

***IKOLO: AN IGBO IDIOPHONE OF INDIGENOUS RELIGIOUS SACRED SOUND AMONG
THE AGULERI PEOPLE OF ANAMBRA STATE, NIGERIA.***

BY

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DECLARATION

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DEDICATION

TO THE DEITIES AND FALLEN HEROES OF AGULERI.

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the meaning Aguleri people of South-Eastern Nigeria attribute to the *Ikolo* as a sacred drum. In the perception of the Aguleri people, the sacred sound of the *Ikolo* is an aspect of African indigenous religious practice which they engage with through the mediation of its symbolic functions in order to create meaning for life. In this regard, *Ikolo* sound plays a significant role in nurturing, structuring and shaping their religion and culture. The objective of this work is to investigate the symbolic functions of this indigenous sacred drum as it concerns those aspects of its use in Aguleri society to bring out its religious, cultural, political, ethical and economic significance. The referent point of *Ikolo* as an instrument of indigenous sacred sound is loaded with the ritual symbolism it evokes, which imbues it with mystical power and a sacredness that is played out in the gendered nature of Aguleri rituals. The *Ikolo* represents patriarchal privilege. Born out of fieldwork and interviews, I found that in traditional Igbo religion and especially among the Aguleri people, the *Ikolo* sacred sound has three significant and related functions. The first one is that it enables the indigenous people of Aguleri to bridge the gap between the seen and unseen worlds and thus, bring them into contact with all those forces that are believed to control the destinies of man. Secondly, through its auditory authority the *Ikolo* makes possible the invocation and possession by ancestral spirits in a highly ritualised contexts. Finally, the sacred sound of the *Ikolo* upholds and sustains the Aguleri religious system, and a complex traditional religious rituals which uphold the privileges of those men who have been initiated into the ancestral cult. Nonetheless, the *Ikolo* sacred sound provides a channel through which the indigenous Aguleri community activates and sustains unique religious communication with their deities and ancestors. Ultimately, this thesis points to an understanding of sound as integral to religious identity and practice in African traditional religion.

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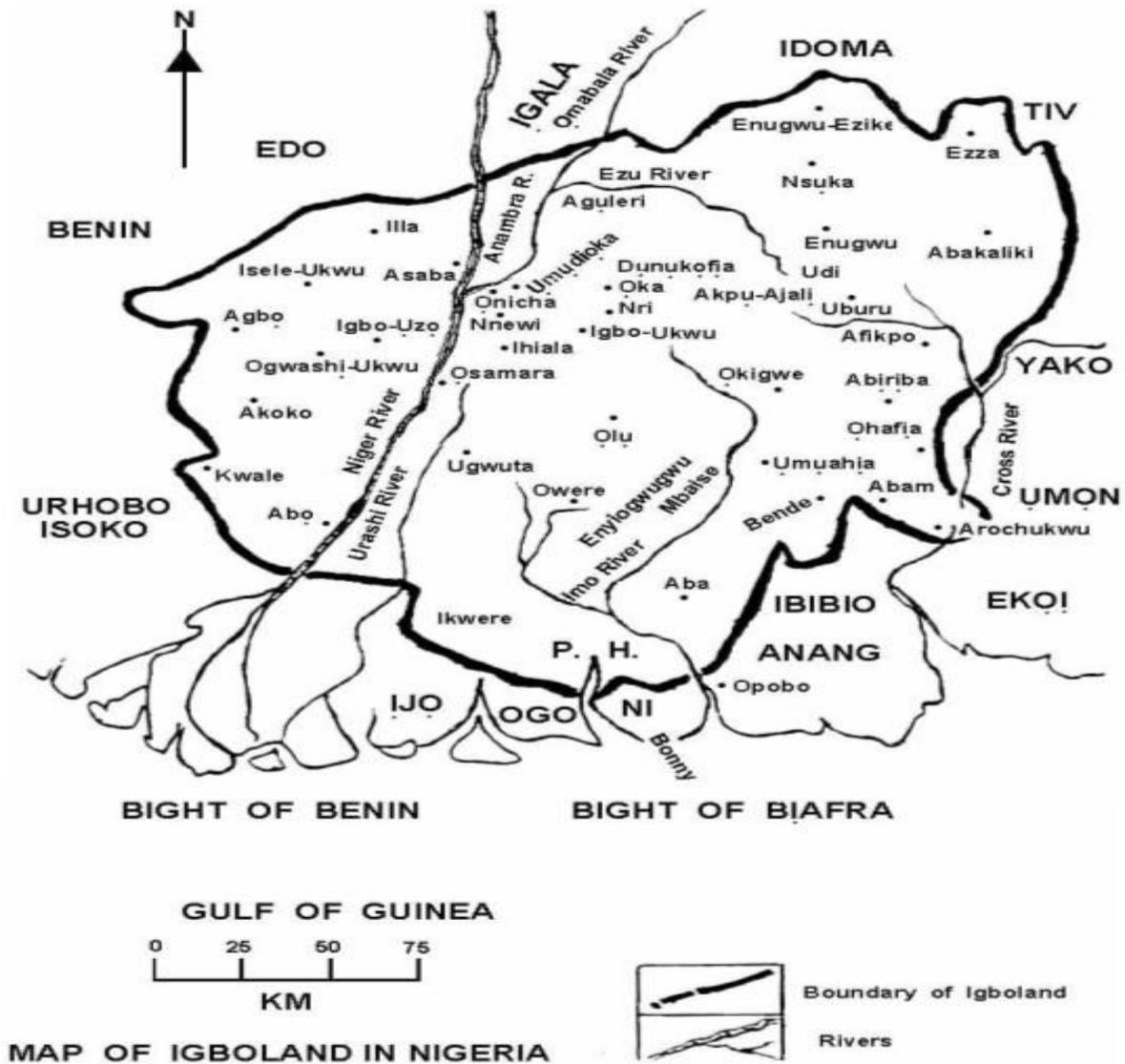
MAP OF NIGERIA



Source; Fist Bank of Nigeria, 2009.

Figure 1: The Map of Anambra State where Aguleri the cradle of the Igbo race is situated.

MAP OF IGBOLAND



Source; Ebiem, (2013)

Figure 2: The indication on the top is where the town Aguleri is situated in the Nigeria-Igbo Map. It is here –[the confluence of *Omambala* and *Ezu* rivers] that Eri the Father of the Igbo race first settled.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

This study investigates the meaning Aguleri people of South-Eastern Nigeria attribute to the *Ikolo*, an idiophone believed to be endowed with sacred qualities. In the perception of the Aguleri people, the sacred sound of the *Ikolo* is an aspect of African indigenous religious practice which they engage with through the mediation of its symbolic functions in order to create meaning for life and general wellbeing. In this regard, *Ikolo* sound plays a significant role in nurturing, structuring and shaping their religion and culture.

However, as a sacred indigenous instrument, the *Ikolo* is used during ritual dances which are restricted to only the initiated and as such its sound constitute part of the essential tools through which the people engage in religious practice. In this sense, the *Ikolo* is central to the Aguleri understanding of who they are and to maintaining their identity (Nnamah, 2002:8). Yet, such indigenous, sacred instruments and their symbolic function continue to be relegated and disregarded in discussion about African religion. This has been said to be largely due to non-acceptance and lack of understanding of its core tenets, and existence (Olupona, 1991:1).

In postcolonial Africa, efforts are afoot with indigenous sacred specialists and scholars of African religion asserting the legitimacy of African indigenous religion which the cynical observers of the African religion labelled or tagged idolatry, fetishism, animism and occultism (Nwoye, 2012:5). In traditional religious rituals, Africans make use of a range of indigenous instruments, sticks, stones, or chants to produce sounds as a means of communication with the supernatural (Dulles, 2014:398). In these traditions, a sacred specialist is often the only person that is believed to possess the spiritual insight to decode, interpret and disseminate the messages emanating from the sound produced from such sacred instruments during religious ritual.

In fact, for a long time scholars of African religion(s) have focused a great deal on issues concerning ritual, divination and conceptions of the supernatural, and paid little attention to the study of sound in African religion. Michael Nabofa (1994) in challenging such narrow conceptions about African religions

argues that it is precisely because of such limited regard that traditional African religious symbols and practices have often been looked at in a derogatory manner. Elsewhere, Peter Clarke (1991) argued such conceptions of traditional religion seldom relied on empirical data but instead was often informed by evolutionary, imperial theories of social and intellectual that characterized much of the nineteenth century.

This brings me to the discourse on the *Ikolo* as an Igbo idiophone of sacred sound among the Aguleri people of Anambra, Nigeria. *Ikolo* is a hollowed log of wood which is drummed upon with sticks, the *Ikolo* is widely used in the Aguleri ritual calendar. Invariably, little attention or emphasis is placed on African symbols, which serve as a channel or medium of communication in indigenous society (Nabofa, 1994), hence the present discourse on the sacred sound of the *Ikolo* and its symbolism. In indigenous religions, instruments like the *Ikolo* sacred drum have various social functions in the area of traditional and religious practices and acts as an accompaniment to songs. The *Ikolo* sacred drum has special social rules reserved for it and its decoration holds highly symbolic meaning related to the Aguleri religious worldview. So intricate is it to the wider Igbo culture that it is used for the heralding sound and announcement of festivals like *Ovala* or traditional burial of any of the royalty, chiefs or titled men. As such, this thesis will focus attention on the examination of the *Ikolo* as a site of identity-making but also an expression of how sacred sound is mediated in African traditional religion. In particular, I will explore the role of *Ikolo* sound in spirit invocation, and spirit possession practices that are central to Aguleri religion.

BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH PROBLEMS

This thesis is located at the intersection between African Religion, ritual, and identity, with a particular focus on how the sound of the *Ikolo* is implicated. I propose to investigate the social, political and religious beliefs that are mediated through the use of *Ikolo*, an Igbo idiophone among the Aguleri people. This is because sound, as an integral aspect of African traditional belief system that is believed to be responsible for spirit invocation and spirit possession, has been under-researched. Also, I will draw on ethnomusicology as a discourse and as a framework for exploring *Ikolo* as an idiophone in African religious communication. Ethnomusicology includes the idea that musical instruments and styles are

frequently the resultant effect of specific cultural determinants emanating from social ethno-historical factors of various kinds (Behague, 2006).

Ethnomusicology concerns itself primarily with non-written musical traditions and attempts to integrate musical expressions of a given culture. According to Charles Seeger (1977) the field of ethnomusicology is concerned with the analytical study of the process of variations of musical text, on the one hand, and the social context for music making on the other. It seeks to explore not only the structure of the musical products of a given society but it also examines the ethnic-elements, social-historical, and economic aspects (Kerman, 1985). This provides a useful framework for examining the social and religious identity of the Aguleri community, which is portrayed through the sound of the *Ikolo*. The *Ikolo* is believed to uphold Aguleri as an auditory community in line with Igbo traditional soundscape. Through the sacred sound of the *Ikolo*, the relationship between the community, their deities and ancestors are structured, managed and mediated. In Aguleri worldview, the *Ikolo* is said to speak the languages of the ancestors and to be the voice of the community.

According to Jacob Olupona (1991), the study of African Traditional Religion has consistently been characterized by issues revolving around the colonial ideas about African beliefs and the recovery of indigenous religious beliefs and practices. Thus, I propose to use a postcolonial theoretical framework because it allows for an approach to African religion that goes beyond the politics of exclusion and recovery (Chidester, 1996), and it holds resources that makes possible the production of new forms of creative resistance and religious self-assertion. Through this study, I propose to examine and critique how in the Aguleri cosmology, almost all social and religious relations are mediated through the sacred sound produced by the beating of the *Ikolo* drum.

Overall in African religious studies, there has been little interest in sacred sound and this makes the concept of sacred sound in African Traditional Religion novel in religious scholarship. It is only recently that one of the first conferences to focus on sacred sound in African and diasporic religions has been announced for early 2015. There has been some work on Christian inculturation in Africa which began with the encouragement of local music in church service as early as 1958 (Tovey, 2004:124). In 2007, Donatus Ohadike published his book *Sacred Drums of Liberation: Religions and Music of Resistance in*

Africa and the Diaspora within which he explores the use of drums in practices of resistance, citing the use of drums in South Africa and in the Caribbean. Ademola Adegbite's 1991 article "The Concept of Sound in African Traditional Religion" probably represents a lone voice in the field of African religion. Adegbite (1991:45) asserts that sound has a broader social and ritual significance to African people, that extend beyond the superficial meaning attached to it. He goes on to state that "in those societies, the textual contents of music are not just mere words, but have mystical potency". Thus we come to see that the idea of sacred sound is not a term ordinarily associated with African Traditional Religion, and yet sound has been central to the invocation of the ancestors, whether a bleating animal, or a drum or a horn being blown (Nabofa, 1994). Through exploring the significance and use of the *Ikolo*, I propose to show that sacred sound is central, not only to the Aguleri religious worldview, but also to African Traditional Religion in general. I also propose to investigate its significance as sound is tied to ritual activation in African indigenous religion as a way to commune with the divine.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Sacred sound is not a term ordinarily associated with in African Traditional Religion, yet sound has been central to the invocation of the ancestral spirits, whether through the mediation of chanting, bleating animal, or idiophones. Insofar as sound as an intrinsic element of African Traditional religious practice has not been researched in religious scholarship, I propose to delve into an investigation of the *Ikolo* drum as an idiophone of religious communication among the Aguleri people of Nigeria, as it has to do with the Igbo Traditional Religion, through the mediation of its sacred sound. Through exploring the significance and use of sounds, I propose to show that sacred sound is central, not only to other religious worldview, but also to African Traditional Religion in particular.

Also, the purpose of this research is to attain a better understanding of common theological themes that feature in African Traditional Religion through the mediation of *Ikolo's* sound and its practices. The outcome of the study could equally lead to better religious interaction, tolerance, understanding, and above all, dialogue among the adherents of other world religions. It reveals the need to jealously safeguard common theological and philosophical qualities and themes of African Traditional Religion such as spirit invocation, ritual, symbolism, and dance; to preserve and use them as mediums in

propagating indigenous religion and culture. Also, it makes possible a more considered understanding of Traditional Religion in terms of their method of worship or approach to the divine, spirit possession, and the significance of sound.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

On this note, investigation into religious sacred sound is comparatively novel in African religious studies as mentioned earlier. Most religious bodies or organizations claim that their creeds were divinely revealed and are therefore infallible, immutable and binding on all people. The issue of sound has been well researched in other religious traditions but in African Traditional Religion, there has been a preoccupation with performance and rituals but not with the sensory, like sounds, and scent. Scholarly, research into sacred sound as an aspect of African Traditional Religion has been neglected and this has led to its under-development. The research suggests possible ways of justifying that in African Traditional Religion, sound as an element of religious practice is very significant in the ritual practice by its adherents because it aid in spiritual upliftment. However, here it has two main significances. Firstly, as it concerns social significance, *Ikolo* sacred sound constitutes part of what the Aguleri community use for their social and ritual announcement, sustaining Aguleri ritual order, ritual festivals and Aguleri identity, mediating social order and social relations.

Secondly, my research suggested the theological and religious significance, *Ikolo* through its symbology acts as a ritual space for attaining spirit invocation and spirit possession. It is the booming, the vibrations and continuous repetition of the *Ikolo* sound that is actually the basic ingredient responsible for the activation and management of spirit invocation and spirit possession on the initiates during ritual festivals such as the *Ovala*. Here, it is believed that hearing the pounding and booming sound that emanates from the *Ikolo* sacred drum instills or creates eerie feelings within the body of the believer and at this time the spirit “mounts” the heads of the initiates, thereby making them feel holy, and culminate the ritual power of the *Ikolo* sound.

Consequently, the gap I sought to fill in this thesis is that sound as an element of African Traditional Religion should be looked upon as an important ingredient in religious and ritual practices of traditional

religion. It is hoped to bridge a gap in the study of African religion as it concerns sacred sound and Africaness, as it is a kind of indigenous medium for religious communication.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Aguleri, where the fieldwork took place, is in Anambra State, an Igbo town in South-Eastern Nigeria. It is in Anambra east local government area. The main language of the entire community is Igbo. Majority of them are Christians, although a handful of them are traditional believers who still carry the banners of their ancestor worship. Observation, interviews and focus groups were conducted in Aguleri for the period of three months from July to September 2013.

The research was conducted in Aguleri (town) with the indigenes, including both initiates and non-initiates. Initiates denote those Aguleri men who are invited and initiated into a cult of the same title. I used unstructured interview questions to carry out seven (7) interviews with key informants which included the King and six other senior Aguleri elders and leaders. These interviewees are regarded as the custodians of the tradition, who were able to speak to the functions and symbolism of the *Ikolo*. I also interviewed eighteen [18] other individuals in three focus groups who were non-initiates including women sacred specialists, and local Christians who spoke on their views of the *Ikolo* and its ritual significance.

This study includes a mixture of empirical and documentary research approaches and practices in the form of interviews, observation and archival research. The non-empirical aspect of archival research was to ascertain the history of the Aguleri, and of the sacred drum *Ikolo*. The empirical research captured participants' experiences and the researcher's observation during the *Ovala* festival.

KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The central research question of this study was: What is the religious and cultural significance of the *Ikolo* in mediating Aguleri identity and ritual practices? In order to address this central question, I explored four sub-questions. These were:

1. What makes *Ikolo* a sacred instrument?

2. What is the significance of *Ikolo* sacred sound in Aguleri cosmology?
3. How is *Ikolo* sacred sound mediated through ritual practices?
4. How does *Ikolo* sacred sound function in the social order in Aguleri community?

To explore these issues, I conducted different interviews with 25 members of the Aguleri community of various categories.

SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The research discussed at length the origin of the *Ikolo*, the functions of the *Ikolo* as it pertains to political, socio-religious, economic and social order. Elements and mechanics of the *Ikolo* as a sacred instrument of the Aguleri people were analyzed. The sacredness of the *Ikolo*, ritual and symbolism of the *Ikolo* as regards its ritual performance in *Ovala* festival was examined. *Ikolo* and gender as a domain for dominance which can bolster patriarchy was examined critically. The socio-cultural and religious significance of the *Ovala* festival were also analyzed, and its general socio-cultural implications formed the scope of the study.

I consciously set out to remain critical of the position of initiates, but being an Aguleri initiate myself, this was difficult at times. I had to inform participants that my task was not to advocate for the prosperity of the *Ikolo* but to carry out an examination of its social and ritual function.

Basically, there are series of limitations or constraints that confronted me in the course of this work. The problem of interpretation of certain data posed a big challenge. The transcription and translation from Igbo to English, via a translator, was time consuming and required vigilance on my part in terms of managing the data. During fieldwork, I discovered that the village women were reluctant to participate in the research. Some suggested that they did not want to participate due the high regard for the *Ikolo* among the initiates and Aguleri leadership. Nonetheless, I managed to interview six women as part of a focus groups discussion. Unfortunately, this study (on sound) was not, by design, concerned with a gendered-critique of the *Ikolo* or Aguleri ritual culture, although this did emerge as a significant issue.

Conclusion

This Chapter introduced the study and provided significant information about the general prevalence, attitudes, debates and by-laws related to the use of the *Ikolo* sacred drum of the Aguleri people. The focus was on situating the research problem, the rationale for the study, and its purpose. I have sought to set out the research questions explored and the objectives of the study. Further I have sought to give some hints of how the data was gathered and some provisional “findings” related to the social and ritual significance of the *Ikolo* in everyday life and how Aguleri religious identity mediated through spirit invocation, and possession is upheld and made possible through the sound of the *Ikolo*.

CHAPTER TWO

SITUATING THE *IKOLO* IN THE CONTEXT OF AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION

The main focus of this thesis centers around religion, ritual, and identity-construction as mediated through the *Ikolo* sacred sound. I propose to delve into this study to examine the social, political and religious belief systems that are sustained by the use of the *Ikolo*, an Igbo idiophone used among the people of Aguleri. The *Ikolo* and the sound that it produces are intimately tied up with Aguleri social and religious identity. As a religious artifact and symbol, it informs a semiotic system, helping the Aguleri people to locate themselves in time and in space, and thus, making them part of an auditory community (Garrioch, 2003:5). *Ikolo* is said to help to structure their relationships with their deities or ancestors and its sacred sound is regarded as an embodiment and the hallmark of Aguleri culture and tradition (Idigo, 2002:24).

A SURVEY IN AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION

According to Chinua Achebe (2012), in his book *There Was A Country: A Personal History of Biafra*, the emergence of African Traditional Religion as a religious discourse took effect when some European missionaries came to Africa. They knew very little of the history and complexity of the people and the continent which made them to believe that Africa had no culture, no religion, and no history. On that basis, many advocated the idea that Africans were savages, and their culture was primitive and barbaric, and cannot cope with the requirements of modern society (Ikenga-Metuh, 2002). Reflecting on the ways in which colonization impacted on local cultures and traditions, Robert Young, in his book *Post-Colonialism: A Very Short Introduction* cautions that at the colonial frontier hasty conclusion and translations were often “part of the process of domination, of achieving control, a violence carried out on the language, culture, and people being translated” (2003:140). Robin Horton (1968) in his article “Neo-Tylorism: Sound or Sinister Prejudice?” warns that this researcher must always seek to use a suitable index when interrogating traditional religions in seemingly in pre-literate cultures. He posits that because scholarship can never really be divorced from the social and political context within which it produced, “what is required in studying them (*traditional religions*) is not an abstention from intellectualist

analysis, but a delicate balancing of intellectualist with political, aesthetic and other analysis” (Horton, 1968:626). Undoubtedly, scholarship on religion in Africa and African religion has had a highly contested history, insofar as some scholars viewed indigenous religions as pre-modern and developmental, while others viewed African religion as primordial and therefore legitimate, authentic and at risk of corruption by the forces of modernity – as will be illustrated by the discussion below. According to John Mbiti in his book *Introduction to African Religion* (1975:40) “all African peoples believe in God. They take this belief for granted. It is at the centre of African Religion that this dominates all its other beliefs. But exactly how this belief in God originated, we do not know. We only know that it is a very ancient belief in African religious life”. Of course, Mbiti’s early scholarship has since been critically interrogated and most scholars of religion in Africa would be cautious about making such emphatic statements about theism in African religion. Bright (1981) contests that the patriarchal religion of the Christian tradition was understood and used as a yardstick against which to measure all other religious traditions encountered in the ‘new’ world by colonists and missionaries. He argued that in line with evolutionary theories popular during the nineteenth century, the actual religion of the African’s nomadic ancestors was often described as an animism or polydaemonism (Bright, 1981:69). Thus the idea of African religion as a primitive form of religion, or pre-religion dominated thinking and scholarship in the field well into the twentieth century.

Commenting on early European analyses of religion and belief in Africa, David Chidester (1996) in his book *Savage Systems: Colonialism and Comparative Religion in Southern Africa*, argues that for the longest time during colonial incursion into Africa, indigenous people were regarded as without religion, and when their practices were acknowledged they were said to be superstitions and religious in a primitive form. As such Sulaiman Osho (2011) in his article “The Uniqueness of African Means of Communication in Contemporary World” argued that because of this biased colonial sciences and accounts about Africa, the continent’s history, heritage, culture, and customs continued to be distorted. He contends that accounts of African history, culture and religion are often slanted, and always manufactured to reinforce the prevailing Western account of African history (Osho, 2011:5). Writing on the privileging of monotheism in the study of religion, Samuel Johnson contests that historically scholarship in religion has been preoccupied with the Christian world and the Muslim world, while all

the were considered as barbarous (cited in Carpenter, 1913:24). It is in this context that Kwame Bediako (1992) in *The Impact of Culture on Christian Thought in the Second Century and Modern Africa*, sees the missionary enterprise as part of a benevolent Western movement to elevate the condition of African peoples, not only through the introduction of Christianity but also a total Western cultural package. Diagonally opposite to Bediako, Frantz Fanon (1967) in his book *The Wretched of the Earth* equated Christianity with pesticide insofar as it is seen to destroy the traditions of the colonized peoples. By and large, the colonial observers of indigenous religion viewed African religion and culture as primitive and as such they regarded African sacred sound and its instrumentation as pagan” (Dube, 1996:106).

However, despite these colonial conceptions of African religion and culture, the postcolonial context increasingly reflect the recognition that not only are music and religion fundamental to human experience, they are also inextricably linked in the context of religious worship (Friedmann, 2009:1). According to Arinze (1973) in, *The Church and Nigerian Culture*, increasing inculturation can be seen for example, in the ways the Roman Catholic Church has borrowed African indigenous religious forms of communicating, by introducing African musical instruments as their style of religious practices. In seeking to resolve some of the tension that came about because of inculturation, and in particular claims that drumming unleashed evil forces and energies, Pobee (1979:66) in his book, *Toward An African Theology*, insists that “no serious student of the subject of drumming can maintain that drumming per se is heathen or evil.” He then goes on to recount how many churches in Africa, including the Roman Catholics and the Anglicans, have for years used drums at worship. In fact, the Roman Catholic Church Council’s Vatican II [Austin Flannery (1988) Vatican Council 11: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents] clearly reflects the church’s position and account of how the church has been using and should continue to use indigenous communication systems to enlighten her members and thereby promote and propagate dialogue among people’s of living faiths.

As this body of scholarship flourished it drew a wide range of response about the relationship between Christianity and indigenous religious traditions. As such, Bolaji Idowu (1965) in his book, *Towards an Indigenous Church*, warns that when mission is understood as crossing frontiers to evangelise other cultures, it often served to reinforce the understanding that Western culture is superior to African culture.

Benezet Bujo in his book *African Theology in Its Social Context* goes further and suggests that all the ritual elements of African Traditional Religion should be incorporated by the church in its socio-sacral and ritual order so as to achieve real inculturation instead of what he describes as an application of “an ideological superstructure at the service of the bourgeoisie” (1992:72).

On the relation between christianity and African indigenous religion, John Pobee (1979:67) asserted that the negative views about African indigenous religion is sometimes due to straight arrogance, often taking the opinion that anything non-European could not be good. Jafotito Sofola (1973:60) in his book *African Culture and the African Personality: What Makes an African Person African?* argues that through “their self-declared superiority of their culture, a declaration which was strongly backed by ethnocentricism and racial arrogance and the points of bayonet and machine guns” colonialist went all over the world to assert western religion(s) and cultures as superior to any other. It is on this position that Udoabata Onunwa (2002) in his article titled “Christian Missionary And Their Influence on Eastern Nigeria” asserts that the early Christian missionaries behaved like social revolutionaries, always trying to achieve the goal of their mission – the conversion of Africans to Christianity. That is the reason why Nabofa (1994:12) in his book, *Religious Communication: A Study in African Traditional Religion*, suggests that the early Christian missionaries who had contact with Africa, instead of developing, civilizing and educating Africans, they succeeded not only in under-developing, under-educating Christian converts, but also aided significantly the erosion and destruction of old traditions and beliefs. Nonetheless, in a postcolonial era characterized by secularization, globalization, and the expansion of dominant world religions, indigenous religious traditions throughout the world are affected. Olupona (2004) in his book *Beyond Primitivism: Indigenous Tradition And Modernity*, argues that in almost every case, indigenous peoples have developed their own responses to the challenges of multi-faceted modernity.

According to Ejizu (2002) in his article “Continuity And Discontinuity in Igbo Traditional Religion”, white European missionaries because of a scholarly bias and social evolutionary theories, had already developed many negative attitudes towards African traditional religious practices – including the use of drumming. Insufficient research and lack of adequate knowledge coupled with racial bias, frequently

resulted wild speculations and misrepresentations by missionary writers and ethnographers when it came to Igbo traditional belief and practices.

Similarly, Gerdes Fleurant (2000) in his article, “The Music of Haiti Vodun”, argues that ignorance of the organizing principles of African sacred music prevented serious and more accurate study of the musical traditions. Likewise, Donatus Ohadike (2007:13) in his book, *Sacred Drums of Liberation: Religions and Music of Resistance in Africa and the Diaspora*, argues that as a result of sustained denigration of indigenous traditions and of people’s self-esteem, indigenous people soon came to resent their own traditions and practices because they were being judged according to indices that rendered their indigenous musical and religious practices as primitive, and not worthy of consideration. In defence of African Traditional Religion, Niangoran-Bouah (1991:82) in his paper, “The Talking Drum: A Traditional Instrument of Liturgy and of Mediation with the Sacred”, laments that by “throwing into the fire and locking into museums the most beautiful specimens in order to silence Africans, a significant access to understanding of African traditional thought was blocked”. He goes on to argue that such prejudiced practices were not able to contain the survival of sacred knowledge, tradition and religions which were deposited into various artifacts because the traditions survived in the memory and practices of the people. (Niangoran-Bouah, 1991:82). He further writes that the “drum is more than a book; it is a fundamental institution” (Niangoran-Bouah, 1991:82). Jacob Olupona (1991:7) in the article “Major Issues in the Study of African Traditional Religion” argues that such prejudices about African religion in general “prevented a proper understanding of the drum’s major role in the social life of the Africans”. It is on this development that African religion scholars like Olupona (1991) describes African sacred drums (like the Ikolo) as a living institution. Likewise, Niangoran-Bouah (1991) argues that the talking drum is to Africans what the Bible and Quran are to Christians and Muslims respectively: “it is sacred, it is the repository of history, of values, and of the divine – and thus, serves as the preferred source of mediation between the human and the sacred”. (Niangoran-Bouah, 1991:82). Thus, it could be argued that the place and significance of the sacred or talking drum in African religion has been gravely under-estimated by missionaries, colonist and scholars of religion alike, especially insofar as they failed to grasp its significance within the worldview of the indigenous believer.

Samovar et al (2009:107) in their book, *Communication between Cultures*, argues that, “at the heart of each of the world’s main religious traditions lies a body of sacred wisdom”. Thus the Durkheimian conception of the sacred as indicative of an early stage of human evolution does not offer the most helpful entry point into the field. Durkheim treated sacred ritual practices, as remnants of prehistoric religion, indicative of the pre-modern state of the society in question, thus limiting the prospects for doing meaningful research expressions of the sacred that does not fit within a traditionally theistic frame of reference. Massimo Rosati (2009:139) in his article “Ritual and Sacred: A Neo Durkheimian Analysis of Politics, Religion and the Self” asserts that “Durkheim is deemed precious in his assertion that modern society must learn from past societies, that modernity is fragile and somewhat tragic, and that we can find some answers in religion”. Situating this kind of Durkheimian thinking in the context of African religion Chidester (1996) suggests that we might need to be open to the possibility of indigenous traditions being an organic, stable system despite the fact that it relies on animal worship or plant icons as expressions of the supernatural. It is therefore not surprising that in the late colonial period, drums and other indigenous artifacts came to represent the stubborn persistence of the indigenous. Thus, Niangoran-Bouah (1991) reminds us that Christian missionaries used the sacred drum as an excuse to wage socio-religious war against African Traditional Religion and that in the process they confiscated and destroyed thousands of drums because they were viewed as a medium through which satanic and other maleficent forces prevent possible converts from accepting the missionary Christian message.

On this view, Olupona (2004) argues that such terms served as an ideological justifications for Western hegemony – a set of cultural, ideological, and linguistic parameters which are used to sustain particular ways of understanding and speaking about the world. Nonetheless, indigenous religious systems are responding by carrying out internal reforms in beliefs and practices to reassert their contemporary relevance (Olupona, 2004:6). It is on this position that Raphael Njoku (2007) in his article “Challenging Possession with Sacred Drums and Dance” asserts that today, Africans in their spirited efforts for recovery and reform, have held strongly to the trilogy of religion, music and dance as a mode of dialogue with their ancestors, a symbol of strength, a means of cultural expression, and idiom of identity. This new development makes it possible to arrive at an enhanced appreciation of African traditional belief system. African religion has often been articulated through the use of exotic images

and music among them “jungles, drums, bare breasts, sweaty bodies, mysteriousness, spirituality and primitivism” (Impey, 1992:173). Chidester (1996:218) argues that the history of indigenous people and their religion moved from denial to discovery during the colonial period. He holds that the sacredness of other sacred objects provided basis for reconstructing the organic unity and culture. Thus, we can infer that an indigenous community like the Aguleri also rely on an instrument made of wood and a totem carved on it to which it traced its origin. Partow Hooshmandrad (2004:52-53) in his thesis “Performing the Belief: Sacred Musical Practice of the Kurdish Ahl-I Haqq of Guran” and writing in the context of sacred musical practice of the Kurdish, argues that the *tanbur*, like the *Ikolo*, is deeply infused with the sacred and in the absence of an agreed upon historical origin, it could be seen as an “absolute idea” which was designed and exists externally in a “Divine Consciousness” that was now manifested.

Thus, drawing upon what has been called the ancient theory of religion; European comparativists would identify a motive in human emotions of awe and terror before the wild, uncontrollable forces of nature. It is in relation to the context of the sacred that I wish to turn my attention to the relatively new discipline of drumology in which *Ikolo* as a sacred drum falls as a useful source of valuable information for African studies in general and African religious practices in particular (Olupona, 1991:7). Basically, *Ikolo* is a wooden musical instrument that is used in ritual festivals like the *Ovala* and as such, it is part of the studies in the area of drumology. As a point of emphasis, the ingredients that make the *Ikolo* unique in Aguleri cosmology is the booming, vibration, and sonority of its sound. This sound infects the initiates with spirit possession, speaking of its voice in deep tones and dancing styles during the ritual of *Ovala* festival, as was clearly articulated by some of my participants.

CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION

African Traditional Religion from time immemorial has been concerned with issues of ancestor veneration, spirit invocation and ritual practices that have to do with the use of sacred drums or sound. Nonetheless, it was the scholarly writings of John Ferguson (1869-1870) (cited in Chidester 1996:207) which described African Traditional Religions as the worship of animals and plants, that actually sparked the in-depth exploration of African religious life in the nineteenth century. It would be almost a century later that African scholars like Idowu, in his book, *African Traditional Religion: A Definition* (1973),

and Mbiti, in his book, *Concepts of God In Africa* (1970), took it upon themselves to examine the nature of African Traditional Religion, from the perspective of those who live in Africa and who practices the religions. According to Chidester (1996) the supposed discovery of indigenous religions was the practice of morphological comparison that established analogies between the strange and the familiar. He argues that morphology did not depend upon reconstructing historical links between ancient and contemporary religions; rather, morphological comparison relied exclusively on the observation of formal or functional resemblance (Chidester, 1996:18). In his *Global Citizenship, Cultural Citizenship and World Religions in Religion Education*, Chidester goes on to argue that “the study of religion and religions is not a strategy for dealing with foreign subjects but a therapy for dealing with fears that arise in ongoing and regular relations with fellow citizens who live and work in the same operational environment” (2002: 4). It has been argued by early African scholars of religion, such as Mbiti (1970) and Idowu (1971) that Africans supposedly have their own way of worshipping God and divinities, and that these religious ways of knowing and practice is equivalent to the religions of the colonialists who had previously described the religions of the Africans as primitive. Benjamin Ray (1976:15) in his book, *African Religions: Symbol, Ritual, and Community*, suggests that Idowu is rightly indignant at much of what has passed for the study of African religions, but contests that Idowu’s own purpose work in the field is avowedly theological, not merely anthropological. Despite his critiques of even the remedial scholarship in the field of African religions, Ray goes on to highlight Idowu’s work precisely because it goes beyond the descriptive level to that of metaphysics which makes religion, religion.

Harold Turner (1981) in his article “The Way Forward in the Religious Study of African Primal Religions”, and more recently, David Westerlund (2006) in his book, *African Indigenous Religions and Disease Causation: From Spiritual Beings*, lamented the tendency to reject all scholarship of African indigenous religions by non-Africans as western constructs and methods. This practice of exclusion and expulsion in the field of African religion, while intent on guarding against a history of distortion and misrepresentation, has also facilitated the marginalization of African religion in the broader field of religious studies. This movement is primarily concerned with setting the record straight regarding the designation of African religion by such names as paganism, heathenism, juju, fetishism, idolatry, and animism through the use of ritual sound. Turner (1981:3) argues that in spite of the undoubted mistakes

of the past, this attitude must be firmly rejected when applied to the international resources available today for the study of religions. Reflecting on the insular nature of scholarship on African religion and culture, Meyer Fortes (1974:6) in his article “African Cultural Values and the Situation of the Intellectual” maintains that “those among them who are engaged in the same academic enterprises and enquiries as their Western counterparts have been concerned with in the past thirty years, come out, broadly, with the same observation and conclusions... And this holds out not only for anthropology but also for musicology”.

