

# Contours and pluralism in Chijioke Onuora's *Ife kwulu, ife akwudebe ya* exhibition of Igbo Cosmology drawings, 2024

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**Abstract:** Chijioke Onuora is a Nigerian artist of Igbo ethnicity. With the thrust of artistic stoicism, this study critically examined Igbo existential pluralism in Onuora's exhibition of drawings at the Institute of African Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka (October 29 - November 29, 2024). The exhibition theme: *Ife kwulu, ife akwudebe ya* (*When something stands, another, also stands nearby*) signifies that things thrive in essential adjacencies. Findings reflect suppression of monism by juxtaposing geometric and linear images for pluralism. Illustration materials were charcoal and textile dye, on paper and fabrics. All the works were produced in 2023 and 2024.

**Keywords:** artistic stoicism, adjacencies, existential pluralism, Igbo, geometric, linear

## Introduction

Like an octopus with many fronts, the problem with discussing Chijioke Noel Onuora is, choosing the aspect of his multifaceted creative life that should be put in front. The challenge of prioritization, therefore, makes research on Onuora seem like an engagement on many facades. However, since this review borders on his current art exhibition, which was specifically narrowed down to drawing, a front was found in his draughtsmanship potentials. Obodo and Okafor (2016) pertinently stated that critics define Chijioke Onuora as a

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“versatile artist who works in different mediums”. This definition aptly describes him. “When he is not involved in painting, sculpting or dying fabrics, he cracks jokes and tells stories” (Obodo and Okafor 2016, 105).

Chijioke Onuora, an accomplished artist, was born into the family of teachers, Rev. and Mrs Joshua Chukwuemeka Onuora of Ede village in Adazi-Ani, Aniocha Local Government Area of Anambra State, on 30th May, 1962. Whereas his art teaching proficiency and student-friendliness are his core sterling qualities, some art scholars ascribe the qualities to his parental background. Like his father who was also a choirmaster, he loves music and sings well, an attribute his mother also had. Chijioke Onuora was indeed, born to do creative things, storytelling inclusive. Over the years, he has successfully transferred his oral story telling gusto unto diverse art media for visual culture bearings. In his art, a lot of stories are told by manipulating intricately woven contours, thereby transmitting his feelings to the public. It also appears that Onuora’s musical mentality found solace in the Nsukka Art School’s popular pattern of linearity, as enshrined in the *Uli* idiom; a wedlock of idealism and expressiveness.

The various tools of Igbo cultural pedagogy are evident in Onuora’s drawings, especially in their didactics. The artist employs the folklores, proverbs and idioms that form parts of his rich Igbo tradition in capturing his themes and artistic thoughts, which are focused mainly, on human relationships, social responsibilities and morality. Some of his drawings familiarise more directly with his cultural background in their titles (Obodo and Okafor, 2016, 107).

### **Educational background**

It was natural that a gifted artist, born to parents who were professional teachers and influencers of young people, went to school, to develop his talents. Chijioke Onuora, in the words of Nnamele (2018), had his primary education from 1968 to 1973 at Thomas Anglican Primary School, Oraukwu. By 1970 he was in elementary 2 but the Nigeria-Biafra war delayed his studies. Onuora recalled that by 1973, when he was supposed to be in secondary school, he was doing his primary 5. At this level he enrolled for the common entrance examination that took him to secondary school without taking the First School Leaving Certificate Examination (Ibid, 1).

Despite the delays occasioned by the war and its downstream unrests, Onuora forged ahead zealously, passing through Oraukwu

high school, for his secondary education, from 1973 to 1979. Enrolling at the Anambra State College of Education, Awka, to study Fine and Applied Arts, was not easy in 1979 but he was also able to scale through, for his National Certificate in Education, NCE. In 1983 he was admitted to study Fine and Applied Arts at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, as a direct entry student, graduating in 1986 with a Bachelor of Arts, BA degree in sculpture. In 1987 he registered for a Master of Fine Arts, MFA, degree programme in sculpture and graduated in 1990. Onuora's subsequent enrolment for a Doctorate, PhD programme in Art History at the same institution, and his promotion to the rank of a Professor, years after, was no surprise to all his past students and admirers worldwide. Bassey (2023) recalled Onuora as having responded thus, during an interview:

My formal art education began at Oraukwu Grammar School and was further nurtured at Anambra State College of Education in Awka, where I was taught by mostly graduates of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. I finished from the College with a Distinction in Fine and Applied Arts. While studying for my degree programme at the university, a year later, I had the privilege of learning from accomplished artists like Obiora Udechukwu, Uche Okeke, Chike Aniakor and El Anatsui, whose influences further shaped my studio art practice.

Close followers of Chijioke Onuora would not hesitate to acknowledge the influence of Seth Anku, a proficient Ghanaian lecturer in the department. Till date, Onuora's strokes look much like those of Seth Anku, with capacious touches of El Anatsui and Chike Aniakor's radical linearity.



