generation. They can be considered true index of what a people regard as true and are interpretative of their principles of life and conduct. They are valid witnesses of the social, political, ethical and religious ideals of the people among whom they originate and circulate. (Ikenga-Metuh, 1987, p.32) In the same way in African onomastic traditions, names are not generally mere labels. They are rather veritable linguistic emblems and symbolic cultural resources. They are based on sociocultural and ethno pragmatic contexts. (Agyekum, 2006) Though the basic role of names is identity construction and expression of individuality (Boluwaduro 2019, Jell-Bahlsen 1988; Mensah 2021, Palsson 2014) they, according to Blount (2016), track social change and social status and thus are part of social and cultural systems. Names in Igbo cultural milieu in many cases is a reflection of their worldview, principle of life, beliefs and ideals.

It must however be pointed out that the problem with the use of names and proverbs to delineate such a philosophy is that sometimes it is not easy to decipher when some maxims and names are just mere factual representation and when they are categorical and normative human conduct, the sort that would be valid for the formulation of such philosophy. Take for instance, the statement “agwọ eloghi agwọ ibe ya ọ naghị ebu” (A snake that does not swallow fellow snake cannot grow big). There is nothing in this statement that shows it as being categorical and normative of human action in addition to its representing the reptile world, and again there is nothing in that which shows that it is not the norm of human conduct; though a more integral and integrative reading of

Igbo cultural mores may consider it in the light of enunciating facts of animal life which can mirror the human society without its being projective of normative for human flourishing.

Be that as it may, wealth is one of the values in Igbo socio-cultural pragmatics. Such names such as Akùbùeze (wealth is king), ùbaka (wealth is greater), ùbabike (wealth is power), are all names that indicate that wealth is highly prized. The saying, “nwatakwochaa aka o soro ogaranya ribe nri” (when a child washes his hands, he joins the wealthy at the table) shows the pride of place that the wealthy occupy. These are names that show the eminence of wealth and the hall of honour to which the wealthy are treated. Perhaps this is not unconnected with the morphological formation of the Igbo word of “ogaranya” which stands for the rich man. An analysis of the word shows two key words: “gara” and “nya.” The first is an active word, “gara” as when one talks about “garagara” or as a diminutive of “nga” which is motif and conveys the sense of being active, not shy, bold, and agile. “Nya” is diminutive of “nnya” which is a kind of slow but regal dance motion characterized by pride, elegance, style, class and grace. The word, “ogaranya” from its morphology resonates certain elegance, being active, some pride! Sometimes the word is written “ogaranya.” In this case “gala” could also be taken to be diminutive of “ngala” which again conveys the sense of pride, high self-esteem. It seems then that its placement with “nya” performs the literary function of emphasis and reinforcement. What it means is that it is a value to be aspired to, value worthy of having, and value to be highly prized. There is no doubt that this morphological analysis indicates some foundation for showism, a key feature of contemporary ego mbute phenomenon already in root of Igbo word for the wealthy. That it could degenerate to that is a sure danger as could already be seen in the showy attitude of the nouveau riche of the ego mbute order. Yet the root like is noted is not just about empty showism and noise of the modern times, it is regal, elegant, classy with the poise of sense of fulfilment and satisfaction. I do think that these attributes are more effectively rooted on deeper ethical principles and values which are part of Igbo philosophy of wealth as well as the intrinsic value of labour and toil which result bring the said satisfaction and fulfilment that is projected in the “ogaranya.” The question is: is it an absolute value? Or relative located within the hierarchy of values and so subject to the moral principle?