On the ethical dimensions of African indigenous systems, Jacob Ayantayo (2001:45) in his paper “The Ethical Dimensions of African Indigenous Communication Systems: Analysis” explores the ethical meanings, messages, information and interpretations, arising from African indigenous systems and argues that using non-traditional musical instruments in carrying out religious practices is alien to African people. According to Michael Nabofa (1994:5) in his book, *Symbolism in African Traditional Religion*, “the enthusiasm with which Africans attend places of worship and patronize religious specialists where such indigenous musical instruments are used” reflects the conviction that sounds enhances the communication between the human and the supernatural. This understanding of sound as somewhat central to African ways of being and believing is also captured by Walter Rodney (1972) in his book, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, when he posits that music and dance played key roles in pre-modern African societies – evidenced by fact that music and dance is almost always present at birth, initiation, marriage, death as well as appearing at times of recreation. So intimately does he regard the relation between sound and African identity that he concluded: “Africa is the continent of drums and percussion and African peoples reached the pinnacle of achievement in that sphere” (1972:41). On the other hand, Westerlund (2006) posits that several scholars have stressed the extraordinary paucity of communal rituals, which contrasts vividly with many over generalized presentations of African religions as being particularly rich in terms of such rituals. Reinforcing this point, Mathias Guenther (1979), in his article “Bushman Religion and the (Non) esense of Anthropological Theory of Religion”, argues that as a rule, initiation rituals and trance dances are the only elaborate communal rituals performed during the annual ritual calendar which involves sound.

Conceiving of religion more generally, Bruce Lincoln (1998:65), in his article “Conflict”, advocates the need to have a conception of religion which is not based on beliefs and moral injunctions but rather a conception of religion that relies on “multiple components that can relate to one another in a variety of ways including disjuncture and contradictions”. He further argues that whenever one of these components plays a role of “some seriousness” within any given conflict, it should be acknowledged that the conflict has a religious underpinning/dimension (Lincoln, 1998:65). This actually tallies with the ritual performance which can contribute significantly to the enhancement of the universe, according to Lincoln (1989:53). Michael Bourdillon (1990:14), in his book “Religion and Society: A Text for Africa”, argues that in the context of Africa, such rituals are performative primarily because it is concerned with human action and social relation in particular, and often as a way of ameliorating social tensions. Similarly, Rosati (2009) argues that ritual in the context of sacrality are vital concepts for understanding and coming to terms with modernity, and as a result, religion is regarded by many a necessary resource for making whole our common world.

Drawing our attention to the role of ritual in African media and the popular imagination, Innocent Uwah (2010), in his article “The Representation of African Traditional Religion and Culture in Nigerian Popular Films”, asserts that Africans communicate to god(s), deities and ancestors through festivals and rituals both in private and in public. He concludes that the wide regard for, and currency of religious ritual has become evident in the increasingly central role it is offered in Nigerian films. The recognition of the abiding power and efficacy of African traditional religion and ritual is very vividly expressed in the work of Nabofa (1994) titled *Religious Communication: A Study in African Traditional Religion*, where he explores African Traditional Religion from the twin perspective of religious communication theory and the practice of arts and culture. He argues that the study of religion has made us to realize that religious practices take place at two main levels: inner and outer planes. The inner level concerns the divine disclosure, and this occurs between people, and can include telepathy and divination. The outer plane concerns expressions of the relationship between people and the supernatural (Nabofa, 1994:iv). Ikenga-Metuh (1987), in his book *Comparative Studies of African Traditional Religion*, asserts that African Traditional Religion is a living religion and that African Traditional Religion is virtually written in the routine of the everyday life of the community. He claims that it is enshrined in the customs,

traditions, culture, festivals, myths, legends, proverbs and sayings of the people (Ikenga-Metuh,1987:20). I may thus, conclude that African Traditional Religion cannot be studied in isolation from other aspects of a community's social life. It is with this notion and the conception of African Religion as articulated and mediated through ritual sound that I propose to explore the *Ikolo* as an Igbo idiophone that permeates every aspect of Aguleri social and religious world through its sound. What is evident from the literature reviewed above is the fact that while there has been little scholarship on sound in African religion, many commentators nonetheless articulate the intimate link between African religion and ritual, and the centrality of sound therein.

RELIGION AND SACRED SOUND

Sacred Sound and World Religions

Sound or music is an intrinsic element in religious communication that enhances worship and aid religious experience and expression; hence, the importance of the use of sacred music in the ritual liturgies of the followers of the world religions. For example, John Bulmer, in his paper "Music in Relation to Public Worship", argues that "music is as an element in Divine Service and an aid in public worship, it is hardly necessary to adduce arguments in favour of a connection which is felt by all to be a most appropriate one" (1881:67). For Bulmer, religion and religious practice are intertwined with music through the mediation of of sacred sound. For him, Sacred music or sacred sound is believed to be used to invoke the mystical and facilitate communion between the divine and the human (1881:67). It is this notion that makes all adherents of the world's religions to have high regard for sacred music. Likewise, Jonathan Friedmann (2009:6-7), in book his *The Value of Sacred Music: An Anthropology of Essential Writings, 1801-1918*, argues that sacred music serve as a conduit through which religious persons "enter the religious dimension through the mediation of its drama of words and music which helps to inspire spiritual intension, and exemplifies music's potentials to enhance the experience of living". According to Stephen Marini (2003:7), in his book *Sacred Songs in America: Religion, Music, and Public Culture*, sacred sound is presented in a social context as "consciously prepared to facilitate such a religious event", and symbolically moves worshipers away from everyday concerns, and into a "shared mythic consciousness" (Marini, 2003:7).For example, for Nicholas Cook (1987:1) in *A Guide To Musical*

Analysis, music “unlock the most hidden contents of [one’s] spiritual and emotional being” and thus, we consciously or unconsciously relate particular sound stimuli to non-musical concepts, images, and qualities. Thus, Richard Viladesau (2000), in his book *Theology and the Arts: Encountering God Through Music, Arts and Rhetoric*”, argues that this ability to transcend the material also explains why such music can often be seen to be the height of spiritual expression or, alternatively, at the heart of sensual depravity. Similarly, Donatus Ohadike (2007) claims that sacred music is indispensable to African religious worship; without it, it is difficult to achieve a deep religious experience, while Aloysius Lugira (1999:75) in his book *World Religions: African Traditional Religion*”, posits that “music is an audible expression of African prayer”. He argues that because they are regarded as powerful means of religious expression, African religious rituals would be lifeless without the accompaniment of music and dancing (Lugira, 1999:75). Ohadike (2007:6) reminds his reader that in *Voodoo, Candomble, Shango, and Kumina* worship, for example, it is difficult for devotees to experience spirit possession without the assistance of music produced from such sacred idiophones, instruments or from chanting. Similarly, Moshe Idel (1997:163), in his book *Conceptualization of Music in Jewish Mysticism* states that “music is portrayed as part of the rite, and it is quite plausible that the musical ritual of the Levites was conceived of as primarily enabling the ecstatic experience of the High Priest”. He further observes that “in the Kabbalah, music induces a feeling of joy which contributes, according to the rabbinic literature, to the occurrence of the prophecy; or more spiritual type of perception” (Idel, 1997:185). Thus, Thomas Trotter (1987), in his article “On being Alive to the Arts in Music and Religion: Music”, concludes that since music emanates from the very being of every person, it has always played an important role in relation to religion and its practices. In fact, music is a natural and an essential part of liturgical experience, but few who engage in religious worship seek to understand the reasons for the unity of music and prayer, or the qualities of music that justify its religious significance.

Bruno Nettl (1983:160), in his book *The Study of Ethnomusicology: Twenty-nine Issues and Concepts*”, writing about sacred sound from the Islamic point of view, argues that the “adherents of Islam give it a role of low importance because, for them, this kind of mediation is not needed. A special device for addressing the supernatural - a priest or music - is not really necessary. It is nevertheless there, but technically not recognized as music”. Veronica Doubleday (2006:111), in her paper “The Frame Drum in

the Middle East: Women, Musical Instruments, and Power”, confirms that Islamic legal scholars have generally condemned music through focusing on musical instruments, thus leaving unaccompanied song in a separate and less blame-able category. She argues that the belief in Qur’anic recitation is quite distinct from music and based on this, in Muslim cultures, a broad distinction is often made between musical instruments and singing (Doubleday, 2006:111). Ruth Stone (1989:75), in her article “Sound and Rhythm in Corporate Ritual in Arabia”, reminds her readers that “though ethnomusicologists might consider the call to prayer, and the chanted prayers which the gathered group performs, music, because of its sustained and rhythmically patterned tones, [Muslims] separate these two forms from the *musiqa* that contains texts which comment on things of the secular world”. This is particularly true for example, in Afghanistan, where words for music [Persian *saz*, Greek *musiqi*] are synonymous with musical instrument, and singing [*Khandan*] is closely related to reading and speech (Baily, 1996:147-148; Sakata, 2002:46-48). Muslim legal scholars, however, argue that all musical instruments have negative powers and that they can lure human beings to lapse into sin (Doubleday, 2006:111). John Baily, in his book *Music of Afghanistan: Professional Musicians in the City of Herat*, observes that for many Muslims, music possessed:

[1] the power to engross and attract, thus distracting people from prayer, [2] the power to deflect people from work, [3] the power to lead people astray, indulging in illicit activities, especially sex and imbibing “wine”, and [4] the power to bring people into contact with Satan (Baily, 1988:146- 147).

Doubleday (2006:111) argues that there is a visible conceptual nexus between musical instruments and Satan, especially with regards to sexuality. According to Henry George Farmer (1929:26), in his book *A History of Arabian Music*, “Abu Bakr, the Prophet Mohammad’s father in-law and successor, is reported to have called one such instrument, *mizmar al-shaitan*, the pipe of the devil”. Nettl (1983:158) writes that “the different repertoires within a culture can be interpreted as having specific functions. The music accompanying lascivious dancing in traditional night clubs has as its use the facilitation of dance. But beyond that, it functions as a force mediating between the human observer and the forbidden; it throws a cloak of formality over an otherwise unacceptable situation”. However, Doubleday (2006) argues that generally in Islamic Middle East, sexual symbolism is not commonly applied to musical instruments, yet

she states that erotic dancing to the rhythm of frame drums has a long history as an entertainment in palaces, harems, cabarets brothels and other places (2006:122).

The Sufis, however, argue in favour of the sacred capabilities of musical instruments which aid them in enhancing their religious rituals and facilitate ecstatic dances in pursuit of a sacred union with God (Doubleday, 2006:125). Significantly, Reynold Nicholson (1978), in his book *Rumi: Poet and Mystic*, makes clear the Sufi regard for sacred sound when he describes how for them such sacred sounds as able to empty the soul of the self and fill it with an experience of the divine. Similarly, according to Baily the concept of music as “spiritual food” actually finds clear interpretation and expression in Persian culture (Baily, 1988:152-155). Today, modern and visionary scholars have come up with intensive research in support of the symbolic uses of musical instruments like the *Ikolo* for religious purposes among the Islamic cultures and it is against this background that Scheherazade Hassan (1980:11), in his book *Les Instruments de Musique en Irak et leur Role dans la Societe Traditionelle*, argues that despite the wide theological contestation about the spiritual significance sound in religious life, we have not done enough research to know its real significance and meaning for the believers. Carole DeVale (1989:97), in his article “Power and Meaning in Musical Instruments”, asserts that sacred instruments “may serve as vehicle for communication between the world of the living and that of the ancestors and gods, the seen and the unseen”. Edward Dickinson (1903), in his article “Primitive and Ancient Religious Music”, writing on sacred music in a Christian context posits that insofar as the people have a share in religious functions, vocal music is employed by them in hymns to assist the singers to preserve the correct pitch and rhythm, and to touch the mood of the worshipers and increase their sense of awe in the presence during religious rituals. He argues that “our knowledge of the uses of sacred music among the most ancient nations is chiefly confined to its functions in religious ceremony and that all ancient worship was ritualistic and administered by a priesthood, and the liturgies and ceremonial rites were intimately associated with music” (Dickinson, 1903:38). Altogether, it has been observed that sound is very paramount in world religions, whether sacred or profane, through the mediation of musical instruments. The implication of this is that sound has been employed in order to invest itself with the power control and maintain its external domination and its internal order.

Sacred Sound in African Religion

According to the National Teacher's Institute of Nigeria (NTI) "music would be described as the arrangement of organized sounds and silences, and that these different types of organized sounds and silences are heard in its different shapes and forms anywhere we go, anytime, for our day to day activities, be it religious, economic, socio-political and so on" (1990:7). Appollos Oziogu (2011:1), in his paper titled "Traditional Musical Instruments in Nigeria" supports this idea that music is "a combination of vocal or instrumental sounds or tones in varying melody, harmony, rhythm and timbre to form structurally, complete and emotionally expressive compositions". Writing less about music as form and more about its effect on the listener, Eyre Janes (1874) in his article "*The Emotions in Music*" claims that during symbolic ritual practices in African Traditional Religion, music emerges to induce a powerful influence upon the believer, to the extent that such a person might not be able to discriminate between their own actions and that being induced. Similarly, Nabofa (1994:56) suggests that in that situation transcendental consciousness induced by music the devotee would be so elated that he may start to see through the veil, to feel, narrate and testify to what he must have seen. Writing from the perspective of psychology of religion as it pertains to traditional practices, Oziogu asserts that "music is a refresher tonic to the troubled mind and the hunting; a spiritual appetizer, and an antidote to melancholic condition" (2011:1). He claims that that in this regard music functions so as to dispel negative emotions and instead fill the person with positive feelings such as joy and happiness. Kaufman Shelemay (2006:304), in his article "Ethiopian Musical Invention in Diaspora: A Tale of Three Musicians", argues that music helps bridge challenging transitions; and that "from ritual to politics to entertainment, music has the capability to embody ideas and sentiments important for individual and collective wellbeing". Ademola Adegbite (1991:53), in his article "The Drum and its Role in Yoruba Religion", asserts that in any attempt to distill a concept of sounds in African Traditional Religion "we have to look for it in African's predilection for esoteric and the occult; in religion and mysticism". The communicative value of music is however more apparent in Africa where music forms a very important part of their rich cultural heritage. Ohadike (2007) argues that "Africans on the Continent and in the diaspora use music and dance to express their feelings and to preserve their culture and history", and as a communication device, music also serves as a source and medium of record-keeping. Hudgens & Trillo (1990:52), in

their book *West Africa: The Rough Guide*, state that “nowhere in the world is music more a part of the very process of living than in Africa”. Similarly, Akinfenwa (2013), in his article “Music and Dance as Elements of Worship in Yoruba Religion” suggests that without music the impact of people’s worship is almost redundant. As an echo from an earlier era, Arthur Leonard (1906:429), in his book *Lower Niger and its Tribes*, asserts at the beginning of the last century, that “the religion of the natives [Africans] is their existence and their existence is their religion. It supplies the principles on which their law is dispensed and morality adjudicated. In fact, the entire life of Africans is so interwoven with music that they cannot do without it”.

It is on this position that Aylward Shorter (1978), in his book *African Culture and the Christian Church*, famously claims that “...Africans are notoriously religious”, while Elizabeth Isichei (1976), likewise, in her book, *A History of Igbo People*, asserts that “the Igbo’s are nothing if not profoundly religious, and all accounts of their life reflect the fact”. Echoing this sentiment of African people’s persistent religiosity, Stephen Ezeanya (1980), in his article “The Contributions of African Traditional Religion to Nation Building” also claims that in Africa, “life is religion, and religion is life”. More recently, Emeka Ekeke (2013:3), in his paper “African Traditional Religion: A Conceptual and Philosophical Analysis” ambitiously goes as far as to suggest that “this means that religion could not be explained away in Africa and whoever tries it will be seen as a stranger to Africa”. While John Mbiti (1975) uncritically and without qualification claims that religion is by far the richest part of the African heritage, it is John Chernoff (1999:172), in his book *Rhythmen der Gemeinschaft. Musik und Sensibilitat im afrikanischen Leben*, that introduced the idea of West African belief systems as a “danced belief”. Heuser (2008), in his article “*He Dances Like Isaiah Shembe: Ritual Aesthetics as a Marker of Church Difference*”, described African religious ritual as a form of worship that is visible and inherently attached to bodily action. Some of these ideas were introduced a decade earlier by James Early in his article on sacred sounds and beliefs titled “Sacred Sounds: Belief and Society”. He wrote that:

In some belief systems, music and sound vibrations are pathways for healing body, mind, and spirit. Among the wide range of human expressive behaviour, the capacity to infuse the joys, sorrows, and humility that characterize religious and spiritual beliefs into oral poetry, chants,

songs, and instrumental music is certainly one of the most powerful and inspirational ways all peoples and cultures acknowledge the spirit of the Supreme in their lives (1997:1).

In expanding our reflection on the relation between sound, dance and the production of the sacred, I am struck by Maria-Gabriele Wosien's claim in "*Sacred Dance: Encounter with the Gods*" when she writes that "man was taught how to dance by the animals, which he observed closely and learned to imitate their habits and characteristics" (1992:17). With regard to the Igbo context Judith Ballard (2006) writes in her paper "The Significance and Meaning of Drumming in Igbo and West African Religion", asserts that earliest religious ritual not just emerged from observing and making sense of nature, but was significantly evolved from the beat of the drum. Scholars such as Hailey (1957), in his book *An African Survey-Revised 1956*, and Akinfenwa (2013), claim that music and dance infuses all the activities of African life from the cradle to the grave, leading some scholar like Joseph Awolalu, in his article "African Traditional Religion as an Academic Discipline" to concluded that "the Africans are a singing race. A lot of their music is of a religious nature. In these songs, they portray their joy and sorrow, their hopes and fears" (1991:132). Awolalu goes on to suggest that these indigenous religious song contain rich data that must be researched by dedicated scholars, because for him the song reveal a great deal about people's beliefs and the history of how those beliefs came into being.. Similarly, according to Ruth Stone (1994:391), in her paper "Bringing the Extraordinary into the Ordinary: Music Performance" "religious Among The Kpelle of Liberia" aspect of music is fundamental to the very being of many musical acts and cannot be stripped from the performance. Thus, it is only for analytical ends that we can, to any extent, pull the religious from the performance bundle from temporary scrutiny". It is thus through ritual festivals like the *Ovala* celebration or the musical accompaniment at initiations, and burial ceremonies that Africans demonstrates the rich texture of their cultural and religious heritage.

Kwabena Nketia (1989) in his article "Musical Interaction in Ritual Events" argues that interacting and rejoicing with music and dance in the context of ritual and worship is also an important aspect of the African concept of religious expression and thus, may be given free reign at religious festivals. Advocating for a conception of sound and music as central to African religious ways of knowing and religious practice, Jonathan Lucas (1948), in his book *The Religion of the Yoruba*", posits that feasts like the *Ovala* festival or other first fruit festivals are often followed by general merriment, including ritual

processions and sacred dances. Finally, Kwasi Aduonum (1980), in his volume “*A Compilation, Analysis, and Adaptation of Selected Ghanaian Folk Tale Songs for Use in Elementary General Class*”, notes that “music in Africa is the soul which is ultimately concerned with various customs and religious practices”, while Mbiti (1991), elsewhere music is central to African worship, religious life and participation. While most scholars of African religion has observed that without the aid of sound in liturgical rituals in African Traditional Religion, religious worship and experience would not be complete, most of the scholarship remain superficial and anecdotal. Considerations of sacred sound in African religion, or the African religious worldview remains elusive, with most scholars and observers uncritically stating that African are a dancing race, religious and musical. What remains absent from the body of scholarship is a detailed and critical consideration (theory) of the material and theological significance of sacred sound in African religion, whether it is an idiophone or other instrument. We know little about what effect is really has on the believer and how such embodiment, or embodied experiences of the sacred is understood and articulated by the those who practice African traditional religion.

Sacred Sound in Igbo Religion

Sound is very significant in the religious practices of Igbo Religion. More especially African and Nigerian music are sung or produced in local language like that of the Igbos because it is believed that music has a universal appeal. This is why Akin Euba (1977:13), in his article “An Introduction to Music in Nigeria” argues that “Nigerian tone language usually had its own inherent melodic structure and the imposition of an imported melody resulted in a conflict with the natural melodic structure of the text, thereby distorting its meaning”. The spirituality of sacred sounds, bodily movement, chanting, incarnations, and divinations are literarily in tandem throughout the African diaspora. No wonder, Melville Herskovits (1941:224) in his book *The Myth of the Negro Past* argues that “the African past must be included under the rubric traditions of the past, whether these traditions are held overtly or not, becomes apparent where the greatest degree of acculturation to European norms has taken place”. Philip Tagg (1989:285-298), in his article “Open Letter: Black Music, Afro-American and European Music”, asserts that the distinction between Africans and Europeans are often based on essentialist ideas about music and people which are often ascribed racist stereotypes and assumptions. Ohadike (2007:2), writing

on Igbo religion argues that, “every sacred drum has a name, and can be conceived as belonging to a particular clan or family unit, albeit a family of drums [sic]”. DeVale (1989:97) stresses that “the magical power of musical instruments may be accumulated by the owner of the instruments. While, the power of an instrument usually emanates from its sound or music, this is not always the case; sometimes an instrument will continue to have a spiritual function after it is no longer played, or even be assigned a new religious function which it didn’t have while it was playable”. Ohadike (2007:2-3) asserts that in Igbo traditional religious belief system, “a sacred drum cannot be treated as the property of an individual. Instead, it is a member of a lineage organization. Like any other member of the lineage, it is treated with certain amount of respect, and it enjoys certain rights and privileges. This explains in part why an African clan could go to war if its sacred drum was violated, seized or stolen by another clan”. Ohadike (2007:194) again stresses that “one of the many ways to fight the enemy is to copy or capture his instruments and symbols of power such as masks, wooden gongs, and war-drums”. Such artifacts through the mediation of its sound are believed to be sacred and the symbol of authority that commands respect from all the community members (Ozah, 2006:71). Jonathan Friedmann (2009:6) argues that in traditional Igbo societies like the Aguleri, sacred music like the *Ikolo* “is a conduit through which believers enter the religious dimension”. He stresses that “through a complex drama of words and music, sacred song of the highest order – that which is sincere, inspired, and true to the liturgy – helps to inspire spiritual intention, and exemplifies music’s potential to enhance the experience of living” (Friedmann, 2009:6-7). Again, Friedmann (2009:7) posits that sacred music serves as what Durkheim called “a revitalizing function, reminding the community of its shared history and common social heritage”. In this way, the *Ikolo* music like every other ritualistic music or festival music performed for the New Yam festival would be out of place in time of burial ceremony (NTI, 1990:2). Bonaventure Umeogu (2013:26), in his article “Igbo African Education and Mass Communication” posits that in such occasions, “when the *Ikolo* sounds, it may mean a number of things ranging from sighting of a new moon; commencement of the New Yam festival or any other festivities; death of prominent man or to signal an impending doom”. Musical style in Igbo Religion according to Christopher Waterman (1990:8), in his book *Juju: A Social History and Ethnography of an African Popular Music*, may

articulate and define communal values in heterogeneous, rapidly transforming Igbo society like the Aguleri.

Nonetheless, the point being made here is that in Igbo Religion, ritual music like the *Ikolo* for a rite, in a ceremony or festival may not normally be performed or showcased in another context unless there are some special reasons for doing so (Nti, 1990:2). Teresa Reed (2012:10), in her article “Shared Possession: Black Pentecostals, Afro-Caribbeans, and Sacred Music”, argues that where such possessions happen, there is every tendency or probability that there will be differences in the “text” of the *Ikolo* sacred sound for the two occasions. This is because there are some myriads of mystical powers imbued in musical instruments like the *Ikolo* generally to invoke awe, aura and sacredness in man (Nabofa, 1994:35). According to DeVale, “such powers may relate to healing, physical strength, farming and hunting, safeguarding villages, or help with family problems, and musical instruments may facilitate spirit possession and exorcism, or serve as vehicles for communication between the world of the seen and the unseen” (1989:107). Through, the symbolism it utilizes and the sacred ethos it invokes, however, it retains the power to influence the spiritual state of its performers and to play a role in the religious consciousness of a community by whom or for whom it is performed (Dunbar-Hall, 2006:59). As a medium of religious practice, the sacred sound of the *Ikolo* thus becomes a source of authority in Aguleri community which “stand for a welcome, peace, unity, conviviality, joviality and so on” (Idigo, 2002:vi). Idigo argues, on the other hand, that its absence or mishandling in Igbo gatherings, social or otherwise invariably can cause confusion in such a way that nothing can move forward among the group until it is found and presented (Idigo, 2002:vi).

Henry Stobart (1994:35-48), in his article “Flourishing Horns and Enchanted Tubers, Music Potatoes in Highland Bolivia”, argues that the sound of sacred musical instruments (like that of the *Ikolo* in Igbo Traditional Religion) have the power to unite people, coordinating marching or work rhythms, or engendering group emotions, and such musical instruments may become an icon, it may be revered or reviled, and it may become targets of hatred or fear. He claims that magical powers are ascribed to such instruments, and their sounds may be used to promote the growth of plants or to influence weather conditions (Stobart, 1994:35-48). David McAllester (1954:88), in his paper “Enemy Way Music: A

Study of Social and Esthetic Values as Seen in Navaho Music”, argues that many of the usual functions of music - like the *Ikolo* sacred sound - “...are subordinated to an all-important function of supernatural control”. Nonetheless, it has been observed from research that talking drums like the *Ikolo* are widely used during rituals and festivals/ceremonies in Africa and beyond and it is also believed to possess supernatural powers, which has been a validation of ritual behaviour (Nettl, 1967c:153). Richard Baker (1975:25), in his book *The Magic of Music*, argues that today talking drums - like the *Ikolo* in Aguleri - “are still used for communication over long distances and are capable of great subtlety, for they use wide variations of pitch and rhythm and can be so eloquent that even those not familiar with spoken language in those parts of the world feel they can understand the message of the drums”. In Aguleri tradition and customs, linking it to Igbo religion, the community depends on the presumption that in normal prehistoric, folk, or tribal cultures, people used the sacred sound of the *Ikolo* to accomplish certain ends, and that therefore make the *Ikolo* sacred sound to be significant and functional in the cultural context. Schneider (1957:2) in his paper “Primitive Music”, argued that indigenous music “is bound up with everyday life and with many special factors: psychological, sociological, religious, symbolic, and linguistic”. In the Igbo context, the continued functions and power of the *Ikolo* has resided significantly in its ability, capability, and capacity to transform and to ease the Aguleri socio-cultural and socio-historical shifts in fostering the practices of Igbo Traditional Religion.

SOUND AND SYMBOLS IN AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION

Ikolo sound features most prominently during the *Ovala* festival in which members of the Aguleri community mark their yearly thanksgiving celebration for good and bumper harvests. Equally, they commemorate good yields in food crops especially yam crops because traditionally, cultivation of yam is associated with Anambra – Aguleri people (Onwuejeogwu, 1981:22; Isichei, 1983:24). In Igbo land as a whole, it is believed that yam is the king of all the food crops (Achebe, 1958:26-32), while Basden (1966:389-390), in his book *Niger Ibos*, describes it as “Igbo staff of life” which involves so much ritual festivals. According to the NTI (1990:2), such festivals are *ifejoku*, *Iwaji* or *Otite*, that is, New yam festivals which usually take place in August yearly (Idigo, 1990:62). The *Ovala* festival is for the commemoraton of ancestor worship where the King acts as a chief celebrant and earthly representative of his subjects between the world of seen and unseen in Aguleri cosmology. It is during this period that the

Ikolo and its practices features most prominently through the mediation of its sound. Adelowo (1990:166), in his article “Rituals, Symbolism and Symbols in Yoruba Religious Thought” argues that the main difference between worship on the sacred day and worship during the annual festival is that, there are more pronounced and elaborate programmes connected with annual celebrations. In further support of this point this point further, Adelowo states that:

This is usually an occasion for jocundity and thanksgiving; people appear in their best and give of their best. The offerings are mostly thank-offerings, and the meals constitute an opportunity of communion between the divinity and his ‘children’ on the one hand, and then among the ‘children themselves on the other’. It is a period for special renewal of covenant relationships. On such occasion, the head of the community, the priest-king, the *Pontifex Maximus*, is usually involved. It is he who is ultimately responsible for all that happens during the festivals. He also has a special ritual, which, personally or by proxy, he must perform during each festival (1990:166).

It is in this kind of occasion that the *Ikolo* produces sounds which convey indigenous symbolic meanings concerned with total well-being amongst the Aguleri people during the *Ovala* festival, a period of great merriment for the entire Aguleri community which marks the beginning of the king’s Royal calendar (Nnamah, 2002:8) when the social, political and religious well-being of the Aguleri people is being reinforced. The *Ikolo* is central to this festival and thus makes it an ideal site for the investigation of sacred sound in African traditional religion. Nonetheless, the messages exuding from the rhythmical sound of the music being produced by such sacred instruments is symbolic insofar as it assumes meaning that are associated with health, wealth and general well-being of the people (Kaplan, 2004:190). Africans make use of certain sacred African musical instruments like the *Ikolo* which the indigenous mystics believe that only a person endowed with particular spiritual insights and inclinations would be able to decode, interpret and disseminate the messages being produced by such instruments (Srivastava, 2007:4). Sacred sound is the experience and expression of the divine disclosure/confrontation which according to Rudolf Otto (1973:5ff), in his book *The Idea of the Holy*, is that which bewilders, terrifies, frightens, spells danger, but yet attracts and invites with a beckoning which is tantamount to absolute demand.

Idiophone

In the study of ethnomusicology, these are instruments which depend on the vibration of their whole body as source of sound production thereby transmitting certain symbolic messages which cannot easily be grasped, decoded and interpreted and they are the most common varieties of instruments found in Africa (Okafor, 1998:175). According to Genevieve Dournon (1992:258), in her article “Organology”, “idiophones form this large and varied instrumental category, particularly resistant to systematic classification, and containing some of those calculated lacks with which any classificatory system must come to terms”. Roger Blench (2009:6), in his book *A Guide to the Musical Instruments of Cameroun: Classification, Distribution, History and Vernacular Names*, argues that “one of the problematic classes of idiophones is the lamellophones which are instruments that make noise with a vibrating tongue”. He states that a key division is primarily between tuned and untuned idiophones, while most sounding bodies produce a definite pitch, and these can either be treated as tuned, or arranged in sets according to a scale system (Blench, 2009:6). However, idiophones have the qualities or tendencies of producing sounds by themselves [self-sounding wares], when stroked, pricked, pulled or pressed with the foot (Ibagere, 1994:91). He argues further that the sound they produce is of a different kind from those of other instruments and in this group are all the different sizes and shapes of gongs, woodblock, wood drum, bell rattle, earthen ware drum, and related instruments like *Ikolo* which is my main focus in this study (Ibagere, 1994:91).

David Lapp (2006:97), in his book *The Physics of Music and Musical Instruments*, argues that the sounds produced when the pipes are tapped on their sides are fundamentally quite different from the sounds produced by the other instruments and that such musical instruments consisting of vibrating pipes or bars are known as idiophones. Bonaventure Umeogu (2013:26) argues that sounds produced from these instruments that comprise of idiophones have specific meanings which are understood by the members of the community. According to Corazon Canave-Dioquino (2007:15), in her paper “Philippine Music Instruments”, “there are metal and wooden [principally bamboo] idiophones”. She explores the range of wooden and metal idiophones in the context of Philippines (Canave-Dioquino, 2007:15). Another musical instrument that is classified as an idiophone is *didjeridu* of the Australians, which Neville

Fletcher (2007:62), in his article “Australia Aboriginal Musical Instruments: The Didjerdu, the Bullroarer and the Gumleaf”, describes as a simple wooden tube blown with the lips like trumpet, which gains its sonic flexibility from controllable resonances of the player’s vocal tract. Idiophones as musical instruments speak the language of the communities; express their feelings, circumstances, situations and events of life among the people of different races, while it communicates different symbolic messages; some are considered to be sacred objects according to Darion & Mauze (2009:2).

In terms of the *Ikolo* as an “instrument of religious worship” (Conn, 1998:41), Nabofa (1992:70), in his book *Principal Elements in African Traditional Religion*, posits that “the temples of the *Igbe* religious movements in Urhobo land are always flooded by devotees who spend days and nights there with the firm belief that their ailments would be healed by the divine” through its sacred sound where such indigenous sacred musical object like the *Ikolo* sacred drum is used. The implication is that this sacred instrument is believed to be an important medium in the act of worship among the traditional worshippers in many parts of Africa because it “easily strike the divine signature tune” (Nabofa, 1994:56). Such sounds that emanate from such sacred instruments produce symbolic sounds that “reminds them of their root” (Turkson, 1992:70). Gerard Kock (1989:12), in his article “Between The Altar and the Choir-lofy: Church Music – Liturgy or Art?”, argues that “within the liturgy, music is no longer something accidental for embellishment or ornament but it has become an essential and integral part of the liturgy itself. Music is itself liturgy”. William Jones (1801:126), in his article “Sing to the Harp With a Psalm of Thanksgiving”, notes that sounds from inanimate bodies, such as musical instruments like the *Ikolo* are “therefore, undoubtedly to be used in divine worship”. The idea is that, musical instruments consisting of vibrating sounds, pipes or bars fall under the category of idiophones. Des Wilson (1987), in his article “Traditional Systems of African Development: An Analytical Viewpoint” posits that:

Idiophones are sounding instruments or technical wares which produce sound without the addition or use of an intermediary medium. The sound or message emanates from the materials from which the instruments are made and they could be shaken, scratched, struck, pricked [pulled] or pressed with the feet. In this group we have the gong, woodlock, wooden drum; bell and rattle (1987:91).

Genevieve Douron (1992:258) asserts that idiophones then are subdivided into seven modes of playing: concussion, striking, stamping, shaking, scraping, friction and plucking. Describing the wood drum, Akpabio (2003:14), in his book *African Communication Systems: An Introductory Text*, asserts that "...the wooden drum is made from tree trunk. To enable it produce mellifluous sounds, the bark is removed and an opening is made at the top. This way when struck with a stick it produces sounds. The drums come in various sizes and shapes and it has various designations". These types of descriptions has been attributed or classified to *Ikolo* which is my main focus in this study.

Conclusion

In conclusion, and from my review of the literature above, I hoped to show that it has become evident that African Traditional Religion as a body of scholarship emerged out of colonial imperial scholarship that denied African religion. Then, I have sought to demonstrate that although contemporary study of African religions remain highly contested, and that it has produced rich scholarship on issues such as ritual performance, indigenous healing practices, to name only a few. However, from the reviewed, I have also sought to demonstrate how despite there being substantial research on sacred sound in world religions, even if primarily viewed largely in relation to rituals practices and performances in sacred spaces, and at sacred sites. Finally I have argued that although the scholarship in African religion(s) has flourished during the past 50 years, research on sacred sound in the context African religion has remained largely under-developed.

CHAPTER THREE

A HISTORY OF THE *IKOLO* IN AGULERI CULTURE AND RELIGION

The history of the *Ikolo* sacred drum and its ritual practices is an oral tradition in Aguleri tradition that has been handed down from one generation to another. Aguleri, perhaps more than other places, was the the cradle of Igbo civilization with a long history, encapsulated in mythology about a man called Eri who lived there (Isichei, 1980:2). Eri is believed to be the progenitor of the *Ikolo* (Idigo, 2001:120). Tradition has it that in the early Igbo history of Eri kingdom, Eri-Aka was regarded as the first settlement of Eri [the father of Aguleri] the founder of Igbo race (Ikeanyibe, 1999:12). Eri-Aka is within the region of Aguleri which lies at the bank of Anambra River (Idigo, 1990:3). According to Michael Idigo (1990:1) “the vegetation of Aguleri is well and jealously distributed and along the streams are clumps of tall gigantic trees which supply stick for building houses and fuel for cooking”. Funsho Arogundade (2014:1) argues that apart from the fact that “the deep forest of the ancient Aguleri community” is far from the river Anambra, there were giant mahoganies and other grasses which are both medicinal and economic along the river Anambra and surrounding streams (Idigo, 1990:1). Such giant mahogany trees are often used in carving or to produce musical instruments like the *Ikolo* drum and Rattray goes as far as to suggest for indigenous communities in West Africa, the giant old mahogany trees were incorporated into “their animistic creed, [because] this tree is regarded as particularly powerful and malignant” (1923:306). Although based on an analysis of the sacred music of Cameroun, Roger Blench (2009:2) makes it clear that traditional musical instruments, such as the *Ikolo*, are “generally the most concrete evidence one can have about the music of the past”, and for preserving identity. Blench (2009:2) again posits that “even if one can speculate the exact type of music people played, one often knows what instruments they used, and something about ensembles and techniques of performance”. Blench (2009:2) further argues that “this has a long intellectual history in ethnology and that it was thought in German *Kulturkreislehre* schools, that musical instruments were associated with different cultural layers in human evolution”.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF AGULERI [IGBO] RELIGION

According to Idigo (1990), Aguleri is a very large town situated at the bank of the river Anambra called *Omanbala* by the indigenes and corruptly nicknamed Anambra by the European Settlers. Despite being a largely nautical people who regularly traveled downriver to trade (Borgatti, 2003), Aguleri people are basically farmers. Their traditional way of life was so good and satisfactory that in recent times they have often been reluctant to abandon the land and move into the modern sector of the Nigerian economy (Idigo, 1955:2), although, Aguleri people are part of the larger Igbo group.

