

## **Adapting Knots and Patterns of Ugwueme Community for Ceramic Production in Nigeria**

**OKONKWO, IVAN EMEKA PhD**

*Department Of Fine And Applied Arts, Faculty Of Environmental Sciences, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.*

**EMELOGU, CHINENYE**

*Department Of Fine And Applied Arts, Federal University, Ndufu Alike Ikwo*

**OFFOR, OBIAGELI GERTRUDE**

*Department Of Fine And Applied Arts, Institute Of Management And Technology, Enugu*

---

### **ABSTRACT**

*Ceramists often encounter a lot of technical challenges in production or in an attempt to decorate or explain an already produced work. Most times, they operate on trial and error basis, not actually aware of the meaning of what they are applying. At times, ceramists make use of clay ropes in designing but cannot explain why they are using them or what they stand for. This situation kills interest and limits the ceramist's chances of unique production. Ugwueme community is in Awgu Local Government Area in Enugu State of Nigeria. They have a tradition where they make use of Alulu ropes and knots for body adornment especially for the young girls between the ages of 16-25 years. They use the ropes and knots weaved from the back of Alulu shrub to explain a lot about their culture and tradition. This research work aims at transforming the Ugwueme Alulu ropes and knots into clay ropes and knots which were used in ceramic productions of various forms which can as well be historical. Primary (oral interview) and Secondary (internet, records, previous thesis, publications) sources were collected as data for the project. The researchers made use of structured interview to get information and employed experimental research which involves both studio and written work. Qualitative method of evaluation was used. The major findings revealed that most ceramists cannot explain reasons for using clay ropes and knots in designing ceramic works. Many cultural, social, religious, economic and political stories are possible through clay forms, rolls and knots. From the findings of this study, some recommendations were made: that ceramic works made of ropes and knots and used as motifs should be produced in commercial quantity that can be exported to other countries for aesthetics, cultural, social and economic values. Besides, other researchers in practical based areas should use this study as source of inspiration and information for enhancement in their own area of Study.*

---

Date of Submission: 18-07-2021






Date of Acceptance: 03-08-2021

---

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

A knot is the joint made by tying two pieces or ends of a string or rope, a way of twisting rope into a smaller shape. A rope could be carefully weaved and knotted artistically to create different designs. Ugwueme is a community in Awgu Local Government Area of Enugu State Nigeria. Ropes and knots are used by Ugwueme community in Awgu Local Government Area in Enugu state of Nigeria. The knots look alike except that they are named differently according to the function each performs and the colour. Oral interviews with the traditional ruler and some elders of the town in 2015 revealed that the knot for *oziza eke* cultural festival is called 'udo nko' with green colour, while that of 'avuragu' is called 'udo ibenne' with red colour, okuizulato is called 'udo ekwu' with blue colour, 'iri ji' is called 'udo okike' with black colour and *egbeajala* is called *udo nkiri* with yellow colour. Each symbolizing acceptance of the topography of the community which is hilly and stony, love for close relatives, acceptance of marriage by the female folk, iri ji and Ugwueme cultural masquerade respectively.

**Table of Knots and its Meaning in Ugwueme Community**

S/N	Types of Knot	Meaning	Usage
	Udo Ekwu 	Acceptance of the Topography of the community which is hilly and stony	Okuizulato festival
	Udo Ibe nne 	Love for close relatives	Avuruke festival
	Udo nko 	Acceptance of Marriage by the female folk. This shows love.	Oziza Eke Cultural festival
	Udo Okike 	Celebration of new yam festival eating roasted yam and drinking of palm wine	Iriji in Ugwueme Community
	do nkiri 	Ugwueme cultural masquerade parade of various attire made of ropes and knots	Egbe aja ala festival

**Fig 1:** Types, Meaning and Usage of knots by Offor Obiageli G.

The different clay ropes and knots which form the medium used in this project is derived from the traditional *Alulu* in Ugwueme language also called *Apari* in some other dialects.

To tie a knot, the *alulu* rope of three tripes are tied together to form a knot at one end tightly. Artistically, the ropes are twisted in such a way that it is very difficult to untie. These knots could be achieved in different styles and sizes which could be adopted for contemporary ceramic designs for historical and aesthetic purposes. Our society is dynamic and as such, things keep changing from time to time, period to period and from age to age. New things are discovered and the old ones discarded or modified to fit new ideas. The Ugwueme community has some cultural festivals that are very interesting. The most popular among them is the 'Oziza Eke' festival. They use ropes and knots knitted from the *alulu* shrub tree to depict a lot of cultural history. It is a festival that all female folk especially those of 16 – 25 age bracket are very eager to see and

witness. On that faithful day, they will wear their attire made of ropes and knots weaved from 'alulu' shrub tree and by simply dancing round the eke square five times holding the rope and knot, some cultural messages are communicated to the audience. It is during that time that the audience admires them, especially the male folk. It signifies the ripe age for marriage and any female that accepts the knotted rope from any of the males will marry him.

Parents are very happy to see that their daughter has gotten a husband. The researchers seeing how they value ropes and knots designed with 'alulu' were inspired to transform that design from 'alulu' to clay ropes and knots for contemporary ceramic production in Nigeria.

In line with this, Rhodes, (1973) states that,

From the time of the pre-historic period, various advances have been made and recorded greatly in civilization from the stone age to the iron age. This led to the discovery of clay and its firing procedures and strategies after ceramic production/pottery making. At each age or period, whatever was discovered was used to meet-up with the needs of the people both physically and aesthetically.

The discovering of clay and then pottery making was crucial to the development of ceramic production. Besides, primitive agriculturists needed cooking and storage containers for their cereals. The prevalence of corded basket-like design on earthen ware whether in the middle-east, China or America led to the theory that baskets were first coated with clay. Accidentally, the burning of these baskets by fire burnt up the baskets completely and the clay became very hard and rocklike. Such clay vessels baked in hot coals of fire which suddenly become hard and suitable for their storage purposes. Initially, ceramics made of clay were done by women as part of their house-hold chores. At first, as the ceramic work grew, market for it developed and craftsmen entered the business probably to make their own money or help their wives.

