

OGWŪEGO: MONEY-MAKING RITUAL IN IGBO ETHNOLOGY

Chika J. B. Gabriel Okpalike

Department of Religion and Human Relations
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria.
cg.okpalike@unizik.edu.ng

&

Kennedy Darlington Ugah

Department of Religion and Human Relations
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria
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Abstract

This research examines a phenomenon in Igbo world experience referred to as Ogwūego. It is the secret of money-making sometimes regarded as occult, clandestine and hideous. Many wealthy Igbo have been understood by the members of their immediate or remote community as ritual performers and occultists who go through some paranormal Ogwūego practices to make their wealth. There is scarcely a wealthy Igbo, especially those whose rise to wealth is phenomenal, who may not have been smeared with the stigma of Ogwūego practice, one way or another. A lot of speculations have been used to reveal Ogwūego gambits, processes, functionalities and dynamics. Even as majority of Igbo people believe and accept the reality of Ogwūego, the basic questions that underlie this phenomenon makes the truth of it at the same time curious, scary, worrisome and ridiculous. This paper takes the realist's and empiricist's position in examining the phenomenon of Igwọ Ogwū in general and Ogwūego in particular while offering a rational explanation of what Ogwūego may really be. The work examines the formational morphology of the relevant words used to express this phenomenon, the symbolism and mystical significance of Ogwū in Igbo cosmology to ascertain their ontological significance. It applied a multi-dimensional approach which includes ethnological, phenomenological and hermeneutic method to analyze the data of this research. The work aims at offering a deeper insight into a phenomenon that has broken families, disorganized communities and brought the downfall of many progressive and successful Igbo persons.

Keywords: Ogwūego, Money-making, Igbo society, Morality, Ritual

Introduction

Ogwūego money-making ritual is perceived to be 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. Coming from the experience of the Nigerian civil war, the Igbo emerged impoverished, disorientated and hopeless. They stood face to face with schemes and programs which aimed at creating out of them economic and political second fiddle in Nigeria. After more than five decades of fighting that genocidal war, it is true that the Igbo seem to be crushed severally in the political sphere, yet in the economic sphere they have broken the jinx and manacles of poverty; making astonishing wealth that has earned them suspicion and envy from other ethnicities and for the individuals who had excelled more than others, suspicion and odiousness from their kith and kin. Before that war, the average Igbo took it for granted that he can survive in any part of the globe, and be established there without bothering about even a return to his land of birth. Like the Jews, the Igbo had the natural disposition of establishing Igbo communities wherever they may be. As a result, many of them that lived in diaspora cared nothing about building houses that befitted their economic status back in their native communities and some none at all, even though all had at their disposal inherited ancestral lands upon which they exercised rights of direct ownership. As a result, many who escaped from the areas where they were threatened with extinction during that war did not find a place to stay having been forced back to their native lands. According to Egodi Elendu:

In a way, the war enhanced the usefulness of the extended family system. Some parents intentionally split their children and wards among members of their extended families to enhance the chances of more people surviving military operations. This created room within the extended family for cooperation in the search for survival. Children utilized this communal institution for their families' good. Where parents were loath to impose on other relatives for assistance, children, lacking adult inhibitions, acted as bridges between their parents and better-placed relatives by calling on the assistance of the extended family when their parents could not extract similar aid.³

In as much as this situation enhanced cooperation and cohesion of families who were forced to cluster together in very small spaces, it raised the consciousness of the need for bigger, better and more comfortable houses in Igbo land. On the contrary it must be noted that for a good number, this same situation affected the cultural cohesion of the extended families, bringing new experiences of

³ Egodi Uchendu. "Recollections of Childhood Experiences during the Nigerian Civil War." *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, vol. 77, no. 3, [Cambridge University Press, International African Institute], 2007, p. 410, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40026829>.

unhealthy alienation where people sought shelter and means of livelihood/survival separated from their relations in rather adverse ways. Consequently, the severance from blood ties inflicted an unhealthy self-centered consciousness on the Igbo spirit. Nevertheless, the Igbo cultural hospitality ensured that no one was left homeless and uncared for amid the devastation of that war.

After the war, the Igbo were left to rebuild socio-economically with the government paying mere lip service to a situation that appeared insoluble and insurmountable – environmental ruins, refugee/displacement crisis, economic crunch, social stigmatization, medical and psychological traumatization. When the aforementioned Federal Government policy of impoverishment took the center stage in the rebuilding of the ruined nation, there were no clues as to how the Igbo could find their feet again in the Nigerian economic sphere safe by a dint of magic. Characteristically, instead of sitting by and licking their wounds, they doubled down on their strength of character and resilience to push all frontiers to survive a rather debilitating and biting condition and as a result, emerged from the experiences of that war with the burning drive of making state-of-the-art residential buildings, which today litter their local communities, as a panacea to their former experiences. Such buildings harbor its owners only but few days in a year when they visit their local communities for one reason or the other, but they all stand as mementos of their owners' socio-economic achievements. Within the first decade, the Igbo have broken even in the Nigerian socio-economic sphere in spite of very many odds. In the areas of sports, commerce, technology, arts and science, the Igbo were pushing hard and successfully. The rate and intensity of wealth creation was so mind-blowing and magical that for very many people, it was only *Ogwuego* money-making ritual that can offer explanation as to the source and method of making such wealth. It is difficult for other ethnicities and indeed many Igbo to comprehend this socio-economic advancement from a scientific and openly accessible perspective, simply because the rise was phenomenal.