Origin and Migration

Strictly speaking, no one actually knows when Aguleri was incepted as a town but the history of Aguleri may have dated back to the early part of civilization and modernity in Nigeria (Idigo, 1990:3). Thurstan Shaw argues that “one of the fascinating things about archaeology is that since it is rarely possible, in a logical sense, to give a watertight proof of anything, the interpretation of archaeological data is always a matter of balancing possibilities” (1975:503). Michael Idigo argues that “since there were no written records, the dates of events, origin and migration of Aguleri people depended heavily on time-honoured legends, oral tradition, recent archaeological discoveries and excavations” (1955:3). Recent carbon dating of an excavated site in Aguleri showed that it had been continuously inhabited for about 5000 years (Omoriege, 1989). The origin of Aguleri people would be linked to the migration of Igbo race to the present-day Nigeria as a nation which is believed to have been among the “Hebrew patriarchs” (Bright, 1981:23) through Gad, one of the sons of Jacob, who migrated from Mesopotamia and the father of Eri. John Bright concedes that although widely held, this position has been “vigorously contested in recent years by certain scholars who maintain that the patriarchal narratives are more or less imaginative literary creations of a much later date with no appreciable stream of oral tradition behind them, and without real historiographical intention or historical worth” (1981:73).

According to legend, Victor Eyisi (2010:3) comments that Eri and his entourage continued their migration southward until they finally settled at a place known to us today as Aguleri, the ancestral home of the Igbos around 1303 B. C. at the confluence of two rivers *Ezu* and *Omambala* - a tributary of the

great River Niger. He argues further that in Aguleri today, there is a place called *Agbanabo-Ezu-na-Omambala* [the confluence of the rivers, *Ezu* and *Omambala*, which form the Anambra River]. Here, it is believed, Eri landed with his entourage before moving to settle in *Obu-Gad*, Aguleri. The *Obu-Gad* [that is Gad's memorial palace] is apparently visible and this remains a tourism site in Aguleri town. Igwah et al (2014:1) argues that this particular place is very symbolic because it is believed that it was in this location that Eri had a revelation that this location was divinely selected as their place of settlement. Onwuejeogwu (1981:22) notes that it is "from this point [that] each settlement pursued its own separate existence and development, owing allegiance to Aguleri, where the collective ancestral temple of Eri still stands to this day". As part of coronation ceremonies of the Igbo King's, there is a divine injunction that official ritual ceremonies must first take place in this sacred place (Jeffreys, 1935:348). To ascertain the authenticity and significance of this site to the tradition, culture and hegemony of the Igbo race, Onwuejeogwu (1981:87) asserts that "this is why before any *Nri* traditional ruler is installed, the king is led to Aguleri where he performs sacrifices to the sacred temple of *Obuga* before being given the scepter of authority or *Ududu Eze* by the Igwe of Aguleri". This depicts that Aguleri people have a strong belief in the existence of one God, the creator of all things whom they call *Chi-Ukwu*, the Supreme Being, but ancestor worship is also practiced where the people offer sacrifices to their dead fathers (Idigo, 1990). Apart from *Chi-Ukwu*, the Supreme Being, there are other divinities or deities owned by the Aguleri people as a whole and these deities acts as mediators or intermediaries between them and the Supreme Being. Likewise, the King is believed to serve as an earthly representative between God and his people, and this demonstrated convincingly that the concept of God is indigenous to the Igbo religious traditions (Ikenga-Metuh, 1981:7). Victor Uchendu states that "the number of Igbo deities, spirits, and oracles is enormous and their anthropomorphous character is well recognized". He goes on to argue that "Igbo attitude towards the gods is not of fear but of friendship, a friendship that lasts as long as the reciprocal obligations are kept" (Uchendu, 1965:101).

Settlement

Eri, the founder of the Igbo race, was among the first migrants and he was believed to have moved and settled temporarily with his followers, in an area near the confluence of the Niger and Benue Rivers

(Ikeanyibe 1999; Idigo 2001). From there, Eri moved to the Anambra valley and quickly settled near the bank of the River *Omanbala* [corruptly called Anambra by the Europeans] at a place known as *Eri-Aka* near *Odanduli* stream, which is presently located between Ivite and Igboezunu Aguleri respectively. Over time, Eri went out on war raids and captured many men and women and his settlement began to grow (Idigo, 1990:3). Eyisi asserts that “by the 1280 B. C they had fully established the first Igbo settlement in Aguleri with distinct culture, religion, tradition and language” (2010:4). To avoid over-crowding and to prevent a situation where all of them could fall prey in an attack which was then the order of the day, the son’s of Eri dispersed to different parts of the region. The children of Agulu, the first son, remained in their grandfather’s [Eri] home, and together with Adamgbo’s children, evolved the town, Aguleri. Agulu’s name was appended to his father’s name Eri, making Agulu-Eri. Nonetheless, through the institutions of royal ordination and ceremonial rituals and spirit manifestation, Aguleri reasserted her authority over other Igbo’s in diaspora to assume headship of Igbo race (Nnamah, 2002:9).

Paul Nnamah (2002:9) again asserts that “it is also very vital to mention here that Aguleri is strategically located at the point of origin of Igbo land from where Igbo land spread further into the hinterland”. He argues further that the significance is that Aguleri as a town, represents the boundary of Igbo land from where Igbo land stretched eastwards to the rest of its heartland (Nnamah, 2002:9). This cultural expression is only typical of the cradle and for a boundary community it makes a stronger claim to originality (Nnamah, 2002:9). Daniel Neuman argues that an ancient town like Aguleri is “the birth place, ancestral home, and a historical centre of culture. Other areas, important as some have now become, are nevertheless derivative from tradition” (1980:12). Insofar as some of the areas deriving their art music from the tradition of Aguleri became, themselves, “great centers for the dissemination of musical culture, though geographically distant from its original place and surrounded by different local traditions, other areas remained little centers of the great tradition” (Capwell, 1993:96). Isaiah Uzoagba (2000:38) confirms this, and argues that societies like Aguleri are famous for different art formations such as sculpting, painting, carving, graphics and design. William Bascom maintains that “religious genres included, votive figures, which adorned shrines, reliquiary figures, charms, figures, stools, used in initiation to the cults. The apparatus for divination, dance staff, musical instruments and a variety of other

ritual paraphernalia” (1973:11). Nevertheless, for the Aguleri, the *Ikolo* ritual dance overshadows all other indigenous arts and ritual performances .

Ikolo

This is a locally made instrument that is carved out from a log of wood. It is constructed from a hallowed out mahogany tree trunk and when beaten with two sticks, it invariably gives rise to melodious sounds that carries symbolic meanings (Ogudoro, 2012:1). The *Ikolo* as one of the indigenous religious practice system according to Umeogu (2013:26) “occupies a sacred place in Igbo land”. It is on this position that Richard Okafor (1998:183), in his article “Nigerian Organology and Classification of African Musical Instruments”, admits that “it is easy to conclude that the giant slit drum must be indigenous to the forest regions of Nigeria especially South-Eastern Nigeria, where they are ritualized. Here, also they serve as instruments of social communication, tonal telegraphy, drum poetry and signal”. On this position Blench (2009:7) laments that they “were in use in many areas as part of systems of long-distance communication but their communication function has been supplanted by telephones and fast public transport”. Brian Tracy (2002:73) states that musical instruments like the *Ikolo* is a “beautiful piece of furniture,



Figure 3: The *Ikolo* Sacred drum of the Aguleri people. Note the symbol of human head carved on it.

elegant and refined in detail, obviously a super of work which no one explains or dismisses its achievements as having been a matter of good luck”. Steven Friesen (2004:340), in his article “The Hawaiian Lei on a Voyage Through Modernities: A Study in Post-Contact Religion”, asserts that such instrument like the *Ikolo* is a “delicately crafted gift that functioned within a system of exchange that easily transcended foreign conceptual boundaries such as sacred or secular”. On this ground, Richard Okafor (1998:183) argues that “if the xylophone is the ‘head or prince’ of idiophone, *Ikolo* would precisely or rightly be described as the king in terms of structure, size, usage, and all it stands for”. In this form, it constitutes “a firm descent and performance of ancestral rituals” (Parrinder, 1980:11) through its symbolic sounds. According to Blench (2005:4), in his book “The Traditional Music of the Jos Plateau in Central Nigeria: An Overview”, idiophones can be subdivided into tuned and untuned, although the only tuned idiophone is the xylophone, thus *Ikolo* is an untuned idiophone. According to Ogudoro (2012:1), in her article “Traditional Igbo Music-Drum and Flutes”, “*Ikolo*– slit-drum is made from two types of different tree stems, the yellow wood or the red wood because of its beautiful intense – natural red colour and its ability to resist insect termite/worms damage”. She argues that “it is carved with slits or hollows and beaten with sticks to produce melodious sound and they are of different shapes and sizes and the bigger the *Ikolo*, the louder the sound it produces” (Ogudoro, 2012:1). As a point of emphasis, there are carvers who specialize in making these instruments but they are not much these days and its production has not been commercialized due to its sacredness and the rigors involved. Okafor (1998:184) explains it as follows; “it was not easy to award an *Ikolo*-making contract because willing contractors were few. Making of an *Ikolo* was regarded as a risky business and a man who accepted the contract had virtually to sleep with his eyes open”.

ORIGIN OF THE IKOLO

Pertaining the origin of the *Ikolo* sacred drum, Nzewi asserts that “the music style in which it figures originated in Aguleri – a farming/fishing Igbo community on *Omambala* River basin of South-Eastern Nigeria” (2000:25). According to Idigo, tradition tells us that:

Among the mahogany trees that grew along the forest area around the Anambra basin, there was a particular giant mahogany tree which had its roots mysteriously eaten up by ants. When it fell, it was discovered that ants had eaten deep into the trunk providing a deep hollow in the tree trunk. Each time Eri and his children went by the fallen tree, they knocked the trunk to find out if there was any animal hiding in the hollow. In one of such occasions, Eri was tempted to knock several times and as he did, the trunk emitted loud sound that travelled miles. Eri was highly impressed and got the children to cut the hollowed area and convey it to the settlement. From thenceforth, the *Ikolo* was born (2001:120).

From the analysis of the above assertion, it can be seen that the historical paradigm of how the the *Ikolo* came into being has been part and parcel of the Aguleri oral tradition that is somehow neglected. Thus, Jacob Olupona (1991) has observed that the failure to engage in a history of African religions has created the impression that the religion is static and unchanging and that in the history of religions, diachronic analysis can no longer be neglected. Such analysis normally leads to issues of continuity and change in African traditional religion (Olupona, 1991:3). David Chidester draws our attention to the idea that “such oral tradition as a myth is not a story with canonical closure, but rather than being subject to timeless repetition, such a myth is opened and reopened by interpretation, and as a result, such myth is a type of ongoing cultural work” (1996:261). Anthony Aveni asserts that by this way “history is regarded as a chain of events, a process whereby every happening contributed to the causation of future events” (1998:315).

Fidelis Idigo (2001:120) argues that “Eri started by using the *Ikolo* as an idiophone to gather or summon meetings of *Eze-in-council*”. He argues that “in later years, many sizes of *Ikolo* were carved from logs of mahogany tree. These different sizes and shapes emitted different sounds. The different melodious sounds in turn gave rise to its symbolic diverse uses. These include the use as an idiophone, the use for communicating with members of the settlement that travelled far into the forest for hunting expedition and farming, the use for announcing time for sacred worship” (Idigo, 2001:120-121).

The *Ikolo* drum comes in different shapes and sizes based on the prescription of the town (Okafor, 1998:183). A typical *Ikolo* described by Michael Nabofa (1994) suggests that such talking-drums of different makes are regularly used in many parts of Africa to transmit cultic verses and messages. He goes on to argue that “expert drummers use these sacred communication instruments, to disseminate religious messages and beliefs. Those who are knowledgeable in this area can easily decode meanings from their various sounds and rhythms” (Nabofa, 1994:39).

To master how to use the *Ikolo* in indigenous society like Aguleri, “one needs to understudy experts in beating the talking drum” (NTI, 1990:115) because of its numerous functions which I shall elaborate later in this thesis. The *Ikolo* drummers, like the *Jenbe* players of Bamako, are specialists who use their acumen, expertise and knowledge handed over to them from tradition, personal competence, privately owned instruments, and even their own labour and potential creativity in individual performances (Polak, 2006:161). They play only when engaged for a specific occasion like in ritual festivals, and earn their livelihood in this way which Caleb Dube (1996:99) describes as “cultural workers”. He argues that such cultural workers like indigenous talking drummers would be classified as “professionals and non-professionals, commercial and non-commercial, rural and traditional, urban and modern individuals whose occupation or part of their occupation involves culture who make their living from music-making” (Dube, 1996:99–100). Similarly, Veronica Doubleday (2006:120) concludes that “those who make or use the drum professionally give it value”. Nonetheless, according to Edith Wyschogrod, this is not measured from “its monetary worth but the value is to be construed as aesthetic, cognitive, religion or moral” (1998:365).

Playing of sacred drum like the *Ikolo* in an artistic ritual dramatic performance shapes the connection between the musician and his audience (Ayu, 1986). But, through the mediation of its symbolic sound for the initiates, “it means the ability to translate the rhythm of the drums smoothly and faultlessly into the appropriate dance-steps” (Horton, 1963:98). Iyorchia Ayu argues that in this context “the public is not just a passive consumer; a mere audience with no influence on the direction and development of the art. The public is a conscious and participatory audience or consumer enriching products” (1986:22). The number of times, a talking drum like the *Ikolo* is beaten or the intensity of the beating can be varied to

convey different symbolic messages and meanings whether religious or secular such as meetings, funerals or announcing a death, warnings of an intruder's presence or emergencies (NTI, 1990:115). It is on this position that Blench (2009:7) asserts that "it is used for signaling major events to the population and still relevant in an area without electricity or mobile phone coverage". No wonder, Robert Rattray notes that "one never ceases to hear wonderful accounts of how this or that item of news has been conveyed over immense tracts of this continent by means of drums" (1923:302).

Through the symbolism which a sacred drum utilizes and the sacred ethos it invokes, the *Ikolo* possesses the power to influence the spiritual state of its performers and to play a role in the religious consciousness of the community "by whom or for whom it is performed" (Dunbar-Hall, 2006:59). According to Blench "those who are wedded to European notions of music, in particular regular time signatures, and the key system, find this music hard to interpret and it is thus often ignored in scholarly accounts and other types of anthropological description" (2009:1). Ademola Adegbite posits that such sacred sound to the traditional African peoples may be described as "the vehicle for articulating an abstract idea in concrete form – for communicating thought as matter" (1991:45). It is from this position that he argues that "music, an aspect of sound, is regarded in traditional African societies as the most immediate expression of Eros; a bridge between ideas and phenomena" (Adegbite, 1991:45). Rainer Polak confirms this when arguing that talking drums like the *Ikolo* "has become an integral part of a supra-ethnic, local culture" (2006:163), while others like Gerard Behague (2006) believe that drumming has significantly shaped African religious heritage.

The style and repertoire of the *Ikolo* drumming in any other place is quite different from rural *Ikolo* traditions of Aguleri because "each sound is imbued with its own lexical code: sound as sign, symbol, index, as ostensibly defining a personal territory" (Arkette, 2004:160). In fact, the Aguleri repertoire and style of the *Ikolo* celebration music actually represents a tradition of its own because it operates as "a prayer, a recognition, a mark of solidarity and a symbol of unity amongst our people" (Ojukwu, 2002:v). This view is supported by Judith Ballard (2006:1), who argues that "oneness, community, unity, and harmony are the very heart beat of every sacred drum and drummer". Sounding of the *Ikolo* sacred drum actually demonstrates and dramatizes the totality of Aguleri tradition and hegemony in Igbo land which

marks Aguleri identity. Chukwuemeka Ojukwu (2002) writing on Igbo traditional ceremonies suggests that the sounding of the sacred drum is intimately tied to the life of the community, and goes on to assert that it “symbolizes our comings in, and our goings out, our joy and our sadness. It symbolizes our positions in the society and our achievements and our failures” (2002: v). He argues that it “remains as a door through which our individual Igboness passes in to an assemblage of Igbo community” (Ojukwu, 2002:v). The Aguleri repertoire and style of the *Ikolo* celebration music represents a tradition of its own – a unique “musical epistemology” (Ayu, 1986:9). Ayu argues that it is out of this genre of popular music that a critical artifact was erected (Ayu, 1986:9). Now, let us start with Richard Okafor’s well illustrated description of the ritualisation of the artifact:

In those days, it was not easy to award an *Ikolo* making contract because willing contractors were few. The first was the search for the tree. The second stage was the felling of the tree, the cutting to size and the seasoning. After that, followed the actual carving, the scooping, the digging, and the occasional sounding for the beginning of ‘life’. Then, full sounding to get the tone acceptable to the community. Hence, came the final dedication. Some ritualistic insignia or symbols like human heads and community totems are often carved on to an *Ikolo* both for ritualistic and aesthetic symbolism (1998:183-184).

Buttressing this, James Eze asserts that “beyond these totems and profound meanings lies another oasis of symbolisms and unspoken communication” (2015:1). Ballard notes that “the great *Ikolo* was fashioned in olden days from a giant Iroko tree at the very spot where it was felled. Since those days it had lain in the same spot in the sun and in the rain. Its body was carved with men and pythons and little steps were cut on one side; without these the drummer could not climb to the top to beat it” (2006:1). Carole DeVale reminds her readers that sacred musical instruments like the *Ikolo* “are commonly anthromorphised and zoomorphised. This can be observed at many levels from the carving, sculpting or decoration of instruments with human or animal forms to the naming of their parts” (1989:100). Similarly, Roger Clarke asserted that “the hewing of a drum is considered an art, or even a closed profession. One who has not learned from his family will not attempt such a project” (1934:35). As such, Margaret Drewal argues that “despite great variation in form and medium and despite multiple shades of meanings, these projections share a basic principle of Igbo religious thought” (1977:43). She goes on to explain that in

Igbo worldview “all organic matters as possessing a vital force [that] can be manipulated to regulate the quality of man’s life” (Drewal, 1977:43). As a point of emphasis, it has been observed that the *Ikolo* drum as an indigenous and ritual technology has not been improved upon for centuries now due to the fact that there is a consequence of lack of artistic and aesthetic imagination among the drum carvers. Arguably, the implication of the presentation of the drum as unchanging artifacts of history and ritual is the representation of African Traditional Religion as fossilised in time and ritual history rather than a creative interface between the challenges of existence and human creativity and coming to terms or coping with these. Nonetheless, *Ikolo* as a sacred instrument and a talking drum is found worthy because it is actually based in Aguleri which houses Eri-Aka, the seat of origin of *Ikolo* (Idigo, 2001:123).

The status of the *Ikolo* as a sacred drum is linked to the fact that Eri-Aka was the first settlement of the Igbo – that is Eri the father of the Igbo people in diaspora in Anambra river basin (Xrydz-Eyutchae, 1986:18). According to Wyatt MacGaffey (2000:246), the activation of musical instruments like the *Ikolo* “were often exquisitely carved and converted into large drums works of art”. To become a sacred and symbolic object, an ordinary *Ikolo* drum must first be consecrated ritualistically by the most senior sacred traditional priest in Aguleri by carefully following what Luc De Heusch (1994) refers to as a “cosmological code”. This is done in order to imbue it with “godlike attributes” (Ohadike, 2007:2). Finally, the sacredness of such artifact, according to Durham, “lay in the fact that it conferred sacredness on whatever is marked with it” (2001:2). Behague (2006:94) argues that this force does not appear spontaneously; it must be transmitted and all objects, all beings or consecrated places can only become sacred through the acquisition of such supernatural power. Behague (2006:98) further suggests that a concrete example of consecration of such sacred drum like the *Ikolo* would be the use of water in what he described as “baptism” of the drum. In order to be purified with water, in that situation, “the priest or priestess takes holy water, ..., and speaking entirely in the African tongue employed by the group in its rituals, blesses the drums while sprinkling them with sacred liquid” (Herskovits, 1966:189). Behague (2006:98) argues that in doing this, the drum becomes, therefore, the main vehicle of communication with the god and the baptismal ritual is placed under the sign of that god.

Although, in Aguleri cosmology, it is during the ritualization and activation of the *Ikolo*, according to Mark Clatterbuck (2012), that its authority is acquired through the mediation of “transfer of spiritual medicine”. Alongside with the ritual breaking of Kola-nuts [*Cola Acuminata* or *Cola Nitida*] and some alligator pepper [*Aframamum*], Nichols summarises the ritual as such: a “chicken is sacrificed and its blood and feathers are daubed on the instrument and it is fed with the fresh blood of animals with the belief that this will maintain its sonority” (Nicholls, 1988:199). Symbolically, the sticks are believed to be imbued with ancestral powers and the *Ikolo* drum is fed in order to keep the spirits pleased (Obi, 2008:143). Equally significant is the fact that feathers are applied on the *Ikolo* with the firm belief that they act as protective mechanism in rendering it powerful. This is done so that the *Ikolo* can “speak in deep-tongues, and the messages it conveys may be shrouded in secrecy and only those that have been initiated into the ancestral cults can comprehend them” (Ohadike, 2007:3). Nabofa (1994:37) states that these kinds of rituals are rigidly and meticulously followed so that they can retain their ancient, ritualistic and spiritual values as revealed and decreed by the divine in order to avoid sacrilege. For this reason, some Igbo ethnographers of the South-Eastern region of Nigeria concludes that Aguleri as an ancient kingdom for “so long is respected for clinging to the ways of their ancestors” irrespective of the fact that they embraced Christianity which encompasses civilization and modernization (Paredes, 1995:355).

As a point of emphasis, it is believed in Igbo cosmology that if unauthorized persons, such as menstruating women, come in contact with the *Ikolo* the spirits that guards it can attack them by making them bleed to death and/or making them infertile. In addition, it is believed that when a menstruating woman touches the drum, the spiritual potency of the *Ikolo* would be negatively affected, so that it can no longer speak mystically. The interpretation of this is that the *Ikolo* abhors, and can be wounded by, the blood of women. It is on this basis that John Picton (1996:252) argues that “indeed the whole apparatus of divination, sacrifice and medicine is regarded as a mediation of energy in ways established and sanctioned by ancestral precedent”. Thus, we can conclude that the *Ikolo* both through its expulsion of women from its symbolic realm and the material relation to the actual, ultimately serves to uphold male privilege within the Aguleri sacred order.

According to Ohadike (2007:2) it is important to explain that sacred drums like the *Ikolo* are at the heart of most African music, dance and religious worship. He argues that such sacred drums like the *Ikolo* are charged with supernatural forces that make the drums to speak the language of the deities (Ohadike, 2007:2). *Ikolo* sacred sound cannot be simply a thing or object plucked from its environment, but rather, the sacred sound that is “created in a constellation of action that is multiple in nature” (Stone, 1994:391). Jonathan Friedmann (2009:9) argues that sacred sound then operates primarily on the level of analogy and that some musical moods are similar to those aroused by the encounter with the holy, and can, by association, inspire within the listener a sacred experience. According to Behague (2006:99) “the ritual takes place shortly after a new set of drums have been constructed. There is no basic difference between this first ceremony and the subsequent annual feeding of the drums, with the exception of the painting and occasional naming”. This explains the reason why not only the sound object must be prepared or consecrated but also the persons who play or manipulate it (Behague, 2006:95). In this wise, “it serves as a manual of pomp, which codified past practice, specified exact performance, and sought to promote ceremonial aggrandizement” (Cannadine, 1987:9). However, once the sacred drum like the *Ikolo* has been hollowed and consecrated, “it is then rendered exclusive in a number of significant ways: [1] protected and set apart, [2] endowed with sacred symbolism, and [3] physically modified” (Doubleday, 2006:124). It is from these forms that sacred drum like the *Ikolo* attains its sacredness in the behavior and characteristics it elicits from, or imposes upon the people around it (MacGaffey, 2000:245). Such behavior and characteristics range from:

Avoidance, food taboos, prescribed forms of speech or music, or demands for food and drinks. Such behaviours are as much part of the total representation as the object itself and are often readable in the same metaphorical terms. A performance requires an audience who respond to the demands of the spirit by being frightened, entertained, or excluded (MacGaffey, 2000:245).

According to DeVale, there are only a few reported cases where by musical instrument like the *Ikolo* is thought to have “malevolent spirits” (1989:97). She argues that “there are cases in which a normally beneficent spirit becomes temporarily malicious, primarily as the consequence of the omission of a prescribed ritual in its honour. This may be a reason why few cases have been reported: such rituals are

rarely omitted because of dire consequences” (DeVale, 1989:97). Musical instrument like the *Ikolo* according to Behague (2006:95), “perhaps more than the sound instrument, the ritual song texts possess the dynamic power of sound, since it transmit and convey a power of action and mobilize the ritual activity”. The *Ikolo* sacred sound is widely used in rituals and ceremonies, “and may be said to possess supernatural powers” (Doubleday, 2006:111). DeVale (1989:94) posits that power meanings are invested in sacred musical instruments like the *Ikolo* throughout the world, “it is ascribed to musical instrument essential to the efficacy of rituals of all kinds, from those ensuring fertility to those of royal courts. Thus, meaning in musical instruments often lies along a physical-metaphysical continuum from the earthly to the divine”. According to Adegbite (1988:19), when the drum makers like the *Ikolo* drum perform rituals to the spirits of the materials from which the drum is made, they are merely repeating a primordial gesture. Adegbite (1988:18-19) again posits that “each of these steps of drum making requires certain rituals which must be performed so that the spirits in the materials from which the drum is made may be placated and that the drum may function well; otherwise the drum will not speak well”.

The *Ikolo* sacred drum is permanently kept in the king’s palace, but in other Igbo speaking communities, it could be kept in the market place, in the shrines, or village squares and only be brought out during sacred and ritualized festivals/ceremonies for special functions because of its size (Nwuneli, 1983:6). For Adegbite (1988), talking drums like the *Ikolo* - as a royal drum ensemble and an epitome of Igbo aristocracy - is primarily found in the palaces of Igbo traditional rulers which are played on important occasions that involve the rulers and their subjects. In support of this, Steven Conn states that from this perspective, such royal drums “took on a number of royal functions”, while “becoming the classifiers and interpreters of objects and the purveyors of legitimate knowledge” (1998:24). Elsewhere, Des Wilson (1998) asserts that such royal drum has four key functions in traditional societies, to reinforce the installation of the king, to announce the death of the king; to alert citizens of imminent danger; and finally it ushers in ushering in various masquerades during key festivals within the annual ritual calendar.

Considering the various royal uses, carving of *Ikolo* soon became an art form (Idigo, 2001). Thus, Okafor writes that “*Ikolo* [slit drums] come in various sizes and under different folk terminologies. Sometimes the folk terminology is determined by size, at others by usage” (1998: 183). The only difference is that of

the size and the different sounds that it emits. According to Joy Lo-Bamijoko (1987:23) “there has been always disagreement on the names of the largest and medium slit drum. The Igbos of Anambra State call the largest slit drum *Ikolo* and the medium one *Ufie*. The Igbos of Imo state call their largest slit drum *Uhie* and the medium one *Ikoro*. The only agreement among all the Igbos is that the small slit drum is called *Ekwe* by all”. Basden (1966:359) in *Niger Ibos*, described the largest slit drums as *Ikolo*, and the same author in one of his books, *Among the Ibos of Nigeria* (Basden, 1966:187) again referred to the same drums as *Ekwe*. Lo-Bamijoko (1987:23) argues that to reduce this confusion, slit drums would be described according to their sizes. Nonetheless, from my own analysis, Achebe’s reference to *Ekwe* instead of *Ikolo* is not a mistake but primarily a matter of language choice, terminology or semantics. Consequently, some other Igbo speaking communities that do not have the *Ikolo* resorted to put *Ekwe*, *Ufie* or *Uvie* as a communicative system to occupy the vantage position of the *Ikolo* as an Igbo idiom of indigenous communication system. On this position, Ayantayo (2010:4) argues that “it is important to note that some of the communication systems are peculiar to specific societies because they are borne out of the people’s culture, religious conviction, and experiences. Thus, their interpretation may vary from one society to the other. In any case, they do reveal the ethics of each society”. Mary Nooter (1993:32), considering the sacred and secular aspects of sacred drum like the *Ikolo* as an African art in the context of secret knowledge, argues that it provides a more nuanced understanding of both the art’s function and its form. She observes that not only would an outsider’s view of art differ from an insider’s, but interpretations of art by members of a given society would vary according to age, gender, status, and many other factors (Nooter, 1993:32-33).

According to Sulaiman Osho (2011:11) “indeed oramedia is culturally based as it is natural with the tradition and customs of the people. It involves their language, dialect, individual occupation or family occupation or communal occupation. So, people of another culture may not necessarily understand the message within a particular oramedia, because it is culturally situated and conditioned”. Although, we should not forget the fact that it is only in Aguleri tradition and customs that one can still see the use of both the *Ikolo* and *Uvie* as being used side by side as indigenous communicative systems within which both play complementary roles because they are each a type of locally carved wooden idiophones.

However, it is meant to showcase continuity in its use, symbol and official recognition in the place of its origin (Nnamah, 2002:8). The *Ikolo* or the *Uvie* as an instrument of indigenous religious sacred sound is used only in Igbo land to summon special meetings, proclaim arrival and departure of important visitors to the palace, arrival of traditional rulers to public functions, announce serious acts of sacrilege and disasters, alert the community against invasion and in war, advertise the presence of war chiefs and sacred or ritualized festivals respectively (Nwuneli, 1983). *Ekwe, Uvie, Ufie, Uhie, Ikoro* or *Ikolo* is the same instrument but only the sizes and the shapes differ and they play the same functions in what Idigo (2001:44) refers to as “Igbo autochthony”. These facts are of great significance as they help us to put history and tradition in proper perspective according to (Nnamah, 2002:7). Idigo (2001:46) argues that neither Aguleri people nor any group of people in Igbo land can convincingly claim this autochthony.

ONYEKOMELI IDIGO AND THE REDISCOVERY OF THE IKOLO

When chaos and disorder were the order of the day in the early 19th Century and the institution of the kingship of Aguleri became disrupted, resulting in the collapse and end of the first known monarchy in Aguleri - the Aguve dynasty (Isichei, 1976:24). This actually thwarted and disrupted the use of the *Ikolo* among the people of Aguleri then, but when Onyekomeli Idigo rose to power and took over the mantle of leadership in early 19th century (Isichei, 1983:195), he reinvented, reorganized and revitalized the concept of the *Ikolo* a large wooden drum which was used by one of his wives to call his attention whenever he travelled far from Aguleri (Idigo, 2001). As such, and due to his frequent absences from home, he had a big wooden gong [*Ikolo*] with which his wives, when he travelled to a distant place, called him home in case of dangerous happening at home or at the visit of a friend. This marked the introduction of the sacred drum as a means of ‘calling’ the kind and the community. This use of the *Ikolo* is used up to the present day in the Idigo family to announce the break of day (Idigo, 1990:49). Arguably, Onyekomeli Idigo’s dynasty introduced this new use of the *Ikolo* at a time when the future of the Aguleri kingdom was uncertain, and in doing so, the *Ikolo* would become a symbol of identity and cohesion.

According to Benjamin Ray (2000:29), the *Ikolo* drum like every other sacred drum “is both of the forest and of the people, sending the people’s enlivening music deep into the forest and bringing something of the mystical reality among the people”. The instrumental voice of the *Ikolo*, Nzewi (1984:320) argues,

“has a farther reach than the human voice in the traditional environment of public information dissemination”. As one of the sacred objects the Aguleri community possesses, *Ikolo* drum is therefore their “means of communication with ultimate reality” (Ray, 2000:29) that is capable of being heard many kilometres away from the town. However, the phrases emanating from the *Ikolo* to bring back Onyekomeli Idigo “sound intelligible only to those initiates who understand the language of the drum” (Adegbite, 1988:20). But, we should take note of the fact that there are levels of meanings to which the sounds are subjected; some meanings are plain to adult members of the community who must understand when aggressive or emergency tone means something untoward has happened in the community and a deeper level of communicative meaning which the initiates are more amenable to decoding. In this sense, the *Ikolo* includes every member of the community at one level and excludes some at another deeper level. It is believed that the sounds of the *Ikolo* actually brought Onyekomeli Idigo back home whenever his presence is needed and today, a miniature *Ikolo* is used by an *Eze* Idigo to herald day-break in Aguleri and summon people for extra-ordinary events (Home Call of HRH, *Eze Idigo* iii, 1995:4). Such miniature replica on a memorial figure actually symbolizes such identity according to Horton (1963:109).

IKOLO AND MISSIONARY ENCOUNTERS

Civilization and Imperial developments in the 18th and 19th Centuries would also contribute to the journey of the *Ikolo* sacred drum from then until today. Popular history recounts that as the king wrestled with the colonial powers in the region, Onyekomeli Idigo negotiated the development of the new Aguleri Roman Catholic Parish as he moved his family under the direction of the colonial administration. Although under the patronage of the catholic church, the *Ikolo* Idigo moved with him (Idigo, 2001:125). This saw the co-optation of the *Ikolo* by early Catholic Missionaries in Aguleri to function as a “church bell”, heralding different sacral duties of the day. This added yet a new layer of meaning and functionality for the the *Ikolo*, and in doing so sustained it presence and visibility among the Aguleri. However, from a critical analysis on the use of the *Ikolo* by Christians, it has been observed that somehow its traditional use was interfered with. In fact, it is expected that such new and alien function created a cultural and religious dissonance in the thinking and minds of indigenous people of Aguleri who now suffered from epistemological confusion of not knowing when the *Ikolo* summons for danger in its original religio-cultural world and when it calls new Christian converts to prayer in the Christian

village created by the European missionaries. Although David Chidester sees this kind of situation as a centre-stage where “the symbolic dynamics of religion appear in the cultural process of stealing back and forth sacred symbols, symbols that are made sacred by the highly charged activity of appropriating and reappropriating them” (1996:261). The *Ikolo*, as one of such symbol was soon put to different uses because of Onyekomeli Idigo’s conversion to Catholicism – which was seen as a good thing and thus the white missionaries were more willing to incorporate indigenous symbols (Idigo, 2001:125). Nonetheless, as the converts lived a different life in the Christian village which was described as “quasi-monastic” (Obi, 1985), the *Ikolo* was given different uses – at times used simply to remind the new converts that it was time for religious service. The council of elders from time to time held consultations with the King at the Christian village and often they were summoned them to meetings in Christian village with the usual *Ikolo* tone indicating a call for a meeting” (Idigo 2001:125). Invariably, during this period the *Ikolo* was used for the purpose of the Christian settlement, which in the process reduced its uses and meaning in relation to the indigenous.

From a different perspective, it could be regarded as an early form of inculturation whereby the church as an institution saw something good and enticing in indigenous tradition and welcomed it for ecclesiastical use. Idigo noted that during this time “they regimented their daily activities and started off mass every morning by 6.00 am, said the Angelus prayers at 12 noon and 6pm and held evening prayers by 7.00 pm. The *Ikolo* Idigo was sounded at these times of the day, as mentioned earlier, in a way that was distinct from the sound made by the wife to invite the king back from a hunting expedition” (2001:125). Thus, the *Ikolo*’s integration into Christian culture resulted in it losing a great many social and sacral functions within the indigenous world of the Aguleri, and yet other more traditional functions of the *Ikolo* Idigo still remained. Despite the fact that the *Ikolo* was moved to the Christian village, the association with the Christian settlement secured its currency, and ultimately sustained its meaning as a symbol of Aguleri identity and religion.

