

CONTINUITY OF *ULI* AS CLOTHING, ITS NECESSITY AND POWER AS IGBO SOCIO-CULTURAL IDENTITY

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Abstract

Uli sprang from the meticulous dedicated fingers of Igbo women of Nigeria, who long before external adventure and contacts fondly clothed human bodies and walls in *uli* designs. *Uli* thus primarily identified the Igbo. In recent times, it is observable that *uli* art style is not generously explored. Without a means of identification, a people cannot be recognized and represented. It is therefore paramount that contemporary artists uphold and foster *uli* art. This paper proposes that artists should passionately devise means of exploring and projecting *uli* forms. The paper asserts that passion for the art is the ground that will yield fruits in *uli* stance and form the beginning of *uli* revival. The genesis of *uli* is reviewed. Some avenues by which *uli* have been felt in the recent past and in this contemporary time are discussed. Methods, by which *uli* could be explored and sustained are recommended.

Introduction

Art, whether ancient or modern is a form of language that tells a people's culture and heritage. It embraces their ways of life, beliefs, values, clothing, and potentials. History of different nations all over the world reveals that people's art initially played religious functions in their lives. For instance, sculptures in Neolithic Jericho (8000-7000 B.C.) were associated with fertility cult (Kleiner, 2009, p.24). Shrines constituted the sculpture of ancient Catal Hoyuk (7000-5000 B.C.) at Anatolia in western Asia Minor (Kleiner, 2009, p.25). Ancient Egyptian art (2680-1342 B.C.) emanated from a strong religious custom (Banjoko, 2000, pp.213-215). Mesopotamia, an ancient region in present day Iraq, was the site of several early urban civilizations which include Sumer, Assyria, Akkad, Babylon and Persia. The arts of these ancient cultures served religious purpose (Kleiner, 2009, pp. 32-47). Greek's earliest buildings were basically simple shrines for the protection of the statues of their gods (Banjoko, 2000, p.218). The present-day emblem of Rome, which is the statue titled 'Capitoline Wolf', is of Italian mythology that dates to 500-480 B.C. (Kleiner, 2009, p.231). According to history-world.org at internet, mercury was one of the many gods of Celts who Celts "regarded as the inventor of all the arts". The Celts were the initial inhabitants of England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales in centuries before and as at the 4th century B.C. (mythmaiden.com). Anglo Saxon people who in the 5th century B.C. drove away the Celts also had a multiple pantheon of gods (www.bbc-co.uk). Some ancient arts of the Americas served religious functions. For instance, the sculpted feathered serpent known as 'Quetzalcoat' was a major Mesoamerican god in the pantheon (Kleiner, 2009, p. 370). Mesoamerica encompasses present-day Mexico, Belize, Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador (Kleiner, 2009, p.

366). Age-old art of Ainus of Japan as well as that of the Igbo of Nigeria, served religious functions (Ikwuemesi, 2014, p.139).

Alongside the religious functions associated with ancient Igbo arts, there was also the purely beautification and aesthetic intent of the age-old *uli* designs. Thus, Igbo art was never at any point in time, produced only for religious purpose. *Uli* was one of the Igbo clothing and cosmetic for human body. In the ancient times, *uli* happened to be a fashion design in vogue in the Igbo society. It also constituted designs that dressed Igbo walls in eras before their contact with western civilization. It is still currently used to beautify human bodies and walls. *Uli* art disproves the white man's earlier insinuation that black Africa's art was all for barbaric and fetish observances. This was their insinuation, yet some European and American civilizations did also metamorphose through these 'fetish observances' as has been elucidated above. This insinuation evolved at the time European Christian Missionaries were propagating the gospel of Christ in the southeastern and western areas of Nigeria in the 19th century (Oloidi, 2011, p.14). *Uli* art was there, yet the white man would not commend or acknowledge the art. According to Ezibota (2015)

The imposition of Western and European values on Igbo cultural practices suppressed the art form. Missionaries and western religious groups insisted that women should not cover their bodies with black designs, but rather with cloth. They viewed *uli* as primitive and inappropriate. Sadly, this led to a period of decline in *uli* practice, and the art form soon became antiquated.

European Christian Missionaries in the 19th century succeeded in belittling, discrediting and down-sizing most of indigenous cultures of eastern and western areas of Nigeria which Oloidi (2011) notes that Pope Pius xii observed and the Pope reacted. Oloidi (2011, p.14), states of the Pope that

Pope Pius xii, in the third decade of the 20th century had instructed various Catholic Missions in Africa to stop the plethora of abuse of African heritage and instead, embrace them with Christian rectitude...