Among the common folk, *Ogwuego* is as real as it is true. Given again the subsisting Igbo understanding of making money as learning that which had been otherwise shrouded in secrecy, they evolved a system of wealth creation called "*Igba Bọyi*", in which an apprentice is trained in the art and initiated into the 'secret'. This cultural disposition worked magic for the Igbo in wealth creation in less than one decade after the war. The result recorded from the practice made it easy for the average Igbo to accede to the conviction that those who made money so fast used the *Ogwuego* ritual, perhaps having also been initiated into a higher cult of money makers. That is to say that money-making like many other areas of

Igbo life is secret to non-initiates. Anyone who gets into such venture gets initiated and trained in the art. To underscore this mentality is this Igbo adage: “*A gwa nwata ihe eji aba ogaranya, o si ka ya hara ka oha*” (If the secret of money-making is revealed to a child, he/she will rather choose never to grow). However, astronomical rise in success indices by only a few can only be understood as the possession of the more hidden things about money-making which are uncanny. *Ogwuego* is the only way the outsider may explain a feat which blows the mind of a non-initiate who seeks to explain it. This disposition of the Igbo towards their folks who made such wealth is informed by four factors: (1) given the post-war economic conditions of the Igbo, it is only natural for the Igbo to think that breaking even in the socio-economic sphere would present as impossible, not to talk of doing so in a short while, (2) the blatant mistrust prevalent immediately after the war following the devastating experiences of mistrust and sabotage during the war, (3) the employment of secret as a tool for outwitting others in the competitiveness of the Igbo egalitarian society, (4) the understanding of commerce among the communalist Igbo and the interpretation of same in the new capitalist economy that took over the Igbo society by storm.

The transition of the Igbo world into a capitalist society was not an easy one. Part of the complications that characterized this transition was that the new economic system was viewed through the prism of the old communalism. In the old communalism the individual is not an isolated or distinct person; he is part of the community and only that community can validate or authenticate his existence. Any case of isolation is viewed with suspicion and such a person most probably ran the risk of taking on the place of an enemy or threat to the community; dines with the devil and is weird by every standard. Meanwhile the capitalist economy thrives in isolation and individualism. So the Igbo who discover this ethics and live it basically strangulate the essence of being Igbo and become the object of this *Ogwuego* suspicion.

The average Igbo believes that this phenomenon is real, that is, that one can actually make money through ritual means by employing some occult, sordid, perverse and clandestine means. These ritual means have been represented in various ways. The commonest being the sacrificing of human beings whose corpses, going forward, generate money in cash. Some are said to sacrifice parts of their bodies which are perceived to actively decompose, some feed on their faeces, some take the forms of animals to attend clandestine meetings where they plan and execute nefarious and despicable actions that are hurtful, degrading and dangerous to the human species; the various depictions of these kinds of activities are endless as seen in Nollywood movies. All these activities one way

or another are believed to generate money in cash for the enrichment of the practitioners.

This work brings together in one stride the sciences of Psychology, Philosophy, Theology, Mysticism and Sociology against the backdrop of the Igbo historical and cultural studies to establish the veracity of this phenomenon. It also interprets the symbolizations that may be empirically verified, stating their connection to making money. With a multi-dimensional approach, the researchers were able to bring together ethnological, phenomenological and hermeneutic methods to bear with participant observation, logical consequentialism, contextual analysis and counterfactual comparison. These are necessary in such a work that studies a complicated aspect of the Igbo life.

***Ogwu* and the Correlations of *Ogwu* in Igbo Ethnology**

Ogwu: Many, who have written on related subjects, easily translate “*Ogwu*” to mean “Medicine”. Different from them, John Anenechukwu Umeh, who represents a deeper insight into Igbo *Ogwu*, contends that ‘Medicine’ is only a part of *Ogwu* like a drop in an ocean, *Ogwu* contains the “Philosopher’s stone’ and the ‘Alchemist’s Elixir’ among much more.⁴ However, the present researchers choose to derive the meaning of *Ogwu* from the formational morphology of the word. Apart from its mystical connection to *Agwu*, which is of a different subject, the word “*Ogwu*” relates to the verb root “*Gwu*” which is intransitive and translates as ‘Finish’, ‘Ultimate’, ‘End’, ‘Final’ or ‘Exhaust’. It is also related to other words like “*Ogwugwu*” and “*Ngwucha*” which are both derivatives from the same root and could translate as same. *Ogwu* is, therefore, anything that can bring about finishing, ending, finality or exhaustion. Put differently, “*Ogwu*” is any solution given in situations or conditions which challenge the physical or metaphysical balance in the life of the Igbo, both as individuals and communities to bring the challenge to an end. In the words of John A. Umeh, “*Ogwu*, which in demotic Igbo literally translates *the end* or finished actually means what it literally says. *Ogwu* is therefore the ultimate solution beyond which lies *Onatalu Chi* the fate or destiny.”⁵ Further still, it should be noted that in Igbo cosmology, it is assumed that there existed a primordial harmony/balance among the elements that constitute the universe, physical and metaphysical. The essence of traditional religion, therefore, is to restore that preexistent balance/harmony many times represented in myths, legends and pithy sayings. In the study of

⁴ John Anenechukwu Umeh (1997), *After God is Dibia* (Volume One), England: Karnak House, p. 87

⁵ John Anenechukwu Umeh (1997), *After God is Dibia* (Volume One), England: Karnak House, p. 87

Ichuaja, which he understood as the pivotal element of Igbo Traditional religion, Chika J. B. Gabriel Okpalike averred:

Evidently, there had existed a primordial harmony and interaction between the two Igbo world orders in the mythical past...there was a time when there was an unmitigated harmony in the world among everything that is – God, deities, spirits, man, animals, plants, and so forth...the Igbo had never out-lived the vacuum created by a possible disharmony...the sacrificial systems are ritual means by which the Igbo ensure that harmony and interaction between the two world orders are sustained.⁶

John A. Umeh referred to this primordial balance as characteristic of “*Uwa Mbu*” (the First World).⁷ “*Ogwu*” is the material or non-material agent to restore that balance. The imbalance or balance here referred to include cosmic, community, circumstantial, situational, localized or individual. In other words, ‘Solution’ in Igbo cosmological arrangement is the seeking after or restoration of that balance in nature in which everything is in perfect order and bliss. It is *Ogwu* which brings about this solution in its finality.

