

THE RISE OF OKE - ITE RITUAL AMONG THE CONTEMPORARY IGBO YOUTHS: THE SOCIO- RELIGIOUS IMPLICATIONS

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Abstract

The revival of money ritual cults in contemporary Igbo society is on the alarming rate. The findings show that the cause in rising of this socio-religious vices are as a result of quest for quick wealth, laziness, lack of employment opportunities, lack of fear of God, and promotion of idolatry in the name of cultural revival among many other factors. The consequences include increase in cult activities, human sacrifices, drug abuse, kidnapping and selling of human parts. The effects on the beneficiary include devastation of family, dead of useful children, misfortunate, madness and sickness among others. The research recommends educating and re-orientation of our youths, creation of vocational and skill acquisition Centre's, award of scholarship and empowerment programmes, celebration of good values in the society. This is a task that all should embrace especially the church and traditional institution so as to redeem the society from collapse. Field study analysis which comprises of interview was employed in the course of the work.

Keywords: Oke-Ite Ritual, Youths, Social, Religious, Igbo Society.

Introduction

The quest for quick wealth among the Igbo youths in contemporary times has led many into various acts that are contrary to Igbo values and customs. One of such acts is the rise in Oke-ite rituals which many youths venture into in order to accumulate fast wealth without much labour. Aghanwenu (2020) decries that killing for money is a common phenomenon in Nigerian daily life. He went further to states that it has become a regular event when hundreds of Nigerians lost their lives to ritual killers or what Leo Igwe (2004) called, "Head Hunters." This act is very lamentable in this modern and scientific age when one thinks that such pseudoscience acts or myths might no more be a challenge. It is worrisome also that despite the impact of church in our era, such devilish act and barbaric acts still holds sway among the youths who are predominantly Christians. How do we know that the perpetrators are "Christian"? This is as a result of the names

they Christian bear; however, does having Christian names imply that one is a Christian? This is may be an argument but the burning issue is the reality of the rise of money making rituals which at present is an indication of the decay in the moral fiber that holds our society together. Notwithstanding, the findings of this work shows that collectively (the church, traditional institutions and government) actions can be taken to alleviate the said problem for the good of our society.

Oke-Ite ritual: What is it?

Oke-ite ritual is a charm prepared with different animals, including dog, elephants, monkeys and often times human parts may be involved. The preparation involves the use of different types of herbs, roots and other ritual materials with the combination of different kinds of drinks. In Igbo communities, it is called different names depending on locality. For example, the people of Ayamelum it is called "Oruru" (that is luck charm), others know it as "awele" and among the youths, sometimes that called it "Yahoo plus" (that is the combination of charm with 419 tricks). For Chukindi (2022) 'Yahoo plus' in the Nigerian parlance according to enquiries came from Yahoo Yahoo which is a popular name for internet scammers, most of whom operated with laptops. But when people became alert about internet scams, young boys started engaging native doctors to make charms for them to hypnotize and defraud their victims. Hence, the involvement of the native doctor it was gathered is what makes their activities 'Yahoo Plus'.

According to Azubike Okudo (Personal Communication, May, 20th, 2022) there is 'Oke ite and there is also "nne-ite'. Both are kinds of native charms or concoctions prepared by native doctors for people but in presents times are predominantly being used by young people who are on the fast lane, to generate wealth. It was gathered that the charms are prepared with different animals, including dog, other animal parts, and human blood. It is believed that it draws unlimited wealth to one who engages in it. Okudo went further to state that Oke-ite have different varieties: Oke-ite prepared and activate with blood of a white ram, Oke-ite prepared and activate with blood of a dog and Oke-ite prepared and activate with white native rooster. It must be noted that all this have different powers and levels of working.

Findings indicate that Oke-ite is made by witch doctors with aims of accelerating accomplishments in life. Oke-ite makes one's accomplishments sudden and quicker. It is a charm used to manipulate nature to one's side but is it without

severe implications. As Oke-ite accelerates riches and accomplishments, it equally accelerates self-ruin, death, doom, pains, anguish and agony. Though, this negative side of oke-ite according to Joseph Nweke (personal communication, May 23rd 2022) is never communicated to the youths who seek it. He went further to state that Oke-ite can make a man impotent, and in the long run can demand human blood.

More so, Oke-ite is something that one will be appeasing with blood of animals as part of renewal rituals, these are done monthly, seasonal or yearly and the beneficiary are not expected to miss the atonement rituals. If the renewal rituals are missed, it goes with severe consequences like loss of one's sanity, life or that of loved ones. Inquiry also shows that anytime the beneficiary decides to abandon it or throws it away all the emancipated wealth brought by Oke-ite equally goes with it. Once you dispose Oke-ite after having it, you will eat from hands to mouth and die poor. In other words, oke-ite or nne-ite is a journey of no return.