Fig. 1. The artist, Professor Chijioke Noel Onuora in three stages of life: pre-degree, degree/doctorial, post-doctorial

Source: Research; Alu et al (2024). Photo: Chijioke Noel Onuora

### **The Zaria rebellion as precursor to indigenous contents in post-colonial formal art learning in Nigeria**

Chijioko Onuora is one of the contemporary cross bearers of the *Uli* art culture that the Nsukka Art School is today, known for. *Uli* itself is a child of ideological agitations held by some Nigerian art students in 1958 at Zaria, for intellectual independence. The undergraduate students of art in the Fine Arts Department of the Nigerian College of Arts, Science and Technology, later re-named Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria, at some point, rose up to challenge the British art pedagogies that dominated the learning curricula, as enshrined by the largely British art lecturers in the institution. In the forefront the Zaria agitations was its founder and leader, Christopher Uchefuna Okeke, more commonly known as Uche Okeke, a vibrant painter, poet and draughtsman. The founding members of the group were: Uche Okeke, Demas Nwoko, Yusuf Grillo, Bruce Onobrakpeya, Jimoh Akolo, Irein Wangboje, William Olaosebikan, and Simon Okeke.

But there were, initially, four student-artists that started the fight for conceptual and pedagogical freedom in art. According to Okeke-Agulu (2015, 2), the decision by four of the eleven students admitted in September 1957 to confront the status quo was nothing short of historic. These students came to Zaria with the ambition to become professional artists after their art training. They were not prepared to cede to their counterparts in other disciplines any claim to or of academic superiority, in part because they entered Zaria highly recommended.

The creative agitators went as far as organising extracurricular art exhibitions in which they showed a lot of works depicting considerable dosages of 'Nigerianness', at least to prove that they knew what they were agitating for. Those exhibitions, apart from marketing the young artists, also became part of the larger call for independence from British colonial rule. It was also predictable that most of them were going to become art teachers and social influencers, and they did. Uche Okeke who was also a poet, took his call for homeward thinking to his poems, likewise others in the category. The original four members of the group referenced above were: Uche Okeke, Demas Nwoko, Bruce Onobrakpeya and Jimoh Akolo. Much later, three students from the previous class: Yusuf Grillo, Simon Okeke and William Olaosebikan joined the group. In the years that followed, the likes of Okechukwu

Odita, Oseloka Osadebe, Ogbonnaya Nwagbara and Felix Nwoko Ekeada also joined. It did not take long before the fever of self-identification and Afro-centricism caught young Nigerian artists nationwide.

In the words of Alu et al. (2024, 55), “their guts came largely from the wave of independence that dominated the country then, and also, the need to be allowed to create art the Nigerian and African way”. There was, therefore, the cry for natural synthesis by the vibrant student-artists. “Natural synthesis means the mixture of indigenous visual art forms with some of the western ones considered useful at the moment”. The ‘Zaria rebels’, as they were also branded, was later to metamorphose into the ‘Zaria Art Society’.

It was therefore, not a surprise that Nigerian art schools where the Zaria rebels had gone to teach, after graduation, started to fuse in elements of traditional idioms to their art forms in teaching and practice. Those who went into personal practice equally did so with a lot of indigenous art-sense, signalling total shifts from the hitherto sought-after synthesis of Nigerian and Europeans concepts. The European art-sense, at some point, started giving way for Afro-centric conceptualisations in art. After the civil war, at Nsukka, Uche Okeke started to project the *Uli* art concept with so much vigour that it soon became a beacon of *Igbo-centric* visual culture. He did so by exposing his students to the traditional roots of the *Uli* painting culture.

According to Ikwuemesi (2019, 4), “experimentation with *Uli* as a creative idiom by modern Igbo painters dates back to the late 1950s when Uche Okeke, an art student and a member of the Zaria Art Society, began to explore Igbo culture in his works, in a manner commensurate with the stylistic ideological rebellion of the Zaria Art Society”. It is good to note here that other members of the Zaria rebel group also went to explore traditional creative metaphors obtainable in their regions of the country, for art inclusivity. Ikwuemesi asserted further that “it was not until the end of the Nigerian civil war in 1970 that *Uli* took a deep root in the art philosophy that dominated the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. This was to be expected, since the immediate post-war period in Igbo land was a time when Igbo artists sought to vanquish the pains of loss and defeat, through the renewal of self and identity via a ‘forward-to-the-past’ philosophy”.

Ezeh (2005, 62) ascertained that during this experimentation, students, namely; Obiora Udechukwu, Paul Igbanugo, Ray Obeta, Bons Nwabiani, Osita Njelita, among others, were carried along. These

students along with the lecturers embarked on several field research trips in some Igbo communities where they viewed first hand *Uli* women painters at work, documented the *Uli* body and wall decorations and paintings, as well as incorporated the *Uli* motifs into their own studio works.

### **The *Uli* idiomatic signature at Nsukka as by-product of the Zaria rebellion**

*Uli* is the name of the dye obtained from the indigo seed. The seed is first of all, broken or ground into a fine liquid paste, then used by Igbo women for body painting and mural plastering, which also translates to painting. In recent decades *Uli* motifs can be rendered with white chalk pastes on red-brown mud walls, to achieve easier contrast. The motifs created by Igbo women are largely drawn from totemic objects and animals in the immediate environment. Shapes that represent Igbo ideologies are also captured in the motif making. Linearity and geometricism are hallmarks of *Uli* illustrations, depending on what is being represented. According to Ikwuemesi (2019, 171), *Uli* is also the name of the entire art tradition in which the indigo dye or earth pigments were used. The word *Uli* equally functioned as an aesthetic determinant among the Igbo, referring to various connotations of beauty, intricacy and sense of design.