In the words of Dosky (2016) "ceramics is the art of making pots, bowls, tiles and other designed objects. This can be achieved by shaping pieces of plastic clay and firing them until they are hard enough and cannot dissolve in water." Adegoke (2014) states that "ceramics are articles made from inorganic compounds formed in a furnace". An example is a porous ceramic made from Kaolin and feldspar and heated to a high temperature. Ceramic materials are made from clay that is hardened by heat. Various designs are possible now with ceramic wares including designing ceramic works with clay ropes and knots. Once clay is plastic, it can be shaped and re-shaped to various designs. Gueded (1979) notes that "Ceramics are produced from a mixture of materials such as quartz, sand and clay binder, hydrated aluminum silicate with impurities such as chalk, dolomite and sulphate which is made plastic with water. The mixture is shaped, dried to remove absorbed water and fired". Sambo, Eboatu and Dioha (2000) stresses that the term "ceramic came from a Greek work Keramos meaning burnt off. Originally, it was applied to products from natural earth that has been exposed to high temperature. In his own approach, Oluwale (2015) maintains, that "ceramics could mean all engineering materials or products or some portions of it, that are chemically inorganic except metals and alloys and are usually rendered serviceable through high temperature processing" there is an enormous diversity in the type of ceramic materials – these ranges from simple structural clay products to high technical component for electronic and nuclear gadgets.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Culturally, ropes and knots mean a lot in Ugueme community. 'The cultural meanings of knots and patterns are being lost to the people of Ugueme Community'. The use of knots and patterns in Ugueme community to depict various cultural activities is very interesting. Regrettably, these interesting cultural activities are gradually fading away without any documentation for future references. The researchers became worried and really considered the rate the extinction is going, what will happen to the Ugueme culture and tradition and how bad it should be should this extinction process continue unchecked. The researchers felt that there is a crying need for artists (ceramists) to adapt and document these cultural history by translating, transforming, and documenting them using contemporary ceramics works.

### **Aim of the Study**

This study is aimed at adapting the knots and patterns of Ugueme people for contemporary ceramic decoration, to propagate the peoples' cultural identity.

### **Objectives of the Study**

Specific objectives of the study includes:

1. To obtain through relevant literature the necessary information, knowledge and ideas from authorities in the area of study on Ugueme festival activities.
2. To produce ceramic wares adopting Ugueme styles of rope knotting.
3. To Contribute academically to the propagation of the culture of the people of Ugueme community.

### **Scope of the Study**

This study covers the cultural importance of Ugwueme tradition as it is used in *Oziza Eke*, *Avuruagu* and *Oku Izulato* ceremonies in Enugu State Nigeria. The motif for the ceramic production was limited to those adapted from Ugwueme knots and patterns and produced in clay not *alulu*. Manual process of clay body preparations was adopted. Available equipment in the studio were used and decorating maternal such as glazes, oxides were applied within the temperature range of the kiln. Locally made glazes were used for the project.

### **Limitations of the Study**

In the course of this study, certain issues posed serious challenges to the researchers. The people from Ugwueme community met for interview to elicit information concerning the *Oziza Eke*, *Avuragu* and *Oku Izulato* ceremonies could not easily divulge information to strangers, this resulted in some delays.

Climatic conditions, such as harmattan period, affected the works because clay tends to dry faster and needs to be wrapped in cellophane or moist cloth, to allow it to dry gradually and avoid cracks which one cannot even guarantee during firing. Again, clay is not easy to use in the production of certain shapes in ceramic works. This is because of its soft nature.

There was also problem of going into the bush to fetch the *Alulu* shrub trees used for the preparation of ropes and knotting which is interpreted to ceramic works which involves long duration and critical thinking by the researchers to actualize success.

### **Research Questions**

The study was guided by the following research questions.

1. What information, knowledge and ideas can be obtained from relevant literatures about ropes and knotting?
2. What type of ceramic wares can be produced by adopting Ugwueme style of rope knotting in designing?
3. Can the production of rope knotted ceramic works contribute academically to the propagation of the culture of Ugwueme community?

### **Significance of the Study**

It is expected that at the end, the study will be significant in the following ways.

The ceramists will have better understanding of the usefulness of works produced by adapting cultural motifs and patterns. This will enlarge their horizon in contemporary ceramic production.

The information derived from this research will be useful to other researchers in other areas who might be interested in translating cultural patterns into ceramic decoration.

## **II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

Though not so much has been commented on “Ugwueme” and its knots, related literature was discussed under.

- 1 Conceptual Framework
- 2 Theoretical Framework
- 3 Empirical Studies
- 4 Summary of Reviewed Literature

### **Conceptual Framework**

Knitting and Knotting

Wingats (1964) notes that knitting and knotting operations were supposedly invented in Scotland in the 15<sup>th</sup> century with first stocking firms appearing in Northern Hemisphere, England in 1589 she then supported this with some knitted works with series of knots. Williams, (1975) presented a knitted work of many threads coming together to create a tight knot expressing strength through unity. In a different context the same work of art may be seen as compounded problems.

*The Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary of Current English* (1974) defined knitting as bringing something or articles by looping wool, silk, nylon, yarn on needles. It further states that it is a way of uniting families, tightly or closely. For example, two or more families, friends etc are united together by common interest. It goes on to define knots as part of one or more pieces of string or rope twisted together to make a good fasten. In other words, something that ties together. Knots can also signify marriage, difficulty, hardship, problem situation and badly confused about something.

In line with this, Igwilo (2006) showed a creative use of knots on his works in cane chair production merely for its beautification. These include “Iga asin Ekwuna Okwu II”. Cole and Aniakor (1984) presented the historical Igbo Ukwu “Roped pot” a water pot set on it’s own pedestal, enclosed in a rope-work. They stated that

the piece which has knots-net work around and it shows mastery of a highly sophisticated process which joined precast pieces. They also presented another art piece from the same Igbo Ukwu which expresses an intricate use of knots and beads. *The Double Egg Pendant* and Beaded bronze housed at the national Museum, Lagos State.

'*Isighe*' is the knot of special harvesting net produced by the people of the riverine areas of Akwa Ibom State especially in Okobo and Oron Local Government Areas. *Isighe* in Akwa Ibom and Cross River states also have some works depicting works of knotting both in costume and nets in fishery activities. The knotting of *Isighe* is also work by the "Ekpe" (Lion) and "Nnaebo" masquerades both in Akwa Ibom and Cross River States. The same "Isighe" in Costume is shown on a model of the "Ekpe" (Lion) masquerade from Cross River and Akwa Ibom States displayed at the University of Nigeria museum, displayed at the University of Nsukka. *Isighe* is used mainly used in fish and crayfish harvesting.