Igbo prides wealth and success. Ikenga is the cultural symbolic representation of success in Igbo cosmology. And that includes wealth and financial success. Igbo personality is a composite of onwe and personal chi. The latter is referred to as ikenga (ike=Force; Nga=Motif). Ikenga is therefore a driving force. It is a symbol of valour and strength which guards a man and inspires in him courage, strength, ambition and achievement. It gives all pre-requisites for success of every man of status. (Adibe, 2009, pp.130-1) Ikenga Nwoga (1971, p.119) notes that personal chi of an individual represents “a rarefaction of the universal force, a personification of his allotted role in the universal motion towards the ultimate goal.” Ejiogu compares this to the concept of election or the spirit of capitalism which is espoused extensively by Max Weber in his study of Calvinist Protestantism. What this serves to show is not to say that personal chi is associated with the rise of capitalism, it is rather to show that Igbo acknowledge the individual and its success and that the concept of personal chi has economic implications. This personal chi, sociologically “enables the individual to engage embrace and accommodate change and innovation in his or her personal capacity. It seemed that for the Igbos financial success is inextricably linked to gaining favour from ancestral gods, hence “agbakambọ bụ nri ọnụ ụba si na chi.” (our struggle could only amount to daily bread but the increase in wealth is granted by God) This truth is found in such names as

Chinenyeakụ (God gives wealth); Chinweakụ (God owns riches); Akuchi (God's wealth or wealth from God). There is of course the question of whether the chi here is in the real sense of Chukwu (God). There is no conflict here for the personal chi remains a special spark from Chukwu. God is ontologically linked to man through the chi, the guardian spirit, the spark or emanation of God in each person. The issue raised here immediately strikes the age old dialectics of freedom and determinism. Ikenga Metuh notes however that Igbo concept of predestination is unlike the Western conceptualization which implies that which must necessarily happen irrespective of what the human person does. According to him, it is true that what one may hope to get out of life is only what has been predestined by God, but what one actually gets is his responsibility. The predestined is like an award by God to individual and held in trust for him by the guardian Destiny-spirit but the responsibility of obtaining the money or benefits of the award rests on him. Thus, "He can get all the award or may lose a good part of it. But try as he would, he cannot get anything that is not included in the award." Besides this responsibility, to achieve success, he needs the assistance of the visible forces and invisible such as the guardian spirit, deities and ancestors. He has to deal with the evil forces. His success depends on "how he marshals the favourable forces through rituals, sacrifices, prayers, vows, offering and making good medicine to neutralize the machinations of the evil forces." Having made concerted effort without success, it seems that what he gets is his destiny for the Igbo has it that "where a man falls, there his destiny (Chi) pushed him down." (Ikenga-Metuh, p.1987, p.190-91)

The responsibility angle immediately brings to focus the how of wealth acquisition. Igbo concept of wealth as "akunauba" in itself is a key portrayal of Igbo philosophy of wealth. "Akụ" has the same root with the infinitive *lku* as when one says *lku azu*. {*kx(ta)* has the basic sense of "tend" and this by no means is an instantaneous thing. It requires attention, it requires patience, and is energy and time consuming. This is the reason that it is preceded by the transitive verb "*lkpata*" and that again has everything to do with carefulness, patience, brains and brawn. Coincidentally Igbo use the same word, "akx" for a certain type of ant, a flying termite which botanical name is *macrotermes bellicosus*. These have their season, move more at night, and are attracted to light sources. These could be gathered, de-winged, fried and eaten but this is hardly an on the spot thing for the whole process of getting the termites involves: "waiting for them in their season, having to stay awake to catch them, putting up a source of light to attract them, setting a bowl of water under the light to trap them once they fall, de-winged, frying and serving them." (Partner, 2021) This shows that hard work, strategy, burning candles are all involved. It is this that is the gate way both to "akx" understood as wealth, which is gradually grown and multiplied into "xba" (abundance). This underscores the fact that wealth is the result of a painstaking process accompanied by gradual growth and expansion. This painstaking requirement for wealth is enshrined in the proverbial saying, aka ajaaja na-ebute onu mmanu mmanu (a soiled hand gives rise to an oiled mouth). The key to economic success is toil and exertion. Unfortunately ego mbutu phenomenon brackets the fundamental values of discipline, diligence and hard work and seeks speedy result that promises to catapult him into affluence. The underlining logic here is that nothing happens by magic; work and effort are indispensable in the quest to achieving economic success. The truth elucidated here is contained in the following lines, "a ruo n'anwu e rie na ndo." (he who sows under the scorching sun will reap under a soothing shade) It is this logic that informs the present writer's discountenance of the view of Nkedilim Nnonyelu, the lead investigator in the presentation of the