RELIGIOUS INCULTURATION OF THE *IKOLO* AND ITS EXPULSION

Onyekomeli Idigo, because he was a community leader, commanded respect within and attracted Aguleri indigene to the Christian village. Nevertheless, many Aguleri did not like his conversion to

Christianity, and his location in the Christian village, and saw it as forecasting the end of another indigenous dynasty. According to Celestine Obi, (1985:46) “the year 1890 ended leaving Idigo bouncing in health and happiness and this became an eloquent sermon to the people and about 15 members of his family”, who eventually “came to ask or seek for one favour or another” (Idigo, 2001:126). Idigo attributes some of the king’s good fortune to some of the medical treatments received, or perhaps from the clothing that was abundantly supplied by the Royal Niger Company’s personnel and white missionaries because their activities were basically influenced by this ebullient and high-spirited leader, Onyekomeli Idigo. As such, Idigo (2001) concludes that some Aguleri indigenes came to the Christian village to join Onyekomeli Idigo in performing certain traditional ceremonies approved by the missionaries who believed that they are devoid of occult elements.

However, Idigo (2001) also argues that the performance of ritual ceremonies posed a problem for the missionaries, as the ceremonies included loud drumming and dancing, and often lasted throughout the night until dawn. Commenting on a similar set of tensions between Baptist missionaries and Shango cultist in Trinidad and Tobago, Angelina Pollak-Eltz (1993:13) writes that missionaries often described the sound accompanying ritual ceremonies as unruly; “the horrible drumming began about seven in the evening and, with the chorus was kept up until daybreak the next morning”. In a community like the Aguleri, according to Sophie Arquette, sacred sound like that of the *Ikolo* “have over the centuries come to embody an archetypal sound stretching back for centuries; they have been the dominant acoustic signals for the communities, reinforcing the social, political, and religious powers of the Church” (2004:163). She goes on to argue that “they also served during missionary/colonial period to demarcate ecclesiastical and therefore civilized territory from the uncivilized heathen domains that lie outside the bell’s acoustic boundaries” (Arquette, 2004:163). Invariably, the white missionaries and their counterparts in Royal Niger Company presumably did not like to live in this kind of noisy and polluted environment. Suffice it to say that the whites could not cope with this kind of ambience that is always noisy and rowdy.

Notwithstanding conversions to Christianity, local Igbo continued to engage in traditional rituals and feasts – feasts of the Aguleri ritual calendar that the Christians are not allowed to be involved in (Idigo, 2001:127). John Pobe (1979:66) asserts that since drumming accompanied most, if not all, religious

occasions in traditional society like the Aguleri, the earliest missionaries assumed that drumming per se had heathen associations, and therefore, was un-Christian, if not sinful. He explains that “the Church made it a law that there shall be no drumming at a member’s wake-keeping. And in recent years indeed as recently as 1972, disciplinary action has been taken by individual clergymen against the families of a deceased at whose funeral there had been drumming” (Pobee, 1979:66). The Church attacked the drums through its dance, complaining it was the dance moves that embodied evil (De Jong, 2010:209). As such,, Nanette De Jong (2010:209) argues, “the pulpit became the soapbox for public condemnation of the sacred drums and its dancing”.

In a radical and provocative sermon, according to Brusse (1969:93), Monsignor Niewindt protested, “you can hear in the streets and in the town the noises of ... drummers and this so called singing, or better said, screaming, by these shameless black women [who] ... take turns doing this appalling dance”. He went on to pronounce that “this has prompted [Dutch] Protestants to feel ashamed, and... say that Curacao is becoming more like Africa—an uncivilized place” (Brusse, 1969:93). Invariably, Monsignor Niewindt was canvassing for the subsequent adoption of Christian music as one of the “symbols of the Africans abandonment of their wicked drums” (Martin, 1980:32). Ikenga-Metuh (2002) asserts that the pulpit, bible school and catechism classes were used to persuade Africans to change their lives, reject their traditional religious beliefs and culture, and adopt Christianity packaged in European cultural forms. In regard to such a propaganda, Edward Dickinson (1903) argued that “the dance was a dangerous reminder of the heathen worship with all its abominations” because the prevailing idea of indigenous religion, at that time, was that it was pagan and illegitimate customs intent on undermining the mission enterprise. Many missionaries, are said to have felt that such heathen customs and practices tended to snare the recently “faithful”, often seducing them back into immoralities. Finally, it would appear that for Dickinson the missionary church saw itself tasked with the elimination of perilous association African converts have with indigenous religious ceremonies, and instead to introduce spiritual worship of the supposedly true God. Dickinson further argues that the “hellenic dance, both religious and theatric, was adopted by the Romans, but like so much that was noble in Greek art, only to be degraded in the transfer which passed over into the Christian Church, like many other ceremonial practices of heathenism, but modified and by no means of general observance” (1903:37). In this regards, Massimo Rosati warns that

“it is easy to call the dream of one human community naive, but on this tiny ball of rock we call home, in the face of a rather huge and unknown and fairly cold universe, before we do so we might want to ask, is this naivety something we really want to give up on quite yet; a savage hope perhaps, we should not relinquish” (2009:141). Emele Uka asserts “that through these periodic festivals, the people’s desire to have their gods participate directly in the material, moral and spiritual life of the community all the year round are made manifest. In so doing, the spiritual and moral tone of the people are uplifted. So we could say that celebration of religious festivals by traditional African societies is an index of their spirituality” (1991:173).

Nonetheless, Idigo (2001:29-30) argues that because of the noisy situation of the feasting and drumming in these occasions in Onyekomeli Idigo’s residence, the white missionaries were deeply disturbed. The indigenous expressions of spirituality threatened to disrupt the quiet environment and a serene ambience they assumed Africans needed. For this reason the missionaries built the first two-storeyed brick house (a palace) in Aguleri for Onyekomeli Idigo 3 miles away from the Christian village to put distance between local ritual practiced by the kings and his followers and the mission station. Their aim for constructing the palace of Ogbuanyinya Idigo was to be free from the noise of drumming and dancing prevalent in the Christian village. As Ogbuanyinya Onyekomeli Idigo moved, the *Ikolo* Idigo also moved. The most significant point to be noted here is that almost all these feasts cited above associate themselves with the sounding of the *Ikolo* sacred drum which possesses certain religious communication and interpretive powers even outside the confines of Aguleri religion and politics.

Also, the religious conflict, or contestations over sonic the sacralization of a community, like the Aguleri urban space, according to Marleen De Witte, “should not only be understood as a competition for symbolic control of spaces but also as a spiritual struggle over the invisible, but all the more affective powers felt to be present in the town” (2008:691). De Witte (2008:691) again argues that that it is therefor not surprising that where there are contestation over sacrality of space, the claims over boundaries are always under negotiation as there is inevitable pushback from one group or the other. Finally, what we see from the account of the *Ikolo* in the history of the Aguleri is that while it emerged as an instrument of adaptability in religious and ritual use in the life of the community, it also embodies

indigenous ways of knowing and experiencing the sacred – especially those aspect of sonic sacrality not normally accommodated within missionary Christian contexts.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have sought to illustrate the circumstances around which the *Ikolo* took its origin from Aguleri settlement in Anambra. I then went on to discuss under the forces of modernity and missionary expansionism that the *Ikolo* has evolved in its roles as the positions and status of the king(s) evolved. Finally, I tried to show how the indigenous character of the *Ikolo* survived the forces of missionary modernity and resisted the allure of inculturation. Finally, in this chapter I mapped how the *Ikolo*, under a man like Onyekomeli Idigo who is the progenitor of the present royal dynasty, emerged to become a true symbol of Igbo indigenous spirituality and sacral expression.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY

The two approaches that I have used for this study are, ethnographic approach to the study of religion and ethnomusicological approach to the study of idiophone as a musical instrument for understanding sacred sound in a particular cultural context as a discourse. Considering the empirical nature of the research project, in this chapter, I will explain the method(s) used in conducting my research as well as the range of instruments and procedures for data collection. Finally, I will discuss the ethical challenges faced in the course of the research design, fieldwork and in data analysis.

METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Ethnography is a method of identifying and explaining a structural system through analyzing the core principles and values that constitute the system of investigation (Clifford & Marcus, 1986:2-3). In ethnomusicology on the other hand, according to Nettl, one must study each musical tradition in terms of the theoretical system that its own culture provides for it (1973:151). The principal methodologies or investigative paradigms that have been, and are, the bases for the scholarly study of indigenous music and religious music are: the scientific historical method, the analytical method and the critical/interpretive method.

However, I have based my methodology on the critical/interpretive method in musicology. The reason is because the critical/interpretive method in musicology explores the comprehensive interpretation and the total evaluation of what a musical work entails within the framework/ambit of its contexts—historical, political, sociological, and economic, as well as aesthetic. In this way, it basically differs from the analytical method, which generally explores the work of music to have a partially, if not completely, autonomous status with respect to its possible context (Kerman, 1985:154). Traditional religious practices as performative therefore, include speaking, singing, dancing, and gesticulation, which have some symbolic meanings and thus more suited to an interpretive approach.

Ethnomusicology as a critical investigation of music and its production within a cultural context, and in relation to the study of the *Ikolo* drum, forces the researcher to enter the world of the people being investigated. It involves, in my own case, rituals and celebrations which I examined properly and now make a general evaluation and infer about its meaning and significance. This method does not exclude interviews around specific questions which were largely done using unstructured interviews, which made the respondent rather than the researcher determine the direction of the conversation (Dawson, 2007:29; & Rugg & Petre, 2007:12), instead of being a dominant researcher who is “typically the one who initiates the conversation, controls its direction, and terminates it” (Scott, 1990:30). I made use of participatory and observation methods which afforded me the opportunity to act as an observer-participant during the *Ovala* ritual festival.

Ethnomusicology is the fieldwork investigation, thus a method concerned with investigating how music shapes relationships that constitute people’s daily lives (Sanders, 1999:47). Fieldwork is also called naturalistic research—research that takes place within the natural setting of the social actor (Mouton & Marias, 1988:1). According to Van Maanen (1988:3), fieldwork is then a means to an end, while Mouton & Marias (1988) call fieldwork qualitative research. They suggest that “... qualitative researchers prefer to use unstructured or informal interview, i.e., interviews which employ a set of themes and topics in order to form questions in the course of the conversation” (Mouton & Marias, 1988:12).

The parameters of my study were limited and it was subject to the felt concerns of the interlocutors. The broad objective of my research was actually negotiated with the interlocutors. According to Agnew and Pyke (1982:45), ethnomethodology is a ‘go-and-see’ method—the ‘eyeball’ technique, which is the core of fieldwork method. In this regard, in the study of the significance of the *Ikolo* as an idiophone of religious practice, I used observation, description, and interpretation methods as they require no manipulation and no controlled experimentation.

The field research was conducted between July and September, 2013 during which time I observed the natural behaviour of people as they performed traditional religious rites and ceremonies. According to Peter Dunbar-Hall, this is “achieved through various means: physical positioning of audiences, timetabling, subtle suggestions of when it was appropriate to leave” (2006:63). Observation was carried

out in an ordinary Aguleri social context and also during *Ovala* festival where the *Ikolo* featured most prominently.

I took as a starting point the position of Jean Kidula who argues that “ethnomusicology has moved from European positioning of other cultures to viewpoints and reportage by indigenous cultures of their own selves — from dominance of Euro-American scholars as objective outsiders, to a recognition that all scholars are biased by their backgrounds, exposure and agenda” (2006:110). This discipline now includes local researchers, performers, and voices – all of whom are contributing to our understanding of indigenous musical practices, which means that in general ethnomusicological practices have moved beyond cultural ethnographies to more musicological analyses. Kidula (2006:99) claims that today the recording and documentation of African music and sounds continue to be restricted to such fields as ethnomusicology, comparative musicology and even systematic musicology - concepts originally intended to serve the European and African scholastic curriculum. Celia Applegate argues that this is done in order “to demystify the Western canon in general and to shake off German influences, whether musical or musicological, in particular” (1998:275). Likewise, John Mohawk (2004) asserts that there have been changes, transformations, and challenges to the prevailing meta-narratives in Western culture. Molaria Ogundipe (2007) notes that we must recuperate ideas from our primal or indigenous cultures in order to use or adapt them for development if we do not respect our past, or understand it enough to make discriminating adaptations of it for our movement forward.

Gerard Behague (2006:91) writes that “ethnomusicology has taught us that musical instruments and styles are frequently the resultant effect of specific cultural determinants emanating from social ethno-historical, factors of various kinds”. He thus argues that ethnomusicology concerns itself primarily with non-written musical traditions and attempts to integrate musical expressions of a given culture or community group. Ethnomusicology seeks to explain not only the structure of the musical product of a given society but also all elements – ethnic, social, historical, economic – that combine to establish the uniqueness of that product (Behague, 2006:91). It is on this perspective that Robert Young sees indigenous artifacts like the *Ikolo* as a “rich repositories of culture and counter-knowledge” (2003:114). According to Charles Seeger (1977:54) “the field of ethnomusicology is concerned with the analytical

study of the process of variations of musical text, on the one hand, and the social context for music making on the other. It seeks to explore not only the structure of the musical products of a given society because it also examines the ethnic-elements, social-historical, and economic aspects’.

Ethnomusicology provides an ideal methodological and theoretical lens through which to investigate the uniqueness of the *Ikolo*. San Juan (1998) argues that indigenous ritual performance might also be imagined as new forms of creative power and resistance against the forces of modernity. Richard King (1999) in *Orientalism and Religion* reminds us that in the postcolonial context, the master discourse is appropriated by the native whose agency reflects cultural resistance in the form of the mimicry and parody of colonial authority. In this regard the study of the *Ikolo* provides an opportunity to examine the place of music in Igbo religious and social hegemony. Finally Gareth Griffiths asserts that “the project of the post-colonial text [or artifact]... can never lose sight of the determining cultural factors which bring it into being, since it is grounded in a perception of how self and other are constituted within a discursive matrix which includes the material forces and institutions of cultural production and reproduction” (1990:162). In short, ethnomusicology is seen as the site or domain within which the indigenous is being re-imagined, asserted and where hegemonic western forms are being resisted.

On this position, Martin Stokes posits that “people can equally use music to locate themselves in quite idiosyncratic and plural ways... A moment’s reflection on our musical practices brings home to us the sheer profusion of identities and selves that we possess” (1997:3-4). Music would take the form of grapevine stories to alert the people on development planned for them (Wilson, 1998). Thus, Murphy (2012) suggests that as music function to effect a cathartic release of pent-up frustration, it is conceived as healing contact with a transcendent will and purpose, encoded memories of another world of grace and freedom.

Eno Akpabio observes that music has been used even in “modern setting to aid the liberation struggle to address inequities in society, talk about the virtue of love, relationship and a myriad of other uses” (2003:20). Nathan Corbitt (1994) offers an insightful exploration of this aspect of music in his study on the role of music as an agent of political expression for the Kikuyu people of Kenya in their resistance struggle during the British colonial occupation. Thus, both Obeng (2000) and Ohadike (2007) asserts that

in such cultural and political contexts, music becomes an instrument of resistance. Likewise Ohadike reminds us that “songs and dances among African blacks in diaspora become the most articulated medium of protest that sustained their feelings and resistance” (2007:8).

Caleb Dube suggests that music is “used in the war to instill determination, inspiration and hope among fighters and everyone who participated” (1996:110). Nettl (1983) notes that music is seen as something that functions as an aid, particularly in times of crisis. In South Africa, the song of Enoch Sontonga, a mission school teacher composed in 1889 later became the national anthem (Corbitt, 1994:11). John Hajduk (2003), while recognizing that music is a participatory leisure activity, argues that music is not always a gateway to better understanding and liberation but that it can also often produce and reinforce narrow nationalisms and ethnic chauvinism. Hajduk contribution offers a refreshing shift of perspective from the notion of music that is always associated with cohesion, development and leisure. It is with this in mind that I find myself in agreement with James Early, who in his article “Sacred Sounds: Belief and Society”, argues that sacred sound cannot simply be associated only with formal ritualistic setting but that it (sacred sound) can quite easily find expression in civil and political spaces such as picketing lines are non-sacred spaces where religious music has been consistently and meaningfully incorporated. The most interesting aspect of this is that often, through music, politics and religion are intertwined and that is the more reason why music serves as a major medium in traditional set-up and is put into very powerful use as a functional part of it, a supportive material or a decorative material as the case may be. Thus the idea that music can invoke and set in motion a sense of identity, as argued by Simon Frith (1987) is of particular value for this study. Arguing along the same lines as Frith, Martin Stokes observes that “a sense of identity can be put into play through music by performing it, dancing to it, listening to it or even thinking about it. It can also leap across boundaries and put into play unexpected and expanding possibilities” (1997:24). This is precisely the conception of music and sound that I have deployed in the course of my study, and in the analysis of the religious and social significance of the *Ikolo* and the supposedly sacred sound that it produces.

Ethnomusicology as method

Ethnomusicology, according to Alan Merriam (1964), was once defined as the study of music in culture and later he argues that this definition did not go far enough, that it is the study of music as culture. Helen Myers asserts that “ethnomusicology includes the study of folk music, Eastern art music and contemporary music in oral tradition as well as conceptual issues such as the origins of music, musical change, music as symbol, universals in music, the function of music in society, the comparison of musical systems and the biological basis of music and dance” (1992:3). These definitions are significant given the realization that the *Ikolo* sound is a significant cultural product that was also the product of creative human imagination. The study of the *Ikolo* sound in relation to *Ovala* festival has something to add in consideration of its role in that context.

It is also clear that method does not operate in a vacuum, and that there must always be a consideration not only in problems but of the theoretical framework along the lines of which an approach to the problem was carried out (Scoville & Wilson, 2003:4). Nettl (1973:151) asserts that in studying indigenous music, the worldview of that particular cultural society should take preeminence. My interest in the *Ikolo* music as a sacred sound is not simply to investigate it as a structural form but as a human phenomenon which functions as part and parcel of Aguleri culture and identity.

Merriam (1960:112), in her paper entitled “Ethnomusicology Discussion and Definition of the Field”, suggests that the study of music can by no means exclude the historic, the structural, the aesthetic from equal consideration with the ethnological. The integration of the historic, structural and aesthetic is completely intertwined with an understanding and assimilation of the cultural background in which these aspects of the *Ikolo* operate. Ethnomusicology as a method brings together the historical, the structural and the aesthetic aspects of culture and identity that is reflected in attitudes, practices and beliefs about music.

Of the three major principal methodologies for musicological research mentioned above, the most suitable method for my study is the critical/interpretive method. The method made possible the comprehensive interpretation and evaluation of what the *Ikolo* music as sacred sound with all of its

forms—historical, political, sociological, religious, economic, and aesthetic forms. Although, challenging what musicology critics perceive as a reasonable demarcation between academic musicology and that of human experience of music, Kerman calls for a methodology that would draw upon “all modes of knowledge, including the theoretical and analytical, the intuitive, to help achieve a critical response to a place of music” (1985:154).

Nonetheless, the notion of transcendence would be an underpinning theory of my ethnomusicological research which has focused on the significant functions of the *Ikolo* sound in enhancing spiritual experience and understanding among the Aguleri. I found John Blacking’s (1967) ideas about transcendence through music, as discussed by Sager, to be suitable for my research. Rebecca Sager argues that Blacking did not focus upon trance per se but rather upon the whole experience of music. Accordingly Sager writes:

first is the idea that transcendent states are natural, normal, possible even necessary for the full development of a human being. The intensely integrating experience of transcendence is not the privilege of the few but something to be experienced [to varying degrees by] any normal human. Second is the idea that the other self – the transcendence state of the self – can manifest outwardly in many different ways, ranging from calm, still, inwardly focused behavior, across a spectrum to ever more overtly demonstrative expressive behaviours, including getting a spirit [or the spirit]. (2012:31).

Similarly Brackett (2012:125) asserts that “while both religious, imply that experiences of transcendence derived from spirit possession may be widespread enough to support the idea of states occurring in secular music such as the blues”. Thus, it is my view that ethnomusicology provides a suitable methodological framework for a study concerned with the intersection between music and religion in the postcolonial African context.

METHODOLOGICAL PRACTICE

Data Collection

The hierarchical social or class structure in Aguleri society is facilitated through complex social and religious structures. The society is divided into royalty, the princely class, sacred specialist, chiefly class (the initiates or initiated men), ordinary people. As part of my data collection strategy which lasted for a period of three months (July-September 2013), I sought the assistance of a mediator or what the sociologists describes as “sponsor” to facilitate my access to prospective research participants – despite the fact that I am an initiated member of the chiefly class. As my mediator/sponsor, I used my father who is one of the High Chiefs in the community to negotiate my access to all the social classes in Aguleri, including access to the princely classes and the king. The advantage of this was that the Aguleri were less likely to show hostility to the researcher because my presence was both explained and justified by the mediator/sponsor. By using a well-placed mediator or sponsor, all cultural protocols were observed. I deliberately decided not to interview any of my relatives as there were plenty of reliable informants within the community in general.

As part of my ethnographic method, I as the researcher, engaged in a go-along ethnography whereby I sought not to distinguish my role as participant-observer and instead, simply participated like any other group member. I effectively immersed myself in the life and activities of the community. All these ‘mediator/sponsorship/go-along ethnography’ choices allowed me to get first-hand information from people regarded as the custodians of Aguleri tradition and customs. This was important as it is believed that such “old men in the community [know] the entire ceremonial musical repertory” (Waterman, 1955:49). It on this basis that Philippe Denis poses the argument that “indigenous people should be recognized as the primary guardians and interpreters of their culture, arts and sciences, whether created in the past, or developed by them in the future” (2008:68).

A significant part of my ethnographic experience was the mediation of power relations between myself as a researcher and the custodians of Aguleri tradition during the course of my data collection. There were certain ritual tributes which the king had to make to enable the ancestors and the spirits of the fallen

heroes of Aguleri to come and be present before anything should be done. By this, I mean that the breaking of kola-nut [*Cola Acuminata* or *Cola Nitida*], putting some amount of money to support the kola-nut [*Ime ego oji*], and pouring of libation [with gin], while prayers were said before the scheduled interview. On another occasion, before the drummer of the *Ikolo* sacred drum was able to play the *Ikolo* for me, I was asked to put down some amount of money, kola-nut was broken, some pieces were thrown on the ground together with bits of native white chalk [*nzu*] for the gods/ancestors to eat. Afterwards, we ate the remaining lobes together with some seeds of alligator pepper [*Aframamum*]. Only after observing these common but highly valued indigenous rituals, was I able to proceed with my respective interviews.

From my observation, all these have some kind of symbolism in Aguleri culture and tradition. In the region many people use kola-nut for ritual purposes and they believe in the Igbo dictum of “he who brings kola brings life” (Nabofa, 1994:40-41). Thus, kola-nut serves as a validation and “a good indicator of welcome to a home” (Dike, 1985:166). Benjamin Ray (1976) also notes that the kola-nuts represents friendship and reconciliation. Christopher Ezekwugo asserts that “*Oji* or kola-nut is used throughout Igbo land as Holy Communion and the Igbo use that to talk to God just as Christians use the Bible to talk to God or Muslims use Quran to do the same to Allah” (1992:85). According to Nabofa (1994), it is considered one of the preferred delicacies of the spiritual forces. Kola-nut is cherished and regarded in Igbo land and the Igbo regard it as the king and most precious of all the fruits on earth (Maduka, 1988:278). Finally, Nabofa reminds us that symbolically, alligator pepper is “believed to lubricate the mouth and a lubricated mouth is endowed with the power of fiat which can produce effective prayers” (1994:41).

Sampling

Catherine Dawson (2007) suggests that in qualitative research “choosing a more manageable number of people” for the research is preferable, as opposed to quantitative research that is normally characterized by huge sample sizes aimed at generalizing the findings. Dawson further suggests that qualitative sampling “might also offer insights into the behaviour of the wider population” (2007:49) though normally results seems different if a similar research is done in a different context.

Since this study draws on data about a specific and local phenomenon, a purposive sample method was used. This sampling method assisted in consolidating the various views of my participants. The total sample size was 25 members of the Aguleri community – which consisted of seven [7] key informants and three group of six [18] individuals of different social backgrounds. These 18 focus group participants were between the ages of 20 to 65 years old, and includes non-initiates like ordinary men, women and Christain converts. Through the focus group interviews I sought to find out what they know, think, believe and understand about the *Ikolo* as a sacred drum. For all the interviews conducted I ensured that participants approval to record the interviews were secured. For the purposes of transparency, all documentation such as the information sheet and consent documents were translated into Igbo. I also read through the information sheet at consent form to ensure that participants had a clear understanding of what was expected of them as well as what their rights were.

The 7 key informants, aged 65 to 95 years are key persons, who are regarded as guardians of Aguleri traditions, participated in the *Ovala* ritual and are permitted a close proximity to, or allowed the use of the, *Ikolo*. These persons are initiated members who pay homage to the deities and ancestors on behalf of the community. These key informants included the King, 2 Princes – Hands of the King, 2 Chiefs and 2 Sacred Specialists.

- (a) The King – he is the symbolic head and the holder of the *Ofo* [a wooden staff and symbol of authority], hence the custodian of the tradition and culture of Aguleri. The King presides over all proceeding of the *Ovala* festival and the use of *Ikolo*.
- (b) 2 Princes – Hands of the King, they act as the guardian and custodians of *Ikolo* and general administrators of *Ovala* festival where *Ikolo* features most prominently.
- (c) 2 Chiefs – they enforce traditional laws and also partake in *Ovala* rituals and *Ikolo* dance as initiates.
- (d) 2 Sacred specialists – One of them is the person who performs sacred rituals that pertains to *Ikolo* and its decoration during the *Ovala* festival, while the other person is the one who plays/beats the *Ikolo* sacred drum and interprets messages sent through the *Ikolo*.

The second category of interviewees were the eighteen focus group participants. They represented different social groups and economic interests in the community. Bloor et al (2001:6) maintains that focus group provides "...concentrated and detailed information on an area of group life which is only occasionally, briefly, and allusively available to the ethnographer over months and years of fieldwork". Rosaline Barbour (2007:37) argues that focus groups provide an opportunity to generate data that are amenable to analysis within the symbolic interactionist approach, which emphasizes the active construction of meaning. By this, these focus groups enabled me to get the general opinion of what the ordinary Aguleri believe, think, and understand about the uses/functions of *Ikolo* as a sacred instrument.

Members of these focus groups were drawn from ordinary Aguleri citizens between the ages of 20 to 55 years old. My reason for selecting them is because they are regarded as adults who are not initiates and they are the backbone of the community but who are not ordinarily permitted to 'dance' to the sound of the *Ikolo* nor are allowed to touch it. They nonetheless offer insights and perspectives on the *Ikolo* from a culturally less invested perspective.

The focus group of 18 ordinary citizens of Aguleri community was divided into three representative groups. Each group was made up of 6 indigenes with the following background: general citizens, business/local government officials and women some of them are Christian converts.

- (a) General Citizens – to have a general view of what an ordinary Aguleri person thinks about *Ikolo* because they are not initiates. These were members of local association and cultural groups who participate in *Ovala* festival and lay men/women in the church were invited to participate in this research.
- (b) Business/local government officials – to understand the socio-political and economic impacts of *Ovala* rituals during which *Ikolo* is used, and how the *Ikolo* is used to invoke prosperity. The group was a sample of people who are presently active in business locally as well as current members of local government, such as teachers or councilors.
- (c) Women – traditionally women are not allowed to participate in *Ikolo*-related rituals but they simply act as observers. Through this focus group I was able to get the voices of women and how

they view the use of the *Ikolo*. This group was developed through a process of self-selection after meeting members of the community.

Participant Observation

As a member of the Aguleri community, I was embedded in the community for an extended period of three months. Participant observers are researchers who are directly involved in the socio-cultural life and activities of the group or community they study. The researchers strive in their observation to be as objective as possible and prevent their own biases, opinions, values, and beliefs embellishing their observation (Agnew and Pyke 1984). Agnew and Pyke caution that “the possible distortions a researcher may cause are brought about by his past experience. Human fallibility makes the possibilities for distortion even greater. In this case, researchers must be conscious of any misleading opinions, beliefs or attitudes they harbor” (1982:48). To avert this, Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) advise that the ethnographer participates overtly during the period of event, watching what happens; listening to what is said, asking questions; collecting whatever data is available and relevant. De Marrais (1998:x) makes a similar argument regarding the role of observation, and argues that ethnographers should rely heavily on observational-knowing, and the writing of detailed field notes to capture the whole behaviours of the people within the culture. More so, in a successful fieldwork, an ethnomusicologist gains the perspectives of both insider and outsider (Nettl, 1983:260).

However, as a researcher and as an initiate of the Aguleri customs and tradition, I learnt the difference between listening from insider and outsider perspectives. During the course of my fieldwork I kept detailed fieldnotes which I later integrated into my coding and the development of themes from the interview data. Commenting on fieldwork in ethnomusicology, Nettl remarks that fieldwork is the “most personalized aspect of ethnomusicological research” (1964:64).

In order to reduce the problems of reactivity and suspicion, I presented myself as co-participant in the research. In this regard, Hammersley and Atkinson suggests that “a complete participant gets access to the inside information and experiences the world in ways that may be quite close to the ways other participants experience it. In this way, greater access to participant perspectives may be achieved”

(1983:97-98). Similarly, Fatima Mernissi (1991:viii) from the position of doing research with Muslim women, argues that it is only a member of Muslim community that can be in the ideal position to conduct research on issues of Muslim rituals than an outsider. Nonetheless, while accepting the fact that Western outsiders have played a significant role in the development of studies in African religions, Africans are suspicious of their motives [whether Christian or secular in origin] and are critical of their academic methods, and favour – by extension – the contribution of insiders to such studies (Knott 2005). Darshan Singh argues that:

The Western writers' attempt to interpret and understand Sikhism is an outsider's of non-participant's endeavor ... Primarily, religion is an area where is not easily accessible to the outsider, foreigner or non-participant. The inner meaning of a religion unfolds only through participation; by following the prescribed path and discipline (1991:3).

Deborah Court (2008:414) confirms that a researcher from inside the tradition can both ask good questions, and also truly understand the answers. Harold Turner (1981:3) argues that this implies that African phenomena are unique, that only Africans [as insiders] can develop a study of African religions that will do them justice, and that this study does not need Western religious studies and methods which can only hinder true understanding. However, Knott argues that it is only an insider that has the capability to represent and paint the true picture of his/her religious paradigm in the sense that “the majority of books written about religions are written by those who participate in them” (2005:247). Francis Fukuyama (1992:323) argues that an insider as a member of a community is recognized not just on the basis of his or her universal “personness” but for a host of particular qualities that together make up one's being. He argues that one can take daily pride in being a member of a community like the Aguleri which recognizes its members in a personal way (Fukuyama, 1992:323).

This perspective on participant observation as postulated by Hinsley (1983) and Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) is also advocated by Lewis who asserts that “the participant observers must fully immerse themselves in the community, and must know their language” (1976:24-26). Here, in my own case, Igbo language is my first language and my mother tongue. The same applies to all my participants. I engaged in this research during the *Ovala* festival celebration where *Ikolo* features prominently and thus,

it was context bound. Nonetheless, I applied the concept of observer-participant — someone who normally would be a participant but as a researcher, I decided to retreat so as to consider and observe the ritual practices critically. As such ethnomusicology provided a great way for me to operate both as the perspectives of an insider and outsider. I found participant-observation method to be very suitable for me as a researcher because it has different perspectives into the society and the festival. Gregory Barz (2003:24) suggests that observing and performing in cultural performance and ritual with people like the Aguleri would be the most rewarding and productive approach. Performers and listeners of the *Ikolo* sacred sound can therefore act simultaneously as insiders and outsiders.

PROCESS AND METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS

The data collected for my study, through my key informants and focus group discussions, were analyzed thematically and comparatively. In qualitative research, data analysis is an on-going process in which the researcher may even adapt new methods depending on emerging themes (Dawson, 2007:119). In this study, I used thematic analysis by constantly identifying emerging themes in the course of my data collection. Dawson (2007:119) again argues that in thematic analysis “the data collection and analysis take place simultaneously” with background reading also making part of the analysis process (Dawson, 2007:120). In this study, such themes were drawn from the perceptions and experiences of the participants as well as from the existing body of the literature on this phenomenon. Also, I drew on comparative analysis in order to compare and contrast data from the participants and the available literature to ensure that “no new issues are arising” (Dawson, 2007:121).

I therefore employed both analysis in this study which enabled me to work through my secondary and primary data “backwards and forwards” (Dawson, 2007:121) for reliable results. However, the data collection procedure in my research has implications for the validity and reliability of the research question. Validity is the tendency or extent to which “an empirical measure adequately reflects the real meaning of the concept under consideration” (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:122), while Silverman (2000:210) states that “validity is another word for truth”. While this data collection is helpful, this research thesis suggested a more “grounded theory” approach postulated by Strauss and Corbin (1990:23) which I used to enable me postulate my own theory about the meaning and significance of

sacred sound in African religion. According to Strauss and Corbin (1990:23) “a grounded theory is that theory that is inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents. That is, it is discovered, developed, and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis of data pertaining to that phenomenon”.

Babbie and Mouton argue that “grounded theory is an approach that allows us to study a relatively unknown social phenomenon around which no specific theory may exist yet. In the process, we will literally build a theory from the ground up, brick by brick so to speak. Our bricks in this case are the concepts that we ground as we proceed through the analysis process” (2001:499). Cathy Urquhart (2013:4) argues that the key point here is that the theory produced is grounded in the data, and this aided me in my analytical framework for understanding Aguleri religious practices as it pertains to *Ikolo* sacred sound through a postcolonial lens – and its concern with the recovery of indigenous practices. In identifying the two processes of grounded theory, Babbie and Mouton (2001:499) state that “grounded theory begins with coding, namely asking questions and making comparisons”. They argue that “when you begin to code, you are involved in taking a segment of text and labeling it according to a meaningful category [your code] and the way in which you do this in grounded theory is by asking certain questions” (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:499). Nonetheless, my research was conducted in Igbo, and interviews were conducted and recorded in Igbo. In order to make my work more reliable and valid, the translation of the interview transcripts from Igbo to English was done by an independent person.

According to Mark Slobin (1992:329) “ethnomusicologists must have a moment of ethical awareness at some point of their research work because of the moral standards by which research situations can be handled and it appears to all circumstances in which there can be an actual or potential harm of any kind to individuals involved”. Ralph Beals (1969:82) argues that “one can find commentary on this situation in the social sciences at times – “whose ethics shall be favored”. This is because “it is due partly to the apparent and overwhelming apathy of professional ethnomusicologists towards public airing of such issues” (Slobin, 1992:331). Nonetheless, since the information about the uses of the *Ikolo* as a sacred drum remains controversial especially among non-initiates and women as with regards to its social, political and religious functions in Aguleri tradition, information and personal details of all participants

remained confidential. In this regard, all participants were made to be aware that their participation is voluntary and that the research will only be used for academic purpose in the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Data or information collected were kept in safe place and it would remain confidential and that they would remain anonymous in order to protect them and to gain “confidence and trust to disseminate information useful to the study” (Churchill, 1991:54).

This is because “in fieldwork, ethics is the light of the scholar’s responsibilities to his client” (Slobin, 1992:330). Beals (1969:2) refers to it as “the increase of knowledge in the ultimate service for human welfare”. Significantly, I made sure that all my participants were properly informed of their own free volition in participating in this research and have the right to withdraw from the exercise at any time. This was strictly pursued decision accepted with or without providing reasons for their withdrawal from the programme. All my participants were informed about the ‘potential impact of the investigation’ and that the exercise was a Doctoral degree research work conducted for solely academic purposes; which was backed up with the consent form attached to the measuring instrument (Strydom, 1998:25).

In the course of this thesis, I sought to minimize generalized opinions as it concerns issues on religious and cultural views on *Ikolo*. Nonetheless, I recognize that if any similar research is eventually conducted in future in the same area, it might produce different research results. There was a number of limitations or constraints that confronted me in the course of this work. Because the interviews and focus group discussions were done in Igbo language, the issue of transcription from the digital recorder was challenging and time-consuming. Another problem I was presented with during fieldwork was the unwillingness of some local women to participate because of the fear that participation in the research may further alienate them. Finally, while I suspect that my being an initiate facilitated access to some Aguleri, it possibly alienated others from speaking openly about their views on the *Ikolo*, however, assessing the extent to which this influenced by data-gathering and analysis is almost impossible.

Reflexivity

According to Research Methodology (2003:1), a researcher “who use participant observation aim to unearth and discover the nature of social reality by understanding the actor’s perception/

understanding/interpretation of the social world”. For this reason, participant observation is sometimes called a naturalistic method and tends to be associated with the interactionist or social action perspective. The method is, as you would expect, primarily interpretive. The point, therefore, is to observe and experience the world as a participant, while retaining a critical observer’s view to be able to understand, analyse and explain the research phenomenon. Van Maanen asserts that “ethnography is the result of fieldwork, but it is the writing of report that must represent the culture, not the fieldwork itself” (1988:4). Chinua Achebe (2012:55) argues that as a researcher, “one should be on the sidelines with his notepad and pen, where he can observe with objectivity”.