Ogwu can be protective, preemptive, curative and preventive; these include both substances and actions which could be referred to as *Ogwu*. Its potency extends from the core of physical nature to the borders between the physical and the metaphysical nature; the human and spiritual. More than western medicine, *Ogwu* also includes words, gestures, ritual performances and observances. It is important to emphasize this metaphysical and spiritual dimension of *Ogwu* because writers on the subject easily admit of magic in the area of *Ogwu*. John A. Umeh, Bernadette Ezeliora, Emefie I. Metuh and a host of others aver that magic is part and parcel of *Ogwu* or Igbo medicine. Bernadette Ezeliora writes: “It has been observed that Amesi medicine like all African medicine has baffled scholars because of the complete interpenetration or “magico-spiritual and rational” elements.”⁸ However, the present researchers, in examining these claims, is of the opinion that “Magical effect” is more apt to describe *Ogwu* than “Magic”. This is because, whereas magic may either be illusory or paranormal, the magical effect of *Ogwu* is real; empirical and enduring. We consider categorizing the magical effect of *Ogwu* as paranormal magic erroneous since the empirical evidences of its effect is a normalization of a previous distortion or dysfunction but not a parallel to it; *Ogwu* operates a single universe of diverse things, in which every single

⁶ Chika J. B. G. Okpalike (2008), *Ichuaja in Igbo Traditional Religion*, New York: iUniverse, pp. 102-3

⁷ John Anenechukwu Umeh (1997), *After God is Dibia* (Volume One), England: Karnak House, p. 3.

⁸ Bernadette Ezeliora (1994), *Traditional Medicine in Amesi*, Enugu: CEFTA, p. 40

entity exhausts its being in shared essence. *Ọgwu* aims at complete restoration and that is why no disease is incurable in the practice of Igbo *Ọgwu*. For instance, Ezenwata Ezenwamma of Akpo, Anambra State, Nigeria, was said to have the power to stabilize violent mental patients by merely spitting at them. There are many instances of magical effects that could be sited in the practice of *Ọgwu*, including the periodical contest of *Ịtọ ebili Ọgwu* in Arondizuogu, Imo State, Nigeria and exhibitions at the *Akalabo* festival of Amesi, Anambra State, Nigeria. Magical effects of *Ọgwu* may not be understood outside the laws and morality of *Ọgwu*, which is the most important element in energizing *Ọgwu*. Every *Dibia* knows that primarily and importantly, *Ọgwu* is composed for the good of human beings and that dire consequences smack for anyone who employs substances, powers and energies to destroy human life or estate. According to John A. Umeh:

While *Dibias* have knowledge of both, most *Dibias* will not dream of indulging in *Ajo Ọgwu* for they appreciate very clearly the continuity which life is, and the spiritual axiom: *Njo je-echelu onye melu ya*: evil must wait for whoever commits it.⁹

This truth about *Ọgwu* is also corroborated by the position of Bernadette Ezeliora:

The people strongly believe that the gift of medicine to them should be used for the good of the people and not for destroying any life. If any of them indulges in bad medicine, nemesis usually catches up with him and his whole family from generation to generation.¹⁰

It is important to stress this, since many Igbo of today find it difficult to associate *Ọgwu* with any good. This turn in opinion raises the question about the authenticity of many practitioners of *Ọgwu* in Igbo land today and sheds light on the consequences of perversion in the practice of *Ọgwu*.

Ajo Ọgwu

The present researchers agree with John A. Umeh's differentiation between *Ọgwu* and *Ajo Ọgwu*. Implicit in Umeh's position is an unmistakable hypothesis that *Ọgwu* by nature is good and is primarily composed both for the good of the user and the enhancement of human life since it is interiorly energized from the crust of a monolithic magnetic field of the cosmos. In Igbo cosmology, *Ọgwu* as well as the user (individual) are intrinsically connected to the community of humans which authenticates their being and operations in the universe (the monolithic magnetic field of the cosmos). So also the community is composed of intrinsically

⁹ John Anenechukwu Umeh (1997), *After God is Dibia* (Volume One), England: Karnak House, p. 87

¹⁰ Bernadette Ezeliora (1994), *Traditional Medicine in Amesi*, Enugu: CECTA, p. 26

connected and interconnected humans for whom it is the same. In order words, *Ajọ Ọgwụ* is the deliberate and precise exercise by which the practitioner of *Ọgwụ* reneges on the fundamental laws and principles of *Ọgwụ*. The consequence of such practice is dire.¹¹ No practitioner of *Ọgwụ* will want to dare it or encourage his client to do so. This is not, however, to say that renegades do not exist in Igbo universe. Taking a second swipe on the same subject, John A. Umeh came close to categorizing *Ife Ajụ* as *Ajọ Ọgwụ*, only that the principles of *Ọgwụ* creates a window for it thus: *Ka a siri na si akona nsi, a siri na si efena ajụ?* (As *Nsi* (harmful *Ọgwụ*) is forbidden, polarizing one's balance is not prohibited). *Ife Ajụ* is a practice by which the practitioner of *Ọgwụ* inflicts victim with *Ọgwụ* to achieve the polarization of the latter's default fortifications/balance. Since the fortification is energized by a cosmic balance, what the former does actually is to cause (metaphysically) the imbalance in that fortification which manifests most often as a physical fall or stagger. Masquerades practice *Ife Ajụ* most often. It is called *Inwa* or *Ima Aka*, by which masquerades brag about power. Even in terms of *Ife Ajụ* as permissible, John A. Umeh observed:

Of course more archetypal *Dibias* would distance themselves from those twilight zone activities as they do not want to risk detracting from their spiritual holiness and the cleanliness of their hands so that when they show their open palms to the Most High One in silent or speechless prayers of the last resort, success is guaranteed.¹²

It goes without saying, that *Ajọ Ọgwụ* is a misnomer in the practice of *Ọgwụ*. However, in as much as every practitioner of *Ọgwụ* possesses the knowledge of *Ọgwụ*, at the same time, they possess the knowledge of *Ajọ Ọgwụ*, since a well-known axiomatic expression in the practice of *Ọgwụ* states: "*Ife na-azọ ndu, na-egbu egbu; ife na-egbu egbu, na-azọ azọ.*" (Whatever is used to save life can also serve in taking life away and vice versa). Invariably, whatever *Ọgwụ* is used for depends on the moral considerations of the very practitioner who puts it to use. Again, stringent restrictions are put in place to forestall the renegeing of practitioners from the accepted ethics of *Ọgwụ*. These restrictions are referred to as *Nsọ Ọgwụ*.

