

## Intersections of Cultural Dynamics and Igbo Spirituality In Oḍunke Artists' *Ojadili*

Ikechukwu Erojikwe,<sup>1</sup>Ph.D, Ndubuisi Nnanna,<sup>2</sup> Ph.D  
Obiorah Ekwueme,<sup>3</sup>Ph.D, Richard Umezina<sup>4</sup>  
Cindy Anene Ezeugwu,<sup>5</sup> Ph.D, Ifunanya Chiwetalu<sup>6</sup>  
Uche-Chinemere Nwaozuzu,<sup>7</sup>Ph.D

Department of Theatre and Film Studies, University of  
Nigeria, Nsukka. Nigeria.

Corresponding Author: Obiorah Ekwueme,Ph.D

### Abstract

In recent times, Igbo culture has evolved in dynamics and spirituality. These evolutions are borne out of intersections of cultural practices and ordinances peculiar to Igbo cosmology and worldview. Some of these are revealed in their mode of worship, marriage rites, title-taking, and literary traditions. Scholars like Chinua Achebe, Esiaba Irobi, Emeka Nwabueze, and Tess Onwueme have been able to establish and promote some of these cultural thoughts through their creative works. Studies carried out in the past queried cultural traditions and values of the Igbo worldview differently but have not sufficiently attempted a critical examination of the cultural dynamics and spirituality that stimulate the intersections of the Igbo worldview. This study, therefore, interrogated evolutions of the Igbo worldview with specific objectives to critically examine the cultural dynamics and spirituality that highlight these cultural intersections. This study will adopt a qualitative research design using historical tools to broaden our comprehension of the research area. Oḍunke Artists' *Ojadili* is purposely selected for the study, and Sam Ukala's Folkism will provide the theoretical framework for the interrogation and comprehension of this study. The findings of this study significantly place Igbo dramatic literature as a fulcrum of critical discourse in Igbo cultural studies. This will push a conscious movement towards tolerance and understanding of individual cultures and traditions and will help promote peaceful

coexistence and sustainable development. The study recommends the relevance and use of drama in projecting, promoting, preserving and protecting cultural values, dynamics, and spirituality.

**Keywords:** Igbo drama, Folkism, Cultural Dynamics, Spirituality, Igbo Worldview.

### Introduction

In recent years, cultural concerns such as intolerance and superiority seem to raise various issues globally. These issues are inextricably linked to religious fanaticism, extremism, and bigotry, all of which are fueled by ignorance, cultural superiority, colonization, post-colonial ideals, dogmatism, indifference, and cultural terrorism. Some playwrights and scholars have begun writing plays, books, and journal articles, focusing on the Igbo culture's essence, significance, roles, and misinterpretation. John Anenechukwu Umeh's seminal book *After God is the Dibia*, Esiaba Irobi's play *The Colour of Rusting Gold*, and Uche Nwaozuzu's *Ajari Nwanyi*, amongst others, are examples of the preceding. The Igbo people's existence is guided by principles, beliefs, conventions, values, and other aspects known as culture. In view of this, Edward Taylor, cited by Logan Peter, notes that "culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (np).

This work evaluates intersections of Igbo cultural dynamics and spirituality in Oḍunke Artists' *Ojadili*. Cultural dynamics refer to the different trends and patterns unique to a culture. In another sense, it refers to the numerous parts of a culture changing because of social circumstances. However, spirituality is not a unique trait of one religion or the other; it is a feature that unites the world's various religious traditions. The concept of spirituality has evolved and extended over time.

Because of this ambiguity, multiple views can be found alongside one another, ranging from traditional spirituality to modern spirituality to subjective spirituality. Igbo spirituality encapsulated in culture finds literary meaning in Sam Ukala's folkism, which he described as “the tendency to base literary plays in the history, culture and concerns of the folk (people in general) and to compose and perform them by African conventions for composing and performing the folktale” (49). Uche Nwaozuzu, in discussing folkism, states that:

Folkism is the manner and method of creating and performing traditional folk orature that derives its roots from the culture and more of the people for which it is meant and gives content. It is an artistic philosophy and way of doing art that appropriates the ideals of myth, commensality, instruction and aesthetics to orchestrate a synthesis of traditional performance theory, form and practice. Some of its quintessential elements include but are not limited to the artistic vision, belief, artefacts, songs, masking, music and mime of the folk (23).