In this way, by engaging myself in fieldwork, analyzing issues through the help of my field journals or note pads, my understanding of people’s behaviour during the *Ovala* festival was greatly enhanced. At times in the course of the interview, I tried my best to put everything that happened down into my field journal. By doing this, it helped me drastically when I was trying to analyze the entire data collected from the field. The recording of fieldnotes provided me with a mechanism for reflecting on what I was experiencing and to gauge my own behavior. Finally, I used the field notes as a way to assess how my interaction impacted on participants engagements or articulations during interviews or otherwise. It is on this position that Bolaji Idowu idiomatically asserts that through the mediation of this method, “a necessary passport into that sacred country of imaginative sympathy and constant readiness to learn; that a scholar must try and enter into the feelings of the people and see with their eyes in order to grasp and possess the knowledge of what they actually know and believe about the supersensible world” (1973:18).

Positionality

As a researcher and as an initiated listener of the *Ikolo* music, I navigated the space between being an insider or the outsider, this is because ironically, “I am a man of the community, a community man” (Venkatesh, 2006:279). In my own case, my insider status as an initiated man needed particular attention, however, I made myself more neutral and accessible by the way I talked and dressed. In fact, I carried out my research as an ordinary person and not as a titled man in the community. Irrespective of the fact that I am an initiate, I did not allow my position to affect my objective in mind. By this, I mean that I approached participants as an ordinary citizen in the community. I did not allow people to address me as

a titled man; instead I made sure that they see me as a student who is a novice and eager to learn from his teachers. Through this method, I was able to mix freely with all my participants. I found that from the way I humbled myself, many did not regard me as the son to one of the first class chiefs in the community. In this way, I was able to break and transcend the strict power structures that exist in the political hierarchy of the Aguleri priestly class.

Through adjusting my perceived position from that of an initiate to that of a student, the informants spoke freely which allowed me to operate as a participant/observer¹. Of course, as an initiate, *Ogbuevi*¹ - a traditional red cap Chief and also the son to one of the King's High Chiefs in the community provided me with unlimited access when fieldwork was conducted in the Aguleri community between July-September, 2013 during the period of *Ovala* festival when the *Ikolo* features most prominently. However, I was equally concerned about the depth of intrusion that researchers make in the communities they are investigating. I was concerned with keeping a critical gap, distance and acting together with the communities in all they do because "fieldwork usually means living with and living like those who are studied" (Van Maanen, 1988:2). Thus, at times I fear that my position and status may have undermined the extent to which I was able to live 'like those who are studied'.

On this position, Ioan Lewis (1976:25-26) suggests that ethnographers must 'mix' with the local people; become the 'life and soul of the party' and seize the essence of the life around them. Ethnographers must identify with the community; must go to places, homes and functions; which I did personally. Lewis (1976:25-26) also advised that researchers should choose a community whose present circumstances render them acutely interesting for theoretical reasons. For the same suggestion by Lewis, I chose Aguleri-my own community because by doing so it actually helped me to come out with classical/concrete information on *Ikolo* as an Igbo idiophone of indigenous religious sacred sound. All together, my position did not affect my intention but instead, I was regarded as a student. Also, very significant is the fact that my participants were very happy that this would be the first time the concept of the *Ikolo* sacred sound would be recorded because in oral history it is there but technically it is not there.

¹*Ogbuevi* means cow killer in traditional Igbo set up. A person that is addressed with this title is known to be traditional red cap chief. In Aguleri, it is only this category of individuals that are permitted to dance *Ikolo* music. Equally significant, during such people's death, *Ikolo* music would be used to announce

Conclusion

This section of my research provided me with a comprehensive research outline on research methodology which guided my current research in general. It also allowed the research design and theoretical framework which helped me to achieve my desired objectives which investigated into the *Ikolo*, an idiophone of religious sacred sound among the Aguleri people as it concerns its social, political and religious beliefs that are mediated through the use of its symbolic sounds. Also, the subsequent chapters presented the result of the research which were show-cased in thematic form and were inferred from transcript, to appropriate the initiates of the *Ikolo* and non initiates' experiences and attitudes towards their understanding of its sacred sound. Finally, it is my belief that my position as an initiate of the chiefly class among the Aguleri, served as both an asset and a deficit in the course of my research, but overall, I am convinced that the research procedures and tools put in place provided the methodologically robust structure needed when doing this kind of insider-observer research.

their death and after their burial. This symbolizes dignity and respect. The idea is that *Ikolo* is used to announce their death to the ancestors and commune with the spirits in the extra-terrestrial realm.

CHAPTER FIVE

AGULERI EXPERIENCES AND PERSPECTIVES OF THE *IKOLO*

In *Ethnicity, Identity and Music*, Martin Stokes (1997:8), writing on musical performance suggests that sacred sounds provide the means through which social identities are constructed and managed. This is certainly true in the case of Aguleri where the *Ikolo* as an idiophone upholds an indigenous knowledge system through which the community mediates and reflects changes in religious, social, economic, and political organization, as well as attitudes towards time and space (Garrioch, 2003:5). For the Aguleri people of Nigeria, the *Ikolo* sacred drum as “the ancient metaphorical descriptions of kings and gods” (Beier, 1954:30), speaks “the language of the ancestors” (Ohadike, 2007:2). Ikenga-Metuh (1987:20) describes such drum as “the voice of the people”. Orlando Patterson (2010:139), writing on artifacts as cultural reproduction, argues that idiophones, like the *Ikolo*, are not just a symbol of identity, “but also a cultural object that societies keep on reproducing in order to bring humanity together”.

Likewise, Iyorchia Ayu (1986) points to historical processes that highlight the fundamental similarities with the trajectory of historic struggles of African peoples. It is in this context, that Sekinat Lasisi reminds us that “traditional music is basically that type of music which is created completely from indigenous elements and has no stylistic affinity with Western music” (2012:108). From another perspective, Maraming Po asserts that the totality of this kind of music “reflects the life of common folk, mainly living in rural areas than urban ones” (2007:1). Jose DeArce (1998) argues that such indigenous music is an under-researched subject and he went further to assert that such “good instruments are rare and highly appreciated” (DeArce, 1998:28). Nzewi, et al (2001:93) holds that despite indigenous musical innovations—Europeans and Americans have continued to authoritatively misinterpret and misrepresent Africa. Jennifer Post comments that:

Ethnomusicologists, and other scholars in music and related fields, have identified the various ways ethnic and racial identities are played out in music-through interpersonal, interaction and global circulation. One of the primary concerns in this

area is the construction of boundaries. Research reveals that music variously subverts and reinforces both genre and social boundaries (2006:9).

Indigenous instruments such as idiophones are easily excluded from discourses and debates about what constitutes an instrument or music. I wish to turn to the question of musical instruments in a brief discussion of organology. According to Mantle Hood, “organology is the science of musical instruments which should include not only the history and description of instruments, but equally important, the neglected aspects of the science of musical instruments, such as particular techniques of performance, musical function, decoration [as distinct from construction], and variety of socio-cultural considerations” (1971:124). Put in another way, the significant subject of organology, according to Andre Schaeffner (1946), is the enumeration, description, localization and history of even the least of the instruments used in all human civilizations and periods to produce tones or sounds either for purely aesthetic ends or solely for some religious, magical or practical purpose. Nonetheless, organology basically considers and encompasses any device, object or apparatus designed by humans in order to produce a sound as a musical instrument.

According to Alexander Buchner “a musical instrument is a source of intentionally produced sound, constructed and employed for musical production, objectively capable, by virtue of its acoustic properties, of participating in cultural standards of a given people at a specific historical period” (1956:14). Erich Von Hornbostel (1933) asserts that for the purposes of research everything must count as a musical instrument with which sound can be produced intentionally. Although, he went further to distinguish between musical instruments in the conventional sense and sound-producing instruments, Schaeffner questioned this kind of distinction by carefully pointing out these questions: “If an object can produce a sound, how do we recognize then that it is musical? What qualities, of what kind, cause it to be ranged with other musical instruments? (1936:9)” In his later thesis, Schaeffner, again, came up with answers to these thought-provoking questions by affirming that “all musical instruments share a characteristic timbre, either for producing a sound or sounds of a definite pitch, or at least for providing material for noises produced successively in a time sequence, which may be described as musical sound” (1946:13).

THE *IKOLO* IN AGULERI IMAGINATION

This section would be dealing with the Aguleri experiences and perspectives on the *Ikolo* as a sacred drum. The reason why this is important is because its ritual is tied up with the *Ovala* festival that encompasses traditional religion, ritual, identity and symbolism. The broad categories of my interview schedule included the origin of the *Ikolo*, the social and religious significance of the *Ikolo* as well as its symbolic meaning for the Aguleri identity. The data was collected through active participation and observation method. This followed the unstructured interviews that actually helped me during the ritual festival of the *Ovala* celebration.

The of people I interviewed include the King, the ritual specialists, the *Ikolo* sacred drummer, and ordinary Aguleri citizens as well as some other initiates in the community who are polygamists. Also some of my participants are farmers, traders and Christian converts. The views expressed here are the result of the fieldwork conducted with some of my participants who were coded with different names in order that they would remain anonymized where certain questions that concern the *Ikolo* were asked. Some of the questions include: Do you think that the *Ikolo* is important for the Aguleri people? What does it mean when the drummers say or use certain languages when playing the *Ikolo*? How is the *Ikolo* a mark of the Aguleri identity? I was able to isolate three key social and religious functions or uses of the *Ikolo* and this made my participant air their opinions.

The general impression I got of my participant's feelings and responses to the interview questions and the inquiries about the functions of the *Ikolo* was that the *Ikolo* is important and acts as a link to the ancestors. Some believe that the *Ikolo* is important because it portrays Aguleri identity which upholds patriarchy due to the fact that women are not allowed to partake in the ritual dance of the *Ikolo*. Aguleri Christian converts, however, see it as satanic. Most people felt that it is important because it aids in ritual festivals. Nonetheless, people were excited about the functions of the *Ikolo* because it made them happy, while some, especially women that are not initiated into the cult of the *Ikolo* felt they were being marginalized.

Below are some of the general views expressed on the *Ikolo* . According to, Chief Onyema, a fifty-eight year old initiate:

Firstly, *Ikolo* is the voice that speaks for the Aguleri people. Secondly, *Ikolo* is the voice of the ancestors and at the same time the voice of our deities.

From the above statement it can be seen that not only does the *Ikolo* speak for the people, it also speaks to the people, thus it makes possible a two-way communication between the Aguleri and their ancestors and deities. As we will see below Chief Nweke, an eighty-two year old initiate suggests that the *Ikolo* is central in mediating relations between the Aguleri and their deities and ancestors. He asserts that:

Without the sound or the music of the *Ikolo*, we the Aguleri people will not be able to commune or have communication with our ancestors and deities.

It is clear from the above comments that the *Ikolo* serves a range of significant functions for the Aguleri, which includes announcements; entertainment and summons. Joy Lo-Bamijoko (1987:22) posits that “musical instruments in Igbo music follow a hierarchical order”. She argues that “in the hierarchical framework of Igbo musical instruments, all are not equal” (Lo-Bamijoko, 1987:22). *Ikolo* as a sacred instrument is basically made sacred by the people of Aguleri community due to symbolic functions it plays such as social and ritual announcement.

The *Ikolo* is regarded as a sacred instrument that not only connects the Aguleri with their ancestors but also binds the entire community together to the extent that they share in the symbolism of the *Ikolo*. Finally, through submitting to the symbolic authority of the instrument, the Aguleri submit also to a particular Igbo religious worldview wherein the practices of communicating with, and possession by ancestral spirits are common. Yet, inasmuch as the *Ikolo* is used to mediate the Aguleri religious world, it is also used to order and regulate the temporal world – the everyday, and annual life-cycle of the community.

Social and Ritual Announcement

The participants indicated or reflected a view that the *Ikolo* is primarily for social and ritual announcements. This view is also expressed elsewhere in Igbo literature and culture. For Dele Odunlami (2006:162), a close reading of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* reveals the use of indigenous idiophone as a source of ritual communication in Igbo land. Commenting on the use of Igbo sacred drumming, Ohadike (2007:3) asserts that "no one can afford to ignore its voice [sound] when it summons the community to assemble at the town-square, or to appear at the chief's palace". Buttressing this point, Chief Nwave argued that:

Ikolo is played whenever there is an emergency in the town for the indigenes to be alerted so that they can converge in the village square (*Amaeze*) for prompt decision/decisions to be taken.

Reinforcing what Chief Nwave introduces above, Mr Chinedu, a fifty-seven year old non-initiate asserts that:

It is used as an authoritative voice in controlling and gathering the community.

In the same vein, Mr Peter, a fifty-seven year old non-initiate notes that it is the unique sound of the *Ikolo* that provokes the Aguleri to pay attention, and it is in this that its auditory authority lies. In particular he noted that:

The sound of the *Ikolo* carries a very distinct aura... It makes the people to feel apprehensive, agitated and uncomfortable especially if there is no ceremony/festival on ground.

From these observations and assertions it becomes clear that the use of *Ikolo* is not restricted to formal and ritualistic use only, but that it is also used as a social instrument for calling the attention of the community, especially during emergency situations. Thus while it is not just used randomly, it is used to mark those occasions or moment that require the particular attention of the Aguleri – those who recognize and adhere to the sound of the drum. This is consistent with Robert Gluck (2005:37)

description that such sacred drum as the *Ikolo* as the “sounds of a community”, while Ohadike (2007:3) asserts that “the town crier’s authority is issued from the power invested in the sacred drum”. In this regard, Chief Nweke, an eighty-two year old initiate observes that:

When the *Ikolo* is beaten, the indigenes would know that something great/serious must have happened.

Similarly, Chief Martin, a ninety-one year old initiate argues:

The sound of the *Ikolo* is not beaten anyhow or at any time without reason/reasons.

From my participants’ responses, it can be observed that, for the Aguleri, the *Ikolo* is only sounded and beaten on occasions of great social or ritual significance. For David Garrioch, instruments such as the bell, or in this case, the *Ikolo*, allows the villagers “to locate themselves in time and in space, making them part of an auditory community” (Garrioch, 2003:5).

From the comment below, it can be observed that the *Ikolo* sacred drum, according to my participants, is about making and marking the Aguleri community, celebrating common identity and upholding the authority of the King as the head and custodian of tradition and culture. This is especially noted by Mr Jacob, a fifty-five year old non-initiate who asserts that:

Ikolo is used for announcement through the command of the King especially if he wants to do something or deliver certain important messages to his subjects.

Ikolo, as an idiophone, normally uses hollowed-out tones, its communication method is by patterns, and one has to be schooled in the patterns of the *Ikolo* language to be able to understand it “when they talk” (Lo-Bamijoko, 1987:22). Thus, not only is the *Ikolo* sound unique but also the drummer is a special or a kind of sacred specialist endowed with the ability to play and interpret the sound of the drum. This sentiment is captured in the following assertions and expressions: Mr Chinedu, a fifty-seven year old non-initiate explains that:

The uniqueness of Aguleri *Ikolo* drummer entails simultaneous chanting and invocation of/praises of the ancestors and gods.

So far, it has been observed that the *Ikolo* as a sacred drum of the Aguleri people is a communicative medium or link by which the community connects to its deities and ancestors. Not only does the *Ikolo* have an auditory authority to call people together, its auditory authority extends to activating a bodily experience among the initiates whereby some overcome and perform ritual dance while others are possessed by ancestral spirit. As we can see below, Chief Onyema, a fifty-eighty year old initiate goes on to assert that:

Its aura makes people to develop eerie feelings because it is a dance for the sacred and prestige. In this sense, it is during this ritual dance that spirit possession occurs. It is this feature that makes the *Ikolo* a mark of Aguleri identity.

The *Ikolo* sacred sound would be regarded as the pride, the epitome, an embodiment and the hall mark of Aguleri tradition and culture (Idigo, 2001:126). The *Ikolo* sound is central to the lived experience of Aguleri social space and crucial to the mediation and negotiation of spiritual space. As a point of emphasis, in Aguleri cosmology, it is believed that the king and initiates represent the entire community. Therefore, for non-initiates, comprising ordinary Aguleri citizens and women, to access the spiritual potency of the sound of the *Ikolo*, they rely solely on the initiates. The point here is that, the participants believe that the sacred space has both temporal dimensions – occupied by the living and a spiritual dimension - occupied by the living-dead. Nketia (1989:117) argues that the significance of such music like that of the *Ikolo* during ritual occasion does not rely only on the symbolic interaction it generates, but also what it provides for the affirmation of communal values and the renewal of the bonds and sentiments that bind the community or the devotees of a god. Not minding the fact that the functions of the *Ikolo* are believed to be significant especially to the initiates, some of my informants have some negative impressions concerning it. This sentiment is captured in the following assertions and expressions: Mrs AveMaria, a fifty-two year old lay Christian woman expressed ambivalence towards the use of *Ikolo* in ancestor ritual:

In the area of belief system, the idol worshippers use the *Ikolo* in worshipping their gods.

However, Mrs Nneka, a sixty-six year old female sacred specialist had a more affirming view of *Ikolo*. She said:

Ikolo is used in worshipping/invoking the deities and the spirits of our ancestors that mediate between the people and their deities.

From the above, it may be observed that the *Ikolo* is used as a mechanism for invoking the spirits of the deities and ancestors in the worldview of the Aguleri people. Vincent Mulago (1991:119) argues that through the mediation and manifestation of sacred sound like the *Ikolo*, a community such as the Aguleri “understand a relationship in being and in life of each person with descendants, family, brothers, and sisters in the clan, with ancestors, and with God who is the ultimate source of all life”. In line with this assertion, Chief Ndigwe, an eighty-nine year old initiate comments that:

Ikolo's saliency among the *Agulerians* is informed by the fact that the music and sound of the Aguleri people's *Ikolo* is essentially different from that of other Igbo people. *Ikolo* drummer artistically drums the Aguleri *Ikolo* with a view to produce a peculiar and desired sound that is synonymous with the Aguleri people.

From the perspectives of my participants the symbolic functions of the *Ikolo* as a comprehensive outfit encompasses ritual communication generally. By this, I mean that through social and ritual announcement the whole cosmological system is completely grasped, interpreted, decoded and disseminated, thereby making and marking Aguleri community as an auditory state in time and space in the Igbo sacred soundscape. As we can see below, Mr Jacob, a fifty-five year old non-initiate observes that:

The sound of the *Ikolo* is a means or method of communicating with the gods and ancestors through ritual performance of certain sacrifices and its religious dance. It connects the spirits of our ancestors in order to commune with the community people.

Again, the fact that the sound produced by the *Ikolo* is believed to be special through the mediation of its booming sound which infects the initiates with spirit possession; ritual speaking of its voice in deep tones and its dance style which is somehow stylistic, can be attributed to its outstanding and remarkable qualities during the *Ovala* celebration, making it the mark of the Aguleri identity. While it brings people together for certain announcements or statements by the King or or a social emergency that pertains to social, religious and political reasons, it is also used to call the Aguleri for ritual gatherings.

Sustaining Aguleri Ritual Order

The *Ikolo* also serves as a mechanism for sustaining and maintaining Aguleri rituals. It accompanies most key rites of passage which means that without the sound of the *Ikolo* no important ritual would take place in the community. In this regard, the participants discussed several vital rituals that pertains to the *Ikolo* sound. Some referred to the use of the *Ikolo* during a coronation, burial ceremonies for the initiated, the conferment of Chieftaincy titles and other designated festivals. The fact that the *Ikolo* is used in sustaining Aguleri ritual order means that it actually supports the insitution of partriarchy that encompasses only the King and other initiates in Aguleri custom and tradition. This is captured by the observation of Chief Arinze, an eighty-two year old initiate that:

The *Ikolo* is used during the period of initiations of the *Ikolo* members like the *Ozo*, *Oba*, *Ogbuanyinya*, or when the community is performing burial ceremony of a well known personality in the town.

From the above, it has been observed that, on the one hand, the *Ikolo* is used to denote privilege, and on the other hand, serves to uphold Aguleri social and ritual order. As indicated by several participants, without the sound of the *Ikolo* no meaningful ritual would take take place in the community and it is used for carrying out ritual ceremonies for designated individuals in the community. Similarly, Chief Avuluoba, a ninety year old initiate stated that:

The *Ikolo* symbolizes the voice that speaks for the people and at the same time, it acts as a link or conduit that binds the deities and the ancestors that protect the community together.

Here, the *Ikolo* is seen to act as a bridge that connects the living and living-dead. This is because the sound of the *Ikolo* is believed to be the mediating link between the deities, ancestors and the people. Michael Nabofa (1994:38), in his observation about the Urhobo people in the Niger Delta, argues that “it is within this world of classical and cultic sacred sound that the elements of traditional cultic and symbolic rituals have complete natural integration, much of African traditional sacred sound and ritual drama are religiously encapsulated in nature”. Likewise, for the Aguleri people the *Ikolo* is used to produce the aura of sacrality to validate the rituals and to invoke the ancestors, and through its mediating sound, to seek their favour. Also, the ritual invocation of the ancestors, and the validation of the incumbent chiefs given during the conferment of Chieftaincy titles are regarded as significant moments in the Aguleri ritual calendar. Reflecting on the use of the *Ikolo* in this particular ritual, Mrs AveMaria, a fifty-two year old lay Christian woman comments that:

Ikolo is used during the initiation of the initiates. It is used for the conferment of chieftaincy titles like the *Oba*, *Ozo*, and for the burial of known personalities that are equally titled men in the community. It is also used for the celebration of *Ovala* festival. It is used during New Yam festival.

Similarly, it has been observed that *Ikolo* serves as an agent of ritual order. Mr James, a fifty-six year old non-initiate asserts that:

Ikolo is played distinctively on the day of coronation.

It is important to note that the *Ikolo* as a sacred instrument is not just for any burial, but it is reserved specifically for funerary rites and rituals of the titled men in Aguleri community where its sound is artfully played. This means that the *Ikolo* does not only mark entries into the physical world, but also exits from this world, as well as entries into the world of the ancestors.

The significant function of the *Ikolo* as a medium of sustaining Aguleri ritual order is seriously tied to its liturgical functions especially insofar as its ritual significance is highly prized in Aguleri cosmology. The *Ikolo* is used to support the privilege of the titled men, it ultimately serves to reinforce and validate the authority of the King. In this regard, the *Ikolo* serves very much the same purpose as ancestor ritual

among the Xhosa (Chidester 1992) or Bruce Lincoln's account of the Swazi *Incwala* as upholding the ritual authority of the Swazi king (Lincoln 1989). According to Kirshenblatt-Gimblett & Brunner, the question is "who has the power to represent whom and to determine which representation is authoritative?" (1992:304). Similarly, Regina Bendix (1997:21) framed the concept of the study/discourse/discipline of folklore in terms of authenticity as an object while retaining the inherent value of the quest for the authentic. She replaces the question "what is authenticity? With "who needs authenticity and why?" and "how has authenticity been used?" (1997:21). In my view, *Ikolo* music is basically a consummation of what Cooley (2006:79) refers to as "preservation and invention" of indigenous culture that is dynamic, which is consistently mediated in the realm of Aguleri heritage as the case may be. On the issue of authenticity, Mr Jacob, a fifty-five year old non-initiate observes that:

When you look at the history of the *Ikolo*, it was King Onyekomeli Idigo who actually transformed its significant functionalities as it is today. No other family has that traditional right to keep the *Ikolo*.

From the above assertion, it can be observed that beyond its ritual function, the *Ikolo* is also used to convey Aguleri sacred history, through its symbolism and place in Aguleri imagination, the royal, and sacred order is reinforced – "No other family has that traditional right to keep the *Ikolo*". It is on this ground that Mr Peter, a forty five year old non-initiate comments that:

When the *Ikolo* is beaten early in the morning, the King and the entire people of Aguleri community wake up from sleep, this shows that it is a new day in order to hand them over to deities and gods of the land.

From this we can infer that through sustaining the Aguleri ritual order on a daily basis, the *Ikolo* is symbolically reinforcing legitimacy and authority of the King, as well as the ritual privilege of the initiated or titled men. Obviously, musical communication in such ritual festivals like *Ovala* in Aguleri would happen as a means of passing message from human beings [the worshipper] to the gods in religious ritual festivals. It is a ritual ceremony or celebration of first fruits, when tribute is made to the

ancestors and the authority of the King as primary guardian of the tradition is re-inscribed. Throughout the *Ovala* festival, the idea of privilege is acknowledged against the backdrop of the less privileged who depend of the fertility of the soils and the good fortune of the ancestors as well as that of the gods. The Aguleri community uses the *Ovala* festival as the high point of its annual ritual calendar during which time the initiated, through the mediating sound of the *Ikolo*, are in constant, ecstatic communication and communion with their deities. Thus, in this context, music through the sacred sound of the *Ikolo* is the permanent accompaniment for indigenous religious festivals, rites, and ceremonies. In support of this view, Chief Ozomma, a sixty year old initiate asserts that:

Of all the festivals in our community, *Ovala* festival takes preeminence because every Aguleri man or woman either Christian or Traditional worshipper actually looks up to the colourful event.

However, it is on this note that *Ovala* festival is seen as a reconstituted ritual in Aguleri community because it is that period when the indigenes come from all walks of life in order to see their relatives and to share in the good fortunes of the community through the mediating sound of the *Ikolo*. Interestingly, Mr Chinedu, a fifty-seven year old non-initiate said that:

Ovala festival is very important to our people because it is during that period that we have a singular opportunity to see our kiths and kins that live in urban areas. Equally, it is during that period that we do have opportunity to see ‘*Nwagwu*’ the jester masquerade and *Ijele* masquerade, the King of all the masquerades and to listen to the sound of the *Ikolo*.

It is through the sound of the *Ikolo* that people would get to know that festivals like the *Ovala* celebration is about taking place. It is also through the sound of the *Ikolo* that various activities, secular or religious, are performed in the community. It is clear from these beliefs that the sound manifestation of sacred sounds like the *Ikolo* as an indigenous talking drum has a much broader scope to the traditional society like the Aguleri people than the superficial meaning often attached to it, and that, “in those societies, the textual contents of music are not just mere words but have mystical potency and can be used in many practical ways to produce concrete observable results” (Adegbite, 1991:45). We have come to understand that from the questions about the *Ovala* festival which says: how is the *Ikolo* a mark of the

Aguleri identity? It has been discovered that it is during the *Ovala* celebration that spirit invocation do occur. As a point of emphasis, it is only the King and initiates that experience spirit invocation and spirit possession through the vibrating sound that emanates from the *Ikolo*. This sentiment is captured in the following assertions and expressions: Chief Ndigwe, an eighty-nine year old initiate and player of the *Ikolo* comments that:

I physically play the *Ikolo* drum but in spirit it is never me who drums the music. There are spirits that overtake me and inspire me to drum to the likeness of the Aguleri tradition and that of the ancestors. I can assure you that no one produces the *Ikolo* music to infect the titled men without being possessed by the spirit that governs the *Ikolo* music. It is with descent of the spirit of the *Ikolo* upon the drummer that the initiates are infected with spirit possession while partaking in the ritual dance. *Agulerians* assumed that the sound of the *Ikolo* is a physical manifestation of the voices of their ancestors and the spirits.

From the above, it can be seen that the drummer of the *Ikolo* serves as a sacred specialist, the one who mediates between the sound of the *Ikolo* and the initiates. It is through this person beating the sacred drum that the initiates are able to enter into an altered state of consciousness while doing the ritual dance. The drummer of the *Ikolo* assumes a critical ritual position in Aguleri sacred order. Also, it has been observed that even the drummer of the *Ikolo* engages in a relationship with a tutelary spirit in order to attain excellence and at this level artistic performance requires spiritual possession. It is on these observations that one can say that the *Ikolo* is a mechanism for upholding and sustaining the Aguleri ritual order, For the participants, this is maintained through the use of the *Ikolo* in rituals of conferment of Chieftaincy titles, coronation of the King, burial of dignitaries and designated ritual festivals.

Ritual Festivals and Aguleri Religious Experience

With regards to ritual festivals and Aguleri identity, based on my observations and views that some of the participants expressed, *Ovala* festival is also a period for entertainment and relaxation which invariably upholds and showcases the cultural identity of the community and that of the initiates to be custodians of sacred canopy. The celebration of such festival like the *Ovala* and New yam festivals would not be complete if *Ikolo* sacred sound “fails to be part of the celebration” (NTI, 1990:10). Ballard (2006:1)

asserts that “the drum is an ancient and powerful instrument in Igbo and West African cultures. The drum is a focal point of every community ritual, dance, festival, initiation and celebration”. This is because it speaks the language of the gods, and can induce spirit possession or, as is commonly said, summon the divinities to mount their horses (Ohadike, 2007:4). Mr Peter, a forty five year old non-initiate, confirmed this position and commented that:

The *Ikolo* ritual dance is assumed to be the dance for the gods and ancestors, and it is meant for the prestige.

Thus, it can be observed that the ritual dance of the *Ikolo* is assumed to be the ritual dance for the gods or the ancestors who are able to commune with all during the festivities. It should be noted, however, that the dance ritual is solely meant for the privileged or titled men in the community of the Aguleri. Chief Onyema, a fifty-eight year old initiate interprets this in the following manner:

Ikolo serves as a conduit that binds the entire community together during the ritual dance of the initiates.

It can be seen from the observation of Chief Onyema that he believes that during the ritual dances and performances, the social and ritual cohesion of the community only acquire effect through the sound of the *Ikolo*. Echoing this assertion further, Nwando, a seventy-seven year old initiate explains that more than some abstract affinity to the sound of the instrument, he argues that he feels its effect, physically:

It is the indigenous instrument we use to know that something has happened in Aguleri community... It makes us to feel like holy ones through its sound.

Ikolo is regarded as more than just an ordinary instrument. It is believed to be the instrument that possesses the very essence of the Aguleri identity insofar as it makes community member, and the initiates feel set apart as indicated in the above statement. This is because of through its symbolic functions and auditory authority, the *Ikolo* both upholds the liturgical pace of the ritual festival on the one hand, and it sustains, and reinforces Aguleri religious identity on the other. Further, the *Ikolo* is used to communicate and to celebrate Aguleri religious identity, even though it is primarily enacted through

the ritual performances of its male initiates. The ritual performances of the initiates characterised by the invocation of ancestral spirits who are believed to then take possession of male initiates. Through such acts of possession divine injunction are conveyed to the community at large. Although the tradition of ritual drumming is widely practiced among the Igbo, it has particular significance among the Aguleri, insofar as they believe that they are the guardian of the tradition among the Igbo and that no other legitimate way of communicating with ancestors and deities are available to them. Many have argued that despite the influence of Christianity and Islam in the region, the significance of the *Ikolo* music is still widely upheld in Igbo society today due to their cultural affiliation to the sacred sound of the *Ikolo* which has deep roots in their tradition. On this Chief Martin, a ninety-one year old initiate asserts that:

Ikolo is a sacred sound that is used in invoking the spirits of our ancestors;

Arguably, though the *Ikolo* is a human product, the fact that the drummer beats the drum to determine and accompany the movement of the initiates for the purpose of spirit invocation and spirit possession makes the *Ikolo* a “sacred” drum for the Aguleri. While its primary function is to mediate between the human and the transcendent, it is also used in key community festival where homage is paid to the ancestors and the deities. In certain festivals, the *Ikolo* sacred sound also marks the culmination of celebration. For example, it serves as a central auditory authority during the *Ovala* festival. Chief Ndigwe, an eighty-nine year old initiate explains that:

it is important in our culture and tradition but also, it is the [voice] representative of the dead and spirit that governs the community.

From the above, it is believed that the enjoyment of the *Ikolo* music is a paramount consideration in *Ovala* festival because of the combination of its art forms, its music, dance and songs. Moreover, in considering the relationship of music and the sacred, the Aguleri believe that the sacred is embodied by aesthetics and symbolism of the *Ikolo*. Through the booming sound of the *Ikolo* the spirits are invoked to mount on the heads of the initiates. In buttressing this assertion further, Chief Nweke, an eighty-two year old initiate observes that:

What all these portray is that the sound of the *Ikolo* is the mystical representation of the voice of the gods and ancestors that protect the community. The Aguleri people have that believe that there is a deep connection or link that binds the King, the entire Aguleri community, and the deities that protects them together through the mediating sound of the *Ikolo*. These links are indivisible because it is spiritual.

From the above assertion, it it may be noted that the power inherent in the sound of the *Ikolo*, as a mystical voice of the gods, connects the living and the dead in the thinking and belief of the Aguleri. This belief in the connectivity between the living and the transcendent extend into all aspect of Aguleri life. Similarly, Chief Nwave, an eighty-four year old initiate asserts that:

The King and his Chiefs cannot do without the ritual sound of the *Ikolo*. In short, they rely heavily on its entertainment power during the *Ovala* celebration.

I can be observed from the above that the King [*Igwe*] of Aguleri and his male initiates have a conflicted, and complicated association with the *Ikolo*. While on the one hand the King, his chiefs and the male initiates are regarded as the close guardians of the *Ikolo* (and by implication Aguleri tradition and religion), it is also evident that these initiated men, including the King, heavily rely on the symbolic and auditory authority of th *Ikolo* for sustaining their privilege. Thus one can speculate that the entire Royal household is subject to the symbolic authority and power of the *Ikolo*. This is because the *Ikolo* is believed to be the carrier of the power of the ceremony in that when the musical instruments are played and danced to, it imbues them with spiritual inspiration and relief. Chief Nwave, a eighty-four year old initiate, concurs that:

It is a sacred sound that is used especially during the *Ovala* festival or New yam festival where the King is seen as ritual head.

It is through this ritual and its dance styles, which sets the initiates apart, that the identity of the Aguleri as a community is equally demonstrated. The dancing to the *Ikolo* music by the King and his chiefs establishes its position as an instrument of Aguleri identity and hegemony. This could also be interpreted to mean that the King is seen as an earthly representative or embodiment of the various classes of people

in the community - both the privileged and the less privileged. It is on such occasions that the King assumes the role of both the earthly and spiritual father respectively. This is because *Ovala* period is also an occasion which the King uses to improve the lives of the underprivileged by donating materials for charity purposes. In furtherance of this assertion, Chief Arinze, an eighty-two year old initiate asserts that:

The *Ikolo* sound is a binding force that connects the King and the entire community together through the mediating link that exists between them and their gods and ancestors.

The summation of the above assertion is that people see that the sound of the *Ikolo* brings coherence to the entire society, but also reinforces the specific relationships of the people with their King, the initiates, the ancestors, and their deities. As we can see below, Chief Avuluoba, a ninety-year old initiate explains that:

Nobody can separate that link that binds the King, the initiate, the gods and the ancestors because the sound of the *Ikolo* acts as a bridge that links the world of seen and the unseen in Aguleri cosmology.

So far, from what some of my participants have said, I have come to observe that the *Ikolo* acts as a link or a binding force that holds the entire community together. While the King and other initiates act as the earthly representatives of the people, they also represent those who are privileged and endowed with special status and regard in the community. Also, symbolically as a mark of ritual festival and Aguleri identity, some of the participants observed that it is the dancing steps from the initiates that give the occasion its particular character. According to some participants, the dancing styles are so stylish that even the youths in the community who are not initiates are eager to become members. It is on this ground that Mr Chinedu, a fifty-seven year old non-initiate, echoes that:

The dance style of the *Ikolo* initiates is filled with great dancing steps and this makes it to be the dance for prestige. More importantly, it is for the high social ranks like the initiates and other traditional Chiefs in the community.

From the above, it has been observed that Aguleri community sees the sound of the *Ikolo* as a conduit that insulates the King, the initiates, the ancestors, and their deities together, and infuses a kind of mystical bond of brotherhood in them through its dancing styles. Buttressing this further, Mr Amuzia, a fifty-five year old non-initiate, says that:

The sound of the *Ikolo* makes me have eerie feelings, it makes me to be elated because it is the music for the King, great people, the valiant's, and also it is the music of the ancestors. The sound of the *Ikolo* makes my head to swell and makes my entire body to be filled with goose pimples.

From my observations, it is this kind of ritual dance that brings the initiates into mystical communication and union with nature, which causes a feeling of elation. In such a situation, such dance movements can be made more simple or more effectively demanding according the dancers' age, ability, or proficiency, because it is believed to be the dance for gods and ancestors. Buttressing this, Mr James, a fifty-six year old non-initiate, explains that:

Sulugede ritual dance is proverbially equated to *Ikolo* dance. It is believed to be the dance for gods, spirits and ancestors living in their extraterrestrial realm. When such ritual sound is heard or danced, it is believed that the gods and the ancestors are practically present.