Nsọ Ọgwụ

Nsọ Ọgwụ can loosely be transliterated as the *Laws* of *Ọgwụ*. There are the general and particular laws; the physical and metaphysical laws; the dispenser and

¹¹ Bernadette Ezeliora (1994), *Traditional Medicine in Amesi*, Enugu: CECTA, p. 37-8

¹² John Anenechukwu Umeh (1997), *After God is Dibia* (Volume One), England: Karnak House, pp. 87-8

receiver laws. More importantly, it is the quality of conformity to these laws that is considered above the logical or scientific connection between the laws and what they aim to achieve. The fundamental metaphysical law of *Ọgwụ* is: *Isi Ọgwụ bụ Aka dị ọcha* (The primary content of *Ọgwụ* is uprightness). '*I sara elu aka*' is very powerful in the operations of Igbo religion and science. It is opening one's palm towards the sky, especially to the rising sun. It signifies uprightness and cleanness without which no *Ọgwụ* can be effective. An equivalent expression is: *Aka dị ọcha na-emerụ Ajo ọgwụ* (Clean hands are the antidote to all harmful *Ọgwụ*). This has nothing to do with hygiene but can be ritualized by rinsing with water. The *Dibia* knows more than indulging in wrongful deeds, both moral and ritual just to make sure his portions are potent. Bernadette Ezeliora submits about even the offspring of *Dibia* who are trained from birth in the laws of *Ọgwụ*:

In fact, many were advised in those days not to curse anybody because if they did, something very serious might happen. Consequently, the people have remained cool-headed. They do not look for trouble, but if you invite their wrath, they would call on their *chi* to revenge for them.¹³

The effectiveness of *Ọgwụ* primarily depends on *Aka dị ọcha*, so also the failure of *Ajo Ọgwụ* in affecting anyone. The first principle of *Ọgwụ* is dependent on this fundamental law and is represented in many variants: *Ọbiara egbu m gbuo onwe ya* (He whose intention is to eliminate me will end up killing himself), *Eji m ogu, jide ọfọ* (I carry with me the marks of justice and fairness), *Egbe bere ugo bere, nke si ibe ya ebena, nku kwaa ya* (the mutual perching of the kite and the eagle is harmony, any of them which denied the other the opportunity to perch should suffer from broken wings) etc, which are principles of natural balance, justice and fairness. Other equivalents are: *Ihe onye ma, ya mara ya* (Our knowledge of things makes us vulnerable to same things) and *Ihe onye amaghi, anaghi egbu ya* (Things we do not know lacks the capacity to kill us). This fundamental and first principle is the basis upon which *Nsọ Ọgwụ* is built. The principle of the effectiveness of *Ọgwụ* is: *Nsọ ọgwụ bụ ire ọgwụ* (the law of *ọgwụ* guarantees the effectiveness of *ọgwụ*). '*Nsọ*' is the noun form of the verb root '*Sọ*', which '*Isọ*' is its infinitive. It means 'to avoid,' 'to keep away from,' or 'distance oneself from'. Its synonym is '*Izere*,' '*Ichara*,' etc. The idea is that every *Ọgwụ* has elements in nature which counters its effectiveness and the most primary of all those elements is evil (moral, social and physical), sometimes inadvertent. Other debilitating elements can be physical/ethical, like "Do not touch oil," "Do not eat food prepared by a woman who is menstruating," "Do not look back." "Do not allow it to touch water and

¹³ Bernadette Ezeliora (1994), *Traditional Medicine in Amesi*, Enugu: CECTA, p. 37

so on. There are numerous of them and they are essential for the effectiveness of *Ọgwu*. Sometimes going against them may have dire repercussions as stringent as the death of the user or dispenser. In this section, we are simply emphasizing that *Nsọ Ọgwu* is an indispensable part of the effectiveness of *Ọgwu*.

Worthy of note is the fact that traditional medical practice is only a part of *Igwọọgwu* which deals with human health and has its experts as *Dibiaogwu*; in a strict sense often referred to as *Dibia mgborogwu na mkpaakwukwo* (Specialist/Expert in roots and herbs), also known as Herbalist. Most times, *Igwọọgwu*, in this narrow sense, may include the diagnostic process of *Igbaafa* which is an interfaced inquiry into the immediate and remote causes of human and world affairs, conditions and situations (past, present and future); *Igbaafa* is the means and medium of this inquiry often translated as 'Divination'. In the condition of sickness, for instance, the *Dibiaogwu* does not stop at proffering empirical solutions; he/she also seeks spiritual remedies by inquiring into the spiritual connections and relations to the sickness. In as much as it is known that the *Dibiaafa* is the specialist in *Igbaafa*, the *Dibiaogwu* may also be knowledgeable in *Igbaafa*. Again, with years of experience, the *Dibiaogwu* knows which health conditions are common or rare; which is environmentally immediate or remote; and which is naturally contacted or artificially inflicted. This experience aids them in diagnosing the root causes of health conditions, spiritual or physical, natural or crafted. Such level of diagnosis is important in the practice of *Igwọọgwu* because its effectiveness is a lot dependent on the extent to which the dispenser and the user adheres to *Nsọ Ọgwu* which can only be known when the immediate and remote relational causes have been ascertained.

Igwọọgwu: Like *Ichuaja*, *Igwọọgwu* is also an integral part of the Igbo Traditional Religion. It is an exercise to ensure that the imbalance/disharmony which is imposed on humans by some conditions or circumstances is reverted/averted. According to Emezie Ikenga Metuh:

Traditional medicine can be described as the total combination of knowledge and practice whether explicable or not used in diagnosing, preventing or eliminating a physical, mental or social disease and which may rely exclusively on past experience and observation handed down from generation to generation verbally or in writing.¹⁴

Metuh here refers to the practice of *Igwọọgwu* which is far more than traditional medicine. *Igwọọgwu* includes actions by which the Igbo exercises control over living and non-living elements of the universe; it is the art of the preparation/conjuring of *Ọgwu*. *Igwọọgwu* is made up of two words '*Igwọ*'(verb)