Isichei (1976, p.115) narrates that in 1902 at Obosi town Anambra State Nigeria, the European missionaries preached tenaciously against the killing of twins and some other practices such as facial scarification even though the latter was and is morally faultless. Facial scarification among the Igbo never had any fetish inclination but rather was for identification and beautification. It initially identified and beautified the titled Igbo men and women and was subsequently relinquished to all as a beauty therapy.

A people's means of identification is very necessary to them, for their identity is part of their culture which indicates their individuality, proves their originality and constitutes their pride. It thereby makes the people's history and actually makes life worth living. Hence, the focus and objective of this research includes, devising means of sustaining and developing *uli* as clothing because clothing being a chief means of identifying a nationality makes *uli* (as clothing) a chief means of Igbo people's identity. A nation's clothing primarily and majorly identifies them more than any other factor in life. A people's food may not be immediately seen. Their shelter or residence may not be immediately seen, their language may not be immediately identified even their artifacts

and technological advancement may not be immediately seen but their clothing is immediately seen on them. Hence, *uli* as clothing should be sustained and developed. In the light of the identification power of clothing in the culture of a race, the goal of this study is to particularly challenge textile and fashion designers to adopt seriously, the *uli* forms as motif for designing apparels. This study also aims at making it clear to the unaware that body decoration and cosmetics such as *uli*, is part of the body that constitutes clothing. Abdurrahman and Ajulo (2010, p. 79) affirm that in addition to garment making, articles of fashion design include jewelry and anything applied to the body such as mascara, tattoo, scarification and the hair arrangements. *Uli* falls into this category. Certainly, clothing must not cover every inch of the body before it is considered clothing. Designing of clothing depends on choice of design, fashion in vogue and use or function of the clothing. *Uli* was and is one of the Igbo clothing for human body though (depending on the design) it may not cover every inch of the body. More light will be thrown on *uli*'s place as clothing in the course of this study.

The Igbo ethnic group of Nigeria is located in the eastern part of Nigeria right into the shores of River Niger. The site of the popular Igbo-Ukwu culture that flourished in the 9th century A.D. is of this locality and ascertains that the Igbo are passionately artistically inclined. Igbo's hospitable nature and ingenuity also manifests in their extensive conceptions and establishment of monumental five-star hotels sited in many parts of Igbo land today. The hotels combine well with her tropicality to offer foreigners good holiday resort. The people were in the 1970s predominantly under the umbrella of East Central State of Nigeria which presently, for more effective administration purposes has been broken into five States. These are Anambra, Enugu, Ebonyi, Imo and Abia States of Nigeria. The land yields abundance of yam, coco-yam, cassava, maize, palm trees, rice and varieties of fruits and vegetables. The religious affiliation of the ethnicity is predominantly Christianity. Besides their mother-tongue Igbo, their lingua-franca is English language.

Late Madam Louisa Nwaume Uzoagba, (1910-1992) was an *uli* designer in her time. She was the mother of Isaiah N. Uzoagba. She derived and fashioned motifs of her *uli* designs from her surroundings which include the sun, stars, moon and shapes from plants and animals that conform to geometric shapes. (Uzoagba, 2009, p.iii). Her son, who is an art educationist and author in Nigeria, wrote of her that

When Louisa Nwaume was converted to Christianity in 1936, she was no longer interested in *uli* body decorations, as the craft of *uli* body decoration was then connected with non Christian rituals and pagan affairs. She channeled her artistic creativity to pot making and wall decoration. There was however, a recurrence of her popular '*uli*' geometric motifs in her new area of pottery craft and wall decoration. (Uzoagba, 2009, p.iii)

Uzoagba's statement implies that before the Christian Missionary's evangelization of the Igbo society in Nigeria, the indigenes naturally had some spiritual being they hitherto believed in. However Uzoagba's report does not authenticate that the indigenes' belief was evil spirit inspired. The statement that *uli* art had connection "with non Christian rituals and pagan affairs" does not prove that *uli* was a medium of fraternity with evil; *uli* rather was used in a bid to beautify human bodies and walls of the buildings that

happened to have been used as places of traditional worship. Uzoagba's statement rather logically reveals that in those ancient days, Igbos were uninformed of Christianity and other religions. They naturally directed their loyalty to what they thought was God. The adherence to righteousness which the traditional religion of the Igbo preached is an attestation of this deduction. Louisa Nwaume Uzoagba's adjustment to Christianity, and return to *uli* also attests to this conclusion. Actually, when the lady realized that *uli* solely was and is just a beautifier, she took up *uli* again. Just as Christians have the intent of beautifying themselves, residents and their places of worship in one way or the other, *uli* art also met the intent of beautifying Igbos of old, their places of worship and residents. Thus *uli* has always served aesthetic purpose only and should be continuously practiced and projected.