findings of UNIZIK Business School already referenced above. Nnonyelu in the presentation of the findings called for a reconceptualization of “Igbabọyi” away from any form of stigma as many of those at the receiving end of the process noted they feel humiliated by the use of that tag. He therefore advocates for a replacement with “nkwado ọgaranya” or “apprentice-preneurship.” (See Eleweke, 2022) While I do not make light of the feeling and experience of humiliation, I do not think that the suggestion “nkwado ọgaranya” (being tutored to be a wealthy man) is adequate. There is the danger of creating a sense of entitlement as well as the false assurance that the process must necessarily be a linear process unto glowing riches. Thus the person is not made to be psychologically ready for the ups and downs, having to begin over and over again that attend the path to economic prosperity. “Nkwado ọgaranya,” given the morphology of the word “ọgaranya,” for me sounds quite glamorous and regal already and this may engender some level of presumptuousness that does not allow for the existential demand of stooping in order to conquer.

In furtherance of our philosophy, the individual is meant to act and live by “ogu” which could be captured in the saying “ndụ mmiri, ndụ azụ”, life to all life. This already shows that ikenga is not an ultra-individualism. It rather submits to motif of connection and decor with people. The Igbo hold that “uwa yaghara ayagha, ugu na-edo ya”(the world is chaotic but ugu orders it.)Ogu is a world organizing and life promoting force. Ogu is an alien English word but the roughest possible translation is the compound word Truth-Justice though in Igbo world it is richer because it is symbolic. In the same way the path to wealth and wealth acquisition like the world itself can be chaotic and in fact a case of man a wolf to the other thus it is only “ogu” that can order it. Perhaps this is because of the phenomenology of interest that may be blinded by the primordial instinct of self-preservation which in its ambivalent operations often eclipses rationality. It can be chaotic and so is in need of ugu. This shows that though wealth is prized in Igbo milieu, its philosophy is undergirded by ethical principles. The Igbo proverb akụ luo uno o kwuo ebe o si (when wealth gets home it declares its source) in addition to the popular appreciation as would be shown shortly also presents a critical and ethical stance in that it illustrates “the importance of ensuring that community remains untainted by illegitimate sources of wealth.” (Matthews, 2021) This is the reason that those whose wealth is seen as the result of ọgwụ ego whether rightly or wrongly are stigmatized and their wealth are not valued. This again shows that diligence, honesty, justice, amongst others, are not virtues to be relegated in the pursuit of wealth. The Igbo maintains “kama m ga-eriju afọ dachie ụzọ ka m chebe chi” (I’d rather I waited for my chi instead of having abundance and endanger myself).

What is already emerging from the our discussion so far is that wealth in Igbo worldview far from being an absolute value is subject to hierarchy of values in Igbo world. Some of the Igbo names show that money and wealth are not absolute values or the most excellent of values. There are more profound values which wealth and money cannot displace. We do not intend to be exhaustive here though. Igbo out rightly maintain that Ndu ka akụ (Life is more valuable than wealth). Though the phrase is primarily meant to offer some sense of hope in the event of especially financial misfortune, it is also a statement on the fact that life which wealth presupposes is actually greater and so cannot be toiled with or disregarded simply because of wealth. Whether one is ready only to acquiesce to the first, all are indicative of limitedness of wealth in the valuation scale. Again the name “Nwakaego” underscores this and expresses the value of a child in the Igbo culture. This name places premium on biological children with the result that wealth without children is