As costume still, Sieber (1972) presents a garment which is of knotted with a cut-pile edging encircling the neck, waist and sleeves used as dance costume in Liberia. The garment which is just ropes and knots with the "eyes" or pattern thrice as those of fishing "*Isieghe*" shows a concentration of knots shaped into a garment (textile) but not in ceramics.

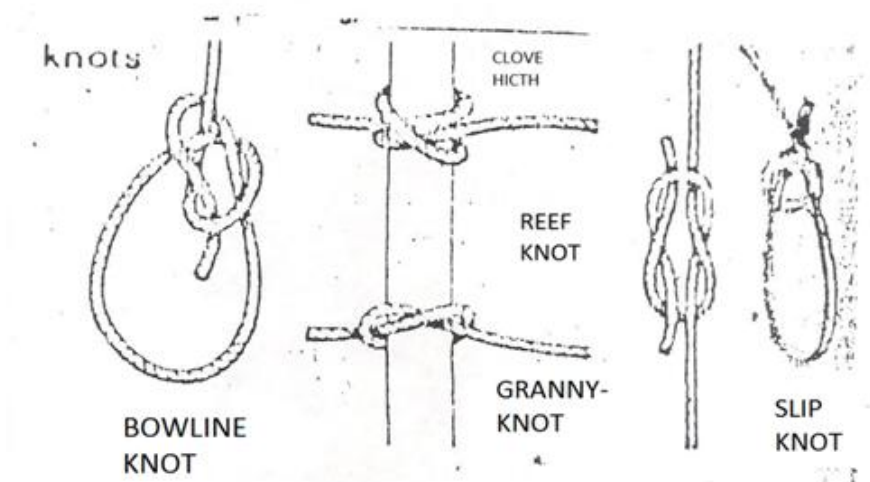
Nwehi (2016) reveals that Ugwueme people used the *alulu* rope to hold a metal device which is used to catch small animals or birds within the community. To him, it is not only used during the *Oziza Eke* ceremony by the girls. They also use it for trapping of birds and animals.

In his own view, Onuzulike (2000) expresses the use of knots in some of his craft works. This could be seen in his *Mass Suicide*, the "Casualties and Genocide" which all shows the use of ropes just for aesthetics. Waller (1977) presents interesting textile, sculptures which consist of very skillful use of fabric ropes.

Williams (1975) notes that symbolism is bringing together a lot of ideas and objects. The symbol is either an object that stands for an idea. He further says that communication lies in the symbolism of language, hence man becomes aware of another's thoughts through symbols and this he says is civilization. The growth of any society therefore depends to a great extent on her ability to evolve symbols and signs or suitable motifs.

In his own assertion, Eze (1995) stresses that visual artists will continue to engage their imaginations in order to be able to fashion out through ideas, facts, relies, secret techniques, other documents and necessary symbols for communication and change. Supporting his view, Lewis (1999) states that art is communication and writing is communication by means of visual symbols substituted for spoken words. This stands true to the fact that the knots are symbols of communication interpreted in words. For example there is a way the knots are used and the observer under stands them to mean friendship and marriage oppression.

Ekemma, (2015) explains that apart from the fact that they knit and tie knots for body adornment especially on their hair and waist during festivals, She further noted that knot slip signify problems that can easily be solved while the granny knot signifies problem that cannot be solved.





**Fig 2:** Sketches of ropes and Knots from Alulu rope by Offor Obiageli G.

On the other hand the “granny” knot too signifies a relationship that cannot be broken. In her own view Nkwonta (2016) reveals that initially they use only Uli to design their body and plait their hair. Ugwueme Community introduced the use of *Alulu* which is woven in three stripes at times coloured to beautify the concerned ladies to enhance their cultural history. According to her, friends and well wishers are invited to admire the occasion as the girls dance round the Eke in different styles and people will be admiring them with their ropes and knots. In support of the above, Mbamalu, (2016) explained that the male folk expresses their intention of marriage to the girl he admires by spraying much money on her as she dance round in the arena and if the girl ever hands the short noted ropes to him, it indicates that she has accepted his hand in marriage.

Nkalele (2001) states that in the development of the collected knots, some knot samples were pasted on black cardboard paper. This prevented the tied knots from loosening. To make the study of the knots, possible, ropes from *Alulu* in Ugwueme dialect and in some other people’s dialect were employed. The knots were reproduced with the “*alulu* from shrub trees” which are about one foot in diameter. The newly tied knots with *alulu* became visible enough for proper studies as they were mounted on black painted boards for easy handling.

Aliozor (2015) notes that for the pencil studies of knots, it is good to understand that every studio work starts with sketches. This enabled and allowed the artist to put down his ideas the way he wanted them. It is by sketches made by the researchers that they knew how to resolve certain areas of the work and how to approach the work to a successful finish. After making several sketches of the knots, several forms were derived from the knots. Some of the sketched forms were chosen and developed into full drawings and working drawing for the actual production. To actualize this, some tools and other studio equipments were acquired.

### **Empirical Studies**

Dokubo, (2008) a senior officer of the Nigeria ports Authority in Port Harcourt, Rivers State expressed satisfaction with the use of knotted ropes in their shipping activities. These include, anchoring loading and unloading the ships. According to him on the symbolic meaning of knots, he says “Nothing except death can untie his own Marriage knots”. Inyang, (2000) states that rope and knots had been in farming right from the ancient times. As beasts of burden, animals provide power for agricultural practice as ox-cart can be attached to animal with rope and knots. These have been used for transportation and source of power for farm implements. Another example is the “emcort” ploughs. Cole and Aniakor (1984) confirms that knots and ropes were used to weave *Nwagu* (Child of leopard) masquerade costume, which is “Isighe” and this has added much substance to this project.