Traditional practitioners of *uli* art use the art to communicate beauty. They derive the *uli* forms or motifs from items in their environments such as the moon, sun, stars, items that suggests dots, spiral shapes and some other geometric shapes. Unlike *nsibidi* sign writing, *uli* was not and is not a handwriting technique.

The problem this research has identified and is addressing is that *uli* as an art practice and technique is not adequately practiced and explored. This is to the extent that observers have noted that *uli* art culture is fading away. This study therefore, showcases and discusses some exercises on *uli* art. It recommends means by which *uli* art could be currently explored for the sustenance and continuity of the art. These means are significant because they will establish the *uli* art practice and concretely immortalize it as Igbo iconography globally. They will also objectively contribute to the continuity and maintenance of the art in this time and age, when foreign cultures are fast infiltrating into, down-sizing and eroding Nigeria's indigenous cultures. Another objective that this study aims at is to erase wrong impressions people may have over the years perceived of *uli* art as a fetish art, undesirable and uncivilised practice. For such perceptions can only result to poor attitudes towards the art.

Personal communications with resource persons, observations, consultations of related published books, doctoral thesis, exhibition brochures and internet materials are sources of data gathering adopted in this study. Formalistic, aesthetic, functional and historical analytical methods of data examination and interpretation are applied to collected data. Formalistic analysis portrays the ancient practitioners' perspective and practice of *uli* art. It also reveals contemporary *uli* artists' view and practice of the art. Functional analysis engages in the assessment of the effectiveness of the various art works (presented in this research) at expressing *uli* art. Historical analysis presents and interprets the past, present and continuity of *uli* art while aesthetic analysis assesses the beautification and decorative powers of the contemporary *uli* art works reviewed in this research. Contemporary artists include the present traditional artists and the current modern artists. Traditional artists are those that did not receive formal art training but rather, received informal training while the modern artists are artists that received formal art training.

***Uli* as an Art Style**

Like the finds of Igbo-ukwu excavations, *uli* body cosmetic and wall painting/designing as the people's age-old heritage affirms that the Igbo have always been beautifiers. *Uli* is one of the Igbo cosmetics in use since the ancient times to beautify and cloth human

body. Other Igbo beauty cosmetics include *Otangele* (black powder), *Nzu* (white chalk), *Ufie* (carmine) and *Edo* (yellow dye). (Lindersay, 2011, p. 421). *Uli* may have gained more prominence because of its durability as it stays not less than five days on a person's body before fading away. The word '*Uli*' encompasses beauty cosmetic, design motifs for human body decoration as well as for the painting and designing of patterns on the walls of traditional buildings incorporating the application of other media such as *Nzu* (white chalk) and *Unyi* (charcoal). *Uli* is a juice extract from *Uli* plant-pod that turns black on application. *Uli* and the other media are applied on mud houses after the house has been smoothed out with a paste of red soil (*aja-upa*). The techniques, media, practice and product are altogether, termed *Uli*. This is usually part of the women's domestic chore which constitutes day and night exhibition of the art. In the words of Sarah Adams (2002, p. 52)

Uli refers to the adornment of clay walls by Igbo women in southeastern Nigeria, a process that includes scrubbing, sparkling, polishing a clay wall until it shines like skin and then painting it in a palette that usually consists of *ajanwammuo* (red), *nchala* (yellow), *nzu* (white clay) and *unyi* (black charcoal) occasionally washing blue. The word also describes a method of body adornment using juice from one of a variety of pods and plants all called *Uli*. Greenish *Uli* juice squeezed from the seeds of *Uli* pods turns a deep black when applied to skin and remain visible for four to five days. The patterns a woman creates when she adorns another woman's body are referred to as *Uli*. Therefore *Uli* exists in reference to an Igbo women's artistic practice, as a word with multiple meanings, embodying an art form with endless variations and manifestations.

Next, is a poem that describes *uli* as an art style:

NNE'S JOY

Uli befriended *Ochiedike Nne*
 And abided with her
Uli equipped *Ochiedike Nne*
 And clothed her children
Uli tarried with *Ochiedike Nne*
 And adorned her house
 Though men flutter
Uli soars
 Though flowers wither
Uli blossoms
 Though fires flicker
Uli glows

Ochiedike's icon
 Contemporary's blaze
 Tomorrow's friend
 Loyalty's replica
 Artists' trend
 Nne's Joy

- Olive Iweka (2016).

Nne is Igbo translation of Mother, while *Ochiedike Nne* means ‘capable traditional mother’.