The Department of Fine and Applied Arts, now Fine and Industrial Arts, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, was established in 1961. It was like one of the institutional babies of the newly gotten independence, with lecturers and students who still had the mentality of freedom ringing in their heads. Irrespective of the upheavals at Zaria before independence, the Eurocentric art pedagogy issue of Zaria showed up again at Nsukka. This was not a surprise, as most of the earliest lecturers in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, were still foreigners who knew little or nothing about Afro-centric philosophy. In the words of Alu et al. (2024, 55), “regrettably, the art programmes of the Nsukka art school, like the Zaria art School, earlier on, were highly ‘Europeanised’. By Europeanisation we mean that the European art lecturers in the institution flagged art teaching structures that showed much Euro-centric educational curriculum”.

Years after independence in 1960, internal governmental crises started rearing up from different parts of the country, culminating in genocide killings, sectional agitations and military coups. The Nigerian political space was getting gloomier, and so were her educational

structures. If there were agitations about synthesizing Nigerian conceptual contents with few of the European ones before independence, for home identity, it remained to be imagined what the proportion of another looming agitation, for total 'Nigerianness' would be, after independence. But the challenge was the fewness of Nigerian art graduates available then. Besides, a wider scope of political unrest was brewing across the country, especially between the North and the East. In the wake of the upheavals leading to the Nigeria-Biafra civil war and its encumbrances, according to Alu et al. (2024, 396), "signs were high enough that schooling was going to be disturbed in the Eastern region, so, the expatriate art lecturers were driven away by the prevailing unsafe. After the war, when indigenous artists took over, artistic experimentation was combined with theoretical pedagogies to form the core bipod of the art learning structure in the institution" thus, Nigerian formally trained artists started taking over.

After the civil war, in the early 1970s, the Department of Fine and Applied Arts, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, turned to native art specialists to resuscitate her academic programmes. Uche Okeke was projecting Uli, a traditional body and mural painting linearistic pattern practised by Igbo women of South-East Nigeria, as an idiom and instrument of 'Nigerianness' in artistic conceptualisation (Alu et al. 2024, 396; 397).

It was, therefore, the *Uli idiom* that Uche Okeke planted in Nsukka that begat disciples over the decades till it got to the generation of Chijioke Onuora, a radical design explorer and multi-talented visual culture crusader. In projecting Uli linearity patterns beyond the original scope, unto more idealistic and intricately woven encompassments of Igbo philosophy, the *ife kwulu, ife akwudebe ya* mantra became an inevitable pole bearer for the 2024 exhibition.

### ***Ife kwulu, ife akwudebe ya: The current voice of Chijioke Onuora***

The art experimental trajectories unearthed by the Zaria Art 'rebels' clarion call for traditional synthesis of art forms and media stood and towered like a tree with many useful branches. From Uli, an indigo seed and pigment sourced by Igbo people for body and mural painting, and an Igbo art repertoire of a sort, to other forms of artistic liberalisations, Uche Okeke birthed an enduring art stylistic trajectory (Alu et al. 2024, 396).

The Igbo people of South-Eastern Nigeria have very rich and deeply rooted philosophical contemplations that guide everyday life. Chijioke

Onuora, duly showed an early thrust in standing his current solo art exhibition on the thematic pedestal of the Igbo adage: *Ife kwulu, ife akwudebe ya* (once a thing or an issue stands, another also stands nearby) meaning that things, issues, persons or even ideas, stand in co-existential twos or multiples. The exhibition which held from October 29<sup>th</sup> till November 29<sup>th</sup>, 2024 at the Museum of the Institute of African Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, was the first of its kind by Professor Chijioke Noel Onuora, in careering his drawing proficiency on fabric, not just on the conventional paper or board. In Nsukka, artistic experimentation seems to be developing on as many outlets as there are artists always in the wings. Onuora himself has taught and bred so many art media explorers over the decades.

In this exhibition, the renowned draughtsman, Chijioke Onuora, concentrated on stylisation of images, in manifold liberalistic abstractions. In essaying the thematic contents of the current art works by Onuora, attempt was made to discuss the social issues thrown up, in presenting the works both dialectically and otherwise. As one of the contemporary crusaders of the *Uli* art ideological doctrine, Onuora, in this exhibition, put forward a strong factual sentence; one in which pluralism in image making was pivotal.

With Uche Okeke as captain of the ship, and, later supported by Chike Aniakor, Obiora Udechukwu and El Anatsui, decades on, another generation of Nsukka art flag bearers emerged in the likes of Chijioke Onuora, Krydz Ikwuemesi, Eva Obodo, Chika Okeke-Agulu, Sylvester Ogbechie, George Odoh, Chukwuemeka Okpara and many more. (Alu et al. 2024, 56) On Chijioke Onuora, Obodo and Okafor (2016, 112), stated that there is something that defines his drawings as a kind of condensed representation of feelings. The strokes and patterns that form them are expressively vivid and contextually saturated with meanings.