This project bothers on the culture of Ugwueme and its’ influence in ceramic production in Nigeria. In line with this, Umuibe, (2002) notes that the custom of Isikwuato has helped a great deal in enhancing art production. The basic costume for the women folk in olden days was to tie a piece of beautiful cloth on their waist and topped it with waist beads in ropes. These waist beads were usually very colourful and are also known as “Jigida” in their native language. This signifies that the girl is of age and ripe for marriage. For the teenagers, the jigida was worn all alone without cloth. Umuibe through inspiration transformed the fabric and beads into art work but in the area of painting. The work contributed a great deal to the present work because the researchers transformed the fabric into ceramic design in three dimensional art using clay ropes to replace the beads changing it totally to flower pot . Nwokike, (2005) emphasized that Awha town in Ezeagu in Enugu State has a lot of culture. Some people of the area depicts and represents some of these cultures in their art productions mostly in weaving. If any of the relations travelled to an unknown place without touching home or contacting any of his relatives for five years, they perform activities as their custom demands. They use tender palm fronds to weave a long rope which they tie on the neck of a big pot that is buried on the ground which they

call 'ite owoko' or ngwunani with wide mouth. After this, they perform some incantations by calling on the person's name asking him to return home. This is performed by the eldest in the family who calls the person twelve times. If after twelve months, the person did not come home, they will perform the Usolo burial ceremony when they announce the death of the person in the village square. They cut the rope on the neck of the pot to depict that the person is dead. If the person eventually returns afterwards, he ties the rope on his neck and waist and dance round the village square five times and his people will celebrate his arrival in good health. The rope is made of palm fronds. This cultural story also enhanced this research work.

### **III. SUMMARY OF THE REVIEW**

From the literature reviewed, none of the ceramic artists has produced works that depicts cultural stories using ceramic ropes and knots. The researchers has been encouraged by the works so far done by the authorities in the areas of knitting and knotting and other related issues but not exactly on ropes and knots. The fact that ropes and knots have been universally accepted as visual symbols of communication which can be interpreted by any observer is very good to the researchers. All the literature reviewed, none was done on creating forms using clay ropes and knots and adopting them as motifs for cultural identity and aesthetic purposes, and the ability of the artists to explain the reasons for using them. The most interesting aspect of the review is that apart from knotting thread and ordinary ropes, none has been done on ceramics.

Onwuka, (2002) displayed some craft works in cane chair production, he used some pieces of cane to design chair but he could not explain easily what it stands for. There are many types of knots such as clove knot, bowline knot, reef knot, slip knot and granny knot. However, Ugwueme knots differs from the above types of knots both in terms of form and cultural usage. For the purpose of this research, few of the knot styles such as the granny, reef, slip and so on which are common and generally known were selected for the study but they were used here as means of communication. Umuibe (2002) worked on beaded ropes to actualize her design on fabrics. This work fills a gap in the area of re-inventing ceramic works of ropes and knots into modern art, changing from using ropes from palm fronds, fabrics or beads to the use of ropes and knots from our locally sourced material - clay.

### **IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **Research Design**

The work employs experimental research design. As a practice based research it has both literary and practical aspects, Ceramic wares produced according to proposed design were documented in a written format.

#### **Collection of Data**

The main sources of data were primary (Mostly oral) such as interviews and secondary (written sources) published and unpublished materials which include text books, journals, thesis among others. Pictures of relevant activities pertaining to the work were also taken and analyzed. The researchers also employed the participant observation technique to have a first hand knowledge of *Oziza Eke, Avuruagu and Oku Izulato* festivals.

#### **Method of Data Analysis and Interpretation**

Data analysis implies extracting the required information which tries to answer the research questions. The researchers employed a qualitative method of analysis and interpretation. Specifically, the scientific descriptive method was used.

#### **Area of the Study**

The study area is Ugwueme Community in Enugu State Nigeria. It's land borders are Isochi in the West, Awgu town in the south, Nkwe in the North and Lokpanta in the East. It comprises of two autonomous communities, namely Agulese and Ezinobu Ugwueme and is often referred to as Anike meaning land of hard Stones and Rocks. The indigenes engage in stone cracking for commercial purposes as one of the means of lively hood and it pays them a lot. The topography is hilly and rocky. Ugwueme is made up of approximately 7,800 inhabitants. Their official language is English but generally they speak Igbo as their indigenous language. The five major festivals celebrated in Ugwueme are *Oziza Eke, Avuruagu, Oku Izulato, new yam festival and Egbeajala* which are being organized and coordinated by the Igwe and his cabinet members with some selected elites in the community. This area was chosen because of their belief in using *alulu* ropes and knots to explain their culture.

#### **Production of the Practical Project**

This explains the processes that were used in the production of the practical ceramic wares. The practical project was organized in stages.

**Stage 1**

**Conception stage**

The practice of art today is undergoing series of changes. There are lots of experimentations taking place with materials, design concepts and technique of manipulation of forms. In the area of ceramic, productions are taking a new turn. The researchers conceptual idea came through inspiration. They have a good friend that hails from Ugwueme community. Oluchi Diribe by name who invited them several times in the past years to come and witness the cultural festivals in their community. In 2012 and 2013 respectively, the researchers attended “Oziza Eke” “Avuruagu” and “Oku Izulato” festivals in Ugwueme community and what they saw and witnessed is better to be seen than be told.

**The Use of ropes and knots by Ugwueme People and what inspired the researchers.**

In Ugwueme, the people have some cultural belief that has social affinity with the beautification of their bodies (hairs, shoulders and waists) especially among the young ladies.



**Plate 1: Females decorated with Ropes and Knots**

**FLOWER POT**



**Fig 3: Umuibe, Gigida on Fabric Transformed to Clay Rolls on Ceramic**



### **Design for Flower Pot by the Researchers. 30 inches.**

To them, what the ladies put on determines their beauty. They have cultural festival called Oziza Eke day. On that day, all females between the ages of 16-25 years of age will be very busy preparing for the occasion. They use the cultural festival to show-case bodily development or ripe age of readiness for marriage. It is performed annually within the third week of every November. During the period, parents that have young girls within the named age bracket are in a very high spirit and good mood to celebrate their daughters that are getting prepared to participate in the yearly activity.

Before the day of the occasion, they usually go to the bush to harvest the shrub trees in large quantity a month to the date of celebration. On getting home, they soak them in water for one or two days to quicken the processing into usable stage. In that manner, they continue with the processes to produce the weaved ropes which in turn is used to form the ropes and at times with knots at intervals as desired which they use to decorate their body. Many such concerned females are seen to be busy in the preparation of the rope made from a type of shrub tree they call *Apari* or *Alulu* in their dialect.

## **V. PRE-FESTIVAL ACTIVITIES**

They use the *apari* to weave ropes of different sizes. They also make different designs of attire with *the rope* which is used to decorate themselves. Olu (2015) expressed that “the concept of such tradition of using knots of ropes for beautification as up held by traditional people of Ugwueme differs from that held by the modern youth in the wider society” it is good to note that with the advancement of western civilization and impact of Christianity, most of these traditional values of old have begun to fade and vanish from the social horizon. Early in the morning on that faithful day, the girls go to the Eke square to sweep and get it ready for the occasion.