The terminology ‘*Ulism*’, was birthed from Uche Okeke’s propagation of *uli* art in the 1970s, a time it was noted by Ottenberg (2002, p.8) that the art of *uli* was fading away. Okeke loved the art and fostered it. As the head of the Department of Fine and Applied Arts University of Nigeria in 1970, Professor Okeke utilized the department to propagate *uli* as an art form and technique synthesizing it into the art courses taught. *Ulism* thus became a terminology that describes the *uli* art practice as impelled by Uche Okeke of Nsukka art school. The terminology is gradually spreading to other institutions, parts of Nigeria and the world globally.

***Uli* as Clothing, Igbo Custom and Legacy**

Certainly, the *uli* in study is not Uli town of Anambra State Nigeria situated on the southeast end of Ihiala Local Government Area. *Uli* art also did not originate from Uli town but has been in practice all over Igbo land. *Uli* is the Igbo name for the indigo extract or dye used by Igbo to draw designs on their bodies and walls. Though Igbo people have engaged in fabric weaving for as far back as 900 years A.D. (Uzoagba, 2009, p.98) it can be deduced that in the ancient times (before the enforcement of western cultures on the Igbo by colonial masters), the Igbo dressed largely in *uli* designs and *jigida* beads which sometimes left larger proportions of their bodies bare. Their demand for covering of the body with woven fabric was not high, because they could afford to stay without woven cloth as covering as they are situated in the tropics where the weather is conducive for dwellers to stay without the covering of the body with woven cloth. Moreover, they were a people who in the ancient times, did not believe that nudity was immoral or unethical. Bareness was a fashion they were comfortable with. Like earlier noted in this study, in the ancient times, *uli* happened to be a fashion design in vogue in the Igbo society. Lindersay (2011, p. 416), quoting Basden (1938 p. 204) confirms

...that men legislated against women wearing cloth. It was contended that this prohibition acted as a deterrent to misbehavior ... in some districts women, young and old, rich and poor, married and single, passed their whole life in a state of nudity...they wear a shred of material as loincloth when abroad, they shed it on entering the home compound...it is forbidden for them to cook for their husbands girded in cloth.

Actually, this is also in conformity with the Christians’ Bible which states that at the beginning of time, Adam and Eve lived bare or nude until they sinned against God. According to King James Version of The Holy Bible, Genesis chapter 2 verse 25, “They were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed”. Today, beliefs and ways of life have changed. Modernity and acculturation has also introduced varieties in the mode of clothing globally and so, *uli* as clothing could be continued in styles and techniques devisable by avant-garde artists for a people’s clothing primarily identifies them and ascribes distinctiveness and originality to them.

Maintenance of the Igbo traditional clay or mud houses entails occasionally filling in the cracks on the walls of the clay or mud house with the paste of the red-soil and generally smoothening out of all the walls of the house with the red-soil paste for even blend, neatness and beauty before the application of *uli* designs. This attests that *Igbo ochiedike* (capable ancient and traditional Igbo) imbibes maintenance culture. By contrast, modern life today, globally, is obviously associated with dilapidating structures. Lack of ‘maintenance culture’ is the order of the day. Roads are not maintained. Pipe-borne water is not sustained. Buildings collapse after some time. Security is not assured. Salaries are not always paid as at when due. Promises from politicians are unfulfilled, to state but a few. But *uli* traditional art of Igbo has been sustained by traditional practitioners of the ancient art, experts whose sensational works and products have been without modern synthetic infiltrations. Its beauty and effect on the society has sustained it and has been felt through ages in the traditional terrain and in the modern scene locally and globally.

In recent times, folks from Europe and America travel all the way to Igbo land to see and have a feel of *uli* art. Some of these include **Dr. Robin Renee Sanders** who was once United States of America **Ambassador to Nigeria** and Sarah Adams a Lecturer of Art History at the University of Iowa, U.S.A. The latter narrated that in January of 1995, at Agulu town in Anambra State Nigeria, she worked with some *uli* artists “as an apprentice to get a feel for what it is like to actually paint *uli*”(Adams, 2002, p. 53).

The substance, crux and uniqueness of *uli* or *ulism* are that it is an art style that will never run out of taste. Its charm and relevance can only be limitlessly explored. Even if the people credited with its origin sluggishly and reluctantly explore it, *uli* can never go into extinction because its conceptional strength is enough to soar and tarry on the wings of human frailty. It has been so in recent times. These statements are not intended to encourage reluctance and nonchalance but to rather awaken all to the awareness and reality of the worth and quintessence of *uli*. They are intended to appraise and project the rich aesthetic resource called *uli* which fate has deposited in the Igbo to elevate them. The observation is expected to generate ‘*Uli* boom’ by the means spelt out at the recommendation section of this study.