Stoically speaking, the Zaria rebellion was as inevitable as it was essentially the springboard for the Nsukka paradigm, the post-independence civil unrests notwithstanding. Decades down the line, the likes of Chijioke Onuora are crusading artistic ingenuity and cultural independence that in turn, engenders interdependence.

## **Methods and materials**

### *Research design*

The content analysis research design was adopted for this appraisal because of the need to exhume ideological baselines and artistic

exertions for comparative analysis. Since content analysis could either be in the qualitative or quantitative form, this study toed the qualitative path. Hsieh and Shannon (2005, 1278) acknowledged qualitative content analysis as “a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns”. Patton (2002, 453) specified that qualitative content analysis is any data and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings.

### *Theoretical framework*

This study is predicated upon the Igbo existential theory of *Igwe bu ike* (There is strength in a multitude) upon which a vast majority of Igbo heterogeneous enterprises stand. The Igbo doctrine of monism, much as it abides within its cosmogony, does not preoccupy the people's mindset as much as pluralism. The *Ike otu onye* (One-man power) mentality, with all the possible credits it may ascribe to individuals who seemingly make solo achievements in life, is not regarded as much as the axioms that buttress pluralism. In fact, pluralism, for its mass communicative and contributory ascriptions, which further yield collaborative success, is of higher philosophical essence among the Igbo people of Nigeria.

Apart from the pluralistic axiom *Igwe bu ike* (There is strength in a multitude), there are others like; *Gidigidi bu ugwu Eze* (The glory of the king is in his multitude of followers), *Aka abuo jikoo onu, ha egbuo ijiji* (When two hands come together, they become capable of killing a fly), *Aziza ka mma n'ukwu* (The broom is more formidable as a bunch), etc. The pluralism-oriented *Ife Kwulu, ife akwudebe ya* being the theme of the current exhibition, readily posits the artist as thrusting in the direction of pluralistic co-existence.

### *Objectives*

This paper sought to investigate the *Ife kwulu* (When something or an issue stands) proposal, and *Ife akwudebe ya* (another thing or issue also stands nearby) juxtaposition, in its portending of duality, with the thrust of breaking down the *ife* (thing) and the *nkwudebe* (standing close-by) in illustrative ideograms. In a layman's language, this study investigated the 'Whats' and 'Whys' doctrinal contents of Onuora's explorative illustrations.

### *Instruments and procedures for exhibition review*

After attending the opening ceremony of the exhibition and interacting with the artist on October 29<sup>th</sup>, 2024, at the Museum of the Institute of African Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, there was need to photograph the works for future references and discussions. For this purpose, Jibrin Ebenezer, the official photographer for the exhibition and a technical staff of the department of Fine and Industrial Arts, University of Nigeria Nsukka, was engaged. After compiling the photographs, they were tabularized and labelled accordingly, for contours and pluralism content analysis, then internet and archival search began, for related literature. The review was qualitative, Igbo cosmology-oriented and observation-based. Thus, the data gathering and compilation instruments were: digital camera, pen, paper, journal articles, books and internet sources.

### **The underpinnings of duality**

Duality is a philosophical belief that things exist or stand in twos. This doctrine covers twosome stances in: oppositeness, contiguity, juxtaposition, superimposition, and the likes. They stand, not necessarily in halves or in some other fractions, but as full independent figures.

Some Igbo mythical stories of origins credit existence with a lot of duality. In fact, it is considered that if the *ihu na azu* (front and back) or *Ikwu na ibe* (kin and neighbour) of a matter gets exposed, it means that the whole sides of a story or an encounter has been told.

Drawing is primarily known to be paper based, and this aptly describes the drawings of Chijioke Onuora whose mastery of the use of charcoal is classical. However, the recent exploration of charcoal drawing on fabrics affirms his quest for doing old things in rather new ways, thereby creating room for comparative analyses.

The exhibition, *Ife kwulu, ife akwudebe ya* had on display, drawings made on two surfaces: paper and fabric. In addition, the drawings were made of two major art media: Charcoal and textile dye, forwarding the exhibition as thrusting pigmentation and contours. All the works on exhibition were produced between 2023 and 2024, another index that underpins duality. In not exerting the drawings in realistic forms, Onuora toed the paths of geometric and linear abstractions.

The art exhibition was a cynosure of all eyes, as the famous draughtsman took his skills to another level, in executing charcoal drawing on plane and dyed fabrics. Though intended to be an

exhibition of drawings, Onuora could not help allow some titbits of his textile design manipulations to manifest on some of the fabrics, for pigmentation and exploration purposes.

### **Other forms of pluralism**

The very intricately woven flow of linearity manifested on the works of Onuora largely interfaced plurality, especially with the stylisation of the human figure. Apart from *Couple* and *Udo na ogwugwu* that represented duality, other works were depictive of triality, quadrality and other forms of Igbo cosmological pluralism. The Igbo theory of *onye akpotara, okpota ibe ya* (He who is brought soon brings another or He who is invited also invites another) is a strong basis for why pluralism is first of all, encouraged by duality. The *Igwe bu ike* (Crowd or multitude is strength) which lives on the mind of an average Igbo entrepreneur necessitates plurality and gently positions monism in some solitary situations.