¹⁴ Ikenga Metu, quoted in Bernadette Ezeliara (1994), *Traditional Medicine in Amesi*, Enugu: CEFTA, p. 39

and ‘*Ọgwu*’ (noun). ‘*Igwọ*’ derives from the verb root “*Gwọ*” which translates as ‘Combining’ (in terms of blending and mixing) or ‘Solving’ (in terms of bringing to an end or healing). *Igwọọgwu* then connotes all actions which aim at combining material and non-material elements in order to exercise control or impose the human will on human and world affairs, situations and conditions. It involves either genealogically inherited or spiritual choice, destined mystical or acquired scientific knowledge, the dynamics of cosmic and environmental elements, discipline and strict adherence to rudiments and rules of life, practice and integral conformity of the practitioner to the demands of *Agwu* (which is the principal spirit/deity of *Ọgwu*). They operate a physical consciousness which presents them as wise and knowledgeable and a spiritual consciousness which presents them as weird, queer and abnormal. However, whatever they do is ultimately for the good of the community to which they are mortally bound to defend, protect and heal. Bernadette Ezeliora beautifully rendered this community aspect in her description of the practitioners of *Igwọọgwu*: “A traditional medical practitioner is a person of immense social standing and significance. He is considered as the greatest gift from God, the most useful source of help and succor in an otherwise harsh environment.”¹⁵

This forms the basic Igbo understanding of the practitioners of *Igwọọgwu*. Each one of them is bound by oath and covenant to this lifestyle and purpose and knows better than violating it for whatsoever reason. Other nuances of *Igwọọgwu* as enumerated by John A. Umeh includes *Imeogwu*, *Igheogwu*, *Isiogwu*, *Isuogwu*, *Ikeogwu*, *Iboogwu*, *Inyeogwu*, *Ileogwu*, *Ibunioogwu*, *Ibuiogwu*, *Ikuogwu*, *Imaogwu*, *Ikpoiogwu*, *Ikaogwu*, *Igbuiogwu*, *Iniogwu*, *Ikpuogwu*, *Imachioogwu*, etc.¹⁶ Nevertheless, these nuances are particularities of *Igwọọgwu* defined by the verb which delineates the very action by which *Ọgwu* is prepared, created, procured, administered, transmitted, conjured or exhibited. *Igwọọgwu* is the precise specialization of *Dibiaogwu*, but can extensively apply to others who patronize his enterprise or make use of his product. Even the person who is judged to have deployed the *Ọgwuogo* money-making ritual is regarded as a client of *Dibiaogwu*, therefore a practitioner of *Igwọọgwu*.

It is important to note that in the context of Igbo ethnological understanding, *Ọgwu* is by its very nature oriented towards the good and health of individuals and whole communities. The dispensers and users of *Ọgwu* are constrained under stringent measures by *Nsọ Ọgwu* within laws and principles that promote and enhance human life and healthy coexistence. It is within this understanding that this work delves into *Ọgwuogo*; its meaning and the possibility of its practice

¹⁵ Bernadette Ezeliora (1994), *Traditional Medicine in Amesi*, Enugu: CECTA, pp. 41-42

¹⁶ John Anenechukwu Umeh (1997), *After God is Dibia* (Volume One), England: Karnak House, p. 86.

within the same ethnological sphere, considering that *Ogwuego* is simply a kind of *Ogwu*. Yet it is important to note at this point that in Igbo ethnology, in spite of the potency and finality of *Ogwu*, the Igbo regards learned art as superior. The maxim “*Ihe a muru amu ka ihe a gworo agwo*” (A learnt art is superior to magic), underscores this point. In other words, one may be better off learning the art of making money that rely on magical money spinning rituals. Therefore it is more beneficial to discover the learned art behind the illusion of *Ogwuego* which is the real money spinner.

Research Methodology

Research in Igbo studies by a member of that ethnic group retains an extent of participant observation by default. One does not necessarily need to be practitioner or an initiate to be part of the cultural dynamics which not even the force of westernization and globalization could alter or eradicate. Yet being an observer participant may not be enough to undertake a study in which data are mostly shrouded in secret. An application of logical consequentialism and contextual analysis is necessary to penetrate the secret areas of data. This research deployed multi-dimensional approach where ethnological, phenomenological and hermeneutic methods were deployed in the areas of participant observation, logical consequentialism, contextual analysis and counterfactual comparison. This is a qualitative research which does not seek prevalence, rate or quantity. Rather it crisscrossed the core idea of religious ritual symbolizations as it relates to *Ogwuego* as a part of the Igbo understanding of *Ogwu*. The work did not thread the path of common methods in studies like this and have new areas it exposed for further investigations.

The Operation of Money Rituals/Spells in Other Cultures

It will be apt to explore the equivalents of *Ogwuego* in some other cultures. Correlative analysis of data offer insight into the grim areas of another data under study. Money ritual/spell correlates with *Ogwuego*. Money spell operates at two levels – *Illusory* and *Paranormal*. It is common knowledge among various cultures of the world, Western and Oriental that certain religious rituals could be performed which in turn translates into money, how it works is the gap intended to be filled by this work. There are a lot of suggestions as to what this ritual actually entails or requires. The internet is awash with various kinds of money spinning rituals or spells. For instance, John Hollywood (a practitioner of the Wiccan religion) recommended the creation of a work space (altar) for the

performance of the ritual, mentioned specific items needed for it and procedure. According to him:

Did you know that by calling the right kind of energy, you can creative positive financial change? It's true. Good things don't happen randomly in life. Instead, we attract them through our thoughts and intentions. Depending upon your mindset, one of those good things can be money. Based on ancient Wiccan lore, you can draw wealth to yourself by casting specific spells.¹⁷

Also Astennu Sever who is a practicing occultist gave vivid occult procedure and demon invocations which are based on natural law of attraction, but which specifically attracts money to one. Astennu Sever believes, like many do, that money is the solution to most problems in the world and that there are at least seven rituals and spells for making money based on the Law of Attraction:

All spells and rituals are based on the law of attraction. It is the underlying principle of the most ancient esoteric teachings, including Hermetical tradition that can be traced back to ancient Egypt. To put it simply, it is the belief that we attract things into our life with or thoughts, beliefs and emotions. These elements of our psycho-physical constitution produce energy. This energy is sent into the universe, and is reflected back to us all the time. It's rebound or boomerang effect that is constantly with us regardless of whether we perform deliberate magic or not.¹⁸