The concept of myth is rightly not far from folkism. Both share the same features in that they deal with culture and have some aspects of mystical creatures or rather try to induce understanding beyond the surface of Earth and other supernatural entities in existence.

### **Cultural Concerns on Igbo Culture**

Africa is embellished with different religious systems, but despite this plurality, they share similar characteristics and philosophies that bind them all. African religion generally is the belief in supernatural beings or powers. These powers are different individuals depending on their beliefs. Due to cultural clashes, colonisation, ignorance, and self-interest, Igbo cultural values seem to be debased, attacked, and, in some climes, annihilated. The lack of understanding of this basic knowledge drives this study to argue that the Igbo Traditional Religion (ITR), despite attacks, and malign has existed for as long as anybody can

remember, making it one of the world's oldest religions. Catherine Acholonu in *They Lived Before Adam*(2009) and John Anene Umeh in *The March to Igbo Civilization* (2017) collectively argue that the existence of Igbos and their civilisation dates to the beginning of time. While Acholonu argues from the perspective of the Biblical Adam, Umeh who believes that Igbo people are “ndembu, nah ndeegede, (the first and the second people on earth) Onu Afa (primordial and esoteric language the dibia), (Umeh, 2017). Umeh's argument has also been linked to Lejja (a community in Nsukka town, in Enugu state), the oldest known iron smelting site in the world(Okafor, 2004).

Most depictions of Igbo indigenous culture are misinterpretations of Igbo religion and spirituality, leading to a wrong perception of Igbo traditional religion and spirituality, as well as cultural terrorism and other parts of intangible cultural legacy among the Igbos. This is exacerbated by ongoing attacks by Western religions such as Christianity on Igbo cultural norms, artefacts, tangible and intangible cultural heritage, sacred objects, cultural relics such as Ikolo Uga, totems such as Eke Idemili, and other sacred objects. Unfortunately, many Nigerian video films about Igbo culture degrade and demonise Igbo cultural values, which appears to have an underlying interest in Christian evangelism and the utter annihilation of some aspects of Igbo culture. This has become the norm, calling into question the concept of a national film philosophy that should conserve the indigenous traditions of Nigeria's various ethnic groups. Ikechukwu Erojikwe, Ndubuisi Nnanna and Jude Aguzie further acknowledge that “Culture is the entire dynamic and complex way of life of a people that provides the framework for articulating and comprehending the structures, while agency constitutes the capacity of community members to make informed choices about issues that concerns them” (83). Thus, the existence of culture within a specific locale is dependent on the inhabitants of that very space, and this space is referred to as community. Within this community are people who have set out to establish certain norms,

beliefs, and systems of operation that will guide man's existence within this space.

### Methodology

This study was concerned with the qualitative design aspect of research because it is a fact-interrogation study. The study broadens and/or deepens our understanding of the Igbo culture and Igbo cultural practices in our postcolonial social world. The research was concerned with developing explanation to the social phenomenon under study. This discourse entails the investigation of documented sources such as books, journals, reports, archival material as well as oral sources were adopted as a discursive methodology of the study.

This paper joins the growing awareness of the need to protect and preserve Igbo culture from extinction. However, the chances of this happening are slim, given the media's constant attacks and the government is seeming complacent and complicit attitude in siding with Christianity and Islam against indigenous peoples and their spiritual and religious practices. Significantly, this study examines the Igbo cultural dynamics in the selected Nigerian play, and it may serve to validate and possibly open discussions that will motivate tolerance of religious tensions and crises, as well as stimulate multi- and intercultural discussions to increase objective scholarly and unbiased responses, particularly about the Igbo people with emphasis on culture and spirituality.

### Cultural Icons and Spiritual Imperatives in Igbo Cosmology

In Igbo cosmology, different cultural and religious movements cannot be isolated from daily life. For instance, the kolanut (Oji) is used for various purposes, including prayer, divination, greeting visitors, invocations, blessings or cursers, marriage rites or dissolution of marriage, title taking, and other religious and socio-cultural activities. The Igbo people believe in dualism, firmly rooted in Igbo culture, as seen by the actions listed. Essentially, the Igbo approach to spirituality is built on the

belief in a supreme being, God (Chukwu), lesser deities and ancestors, and the afterlife.