In some instances, it is believed that in-between two existences is always an existence that consolidates the positions of the main two. For instance, between the *Ihu na azu* (Front and back) theory exists *etiti* (The middle). Without the *etiti*, there would be no evidence that *ihu* and *azu* exist and descriptively represent the oppositeness of the front and the back. The *Elu na ala* (Up and down, heaven and earth or high and low) theory of duality is consolidated also by the *etiti* (middle or hemispheric) stance. If there is no hemisphere, it is possible that there will be no difference between the heavens and the earth. However, the *Nwoke na Nwanyị* (Male and female or man and woman) duality doctrine, which naturally represents both genders of the human being, has no midway theory that consolidates it. The same applies to the *Mmiri na mmanu* (water and oil) oppositional duality theory. The point here is that it is not in all cases that duality is consolidated by a monistic doctrine that, in itself, seems to present 'threesomeness' in the course of manifesting duality.

### **Thematic and depictive imports of the works**

The works of Chijioke Onuora in the current exhibition, justifiably, express the *Igwe bu ike* doctrine with detailed hierarchical positioning of persons of leadership, physical or spiritual. The persons represented on the works are both physical and metaphysical, depending on societal positioning. Also, while some persons of existential positioning are contemporaneously imaginative, others exist in the

Igbo metaphorical sense. The stylisation of images, human and spiritual, was very well in tandem with the tradition at the Nsukka School of Art where artistic experimentation holds interpretive sway.

The titles of the works were rendered in English or Igbo. The works titled: *We move*, *Entanglement*, *Continuous flow* and the *Umuada* series depict motion and fluidity, while others like: *Family* and the *Neighbours* series show stillness and rigidity in rendition. However, the *Ikoru na umu okorobia*, *Udo na Ogwugwu* and the Igbo market days of *Eke*, *Orie*, *Afor* and *Nkwo* combined the impressions of both rigidity and fluidity.

Onuora, in attempting to dye some fabrics in bubble-like, linearistic and painterly *prima facie* before the fusion of charcoal drawing, successfully injected a considerable dosage of pigmentation into the rich contours on display. Some of the works that had textile dyeing and painterly precursors were: *Udo na Ogwuwu*, *Continuous flow I* and *Continuous flow II*, and *We move*. *Umuada I* and *Family* were executed with brown charcoal, making them look somewhat coloured and executed in shades of tea-coloured contours. Essentially, Onuora successfully made a fusion of drawing and textile art, with a little touch of painting. Though trained as a sculptor, Onuora's drawings on fabric capture one of his latest forays in mixed media art and explorations.



Fig. 2: ENTANGLEMENT

Med: Charcoal on fabric Dim/Yr: 80 x 50 inches. 2024  
Source: Research; Alu et al. (2024) Photo: Jibrin Ebenezar

Figure 2 is a rightward horizontal cascade of contours, showing a mother figure with her kids closely wrapped around her, from the feet upwards, each, struggling for an upward holding on the mother's body. In showing pluralism, the work also looks like dream land sullenness between mother and kids.

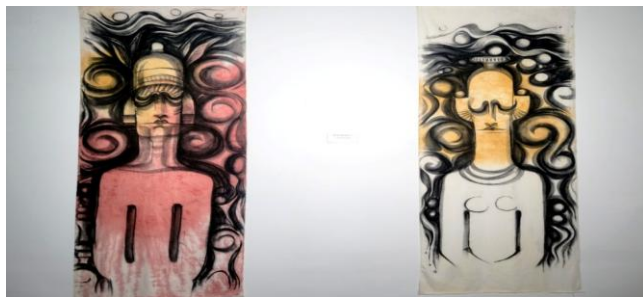


Fig. 3: UDO NA OGWUGWU  
Med: Charcoal and Dye on fabric Dim/Yr: 26 x 78, 27 x 78 inches. 2024  
Source: Research; Alu et al. (2024) Photo: Jibrin Ebenezar

Figure 3 portrays the *Udo* and *Ogwugwu* male and female Igbo deities, submerged within thick contours of complaints by devotees, waiting for attention, or, being attended to. The husband-and-wife mythological stance possibly warranted why the artist depicted both of them on a single fabric surface. The verticality of the deities, suggest serenity and supremacy. *Udo* shows masculinity by looking stiffer and being bigger in size while *Ogwugwu* has breasts and an adorning beaded necklace. Both deities portray frontality and jointly represent duality in Igbo cosmology.



Fig. 4: EKE Fig. 5: ORIE Fig. 6: AFO Fig. 7: NKWO  
Med: Charcoal on fabric Dim/Yr: 28 x 88.5 inches each. 2024  
Source: Research; Alu et al. (2024) Photo: Jibrin Ebenezar

The four Igbo traditional market days are mythically connected. First, they constitute the *Otu izu* (one week) cycle of four days. The days, otherwise called market days, also have gender inclinations attributable to spiritual essence. Deities in charge of each market day have their priests and cultural custodians who serve as mediums between the

deities and man. Onuora carefully distinguished the female days, Orié and Nkwo with domestic utensils on their heads and circles that represent breasts, from their brothers, Eke and Afo who have thick and well projected foreheads and bearing brick-like burdens on their heads.