The Law of Attraction is one of the beliefs shared by loosely-knit group of philosophers, religious practitioners, authors and so on. It is also related to positive thinking, healing, life force, creative visualization, metaphysics and esoteric power. Law of Attraction has to do with the focus of consciousness on desires and aspirations. It is fundamentally expressed as "Like attracts like." It implies that putting our mind to things necessarily attracts them to us. To ascertain how that happens, it is important to critically analyze the position of John Hollywood who clearly stated that it is the ritual performers who actually have the power to change their financial situation: "...you can create positive financial change... Good things don't happen randomly in life." It is important to isolate this caveat because many times readers do not exercise the analytic power to penetrate meaning. In other words, it is not the ritual which brings about the change, but living out what the ritual symbolizes may bring the change about. It is, therefore, important to understand the idea of ritual, how it works or may

¹⁷ John Hollywood (2020), "5 Money Spells, Rituals, and Chants to Attract Wealth" in *Exemplore*, retrieved December 1, 2020, from <https://exemplore.com/wicca-witchcraft/moneyspells>

¹⁸ Astennu Sever "7 Powerful Money Spells and Rituals", in *Occultist.net*, retrieved December 1, 2020, from <https://occultist.net/money-spells-rituals-that-work-overnight/>

affect human life in visible ways. The Yoga adept, Sophie Miller quoted the mythologist Joseph Campbell's definition of ritual thus:

A ritual is the enactment of a myth. And, by participating in the ritual, you are participating in the myth. And since myth is a projection of the depth wisdom of the psyche, by participating in a ritual, participating in the myth, you are being, as it were, put in accord with that wisdom, which is the wisdom that is inherent within you anyhow. Your consciousness is being re-minded of the wisdom of your own life. I think ritual is terribly important.¹⁹

By "casting specific spells", John Hollywood meant 'performing specific ritual', and by ritual he means exactly what Joseph Campbell is implying. Performing a ritual is becoming part of a myth which one is actually enacting or re-enacting. Enacting or re-enacting a myth is being that myth. It is simply living out the wisdom of one's consciousness which is inherent in one. About rituals and spells, Astennu Sever wrote: "It's rebound or boomerang effect that is constantly with us regardless of whether we perform deliberate magic or not." This is very important in understanding how money ritual/spell works. In other words, when one harnesses one's thoughts, beliefs and emotions, they constitute psycho-physical energy which one invests (sends back) in the universe, its produce (money) comes back to one; and most importantly, it does not require magic. Some are self-motivated to do just this and more, some need push. Performing a ritual or casting a spell can constitute this spur. Magic is totally unnecessary.

***Ọgwu*ego: Meaning and Operations**

*The Meaning of Ọgwu*ego: *Ọgwu*ego is a compound word, made up of two words: "*Ọgwu*" and "*Ego*". *Ọgwu* has been extensively discussed in the preceding subheadings. *Ego* is the noun from the verb root "*Go*" and infinitive form "*Igo*" which transliterates as "Purchase" and "To purchase." *Igo* expresses the extrinsic appropriation of the ownership of a thing which is opposed to an intrinsic/congenital appropriation of a thing which is often the norm in Igbo traditional exchange of goods and services. Intrinsic/congenital simply underscores that in the pristine Igbo culture, ownership is not by appropriation in exchange for any kind of legal tender, but by inheritance and transfer; goods and services were not commercialized and no enterprise, endeavor or engagement was designed for money-making as such. Economic, agricultural,

¹⁹ Sophie Miller, "What are Rituals?", *Gaia*, retrieved September 28, 2021, from <https://www.gaia.com/article/what-are-rituals>

religious and social activities were interconnected and complimentary and are undertaken for the sustainability and sustenance of life and natural ecosystem. The noun “*Ego*” is often translated as “Money”. Money or *Ego*, for the Igbo, is the means by which one extrinsically appropriates the ownership of a thing which otherwise cannot have been owned by the appropriator in the natural order. For the Igbo, *Ego* gives the appropriator limitless opportunities to exercise ownership of things in a rather magical way; magical, because in the natural order, ownership is limited to known and perceived possession, property and need, not to limitless possibilities determined by the quantum of *Ego* possessed by the appropriator. It could be said that *Ego* as legal tender is a strange intrusion in the Igbo economic lexicon especially the coins and the paper notes. Ownership and transfer of ownership was by heredity or some traditional form of exchange that does not involve payment of money for an equivalent. Trade by barter is the closest description of the method in which goods and services exchanged hands in the traditional Igbo society. There are other means that may be viewed as religious which are in the form of covenants. The cowries were forms of money, but their concrete and bulky nature made them property more than legal tender. The foregoing discourse informs the basic Igbo disposition towards money as a means of owning something which one desires, needs or wants. As a strange phenomenon, money firstly impressed the mind of the Igbo as magic and phantasm; there was something weird or unreal about it. It has a strange power of appropriation which sets the Igbo appropriation ethos on its head. For instance, it was considered outrageous to exchange land with money and almost taboo to sell off the *Obi* or *Ngwuru* up till the present day. *Obi* or *Ngwuru* is the particular area of habitation or compound where one is born; where one’s *Ichi* (umbilical cord) was believed to have been buried. Even when cowries were introduced as means of exchange among the Igbo, it had not the capacity to purchase everything. Yet *Ego*/Money has the capacity of buying off *Obi*/*Ngwuru*. Money is a stranger in the Igbo economy and the Igbo still live the consciousness of the fascination of money and the amazement of the power money has come to portend through time.

Given the above, it is no longer difficult to see the connection between *Ego* and *Ọgwụego* in the perception of the Igbo. *Ọgwụego* is the perceived mystical money spinner which makes available countless amount of money to anyone who deploys it. It is naturally aligning for the Igbo to think of *Ego* in terms of *Ọgwụ*; *Ọgwụego* is easy to be imagined in the Igbo world, the other extent which remains to be explored is its nature, form and functionality. The acquisition of this strange element is for the Igbo mind a looming riddle always waiting to be solved. Very few people stumble into the solution and when they do; they untie

the knot that has always kept money away. The result is that money begins to flow in by the power of the Will. This Will is only driven by desire and the actual human rational and empirical interface between the desires for money and making money is completely eliminated by the power of this Will such that money surges without cultivation. In the *Ogwuego* ritual, it is this Will that is tested and fortified to operate without let. Even in the imagination of *Ogwuego* as is presented in Nollywood movies, it the Will of the ritual performer which is ultimately tested, trusted and solidified. When the Will is stretched to a breaking point and did not cave in, one is said to have deployed the *Ogwuego* money spinner.

