

Material Resistance: Reclaiming Indigenous Narratives through Pottery Practices in Colonial and Post-Colonial Nigeria

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Abstract

The research surveys the significant shift in pottery practices in Nigeria starting from the pre-colonial to the post-colonial era; with emphasis on the decolonization of cultural and artistic expressions among indigenous Nigerian potters. Colonial rule undeniably influenced Nigerian pottery, leading to the introduction of new techniques and materials. This paper argues that the essence of indigenous pottery was not entirely erased but rather it is in an evolving phase, and this phase is categorized by the influx of contemporary and emerging artists who see the concepts of indigenous art forms as their heritage. The researcher explores the various aspects of pottery making, from techniques and motifs to the functions of pottery and potters in the socioeconomic system, demonstrating how Nigerian pottery outlived colonialism by maintaining its cultural identity under colonial influence. These resurgent and resistant elements function also as decolonial sites that challenge the trajectory that colonialism erased the indigenous Nigerian cultural object. The study unequivocally employed narrative and case study research designs to thoroughly analyze scholars' opinions found in literature sources. The study highlights the resilience of local traditions and the pivotal role of pottery as a medium of cultural expression and preservation in the face of external forces. The assessment is expected to contribute to a broader discourse on decolonization and the dynamic nature of cultural practices in post-colonial societies through a comprehensive analysis backed with historical and contemporary pottery practices.

Keywords: Indigenous Pottery; Material Resistance; Decolonial Aesthetics; Nigerian Art History; Post-Colonial Nigeria.

1.1 Introduction

The spread of society by conquest and settlement of new areas for political domination, economic gain, and other objectives harmful to native populations of the colonized areas is known as colonialism. It can be challenging to distinguish between colonialism and imperialism because the phrases are commonly used interchangeably to refer to the annexation of territory for the benefit of the conquering nation. Colonialism involves the subjugation of one nation or people by another, with political theorists using notions of justice, contract, and natural law to critique and rationalize European rule since the Crusades and the conquest of the Americas (Kohn & Kavita, 2024). The era of colonization began in the 16th century and had encompassed the majority of the Earth's surface by 1921. By the mid-1960s, most colonized African states, including Nigeria, had gained independence (Umaru, 2019). The colonizers were drawn to prominent places in Africa due to its diverse environments and communities living together. The African continent consists of various terrains, including grasslands, deserts, rainforests, mountains, and highlands (Speight & Toki, 2003), each rich in cultural heritage and natural resources prior to the arrival of colonial powers from the West. According to Kohn & Kavita, (2024), technological advancements in the 16th century facilitated colonial navigation, enabling the colonizers to navigate remote parts of the world in their quest for sustainable settlement. This technological progress made it feasible to move large populations across the ocean, thereby shining a spotlight on the European colonial project.

Before the European scramble for African wealth, it was evident that most African states, including Nigeria, were not economically isolated from the rest of the world. Various states had engaged in international trade since ancient Egyptian times, with West Africa, in particular, developing extensive international trading systems during the Ghana, Mali, and Songhai reigns. Gold trade was pivotal to the wealth of these empires. By the 9th century, early Hausa dynastic states and others had expanded over the sub-Saharan Savannah (Umaru, 2019; Glick, 2005; Ira, 1988; Settles, 1996). Moreover, evidence of civilization in Nigeria dates back to 9000 BC, with notable events in the 11th century shaping the culture, landscape, and political organization of Nigeria's first peoples. Social groups in Nigeria formed segmented political kingdoms and empires, establishing long-range diplomatic and economic relations. Even nomadic peoples like the Fulani had well-organized political structures. With the arrival of colonial and protectorate governments came the alienation of large territories and assumed responsibility for the natural

environment. Settler state governments aimed to protect the environment from careless settlers and indigenous peoples whose land-management systems were considered destructive (Beinart & Lotte, 2007).