*Eke* is the *Okpara izu* (First son of the week), also known as *Isi mbido ahia* (beginning of the market week). In most Igbo communities, oath taking is conducted on *Eke* market days. One who dies on an *Eke* day is considered guilty of some offence. Child naming in Igbo land is traditionally determined by the market day of the child's birth. Such names as follows may be given to babies born on Eke market days: *Okereke* or *Okeke*: Male child of Eke. *Mgbeke*: Female child of Eke. *Nweke*: Child of Eke.

*Orié* is the *Ada izu* (First daughter of the week). Due to inclinations to fertility and commercial successes, the opening of the farming season in Igbo land is always fixed on *Orié* market days. Children born on Orié days may be given such names as: *Okorie* or *Okoye*: Male child of Orié. *Mgbaorie* or *Mgbaoye*: Female child of Orié. *Nworie* or *Nwoye*: Child of Orié.

*Afo* is the *Osote Okpara izu* (Second son of the week), it is usually a day for merriments. Masquerading, wrestling and other festivals are usually fixed on *Afo* market days, though, in some Igbo communities, occasions may not be fixed on Afo days for reasons peculiar to each community. Children born on Afo market days may be named as follows: *Okoroafo* or *Okafo*: Male child of Afo. *Mgbafo*: Female child of Afo. *Nwafó*: Child of Afo.

*Nkwo* is the *Osote Ada izu* (Second daughter of the week). Merriments are also done on *Nkwo* market days too. If one dies on an Nkwo day, he is considered as upright. In some Igbo communities, burial ceremonies are not fixed on Nkwo market days. Children born on Nkwo days may be given such names as: *Okoronkwo* or *Okonkwo*: Male child of Nkwo. *Mgbankwo*: Female child of Nkwo. *Nwankwo*: Child of Nkwo.

There are other variants of traditional Igbo names traceable market day inclinations, for instance, *Dikenwo* or *Ochiaghankwo* (Warrior of Nkwo), *Ekemma* (Pretty Eke daughter), *Agunkwo* (Lion of Nkwo), *Afodike* (valiant man of Afo), etc. It should also be noted that a name like *Okafo* was 'Europeanised' by the conscious addition of the letter R to its ending, as misspelt by the Whiteman, during the colonial era. To this end, *Okafo* was wrongly spelt as written as *Okafor*. The instances in which Igbo names of people and places were misspelt by the

colonial masters will not be discussed here for reasons bothering on study scope.

The traditional days are also discussed in gender terms, the connotation of which translates to the market days they represent in every Igbo community. Given the above explanations, Fig. 4 is Onuora's representation of *Eke*, being the first male day of the week. Fig. 5 depicts *Orie*, the first female day, Fig. 6 shows *Afo*, the second male day, while Fig. 7 represents *Nkwo*, the second female day. In justifying quadrality as an agent of pluralism, otherwise called quadruplicity, the Igbo adage *Ubochi ano: Ahia ano* (Four days: Four markets) captures the above traditional quadratic theory and aptly presents the Igbo calendar as having 4 days in a week, 7 weeks in a month, 28 days in a month, 91 weeks in a year, 364 days in a year and 13 months in a year.



Fig. 8: CONTINUOUS FLOW 1

Med: Charcoal and Dye on fabric

Dim/Yr: Unknown

Figure 9: CONTINUOUS FLOW 2

Med: Charcoal and Dye on fabric

Dim/Yr: Unknown

Source: Research; Alu et al. (2024) Photo: Jibrin Ebenezar

Figures 8 and 9 show the *Elu na ala*, *Enu na ana* or *Igwe na ala* (High and below or heaven and earth) duality concept playing out, as a suffocating queue of people struggle towards the powers above, for help, protection, or even forgiveness. To deepen the mysterious profiles above, Onuora dyed the upper parts of the fabrics, prior to the charcoal illustrations. Though the works portray duality, in bringing the heavens and the earth to bear, so many individuals are positioned way-between in very pluralistic manners. There are few pebbles or droplets of water issuing from above, suggesting inadequacy to calm the terrestrial draught that defines the foregrounds from where the dwellers had started a mythical migration to the abodes above, in search of abundance.



Fig. 10: WE MOVE  
Med: Charcoal and Dye on fabric Dim/Yr: 75.5 x 51.5 inches. 2024  
Source: Research; Alu et al. (2024) Photo: Jibrin Ebenezar

Looking somewhat polychromatic is Fig. 10, in clearly embodying pluralism. It seems there had been a massive release of the sought-after blessings lacking on Figures 8 and 9. The gloomy indigo-blueness of the celestials has given way to warm, red and orange bubbles of hues, parted in-between by some whiteness in the middle above. All the hitherto struggling persons that migrated to the heavens for comfort are now celebrating and dancing earthwards. The silhouetted human images, in their festival, seem to have also obtained reconciliation from above. As the title *We move* states, this utilitarian work of draughtsmanship in textile design embodies very kinetic moments among men when there is peace, not war.