The reasons for the rise of Oke-Itite rituals

There are numerous reasons why the present youths have ventured into the Oke-ite charm, but prominent among them are quest for quick wealth, laziness, lack of employment opportunities, lack of fear of God, and promotion of idolatry in the name of cultural revival among many other factors.

Lack of Employment Opportunities

Okonkwo (2022) lamented that in a country with over 100 million people living in poverty while a tiny minority corners all the resources and displays an affluent lifestyle with careless abandon; the disfranchised will find a way to escape their deplorable station in life. If one percent of 100 million people choose ritual killing, one million ritualists will be on the street. Luckily, we are not there yet. If we are, dead bodies will litter the streets of Nigeria and the stench will overwhelm the country. From the above, one sees the obvious reason why many frustrated youths who are mainly graduates venture into this barbaric actions in order to make ends meet. In the same vein, the President of African Development Bank, (AfDB) Dr. Akinwumi Adesina was quoted by Utomi (2022) as saying that high rate of joblessness among Nigerians at present is on the very high increase. According to him, about 40 per cent of youths were unemployed. The implication of this fact is that many youths were discouraged, angry and restless, as they look at a future that does not give them hope. He, however, said

all hope was not lost as youths have a vital role to play, if the country should arrive at its destined destination.

Utomi (2022) went further to query what could be responsible for the ever-increasing unemployment rate in Nigeria. Is it leadership or the nation's educational system? If it is faulty education sector-driven, what is the government (both state and federal) doing to rework the policies since education is in the concurrent list of the nation's 1999 constitution (as amended)? Are the leaders embodied with leadership virtues that the global community can respect? Or moral and ethical principles the people can applaud with enthusiasm? The solution in arresting the drifting unemployment situation in the country lies in four sectors: education, science and technology, agriculture and infrastructures. Do our leaders have the political will to address these challenges in the midst of numerous jar breaking corruptions among the ruling class? It is important to note, that unless the issue of unemployment is addressed, solving the problem of rising oke-ite rituals will still be elusive.

Quest for Quick Wealth and materialism

Oluwatoyin (2022) states that the quest for wealth did not start, but an increase in the trend has been so alarming that it has turned so bizarre and frightening and has made it difficult to trust close friends or relations due to fear of not being for rituals. Most often desperation and pressure from friends and family members are silent factors that lures many youths into get rich at cost syndrome. In the same vein, Nwanne and Anazia, (2019) recalled that there was a time in Nigeria when becoming a Medical Doctor, Engineer, Accountant, Lawyer and the rest was a big deal among the youth. Those days, young people did not mind sitting for multiple JAMB exams just to secure university admission and study a professional course. That time, even parents were more interested in having a doctor son or a lawyer daughter; it was a thing of pride.

Today, all that has changed. Unlike days when young people clamoured for professional careers that would earn them good paying jobs, quest for fame and fortune has become the order of the day. In fact, even those who had acquired professional certificates from both Nigerian and foreign universities have abandoned them to pursue a career in showbiz. One can see why many youths desire for riches at all cost. A winner of BBNaija will be paid 25 million naira with other benefits after being locked up in place for month displaying all sorts of immoral behaviours publicly. With all these, one sees that the

breakdown of our moral fiber is among the causes of all these abnormally in our societies today.

Also looking at how our political leaders embezzle our common good with impunity without anyone holding them accountable multiplies the woes of the youths who chose alternatives that seems good in their own eyes.

Laziness

According Okudo Azubike (personal communication) most youths of present day society are too lazy to work. What most youths are interested in is easy made things that bring money without engaging in activities for hours. This is the brain according to Ijediogor, (2022) why most youths decided to jettison hardwork and embraced the get-rich-quick syndrome by getting involved in ritual killing. He went further to narrate that in some years back, matters of ritual killings and the quest to get rich quick by whatever means were restricted to the older generation, but not anymore in contemporary times. Cases of youth involvement in ritual killings in the country have been on the rise since last year, no thanks to the new fad among the younger generation to acquire wealth with less hardwork, including via the Internet. Ijediogor (2022) concludes that it is sickening that while some youths are embracing science and technology, others, perhaps out of laziness, are turning to ritual killings to get rich quick. All these are as a result of increase in pleasure seeking youths.

Notwithstanding, most youths cannot be blame blatantly due to the fact that the value system of present Nigerian society has been destroyed by parents, government, the New Religious Movement in the name of Church and parents alike. Materialism has been exalted above good virtues of hard work, honesty, integrity, and patience.