The Igbos believe firmly in Chukwu's omnipotence. Francis Arinze, in *Sacrifice in Igbo Tradition Religion*, acknowledges that "Chukwu" has three chief names: Chukwu (Chi-ukwu, the great spirit), Chineke (the spirit that creates), and "Osebuluwa (the great one who upholds the world) (4). However, these names play a vital role in Igbo society; for instance, the existence of man and his purpose of living is being guarded by one supernatural being known as God, hence, *Osebuluwa*. He is the creator of everything on earth, hence (Chineke). At the same time, the world is divided into the Human and Spirit world. Also, the Igbos believe that every man has a personal God or guardian spirit known as (Chi). This spirit also follows the person into the world of the spirits when they die. Chineke or Chukwu assigned these spirits to every person. Umeh gives a deeper explanation of the Igbo belief in Chi when he acknowledges that:

In effect, every person's spirit ends at their chi, a part of *Chi-Ukwu* (Chukwu), the Great Universal Spirit/God. According to Igbo theology and practice, which are part and parcel of Chukwu, the myriad existences up and down the universe, living and inanimate, spirit, non-spirit, or a blend thereof, are based on Chi. To put it another way, this Chi is housed within *otu/ofu*, which is Chukwu, the great universal and all-encompassing Chi (26).

Igbo people believe they can speak with their ancestors who live in the spirit world through divination (Afa). However, Igbo people also have ancestral shrines, through which they try to keep in touch with their ancestors by providing for them through libations and offering (itunkwu and Itu Oji/ nri) and votive offering through a *Dibia*. *Dibia* in the Igbo language comprises two words: Di and Abia. Di means husband, head, or master, but in this context, it plays the role of a master. Abia means knowledge

and wisdom. So, while the Igbos call Chukwu (God) Abia Ama, the knowledge and the wisdom that reveals himself, Dibia is the adept or master of knowledge and wisdom (Umeh, 1997). The powerful stance of the Dibia as regards his relationship with Chukwu (Almighty God), ancestors, and the people is captured in the words of Onwuejeogwu, as cited by Felix Ufedo-Egwuda when he enunciates that “the traditional doctor called dibia-afa can be manipulating the afa controlled by agwu, interprets the nature and character of these relationships.

Undoubtedly, all these scholars have the same view about the Igbo people's origin and belief system, and their ideas work in tandem with each other. Conversely, Ossie Enekwe is not an exception among these scholars who have emphasized the connection between the Igbos, their beliefs and their relationship with supernatural beings. He posits that:

There are two broad categories of supernatural forces. The first comprises the sky deities headed by Chukwu, which are omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient. The second category is made up of the earth Goddess and other spirits. Chukwu is not directly involved in the affairs of the Igbo, but the less powerful earth goddess, Okike, “governs thought and action in more perceptible ways.” Next to the earth goddess are the ancestors who “wield tremendous powers of blessing and curse over their relatives living on “earth” (46).

Enekwe in this context observes that besides the existence of *Chukwu* and *Chi* in the Igbo cosmology, there are other spiritual beings assigned to man by God (*Chukwu*) to oversee man's activities on earth. Anthony Ekwunife, in the same vein, avers that:

In the spiritual sphere, different categories of spiritual beings exercise roles assigned to them by the creator in cooperation with each other. The creator, however,

reigns supreme, operating at times independently but most of the time through the agency of created spiritual beings (deities, spirit forces, ancestors, and other disembodied spirits like *Akalogeli*, *Ogbunuke*, *Ogbanje*, etc.). On the physical plane, man becomes the centre, the bridge between the spiritual and physical spheres. Equipping himself with all sorts of ritualised gadgets, he strives to maintain a lively relationship with the spiritual beings through sacrifices, prayers, libations, ritual gestures and spells (18-19).

Ekwunife affirms here that man's existence is governed by his life cycle. This cycle represents the various stages of life that man must pass through to fulfil what he is destined to do in life. Sabine Jell-Bashlen acknowledges this belief in his work, where he states that:

the significant stages of life are birth, naming (coinciding with entry into human society and childhood), puberty and initiation (associated with the metaphorical death of the child and the birth of the adult), adulthood (associated with marriage, parenthood, title taking and going to war if needed, old age ( associated with acquisition of wisdom, more advanced title taking, dignity, and priesthood), loss of spouse and death (associated with funeral rites), and eventually reincarnation (32-33).