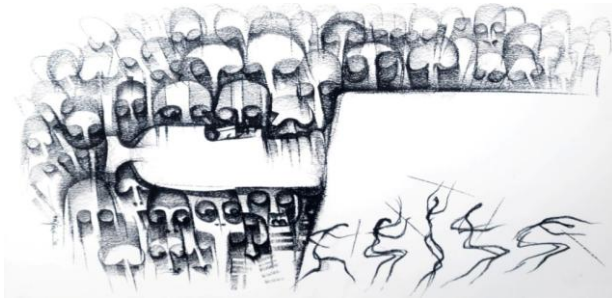


Fig. 11: IKORO NA UMU OKOROBIA  
Med: Charcoal on paper Dim/Yr: 22 x 15 inches. 2023  
Source: Research; Alu et a.l (2024) Photo: Jibrin Ebenezar

Figure 11 depicts a very vital aspect of Igbo cosmology, one that entwines administration and security. *Ikoro*, the huge wooden gong used to beckon on male members of the community when certain events of great magnitude happen, is significant in Igbo culture. *Ikoro na umu okorobia* (Ikoro and the young men) showcases the caller and

the called. Though, Ikoro is used to beckon on the community when a man of high traditional hierarchy, like the *Igwe* or *Eze* (King) dies, Ikoro is mainly used to call on the men to respond to matters of urgency. Its necessities are highly male gender based. When there is need to respond to invasions by trespassing sojourners, guerrilla fighters, kidnappers, land grabbers, etc, the Ikoro is sounded for all the young men to run to the village square. It also signals the women and children to go into emergency hiding. Most communal battles are kick-started this way because the young men are always full of the hunger to retaliate. In Igbo land any young man who fails to respond to the call of Ikoro is considered sick or cowardly. The silhouetted images of the young men carrying spears and arrows show that this very call was unto war or security.



Fig 12: COUPLE  
Med: Charcoal on fabric  
Dim/Yr: 44 x 71.5 inches. 2024



Fig. 13: THOUGHTS WITHIN  
Med: Charcoal on fabric  
Dim/Yr: 78 x 58 inches. 2024

Source: Research; Alu et al. (2024) Photo: Jibrin Ebenezar

Figure 12 depicts duality, as the man and his wife are connected by spirals upon their heads. The couple seem overwhelmed by domestic issues in a difficult economy. The entwinements upon the heads make them appear surreal, while the thoracic regions and below seem bare. All the worries of life, including squabbles between couples are generated in the head. Eventually when it is time to settle the matter, it also starts from the head. Figure 13 shows multiple figures in reclining positions. Highly suggestive of calm and cold, the figures justify the title: *Thoughts within*, as they cogitate over some home issues.



Fig. 14: THOUGHTS WITHIN II  
Med: Charcoal on fabric Dim/Yr: 85.5 x 55 inches  
Source: Research; Alu et al. (2024) Photo: Jibrin Ebenezar



Fig. 15: THOUGHTS WITHIN III  
Med: Charcoal on fabric Dim/Yr: 36x 54.4 inches  
Source: Research; Alu et al. (2024) Photo: Jibrin Ebenezar

Figures 14 and 15 are sequels to *Thoughts Within I*, showing even more intricate reflections among the stylized human images. A clear difference, though, is that while Fig. 13 is vertically framed, meaning, portrait positioning, Figures 14 and 15 are horizontally framed and seem to contain three main images each, within which other miniature, silhouetted and contoured images are submerged. The wavy fabrics naturally concur with the swimming images in musical consonance. *Thoughts within I, II* and *III*, indeed provoke curiosity within the minds of the viewers.



Fig. 16: UMUADA I  
Med: Charcoal on paper  
Dim/Yr: 22 x 15 inches. 2023  
Source: Research; Alu et al. (2024) Photo: Jibrin Ebenezar



Fig. 17: UMUADA II  
Med: Charcoal on paper  
Dim/Yr: 29 x 12 inches. 2023



Fig. 18: UMUADA III  
Med: Charcoal on paper  
Dim/Yr: 11.3 x 36. 2024  
Source: Research; Alu et al. (2024) Photo: Jibrin Ebenezar

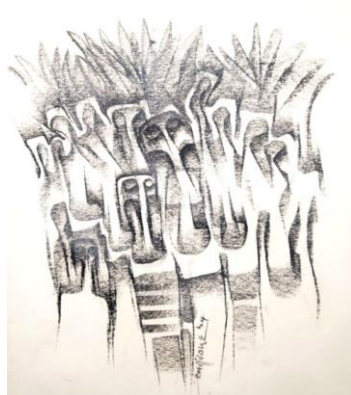


Fig. 19: UMUADA IV  
Med: Charcoal on paper  
Dim/Yr: 12 x 15.5 inches. 2023

Figures 16-19 constitute the *Umuada* series. *Umuada* is one of the strongest organisations in every Igbo community. *Umuada* (Indigenous daughters or daughters of the lineage) was first comprised by the first daughters in every indigenous Igbo family in a community. From *Umu* (children) and *Ada* (first daughter) came the original compound name *Umuada* (children that are first daughters) but since other daughters, can as well, be regarded as *Ada*, beyond the first daughter reckoning, *Umuada* has become a general name for all indigenous Igbo daughters in a community. In some Igbo communities, women married

from other communities, even non-Igbo communities, have been accepted as part of the Umuada kin because, by marriage, they are indigenes of their husband's communities. The Umuada kin are good custodians of female gender based culture. During marriage, child naming, burial and other occasions, the Umuada socio-cultural group takes charge of female gender aspects of culture and even penalises offenders. They share moments of grief with their members and also share in their moments of celebration. Dissident wives or grown-up daughters may be reported by their husbands or fathers, to the Umuada group for disciplinary actions, which may include ostracising the guilty woman for a reasonable period of expected penitence. Figures 16-19 show the women gathering for different purposes, marking pluralism as a vital aspect of Igbo culture. The artist did a combination of geometric and spiral abstractions in bringing forth the Umuada illustrations.