From the views of the participants, the *Ikolo* dance is equated to the dance of the gods which invariably calls for spirit invocation and possession. On this, Chief Onyema, a fifty-eight year old initiate, explains that:

It is during this rituals dance that that spirit possession do mount on them. It is this kind of characteristic that marks the *Ikolo* to be an Aguleri identity.

In the above section, it has been observed that the spirits have taken control of the dancer's body through the attunement in which the drum's rhythms are being manipulated by the *Ikolo* drummer with the view to invoke spirits to take over the dancer's movements and body. Chief Nwando, a seventy-seven year old initiate, was very clear about who is allowed to dance:

The people that are allowed to dance the ritual dance are men with courageous abilities and valour in the community.

From the views expressed by my participants, it is very clear that the *Ikolo* accompanies festivals and ceremonies concerned with celebrating Aguleri [Igbo] identity and ways of being. Through the ritual performances during festivals, ideas about social hierarchy and behaviour is articulated and reinforced.

Mediating Social Order and Social Relations

In the Aguleri tradition, the sound of the *Ikolo* sacred drum is seen as symbolically powerful because it is a medium which the indigenous community invokes the will and the direction of the ancestors. Such ancestral dictates are used to moderate the social and ethical challenges faced by the community. Thus, the *Ikolo* acts as a mechanism for reprimanding and urging the devotees, especially the cruel, savage, and dishonest elements in the community, to lead a pure and chaste life in order to avoid the displeasure of the gods and goddesses. It is widely believed in Aguleri cosmology that the sacred sound of the *Ikolo* is the voice of the ancestors that “communicate messages full of cultural meanings” (Nwauwa, 2007:xiii). In this perspective, Hylton White (1995:47) refers to such ethical code of conducts as the “letters from our forefathers”. However, as is made clear from the quotation below, the sacred potency of the *Ikolo* is believed to be under constant threat by women’s supposed embodiment of impurities that will defile the sacred instrument and render it impotent. Such strong theological conviction seem to only serve the exclusion of women from Aguleri sacred order. Though about the threat to the potency of the drum, Mr Paul, a fifty-year old man, reveals the gendered nature of Aguleri religiosity:

If women are allowed to partake in the ritual dance, it is believed that it would not allow the *Ikolo* to speak. It is believed that the goodwill messages we usually derive from the sound might cease because its potency has already been defiled.

It has been observed from the above that because it acts as an agent of social order and social relations, it speaks ritualistically in the Aguleri worldview. Similarly, Chief David, a seventy-seven year old initiate, stated that:

It is in this kind of social event that the drummer of the *Ikolo* sarcastically uses certain linguistic innuendoes to jestingly criticize the evil doers in the community by advising them to desist from their evil ways.

From the above assertion, it has been observed that the *Ikolo* is used as a way to mediate social order and relations in some African traditional contexts. This is largely articulated through references to the power of the *Ikolo* to purify, to heal and reprimand the Igbo community. However, the *Ikolo* is not believed to be able to ‘speak’ ritualistically all the time and that its ritual capacity is always vulnerable to pollution by the uninitiated and women. Apart from its primarily sacral use, the *Ikolo* drum is also used for dance entertainment and competitions, as well as in the sacred drumming state. It is on these occasions when it can speak in deep tones, mystically and metaphorically, that it can “provide an elaboration of transgression in terms of negation and its connection with taboo” (Taussig, 1998:349). Explaining this practice, Chief Nweke, an eighty-two year old initiate, comments that:

It is during *Ovala* festival that the drummer of the *Ikolo* uses its sound along side his songs to cajole and criticize those that are known in the community to be bad people and at the same time praises the good members of the community. Such bad people are cautioned through this means to desist from doing evil or face the wrath of the gods of the land.

From the above assertion, it has been suggested that the *Ikolo* sound is used alongside its songs to cajole and criticize those that are known to be bad in the community. In this form, it is believed that it speaks in deep tones through the mediation of the drummer. Mr Amuzia, a fifty-five year old non-initiate, asserts that:

The sound of the *Ikolo* is used with its songs to make jest of some of the members of the community that are evil doers. The drummer of the *Ikolo* criticizes such people openly, asking them to turn to good.

From the above assertion, it can be seen that despite, and because of, its profound ritual significance, the *Ikolo* is also afforded some ethical functions. Mr Amuzia indicates above that the playing of the *Ikolo* is also used as an opportunity to chastise initiates who are believed to behave unethically. In this sense the

sacred drum does not only assume auditory authority among the Aguleri but is also significantly imbued with ethical authority. Reflecting on the significance of drumming and rhythmic song, dancing, and other designated symbolic functions, the drumming of the *Ikolo* is considered to be the voice or influence of ancestral shades or other spirits that possess the sufferer and give the cure (Janzen, 1994). Janzen further argues that it is in this form that rituals like that of the *Ikolo* drum of affliction “showed their inner workings and social contexts, their intricate ritual symbolism, therapeutic motivations, and societal support systems” (Janzen, 1994:162). Mrs AveMaria, a fifty-two old lay Christian woman, observes on the same issue, that:

The sound of the *Ikolo* is sacrosanct. Its sound has the proclivity to enhance child bearing and to heal, if its laws are respected. Nonetheless, women who menstruate at any point in time are not allowed to come in contact with it, this is because its potency would be at the risk of defilement.

From the above assertions, it is clear that through the mediation of its sound, the *Ikolo* is regarded as a cultural and social agent which can act as a source of authority and social order. For those who believe it holds the power to determine one’s fertility, but only if the laws are respected. In the above discussion the coupling of social order, gender compliance and degeneracy is very revealing. It suggests that in relation to the *Ikolo*, women are the ones regarded as most likely to throw the Aguleri social order into disarray – either through disobedience, manifested through infertility, or through direct defilement of *Ikolo*. By this perspective, women are viewed as the greatest threat to Aguleri religiosity and the symbolic power of the sacred drum. So while the drum is seen as an agent of ethics – this role seems to be primarily articulated as ordering women’s behaviour. Mr Paul, a fifty-year old non-initiate, made it clear that the possession of the power of the *Ikolo* also facilitates the ability to call out wrongdoers in the community:

The sound of the *Ikolo* teaches us about many issues of life as it concerns social ethics about the community.

From the above assertion, and from my observations I became clear that the drummer of the *Ikolo* uses this position to chastise and criticize certain social conduct, while praising others. The format appeared to be one of sarcasm and jesting. The drummer of the *Ikolo* assumes a particular position of authority –

almost as if the instrument ‘speaks’ through him. It is through this method of addressing serves as one way that social tension can be resolved, while at the same time it serves as a means through which traditional norms and behaviours are reinforced. As a point of emphasis, by using the sound of the *Ikolo* for mediating social order, it has been observed that in Aguleri community, the drummer of the *Ikolo* is seen and accepted as a spokesman, who has the ability to get the attention of the ancestors easily through the mediation of the spirits. By this singular privilege, he is assumed to “possess a great amount of ritual esoteric knowledge; he is wealthy; ...he is accorded high prestige and enjoys charismatic appeal” (Guenther, 1975:163). Thus, the sound of the *Ikolo* and simultaneous chantings of the *Ikolo* drummer acts as a mechanism for keeping ethical code of conducts in Aguleri worldview.

IKOLO AND AGULERI’S OVALA FESTIVAL

The *Ovala* festival is a ceremony that centres around Aguleri kingship in order to assert the authority of the king over his subjects. The festival is held once a year to mark the beginning of the king’s royal calendar. *Ovala* festival is a three day celebration filled with a wide range of activities, ranging from preparation, marking the eve of the festival and the *Ovala* festival proper. Stage one is about getting the King’s square in good order for the celebration, the eve of *Ovala* is dedicated to the decoration and consecration of the *Ikolo*, and the final stage is the day when the king and all the male initiates dance in the king’s square to the rhythm and the sound of the *Ikolo*.

The word *Ovala* has come to be known or regarded as the most well-known royal festival and celebration among the traditional rulers [*Ndi Eze*] of the Igbo speaking people of Southern Nigeria and beyond (Idigo, 2002:23). *Ovala* festival is a ceremony that basically centres on the Aguleri Kingship in order to reaffirm and reassert his authority over his subjects. Nnamah (2002:8) affirms that *Ovala* festival is held occasionally like once a year to mark the beginning of the Kings’ royal calendar. *Ovala* festival is a three day celebration packed with different activities ranging from preparation, marking the eve of the festival and the *Ovala* festival proper. The preparation stage entails clearing and putting the King’s square in good order. The second stage which is the eve of the *Ovala* is when the consecration of the *Ikolo* takes place, while the third stage is when the King with his Chiefs dance round the King’s square to entertain the people.

According to Willie Obiano (2013:1) “the *Ovala* is today the biggest and most significant cultural festival in Aguleri. It is a royal festival celebrated by the traditional ruler and the custodian of Aguleri culture and tradition”. Similarly, Eddy Idigo (2002:24) suggests that in Aguleri today, the *Ovala* has assumed the position of a national festival, co-celebrated by every Aguleri person whether Christian or traditionalist alongside the monarch. From my observation of the community, and from the interviews conducted, it is clear that what people celebrate is not just *Ovala* festival a symbolic event that encompasses the well-being of the community. It is during this period, according to Nzewi (1979:170), that “the incumbent principal religious official and his assistants set about procuring objects for the sacred rituals or ceremonies of the festival.

According to Paul Nnamah (2000), the *Ovala* festival is a product of Aguleri religiosity and he argues that although this ritual festival originated among the Aguleri, it has spread to, and has been incorporated, and practiced among the Igbo more generally. He argues that until 1900, the word *Ovala* was a restricted expression as a cultural form in other parts of Igbo land except Aguleri, but today, it has become what ethnomusicologists would refer to as ethno-cultural festival in Igbo land (Nnamah, 2000:8). Thus, *Ovala* festival is celebrated as a spiritual festival of cultural heritage in Igbo society.

Significance of the *Ovala* festival in Aguleri

Though the *Ovala* festival is purely a royal and kingly festival, its significance and meaning in Aguleri has drastically transformed over time. It is during this period that many of them spend three to four days in Aguleri in order to see their culture, and all performances, such as the *Ijele* masquerade, and their deities (Drewal, 1992:164). Chike Aniakor asserts that “*Ijele* masquerade is seen only on very special occasions such as yam festivals or in the case of the Northern West Igbo in Aguleri area, the *Ofala* festival of Eze Idigo, a used pattern that dates back to the nineteenth century” (1978:42). Aniakor goes on to explain that it is in *Ovala* festival that “the mask performs to *Igba Eze* music, the music of Kings, named for its association with major events in those Northern Igbo areas that have a tradition of

Kingship” (1978:42). Thus, Chike Dike confirms that the King’s “*persona* has been built up by his association with certain objects and his controls of certain festivals and masquerades” (1987:75).

Eric Ayisi argues that ethnic festival like the *Ovala* festival “besides being a national festival, is also a calendrical festival because it occurs annually like the Christmas season” (1972:70). Benjamin Ray (1976) argues that African ritual has a specifically social-functional character, and this is clearly recognized by the participants themselves. Every sacrifice is a re-creation of the group’s solidarity, every rite of passage, and a re-forging of the corporate life. Nonetheless, the king represents the royal dynasty, the ancestral force, which is incarnated in his beaded crown (Thompson, 1970). Margaret Drewal, writing on Yoruba artifacts, argues that “the crown as an emblem of the royal ancestral spirit, constitutes an object in the palace shrine; and even when the king is not around in person, the crown [more often the original one] is publicly displayed, usually by being placed on the throne” (1977:47). In the tradition and customs of the Aguleri, this pattern of collective identity through *Ovala* ritual festival is mediated as an essential expression of “charismatic legitimacy” (Jarbawi & Pearlman, 2007:7) or of hierarchical continuity, and even of religious truth (Heuser, 2008:41). It is the kind of ritual celebration that binds the whole community together.

The significance of *Ovala* festival basically rests in its form and symbolism simply because it is during such period that the King prays for the entire community for their well being. Ikenga-Metuh (1985:104) asserts that it is in this kind of ritual proceedings that “certain human activities have sacramental character and they have spiritual efficacy in that they evoke divine intervention in human affairs”. Nabofa (1994:3) explains that it is in the process of decoding its symbolic forms and practices that we can meaningfully confront and understand the essence, metaphysics, exoteric and esoteric nature and other aspects of it, which makes or conveys symbolic meanings to *Ovala* festival through the mediation of *Ikolo* sacred sound. Peter Idigo (1977:119, 21) asserts that before the King’s appearance in the field, the “*Nwagwu*”² the jester masquerades entertains the spectators with their funny movements/talks, and the brave hunters of Aguleri known as the “*Egbenobas* would display their prowess and showcase the skulls of the dangerous animals they have killed”. In this sense “they are presumed to possess an identity

as hunters even though they are historically agriculturists, aristocrats, or mercenaries” (Obeyesekere, 2004:282). Borgatti (2003:44) affirms that these kinds of individuals are seen as a group “that provides protection for the community”. Although, “the *Egbenobas* through the wearing of decorative costumes on their bodies with ritual feathers and charcoal paintings look fearful” (Idigo, 1977:21)”, “their demonic and animal instincts were controlled by a dance style” (Fraleigh, 1999:68). Nabofa (1994:63) asserts that “thus, it is easy for on-lookers during such display to assess the number of human beings that each human hunter taking part in the ritual drama rehearsing their exploit has killed”. Robert Nicholls (1988:199) argues that sacred drum like the *Ikolo* as a “symbolic instrument, the slit-drum very often is associated with warrior societies and powerful confraternities” like the *Egbenobas*.

According to Bruce Lincoln, festivals like *Ovala* are a form of “cultural fiesta where the king dances and celebrates with his people” (2004:158). This is also the occasion that the King uses to make charitable donations to the poor and to children (Idigo, 1977:21). It is also during this period that the Aguleri community remembers the Idigo dynasty and some of the fallen heroes of Aguleri through the power invested in the *Ikolo* sacred drum. It is in this regard that Lorand Matory suggest that “the King is seen as the nodal figure representing the politico-religious where he occupies that position because he is a vessel and conduit of divine forces, an inferior participant in the god’s cone of authority” (1993:68). In the Aguleri worldview, the king represents the symbol of authority and this is reinforced by the sacred sound of the *Ikolo*, which also echoes the cultural identity of the Aguleri. The king also is considered to be

² They are jester masquerades known for their comic dramatic performances. They are not all that diabolical but they are powerful in nature because of the protective ritual medicines they are made of. Please see one of the masquerades at the extreme left hand side of the King herein.



Figure 4: Here, the king of Aguleri *Eze* (Engr) Christopher Nwabunwanne Idigo IV (*Ogalagidi* II) is led out of the palace to the king's square (*Amaeze*) with the Royal drum and his cabinet chiefs.

representative of all the spiritual and physical resources, and by virtue of his investiture, it is believed that he becomes more than an ordinary human being – and thus he represents both aspects of existence (Hackett, 1991:142-143). In recognition of the centrality of *Ovala* festival in the Aguleri ritual calendar, some of my participants made the following remarks. Mr Peter, a forty-five year old non-initiate, explains that:

It is during this period that the kiths and kin of Aguleri indigenes, home and abroad, come home annually to participate in this cultural fiesta.

From the assertions of the participants, it has been seen that *Ovala* festival is a major event in Aguleri community. As we can see below, Chief Avuluoba, a ninety year old initiate, comments that:

Apart from the fact that people travel from far and wide to relate with their kith and kin at home and from other places, it provides the rare opportunity to witness such events as the inaugural outing ceremony of nascent age grades being integrated into the community's trado-social structure.

During this festival, the indigenes who sojourn abroad come back home in order to see their loved ones and in order to participate in ritual festival. Jean Borgatti (1982:47) claims that such a "festival represents an exciting experience for the community". This is because, its symbolic "yearly rituals are tied to the agricultural cycle, which are still performed today" (Kaplan, 2000:117). Mary Macdonald argues that in most pre-modern communities, such as the Aguleri, 90 per cent of the indigenes "identify themselves as Christians, but at the same time they continue to assert the tradition and hegemony of their ancestors" (2004:317). Ilesanmi (1996:2) argues that it cannot be denied that the entire community, including the 82% who are said to be Catholics, under the symbolic shadow of ancestorship, hold great ancestor like Eri in high esteem probably not as a deity, but purely as an ancestor of the community, a great grandfather of high dignity whose influence is still currently felt in the town politically, socially and religiously. In this regard, Kaplan observes that such rituals are still observed and maintained today by the traditionalists in the community and "even among most members who have converted to denominations of Christianity" (2000:122). Through this form, it serves as a catalyst in cementing people's solidarity (Dube, 1996:110), while making community like the Aguleri a community of "one people – one destiny" (Arkin, 1989:xi). Thus, Toyin Falola contends that it is in this sense that we must understand how "the ruling dynasties in the various states forged relationships with one another by promoting brotherhood relations and the cordial relations among them were sometimes explained in affinal relationships" (2003:147). Ayisi echoes this when he writes that in this way, "it also reflects the religious and cosmological beliefs of the society" (1972:93). On this issue of ritualistic prayer and the significance of the king, Mr James, a fifty-six year old non-initiate, states that:

The King would pray ritualistically with his staff of authority [*Ofo*], after his prayers and blessings, the King would now share some tubers of yam to the traditional elders [*Ndichie* and *Ojiana*] and his cabinet members before sharing to the entire community. On that particular day, *Ikolo* is played distinctively.

From the above, it would be observed that the King is regarded as an earthly spiritual representative for the Aguleri community. It is also during this period, that the King uses his symbol of authority to pray for the well being of the community and to reassert his symbolic position as the people's link in the world of the seen and unseen. Maurice Bloch (1987:286) asserts that it is during this kind of ritual that "the King is acting as the father or elder to his subjects, and he actually says so during the ceremony", which depicts the "paradox of the general symbolism of authority" (Bloch, 1987:285). Equally significant is the fact that the traditional monarch uses the *Ovala* festival as an avenue or occasion to commemorate his kingship, and also an occasion for the subjects to reaffirm their solidarity and loyalty to his Kingship, through paying of homage and tributes (Idigo, 2002:24). Also, during this period, the Aguleri people gather around the king's square – *Amaeze*, which has become the "centre point of cultural activity and important source of innovation in music and other forms of performance" (Wolcott, 1974:83), to reaffirm their loyalty. It is in this king's square [*Amaeze*] that the Aguleri community shows their solidarity with the monarch who makes himself available and accessible to be seen during his public appearances and cheered by his subjects while dancing his *Okanga* Royal Band and *Ikolo* music respectively (Idigo, 2002:24). Wilberforce Echezona (1963:26) argues that "the King does not come out to dance unless his royal drums invite him; then he appears with his senior cabinet ministers, *Ndi-ichie*, dancing while the excited crowds cheer for joy". Felix Abugu (1998), in his description and illustration of the event, writes that:

The *Okanga* Royal band of Aguleri came into the scene in measured and articulated steps swaying gently to the sombre rhythms of the traditional sacred drums and the deep bass sound of the accompanying long elephant tusks being carried by one of them. The traditional chiefs wore long red caps and long sleeveless red gowns upon George wrappers, the latter's expertly-tied thick knots pushed to the left hand side of each wear. The long caps care with the all-familiar eagle feathers stuck into their bottom folds to keep the feathers in place" (Abugu, 1998:15).

The place of the *Ikolo* and the king in the *Ovala* festival was also captured by the participants. Chief Onyema, a fifty-eight year old initiate, asserts that:

It is during their ritual dance that the spirit possession comes upon them. It is this feature that makes the *Ikolo* a mark of Aguleri identity.

Correspondingly, Mr Amuzia, a fifty-five year old non-initiate argues that:

I am having a rethink whether to denounce my Christianity and to become part of the traditional people to enable me become an initiate which will allow me to be partaking in the ritual dance of the *Ikolo*.

However, Nnamah (2002:8) explains that the *Ovala* day – *Mbosi Ovala* - is the day when the King's royal outing with his cabinet members display their royal dance. On the stylistic nature of the dance of the King and his Chiefs, Mr Chinedu, a fifty-seven year old non-initiate, explains that:

The dancing style of the ritual dance of the *Ikolo* by the King and his cabinet chiefs during the commemoration of the *Ovala* festival is very distinct from the dancing steps of other chiefs in Igbo land.

Until recently, during the *Ovala* festival, the *Ikolo* ritual dance, like every other sacred dance, according to Ray (2000:28), was the main focus of the religious festival of the community. Martha Davis (2012:166) notes that the sacred drum dance performed in traditional societies is traditionally a “dance of respect”. Chief Nwando, a seventy-seven year old initiate explains that:

The people that are allowed to dance the ritual of the *Ikolo* are men of valor and courageous in the community. These personalities are basically regarded as having construed the priestly class because of their individual contributions to the community.

From the above, it has been observed that the *Ikolo* ritual dance is not a kind of dance people perform outside the ritual festival. As such, it is believed that the dance is only meant for the priestly class in the community. It is the dance for the initiated men and through the mediating sound of the *Ikolo* that spirits perform or cast mystical elements over the community during the king's three different public

appearances in the kings square – [*Amaeze*³], “to dance savagely in the Court yard of the impertinent” (Gleason, 1980:165). Katherine Hagedorn (2001:57) argues that the effect of the performance is so powerfully evocative that the sacred sound, and its gestures performed, demonstrates its divinely coded beings.

Perani and Wolff explain that the dancing steps of the King which is cloaked under the sound of the *Ikolo* coupled with “the visual brilliance and textual complexity is enriched by a scintillating surface, sparkling and shining in a kaleidoscope of colour and light under an impressive twirling state umbrella” (1999:125). The performance by the king is accompanied by the *Ikolo* sacred drum which reinforces its place as a symbol of ethnic identity and thus, considered to be the most important sacred instrument in Aguleri community. On the theme of *Ikolo* as an instrument of social and ritual authority, some of my participants made certain observations. Mr Chinedu, a fifty-seven year old non-initiate, asserts that:

The *Ikolo* is a mark of the Aguleri identity because it is believed that the *Ikolo* music originated from Aguleri. it is believed that Aguleri is the head of the Igbo race.

Chief Nwando, a seventy-seven year old initiate, explains that:

Ikolo sacred drum is a mark of Aguleri identity. If the King orders another person to play it, it means that the King must have taught that particular person how to play it but the person in question must be an initiate from the royal family.

From the above assertion, it has been observed that it is only the King and designated individuals that can play the *Ikolo*. The *Ikolo* originated from Aguleri, therefore, its sound, which invokes certain mystical aura or feelings very peculiar to the community marks it as an identity of the Aguleri. This is expressed in the comment of Chief Onyema, a fifty-eight year old initiate:

³ This is a village square that is associated with the King. The etymologically, the word came from the King. This village square is directly opposite the King's palace in Aguleri. It is in this square that every important meeting is held and it is in the same village square that the *Ovala* ritual festival is performed.

...its aura makes people develop eerie feelings because it is a dance for the sacred and the prestige.



Figure 5: Here, the king of Aguleri *Eze* (Engr) Christopher Nwabunwanne Idigo IV (*Ogalagidi* II) dancing during an *Ovala* festival in the King's square (*Amaeze*).

Through the sound of the *Ikolo* and the dance styles of the King and the initiates, the *Ikolo* rises to ritual prominence as the central symbol of the Aguleri social identity and hegemony. Reflecting on the various contesting symbolic functions of the *Ikolo*, Michael Echeruo argues that “the dramatic content is, in other words, buried in the purity of festival” (1973:30). The symbolic significance of indigenous ancestor rituals, like the *Ovala* festival, according to David Chidester, is that “it strengthens the fertility of the land and the political authority of the King and under different historical conditions, these rites of power

formed a religious repertoire of practices that were available to the Chiefs in asserting their supernatural, sacred claims to political power” (1992:24). Van Dijk contends that festivals like *Ovala* is also “the occasion for the King to assert his authority over his sub-chiefs and their subjects and for announcing the ways in which the community will benefit from the various development efforts the paramountcy will undertake on their behalf” (2001:47). Finally, Stokes argues that such ritual dances during festivals “provide the principal means by which the resulting contradictions between an egalitarian ethos and intense competition between factional leaders are socially managed” (1997:8).

Seemingly, the *Ovala* festival has acquired so much significance and relevance in Aguleri in the sense that the Idigo royal dynasty as the ruling monarch of Aguleri for over a hundred years is evidently one of the longest monarch in the world today (Nnamah, 2002:7). Chike Ifemesia argues that Aguleri “kingship is an institution of antiquity in Igbo land, where through centuries, it influenced and was influenced by events and developments in its cultural ecology” (1970:50). He states that “the concept of Kingship is...so traditionally entrenched in Igbo culture, so deeply built into the Igbo language that it cannot have been alien or recent provenance” (Ifemesia, 1970:53). According to Ruth Stone (1989:73) traditionally, a festival like the *Ovala* ritual has been corporately created by the people to express their beliefs in the supernatural and reflect both ancient and modern adaptations. She argues that communities like the Aguleri explain the significance of the *Ikolo* sacred sound as the result of a “longing for times past and a desire to recreate that past” (Stone, 1989:77). Ayu (1986:114) argues that sacred sound like *Ikolo* sound “are not just social explosions; they are time bombs that tick through history. Hence, they can only be understood and appreciated in their historical context”, through its historical record. Equally, in terms of its symbolism, Hagedorn (2001:98) confirms that such sacred sound is not only something beyond compromise, but also a source of power and authority to the aesthetic. This is because its mediating sound has been discovered to be what Michael Taussig (1993:80) refers to as “sound of sound”. During such ritualistic performance, the diviners or cultic functionaries and other participants act out in symbolic mimic in line with the attributes of the divine and doctrines of the cult (Nabofa, 1994:34-35). Through this form, the *Ikolo* drum is used, through the mediation of its symbolic sound, to create and disseminated an image of African authenticity to serve as a basis of national identity, while representing Traditional religion as part of the national cultural heritage that upholds the storeroom of authenticity that the

nation's leaders drew from (De Witte, 2004:138). Arguably, because of contestation over sonic sacralisation through the mediation of *Ikolo* sacred sound, it has been observed that the "sacredness of specific spaces and places is claimed by some and disputed by others, and boundaries of sacred spaces are pushed back and forth, made permeable and sealed off" (De Witte, 2008:691).

Conclusion

Basically, sacred sound has been found to be an element of African Traditional Religion and its significant functions cannot not be overemphasized, comparing it with the symbolic functions of the *Ikolo* as it pertains to the *Ovala* festival as has been expressed in Aguleri world view through my participants. The *Ikolo* is very significant in the selected ritual practices observed in Aguleri community. It is during the *Ovala* festival that the King reasserts his supremacy over his subjects, and through the mediation of the *Ikolo* sound, he acts as spiritual bridge between the ancestors and the community.

What is evident from this chapter is that across Aguleri society, the *Ikolo* is regarded as a sacred drum endowed with social and ritual authority. According to participants, it has (1) an auditory authority – that is, it possesses a unique sound that all Aguleri are compelled to respond to.(2) *Ikolo* is the means through which the Aguleri communicate with their ancestors and deities, and through this (3) the *Ikolo* reinforces and sustains Aguleri social and ritual order, to the extent that it uphold the authority of the king, and sustains the privileges and functions of the princes, chiefs and the initiates. Participants were also at pains to point out that (4) the *Ikolo* marks and accompanies Aguleri social and ritual calendar when indigenious values and ethical authority of the *Ikolo* is made evident. Finally, the *Ikolo* is regarded (5) as ritually authoritative in that it facilitates the embodiment of Aguleri religion by making possible the invocation of spirits, and the mounting of iniaties by ancestral spirits. What is evident from this chapter is that sacred music – as seen from a study of the *Ikolo* – emerge as a highly visible and audible medium of religious authority in African Traditional religions. Through rituals and drama such as the *Ovala*, the *Ikolo* is used in religious rituals to mark and distinguish Aguleri identity and religious cosmology.

CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

My data analysis suggests that, in the Aguleri cosmology, the sacred sound of the *Ikolo* drum is used as an instrument of social and ritual authority because *Ikolo* is assumed to be the voice of the people, the voice of the ancestors, and the voice of the deities of the Aguleri people. It is used in locating the community, morally and socially, through the mediation of its symbolic sound. The *Ikolo* plays dual function as a religious and secular resource. In terms of the secular, whenever the *Ikolo* is played during unusual periods, its call summons the people to gather. This means that it is used to disseminate information in the community. In terms of its religious function, the *Ikolo* sacred sound helps the community in communicating with their gods and ancestors, as well as to facilitate spirit invocation and possession. While the *Ikolo* is regarded as a powerful symbol of the practices and institutions of patriarchy, it is, nonetheless, vulnerable to the touch of women and the uninitiated which, it is believed, disrupt its sacred capacity.

Nonetheless, it has been observed that some of the rituals that pertain to the *Ikolo* are dangerous for the neophytes. This is because its sound and esoteric speech are used in satirical commentaries by the *Ikolo* drummer in order to inform evil-doers to desist from wrongdoing, while at the same time it may be used to praise or elate the well behaved in the community. It thus serves as a caution to the initiates who are being reprimanded of their abuse of power or privileges.

Thus, it is believed that the *Ikolo* both speak to the issues of evil-doers and affirms the faithful. Such cautionary speech only happens during *Ovala* festival or New yam festival. The ritual dance of the *Ikolo* performed only by initiated men is specifically meant for the privileged men, for the princely and priestly classes – the King, members of the royal family, and initiates. Here, *Ikolo* sacred drum is interpreted as a symbol of dignity as represented by the *Egbenobas* – hunters/warriors in the community and for all who regard themselves as members of Aguleri community. The sound of the *Ikolo* for the Aguleri community is distinct from that of other Igbo communities, what Nzewi et al describes, in connection to sacred

drums generally, as “melorhythmic code which is vocally reproduced as an approximate octave of any pitch-tone from which a voice drop-musical or speech is made” (2001:95).

Regarding the method of selecting an *Ikolo* drummer, it must be noted that this is genealogical. The *Ikolo* sacred drum cannot be played by ‘anybody’. Not only that, the selection must be done through the process of *Igba-Ava* divination, and through an officiating ritual ceremony led by the head of the sacred specialists in the community. This entails casting of lots and performance of certain sacrifices in order to thank the ancestors and the gods for choosing the right person, relying on a clear and precise order of their position within the social hierarchy. This formation also shows that there is a structural hierarchy that exists in spiritual functionalities of such sacred specialists. Through an interview process, the King, with the assistance of his cabinet chiefs, *Ndichei* and *Ojiana* (these people act as custodians, diplomats and advisers to the King), is able to pick someone with high integrity. This follows the casting of lots during the divination process, which is a demonstration and reaffirmation of what the gods and ancestors have sanctioned (Eyisi, 2010:39). This also goes to show that the drummer is not chosen because of any special quality but simply because of the status and prestige attached to the *Ikolo*, and the person must be a titled man in the community—*Ogbuevi* [(a title which literally means, cow killer and denotes the tradition that privileges one to wear a red cap)].

From my data analysis, it has also been observed that the sacred sound of the *Ikolo* drum serves several religious and theological meanings. It concerns spirit invocation and socio-sacral validation because it is assumed the *Ikolo* sound is responsible for the feelings of awe and wonder that affect the people. For example, it is assumed that the *Ikolo* ritual dance is for the courageous because if the initiates are not spiritually strong they might not be able to withstand such feelings. Conversely, one can interpret it to mean that it is the sound of the *Ikolo* that actually invokes the spirit possession because without the sound, spirit possession is not possible. It is believed that the dance styles of the initiates who move to the sound of the *Ikolo* invoke the spirit possession on the initiates which serves as a proof of ancestral approval and presence, and a recognition of Aguleri identity.

This concept of spirit possession is coupled with the concept of *Agwu* spirit in Igbo cosmology (Ikenga-Metuh, 1999:96). Members of the community see their King as a powerful and symbolic representative

or mediator between them and their gods in the spiritual world. This is because the *Ikolo* sound serves as a spiritual bridge that connects the living and the dead. Interpretatively, the sound is the bridge between the living and the dead, while the King's close association with the *Ikolo* is more of a validation of his social and ritual authority. The King is a ritual mediator but the *Ikolo* sound makes affective the spiritual link. Agulerians assumed that the sound of the *Ikolo* sacred drum is a physical manifestation of the voices of their ancestors or the voices of the spirits that guide and protect the community.

It is my view that the *Ikolo* ritual dance is a cultic dance, accompanied by the *Ikolo* and a dance that is set apart only for the initiates to perform. It is believed that the esoteric and coded commentaries are only known to the initiates and it is said that these messages cannot be understood and interpreted by any person apart from the members of the *Ikolo–Ogbuevi/Ozo*, that is, members of the indigenous cultic movement in the community. Also, it is important to note the material elements used in decorating the *Ikolo* during the *Ovala* festival. These are believed to be imbued with spiritual properties without which it cannot 'speak' ritualistically. In recognition of its sacredness, the *Ikolo* is decorated by the most-high ranked sacred specialist in Aguleri which situates the instrument within the ritual hierarchy and the socio-sacral order of Aguleri. The materials used for the decoration are rigidly and ritualistically used for imbuing the power of the *Ikolo* so that it would retain its ancient and spiritual values on the eve of *Ovala* - the *Eke* day – according to the local royal calendar (Thalia, 2012:1). Such material elements are, native white chalk [*nzu*], alligator pepper; blood; and feathers, each of which has its own symbolism. Native white chalk [*nzu*] and blood represent the delicacies of the ancestors and gods, and feathers symbolize the dress for the deities in indigenous African society. Alligator pepper [*ose oji*] is encompassed with the power of fiat which can produce effective prayers (Nabofa, 1994:41).

From the critical observations that emerged from my data analysis, it has been made clear that the sacred sound of the *Ikolo* drum serves as an avenue for bolstering patriarchy and alienating the femae gender. In the Aguleri tradition and culture, women are not allowed to partake in the celebrations or rituals associated with the *Ikolo*. The only exception is the Queen Mother who is allowed to partake in such rituals in her menopausal years. Arguably, the Queen Mother who has reached the stage of menopause could educate the new appointee (drummer) on how to play the *Ikolo*. The fact that the Queen Mother has

attained the stage of menopause, it is believed, means that she can no longer defile or disrupt the ritual potency of the *Ikolo*. However, this concession must be viewed in the light of her position in the royal household (which in itself uphold the privilege of the king) and this concession also serves as a way to neutralise possible dissent regarding the exclusion of all women in the society.

However, of those dissenting voices who regard the exclusion of women from *Ikolo*-related as unfair and patricarchal, almost none are advocating that the tradition should be abolished. Their main objection is with patriarchy and the refusal of those men who are privileged by the system to adjust the ritual practice and the symbolic association so as to incorporate all Aguleri – not just initiated, and titled men. At the heart of their objection is the notion that custom is not static and can be changed to enable all parties to be partners in progress. Without such progress, it would mean that there is gender inequality and male dominance in the community. The *Ikolo* is also seen by some christians as an indigenous religious instrument that is used by traditional worshippers to communicate with their ancestors and gods, and thus, it is considered satanic. The people who hold this view believe that its rituals should be stopped. As such the *Ikolo* is viewed as fetish and an instrument of paganism. Christian and women critics argue that allowing only men to be part of the ritual ceremonies that pertain to the *Ikolo*, means that there is something hidden about their association with the *Ikolo* group, making non-initiates believe that the initiates seek extra powers elsewhere. Thus, we can see that the *Ikolo* is not without its detractors. However for those who advocate a wider access to *Ikolo* for the Aguleri, it would seem critical for there to be a shift back to the instrument as opposed to the men who maintain themselves as guardians of its symbolic power. If the instrument is believed to possess extraordinary power to facilitate spirit possession and communication with the ancestors, then it cannot be restricted to the whim of it self-appointed male guardians.

***IKOLO* AND AGULERI RELIGIOUS WORLDVIEW**

In the thinking of the Aguleri people, the mere mention of the *Ikolo* signifies so many things. *Ikolo* stands for authority and identity. It is an embodiment of status or class consciousness for the custodians of sacred positions. It guards the positions of the privileged in the community. *Ikolo* means so many things

to so many people, but basically it upholds the class of the initiates. In furtherance of this argument, Mr James, a fifty-six year old non-initiate, explains that:

It is for the respected individuals in the community, that is why if a big personality who is an initiate dies in the community, the sound of the *Ikolo* would be used to communicate his death and even during the person's burial ceremony the *Ikolo* would be used

From the above statement, it may be observed that although the *Ikolo* is used to sustain the positions of the privileged, it is also used to reinforce Aguleri social hierarchy through its use at funerals. What this means is that the *Ikolo* sound serves as a link between the humans and the ancestral spirits living in the extraterrestrial realm for traditional worshippers. This is the reason why Steve Pinkerton idiomatically describes such sacred sound as “the sad sound of weeping bugles that announces the death of its founder” (2011:190). Nzewi (1987:90 & 91) argues that the *Ikolo* sacred music is specially designated for meritocratic men in the community, and in particular that its sound signifies the death and funerary events of a male person of achievement.