They wear their dresses or tie wrapper and decorate themselves with the ropes knotted at intervals as they are expected to dance around five times in the arena to the admiration of others. It is at that festival that the male folk see the girls and can ask for their hand in marriage. So interesting especially as the girls played with the ropes and knots on their attire and on their hair for body adornment coupled with *Uli* design on their body. Remembering the opinion of Weschler (1982) who noted that “one can quickly forget the forms and details of what he/she saw but stressed that as a designer, wonderful ideas and intuition of styles, forms and details are retained more in memory when written down” the researchers quickly took pencil and paper and made some sketches of the variety of knots. There was an intuition that these knots and ropes could be related, transformed and developed as clay rolls for motifs which could be utilized for designs on ceramic productions. The researchers quickly thought of it and imagined how good it will be if such could be written down and documented for and as an academic exercise so that present and future generation can read and learn about it (culture of Ugwueme people) This actually motivated the researchers to put the ideas into practice by transforming the ropes and knots of “*Alulu*” into ropes and knots of clay. Some stylish adoptions were made from the different knots into contemporary ceramic products.

In a similar but different festival called “*Avuruagu*” which is organized and performed once in a year during the Easter period, it is a feast set aside by the community to enable the young ones (male & female) know their maternal homes and the relatives of their mother. On that day both boys and girls within the same age of 16-25 years will wear their best attire and also use ropes to decorate and beautify their body. The feast is usually very interesting. Their maternal relatives will be well prepared, waiting to receive them. There will be decorations in the concerned compounds with ropes at times knotted including some coloured ones of various sizes. Different dishes will be prepared by the hosting families with variety of drinks. On arrival to their maternal homes, there will be great joy and this is expressed by embracing them and offering of seats followed by issuance of water with which to wash their hands. They will be made to know the dishes and drinks that are available for them to make their choice. After eating and drinking, one or two persons from their maternal home will joyfully take them and introduce them to their maternal uncles, their wives and children. Such uncles visited will also decorate and give them well designed rope and coconut to take home to their parents as evidence that they visited them. In most cases, some may also add monetary gift. They will escort them to a reasonable distance and bid them fare well.

All these the researchers perceived will contribute greatly to the production of contemporary ceramic works. The ropes of knots if well incorporated in the ceramic wares and various productions will enhance not only the aesthetics of the ceramic products but also their cultural history. Most ceramists cannot explain how the clay rolls in rope forms and knots could be used to create interesting historical forms or show how to apply them to achieve results. This is a big problem and does not augur well for enriched ceramic works especially for cultural, aesthetics, and exhibition purposes. Some forms of ceramic works can be achieved with interplay of ropes and knots made with clay through trials and error. This study through the skillful use of the chief ceramic materials (clay), techniques in production observing the principles and elements of design can go a long way in creating awareness on why and how to explain their art works. In this way, the information will be sought,

developed documented and preserved for present and future generations and the culture of Ugwueme in particular and Nigeria in general.

### **Stage 2**

The researchers at this stage started to transform those ideas they saw into art forms to give it a better shape as ceramic works. Bearing in mind the elements and principles of design. The researchers drew some ceramic forms which they produced using clay ropes and knots.

#### **SKETCHES**



**Fig 4: Quick sketches by the researchers which was later transformed into ceramic forms.**

The Chief or basic raw material used for this project is the “clay” usually the secondary clay.

In the preparation of clay, the clay was collected from clay dump by digging for the required quantity. This is followed by sieving the clay collected after allowing it to soak for not less than two days. The sieved clay is syphoned off water until a thickened clay slip is realized which is poured on a cemented floor or Plaster of Paris bats (POP) where it is allowed to become hard enough to be used. Before usage, the clay must undergo the processes of wedging and kneading.

Oluwale, (2015) states that the execution of the ropes and knots into actual ceramic works require that the type of clay to be used should be ready which is claybody. The researchers engaged in the preparations of clay body and mixture with grog. Clay body is the mixture of various clays both plastic and non plastic materials that are mostly used for both local and industrial ceramic productions. The researchers were limited to the manual preparation of clay in the studio as this is the only option left. Egwane (2004) opines that when different types of clay are mixed to formulate a workable body for the successful usage, it is called clay body and that is what will be used by the researchers in the execution of this project. This was chosen because this type of work requires clay body due to the tying and twisting nature of the knots.

#### **The Reasons for Using Clay Body**

- a. Not all natural clay has good working and firing properties but clay body provides these properties.
- b. A combination of different clays gives a better result as each one contributes to some specific desirable qualities.
- c. Where one of the clay ingredients diverts slightly or completely from what is expected, the overall effect in the production will be small.
- d. The clay body developed from the respective clays is always consistent.

#### **Qualities of Suitable Clay Body**

Good working strength

1. Green strength

2. Drying without undue shrinkage
3. Good colour effect

By good working strength, the clay body has good working strength. Ekuene, (2004) noted that if clay body has green strength, it means that the produced ware has the ability to withstand or resist pressure at the dried State. A clay body subjected to a very high temperature without shrinkage excessively upon drying is said to dry without undue shrinkage. One other quality of clay body is that it has good colour effects. It is worthy to note that clay bodies are classified usually according to their structure and firing temperature thus we have kaoline, Ball clay, Fireclay, Stone ware and Earthen ware clays to mention but a few.

Ilo, (2009) explains that the clay body was therefore prepared taking into consideration its plasticity porosity, shrinkage rates, firing, colour and maturing temperature based on the firing range of the only available kiln in the studio. For the purpose of this project, the formulated clay-body was left over a long period of not less than two months to age well for use. During the aging period, the researchers prepared themselves for a studio work through the provision of other required materials and tools. It is worth mentioning here that the grog was added to the prepared blend. This also enabled the modifiers to age with the clay body there by rendering the formulated body highly pliable.

#### **Stage 4**

##### **Techniques involved in the Preparation of Clay**

##### **A - Coiling Technique in the Production of Ceramic Forms.**

The techniques in the production of ceramic forms include modeling, coiling, throwing, slab, and pinching methods, the researchers in the course of execution of this project employed these techniques of ceramic production.

These production techniques are sometimes combined as they appealed to the artists. It must be stated that the most simple, comfortable and useful technique to the researchers were modeling, coiling throwing, pinching techniques. In modeling, they achieved the forms they desired with ease through the skillful manipulation of lump of clay. Another technique used is the slabbing technique.

Two types of firing were given to the wares.