Contemporary Propagations of *Uli*

The body beautification power of *uli* is tastefully ever trendy. Its touch on walls evokes design concepts. These are respectively seen on the legs of Ekeidinma Ojiakor as portrayed in Figure 1 at the appendix and on the walls of a traditional clay house in Figure 2 painted by Ekeidinma Ojiakor who is a traditional *uli* practitioner. Both and the mural painting in Figure 4 demonstrate the art at its traditional level. Other traditional *uli* practitioners at work on a mural painting or wall beautification are showcased in Figure 3. The joy they derive from the exercise and art, accounts for the rapt attention the work was able to kindle and stimulate in them as is observable in Figure 3.

In the 1970s, *Uli* was promoted by modern artists like Uche Okeke, Obiora Udechukwu, Chike Aniakor, El Anatsui, Olu Oguibe, Tayo Adenaike, David Haig-West and some others. Some of the works of these modern pioneers of *uli* art are showcased in Figures 6-8 at the Appendix. Figure 6 exhibits line drawing by Uche Okeke illustrating his use of line to develop *uli* spiral shapes and other *uli* shapes by which he built a picture

of a concept he titled 'The Moonlight of Ekeama'. The art piece truly discloses the artist's desire and effort at synthesizing *uli* forms as technique into other creations. The throb of El Anatsui's beating-in of *uli* forms into his carvings is felt in Figure 7. The meticulously handled combination of carving and painting demonstrates his love for *uli* art. Tayo Adenaike's assemblage of *uli* forms by which he illustrated the head of a cow, as seen in Figure 8, spotlights the versatility of *uli* shapes as they quite enhanced the painting. The shapes enabled Adenaike to walk away from naturalistic representation of the cow and averting abstract representation at the same time, he was and is able to give the audience a picture that appeals to every class of people.

At an art workshop captioned *African Art History and the Formation of a Modern Aesthetic*, held at Kampala Uganda in September 2016, Professor Ozioma Onuzulike presented a paper titled "The Emergence of Modernism in Nsukka in the 1970s". He remarked that *Uli* is at present, not strongly practiced by modern artists in Nsukka like it was in 1970s (Personal conversation with Ozioma Onuzulike. October 18th 2016). This deduction, is obviously because not much of *uli* impact is felt in modern Nigerian society today.

However, some artists have made effort to propagate *uli* in this 21st century, though more effort is needed. An artist like C.K. Ikwuemesi has organized forums under the platform of 'Art Republic' where they held *Uli* trainings and exhibitions in 2009, 2010 and 2015 respectively. During the trainings, the artists taught the *uli* art to people that included students of University of Nigeria Nsukka, Institute of Management and Technology Enugu Nigeria and some rural people. (Personal communication with Chuu K. Ikwuemesi. October 22nd 2016). Roseline Chukwu was one of those trained. The composition of one of her drawings in Figure 5 which reveals her organization and development of some geometric shapes that constitutes *uli*, show that she benefited immensely from the training.

'Onitsha at the Millennium', (2013) edited by Nkiru Nzegwu, is a book that has *uli* forms embedded practically on all its pages. The same goes for another book Nzegwu edited titled 'His Majesty Nnaemeka Alfred Ugochukwu Achebe A Ten-Year Milestone' (2013). One cannot help noticing and appreciating the very special presence and beauty of *uli* in these books. The front and back covers of these two books have rich and colourful illustrations of *uli* art on them. Figure 12 displays the *uli* paintings that were illustrated on the covers of the books. From 11th to 25th July 2014, Chijioke Onuora held a solo exhibition at National Gallery of Arts Enugu Nigeria titled 'Akala Unyi'. It was an exhibition of charcoal drawings where most of his exhibits were works on *uli* forms. His efforts in the exhibits demonstrate his passion for *uli* art which inputed essence in them. One of them is his charcoal and white chalk drawing titled *Ulukububa*. It embodies a lot of *uli* forms. This is shown in Figure 9.

Another effort at *uli* propagation includes the sales of *uli* textile designs of Olive Iweka, which a number of people have purchased. The garments exhibit the capacity of *uli* as an art technique because the textile/fashion designer artistically arranged some *uli* shapes to arrive at captivating designs. Iweka also displayed *uli* fashion designs on the fashion run-way held at the 'Ijele Anaa', a national colloquium on Uche Okeke on the 24th of June, 2016. She used the fashion run-way to exhibit and propagate *uli* by the collection of fabrics on which she designed *uli* forms titled "Uli Expressions". Figure 10 displays some of the fashion outfits demonstrating combinations of green,

orange, purple, gold, black and white colours as they project *uli* forms. As the fashion models paraded on the run-way organized at the national colloquium, the audience gave strong applause which revealed that they were electrified by the gears. This “Uli Expressions” also featured at the group exhibition organized by Society of Nigerian Artists at Awka in celebration of Anambra State at 25 from the 8th to the 10th of November, 2016.