Consequently, man moves in a circular shape, as Jell-Bashlen observes. In the same way, a circle does not have an ending, so does the soul of man; it lives forever, either in the spirit of the world or comes back through another being or offspring (reincarnation). Undoubtedly, every symbol in Igbo cosmology is representational and of vital importance in everyday life. Christian Nwaru endorses the above statement in his article, where he states that, “...Symbols in any culture are effective means

of communication, without words Igbo, like other cultures, has symbols that are generally known and others that are esoteric..."(21). Furthermore, Nwaru classified these symbols and their significance. Each of them is an embodiment of strength and meaning beyond human comprehension.

The actions of the alusi (deity) are directed by its chief priest (9)." It is safe to say that the *dibia* is, therefore, the link between the deities, *Chukwu*, and the mortals; he intercedes for the mortals because he is the eyes of the deities. The *Dibia*'s role transcends one holistic concept as portrayed by native doctors or herbalists; he is entirely beyond that because the person that carries this gift cannot be boxed; in furtherance to this, there is *Dibia afa*, (diviner) *Dibia mgbologwu na nkpa akwukwo* (herbalist), *Dibia Oha-Mmiri* (rain Maker), *Dibia Ojena-Mmuo* (time traveller, teleportation and others). Despite this rich cultural heritage of the Igbo, which spirituality is part of, it is said that some age-long and recent societal trends such as civilisation, Christianity, Islam, and so many other factors create negative notions and patterns to demean the Igbo way of life and spiritual value which the insight developed *Ọdunke Artists' Ojaadili* counters and provides needed perspectives and realities.

The interconnections between Igbo culture's physical and metaphysical conceptions, such as the world of spirit, humans, and animals, will be examined. The play demonstrates how drama may alter people's perceptions, misinterpretations, and generalizations of Igbo culture, provide accurate reflections, and function as a cultural defender and custodian to a large extent. This research will examine these conceptions within the ambit of *Ojaadili* to see how they may function as cultural preservers and guardians. The study also aims to shed more light on the beauty, dynamics, and significance of Igbo culture and history and the understanding of her spiritual value in the context of Igbo cosmology and belief systems. This is to discourage the negative beliefs that have been modelled by the society because of

Christianity, civilization, and other social patterns in order to denigrate the Igbo way of life and spiritual worth as exemplified in *Ọdunke Artists' Ojaadili*.

## Data Presentation

### Synopsis of *Ojaadili*

*Ojaadili* is an Igbo play about *Ojadili*, a young man full of strength, fierce, relentless, and fearless. One can rightly argue that he is a descendant of the gods. *Ojaadili* has fought so many battles and conquered them all. With the help of his flutist *Udumeje* he conquered *Otiaba* who has never lost in any battle. In the bid to bring back *Otiaba* to life, *Udumeje* goes into the forest with *Ajiobu*, but they are attacked by a band of chimpanzees (*ozo*), and *Udumeje* loses his life, too. Without the support of the villagers, *Ogwumagana* his guardian spirit who becomes his flutist after the demise of *Udumeje*, *Ojaadili* journeys into the land of the animals, kills the leader of the chimpanzee and comes back victorious. *Ojaadili* is honoured with a chieftaincy title, but he rejects it, saying that it is only when he goes into the land of spirit, fights, and comes victorious that he will accept the title. Even though the community did not give him their blessings, *Ojaadili* still journeys into the land of the spirit. As an Igbo idiom goes, 'A man does not fight with his *Chi* (personal spirit), but pride will not let him acknowledge this famous axiom.

### Belief System and Predestination in *Ojaadili*

The study has already discussed the concept of Igbo cosmology, which involves the cultural dynamics and spirituality inherent in it. The close affinity of the Igbo with their ancestors cannot be taken for granted. These ancestors serve as mediators, protectors, and advisers to them. Eugene Atansi, in an interview, reveals that:

Before anyone starts a journey, he must summon his ancestors' spirits with kola nut (*oji*) for guidance and protection. Because these ancestors are spirits and see beyond the physical, they tend to clear the path for their

successors. Kolanut, as a symbol of prayer in Igbo land, plays diverse roles. However, it seems that most Igbos are no longer in sync with methods of prayer and other uses of Igboland due to demonisation, obliteration and annihilation, but this will form the topic of another research.