#### **BISQUE and GLOSS FIRING**

A ceramic piece must be hardened or rendered permanent by fire or heat treatment. This means that the ceramist must understand the effect of heat upon ceramic materials. He/She must be able to operate the kiln and measure the temperature as required. Firing becomes one of the most important and interesting aspect of ceramic production. This is because no piece is accepted as a ceramic ware unless it has been fired. Thus firing determines the success or failure of any ceramic production. The firing therefore can be either bisque or gloss firing.

#### **BISQUE FIRING**

This is the first firing given to ceramic wares. The dried wares, still contain certain quantity of water of about 5%. Such water content can only leave the ware upon firing it is called chemically combined water. The essence of bisque firing is to make the wares retain their permanent shape and also to have resistance to the actions of water and weathering. Bisque firing makes the clay indestructible, it also reduces the porosity of the ware and makes it absorbent enough to permit glaze adhesion. It is better to remove the water gradually by making sure that a low temperature is introduced to the wares at the initial time or else the wares will crack/shatter. At this time, all the dampers (outlets) were opened to allow a free escape of water vapour. It is assumed that on getting to the temperature of about 100<sup>o</sup>c to 350<sup>o</sup>c all such water content might have been drawn when it gets to the temperature of about 573<sup>o</sup>c a physical change takes place. The silica content in the clay expands, this change is called change from Alpha to Beta Quartz "By this a slight increase in volume occurs. Upon cooling, the change will reverse from "Beta to Alpha Quartz". At this point, the wares resumes their original forms and sizes. These remarkable changes are called "Quartz inversion".

This is a critical point in firing cycle at which large pieces sometimes break. As soon as the firing reaches the desired temperature between 800<sup>o</sup>c to 1000<sup>o</sup>c, Note that the pieces were closely placed in the kiln for the firing process. Consequently the attainment of the required temperature is most desirable for the ceramic pieces. The vents and the spy holes were left open until 400<sup>o</sup>c was reached before they were sealed for the full firing: After firing, the kiln was left closed for one and half days or two before it was slightly cracked open and finally opened for the off loading of the bisque wares.

#### **Stage 6 Glazing**

After the bisque firing, the wares were off-loaded, checked and selected for gloss firing. The selected wares were dusted with water and foam. This was to avoid the layer of dust between the glaze layer and the

piece which would have resulted in glaze faults such as crawling. Glaze looks like glass in appearance and composition. It could then be defined as a glassy coating formed on a ceramic surface by melting of finely gloomy glaze materials like feldspar, flint, whiting, clay Baruim carbonate and magnesium carbonate. Glazing is a technique for adding a durable water resistance. Glaze can be clear, white or coloured and are typically made from ground mineral pigments mixed with water. Glaze becomes necessary for the following reasons.

- It makes the ceramic were more durable
- It helps to achieve a varied colour and texture
- The wares become more attractive
- Glaze makes them to be smooth when touched and it is washable.
- It makes them impervious to liquid and so it is more hygienic. Glaze which comes in liquid form is applied to ceramic ware using any of the under listed methods – pouring, spraying, brushing and dipping methods.

Conventionally, glaze faults cannot be accepted on dinner wares but could be tolerated on or ornamental wares especially if the effects so achieved are intentional. These faults include:

Crazing, shivering/peeling, crawling, pinholes, blistering, bloating, cracking and dunting. The researchers prevented these glaze faults by observing some precautions before glaze applications like - checking for cracks, dust, oil, under fired wares, over fired wares.

To avoid the glaze materials settling in the bottom of the container, the glazes were continuously stirred during the application process.

### **Stage 7**

#### **Gloss firing (Final firing)**

This is the second firing given to ceramic wares after the application of glaze. The wares were properly fettled and left to dry before loading for gloss firing. The glazed wares were placed on the bat in the kiln with all effort to observe and take precautions meant for gloss firing. Adesioye (1992) noted that the wares should be fired to a temperature between 1060°c to 1100c. Just like the bisque firing, at the initial time of firing, the vents and spy-holes were left open during the pre-heating period. They remained so till the temperature got up to about 350°c. After firing, the researchers put off the kiln and followed the same cooling process in bisque firing.

### **PROJECT ANALYSIS**

A work of art that is not well presented will lose its beauty. Therefore presentation of works became the final stage of this project. The finished ceramic wares were finally exhibited with drawings. The works were entitled *Self Murder, Golden Mum, Determination, Snare, One Love, Before the Supreme Being, Economic Challenges and Except in Death*. This was possible through information, knowledge and ideas obtained from literatures.

#### **Presentation of Project Works that were Produced Using Clay Body**

The works were presented as practical projects

##### **1: SELF MURDER**



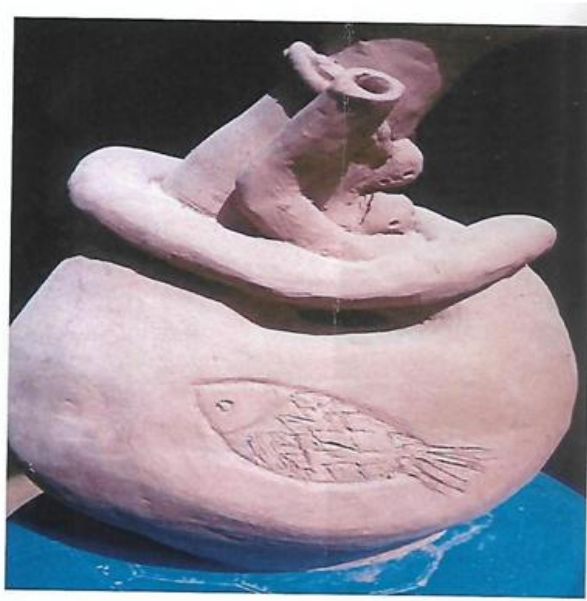
**Fig 5: Self Murder, clay body, 14 inches**

### **SELF MURDER**

The work has a very solid base which grew into a stylized human figure that carries a very smooth pot. The body of the figure developed into a rope which ended in a knot around the neck. Looking at the form one is tempted to ask what might have gone wrong with this healthy pretty looking figure?

The work actually depicts a figure who despite her seemingly healthy look, appears ungrateful to God. The bowl she carries symbolizes many blessings. Yet consequent to the ups and downs in life, she became frustrated to the extent of committing suicide, (both physically or spiritually)

### **2. GOLDEN MUM**



**Fig 2: Golden Mum, Clay Body, 14 inches**

### **GOLDEN MUM**

This work depicts a form with a very strong base, which grew and divided into two arms. One seems to be larger in size, symbolizing the mother while the smaller one symbolizes the child. The two arms grow upwards and ended in a prop. The smaller arm (the child formed a knot around the mother's neck).