Chuu Krydz Ikwuemesi, Nneka Odoh, Petrolina Ikwuemesi and Kenechukwu Udejaja, held a group exhibition at Alliance Francaise, Enugu Nigeria from 13th to 22nd September 2016 where they generously propagated the *uli* forms titled “Uli and the Challenge of Postcoloniality”. Figure 11 showcases a set of art works on *uli* displayed at the exhibition. The set is a collection of mortars and pestles (kitchen utensils) on which C.K. Ikwuemesi designed colourful *uli* forms. The designs make an addition to the mortars and pestles, which removed ordinariness from the usual Nigerian kitchen mortars and pestles. It is worthy of note that Chuu Krydz Ikwuemesi has *uli* spiral form incorporated into his signature. *Uli* is thus propagated each time the artist signs a document. This reveals the strength of his passion for *uli* art. It also portrays the proficiency of the art as its originator’s signature.

These are the few expositions of *uli* with this paper. There may be more that this paper have not discussed but the fewness represented here, justifies Professor O. Onuzulike’s remark that *ulism* is at present, not strongly practiced by modern artists in Nsukka like it was in 1970s. However, Nsukka art school has planted the seed. The germination has also taken place. It is now up to artists to uphold, foster and propagate *uli*.

Prospects of *Uli*

Arochukwu, Ohafia and Abiriba towns of Abia State Nigeria, have the Ekpe secret society exclusively for men. *Nsibidi* is a coded language of Ekpe society, which constitutes signs. The signs are adopted by the society as motifs for the designing of the society’s cloth and uniform known as *Ukara* cloth (Personal communication with Professor O.K. Oyeoku. October 15th 2016). The *Ukara* cloth of the secret society has thus been an instrument of immortalization of the *Nsibidi* forms.

Tattooing the skin has become a fashion of today globally especially for youngsters. Entertainers and performing artistes are promoting tattoo by wearing tattoos. For instance, Nollywood actresses like Tonto Dikeh, Nadia Buari and Oge Okoye to mention but a few have their skins tattooed. Some fashion designs and hair-dos’ have also received accolades by their exponents and have thus acquired immortality. The immortalized fashion design and hair-do, includes the trouser design locally called ‘Fela’ by Nigerians, the hair-do referred to as ‘Bob Marley’ and the hair-do named after Anita Baker. These designs have been largely accepted because the exponents of the designs were and are popular entertainers; late songster Fela Kuti, late songster Bob Marley, songstress Anita Baker and others. ‘Capitoline Wolf’, which is of ancient Italian belief, is to this day immortalized by its usage as totem or emblem of Rome.

Who today speak *Uli*? Ottenberg (2002, p.21) states of Nsukka art school, that “given a different founder, Nsukka artist might have moved to emphasizing Igbo sculptural forms, masquerades or something else.” But for Uche Okeke’s voice, age-old *uli* of the Igbo would not have gained the international exposition and popularity it now

enjoys. The dynamic Professor of Painting, on becoming the Head of the Department of Fine and Applied Arts, University of Nigeria Nsukka in 1970, embarked on shedding the academic art of Britain which was in practice then and propagated as natural synthesis, the long existing traditional *uli* forms. So that *uli* is now expressed in other media besides the indigo dye (*uli*). Okeke had hitherto collected this ancient art from the 'parent rock'-the gifted hands of his traditional mother who Ottenberg (2002, p.21) affirms "had been an *Uli* artist". Uche Okeke's articulation and focus, no doubt further confirms the Igbo's strength of creativity whose consistency dates back to 900 years A.D. (Egonwa, 2011, p.23)

Ottenberg further remarked that before Okeke's embarkment on *ulism* in 1970s, the *uli* culture had started to wane away. Professor Okeke utilized the Department of Fine and Applied Arts, University of Nigeria Nsukka in projecting, exposing and hence sustaining the ancient *uli*. It is now up to contemporary artists to continue from where the honorable professor stopped so as to nourish and retain a worthy culture that marks and makes a People. Some avenues through which *uli* have been felt in this present time globally, include the traditional body decorations of contemporary Nollywood artistes as they perform some of their movies that portray Igbo traditional cultures. These movies feature on the television and other social media globally.