Massive social and cultural changes were introduced into Nigerian communities, with the transition from colonial to post-colonial Nigeria, thereby affecting its artisanal works, including pottery production processes. Pottery made in Nigeria before being colonized carries with it, social, symbolic, religious, and practical significance for the country's indigenous tribes. This claim however, clearly shows how pottery practice was not merely a form of expression for indigenous Nigerian society, but was also an essential aspect of their daily life structure; which in fact, is closely connected to their socio-cultural beliefs and religious philosophies (Ozidede, 2024). But with colonial rule came new materials, techniques, technology and aesthetic preferences that ruptured much of the traditional ways of making pottery. Colonial economic policies, favored imported goods over local arts and crafts, decimated traditional pottery and other forms of art which was already an aspect of the African ecosystem. As a result, craftspeople struggled to compete with a massive influx of cheaper, mass-produced imports. These fundamentally changed a generations-old indigenous knowledge system.

1.2 Literature Review

Nigeria has a complex history of colonial rule by various European powers. The Portuguese were the first Europeans to establish trade in Nigeria in 1472 (Umaru, 2019), and they were soon followed by the English, Danish, French, and German merchants who saw Nigeria as a territory to be colonized for exploring trading options. These Europeans exchanged commodities such as spices, palm nuts, and ivory with the indigenous population. The British colonial period extended from 1840 until Nigeria achieved independence in 1960. Notable occurrences during this period encompassed the explorations conducted by Mungo Park and Hugh Clapperton, alongside the annexation of Lagos in 1851 (Tunde, 2011), and subsequent territorial expansion into further regions. Colonialism profoundly influenced Nigeria, impacting culture, history, religion, art, language, cuisine, politics, music, ideologies, and education (Garba, 2012; Iyang, 2008). The colonial era transformed Nigeria's economy, which had once depended on agriculture and many non-agricultural pursuits (Abamwa, 2021, 2020; Warekoromor, 2021). Before colonial rule, the economy was supported by activities such as leatherwork, jewelry making, embroidery, dyeing, blacksmithing, weaving, pottery, and more. Pottery production in some societies was predominantly female-dominated according to Agberia

(2005), and it was an important craft industry with a long history in Nigeria. Oloidi's (2021) study explores the significance of pottery activities as a fundamental part of the economy during the pre and post-colonial eras.

Anti-colonial resistance, or the struggle for independence from colonial rule, began in North America in 1775, as there were massive waves of decolonization after World War I, and especially after World War II. However, decolonization is far more than the process of achieving independence or equal rights for colonized peoples; it includes all the economic, cultural, and psychological elements of the colonial experience, according to some historians (Betts, 2012; Cornthassel, 2012). Decolonization refers to undoing colonialism, which involves imperial nations establishing and dominating foreign territories, often overseas. The term's meanings and applications are disputed. Some scholars focus on independence movements in the colonies and the collapse of global colonial empires during decolonization (Lynch, 1995). The argument that decolonization is not merely political independence has been both contentious and critiqued (Táíwò, 2022; Kurzwelly & Wilckens, 2023; Naicker, 2023). After the Second World War, Nigeria witnessed the rise of organized resistance against colonial rule. This period was marked by a call for active opposition to societal conditions (Katchru, 2006).

In their reading of Thucydides, Lebow & Kelly (2001) foreground discussions of hegemony and power, concepts that later become central to the analysis of colonial domination and decolonization. Decolonization has occurred during various periods of modern history, including the decolonization of Africa, the dissolution of the Spanish Empire in the 19th century, and the collapse of empires such as the German, Austro-Hungarian, Ottoman, and Russian empires after World War I, as well as the British, French, Dutch, Portuguese, Belgian, Italian, and Japanese empires following World War II, and the Soviet Union at the end of the Cold War (Strayer & Robert, 2001). Contemporary society comprises sophisticated cultural components, with the core of any culture residing in its inherent characteristics and foundational ideas. This establishes the basis of a sociocultural framework that has developed from the pre-colonial to the post-colonial period. The notion of 'resistance' functions as a foundational framework for the critical analysis of post-colonialism. Resistance is a recurring theme and an implicit focal point in much of post-colonial criticism and theory, especially in the analysis of the shortcomings or postponement of liberation in regions such as Africa, South Asia, and the

Caribbean. However, resistance is a multifaceted concept in post-colonial studies, encompassing a diverse range of methods, practices, and more (Jefferess, 2008).