The Operations of Ogwuego: *Ogwuego* is the equivalent of money rituals/spells. The present research is not quick to asserting that one can conveniently translate another. However, because of the more robust permissibility in Western culture, there are more literatures of money spell and magic than *Ogwuego* which may hardly have any literature. Here we are going to derive the sense of *Ogwuego* from the idea of money rituals/spells discussed above. First of all, let us critically analyze what is commonly known about *Ogwuego* among the Igbo. Often the ritual of *Ogwuego*, the manner it is often presented, involves the sacrifice of the most precious thing in one's life, especially human being or personal body part. Sometimes it may demand one's most cherished habit or precious property. These go with adopting some weird and disgusting life style, including having a secret place in a shared house, feeding on human faeces or animal dropping, involving in bizarre sexual activities, adopting inhuman disposition towards others and so on. Then comes the regular and particular ritual/spell recommended to be performed. Usually as is often depicted, the result of having these rituals in place is that one gets magical cash reward. The present researcher did not verify the actual veracity of the above items, but chose to go by the popular ideas among the Igbo oftentimes represented in movies and stories.

This work assumes that the above ritual/spell expressions are true. The task before this work is to evaluate the workability of it, using the correlative analysis above as the tool of interpreting the rituals of *Ogwuego* as also shown above. It is important at this point to recall the core aspects of Joseph Campbell's definition of ritual. Going by that definition, sacrificing the most precious thing in one's life like child, spouse or parent symbolizes that one's quest for money demands the most from one; nothing is too precious to be sacrificed in the course of making money. It is actually one's engagement with the physical world with such disposition, which comes back to one as money. Having a secret place in a shared space symbolizes the demand that one will be ready to keep his dealings secret. Such a person most times will be introduced into dealing in an illicit business but

will not have the opportunity to unburden his/her conscience always laden with guilt and self-condemnation. Feeding on human faeces or animal dropping will symbolize the demand for enduring disgusting things or avoid wastefulness in the process of making money. Ritual symbolizations are not restrictive in meaning; they are discoveries which the ritual performer goes on to make with every new encounter. Therefore, *Ogwuego* does not furnish the performer with more wealth without a conscientious living out of the demands of the ritual symbolizations he/she constantly performs. Living out those demands without the ritual also works perfectly.

Counterfactual Discourses on *Ogwuego*

The mental picture of *Ogwuego*, especially painted by Nigerian movies, in many cases presents a magical rain of bank notes into the ritual space of the performer. When the ritual is invoked, countless bank notes fly in from nowhere which the ritual performer picks up and appropriates after the ritual. These bank notes are legal tender of specific economies; they can be Nigerian naira, Ghana cedi or American dollars. The Central Bank of each nation has the onus of determining the amount of banknotes in circulation and supply; and also maintaining their integrity. If the monies represented in the *Ogwuego* fancy are counterfeit, then *Ogwuego* will be rife with a lot of risks not worth taking. If those banknotes are real, then they must come from the Central Bank or any other deposit bank. Is it the case that any of these banks have magically lost money stored in their coffers? The answer will surely be in the negative. So, where do the monies in *Ogwuego* as perceived and captured in common narratives come from? Since bank notes have identifiers, it is possible to trace the source of any cash. The present researcher did not come across physical *Ogwuego* bank note, but if they could be found anywhere, the source can be ascertained in as much as they are valid legal tender.

Secondly, there is a pithy saying among the Igbo that “if there is anything like *Ogwuego*, then everyone will be rich.” Many times it is the *Dibia* who performs the *Ogwuego* ritual for his clients. If it is the ritual that brings the money about, then there should be no poor *Dibia*. The average Igbo person wants to be rich and a good number want to be richer than others. Most *Dibia* are poor in the material sense of the word. It is true that their material poverty may not entirely be due to a lack in their ability or desire to make money, it may also be part of the demand of mystical life. Arguably, no authentic *Dibia* does *Ogwuego* for anyone and they are the ones who may most likely comply to the demands of a *Dibia*'s mystical life. Therefore, since it is the make-belief ones who will most likely renege to do *Ogwuego* for people, it is likely that such will also desire to rebel against the mystical demands of *Dibia* to get rich. If it is so, why are there not rich ones

among those who boast of the powers to make others wealthy through the ritual/spell of *Ogwuego*.

Thirdly, sometimes it is also impressed that the carcass of the human being used for the *Ogwuego* ritual is preserved in the secret room or that the body part sacrificed for the ritual actively decomposes. If these were true, how long may this carcass last; what mode of preservation do they use to avoid festering disease? How is it that the ritual performer who had sacrificed his body part, does not get infectious and diseased?

Fourthly the illicit and clandestine business one could be introduced into after the purported initiation is human body part syndicate network which is known to be a thriving business today. In a publication by Death Investigation Academy, a staff writer posits:

The selling of human body parts by “body brokers”, also known as “non-transplant tissue banks,” is an incredibly lucrative business. A full human cadaver can sell for as little as one thousand dollars, up to as much as two hundred thousand dollars. Startlingly, many funeral homes actively participate in selling human remains to body brokers in order to make a larger profit than they would otherwise be able to through their ethical business practices.²⁰

It could also be that one’s initial sacrifice of a loved or close relative was meant for the human body part market whose syndicate one has been unknowingly initiated into; a knowledge which will surely be fully revealed when one has taken the oath of secrecy which often accompanies initiation. The initiate who hitherto was a pauper hits big money which actually is proceed from the body parts of the murdered relative.