Recommendations

Yes, *Uli* started with clothing and beautifying human bodies and traditional walls but today it can also be designed on garments, shoes, bags, house hold draperies, Nigerian textile designs and prints such as *Abada* and *Adire*. *Uli* art can be explored by the use of other types of dyes, inks and paints to transfer the motifs to other items of life which includes cars, airplanes, interior decorations, greeting cards, carpets, rugs, Church buildings, hotel buildings, other modern houses and items in the banks of imaginations and memories. *Uli* carnivals could be held occasionally by groups of artists like the Society of Nigerian Artists etc where all will appear in attires embodying *uli* forms. *Uli* could be promoted by *Asoebi* (uniformed) groups at functions and by designing *uli* motifs on garments for popular personalities in the society whose popularity will help spread and honour *uli*. Entertainers' costumes example of which is the *Mkpokiti* dance group could be richly designed with the *uli* forms. Ceramic artists can transfer *uli* motifs to their wares by glaze and by painting. Carving and wielding of *uli* forms to their products could be done by sculptors just as graphic artists may well apply *uli* forms in their designs. Painters can perform dynamically with *uli*.

Poems and songs can be formulated and composed out of passion for the art and in honour of the art. In libraries and on the internet there is little scholarly documentation on *uli* art. More conceptual and academic perspectives on *uli* art should be uploaded online to ensure consistent upgrade on the evolution and development of *uli* art or *ulism*. *Uli* or *Ulism* should be advertised on social media like facebook etc. Every institution of higher learning in Nigeria, Africa and the world, should introduce and apply *uli* variations and techniques in their art courses. *Uli* art being a practice that has been classified as 'fading away', should actually be accorded a day in every year, for it to be celebrated annually for its revival and also because when you recognize what you have and celebrate it, the world will join you in doing so.

Conclusion

This paper has succeeded in projecting the continuity, power, necessity and uniqueness of *uli* art. It has addressed and treated the issue or the problem identified about the art, which is that the art is not accorded adequate attention and is not being adequately explored for its maintenance, sustenance and role hence the identified result or consequence of this lack of adequate attention and lack of adequate exploration is that *uli* art culture is gradually dying away. The paper investigated the meaning, use, embodiment and history of *uli* art. The study brought to light that clothing is the most viable means of physical identification of a nationality. It exposed the possibilities and means of consistent continuity and bloom of *uli* as clothing, design forms and design technique. The research is significant because it disclosed some efforts made at sustaining and propagating *uli* and recommended means of more propagation and thus immortalizing of *uli* art.

The worth and quintessence of *uli* sought out a true artist of like element-Uche Okeke, whose natural artistic instinct embraced *uli* passionately. This same *uli* as an Igbo iconography is calling out to true artists today as it is willing to elevate the status of the contemporary artist. The art being an evidence of the age-old potentials of Igbo as an innovative ethnic group, today constitutes an identity of the Igbo. It is up to contemporary artists to concretize *uli* art as an 'international practice' for their own benefit.

Just as thanks goes to Professors Thurstan Shaw and Donald Dean Hartle for their finds at Igbo-Ukwu (Kleiner, 2009, p.397) and Ezira towns (Chikwendu, 2002, p. 35) respectively, which pointed out Igbo pedigree and identity, thanks equally goes to Professor Uche Okeke who circled out an Igbo icon-*Uliism*. He hence spotlighted one of the ancient arts of Igbo and a natural resource of the Igbo. He also placed *uli* art or *ulism* in the status it internationally belongs. His benevolence and foresight are today propagating the art and have produced modern *uli* artists.

British expeditions and exploitations of Nigeria in the eras before Nigeria's independence in 1960 could not relocate *uli* art to British museums. *Uli* art is so proficient that white man's derogatory of the art in the past, could not exterminate the art. Humans live and die but *uli* art would not extinct.

Appendix



Figure:1. Body Uli by Ekedinma Ojiakor.1995. © Ottenberg 2002.

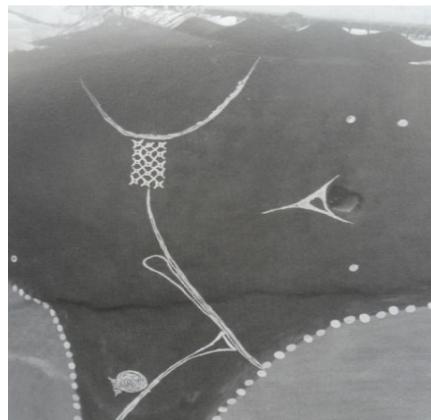
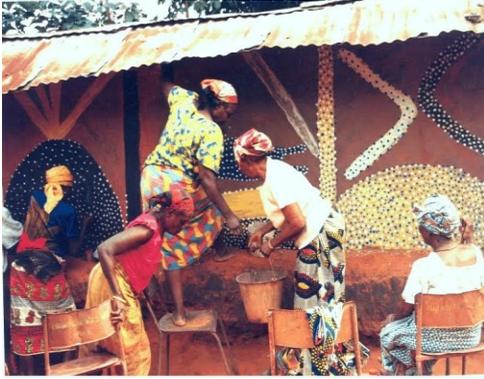


Figure: 2. Wall Painting by Ekedinma Ojiakor.1995. © Ottenberg 2002.