Indigenous scholars have criticized post-colonialism for obscuring the ongoing nature of settler colonialism. The central contention is whether institutional reconciliation attempts reinforce the historical dominance of settler colonialism or promote Indigenous self-determination in alignment with Indigenous interests, perspectives, and ethics (Kohn & Kavita, 2024; Adom, 2019). Critics of post-colonial theory argue that colonial discourse theory has shifted focus from the economic and political impacts of colonialism to concerns of language and identity. They believe that post-colonial theory has diminished the attention given to the material effects of colonialism on colonized people, as well as its role in the rise of global capitalism as an ideology and material structure.

1.2.1 Nigeria's Society, Culture and the Role of Pottery Practices

The role and impact of pottery practices from ancient civilizations cannot be overstated in today's modern society. Societies have become the canvas through which pottery cultures and potters' creativity thrive in documenting the history of their origin and civilization (Ozidede, 2025a). Culture has been defined and redefined by several authors and scholars, and a simple definition would lead to the conclusion that culture is the way of life of a society; this suggests that culture is what defines a society or vis-a-vis. Nigeria has a rich artistic heritage that dates back centuries. Nigerian Art history provides insights into practices and practical activities and skills similar to those found in different parts of the world. This vibrant cultural practice encompasses traditional crafts, performance (music, dance, drama, etc.), and visual arts, with a focus on traditional craft works (Naija Scholar, 2024). Practically, all of Nigeria's ethnic groups engage in some form of art. Similar to other African societies, early Nigerians viewed art as inseparable from their religion (Njoku & Okafor, 2019). This diversity contributes to a complex tapestry of intersecting identities, which, when viewed with historical and socio-political factors, has occasionally been associated with tensions of cultural and communal clashes in the region (Aboderun, 2021).

Culture is formed through shared practices in a specific place, and it influences how people engage in these practices and how it shapes their surroundings (Causadias, 2020; Triandis, 2007). Culture is a comprehensive system, a dynamic entity that is both created by people, places, and practices and, in turn, shapes them. The system and its elements are so interconnected that they mutually influence each other - the whole organizes the parts, and the parts organize the whole. People are the primary components

of a cultural system. Culture cannot exist without people, and people cannot exist without culture (Cooper & Denner, 1998). Culture encompasses the ways of thinking, acting, and material objects that together form a people's way of life. Culture is the blueprint for how we live, think, and act, while society is a group of people within a geographic area. Some scholars argue that culture may include tradition and inheritance (www.uop.edu.pk/ocontents/culture.pdf). Therefore, it is essential to improve the definitions of culture to avoid misconceptions and biases that shape theories, research, and practices.

Nigerian artists have a long history of storytelling through a range of visual and material practices that have drawn on the country's many cultural traditions. Among the Igbo in the Southeast, Uli painting, mural decoration, masquerade arts and pottery have been significant channels for the transmission of social, spiritual, and cultural narratives (Ikwuemesi & Obodo, 2021). Textile production, and especially Adire, weaving, carving, and decorative arts, have been a major site of cultural expression and memory in the Southwest (Rice, 2020). The north of Nigeria also has its own textile traditions, such as the re-interpretation of Adire by Hausa makers in Kano and Zaria (Renne, 2020). Material and performative practices such as pottery, sculpture and festival celebrations are significant forms of cultural expression in the South-South (Abamwa & Diakparomre, 2021; Ovie-Jack, 2020). Such practices reveal that Nigerian art is, in the aggregate, a geographically dispersed phenomenon, rooted in a multiplicity of indigenous visual languages, material traditions, histories, and systems of cultural knowledge.

Artistic explorations flourished after the independence of Nigeria and many contemporary art styles emerged (Iriwieri, 2007), negotiating tradition, modernity and experimentation. In their work, Njoku & Okafor (2019) cite Aina Onabolu as a pioneer who blended western realism with local themes. But Nigerian artists negotiated between tradition and modernity differently. For cultural continuity, artists such as Kunle Filani have called for the preservation of African traditional art forms. Uche Okeke, Demas Nwoko, and Bruce Onobrakpeya attempted to fuse traditional aesthetics with modern influences, which in turn; produced a multicultural atmosphere. Others, such as Dele Jegede, Kolade Oshinowo and Abiodun Olaku, incorporated the contemporary trends into existing modernist paradigms. Experimental artists such as El Anatsui, Bright Ugochukwu Eke, Olu Amoda, Sokari Douglas Camp, Yinka Shonibare and Uchay Joel Chima have also challenged conventional techniques through innovative media and concepts.