In an interview, May-Blossom Brown submits that “the importance of having a mutual relationship with your ancestors is enormous. If any man decides to embark on a journey without summoning the spirits of his ancestors, then that journey is a failed one (np). Ojaadili was able to make this belief visible to everyone when, before he journeys into the land of the animals to fight with Ozọ (chimpanzee), he first prayed to the spirits of his ancestors to guide his path, which at the end he returns victorious;

**OJAADILI:** *Ikenga m, taaoji, Ezenwanekwu, taaoji. Okeke nna m ochietaaoji (tusaoin'ala) Mgbe m na-akwadoije ala anumanu, ndimmadusinamugaghialota. Gi buIkenga m wee duru m jee M lotan'udo. Ugbu a, akwadoola m ijeala mmuọ aga m ejen'udo, lotan'udo (51).*

#### Translation

**OJAADILI:** My Ikenga, eat kola. Ezenwanekwu, eat kola. Okeke, my mother's forebears, eat kola (throws kolanuts to the ground). When I was preparing to go to the land of animals, people said I would not return. You, my Ikenga, led me home in peace. Now, I am prepared to go to the spirit world. You will lead me to go in peace and return in peace (51).

Furthermore, the Dibia also acts as a mediator between the spirits and the living. He gathers the people's requests, communicates with God (Chukwu) and Unseen forces (Ndi ana ada afu anya) and then gives the people a response. He is a messenger of the gods, as it is the culture of the supreme God to

live away from mortal men. He can only be reached through a medium. Before Ojaadili goes to fight in the land of the animals, the Dibia first got the consent of the gods before Ojaadili took any action.

**OMEIRE:** *Ojaadilichere ka i nuruiheEbunuUkpabikwuru! (29).*

**OMEIRE:** Ojaadili, wait and hear what the Creator said (29). However, Albert Ogoko implies that:

... God is the first and final cause of all things. By a casual necessity, all things determinately follow and are ordained. Freedom is complying with this determinism. Whatever was, is and will be is already ordered to be so. Whatever we are, we can attain or achieve, and we must derive from God. We are efficient causal agents with distinctive destiny parcels (17).

In *Ojaadili*, the playwrights presented the personal god (Chi) as a small spirit creature which she called Mmuọ isiatọ (a spirit with three heads).

Thus, Ogoko further asserts, "Ife sina Chi, meaning that light, knowledge, wisdom, reality, or insight comes from God who has dubbed all things with his divine touch" (23). Furthermore, there is the dual existence of things on earth as nothing. Nothing can ever stand alone. There is a common saying in Igbo language that *Ihe kwuru, ihe akwudobeya* (anything that stands must have a partner standing next to it). Odunke Artists presented this belief to his readers when Ojaadili goes into the land of the animals and confronts Ozọ.

**OZO:** *Ibonaibokwu, ibonaibokwu. Nke a, kedunwannegi? O bugini ka m na-ahu? O buzikwaawa Chukwu kere di ihe a? ihenilen'ibo. Nw oke nanwanyị, n'ibon'ibọ. Okeosisinanwunyeya, n'ibọ n'ibọ. Anya naabọ, nantinaabọ, n'ibon'ibọ. Ugwu nandida, n'ibon'ibọ. Ihe di mma, naihe di njo... (40).*

### Translation

**CHIMPANZEE:** They all stand in pairs. This one, where is your brother? What am I seeing? Is this still the world created by the Almighty? Everything is in pairs: man and woman, a pair; the giant tree and its female, a pair; two eyes and two ears, a pair; the hill and the valley, a pair; good and bad things... (40).

As previously stated, in Igbo cosmology, there is a common belief that everything in existence has a pair. The earth and its components are dual; nothing exists or stands alone. As Earth is to Heaven, so is Man to Woman. The concept of dualism permeates Igbo cultural thought and consciousness, stating that if a thing exists alone, there is an aberration. Dualism creates balance; the playwrights consciously push and acknowledge this thought through the chimpanzee. It may sound strange to find a speaking chimpanzee, but the play is fully anchored in the concept of folkism, and folktales stem from this and acknowledge that man, spirits and animals once coexisted. While the spirit world is challenging to access, the animal kingdom is not.

### Mystical and Symbolic Icons in *Ojaadili*

Symbolic icons are essential in any society; the Igbo community is no exception. Symbols are bound in the human world; thus, they are a common phenomenon in human existence, and their potency and sacrosanct nature are brought alive through various meanings and interpretations. Arinze, however, is of the view that Ikenga is “the personification of a man's strength of arm which has everything to do with his good future... Ikenga is personal to a man, and its symbol is split at the person's funeral” (16).