No. 4: The Nri Uli classicists, painting the walls of Iyi Azi

Figure: 3. *Uli* Traditional Artists @ work.(Uli Mural). © <https://ezibota.com/uli-and-the-igbo-woman/> 2015.



Figure: 4. Artist: Martina Okafor, Uli Mural at Agulu. Date and Dimension unknown. © Catalogue on ‘Uli and the Challenge of Postcoloniality’. 2016.



Figure: 5. Artist: Roseline Chukwu, Uli Motifs. Media: marker on paper. © Catalogue of ‘Uli and the Challenge of Postcoloniality’. 2016.

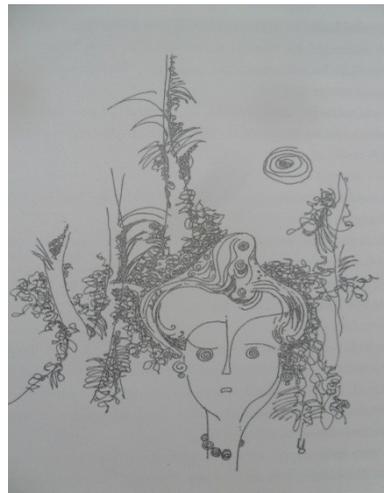


Figure: 6. Artist: Uche Okeke. Title: The Moonlight of Ekeama. 1973. Technique: Line Drawing. © Ottenberg, 2002.

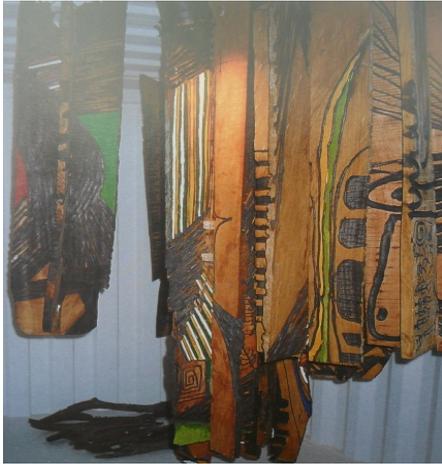


Figure: 7. Artist: El Anatsui. Title: Yohoho and a Bundle of Gods. 1972, Media: Wood and Tempera colour. © Ottenberg, 2002.

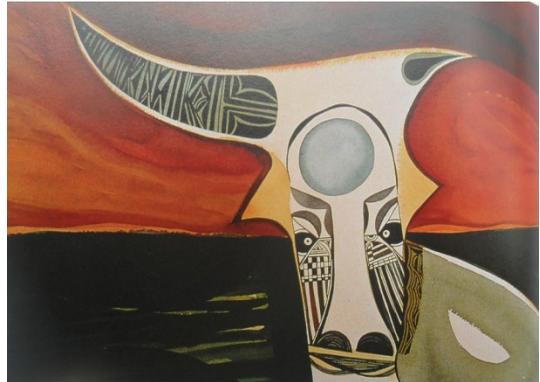


Figure: 8. Artist: Tayo Adenaike. Title: Staring Cow, 1996, Media: Watercolour. 1996. © Ottenberg, 2002.



Figure: 9. Artist: Chijioko Onuora. Title: *Ulukububa*. Media: Enamel, charcoal and white chalk. 2005. © Akala Unyi Exhibition Catalogue, 2014.



Figure: 10. Artist: Olive Iwaka. Title: Uli Expressions. Media: Acrylic on Caftans. 2005. © Olive Iwaka.

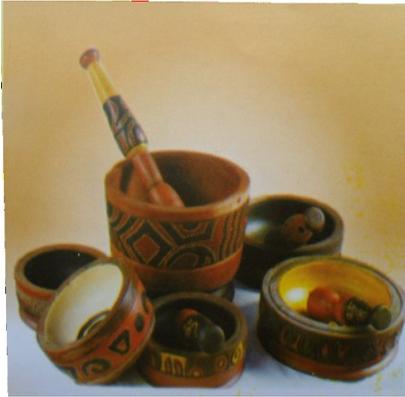


Figure: 11. Artist: Chuu Krydz Ikwuemesi. Title: Nne n'umu (mother and children). Media: Acrylic on wooden kitchen mortars. 2016. © Catalogue of 'Uli and the Challenge of Postcoloniality'. 2016.



Figure: 12. Artist: Uwechie N. Nzegwu. Title: Seeing Eye-1 and 2. Media: Gouache on paper. Date: 1993. © Books: 'His Majesty Nnaemeka Alfred Ugochukwu Achebe A Ten-Year Milestone' 2013 and 'Onitsha at the Millennium' 2013.

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