The tradition of pottery in various African cultures dates back to prehistoric times and continues to evolve, as documented by Ozidede, (2024) and Ojie & Egede (2010). The various cultures in Africa have progressively enhanced their ceramic/pottery techniques and production procedures. In this environment, society shapes the cultural practices individuals adopt and defines what is deemed normal, mirroring the African-Nigerian ideology alongside other global civilizations. As such, indigenous Nigerian pottery represents a rich cultural heritage, displaying the nation's artistic and utilitarian craftsmanship (Idoko, 2024). Nigerian pottery emerged as a necessity to meet basic societal needs. This is evident through the creation of utilitarian vessels using indigenous technology (hands and legs), which highlights the importance of the first potter's technology in all pottery civilizations worldwide. Pottery refers to objects made by molding or shaping moist clay into objects, such as vases, pots, plates, or sculptured articles; and hardening it by heating it in an enclosed chamber, usually a kiln (Ojie-Ogwu & Ozidede, 2021; Ozidede, 2025b; 2017; Encarta, 2009). In recent years, the significance of pottery culture has transcended from simple production of tableware or utilitarian objects in various Nigerian societies. Scholars have highlighted and deliberated on the importance of pottery in society and culture. Pottery making today is one of the primary occupations and livelihoods of people around the Niger Delta (Abamwa, 2002a; Ojie, 2000), and there are several pottery centers spread across Nigeria, Africa, and the world. Historically, Nigerian women have played a central role in pottery production (Fatayi, 2018; Kashim & Shado, 2017; Agberia, 2005), creating forms that can be used for domestic, ceremonial, religious, and ritual purposes in regions such as Nok, Gwari, Osun, Ekiti, and Akoko Edo, Amai to mention a few.

1.3 Materials and Methods

This study employed descriptive research techniques to analyze the perspectives of researchers identified in multiple sources of literature. Such sources focused on literature regarding colonialism, decolonization, resistance, sovereignty, the cultural, and economic activities of indigenous peoples before colonization and post-colonization. Utilizing secondary data from printed and electronic sources, the study analyzed the importance, reliability and representativeness of the sources. The study turned to pottery practices in Nigerian society while reviewing the impact of colonization, also how Nigerian potters resisted colonial influences as a means of upholding traditional knowledge and craft skills in present day.

1.3.1 Pre-Colonial Nigerian Pottery Practices: *Materials, Styles, Techniques, and Technology*

Examination of pre-colonial pottery in Nigeria gifts valuable insights into the political, social, economic, and cultural aspects of an ancient civilization. It sheds light on how these materials were crafted to meet the needs of society, being transformed into utilitarian objects. Exploring the materials, techniques, and styles employed in pottery production, provides a glimpse into the technological advancements and artistic expressions of early Nigerian societies before colonization. Choice of materials in pre-colonial Nigerian pottery was largely influenced by the geographical and ecological conditions of the region where the potters resided. Earthenware clay was the main material used by traditional potters in Nigeria during this era and still continues to be used today. The use of this material, was due to its availability through weathering and its ease of sourcing locally. The plasticity of earthenware clay allowed for the formation of various shapes and sizes, and its abundance made it accessible to many cultures (Ojie, 2002). Additionally, potters mixed additives such as sand, grit, grog (fired crushed clay), or organic materials with the clay to modify its properties, enhance durability, improve thermal shock resistance, adjust porosity, and alter its texture and color for aesthetic purposes (textured by indigenous knowledge system that has been adapted over generations). These sedimentary materials were typically found along river banks, gathered water strata, and ponds. The easy access of this material made it the ideal choice for pottery production in Nigeria.

