

The Enugu man who beat his mother to death over land tussle

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THE burgeoning proclivity for desperate and single-minded pursuit of and devotion to materialism by some citizens, arising from the collapse of society's moral values, would appear to be taking its toll on what remains of family ties, cohesion, and love in some homes. It is so bad that a dispute between nuclear family members over a landed property recently resulted in a deadly physical assault. In a shocking and very distressing twist, one Abuchi Joseph allegedly murdered his 65-year-old mother, Josephine Azegba, with a hoe during an argument over family land! The tragic incident reportedly occurred last Tuesday in the Umuogbo Ulo community, Igbo-Eze North Local Government Area of Enugu State. The bizarre and abominable incident sent shockwaves across social media and local communities, and not a few were distressed by the sordid turn of events between a mother and her son.

The horrific act was reported by the deceased's daughter, Charity Azegba, who apparently is the suspected killer's sister. She was said to have watched in horror as the land dispute spiralled out of control, with the suspect dealing a lethal blow to his mother's head with an iron hoe during the disagreement over the sale of ancestral land. Unfortunately, the blow proved fatal, and she was confirmed dead on the spot. And, as is customary with wicked and cowardly persons who are seldom willing to take responsibility for their thoughtless actions, Abuchi made a desperate bid to escape justice; he reportedly fled the crime scene, triggering a massive manhunt by local security forces and vigilant youths. However, he was caught after he snatched a motorcycle from a woman in the neighbouring Okata community in an attempt to make good his escape. Apparently, Abuchi is a recidivist, as he easily got involved in yet another criminal act—robbery of a motorcycle – while escaping from the scene of a more grievous crime of murder, which he allegedly committed. It is hoped that he will be formally made to answer for these crimes at the appropriate time. He was said to have been roughened and restrained by enraged locals before being handed over to the authorities.

This incident is, to say the least, extremely shocking and bizarre. How would a son raise his hand or even his voice against his own mother, let alone murdering her? What is the society turning into? Why is there no respect

for law and morality? Why has the humanity of many diminished so badly that the sanctity of human life is now observed in the breach? To be sure, the question of whether Abuchi intended to kill his mother does arise, because you don't hit someone's head with an iron object and expect the victim to remain in excellent health. It is rather ironic that many people fight and kill over property when the person who originally owned them died a long time ago. In their desperation, they forget that those who originally laboured for the property are long dead and forgotten, leaving the property behind. They seem to have ignored the fact that the fate that befell the original owner of the property awaits them, too. The authorities may have to confirm whether or not the suspect acted under the influence of illicit substance or that he was plainly mad before committing the dastardly and abominable act if his lawyer pleads insanity. What is not in question, however, is the fact that the suspect is an extremely callous and selfish individual who is mindless and willing to achieve his ignoble objective at all costs. And now that he has murdered his own mother, will he now gain access to the land in dispute? The law will not only restrain him but will severely sanction him for the egregious crimes he has committed if he is found culpable.

The common dispute over property among family members usually happens between siblings or relations of the original owner of the property, especially when the latter died intestate, not between living parent(s) and their children. But in this unique and absurd instance, the dispute which took a fatal turn, culminating in the death of Josephine, was between mother and son. It is really unfortunate. It is time people learnt to be self-reliant and independent instead of killing one another over assets bequeathed to them by those who toiled and laboured to acquire them but still had to leave them behind in the fullness of time. Often, it is slothful people who have no visible means of livelihood or greedy folks that are usually ready to take precipitate actions—killing, maiming, or engaging in endless litigation—in order to take over their parents' or relations' properties. Meanwhile, these are the kind of properties, and even much more, that they could also acquire by themselves if they are hardworking and productively engaged and dedicate themselves to achieving success.

Last week, we referenced a number of criminal incidents that eloquently pointed in the direction of the country becoming a crime scene. This week again, there is yet another strange crime of a son killing his mother over a landed property! It is time all stakeholders began to observe this dangerous pattern of criminal acts and violence of different hues that is beginning to define the Nigerian society. All hands must be on deck to put a stop to the unsavoury predilection, which is not only sully the image of the country but also imperiling the physical wellbeing of citizens. A reversion to the Hobbesian state of nature where power, might, or crime was right and permitted to the extent that it served the aggressor's selfish interest is unacceptable and should not be tolerated in any modern society. And, as we have often advocated, strict enforcement of the law and moral codes by every stakeholder in society is one of the sure-fire panaceas to rein in brutish, savage and uncivilised conduct. We commend the local vigilance group for rising to the occasion by ensuring that the suspect was apprehended and handed over to the authorities. The relevant authorities are urged to launch a painstaking inquiry into the incident and ensure that the suspect is diligently prosecuted so that he can receive his just deserts if he is found guilty.