Promotion of idolatry in the name of cultural revival:

It is quite disheartening that what our fathers abandoned in the past to embrace Christianity are being revived in the name of cultural revival. In many communities, masquerade cults, idolatry, the use of amulets and charms are being reinvented. With such great wave of reawakening, most youths assume that visiting native doctors, shrines and other cultic groups including witchcraft is something to embrace and cherish. Nwaka (2021) explains that the rising interest in ritual and occult world among the youth is arguably closely associated with the persistent rise in youth unemployment and poverty. In other words, the

cause and effect principle gave birth to revival of idolatry as Anugwom (2011) shows in the case of the Niger Delta, the perception of injustice and marginalization at the hands of both transnational corporations and the government provided fertile ground for occult practices, and also facilitated the rediscovery of deities that were previously associated with justice and fairness.

Poor parenting, poor education, bad governance as factors:

The way and manner our society celebrates rich people without questioning the source of their wealth serves as an encouragement to youths to venture into quick wealth syndrome. For Jannamike (2022) the Church is not left out because in most churches, the best-dressed worshippers and members with big cars are highly recognized not minding the source of all they flaunt around. In such scenario, how will poorly brought-up children not think that money is everything and go after money anyhow just to be recognized and celebrated? Parents are not spared due to the fact that many atimes parents do put pressure on their children to acquire money at all cost. The solution lies on the fact that our society and our youths will reject the temptation of killing for money when parents bring them up in the fear of God and love for fellow human beings. Everyone should therefore take parenting seriously by helping to raised godly and responsible children.

Consequences of Oke-Ite rituals in our society

The effects are both personal and societal in nature. Personal borders on the implication on the person and his immediate family while societal borders on those ones that affects the larger society. On personal effects, many youths sees Oke-ite has the easiest way to get quick wealth without knowing the consequences. Oke ite is a terrible charm (Ajoo Ogwu). But how does it work? Findings indicates that all you need to do is assumed very simple; that is ensure you settle all the spirits that needs to be settled and those spirits will manipulate nature and do your biddings. However, many people do not know that consequences are so enormous. This is because it can short your life, make you blind, impotent and take the life of your loved ones too. In Igbo cosmology, it is understood that such manipulation of spirits to one's favour are against the wishes of some good spirits (Onye Uwa gi , Agwu, Ndi mmiri, Ndi Iche - ancestors -these Spirits mentioned are against Oke ite). Inquiry indicates that oke-ite does not work for everyone. For instance, if one is 'nwa mmiri', Oke Itte will not work for you because your pot of wealth is in the water. In igbo adage, (Nwa Mmiri adi ghi agwo o gwu ... Mmiri na aso o gwu). In the same vein, the

rise in many youths who are vagabonds, mad, die at very young age in the middle of their wealth are connected to Oke-ite syndrome. No wonder at present, many young ladies are widows at very young age, with many children as orphans rooming around the strength seeking for help.

More so, many young girls are married to young people without knowing that they are impotent as a result of oke-ite charm. Such ladies will be moving from one hospital to another, prayer houses to another without knowing that the real cause is that their husband has used his would be children for oke-ite charm. What a disaster? It is unfortunate that native doctor that prepares oke-ite, will never tell you to be in good terms with your Spirits guides because he knows, mentioning those Spirits to support the Oke ite will prevent it from working because he knows they do not support it.

On the societal level, without prejudice, increase in cult activities, human sacrifices, drug abuse, kidnapping and selling of human parts which are on the high side in Nigeria today is seriously unconnected with quest for materialism. Looking at the way and manner in which insecurity has risen in all the parts of the country, one can see the implication of lack of employment and made rich syndrome among the youths. The rich and the political class can no longer sleep as a result of their neglect of the responsibility which the government is supposed to do.

Ayandiji (2022) lamented that the rising cases of ritual which involves the use of human beings among the youths in Nigeria have become unbearable. These killings have left the whole country in shock, terrified and leaving many afraid of what is to come next. The countrywide increase in kidnapping, as well as ritual killings has grown rapidly over the past years and most Nigerians are seeing this issue as nothing but an unsophisticated matter and tend not to be surprised by the lack of actions that follow. Who then is to blame? Is it the Government, the society, the church or even the parents?

There may not be need for blame game on this issue because everyone is seriously feeling the impact. However, looking at the manner our present Governmnet in Nigeria is treating the matters that affects the youths left one to wonder what the future will be. The strikes upon strikes by Academic staff Union of Universities (ASUU) has kept the students of Federal Institutions at home for months and effects will be that idol mind is the devils workshop. These youths who are supposed to be in school but strike has prompted them to stay at home are the same people which the political elites engages in political violence.