Traditional methods of preparing earthenware clay by indigenous potters in the pre-colonial period involved stamping on the clay with their feet or pounding it in a mortar. After this process, the clay was covered with pieces of sack or leaves (either wet or dried) to ensure homogeneity before it was ready for use by the potter. The readiness of the clay was also influenced by ecological factors such as weathering; because pottery production in indigenous settings was produced mainly during the dry seasons. It is important to note that these potters were also farmers who relied on agricultural produce to support their families (Ozidede, 2025a). Their agricultural practices included cassava farming, rice cultivation, millet farming, yam cultivation, palm oil production (with the residual waste being molded to form traditional lights by hunters for hunting at night), rubber tapping, and plantain farming, amongst others. The waste residue from their farm produce, such as the husks from grains (rice, millet, corn cobs), stems, stocks, and peelings

from tubers (cassava, plantain, etc.), served as fuel to facilitate the indigenous firing process. The use of agricultural waste reduced dirt, enabling a clean environment; while the residue from the waste helped in preheating and subsequently, during the entire firing process.



Figure 1. Traditional method of pottery
air stack firing



Figure 2. Traditional Open
production.

www.commonsm.wikimedia.org/

www.congress-intercultural.eu/

The predominant firing technology in pre-colonial civilization was mainly the open firing or pit firing method (Ojie-Ogwu & Ozidede, 2021; Abamwa, 2002b; Rhodes 1968). Agumba & Abbott (1996) explained that this method of firing is advantageous to indigenous potters because it is less expensive in terms of materials and fairly simple to operate, as it doesn't require advanced technological knowledge to operate. Additionally, kiln is crucial in pottery production at any level, because it is made to house heat in an enclosed chamber which utilizes embodied energy during firing (Ozidede, 2025b); but the mode of firing in indigenous settings leads to a substantial amount of energy depletion, since it lacks the insulating properties of a modern kiln structure. This means that the mode of firing these indigenous wares requires skilled manpower to operate round the clock until the firing process is completed. Pottery making in Nigerian pre-colonial society was characterized by a culture specific period based diversity. Pottery was primarily produced using the coiling, slab, and pinch methods. To create the vessel's shape, long "snakes" of clay were coiled, which were then smoothed. In slab construction flat pieces of clay were shaped or moulded into the required form (Otimeyin, 2015).



Figure 3. Cross-section of Indigenous

Nupe-pot (35 cm)

Pottery tools for surface decoration.

www.bonhams.com/auction/19988/lot/327/nupe-pot-

www.pottedhistory.co.uk



Figure 4. Nigerian

There were many different styles of Nigerian pottery made before colonization, so both the cultural, spiritual and functional needs of the society were met in the designs. It developed with distinctive artistic expressions using different decorative techniques, including incising, stamping, and local glazing. Indigenous-style local glazing is similar to contemporary raku firing and glazing, where hot-fired wares are dipped into local mixtures using handheld tongs. This sealing process from the concussion aids in the reduction of porosity in the ware after firing. In modern pottery production, dipping finished pottery wares into glaze is also a common technique. This local glazing mixture consists of fat and oil-based materials as well as plants, which were previously soaked and stored in a container of already fired vessels. Pottery patterns and motifs may carry symbolic, social, historical, or spiritual meanings; often drawing on elements of the natural and cultural environment, which may appear in zoomorphic, anthropomorphic, floral, geometric, or biomorphic forms. Such visual and iconographic dynamics afford the surfaces of pottery wares to act as an arena for artistic expression and the communication of community identity, belief systems, indigenous values, and collective memory (Berns 2020; Gosselain 1999; Okpoko 1987; Adeyemi & Golitko 2026). The intended use, — ceremonial or domestic; for storage, etc., was established by the form and style of the pottery. David et al. (2024) pointed out that not all design inscriptions on wares are indicative of an ideological statement but rather that meaning can be produced through other means (social memory, identity, and context).

Finished pottery products were distributed and marketed using some indigenous transportation system which was customized according to the environment and available resources. These vessels were transferred through head loading by potters, traders and consumers from their source to the site of usage. In fact, this type of pottery was transported over short and long distances even in difficult terrains across various regions of Nigeria where animals such as donkeys, camels, and horses were available (Drengk & Madugu, 2023; Delvoye & Mayor, 2026). Even riverine communities depended upon canoes and other watercraft technologies to connect production centers with markets. Pottery was distributed through a network of movement between production sites, homes, and marketplaces. These methods of transport supported indigenous exchange networks; allowing the mobility of pottery as utilitarian goods and as cultural material objects.