The work stands for the warm embrace that a child gives to a loving and caring mother. The fish motifs used for the decoration are just to remind the mother of her continuous delicious meals. All these confers the feeling that one is hearing the child tell her mother. "You are one in a million and a golden mum"

### **3: DETERMINATION**



**Fig 6: Determination, Clay Body, 14 inches**

The work sprang from a solid base which broke into two as it grows up wards. The two distinct parts again came together at a point to form a knot after which they joined to form a prop. The prop continues to grow upwards. The work reminds one of tender age when a child enjoys parental care especially from the mum. However, as the child grows, he begins to try and venture into so many things. In the course of his adventure into so many things, he met several obstacles, one of which was symbolized as a hard knot. He has to untie the hard knot if he desires to succeed. With full determination he does so and begin to grow and enjoy his life again.

#### 4: SNARE



**Fig 7: Snare, Clay Body, 14 inches**

The work consists of a spherical shaped pot, part of which was cut vertically into two parts. The edge of the cut out part was developed into a rope with a knot which ends in a funnel shaped form. There is also money inside the bowl which was suspended with a rope.

This work signifies the trap set by evil ones along with their agents, usually using money or any favourite thing as bait for those who struggle for anything at all cost. The smooth nature of the entrance into the trap depicts the trick of the devil. It is only God who can save those who are careful enough to stop to look before leaping. The funnel structure that ends it shows the source of strength to the rope and trap. This means that evil doers do not relent in their wicked ways. They continually lay traps and sit back to laugh and mock any unsuspecting victim.

#### 5. ONE LOVE

The work consists of two separate ropes which come together and interlock to a reeve knot. These ropes symbolize two different persons, communities, countries among other differences that came together to become one for a common goal. It requires and involves sacrifice to sustain such an intimate relationship



**One Love, 14 inches**

**6: BEFORE THE SUPREME BEING**



**Fig 8: *Before the Supreme Being*, Clay Body, 14 inches**

This composition consists of musical instruments, of different size. The drum forms the base which carries the other instruments. The rope which grows from the drum is used to bind the composition together with the help of the knot at the top. The musical instrument symbolize human beings who engage in different endeavours and from different backgrounds.

In praise of the supreme being – God, all the instruments have their sounds. They come together to produce a balanced and harmonized sound to the glory of God. They are equally important. The little instruments, the flute, seems to be encouraging those who feel that they have lost out in their endeavours. The message therefore is that, anyone who has a talent should make it known, and should not give up for God has a place for everyone.

**7. ECONOMIC CHALLENGES**



**Fig 7: *Economic Challenges*, Clay Body, 14 inches**

This piece has a spherical base which appears very strong. The pot grows upwards to a point where it splits into two equal parts. It has some cowries shells lining up the belly from the inwards to form a knot. They continue to grow upwards after the knots. This work depicts the general economic challenges in individual lives, companies, local government areas, state government, the country-Nigeria, which extends to the entire world as a global village. The different exchange rates of the world currencies and other problems in business transaction are also inclusive.

## **8. EXCEPT IN DEATH**



**Fig 8: Except in Death, Clay Body, 14 inches**

The above work consists of two stylized human figures (male & female) in rope form on the both sides struggling to get to the top of a big rock. They are seriously in love with each other. The two separate ropes met at a point and formed a knot, joined after the knot to form a rope which continues to grow upwards in love. They tried to sustain themselves despite all the difficulties on their way climbing the rocky hill. However, at last they succeeded in getting to the top of the rock.

The base of the work shows an oval shaped rock bounded together by a big knotted rope depicting unity that exists in the community. The big rock signifies the Ugwueme community and its topography of stones and water gushing out from the stone found in Ugbokihite hill. An indigene who discovers a girl he wants to marry as the custom demands will subject the girl to climb and see the environment of Ugwueme community at a glance from the top of the rocky hill in Ugbokihite. This exercise seals their relationship once the girl agrees to marry him after climbing by accepting to eat and to receive a rope from the man's family. This happens during the Oku Izulato and then payment of dowry follows. They remain inseparable except in death. The girl agrees to eat with it after climbing Ugbokihite, it depicts acceptance to the marriage.

The adaptation of Ugwueme ropes, knots and patterns, in addition to aiding in obtaining relevant information, production of ceramics that are of cultural interest also can contribute academically to the development of culture of not only Ugwueme Community but beyond.

## **VI. SUMARRY, CONCLUSION, FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Summary**

These ropes were used to produce motifs which can be used to design ceramic works and made them attractive to people. The occasions were very interesting and everybody enjoyed them especially the youths. The clay products of rope designs depicted a lot of things such as love, unity, peace and good moral.

The practical works made of clay body were allowed to dry, fired for durability and aesthetic purposes. Locally produced equipments like boards, cutter, rolling pin, wooden mould, saw blade, spatula, improvised designing tools, porters wheel among others were used to produce the ceramic wares. Slip was used for joining two or more separate clay designs. Upon completion of these ceramic works of ropes and knots designs adopted from Ugwueme community, they will apart from generating funds for the development of the society offer employment opportunities for our young school leavers.

The ropes and patterns in Ugwueme, *Oziza Eke*, *Avuruagu* and *Oku Izulato* celebrations played a significant role in Ibo tradition – as it equips people with entrepreneurial skills which inspired many artists to



produce meaningful art works. However, it is good to note that there is no success especially for artists in their productions without multiplied efforts. An artist may experience distractions, discouragements, confusion and so on. Such experiences were the hard knots representing different things. It is only those who are creative, strong, bold, courageous and hardworking that will certainly succeed in art production. For one to be successful in art productions, he/she must be somebody who has new innovation and unusual ideas to offer as shown by the current study.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this research was to adopt the knots and patterns of Ugwueme community for ceramic production in Nigeria. This project made it clear that the knots and patterns of “Ugwueme” can form very interesting motifs that could be utilized for the development of designs in ceramic production. The researchers therefore tried to prove that these knots and patterns could be adapted by potters in particular and designers in general as tools for communication, development and preservation of our cultural norms.