For Dakuku (2021) the spate of ritual killings has become so problematic that our political leaders should declare a national emergency on the crises. I call for stiffer jail sentences to deter potential perpetrators from engaging in ritual killings. The trust and confidence of citizens in our law enforcement need to be built, to motivate them to provide credible intelligence required for security operators. Reflecting on the above, Ayandiji (2022) ask a pertinent a question. Where lies the future for the younger generation if such vicious and cruel acts are to be viewed as an acceptable norm? It is quite known that Nigerians cannot seem to identify the reasons why killing for rituals and other have been more persistent ironically in this 21st century. Some believe that it is the desperation for wealth, protection (spiritual defence), power, and cultural influence. The loss of innocent lives as a consequence of ritual killing is leaving a stain on Nigeria's image in the international community.

The rate in which people are missing in the country at present is highly alarming. While some are found, others are not. Dakuku (2021) explains that there is the speculation that a majority of those who disappear perpetually without a trace are often victims of ritual killings. Dakuku went further to decry that there seems to be little or no effort by concerned government agencies to checkmate the trend. It is expected that such cruel and barbaric acts would no longer exist in our society given our levels of exposure, enlightenment, and civilization. Ironically, as our communities seem to be getting more religious, given the proliferation of churches and mosques in all nooks and crannies of the country, it seems that these heinous acts are increasing, as the quest for filthy lucre pervades our society. One begins to wonder is our security overwhelmed or is it a negligence of duty? There is an urgent need to put a stop on this menace so as to salvage the future and soul of our youths and nation.

Solution and recommendations

Though Oke-ite syndrome is a challenge that affects all and sundry in Nigeria, the solution lies in the following:

Youth Empowerment programmes

It is quite obvious that many able bodied youths in Nigeria mostly graduates do not have any meaningful employment due to government inaction in reviving the critical sector especially power (electricity) sector. One of the major solution lies in the creation job opportunities and numerous empowerment plans that will

empower the youths and ensure that able bodied persons especially graduates are engaged immediately after graduation. Such programmes are not going to be left for the government alone, the church and private institutions need to be part of it. In essence, through training and re-training of our youths in skill acquisition programmes and also helping them to start up something small will go a long way to engage them on daily basis. This menace that has become the order of the day due to neglect by government and security agencies can be tackled seriously by engaging the youths in skills acquisition programmes to keep them away from being enticed with money. Giving of scholarship must also be part of this for children who may not afford to pay for it.

Re-orientation/re-education

There is an urgent need for re-education of youths and entire citizens on the fallacy of their beliefs in occult practices and superstitions in this 21st century. These orientations will go a long way to sensitize our youths in families and schools on our values and the sanctity of human life, hard work, integrity and contentment. With this tool in place, the religious institutions (both the church and traditional) will ensure that sensitization programs are carried out often and on among the youths so to help them understand right values to be appreciated.

Good Parenting

One begins finding is that many parents are responsible in pushing their children to look for quick money. In this case, of charity begins at home implies in the sense that the school cannot teach our children everything they need to know. Parents should train their children in such a way that they will not bring shame to their families and the society at large. In essence, parents must ensure and insist that their children must represent the best behavior in any environment they live or work.

Celebration of Good Values in the Society

It is high time our society embrace virtues that made institutions stand test of time rather than going after materialism. On this note, the church and traditional institutions need to embrace the issue of knowing the source of one's wealth before any investiture of honour to anyone. By so doing those who earn their living lawfully with genuine business and hard work will be celebrated while those who earn their wealth in ill manners will not be tolerated. This also applies to the political class who embezzles public fund and community development

projects yet, the community applaud them because they are their sons and daughters. Evil is evil in every society. Corruption and misappropriation of fund must be rejected and those involved if need be must be ostracize in their communities. By so doing in the community and the church, the fear of God will become paramount thereby raising children that will value and cherish good morals above materialism.

Conclusion

The findings of this research indicate that all the institutions must be involved in addressing the issue of Oke-ite syndrome. The church has a role to play, the traditional institutions has a great part too while the government and security agencies must rise up to their duties of providing job opportunities, punishing offenders, celebrating good virtues rather than immoral acts, and rebuilding plus building of critical infrastructure of economy. The research recommends educating and re-orientation of our youths, creation of vocational and skill acquisition Centre's, award of scholarship and empowerment programmes, celebration of good values in the society. This task should be embrace by all so as to redeem the society from collapse.

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