1.3.2 Continuities from Colonial to Postcolonial Pottery Periods

The impact of colonialism on Nigerian pottery practices is evident in the adaptation and utilization of indigenous knowledge by indigenous Nigerian potters. Indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) can be used in understanding the broad skills and philosophies developed by societies with long histories of interaction or an integration with their natural environments. Despite changes in material, techniques, technology, ideology, and philosophy, pottery practice was not a new phenomenon for them (the indigenous Nigerian potters). The extensive knowledge system passed down from generation to generation facilitated the adaptability, utilization, and hybridization of new materials, methods, and techniques introduced during the colonial period by the colonizers.

The arrival of colonialism brought industrialization and advancements in pottery production technology. This compelled indigenous potters to learn new ways by adapting new philosophies, modern themes for their production as well as artistic explorations and expressions. However, post-colonial vocabularies in Nigerian pottery contributed significantly to the global art scene by combining traditional materials and methods with innovative techniques, emergent styles, challenging and transcending colonial narratives. The impact of colonialism led to the introduction of foreign human influence such as Kenneth C. Murray, Michael Cardew, Bernard Leach among other notable personalities. The establishment of various pottery centers around Nigeria changed the trajectory of Indigenous pottery practices. There is a likelihood that these pottery personalities brought their British pottery influence to enhance pottery practice in Nigeria. They introduced Kiln building which enhanced the firing of wares (a shift from the normal rudimentary style of

indigenous firing), throwing on potter's kicked wheel and glazing of pottery wares (Peters & Gadzama, 2019). These individuals were the pioneers of modern pottery practices in Nigeria. They recruited and trained individuals who were ready to develop and adapt to new and improved methods of pottery production. One of such prominent students of the Abuja pottery center was Ladi Kwali (Agberia 2005). Ladi Kwali, initially, was trained by her aunt in her village at Kwali. She was discovered for her exceptional pottery skills by the Emir of Abuja, Alhaji Suleiman Barau, and later caught the eye of potter Michael Cardew during his 1952 tour. Kwali became the first female trainee at the pottery training center in Abuja founded Cardew in 1952, and she completed her training in 1959 (Awarewomenartist.com). Although Ladi Kwali was taught wheel-throwing by Cardew, Kwali excelled in creating pots using traditional free-hand modelling, decorating them with intricate designs and figures. Her innovative use of stoneware clay, new materials and, foreign techniques transformed her creation into fine art pieces, marking a significant shift from local to internationally acclaimed, and thus, establishing her as a pioneer of African ceramic art modernist. Her prominence soon attracted the attention of the Nigerian government, which featured her on Nigerian official currency.

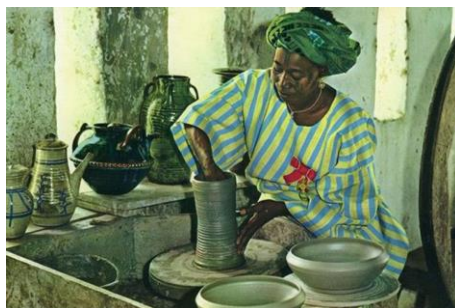


Figure 5. Ladi Kwali throwing with the potter's wheel.



Figure

6. Modern Ceramic tools.

www.awarewomenartists.com

[www.u-](http://www.u-buy.ng)
[buy.ng](http://www.u-buy.ng)

Materials used in the post-colonial ceramic production are considered to have symbolic significance. Collectively, they are often integrated into place to honour and restore indigenous resources that have been historically exploited and overlooked during colonial periods. It's a deliberate rejection of that old reality, and an attempt at

sustainability and self-sufficiency, so it is a political and practical inclinations at the same time. Whether colonial or post-colonial activities, indigenous pottery styles still capture the union of artistic ambition and respect for tradition. The methods utilized by these new contemporaries include industrial reproduction (utilizing Plaster of Paris [POP], Jigger and Jollyng Machines, etc.), 3D printing and prototyping (Chen et al., 2018; Gibson et al., 2014; Bengisu et al., 2013), hand-forming techniques like coiling extruders, slab rollers, and the innovative concept of the potter's wheel development (Ojie & Egede, 2009; Bazunu & Odokuma, 2008). Thus, a significant technological advancement that allows for more precision and reliable production.