From the remarks of the participant it becomes clear that the *Ikolo* does not only connect the Aguleri to their dead ancestors, it also serves as a tool that ties different groups of Igbo people together. This is particularly clear through the fact that the *Ikolo* is not used in connection with the Aguleri only, but among the Igbo more generally. Buttressing this further, Levinus Nwabughioqu (2013:1) ironically asserts that the Pan-Igbo group known as *Ohaneze Ndi Igbo* at its secretariat in Enugu State, Nigeria, used the *Ikolo* sacred sound to salute and honour late Professor Chinua Achebe as a mark of last respect for their illustrious son before his burial. The *Ikolo* sacred drum showers praises on the Royal family, the king and men of achievements and valor in the community – the living and the dead. The symbolic sounding of *Ikolo*, thus, represents royalty, dignity and respect in all its facets in Igbo land (NTI, 1990). On the social and ethical authority of the *Ikolo*, Mr Amuzia, a fifty-five year old non-initiate, echoes that:

Ikolo is the voice of the Aguleri people. Its sound is used in satirical form in order to tell the evil doers to desist from their evil ways. The sound of the *Ikolo* is used to praise or elate the well behaved in the community.

Here, it has been observed that the sacred sound of the *Ikolo* is used as an agent of social control in Aguleri community because it is during certain festivals that it is used to talk to, or chastise, individuals who are regarded as unethical or immoral in the community. Thus, the *Ikolo* sacred sound provides an ethical code for the community. Joseph Omoregbe argues that sacred drum like the *Ikolo* “provide guides for human conduct indicating certain things or certain ways of behaviour, which should be avoided and other things or ways of behaviour which should be adopted” (1993:62-63). Thus, Ade Adejumo goes on to remind his readers that by “reminding people of their responsibility to conform to the wishes of their society” (2013:44) the *Ikolo* sacred drum, through its sacred sound, acts as a moral barometer for the Aguleri.

Further, the king and the *Ikolo* are believed to be sources of mediation between the living and the dead, further reinforcing the coherence of Aguleri religious and social identity. A particular aspect brought out by this participant is the power of the *Ikolo* to cohere the community and to sustain that bond. He emphasises the fact that no human can separate this bond of this four-tiered cosmology - the Aguleri, the king, the ancestors and the deities. It is on this position that Richard Okafor (1998:189) comments that “Igbo people turn instruments into metaphors for conveying their feelings and emotions and for giving oral spectrum description”. Elsewhere, Victor Turner (1968) posits that such sacred musical instrument is regarded as a magnificent instrument for expressing and maintaining social ethical codes. Through its status among the Aguleri people, the sacred sound of the *Ikolo* is used to promote has a paradoxical function because on the one hand it is said to cohere Aguleri around a distinct igbo identity, and yet is also sustain a high regulated and stratified social order – one which ultimately sustains male privilege. This, however, is founded and depends upon the exclusion of women and men who are not royalty or titled, exclusionary practices that in themselves can be seen to work against the values and morals the *Ikolo* is said to promote and uphold.

It is thus clear that the concept of ethics in traditional African society “is in living to avoid shame in any family or community” (Ekeke, 2013:13). According to Nzewi et al “the concept of encoding ethical lingual text on a music instrument derives from instituting authority voicing in a worldview that processes openly disseminated information for particular, cognitive audience” (2001:93). They argue that

“the essence is in its imperative transcendental attributes, which empower it to coerce conformity in issues of societal engineering and human management” (Nzewi et al, 2001:93). This resonates with Chidester’s (1992) argument that ultimately, indigenous ritual provides symbolic system that support the authority of elders and initiates in a chosen community. Nabofa (1994:19) connected and interpreted these ethical values through the mediation of the *Ikolo* sound with the understanding that wisdom belongs to the elders. Thus, he describes the sound of a sacred instrument as “the voice of the elders which invariably is the voice of wisdom”. This sacred instrument on the one hand renders the authority of the king and elders beyond reproach, and on the other hand, it puts upon such elders a huge set of responsibilities and obligations to care for the rest of the community (Nabofa, 1994:14).

Iyorchia Ayu (1986:16) asserts that sacred sound like the *Ikolo* is “the voice through himself and for himself; and despite the odds, must be prepared to stage the festival of the oppressed”, Preservation and inscription of such a distinctive voice would signify the site of their own cultural differences and identity. Des Wilson, writing on traditional media in modern Africa, states that it is not uncommon to find “itinerant musical entertainment groups sing satirical songs, and generally criticize wrong doings of individuals in the society. Names of those being satirized or praised may be mentioned or descriptions of their physical or personality attributes, where they live, or what they do may form part of such songs” (1987:93). Michael Bourdillon, reflecting on the Southern African context, argues that “dancers can jestingly criticize individual members of the community, or particular types of behaviour. Such dances perform similar functions of reinforcing societal values, as do initiation rites” (1990:325). On this ground, John Chernoff asserts that “in many African societies, someone with grievance may hire a song writer to prepare a song which states the problem: a song may exceed the boundaries of social property without giving undue offense, and at the same time, people attracted to the song will be more accessible to its argument and may help induce a miscreant to make amends” (1979:70-71). Sacred drums like that of the *Ikolo*, according to Olupona, “relates to the social, historical, religious, and communal ideas and feelings of the people” (2000: xxxv).

Aguleri Religious Symbolism and the ritual Authority of the *Ikolo*

It should be noted that religious symbolism in African traditional religion has not been much interrogated in relation to the use of sacred items and its representations. The African liturgical symbolism of the *Ikolo* sacred drum should be seen as culturally-situated materials for inter and intra personal religious communication and perceptions in Aguleri worldview. Helen Timothy (2002:137) states that “by the inclusion of these details the authenticity of the ritual in the New World is reasserted and attempts to put the dismembered and discredited areas in the ritual back together” These items are:

(a). Native White chalk [*nzu*]: This is a religio-cultural symbol of happiness (Onimhawo & Adamu, 2011:37). It symbolizes the purity and holiness of the object of worship and the idea is that, to the believers, the white chalk is not ordinary white clay but a powerful spiritual force or entity (Nabofa, 1994:57). According to Ogwezzy (1999 cited in Noun) “in African traditional belief system by using the native white chalk during rituals, it is believed that people telephone; send cable and postal messages to the spirit world. It is equally believed that native chalk powder thrown outside or blown into the air would attract blessings to the people from God, ancestors and the spirit world” (2009:44).

The white chalk is believed to be part of the spiritual food for the gods. In every home of a traditionalist in Igbo land, and Aguleri in particular, one will find white chalk, and whenever kola-nut is served to any visitor(s) the native white chalk is included. In African Traditional religious practices such sacred items serve as “psychological devices for communicating and personalizing religious ideas” (Nabofa, 1994:46). It is on this note that Mr Jacob, a fifty-five year old non-initiate believes that:

Once such item is used or applied on the body of the *Ikolo* drum it increases its potency to enable it speak. Also, once such item is used ritualistically, it is believed to be the delicacies of the gods and ancestors in traditional religion. According to our tradition, the native white chalk [*nzu*] symbolizes the food of the gods and ancestors, and when it is applied, it is assumed that the ancestors have been fed too.

From the perspective of psychology of religion, one can interpret this to mean that the white chalk [*nzu*] carries a kind of aura that makes the traditionalists believe that it has some mystical powers not only with

its application on the *Ikolo* but also in other ritual divinations. In this regard, Onimhawo & Adamu (2011) note that generally, after divination, the white native chalk is given to the client to confirm success in future endeavours related to the ritual or divination. As a protective mechanism, Nabofa (1994:56) claims that among the Urhobo and Isoko, the blessed and consecrated white chalk given by the priest in charge of the shrines is made to be taken by the devotees to their places of sojourn with the belief that such chalk would protect them and their property as well as prosper their ways. Lawrence Emeka (1998:390) asserts that the “*nzu* is also a symbol of mystical power and so of the *dibie* – the healer, mystics and diviners of the Igbo society”. Emeka further argues that it is on this basis that “a *dibie* [diviner] paints the region of his eyes with *nzu* to symbolize his ability to see beyond the visible” (1998:390). Finally, Innocent Uwah confirms that “the spirit world is seen as part of the human world and the mediators between these worlds are culturally called the chief priests [*Dibia*] in Igbo language and *Babalawo* in Yoruba” (2011:89) and that the white chalk attached to the *Ikolo* facilitates such exchange between the temporal and the spiritual planes.

(b). Alligator Pepper [*ose oji* or *Aframamum*]: It is believed to arouse the psyche and alert the mind, and thus in traditional Igbo community, diviners combine the alligator pepper with bitter kola when they are performing some delicate rituals. The idea is that these items facilitate esoteric or spiritual potency, and efficacy of prayers and curses during some ritualized activities (Ejizu, 1986:51). Chief Nwave, an eighty-four year old initiate, explained the role and importance of these ingredients:

Alligator pepper is very essential in Igbo religion. It goes hand in hand with Kola-nut. It is believed that it contains mystical powers, that is why it is used as part of rituals and in most cases, priests love to use it while officiating at the shrine because it can put someone in altered state.

Chief Arinze, an eighty-two year old initiate was also clear about the role played by the alligator pepper:

Alligator pepper is among the items used in preparing the *Ikolo* drum in order to imbue it with mystical powers to enable it to speak in deep tones.

It can thus be seen that the pronouncements which the priest makes after eating some seeds of alligator pepper can put him in an altered state of consciousness for a short period during which time he will make further utterances. Thus, alligator pepper is viewed as a special food for gods and ancestors in traditional Igbo religion because it facilitates transcendent communication and receptivity. Through attaching this element to the *Ikolo*, the instrument becomes anthropomorphised as it is assumed that the alligator pepper will have the same ‘mind altering’ effect on the *Ikolo* as it has on diviners, thus imbuing it with the power to speak to and for the deities or ancestors.

(c). Fowl Feathers: feathers features prominently in the decoration of the *Ikolo* during the *Ovala* festival in Aguleri which Nabofa (1994:65) sees as an “instruments of protection”. Mr Chinedu, a fifty-seven year old non-initiate, explained the role of the feathers:

In our tradition, it is assumed that the feathers symbolizes and serves as the clothes for the ancestors. This is the reason why every indigenous shrine for the traditional worshippers in Igbo land is decorated with such items.

Similarly, Mr Jacob, a fifty-five year old non-initiate, stated that:

The feathers symbolize the clothes for gods and ancestors.

It can be seen that the use of fowl’s feathers basically signifies protection from defilement and malevolent forces in African Traditional Religion. This is why Joseph Awolalu (1979:166) states that “people use fowls very regularly as victims of sacrifice not only because they are easily available but also because certain parts of these creatures have distinct meanings for those who offer them. For example, the chest-feathers of a hen are believed to give protection when ceremonially used”. In further support of this point, Chief Arinze, an eighty-two year old initiate, comments that:

The feathers symbolize the clothes for the gods, this shows that when one have a critical look over all the shrines in Igbo land, one would discover that such materials are applied generally.

The fact that feathers of animals symbolize or represent the clothes of the gods and ancestors in African Traditional Religion suggests the opulence and the good favour of the ancestors. Likewise the eagle feathers that are used in decorating the crown of the king during the *Ovala* festival, symbolize royalty, dignity and victory in Aguleri culture and tradition. According to Margaret Drewal “these feathers are said to be symbols of extraordinary power, and in another form, the feathers are actually plucked from the first bird sacrifices made for the priests upon acquiring their positions as mediums” (1977:47) and thus, such prestige is transposed onto the *Ikolo* during its decoration.

(d). Blood: Gerard Behague (2006:99) suggests that the ritual use of blood is a common practice in African religious contexts. He argues that as the most manifest symbol of life, blood, especially running blood, is necessary in the wide number of liturgically significant rituals (Behague, 2006:99). In sacred and ritualistic activities like *Ovala* festival in Aguleri, the *Ikolo* sacred drum is smeared with the blood of a bird and this ritual has symbolic meaning. It should be noted that the above animal is used for burial rites because its natural characteristics are associated with the spiritual content of blood (Nabofa, 1980). In furtherance of this argument, Mr Peter, a forty-five year old non-initiate, explains that:

In our tradition and culture, it is believed that blood of the animal symbolizes the food or delicacies of the gods and the ancestors.

The idea is that when blood is applied to the object it can give protection to the sacred instrument and imbue it with mystical potency. In Aguleri tradition, non-initiates and outsiders are believed to be frightened by it, but it is this mystical power that upholds the collective solidarity and responsibility of the initiates. It is on this note that Mr Jacob, a fifty-five year old non-initiate explains that:

...it increases its potency to enable it speak. ...once such item is applied ritualistically, it is believed that the spirits have been fed because such item is believed to be the delicacy of the gods and ancestors in traditional Igbo religion

In the practice of indigenous religion, symbolic art objects and processes are basically utilized to express religious practices, be it beliefs and ideas. Nonetheless, the ritual art suggests, identify the reality and character of the spirits. It is through this symbolism of blood that the *Ikolo* sacred talking drum through

its sound “oozed the secrecy, and coded messages” (Njoku 2007: xxx). On this note, Chief David, a seventy-seven year old initiate comments that:

It adds to the symbolism and sacredness of the *Ikolo*. The *Ikolo* is beautified with the blood of animals and even the surroundings where such sacrifices were made. This is the reason why every African shrine is decorated with such things.

However, from the above assertion, it has been noticed that through the ritual application of blood on the entire *Ikolo* sacred drum, it is able to send powerful messages intended to maintain its function as a mechanism for solidarity and as an agent of religious expression. On the theme of religious and theological meanings of the *Ikolo*, as it pertains to the socio-sacral validation and symbolism of the items used in decorating the *Ikolo*, Chief Nweke, a eighty-two year old year initiate stated that:

...it can induce the *Ikolo* to speak ritualistically. This item aids the spirits that guard the *Ikolo* in order to enhance its power for the spirit possession to mount on the initiates when they are partaking in the ritual dance.

Mr Paul, a fifty-year old non-initiate explains that:

The blood represents part of their delicacies also, while ...it is believed that it imbues the *Ikolo* with the spiritual potency to be able to speak.

From the above, there is a clear indication that the presence of blood is one of the conditions under which spirit possession would take place, in the belief and thinking of the Aguleri people. The basic condition is that the *Ikolo* must be fed with certain symbolic items in order for the *Ikolo* to speak and to be able to have that mystical potency to infect the initiates with spirit possession while they are dancing. All the four items work together to provide and imbue the *Ikolo* with the spiritual potency conveyed through its sound, to uphold and sustain Aguleri religious ideas and practices.

***Ikolo* Sacred Sound in spirit invocation and possession**

Spirit possession is a condition where one is assumed to be in a temporarily altered state of consciousness in African Traditional religious thought. It is believed that such situation is a mystical experience where

the ancestral spirits take control of the entire body of its host. This concept of spirit possession would be linked to *Agwu* spirit in Igbo cosmology which Ikenga-Metuh (1999:96) describes as a power of spirit possession as in Igbo tonal language. It is on this notion that Elbein dos Santo states that “the dynamics of spirit possession can only be understood as long as it is lived through ritual” (1976:45). Osita Okagbue asserts that “this paradox is a common feature of most indigenous African religious thought and practice, and means that because it is the human who creates the gods and spirits, it is therefore humans who give the gods and spirits whatever power they are perceived to possess” through the application of sounds like that of the *Ikolo* sacred drum (2008:272).

In fact, in Aguleri tradition and religion, without the sound of the *Ikolo* no meaningful ritual can take place. This is because *Ikolo* speaks the ancestral language of the gods in Aguleri kingdom. It is through this form that it “invokes the gods” (Oziogu, 2011:1). Through the mediation of the sound of the *Ikolo*, it can “induce spirit possession or, as is commonly believed, summon the divinities to take charge” (Ohadike, 2007:4). Mickie Koster (2011:180) argues that in a live observation, the pounding sound of the *Ikolo* in its full energy reverberates and can be felt in the resonance of the drums. Falola and Essien (2007:xii) argue that it is in such traditional practices like the ritual festival of the *Ovala* that the sacred sound “serves as a guide and as an outlet for obtaining divine powers” by the initiates while partaking in its ritual dance. Cohen and Barrett asserts that it is during this period that “the possessing agent is wholly responsible for all behaviours for the duration of the episode” (2008:247). Chief Onyema, a fifty-eight year old initiate, spoke clearly to the feeling of possession:

The *Ikolo* music makes me to have eerie feelings. This happens when the music is played, I feel like a holy person. It is this condition of holiness that puts one in an altered state which brings spirit possession.

From the above remark, it can be seen that spirit invocation and possession takes place only when the *Ikolo* is played. However, it has also been observed that through the mediation of the *Ikolo* sound during the ritual dance, the initiates do feel special and this makes them experience spirit possession. It has to be noted here that it is the sacred sound of the *Ikolo* that is used or responsible for invoking the spirits of the deities, spirits and ancestors during the annual festivals or special ceremonies. This goes to suggest that

without the sound of the *Ikolo*, there would be no spirit possession. Ioan Lewis (1971:127) argues that, in the cults, “possession is concerned essentially with the enhancement of status”. Mr Chinedu, a fifty-seven year old non-initiate, asserts that:

The sound of the *Ikolo* brings out goose pimples on my entire body and it makes me to develop a kind of eerie feelings. This usually happens when the King and Chiefs are dancing to the music. In the course of the ritual dance, it invokes and brings down the spirit possession.

The sound of the *Ikolo* is seen to be a mystical sound that makes the initiates to develop eerie feelings which “brings out goose pimples on the entire body” and this makes them to have the feelings or the belief that they are holy people. This is a physical manifestation of, and response to, the effect of the sound of the *Ikolo*. This mostly happens during *Ovala* festival. In the course of the ritual dance the *Ikolo* greatly enhances the conditions for heightened spiritual feelings or the experience of the numinous. From this observation, it is believed that the *Ikolo* sound is not an ordinary sound and also that there is a connection or link between the sound of the *Ikolo*, the activation of spirit invocation and the managing of subsequent possession.

Also, it can be observed that there is a kind of class consciousness here because spirit possession does not befall on ordinary people except the initiates. Equally significant is the fact that there is a kind of mystical expression here, the first one is spirit invocation and the other one is spirit possession. It is the sound of the *Ikolo* that will invoke the spirit into the body of the initiate before the body will enter into the mystical journey of spirit possession. Invariably, the notion of spirit possession is entrenched in the possibility of separating the self into one of various elements. Ruth Stone (1994:392) asserts that even ordinary entertainment calls for spirits to attend and participate and with this participation comes the possibility of the manipulation of power by the people as well as spirits. Stone argues further that secrecy is, therefore, required to protect the musicians in their very delicate relationships (1994:392). Explaining further, Chief Ndigwe, an eighty-nine year old initiate, notes that:

On the process of the drumming, if you look deep you will observe that the *Ikolo* drummer is the physical representation of the ancestors / spirits in disguise. He is not the actual person drumming it to the method and this informs the people that he has been taken over by the spirits.

It is through the mediation of the *Ikolo* liturgical performances which encompasses drumming, chanting, and praise songs that spirits are invoked and that possession takes place. Equally significant is the fact that in Aguleri worldview, it is believed that ancestral spirits are responsible for the spirit possession and the nature of this kind of spirit possession is that they are benevolent in nature as it pertains to the *Ikolo* sound through its liturgical ritual dance. Confirming this, Chief Ndigwe, an initiate, stated:

Once the spirits take control of him, he starts to see through the veil thus chanting, songs and praises of the deities follows. In short, he plays the *Ikolo* under the symbolic shadow of the spirits that have infected him.

From my observation, the chanting, songs and praises from the *Ikolo* drummer would be classified as part of the ritual performance or drama because all these demonstrate what marks the *Ikolo* as sacred. Nonetheless, it is from the sound of the *Ikolo* that the spirit possession is constructed and activated. In the context of African Religion, for someone to “see through the veil” it means that the person has come directly in contact with the divine and also that he is basically under the control of the spirits. This implies or suggests that in Aguleri cosmology, this kind of spirit possession is not negative and out of control but simply facilitates a liturgy of songs, praises and chanting for the deities. This means that many things take place once a person is possessed through the influence of the sound of the *Ikolo*. Also, from my observation, the *Ikolo* sacred sound is generally well received and generally understood as a means by which the Aguleri community enters into a relationship with their deities and ancestors. It is through the mediation of the sound of the *Ikolo* that the initiates “acknowledge higher states of wonder, consciousness, and order that transcend everyday thoughts, actions, and activities and connect one and all to the deeper recesses of the universe” (Early, 1997:2). Chief Martin, a ninety-one year old initiate, echoed this when he stated that:

The ritual dance binds the entire community, the King, the initiates, the ancestors and the deities that guide the community together.

Basically, it would be noticed that there is a deep link between the King and the deities through the mediation of the sacred sound of the *Ikolo*. In the thinking of the Aguleri, it is the sound of the *Ikolo* sacred drum that acts as spiritual conduit or bridge that connects them and the spirit world. Here, the sound of the *Ikolo* is seen as a liturgical apparatus that aids the possessed person in climbing and attaining spiritual height. On the theme of religious and theological meanings as it concerns spirit invocation and socio-sacral validation: Mr James, a fifty-six year old non-initiate, said that:

It is a cultic language and such languages are believed to be used for invoking the gods and ancestors of the land. It is such language that makes the *Ikolo* to be the voice of the people, the voice of the ancestors and the voice of the gods.

Mr Peter, a forty five year old non-initiate asserts that:

Such language is believed to be used to invoke and commune with the gods and ancestors. Such languages are so esoteric that it is only the *Ndichie*, and the chiefs who are also members of the initiates that can understand and interpret such weird languages.

During the ritual dance, the drummers' chanting and songs are filled with esoteric speeches that have deep meanings. This coded, esoteric language which is cloaked under secrecy is believed to contain praises for the deities, spirits, ancestors, and the King which no ordinary person can understand except the initiates. This means that such language is cultic in nature. On the theme of religious and theological meanings of the *Ikolo* as it pertains to spirit invocation and socio-sacral validation, Chief Onyema, a fifty-eight year old initiate, shared that:

Ikolo music makes me to have eerie feelings. I feel like a holy person. It is this condition of holiness that puts one in an altered state which brings spirit possession on me or the initiates.

However, this emphasis on the condition of being holy is a total reaffirmation of being in an altered state which invariably upholds the view that the sound of the *Ikolo* is sacred. Equally significant is the fact that it is not everybody that can enjoy this state or condition except the initiates who are believed to be set apart to experience that aura of holiness in Aguleri worldview.

Chief Ndigwe, a eight nine year old initiate asserts that:

It is with the descent of the spirit of the *Ikolo* upon the drummer that the initiates are infected with spirit possession. *Agulerians* assumed that the sound of the *Ikolo* is a physical manifestation of the voices of their ancestors and the voice of the spirit that protects the community.

The fact is that for the Aguleri, it is the sound of the *Ikolo* that activates and invokes the spirits of the deities and the ancestors. For the study participants, the saw spirit possession as the primary means through which to commune with the ancestors and, or to divine the will of their deities. However, unlike traditional notions of spirit possession, which regards the subject as vulnerable and out of control of his/her faculties, under the ‘power’ of the *Ikolo*, the possessed person is not lost in ecstasy, rather through the rhythmic sound of the drummer, participates in the ongoing liturgy of the ancestor ritual. The possessed person is believed to be chanting praise and engaged in mystical communication between the living and the supernatural. Finally, it is through the beating and sound of the *Ikolo* that the possessed is brought out of their state of possession, thus rendering the sound of the *Ikolo* a powerful, spirit mediating resource within African religion.

Spirits are unscrupulous creatures in settings in where peripheral and subordinate members of the society, notably the initiates of a particular cult such as that of the *Ikolo*, are possessed. Spirits uphold morality in societies where it is people in authority who enter trance (Lambek, 1989:39). Michael Nabofa argues that “it is within the world of classical sound that the elements of traditional cultic ritual have a natural alliance” (1994:38) which invariably calls for spirit invocation and possession. Janice Boddy (1994:407) explains that “these forces may be ancestors or divinities, ghosts of foreign origin, or entities both ontological and ethnically alien”. Spirit invocation and possession is a significant feature of life in the ritual liturgy of the Aguleri *Ovala* festival. During the ritual festival, the recognition of the abiding power

of spirit invocation and possession emerges in a variety of circumstances during the pounding sound of the *Ikolo* and is constructed from signs ranging from apparently psychotic breaks to sudden competent expression of trance during the feast. According to Michael Lambek (1989) some initiates with spirits have to observe different taboos imposed upon them but never enter trance except when the sound of the *Ikolo* is activated, managed and manipulated in ritual circumstances. He argues that “people’s ability and circumstances differ, but the main point is that not every spirit will make the same demands upon the host – although, when such is made there is every possibility or tendency that the demands are quite conventional” (Lambek, 1989:42). A close observation of trance behaviour can be seen and interpreted as an expression of the identity or attitude of the spirit and the stage or immediate effect of its relationship with the host. It is in this situation that altered state of consciousness or the creation of a secondary self is achieved (Frazer, 1922:91).

Spirit possession in Aguleri cosmology during the *Ovala* festival, can be viewed broadly as a symbiotic and symbolic system of divine communication. First, one must have to consider the period of the emergence of a spirit in a particular host, during which messages concerning its individual status are communicated. At this stage, it is during the ritual decoration of the *Ikolo* on the eve of the *Ovala* that certain ritual items like the blood of a chicken, feathers, white chalk, kola-nut and alligator pepper are used to imbue it with spiritual potency and symbolic qualities. All these act as ritual mechanism and primordial symbol of kinship ties without which nothing can be done (Shapiro, 1995). Kazuo Fukura (2011: 107-109) confirms that “these are must-have items that constitute a teacher spirit’s tray on the altar of a medium”. In this situation, the identity of the spirit emerges during the interpretations of signs and on the first appearances of the ancestral spirit which emerges during the application of ritual medicine on the body of the *Ikolo*.

Secondly, during the stage of spirit possession, the behaviour of the host is conventional and highly constrained by the codes of performance [the rhythmical sequence of the sound of the *Ikolo* which goes simultaneously with its dance styles and praises]. Lambek (1989:44) argues that such an experience is “symbolically rich and open-ended, both because it does not prescribe particular channels or avenues of behaviour to the onlookers and because its playful qualities, especially the use of sound and dance and the comedic-drama, are usually kept apart”. It is during this stage that the sound of the *Ikolo* breaks the

spiritual link or barrier between the worlds of the seen and the unseen in the extraterrestrial realm, and in this situation, it is believed that the community “is dancing on the shoulders of their ancestors” (Glocke & Jackson, 2011:6) through the mediation of ordered hierarchy from deity to people. Lambek (1989:44) asserts that spirit invocation and possession performances are somehow amusing, intellectually and aesthetically gratifying. Spirit behaviour is endlessly fascinating to some people; the parties held for spirits at the last stage of a possession attract large audiences as well as hosts whose spirits would not rise otherwise, and the appearance of a spirit on any occasion produces general interest for the entire community.

In the course of ritual liturgy of order, the identity of the spirit is known or established as separate from that of the human host and given both psychological and social reality. When the initiates are under possession, the people possessed dramatically through dance behave like the spirit which activates and possess them (Ohadike, 2007:10; Shuaibu, 2002:62). Fumiaki Nakanishi (2006:234-235) states that in possession, the gods come down to the person who is possessed. This is because “the dancing contains elements of both reinforcement and inversion of norms of gender typification” (Rasmussen, 1994:79). No wonder, Judith Hanna argues that such vigorous dancing can lead to an altered state of consciousness because it has a unique potential of going beyond communication by creating moods for divine manifestation (1988:286). Emma Cohen (2007:64) asserts that during this stage it creates a “specific atmosphere which has a decisive effect on the nature of the neurophysiological activity in the brains of group members”. The sound which invokes the spirit, believed to be around, in anticipation of its mounting on the initiates eventually results in altered state. Basically, it is with this assimilation and understanding that William James argues that the mystical states or interlude are very brief and cannot be sustained for a long time (1975:367). Andrew Greeley posits that in this mystical episode, the person consciously experiences his intimacy with the cosmos (1974:65). It is also significant to say here that it is during this period that some onlookers do develop eerie feelings and goose pimples according to the views expressed by some of my participants. However, the public is seen here as a conscious and participatory audience enriching ritual production of the *Ikolo* through the mediation of its sound (Ayu, 1986:22).

Nonetheless, it is the booming and vibrating sound of the *Ikolo* that calls for spirit invocation and possession because its sound would be compared to the wind, and according to Shuaibu (2002:63) “it is everywhere and no one can tell with any accuracy just how it feels to be possessed, one knows that it is there that is all”. Here, sound wave is nothing more than a compressional wave caused by vibrations (Lapp, 2006:7). In this mystical process, a current of energy or vibration through the sound stimulates the initiates’ spirit and the meeting point is the point of communion with the initiates by hearing the mystical sound emanating from the deep (Akintola, 1992:18). In this mystical transformation lies the whole secret of where spirit invocation and possession are articulated and managed. As a point of emphasis, at this point the identity of the spirit may be in suspense until the enactment of the final ceremony. It is a by-product of the host’s deep motivation and the actual identity of the spirits of the host’s consociates and predecessors (Lambek, 1989:43).

Nabofa (1994:39) asserts that at this stage the host is in a frenzy mood, and the divine is believed to infuse the total being of the subject and would enter into an intimate inner communication with the devotee. It is also believed that the possessed person would begin to hear sonorous voices blended with melodious sound emanating from inside the deep. He states that at this stage also, the devotee would be enticed and would have a feeling of compulsion to go there. He becomes ecstatic and moves to the shore or to that direction, and endeavours to answer the divine summons (Nabofa, 1994:39). In this situation, “his bodies often end up signifying order and purity when they are displaced according to morally appropriate norms of containment and control” (Masquelier, 2008: 41). Alyward Shorter (1970:112) posits that during this period “the subject is seized with shaking sways from side to side, falls down and speaks a meaningless, gibberish, or words of a foreign language already known to him”. Similarly, Umar Danfulani (1999:191-192) argues that “some members may be gripped by the spirit and they may speak in tongues. Their involvement with glossolalia demonstrates very clearly their practice of spirit possession, similar to what obtains in many Pentecostal churches today”. Nabofa (1994:40) explains that “experience has shown that it is not always very easy to overpower such a possessed person because of the extra power the divine has infused into him because his body would become slippery and to calm the ecstasy, some symbolic items would be applied in order to placate the divine”. The *Ovala* festival where the *Ikolo* sound features most prominently is a liturgical ritual site to reconstitute royal authority and

enable the spirits to perform ritual blessings over the human populace through the act of spirit invocation and possession (Bloch, 1987:272). The authority of spirits is a key feature of their makeup and one that actually plays a significant role in the final sort of ritual communication (Lambek, 1989:45).

Thirdly, there are substantive communications between established spirits and their human consociates, including the internal mystical conversations maintained by adepts. But the conversations established between the initiates and the deities are very paramount (Lambek, 1989:45). Lambek further argues that spirit invocation and possession is treated as natural in the sense that, while it is unusual, an oddity that cries out for explanation, it can, in fact, actually be explained as the direct, unmediated contact or outcome of a material process in the thinking and belief of society (Lambek, 1989:47). The most common type of variants of this approach is to assume or believe that spirit possession is a more or less direct contact or mystical manifestation of divine attributes where possession is concerned essentially with the enhancement of status (Lewis, 1971:127).

On the contrary, spirits are powerful creatures or mystical agencies, and in their effects upon their human hosts and their demands upon others their ritual power is vividly mediated and manifested (Lambek, 1989:50). However, this power is socially constructed, generated and activated when the sound of the *Ikolo* is played in ritual festivals like the *Ovala* and it also portrays a kind of system of communication through which possession is constituted. It is on this position that Lambek (1989:51&55) argues that spirits, through the mediation of sound, “act with a power and speak with an authority that transcends the mundane, and humans are not considered responsible for their actions or directives at that particular point in time. This is a view of spirit invocation and possession as ritual, but ritual that does not merely speak, in symbolic language or voice about society, but actively constructs it”. Nakanishi (2006:234) argues that in this sense the “host is at the mercy of the authoritative power of another world and his personality disappears at the time of the eruption of the divinity or spirit possesses him”. Lambek (1989:55) argues that in ritual performance like the *Ovala* celebration, “real things happen to real people”, because this is where the sound of the *Ikolo* is used to invoke and infect spirit possession on the initiates. Nabofa (2005:358) posits that “the vibration from the sound enables the devotees to be elated. They are thereby harmonized with the smooth ebb and flow of nature and spheres, and from them the worshippers draw inspiration”. Arguably, Ilesanmi (1996:5) asserts that it is during such ritual dance through the sound of

the *Ikolo* that “the deity himself possesses some of them, making them perform fits beyond the normal capacity of the generality of the people”. It is on this position that Erika Bourguignon (1968:4) asserts that spirit possession through the mediation of sound is apparently dependent on the possibility of separating the self into one or more elements. Put another way, spirit possession entails a complete separation of mind [or agency, spirit, person, self] from the body (Rouget, 1985:325). Similarly, Lambek (2008:246-247) notes that the agency of the host is frequently represented as withdrawing from the body or assuming a passive role in relation to control of the body, which is subsequently occupied or simply animated by the possessing spirit. Thus, spirit possession entails the complete displacement of the host’s agency by another agent’s, such that a bodiless or lifeless agent effectively takes control of the body – but not the mind of self – of a living being. Cohen & Barrett (2008:247) argue that during the possession episode, the agency of the host is completely replaced by an agency other than the host’s. Equally significant is the fact that the possessing agent is wholly responsible for the duration of the episode. Spirit possession involves a fusion of an antideity with the spirit or mind of a human host or joining of the body of the medium with that of the spirit entity. In other words, the otherness of possession, as it is believed, is captivating, mysterious and enigmatic (Cohen & Barrett, 2008:250).

On this position, I can say tersely that sound is very significant for spirit invocation and for summoning the divine to attend ritual worship. Spirit invocation is achieved through the ritual power of drumming which invokes the ancestral spirit during the *Ovala* festival. During the invocation, incantations are recited and praises are showered on the ancestors and deities of the community through the simultaneous pounding of the sound that emanates from the *Ikolo*. It is from the sound of the *Ikolo* and its ritual incantations that we would be able to know the attributes, praises, the theogony, powers and capabilities of the object of worship (Nabofa, 1994:16). Nonetheless, the fears and aspirations of the initiates are equally identified in the course of the sound and incantations. The sound of the *Ikolo* is played and manipulated in such a manner that they easily create eerie feelings on those within the liturgical or ritual ground. By such act, the whole place would be charged, and also surrounded with the aura of reverence, while all these combined with some other symbolic processes that will make the ritual liturgy to be more meaningful and enjoyable (Nabofa, 1994:35).

The sound produced by the *Ikolo* in conjunction with other things and conditions will “aid to awaken the spirituality in the initiates” (Akintola, 1992:25). Nabofa (1994:35) argues that “when they have been so aroused they would be so elated that they may have direct contact with the holy. In order to arouse the sense of awe and reverence in people’s mind and consciousness, cultic functionaries combine non-verbal communication techniques through the mediation of the sound with spoken words in transmitting their messages and intensions in order to align others”. He explains that “different messages are usually encoded into the sound expressions and different onlookers decode different meanings from the symbolic ritual dance and drama” (Nabofa, 1994:35). The impressions created by the booming and pounding sound from the *Ikolo* seem to linger and indelibly remain as a point of reference in the minds of most spectators because, according to the views expressed by some of my participants, they like it. This is one of the reasons why the presence of a devotee, in whose interest a particular ritual is being performed, is needed. Such is required in order to enable the message of the ritual, which is basically transmitted through the symbolic sound, to sink deeply into the inner recesses of the devotee where spirit invocation and possession control the movement between individuals while the spiritual potency of the sound is ritually and spiritually contained.