Furthermore, Ikenga symbolises strength and serves as a protection tool for the owner. Thus, in *Ojaadili*, it is evident that the Ikenga played a significant role in *Ojaadili*'s life as he always makes sure he appeases it before embarking on any journey. This

is captured in the lines below;

**ỌJAADILỊ:** *Hoyi! hoyi! hoyi! Agadinwanyianaghịaka nkan'egwu o maara agba. Ikenga m! ikenga m! Hoyi! hoyi! hoyi! (Udumeje, wetekwompiozo. kuruekwempuna-achusoOjaadili)*

**UDUMEJE:** *(ntakwunye) Akirika, Osogaan'ulo m n'imeakpanwaehi k o n'obimwetara m oja m...(12).*

**ỌJAADILỊ:** *Ikenga m, gibuike m, gibuogu m. Lee aka nri m naa m aka (51).*

### Translation

**ỌJAADILỊ:** Hoyi! hoyi.hoyi. An old woman does not get old regarding a dance step she knows very well. My Ikenga! My Ikenga! Hoyi! hoyi.hoyi. *(Udumeje took a horn, followed Ojaadili, play his gong).*

**UDUMEJE:** *(In whispers) Akirika, run to my house, inside the cow skin bag at the obi, get myflute...(12).*

### Communalism and Retribution in *Ojaadili*

In the Igbo cosmology, there is a certain belief in oneness and communal living. Whatever concerns an individual also concerns the rest of the community. The title holders are the highest authority and the community's decision-makers.

**ỌHA NA EZE:** *Ka anyi je weteegbenamma, ka anyinaumuanu mara ndi ga-apuruibe ha n'obodo Umungodo*

**ỌKAGBUE:** *Cherenu o! Onye kwadosia ka m sikwuo, yaputanambaraezibe a. Okonti, gwaagbata obi gibu Ojaadilina achoro m mmadunilen'ebe ka anyikpaaaro ka a ga-*

*esijeeogụ otu onye. Gịnwa otuedo, ị na-  
aputakpoo Omeire. Siyanaezechoroyaugbu  
a ugbu a. Onye obulajeekwadoo, biaoso  
(26).*

### Translation

**COMMUNITY:** Let us go and bring guns and knives; let us see humans and animals who will vacate Umungodo for the other.

**OKAGBUE:** Wait! My instruction is that once anyone is ready, let him come to this community ground. Okonti, tell your neighbour Ojaadili that everybody is wanted here so we can deliberate on how to embark on this fight. You, Otuedo, while coming, tell Omeire that the king wants him now. Everyone, go and get ready and come back fast (26).

The king's cabinet agrees to go into the land of the animal together with the rest of the community and the ruthless animal that has been tormenting their community.

Furthermore, there is a common adage in the Igbo cosmology “Onwu ga-egbu nwankita anaghị ekwe ya anụ isi nsi” it simply means, the death that will kill the dog does not allow it perceive the smell of faeces. Relating this to Ojaadili's life, despite all the warnings given to him by the elders in the community, he went ahead with his plans by journeying into the land of the spirits to defeat them and come back victorious. Ojaadili can be classified as an anti-conventional man. He has his approach and ideology towards life; whatever he sets his mind to is what he does. He also does not tolerate anybody's interference.

**OJAADILI:** *O folautu ebe, a nyuchaa nsị, o  
tupiaaghionu o buru otoro. Onye chorọ  
ichiozo ga-echizu echizu. Yabu n a*

*Ojaadili ga-agabazu mgba tupu o zawa  
okamgba. Ebe o forobu ala mmuo*

**NDI MMADU:** *Gburuasọ!*

**OJAADILI:** *O bumubu Ojaadilikwurunke a unu mara  
ugounu  
ga-etunye m, Dewenuya. Mgbe m si ala mmuo lota  
unu ejiriya biazute m.*

**OMEIRE:** *Onye na-ekwu?*

**OJAADILI:** *Mu bu Ojaadili na-ekwu*

**OMEIRE:** *Anya O dikwagi mma?*

**OJAADILI:** *Ala mmuo...Ojaadili jekomgba n'ala  
mmuo. (48-49).*

### Translation

**OJAADILI:** It is remaining one place. Everything worth doing is worth doing well. He who wants to take a title should go through the entire process and take a full title. That means that Ojaadili will complete all the wrestling there is so he can be called the great wrestler. The next task is to wrestle in the spirit world.

**PEOPLE:** May the gods forbid!

**OJAADILI:** I, Ojaadili, said this: that title you want to confer on me, keep it; when I come back from the land of spirits, use it to welcome me.