A new era for ceramic designers was ushered in with the advent of clay bodies, such as stoneware and porcelain (a shift from the normal earthenware clay), which transformed the ancient craft into a more sustainable modern form. Alternative fire procedures and a move toward the use of more sophisticated firing equipment, which use various kiln types and fuels to generate diverse atmospheric conditions, are two new methods that post-colonial potters are currently exploring with (Ozidede, 2017). This has increased administrative and operational effectiveness and made it possible to determine the material composition with greater accuracy. The use of unconventional materials has allowed the medium to grow from classic to more sophisticated shapes for different uses. The pieces by Onuzulike are excellent illustrations of the post-colonial concept of hybridity, which promotes dynamic and distinctive artistic expressions through the blending of conventional and contemporary concepts. From eclectic realism to arid geometric minimalism, post-colonial pottery resists homogenization. Some artists cull from the fragmented view of the world offered by colonial societies and experiment with minimalism, abstraction or a blend of influences, while others reach back using motifs, patterns and symbols from their cultural history. Post-colonial pottery cannot just be seen as an art form, but much also as healing, remembrance and resistance. It is also a mechanism of historical reclamation and social indictment. Potters negotiate in their work, the relationship of their own personalities, cultures and politics to the legacy of colonialism, parsing through their own complicity and imagining features based on decolonial futures.

For instance, *In Royal Skirt* (2022), Ozioma Onuzulike (b. 1972) deploys materiality of clay as a resistance by correcting broken indigenous stories of colonial and postcolonial narratives. The work traces back to royal and ceremonial regalia, both permanent symbols of power and continuity in African cultures. Constructed with over

5,000 palm-kernel shell and strained ceramic beads, the skirt figures authority as a species of ornament and burden. It weighs 58 kilograms, and does burden on the history of leaders and communities grappling with colonial exploitation and post-colonial instability. Individually, each bead is unique and are knitted together into a massed texture recalling the pottery traditions of Nigeria, where the pot is at once a functional and cosmological form. Here, palm kernel, one of the mainstays of Onuzulike's practice, evokes cycles of sustenance, exchange, and memories of extraction under colonial economies. His work also solidifies identity by providing a sense of togetherness as a communal ethos.



Figure 7. Ozioma Onuzulike, Royal Skirt, 2022 Stoneware clay bodies, palm kernel shells, recycled glass, and copper wire (5,382 ceramic and natural palm kernel shell beads), 179.1 x 119.4 x 15.2 cm (70 1/2 x 47 x 6 in).
<https://ko-artspace.com/artists/51-ozima-onuzulike/works/511-ozima-onuzulike-royal-skirt-2022/>

The recycled glass and copper wire is a mechanism that extends his work into an ecological landscape (turning refuse into cultural artifacts and culture). Onuzulike resonates indigenous eco-intelligence, and contributes to ongoing debates on sustainability as a practice (Ozidede, 2025c). Pottery here is not just preservation but regeneration, a bridge between ancestral habits and present-day exigencies. The contradiction of Royal Skirt being textile concept yet solid, ornamental yet cumbersome, is a symbolic documentation of the nested tensions and terrains of Nigeria's material pasts.

It is a testament to pottery as memory and critique, a means through which indigenous practices square off against colonial legacies while innovating new logics of survival. Across clay, shell and glass, Onuzulike emphasizes the way that matter itself can reclaim narrative agency, by reclaiming pottery as archive and agent of change.