***Ogwuego*: The Metaphor of Making Money**

Ogwu, as discussed above, has a sense of finality and is a panacea to/protection from known /unknown problems. *Ogwu* is not just material substance; it can also be action or thought. *Ogwuego* is the panacea for money-making. The present researcher did not find charms, talisman or concoction, which is energized for money-making like could be found for good luck, safety, love, enchantment and so on. Every attempt made to find the ritual performer who fitted into the common narrative of the everyday Igbo about *Ogwuego* yielded no results. Therefore, this work, hypothetically, states that *Ogwuego* is a figurative

²⁰Staff Writer (NA), “Selling Body Parts from the Dead Is Becoming a Big Business,” *Death Investigation Academy*, <https://ditacademy.org/selling-body-parts-from-the-dead-is-becoming-a-big-business/>

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. *Ogwuego* rituals are mere symbolizations of those actions necessary for the creation of wealth. The ritual symbolization of *Ogwuego* is essentially of a religious nature. Kurt Moritz Artur Goldammer avers that religious symbols are both esoteric and exoteric. As esoteric, it conceals an inner meaning which is unknown to many people, and as exoteric its external significance is knowable to everyone. Religious rituals in Igbo religious culture are both esoteric and exoteric. Remarkably, the exoteric dimension is also as unknown to the non-initiate as the esoteric dimension. Notably, the knowledge gap between the *Dibia*, who are adepts of the religion, and others not of that class, would easily give the latter away as a class of non-initiates. Therefore, being a practitioner of the religion does not give everyone access into every hidden knowledge of its workings, and there are many of such secrets even in the exoteric areas. Those practitioners who are not *Dibia*, this work refer to as non-initiates. They have very limited knowledge of the deep things of the religion, and are in the majority. Secondly, Kurt Moritz Artur Goldammer noted pointedly: “Religious symbols are used to convey concepts concerned with humanity’s relationship to the sacred or holy ... and also to the social and material world...”²¹ This relationship with the social material world is evoked by ritual symbolisms and is our main focus in interpreting the ritual symbolism of *Ogwuego*. It is important to note that in Christianity, symbols evoke the sacred or holy whose holiness can be distinguished from the symbol, but in Igbo Traditional Religion (ITR), symbols evoke the sacred or holy whose holiness is inseparable from its social and material environment. Consequently, ritual symbolisms in ITR are demands for social and material action which reverts to wellbeing. Therefore, it is only when what is represented in symbols is translated into action that its result comes back to the performer as wealth. This wealth is material and from the point of view of generation has no ontological connection with immateriality represented in religious rituals.

Among the Igbo, there are moral principles that have remained immortal. For instance, “*Aka aja aja na-ebute onu mmanu mmanu*” (When the hands are soiled, food is produced), “*Aruo n’anwu, erie na ndo*” (Work is done under the scorch of the sun while enjoyment takes place under the calm of the shade) or “*Ojukọ si na akughị akụ eri, na-agba afo*” (The domestic fowl said that eating without working

²¹ Kurt Moritz Artur Goldammer, religious symbolism and iconography, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 12 Nov. 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/religious-symbolism>. Accessed 6 October 2021.

upsets the stomach). The emphasis of these moral principles is that nothing happens by magic; work and effort are indispensable in our quest to make more out of life. Morality and moral conduct is at the heart of Igbo religious culture. It is as though the world works in accord with moral human conduct. There is an intrinsic connection between the moral value of human conduct and the internal mechanism of the universe. These conducts are actions and actionable and are rife with consequences. Wealth is consequent upon wealth-generative actions which *Ogwuego* ritual symbolizes.

Summary and Conclusion

Ogwuego is common knowledge considering that it is believed by most common folks to be money-making ritual performance among the Igbo. Yet the knowledge of its actual operation is not common in as much as the mental pictures of it taken for granted by the average Igbo cannot be empirically verified. The ritual of *Ogwuego* is of a religious nature and religious rituals are mediums of communication between the human and the spiritual. In it, the spiritual is believed to be activated by the mystical combination and coordination of symbols. Such activation can generate mechanical and physical motion. In the case of *Ogwuego*, physical motion is perceived to be the random emission and rain of bank notes in the ritual space and is a result of the ritual action itself. This work investigated the factual occurrence of such and found none. It also questioned the possibility of it based on the laws and regulations of money together with the roles of the Central Bank and other banks in the economy of every nation in terms of printing and regulating; the distribution and circulation of currencies. The work was elaborate on the understanding of *Ogwu* in Igbo religious culture in order to derive the fundamental idea of *Ogwuego*. *Ogwu* is panacea; the ultimate solution to any perceived problem among the Igbo. This sense agrees with the meaning derived from the root of the word, “*Gwu*” which means finish, exhaust, final and so on. This position gleans from the assertion of Chika J. B. Gabriel Okpalike that concepts in Igbo language contain in themselves their ontological sense known through analyzing their formational morphology.²² Therefore, *Ogwuego* stands for the ultimate solution to the problem or challenge of making money. This work took the position that this solution is action symbolized in variety of ritual performances. It understood those ritual performances as expressions of those actions demanded of an individual who earnestly seeks to make money. However, money is made not

²² Chika J. B. Gabriel Okpalike, “*Onweonye: Introducing the Concept of Self-Personhood in Igbo Ontology*”, [International Journal of Philosophy](#), Vol. 8, No. 4, 2020, pp. 88-97. doi: 10.11648/j.ijp.20200804.12

through the magical or mystical manipulation of cosmic energy to generate bank notes as is often depicted, but through diligently living out those actions as demanded by the ritual expression. The work also argues that in as much as some fundamental ethics of the Igbo people like “*Aka aja aja na-ebute onu mmanu mmanu*” (When the hands are soiled, food is produced), “*Aruo n’anwu, erie na ndo*” (Work is done under the scorch of the sun while enjoyment takes place under the calm of the shade) or “*Okuko si na akughi aku eri, na-agba afo*” (The domestic fowl said that eating without working upsets the stomach) subsists, *Ogwuego* as magic is a contradiction. Yet it is possible to make money through those actions that would appear magical. The Igbo people are indisputably the singular ethnic nationality in Nigeria with overwhelming number of wealthy people. They have the Midas touch in whatever they determine to engage with, so much so that they even surprise themselves with their own achievements. It is, therefore, more profitable to seek a more cultural and ethical dimension if one would be able to get access into the secret of money-making among the Igbo. It is that same culture and ethics which they apply in other areas like education, industry, science and technology and which puts them ahead of their counterparts most of the times. The area of Igbo cultural ethics demands further research to unravel many other things that lie underneath being Igbo.

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