**OMEIRE:** Who is talking?

**OJAADILI:** It is me Ojaadili talking!

**OMEIRE:** Are you in your right senses?

**OJAADILI:** The land of the spirits...Ojaadili is going there to wrestle (48-49).

However, Ojaadili's downfall is caused by hubris. His tragic flaw as a hero leads him on a journey of no return. Being a man who is full of himself and anti-conventional, he wants to do things his way without consulting or seeking the advice of the elders or listening to the mouthpiece of the gods (Dibia).

**OMEIRE:** *Ojaadili, jewe ala mmuona Chi giegbuogitaa. Orijuruafọ, che Chi yaogụ! Nwaetoghietowara ogodoikuku fee, o tie, okokookoo! Jewe, na mberedena-anyikwanu dike. Onye gwaraginananị otu onyena-ejeoguna be ndimmuọ. Jewenaijesigo*

**OJAADILI:** *Okwu mmanya! O na-asi m na mụ e j e s i g o . M g b e C h u k w u Ukpabikere Ojaadili Omeireonoya? Ka Omeirena-ahu ndi mmuọ, O na-ahu Chukwu Ukpabi? (50-51).*

### Translation

**OMEIRE:** Ojaadili, go to the land of the spirits and meet your doom. One that challenges his chi to a duel because he has overfed. A child undertaking adventures meant for adults will be blown away when calamity strikes. Eventualities often overshadow heroes. Who told you that one man alone can embark on a

war to the land of spirits? Go for this is your last journey. I say to you, go and meet your doom.

**OJAADILI:** Words of a man in a drunken state for saying this is my last journey. Was he there when the creator created Ojaadili? As he sees the spirits, can he see the creator too? (50-51).

### Imagery, Symbolism and Iconic Mysticism in Characterization of *Ojaadili*

#### OGWUMAGANA (Chameleon)

As the name implies, Ogwumagana, the chameleon, is known for its ability to adapt to its environment. This conforms to Ojaadili's intentions rather than creating them. At the beginning of the play, Ogwumagana came as a messenger sent by God to check if what God created was good enough. In subsequent scenes he was able to change form and become Ojaadili's flutist after the demise of Udumeje. This is a point in which the playwrights try to establish that in Igbo cosmology, there is a belief in shape-shifting, where any creature can take any form to achieve whatever it wants.

Atansi also reveals that, in Ogbunike, Oyi Local Government Area of Anambra State, Nigeria, shapeshifting (ihi ehihi or Ihi Agu) was in existence, and it was a cult; before an individual will begin to change, he must be initiated, given a small pot of fire that will be kept in the forest. Once he wants to change the form, he goes into the forest where the pot is kept and says some incantations. This act is not something an individual will carry out with evil intentions. However, it is usually carried out during periods of war or whenever there is danger in the community. Misusing the mystical powers to harm others is why the Dibia in charge of the cult covered the pot of fire so that no one can shape-shift. Raymond Arazu, a traditional healer and Catholic Priest, notes that:

The Phenomenon is called *Ihi Ehihi* in Igbo tongue. The man with the *magical faculty* sleeps in his bed. At the

same time, his etheric double (the animated astral body) assumes the shape of a leopard (*agu*) or takes possession of an actual leopard or any other beast which goes into human habitations to produce the desired effect. There are families reputed for such feats (91).

Arazu's position agrees with the assertion of Atansi but further acknowledges the deep-rooted mystical and esoteric knowledge found in Igbo society and captured by Odunke Artist in *Ojadili*.

For example, Ogwumagana, a character in the play, can also be classified as the people's conscience, who is always there to judge or applaud people. He can be observed as the authorial voice in the play. He also played a vital role in Ojaadili's life. As man's conscience is always there to guide and judge him at any point in life, even when every other person or creature has deserted him to walk the journey of life alone, Ogwumagana can stay with Ojaadili till the very end, when everyone else has left him. He went to the extent of bringing Ojaadili back after being defeated by Mmuo isi ato (Ojaadili's Chi). Ogwumagana is anti-conventional; it takes whichever form it wishes to at any point, yet it has a common purpose with the being he guides: to achieve what is of great importance to an individual.

### **Mmuo Isi Ato**

He is the smallest of the spirits that Ojaadili battled within the land of the spirit but the strongest of them all and a representation of Ojaadili's personal God (Chi). However, despite all the warnings Ogwumagana gave Ojaadili, he neglected him and went ahead to fight Mmuo isi ato. Knowing the power he possesses and the authority he commands, he is the last person to encounter Ojaadili, yet he defeats him without laying a finger on him. He can take charge and control forces beyond the physical realm and go farther into the spiritual realm.