Fig. 20: FAMILY  
Med: Charcoal on paper  
Dim/Yr: 15 x 23 inches



Fig. 21: NEIGHBOURS VII  
Med: Charcoal on paper  
Dim/Yr: 15 x 15.5 inches. 2023

Source: Research; Alu et al. (2024) Photo: Jibrin Ebenezar

Figure 20 shows a geometric rendition of a man, flanked by his two wives during a family contemplation. Polygamy is ideal in traditional Igbo settings. A man who has wives, barns of yam, farmlands and many children, was considered a successful man; every good reckoning was in plural terms. *Onye ihe ya di otu gba aka* (He whose belonging is just one, is empty-handed) shows the Igbo preference for pluralism in all aspects of life, marriage inclusive.

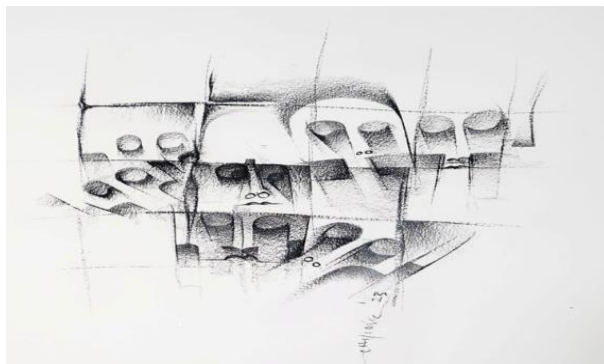


Fig. 22: NEIGHBOURS VI

Med: Charcoal on paper

Dim/Yr: 13 x 22 inches. 2023

Source: Research; Alu et al. (2024) Photo: Jibrin Ebenezar

Figures 21 and 22 show the next level of societal pluralism after the family, which is neighbourhood. Also in geometric rendition, the neighbours stand in different hierarchies yet they dwell in the same compound or near-homesteads in unity. *Agbata obi onye bu nwanne ya* (One's neighbours are his siblings) is an Igbo adage that shows the high value attached to good neighbourhood. Your blood sibling might be living faraway, meaning that your neighbour is the one that runs to you when you cry out during emergencies. The *agagbata obi* pluralism theory in Igbo land is very vast in explanation and application. One is expected to live kindly and relate well with people, so as to deserve the respect and regard of neighbours, not just in times of crisis, but also, peace and merriment. There are homestead neighbours, market neighbours, bush farm neighbours, vocational neighbours, etc.

### Conclusion

Generally, the *ife kwulu, ife akwudebe ya* exhibition of drawings by Chijioke Onuora was an illustrative compendium of Igbo doctrine of pluralism, as thematically presented. Both the works titled in English and those titled in Igbo languages addressed similar issues of pluralism being preferred to monism. At the close of the exercise, investigative art educationist and visual culture hermeneutist, Dr. Nkem Fortyunes Alu, and his current team, in this vigorous assessment of Chijioke Onuora's current drawings, came up with the following findings:

- i. There was a conscious attempt to subdue monism, in showing the Igbo people's preference to pluralism.

- ii. There were 2 approaches employed during the making of the drawings, to subdue monism; juxtapositioning of images to buttress duality, and further multiplication of images to foster pluralism.
- iii. Basically, charcoal and textile dye were used to make the drawings, even where there were slight touches of pigmentations.
- iv. In using charcoal, brown and black were the colours used.
- v. Likewise 2 colours of dye were used; indigo and red-orange.
- vi. Paper and fabrics were the 2 backdrops for drawing.
- vii. The 2 approaches to stylization were geometric and linear abstractions.
- viii. All the drawings were produced within 2 years; 2023 and 2024.

Onuora, in this cosmological outing, was not just an *Ulistic* social crusader for Igbo philosophy, but, in doing so, equally a signpost for hybrid artistry and unusualness. This he attained by taking drawing from paper to fabrics.

[Author Contributions: The authors undertook every stage of the research, from ideation to the end, except photograph taking, which was handled by Jibrin Ebenezer, the official photographer for the exhibition and a technical staff in the Visual Communications Design section of the department of Fine and Industrial Arts, formerly, Fine and Applied Arts, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. However, the personal photographs of the artist were accessed through him online.

Funding: There was no sponsorship or financial support from individuals or organisations outside.

Ethical Considerations: The artist, Professor Chijioke Noel Onuora was duly consulted before and during the study. Beyond giving his consent, he offered useful pieces of advice that helped fast-forward the process. All other official or informal procedures that needed to be taken were so handled, without giving room to breach of protocols.]

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