1.4 Challenges and Opportunities in Decolonizing Indigenous Knowledge System

The process of decolonizing Indigenous knowledge systems in pottery practices has come with a unique set of challenges and opportunities that could benefit greatly from further examination. Such a thistle needs to be critically evaluated as it delves deep into the layered process of recognizing, respecting and incorporating Indigenous clay works techniques and philosophies in the working-footprint of pottery today. Such a statement aims to redress historical injustices that engendered colonialism-based cultural instability and sustainability. There exist new forms of discourses in the domain of knowledge, education, apprentice, and tradition. This introspection resonates with the academic scholarly dialogue regarding the tension and possibilities in intergenerational exchange and transmission of cultural heritage and skills. The remarkable work undertaken by UNESCO (2019) to safeguard intangible cultural heritage has contributed to a growing awareness of the significance of traditional knowledge and the threats to its survival in modern society. One of the challenges faced by the social and cultural values and institutions as a result of modernization is a major issue in the study; the confrontation between cultures that the Westernization and the globalization brings, that demand non-western societies to assimilate their practices, suffer from cultural clashes and the creation of identity crises. On the other hand, it reflects prospects of modernization by offering better quality of life, greater access to information, and reforms towards better governance and democratic values in terms of artistic values. By studying the difficult of market forces and valorization of indigenous pottery, an abundance of review and reviewers has risen, in an attempt to reveal the nuances within this complex topic. Scholars have tried to disassemble, identify and then understand the push and pull between indigenous craftsmanship and global market trends. A vein of research focuses on the commodification of indigenous art and crafts, emphasizing the tensions between maintaining cultural integrity and the forces of commercialization. Arguably, both ways on the global demand of indigenous products leads to economic benefits and cultural dilution.

1.5 Discussion and Conclusion

In the post-colonial period, the study of potters and their pottery practices indicates a tension-filled relationship between tradition and modernity. This narrative has thus informed the ways indigenous Nigerian potters have grappled to weather globalizations pressures while sustaining their cultural practice. The trajectory of pottery practices among Nigerian potters during the pre and post-colonial eras has thus served as a microcosm of a larger narrative of resistance, resilience and renaissance that highlights the role of cultural preservation amidst external domination. These colonialism challenges have, however, opened doorways that catapulted decolonization as the signpost of a new era for the Nigerian post-colonial potters of resistance against imported-colonial cultural hegemony. This post-colonial period has seen a resurgence of interest in indigenous techniques and philosophies. Potters have begun to reclaim their heritage by blending traditional techniques with these new colonial ideas, in a quest to craft innovative ideas that speak to the complexities of Nigeria's post-colonial identity. This renaissance of pottery practices has been fueled by the nationalistic desire to celebrate Nigerian culture and resources, driving a shift towards indigenously sourced materials and themes which are a reflection of the nation's diverse ethnic and cultural groups.

Pottery is a very important culture that is similar in production in almost all parts of the world. The study highlights its practical value but also it's potential as a medium for historical narrative, identity and political expression. As they are symbiotic - pottery provides insights into socio-political and cultural narratives; and vice versa, enhancing the understanding of the identity and itself becomes an indicator of sovereignty. A simple understanding of the materials, techniques, and styles that were used by the pre-colonial Nigerian pottery culture offers an extensive acumen into the technological innovations and artistic endeavors of ancient civilizations before colonialism. This study has accentuated the complexity and diversity of pre-colonial pottery practices among indigenous potters and their indigenous knowledge, thereby, heightens the significance of a continued research in this field of ceramic / pottery and material science.

The pre and Post-colonial Nigerian pottery practices have offered rich and multifaceted insights into the ongoing processes of cultural assertion, hybridization, and resistance. This beam of light stands as a powerful illustration of how art can both preserve heritage and propel forward-looking dialogues which are embedded within it the struggles, hopes, and dreams of post-colonial realities. Post-colonial potters not only reconstruct

their identities with their pottery creations, but also, through the process; they have been able to invite global audiences to reconsider ideas and narratives of history and power paradigms that serve colonial systems and ideas while also decolonizing the decolonized. Thus, these evolution is a fascinating concept in regards to the production of pottery and in terms of recreating culture and supporting cultural identity; potters remain the focal transmitter of these ancient practices. These traditions are as much about artistic expressions as they are an illustration of a communal connection to their ancestral lands, resources, and histories. These practices are crucial in maintaining cultural sovereignty, especially for indigenous populations who face pressure from globalization and cultural assimilation or the threat of extinction.

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