### **Findings**

The message from these works produced by the researchers is that there are many artists and students in the area of ceramics in most tertiary institutions especially those who apply clay rolls and knots on their works as motif designs but cannot expertly explain why they are applied. Mgbahulu, a local potter who lives in Awgu town and one of the indigenes whom the researchers met in Ugwueme *Oziza Eke*, *Avuruagu* and *Oku izulato* festivals, was able to tell a lot of stories on how they utilize ropes and knots from *Alulu* shrubs to explain different scenario (love, unity, religious, war) etc in their community. She was so impressed that from what she saw the researchers produced using clay rolls and knots as the medium and to also design art works, she said she will also practice the production of works that depicts interesting stories using clay rolls and knots.. Nwehi, (2015) pointed out that artists should endeavour to discover themselves to identify their talents and potentials. Ceramists through this research work can be versatile in their creative thinking as this will enhance their productions.

### **Recommendations**

From the researchers personal observations and interactions with Ugwueme indigenes, ceramic products made of ropes and pattern designs are admired by not only the potters and ceramic designers, but all and sundry. The researchers are of the view that such products should be produced in commercial quantity not only for Enugu State but to be enjoyed by other states in and outside Nigeria. This is because the products will not only be exported but will also be made available and affordable by every home. As a result, people who do not at present know what the designs are will be awakened to this new knowledge and job opportunities.

Interests are more in ceramic production when tools, equipments and consumables are available. Ceramists should endeavour to make these at reach. This will help immensely in promoting our culture. Besides, greater awareness should be created on discrimination against those who has flare for practical base courses. There should be more advocacy for entrepreneurial skills. Parents should also encourage their children and wards to venture into this area of study.

Furthermore, other researchers especially in practical based courses should use this study as source of inspiration and information for enhancement in their own area of study.

### **Contribution to Knowledge**

To the best of the knowledge of the researchers, adaptation of Ugwueme knots for modern ceramic production has not been explored by scholars and ceramists. The researchers came up with an alternative means of conceiving ceramic works that can convey messages of a particular set of people. Historical ceramic works can henceforth be achieved using clay ropes and knots

## **REFERENCES**

- [1]. Adegoke, J. (2014). *The Use of Ceramics for Exterior Decoration*. Fine and Applied Applied Arts Project (MFA) University of Nigeria Nsukka.
- [2]. Adesioye, C. (1992). *Encouraging the Production of Traditional Craft to Curb Unemployment in Nigeria* Ibadan: Evans Brothers Nigerian Publishers Ltd.
- [3]. Aliozor, V. (2015). *Ceramics at a Glance for Students* – Retrieved Wednesday 22, 2016 – [www.ceramicartsdatvily.org/firingtechniques](http://www.ceramicartsdatvily.org/firingtechniques).
- [4]. Dioha, C. (2000). *The History and Innovations of Ceramics Designs*. New York: The pearl collection in the metropolitan museum of Art.
- [5]. Dosky, C. (2016). *An Introduction to Traditional Beliefs of Igbo Land*. Vol 1. Enugu: Lucazs Publisher.
- [6]. Ekuene, B. (2004). *Ibibio Pottery Heritage: A Focus on Ndum Eboni Pottery and Nigerian Crafts and Techniques*. Lagos: Oxford University Press.
- [7]. Egwane, P. (1998). *The use of Ceramics for Exterior Decoration*. Fine and Applied A1rts – University of Ahmadu Bello – Zaria. Unpolished Theses

- [8]. Ekemma, V. (2015) *Understanding the Various Culture of the Different Ethnic Groups*. Chuka Printing Co
- [9]. Eze, A. (1995). *Impact of Folklore on Nigerian Visual. Uso Nigerian Journal of Arts NSII*. Lagos. University Press Plc, Ibadan.
- [10]. Gueded, P. (1979). *Encyclopedia of Architecture and Technology*. New York: McGraw Hill Book Company.
- [11]. Ilo, J. (2009). *Clay and Glazes in studio Ceramics*. Wiltshire: The Crowood Press Ltd Kamsburu.
- [12]. Igwilo, B. (2006). *Tradition and Modernity: Catalogue of an Exhibition of Ceramics*. Enekwe Research Center UNN.
- [13]. Lewis, G. (2009) *Government Machinery for Art and Culture, New York. Holt Rinehart and Winston , 1963*.
- [14]. Nwehi, E. (2016). *Ceramics made Easy*. New York: Hall Inc.
- [15]. Nkalele, O. (2001). *Ropes of Clay in Igbo Ceramic Art and Culture*. Ibadan: New Culture Studios.
- [16]. Nkwonta, F. (2016) *Traditional Potter Practice in Contemporary Nigeria*, Tolask 67.
- [17]. Nwokike, J. (2005) *Pottery and Cultural Life of Awha People*. Enugu. De-Adroit Press.
- [18]. Onuzulike, O. (2000). *Earth to Art Catalogue of Ceramics*. Los Angeles: California up North.
- [19]. Oluwale, B. (2015). *The Impact of Technology on Traditional Pottery in Nigeria*. Lagos: Dolton Publishing Consultants Ltd.
- [20]. Olu, C. (2015). *Potter and Cultural Life of Igbo People*. Lagos: The Apple press.
- [21]. Rhodes, O. (1973). *Clay and Glazes for Porter*. New York: Chilton Book Company.
- [22]. Sieber (1972). *African Ceramics and Decorative Arts*. New York: The Museum of Modern Art.
- [23]. Sambo, T., Eboatu, M; Dioha, W. (2000). *Cement Ceramic and Glass*. Bauchu: Unpolished Project. Abubakar Tafawa Belewa University.
- [24]. Umuibe, D. (1992). *Beauty in Isukwuato Traditional Woman*. Owerri: Chilton Book Company
- [25]. Wingats, J. (1964). *Hands in Clay: An Introduction to Ceramics*. California: Alfred publishing Co.
- [26]. Weschler, A. (1982). *A Coincise History of Ceramics*. London: Thames and Hudson London.
- [27]. Waller, I. (1977). *Textile Sculptures*. London: Studio Vista.
- [28]. Williams, A. (1960). *Ceramic Symbols, Signs and their Meaning*. London: Leonard Hill.
- [29]. Zuidevaart, D. (1991) *Self Help Art, Culture and Society*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1988.

OKONKWO, IVAN EMEKA PhD, et. al. "Adapting Knots and Patterns of Ugwueme Community for Ceramic Production in Nigeria." *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention (IJHSSI)*, vol. 10(08), 2021, pp 01-18. Journal DOI- 10.35629/7722