### **Conclusion**

These findings reveal that it is sufficient to say that this paper was able to use the mystical and self-awakening journey of *Ojaadili* and his fall from grace to grass as a metaphor to examine the Igbo culture of destiny, retributive justice, spirituality, and the forte of one's personal god as seen in the journey of *Ojaadili*. The paper also x-rayed the richness of folkism in *Ojaadili*. Materials from the vastness of oral tradition are skillfully produced in the play to organize the structure of oral traditional performance, which includes music, storytelling, dance, and other visual aesthetics.

The study has proved that folkism effectively educates young and old people. Due to erroneous perceptions, the study also discussed negative trends and beliefs, which society models through some modernity to belittle the Igbo way of life and spiritual values in contemporary Nigeria.

There is little doubt that there is a wealth of literary works written in several Nigerian languages, and the academics point out the challenges of translating them into English for a wider audience. As a result, the experts advise that many of these literary treasures be made apparent by having them translated into a widely accepted language, such as English. By doing so, the awareness to defend Igbo cultural dynamics, spirituality, and worldview from denigration and malignity will be realized. The study also recommends more performances of Igbo plays or adaptations into films for a wider audience.

### Works Cited

- Zuckerman, N (2015) Heidegger and the Essence of Dasein. *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 53(4):493–516.
- Arinze, Francis. *Sacrifice in Igbo Tradition Religion*. Indiana: St. Stephen Press, 2008.
- Arazu, Raymond. *My Life's Journey*. Nsukka: University of Nigeria Press Limited, 2016.
- Egwuda, Felix. *The Quintessence of African Indigenous Theatre*. Enugu: Quarter Press Limited, 2014.
- Ekwunife, Anthony. *Consecration in Igbo Traditional Religion*. Enugu: Snaap Press Limited, 2003.
- Enekwe, Ossie. O. *Igbo Mask: The Oneness of Ritual and Theatre*. Lagos: Nigeria Magazine, 1987.
- Erojikwe, Ikechukwu, Ndubuisi Nnanna and Jude Aguzie “Onyekulufa and Atumma: Breaking the Barriers of Gender Discrimination in Health-Related Indigenous Masquerade Performances in Nigeria” *The Creative Artist: A Journal of Theatre and Media Studies* 8.1 (2014): 83-96.
- Logan, Peter Melville. “On Culture: Edward B. Tylor's Primitive Culture” (<http://www.branchcollective.org>) Accessed: March 20, 2024.
- Nwaru, Christian. *Upholding the Igbo Cultural Heritage through the Theatre*. (<http://dx.doi.org>) Accessed: July, 2019.
- Nwaozuzu, Gabriella. *Eruru*. Awka: Format Publishers, 2009.

- Nwaozuzu, Uche-Chinemere. “Music, Narration, Mimesis and the Mytho-epic Essence: A Folkist Interpretation of Two Plays.” *Ikenga: International Journal of Institute of African Studies* 18.1 (2018): 23-31.
- Odunke Artist. *Ojaadili*. Ibadan: Oxford University Press, 1977.
- Ogoko, Albert O. *Igbo Theory of Knowledge: Theoretical and Methodological Consideration* (<http://www.ajol.info>) Accessed: May 03, 2024.
- Onuorah, Chioma. “Things Fall Apart: A Portrayal of Cultural and Traditional Belief Systems of the Igbos.” *Chinua Achebe and the Convolution of Immortality; Reassessing the Writers about New Realities* (2018): 202-218.
- Sabine Jell-Bahlsen. *Mammy Water in Igbo Culture. Ogbuide of Oguta Lake*. Enugu: Ezu Books Limited, 2014.
- Umeh, John. *After God is Dibia: Igbo Cosmology, Divination and Sacred Science in Nigeria*. London: Karnak House, 1997.
- Velkley, Richard. “The Tension in Beautiful: On Culture and Civilization in Rousseau and German Philosophy.” *Being after Rousseau: philosophy and culture in question* 2002 11-30. (<https://www.amazon.in>) Accessed June 18, 2019.
- ### Personal Interviews
- May-Blossom Brown. Personal Interview. January 17, 2019.
- Eugene Chiwetalu Atansi. Personal Interview. May 28, 2019.
- John Anene Umeh. Personal Interview. May 29, 2019.