considered worthless. Besides children are themselves considered potential sources of economic empowerment and so great asset for the family. The question on the lips of all would be for whom is wealth meant for. Little wonder that bearing (male) children in many quarters is prerequisite for gaining entrance into cult of ancestors. By way of extrapolation such understanding acts as a heuristics in regulating the hot pursuit of power. What is key here is the fact that money and wealth is never the ultimate as far as Igbo philosophy of wealth is concerned. The name “mmadūkaku” flows from the same logic and shows how communalism is made to check individualism that goes with wealth pursuit and accumulation. This obviously betrays the communalism and organic solidarity for which Igbo are known. Such a name is usually given in order to appreciate the value of family relations, because “onwelu mmadụ ka onwelu ego” (he who has people is greater than he who has wealth), In fact “mmadụ ka e ji aka.” By family is meant extended family who would always remain to offer support and protection in times of need. Mensah (2021, p.718) reported a certain Okereke whom he interviewed as saying that “When you have people who are willing to assist and raise you up in life, those people are your wealth. Wealth is vanity outside people. It is the amount of life one touches with his wealth that grows the wealth. People are sacrosanct and the name, Mmadūkaku drives this ideology.”

What the above entails is that communalism is priced above wealth which should be at the former’s service. This is because of the philosophic axiom of I am because we are which emphasizes “the centrality of people as an essential principle of African communal consciousness and sociality, wherein everybody lives for the other.” (Mensah, 2021, pp.718-9) Akụ luo uno philosophy besides the ethical dimension pointed out a while ago, principally projects an important point in Igbo conceptualization of wealth, namely, that the effect of wealth has to be felt at home. This immediately points to the Igbo man’s attachment to his ancestral home and communality of the individual existence in spite of the republicanism and adventurism disposition. Perhaps this is the reason that we had people coming from the same community settling on the same area outside their ancestral home and engaging in similar business enterprise. This is again the reason that communities gathered to sponsor their own, this is the reason that one could alight to train members of families in that Igbo apprenticeship system that made many millionaires and billionaires. Perhaps this is the communalistic dimension of “ọgaranya bụ omume omume” before it became more pronounced in its empty exhibitionist dimension that is more entrenched in consumerist ideology is more pronounced in the contemporary times. The apprenticeship system has been defined as stakeholder capitalism and among the Igbos, a communal enterprising framework where successful businesses develop others and overtime provide capital and give away their customers to the new businesses. It is a business philosophy of shared prosperity where participants co-operatively participate to attain economic equilibrium. (Ekekwe, 2021) It is basically a productive system rather than a consumerist system. Perhaps this communalist slant could explain the etiology of the nomenclature for the poor, “ogbenye”. This entails that the poor must be given by the community which ọgaranya is part of, especially given that his wealth has to get to that community in the light of the philosophy of “aku luo uno.”

Evaluation and Conclusion

The point of this piece is that the ego mbutu phenomenon and its increasing attraction brings to the fore the urgency of re-orientation and revaluation for the emergence of the needed critical society. Igbo Philosophy of wealth in many ways is a valid candidate for this all important social

exercise. The major problem in ego mbute has been shown to be its absolutization of wealth and ultra-materialism which in following the logic of Machiavellian principle of ends justifying the means validates all means to its acquisition. In doing this, it grows too impatient to walk through the oscillating path to genuine wealth which demands diligence, discipline and hard work. Little wonder that one of its key feature is the ritualization and spiritualization of the economic space which though is in tune with traditional epistemologies and worldview is nevertheless used rather wrongly and most often for wrong purposes. Its attraction lies in its empty exhibitionism tenured by consumerist ideology as well as the exceptionalism to which the holder is treated and the power the holder sometimes unilaterally commands. This, as has been shown is a departure from the Igbo philosophy of wealth which while specially valuing wealth, does not absolutize it. It rather subject wealth to hierarchy of values, moral and communalist principles, all of which constrains one against all forms of social ills and ultra-individualism in the quest for quick money and wealth. Economic success in the light of the metaphysics of ikenga while seen as being predetermined, is predicated on toil, endurance, struggle, diligence and discipline. It is the concatenation of these values that actually makes for the elegance and regality of ogaranya otherwise there is a degeneration into empty ‘showism’ of the contemporary ego mbute phenomenon. What this means is that the Igbo philosophy of wealth needs to be recaptured in order to displace the contemporary attraction of the ill-fated ego mbute phenomenon.

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