IKOLO AND PATRIARCHY

Ikolo sacred music is an intrinsic element of Aguleri tradition and culture, and “it has gained immense popularity because of the representative qualities of its symbolic sounds” (Marini, 2001:2). Frankly speaking, the sounding of *Ikolo* apparently becomes the heart beat of the Aguleri community, no wonder Hussein (1970, cited in Nanji (1994:54) notes that such sacred drum represents what he refers to as “matter and desire” and its “rhythmic beat of life is very distinct and unbridgeable”. The principal instrument in this category, the idiophonous slit-drum, perhaps is best known as a traditional transmitting instrument of telegraphy”. More so, the *Ikolo* sound “represents more of a process than a product, based on this, it “carries its own rules of etiquette” (De Jong, 2010:199). The accessibility of the instrument to members of the community who are not initiates is highly restricted. Nonetheless, it is believed in Aguleri cosmology that the ordinary members of the community can only attain that ‘mystical glory’ and access the sound emanating from the *Ikolo*, only when the King and his cabinet members are partaking in

its ritual dance. Though very brief, some would develop or experience eerie feelings and others goose pimples on their bodies. The idea is that the King of Aguleri and his cabinet members as “the dancing people” (Horton, 1963:94) dramatically swirl in a dance through the vibrating sound of the *Ikolo* to create what Fitzgerald et al (1995:57) refers to as “breeze of blessing” to infect the mystical experience on the entire community including those who are not initiates. Arguably, in the psychology and belief of the Aguleri people, it is these mystical feelings, experiences and expressions that makes the *Ikolo* sound to be central to Aguleri ritual life. Daniel Pals (2009:109) argues that such sacred sound as that of the *Ikolo* when used “substantively therefore designates the thing whose essential characteristic is sacredness”. Bolaji Idowu argues that the “sacred informs and gives meaning to the common, and the common is for the sacred a means of self-expression” (1973:58). On this position, Derion & Mauze (2010:6) posits that words like “sacred/secret/sensitive” are used to describe object like the *Ikolo* drum because it “commands respect and therefore require special care or the observation of prohibitions in all events”. Derion & Mauze (2010:6) again argues that such sacred object “propose to use the all-encompassing expression culturally sensitive object, which is less reminiscent of religion and emphasizes the native peoples’ values and sensitivities effectively at the heart of the matter”. It is on this ground that David Brown (1975:43) suggests that “anything or any place could become sacred”.

Maria-Gabriele Wosien (1992:10) argues that due to the theology and asceticism which adds to the repression of spontaneous movement; eventually the dance becomes a taboo and is regarded as dangerous, underground or evil manifestation. The sacredness conferred on *Ikolo* by the Aguleri community is partly positive and partly negative among the initiates, neo-phytes and “especially women and minors” (Nabofa, 1994:18). Ogun-dipe (2007:29) states that there are several places that women are forbidden to enter in view of the widespread fear of the contagious blood in them. John Durham (2001:2) argues that “on the one hand, it had to be kept separate from the profane; it should not be touched or looked at by profane persons; when not in use, it is hidden in special location, itself made sacred by association”. Femi Adedeji (2013:1) points out that “it is a blend of the sacred and secular”. Doubleday (2006:124) posits that attributions of sacred symbolism may express androcentric ideas. Jean During (1993:561) asserts that sacred drums like the *Ikolo* symbolize “the image of both the heavens and the assembled circle of mystics”. Miriam Clavir (1996:100) argues that objects like the *Ikolo* “command

respect and can give rise to prohibitions as to who may view, touch or use it” because it is used during the ritual dance for titled men. It is through this practice that the initiates who are also the custodians of the tradition and customs of the community “pursue practices and ideals embedded within a tradition that has historically accorded women a subordinate status” (Mahmood, 2005:4-5), and confer males with religious authority. Elizabeth Isichei attributes it to “abhorrence of menstrual blood; a kind of role selection in which men are perpetual performers of an art, women are perpetual spectators; while many observers have seen it as a way of subordinating women” (1983:289).

Ikolo and the Alienation of Women and Children

In the tradition and culture of the Igbo people, the *Ikolo* is highly prized and thus, in this patriarchal tradition, there are restrictions put upon women, non-initiates and children as they are prohibited from touching the *Ikolo* or from dancing to its tune. This is the reason why Joy Lo-Bamijoko (1987:23) claims that “in Afikpo area, women are still not allowed to see or listen to these instruments while they talk” and they are not allowed to touch or carry them. Reed & Hufbauer (2005:135-136) argue that through such sacred drum as the *Ikolo*, the Igbo concepts of gender are articulated and the restrictions of women through such sacred sound is tied to ritual and political authority. Thomas Beidelman (1993:41 & 43) asserts that secrecy and the public acknowledgement of concealment create an etiquette that helps further the aims of men who maintain the ritual and social hierarchy. Reed and Hufbauer argue that “such carefully delimited categories maintain political boundaries and create categories of legitimate and illegitimate knowledge” (2005:136). In other words, it is the initiates that are legitimate here, while the illegitimate include men that are not initiated, women and minors. Against this background, Mr James, a fifty-six year old non-initiate, explains that:

Women are not allowed to partake in such ritual dance because it is believed to be the dance for the gods and ancestors.

From the above assertions, it has been observed that in Aguleri custom and tradition, women are not allowed to dance or partake in anything that concerns the *Ikolo* ritual because it is believed to be the dance for initiated men in the community who are the earthly representatives of the gods and ancestors.

Equally significant is that not only women but also men that are not initiated and children. African feminist scholar, Amina Mama (1995:12) asserts that “such a view confers epistemic privilege on those who are disempowered and marginalized in our societies” and in this way women are enslaved by religious patriarchy. George Basden argues that although, sacred artifacts are said to “inspire fear, but practically it is the women and children who suffered intimidation” (1966:366). Mr Peter, a forty-five year old non-initiate states that:

Women are not allowed to participate in the ritual dance of the *Ikolo*. It is an abomination for them to do so.

From the above assertion of my participant, women generally are excluded from participating in anything that concerns the rituals of the *Ikolo* and these rules tend to instigate dominance against them. Eric Ayisi asserts that “these rules have religious implications and people who overlook them feel a sense of guilt and seek ritual restoration” (1972:91). Likewise, Lo-Bamijoko argues that “the functions for which those instruments are used take place at night, in order that women may hear the instruments playing but not see either of them or the players” and this makes women invisible (1987:23). Warren D’Azevedo (1994:345), writing on *Poro* a secret society in Sierra Leone, states that “the position of women remains subordinated to that of men, because *Sande* may be viewed as an instrument of male control of women in which the high-ranking leaders of *Sande* engage in an ancient conspiracy with their dominant male lineage-mates to sustain the principles of patrimony”. Temple (1922) cited in Isichei (1983:289), writing from the context of *Dodo* secret society of Kagoma traditions, argues that the “initiates were told that the whole society was really a conspiracy to keep their women folk in subjection”. Analytically, from the above, one would say that there is a deep connection between traditional religious practices and women domination particularly in the West African sub-region.

John Shepherd points out that “male hegemony is essentially a visual hegemony”. He argues that “the male desire to control women therefore parallels their desire to control the world, which implies that women themselves must be controlled and manipulated” (1987:154). Reed & Hufbauer argue that men link the dominance of male initiates of the *Ikolo* “to the control of women’s knowledge and behaviour, and describe it as an important means of dividing male and female responsibilities and privileges”

(2005:136). Reed & Hufbauer further state that members of sacred drums like the *Ikolo* are upheld as the custodians of its secrets and mysteries, whereas women, children, and uninitiated men are spectators who must nonetheless provide the necessary support. It is on this position that Pals (2009:109) explains that these profane persons, that is to say, “women and young men that are not yet initiated into the religious life are not allowed to touch or dance the music, they are only allowed to look at it from a distance and even this is only on rare occasions”. James Frazar concludes that “in general, we may say that the prohibition of women and the effects supposed to follow an infraction of rule, are exactly the same whether the persons to whom the things belong are sacred or what we might call unclean or polluted (1922:190).

Women’s Blood as Threat to *Ikolo*’s Spiritual Potency

From the above discussion, it has been observed that because of the nature of women as people who menstruate, they are not allowed to partake in the ritual dance of the *Ikolo*. The reason is because it is believed in Aguleri cosmology that their menstrual blood has that power to defile the spirit of the drum. This also signifies that women’s blood is a powerful element that can render certain rituals useless in traditional belief system. Mr Peter, a forty-five year old non-initiate, expresses this understanding clearly:

A woman who is her on menstrual period cannot come near the *Ikolo*, [and cannot even] think of touching it. The only woman permitted to play the *Ikolo* is the Queen Mother, who has reached menopause.

It is on this ground that Bruce Derr asserts that menstrual period “is a liminal state whereby the menstruating woman in preindustrial society symbolizes the dangers facing such societies” (1982:645). Jacob Olupona (1991) argues that almost all cultures throughout the world have elaborate beliefs and practices about menstruation; and African practices no doubt are part of this larger tradition. He argues that in all African cultures, menstruation is associated with women’s secret power – often expressed also in witchcraft as anti-thetical to men’s secret power, one of the ways in which women exert force and

power mystically in the universe and on men (Olupona, 1991:6). Chief Nwave, an eighty-four year old initiate, asserts that:

It is not allowed or permitted for women to come closer where the *Ikolo* rituals are being performed in Igbo land. Women are regarded as not being clean; this means that they can defile the laws and spiritual potency of the *Ikolo*.

From the above assertion, it has been noticed that in Igbo religion, menstrual blood from women is regarded as a negative force that can render the efficacy of any ritual sacrifice powerless. Then, in relation to the *Ikolo*, the menstrual blood of women can equally do the same, thus women are not allowed to be part of anything that pertains to the *Ikolo*. Buttressing this further, Joseph Murphy observes that in religions like that of the Igbo, “the menstrual blood from women can disturb the physical and spiritual compounds that enable sacred drum[s]” (2012:78). Thomas Buckley (1993:134) writing in the context of the Indian law and belief system, argues that “a menstruating woman is highly polluting and will contaminate the family house and food supply if she comes into contact with either. Thus, in the old days, a special shelter for menstrual seclusion was built near the main house, and special food for a family’s menstruating women was separately collected, stored, and prepared for consumption in this shelter”. Chief Ndigwe, an eighty-nine year old initiate, comments that:

For emphasis, all cultures across the Igbo land do not allow women’s participation in such sacred ritual as that of the *Ikolo* to avoid violating the guiding rules and regulations that constitutes the essence of the *Ikolo*. Women do menstruate, and a menstruating woman can defile the spiritual essence of the *Ikolo*.

From the above assertion, it is implied that throughout Igbo land women are prohibited to be part of the *Ikolo* ritual for the fear of defilement. One might read this not so much as matter of fact assertion of – this is how things are – but rather the invocation of the broader Igbo, here serves to legitimate a seemingly primordial exclusion of women from the sacral life and practices of the community. In this context it serves to sustain patriarchy. Teresa Velez suggests that one of the views advocated by promoters of such patriarchal religions would argue that it is “in order to protect them [women], not the drum and it is believed that the spirit that inhabits the drum, desirous of blood, may cause women to bleed to death” (2000:156).

Women are afraid of it, and if one should see the activities forbidden to women she would no longer conceive (MacGaffey, 2000:238). Nabofa (1980:394) asserts that “this is one of the major reasons why women, especially those who are still of child-bearing age, are often precluded from taking key positions in many religious activities”. It is on this note that Ikenga-Metuh (1985:89) asserts that holy things/objects like the *Ikolo* “is surrounded by a set of prohibitions. Ordinary people may on the advice of a priest or diviner adopt and practice certain prohibitions and thus achieve a limited level of holiness. It would appear therefore, that prohibitions create or preserve the status of holiness [*nso*], while the breach of prohibition [*nso*], result in pollution or unholiness. *Nso* are therefore sacred prohibitions”.

Molara Ogundipe (2007:29) asserts that “as the woman is sacred in endogenous thought, her body is also sacred. According to Michael Nabofa (1996:11) “the study of African thought forms and religious practices have revealed some beliefs and symbolic cultic practices associated with blood and its uses for positive and negative ends which have multivocal symbologies encoded, with varied meanings decoded from it. Ogundipe (2007:29) argues that “they can and are used as blessings, curses, and potions for power – social, material and supernatural”. She argues that women’s menstruation is considered sacred and powerful, and that it is believed to have the power to interrupt, interfere with and cause to happen (Ogundipe, 2007:29). Such a thing is the “symbolic representation of the embodiment of womanhood” (Ozah, 200:67). Olupona (1991:6) comments that “it could not be that the biological nature of women is sinful, but rather that blood, which is a symbol of life, has some potency, which can itself destroy. It may be that people like to put this potential threat/power at bay, to control, so to say, that which is highly charged with the sacred”. Richard Leppert writing about playing the family piano in England, argues that “in this instance, the virginal, anthropomorphized as woman, is made by the violence imposed upon her. Music is posited as harmony, but harmony is produced by a beating. Aestheticized as music, women’s very being is articulated as a product of a deferential masochism in response to sadistic revenge...Yet even in the privacy of the playing, such instruments’ discursive boundaries must be preestablished” (1992:109).

More than a Woman: The Exception of the Queen Mother

In the Aguleri traditional paradigm, the *Ikolo* performance in this dimension is solely men's affair except in few instances where one or two women of matured age who have attained their post-menopause age. Although, precautions are put in place to prevent the audience from coming in contact with the instrument of the performer, which reinforce the separation of the two realms (Drewal, 1977:44), the queen mother is allowed to play it for the king, despite her being a woman. The idea is that the Queen Mother is an androgynous person who possessed the "moral quality of wisdom, knowledge, emotion, compassion...symbolically, not granted by man, but as a person with the innate quality of a woman who moves in a man's sphere of action; a person without formal political authority in a court of male power" (Gilbert, 1993:9f). Thus, Timothy Rice (2007:25) argues that "constructed identities become an issue in situations of change or where the weak and the powerful are fighting over issues of identity". Pashington Obeng (2000) states that often postmenopausal women are permitted to perform religious ritual acts in their own right in the indigenous society, and that these are characteristic of patriarchal societies.

It has been observed that women who have attained such a high status in Igbo society as they get initiated into the new status or cult take a new name in order to mark this elevation "which invariably implies a remarkable change in their life" (Ezeanya, 1994:7). In this situation, because the Queen Mother has been admitted into the group [cult] of the *Ikolo*, "the concern may likely be less serious or non violent" (Ibekwe, 2013:142) and in that case, the Queen Mother is invariably regarded as [*Nne Manwu*] mother of spirit manifest (Ibekwe, 2013:141). It is in this form that she "design, shape and size motifs symbolic of their matrilineage" (Antiri, 1974:32). Filomina Steady (2005:319) argues that such "changes in the lifecycle can alter women's status so that post-menopausal women can assume political functions and serve as elders and advisers on the same basis as men". Ibekwe (2013:141-142) explains that "spirit manifest [*manwu*] in Igbo tradition is an embodiment of ancestral spirit in the physical realm and for that, it is only the men who are qualified to communicate with such supernatural beings". It is only in such special situation that the Queen Mother is permitted to undergo certain ritualistic tests, after which she can begin to use "the homiletics language in a transformative manner so that the believer would begin to speak" (Kalu, 2010:125) in weird language anchored on priest craft. Nabofa (1994:59) notes that such

language usage are meant to create an aura of mystery around their practices. In this situation, where such transformation has taken place “the foray into the men’s repertoire is viewed as evidence of an unusual degree of intelligence and talent” (Sugerman, 1989:208). This positional transformation of the Queen Mother affirms a decoration and demonstration of exalted power after “grappling and wrestling individually with God” (McAdams, 1988:35), which actually accords high regard and respect ordinarily reserved for men. When such respect is accorded to a woman in a community like the Aguleri, she is looked upon as not being an ordinary woman but a man. Bronislaw Malinowski (1954:74) posits that the use of such languages or words “invokes, state, or commands the desired aim”. Farid Al-Din Attar (1966:40) writing from the Muslim context, clearly concludes that in that situation, “when a woman becomes a man in the path of God, she is a man and one cannot anymore call her a woman”.

Ikolo: Bolstering Patriarchy

On the issue of how the *Ikolo* drummer is appointed in order to bolster patriarchy, there are stipulated steps according to the tradition and custom of the community one would follow and these fall under the theme, instrument of social and ritual authority. On this, Mr Paul, a fifty-year old non-initiate asserts that:

...the appointment of such a drummer is in the lineage of Idigo family and ...it is through *Igba Ava* divination process/method.

Chief Ndigwe, an eighty-nine year old initiate posits that:

...a fortune-teller will cast his lot to determine who the deities and our forefathers desired for the role. ...the person selected by both ancestors and the deities will be a person of integrity and avid observer of the guiding rules of HRH and his cabinet members.

From these observations, it has been shown that the *Ikolo* sacred drum cannot be handled or played by ‘anyhow, anybody’ without the approval of the King and cabinet members as this would constitute a violation of Aguleri cosmology. This also sees the men in such position as privileged because it is believed that they are divinely selected and appointed. On this note, Chief Arinze, an eighty-two year old initiate, asserts that:

...it is rigorous...because of certain rituals that are involved. ..it is hereditary and in particular family linages. ...it is only the titled men in the family that could be appointed or chosen and the Queen Mother.

Chief Onyema, a fifty-eight year old initiate claims that:

After all these divination processes, certain sacrifices would be performed in order to thank the gods and the ancestors for choosing the right person.

From the above, it is has been noticed that it is hereditary and apart from the fact that divination process is involved to enable the wishes of the gods and ancestors to be known. It is after such sacrifices that the person would be taught and allowed to be playing the *Ikolo*. Mr Paul, a fifty yeat old non-initiate notes that:

If women are allowed to partake in the ritual dance of the *Ikolo*, it is believed that it would not allow the *Ikolo* to speak. It is also believed that the goodwill messages we usually derive from the sound of the *Ikolo* might cease because its potency has been defiled. The only person allowed to touch the *Ikolo* is the Queen Mother.

From the above, it has been noticed that in Aguleri worldview, it is not every woman that is permitted to play the *Ikolo* except the Queen Mother who must have attained certain status in order not to defile the spiritual capabilities of the *Ikolo*. This situation is remarkable because in many other regions,parts of Europe and Sub-Saharan Africa for instance, sacred drumming is traditionally performed by men, not women (Doubleday, 2006:109). It is not proper in Igbo tradition for women to over step their boundaries or do the obvious in matters or roles strictly meant for males, nonetheless, all these put a check and balance on the type of music being performed by any categorized group, male or female (Ibekwe, 2013:143). Again, the ritual, cultic and esoteric affairs usually involved in the sacredness of the *Ikolo* have male dominance and women are highly restricted from intruding or interfering in such situations. Therefore, it would be seen that both culturally conceived notions and biological sex differentiation are at play in gender definition, which in turn influence musical performance typology (Ibekwe, 2013:138). Buttressing this concept of the sacredness of the *Ikolo* on the theme: instrument of social and ritual

authority, and why women are not allowed to partake in its ritual dance, Mr James, a fifty-six year old non-initiate explains that:

Ikolo dance would be compared to *Sulugede* dance in Igbo tradition, because it is believed to be a ritual dance for the gods and ancestors. This dance is believed to be a ritual dance for the gods and the ancestors in Igbo land and women are not allowed to partake in such ritual dance because it is believed to be for the spirits and ancestors.

From this, we can see that traditionally Aguleri women are not allowed to participate in the ritual dance of the *Ikolo*. But this can also be interpreted to mean male dominance, which Ali Rattansi (1997:494) argues, has a resultant reactionary consequences that he describes as “the romantic culturalist chauvinism”. In other words, the initiates have formed a dominant club for themselves. Chief Nweke, an eighty-two year old initiate, says that:

The *Ikolo* is not meant for women at all. The *Ikolo* music is very distinct and important for the Aguleri people. It is the ritual dance for the *Egbenobas* – that is men of valor or the warriors of the community.

Basically, *Ikolo* dance practices, from my own observation, are seen as a traditional ritual dance meant only for initiated men. This is because it is assumed to be the dance of the gods. Ibekwe (2013:142) explains that there are significant areas where men have advantages over women in sacred music which include ritual music, wrestling music, hunting music, war music, initiation music and so on. Van Allen (1993:459) argues that “in traditional Igbo society, women did not have a political role equal to that of men. But they did have a role – or more accurately, a series of roles – despite the patrilineal organization of Igbo society. Their possibilities of participating in traditional politics must be examined in terms of both structures and values”. That is why Lester Monts (1989:220) asserts that musicianship in *Ikolo* musical practices like other professions is divided along gender line.

However, the sacredness of the *Ikolo* as a sacred sound offers an amazing field for the exploration of gender inequality and power because according to Valji et al (2003:72) “modesty, submissiveness and fear of authority” are the causes of this gender inequality and restrictions in many aspects, including

music. Since culture represents routine behaviour that carries norms and values of a society, they are often not easily changed (Steady, 2005:326). Phil Okeke (2000:50) consistently argues that the tendency is to regard gender discrimination inherent in cultural practices as acceptable because it is the tradition. Saba Mahmood (2005:2) argues that it is under the pretence of tradition that women are enchained. Al-Bukhari (1928, cited in Mernissi 1991:49), writing from the Islamic point of view, asserts that “those who entrust their affairs to women will never know prosperity”. Leppert (1987:64) argues that “this attitude reached its climax in the early nineteenth century in the establishment of rigid distinctions between both peoples at all levels of interaction”.

It is also noticeable in the same community where men and women play different roles in the areas of musical practices especially as it concerns instrument like the *Ikolo* (Ibekwe, 2013:137). Strictly speaking, this religious structure of the Igbo in the context of Aguleri tradition, culture and hegemony, regarding the sacredness of *Ikolo* drum, is apparently chauvinistic and a symbol of women’s oppression which portrays “women as timeless victims of a ferocious patriarchal order” (Zezeza, 2005:213). Rattansi (1997:485) argues that “the feminization of the colonized male also of course occurred in the context of the masculinism of imperialism and the dominance of the male in the metropolitan order of things”. On this, Mrs Nneka, a sixty-six year old female sacred specialist, asserts that:

...there are women who are sacred specialists that are believed to be even more spiritually powerful than their male counterparts. ...As a woman sacred specialist, am advocating that women should be permitted to partake in the ritual dance.

From the above, it has been observed that irrespective of the fact that women are been marginalized in the area of the *Ikolo*, there are other ways such as the area of spirituality, that women distinguished themselves and make their agitations very strong. On this position, John Brenkman (1987:231) argues that the notion of dominance is a “socially organized form of exploitation, coercion, and nonreciprocity which structure the uses that one individual or group makes of another for the satisfaction of its own need”. on the issue of bolstering patriarchy and alienating the female gender in the *Ikolo* ritual dance, Mrs AveMaria, a fifty-two year old lay Christian woman, contests that:

It is satanic and archaic. ...for those women that are involved in the worshipping of idols...it will be good if they should be allowed to partake in it. By not permitting such women they marginalize them in this area. ...it means it is gender biased....There is a kind of segregation and dominance against many of us that are married to those chiefs. In this 21st century people still believe in fetish ideas and sacrifices. I see this ritual of a thing as a medium which Satan/devil uses to operate.

Overall, from my observation, it is to bolster traditional and institutional patriarchy through the sacred ordinance of the *Ikolo* sacred sound and the fear that women's blood can defile the spiritual potency of the *Ikolo* drum that women are not allowed to touch it. Also, through the mediation of its ritual dance, in which the women are not allowed to participate, all through the response to its sacred sound, the *Ikolo* and the traditional patriarchy in Aguleri cosmology is upheld. Nonetheless, there is a kind of power dynamic where women are dominated and marginalized in everything that concerns the musical instrumentation of the *Ikolo*. There is also a contestation from some community women against such gender bias. Some, however, conclude that the fact that women are side-tracked in this area suggests that there is something hidden and fetish about the *Ikolo* association especially in this modern era. These voices are agitating that all women should be initiated into the ritual instrumentation of the *Ikolo*. It is on this position that Helene La Rue (1997:189) asserts that musical instruments like the *Ikolo* can be makers of culture, as well as status; they can also imply the status of gender. Stokes (1997:22) argues that playing of musical instruments like the *Ikolo* not only defines ranks and hierarchies but gender. Thus, the totality of the instrumentation of the *Ikolo* and its ritual practices becomes "more assertive and emotionally indulgent" (Sugarman, 1989:202). David Brackett (2012:120) refers to this kind of gender struggle and inequality as "social/power dynamics".

Conclusion

From my analysis of the Aguleri beliefs and experiences of the *Ikolo* I was able to identity two overarching themes; (1) *Ikolo* in Aguleri identity and ritual practice, and (2) *Ikolo* as symbol for bolstering patriarchy. I found that Aguleri identity is intimately tied to the *Ikolo* since it makes possible a mediation between the living and the dead, as well as to the broader Igbo community, and upheld by a

strict social hierarchy which holds the King (and the *Ikolo*) at its epi-centre. Aguleri identity is further sustained through the symbolic decoration of the *Ikolo* which serves to further, materially, the enactment and embodiment of unique Aguleri symbolism (cola-nut, blood, chalk and feathers). Finally, my analysis reveals that the *Ikolo* also reinforces Aguleri religious identity through spirit invocation and possession activated by the sound and the vibrations of the *Ikolo*. The auditory authority of the drum allows for the embodiment of ancestral spirits that connects contemporary Aguleri with the forefathers and traditions.

However, while my analysis reveals the multi-layered authority of the *Ikolo* (auditory, social, ethical and ritual), it is not without detractors. The authority of the *Ikolo* operates, and is sustained within a highly regulated and insulated patriarchal system. While its uniqueness rests on it being coupled with the initiated (men), it simultaneously rests on the notion of women as defiling by virtue of the ‘uncleanness’ of their menstrual blood. Within the indigenous religious worldview, the alienated position of women is supposedly minimised by the elevated status given to the (post-menopausal) Queen Mother in relation to the *Ikolo*. However, despite the supposed vulnerability of the *Ikolo*’s ritual power, or potency, it is soundly insulated within the highly symbolic and ritual order which ultimately serve to sustain the privilege of initiated men.

Nonetheless, for the Aguleri, the *Ikolo* drum is perceived to be sacred and an object that is made sacrosanct by the community. This is why there are so many by-laws that guide and protect the *Ikolo* and these are the main reasons why women are not allowed to partake in its ritual dance, which upholds the traditional patriarchy of the Aguleri community. However, despite the many limitations that can be levelled at the social and ritual function of the *Ikolo* as symbol of patriarchy, it nevertheless, points us to new ways in which sound can be imagined in the production and mediation of the sacred in African indigenous religions.

CHAPTER SEVEN

TOWARD A THEORY OF SACRED SOUND IN AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION

Basically, interests in the study of sound and its significance in African traditional religious practices is comparatively novel. From the research conducted it became evident, that despite the widespread availability of more modern technologies that link the Aguleri with global market forces, and auditory technologies, the *Ikolo* remains highly valued and insulated from such global forces. This is because it is not only valued for reinforcing Aguleri royalty but that through its symbolism, and use in Aguleri sacred ritual the community's identity is sustained. However, the *Ikolo* sacred sound is primarily associated with the king, the chieftaincy and for the initiated elite in the community. Before any Aguleri ritual festival or ceremony would take place, the *Ikolo* sound must fill the air. It both marks the beginning of a ritual occasion and it is also sounded to bring such occasions to an end. The *Ikolo* sound is sacred to the Aguleri because without it no ritual is regarded as sacred, and without it no communication with ancestors or deities are possible.

From my research, it has been shown that women, children and the uninitiated are not allowed to partake in its ritual dance or touch the *Ikolo*, although, it is believed that by listening to its sound, they can gain some spiritual experience. However, despite the highly patriarchal ritual and social context through the *Ikolo* is mediated, it nonetheless offers a useful context within which to consider the significance and meaning of sound in African Traditional Religion in general, and Igbo/ Aguleri religion in particular. The central significance of the *Ikolo* sacred sound lies in its ability to situate the Aguleri identity in historical context through annual ritual re-enactment of Aguleri socio-sacral order, and it serves as a means through which Aguleri religious belief become embodied through spirit invocation and possession. Invariably, because of the significant functions performed by sound as part of African Traditional Religious practices – whether through chanting, drumming, bellowing, singing, crying, etc - Africans should hold tenaciously to such practices to recover and retain the full repertoire of sacred sound in indigenous ritual practice. This study of the *Ikolo* offers on such opportunity to confirm the relevance and the usefulness of sacred sound in contemporary African society.

Consequently, indigenous religious communication practices calls for cultural renewal in which Africans should be allowed to operate or do things according to their own culture and traditions. More so, the need for cultural renewal of indigenous sound regimes and practices in ritual context generally becomes imperative if cultural re-orientation of African society is to be achieved. Indigenous auditory repertoires and practices are often commodified in the face of globalization through uncritical ethnomusicology – when the practice of sacred sound is removed from its indigenous ritual context. The time for the renewals and revival is now because our cultural artifacts and auditory heritage with its rich cultural heritage which are variously impregnated with symbolic meanings that guard our religious, economic, socio-political and ethical values. Nonetheless, in this corpus, indigenous sacred sound like the *Ikolo* as an instrument of religious practice has some fall-backs, and it has a problem of explanation, illustration, and definition in modern linguistic terms. In other words, it (like other forms of indigenous sacred sound) lacks appropriate terminologies (Noun, 2009:14) because sound as an aspect of African traditional religion remains largely under-researched.

In the early chapters of this thesis I have sought to demonstrate that sacred sound is a more common, and more researched phenomenon in the ritual practices of other world religions. Apart from its social and political functions for cohering the community and sustaining Aguleri identity, *Ikolo* sacred sound helps in communication with the supernatural. What my research has revealed is that among the Aguleri it is believed that without the use of such sound, the activation and invocation of the spirits would not be possible. In fact, in Igbo religion and in the Aguleri worldview, where the *Ikolo* sound is at the heart of African Traditional Religion, it is believed that communication between the divine and the human would not be complete if there is no such sound. The sound itself assumes and asserts a kind of ritual authority over the living, the ancestors and over Igbo deities.

Further, the *Ikolo* assumes social and religious significance within Aguleri culture due to the prominence that it assumes in contexts like the *Ovala* festival. The examination of the *Ikolo* outside its primarily ritual function provided me with the means to investigate the historical, political, sociological and the aesthetic values of the *Ikolo* and its sound, insofar as it pertains to the making of Aguleri identity. However, and notwithstanding its being deeply tied into Aguleri patricracy (through the ritual expulsion

of women, children and the uninitiated), two major insights about sacred sound emerge from this study of the *Ikolo*:

The first is the issue of religious symbolism of the *Ikolo*. The *Ikolo* sacred drum is an artifact through the mediation of its symbolic representations/ decorations and sacred sound represents the ideas and beliefs held by the Aguleri people. The auditory authority of the *Ikolo* is intimately coupled with the sacrality, and indigenous legitimacy that is gained from the Aguleri symbolic representations used in the making of the *Ikolo*. Here, it must be observed that there are symbolic materials or items that the *Ikolo* is decorated with in order to reinforce its indigenous character, and most significantly to enhance it with a distinct sacrality. It is through the display of these symbolic items that the Aguleri believe that the *Ikolo* is able to “speak”. These material objects, such as the native white chalk [*nzu*], alligator pepper, blood and fowl feathers aid its spiritual potency and efficacy, transform the sound of the drum into transcendental beats and pulses through which the believers connect with each other, the ancestral, and the transcendent.

Secondly, the *Ikolo* sacred sound facilitates ancestral spirit invocation and possession. In Igbo traditional belief system, it is believed that spirit possession is a mystical condition or stage where one is assumed to be in altered state or consciousness. Through the sound of the *Ikolo* the titled, male initiates experience bodily response – vibrations and an eerie feeling within their bodies – that provide for the invocation and spirit possession of the initiate by the ancestors or the gods. Thus in Aguleri cosmology spirit possession is not unruly and disruptive but, through the drumming of the *Ikolo*, it operates within a liturgical ritual structure(s).

Conclusion

If at this level we inquire what the role of the *Ikolo* is in indigenous Igbo religion among the Aguleri people of Anambra State, Nigeria, the answer would be summed up as follows: in Igbo religion, the *Ikolo* sacred sound has two major and related significance and symbolic functions. The first one is that it enables the indigenous people of Aguleri to bridge the gap between the seen and unseen worlds and thus bring or bind them into complete and direct contact with all the psychic forces in the extra-terrestrial realm that inhabit the world and controls the destinies of humans (Adegbite, 1988:24). It is on this

position that Jacobson (2000:9) describes sacred sound like the *Ikolo* as a sacred bridge. Ademola Adegbite (1991:53) argues that such sacred sound “acts as a spiritual and material conduit in planes of existence, in which it provides musical sound of valuable insight into the African metaphysical system, myths, and complex traditional religious thought and notions, and these affect and relate to the physical realm”. Apart from the roles the *Ikolo* sacred sound plays as an instrumental accompaniment to ritual dance, chants, songs and other religious ceremonies like the *Ovala* festival, *Ikolo* sacred sound provide the channel through which the indigenous people of Aguleri community are in constant ecstatic/religious communion with their deities especially the initiates. The *Ikolo* sacred sound is used to evoke the presence of the Aguleri divinities and like every other traditional sacred drums, according to Adegbite (1988:24-25), it “can properly be compared to an audio visual system that is capable of bringing the dwellers of a remote planet, the world of nature, and of mother earth right into one’s home so that intelligible communication can take place between them face to face”. In this regard, “one only needs to listen” (DeVale, 1992:106-107).

Insofar as *Ikolo* sacred sound acts as metaphysical agent or resource in the sacred relationship between the deities and the Aguleri people, the participants (the initiates) during the *Ovala* ritual festival become ‘mounted’ to the point of frenzy and ecstasy when they experience spirit possession during their ritual dance. Spirit possession, occurs during festivals where *Ikolo* features most prominently, when the king and the initiates dance to the sacred music. *Ikolo* sacred sound as an identity and mark of symbolic authority in Aguleri tradition and culture has the ability and capability of fusing/binding the entire Aguleri community together psychologically. George Niangoran-Bouah (1991:92) argues that sacred drum sound like the *Ikolo* is a monument of the human spirit because it is timeless. He argues that the drum is a tool and an appropriate instrument of knowledge which for a long time was considered as not being accessible to the universe of African traditional beliefs (Niangoran-Bouah, 1991:92). Adegbite (1991:53) argues that *Ikolo* drum sound “in its role as a metaphysical agent, seems to be evocative to the traditional Africans. This means that it has magical power and can be used to evoke psychic forces of tremendous potency. The mystical role of sound, on the other hand, is observed in the ritual and the profane gestures often exhibited by the traditional...musicians before the beginning of a performance”. Adegbite (1988:25) again argues that “it does this by requiring, engendering, and fostering a corporate

spirit, a togetherness, both in the fashioning of the materials for music making and in the actual making of music”.

This ambivalent attitude towards indigenous sacred sound calls for complete reorientation towards incorporating indigenous theological ideas that do always start with ideas of the transcendent, but that take seriously the ways in which sound – drumming, or general idiophone, bleating, singing and howling – all serve as foundational ways to understand and practice religion. In summation, I have sought to illustrate the significance of the synergy between music, dance and religion as it concerns such sacred drums like the *Ikolo* in Africa. According to Sofola (1973:7) “in African society, therefore, while the usual Western functions of music as entertainment, accompaniment for the dance and in religious services are also present, music is used, in addition, in many other settings”. In agreement this, Judith Hanna (1992:323) asserts that “dance in many societies is an integral part of religious, social, economic, or political life. Irrespective of time and place, however, dance is a powerful means of communicating a group’s values and beliefs and transmitting them from one generation to the next”. She argues that such powerful and ritualistic dance, like that of the *Ikolo* ritual dance, which constitutes an “intense, vigorous dancing can lead to an altered state of consciousness through the mediation of brain wave frequency, adrenalin, and blood sugar changes – induced altered states of consciousness may be perceived as numinous” (Hanna, 1988:286). In this way, my appreciation of the relevance of *Ikolo* sacred sound as an element of religious practice in the contemporary Igbo society would be enhanced towards developing a theory of sound in African Traditional Religion.

My ethnographic data, through an analytical or interpretative framework for understanding Aguleri religious practices and examining the ways in which the Aguleri community have innovated or arrested the tradition of the *Ikolo* sacred sound to produce postcolonial identities as it pertains to the full recovery of indigenous practices, has shown that the *Ikolo* is an intrinsic part of Aguleri Identity. Further, I have come to conclude, through my research and from the themes that emerged from my data, that it is through the sacred sound of the *Ikolo*, that the Aguleri community come to be at peace with their deities. Also, through the mediation of the symbolic functions of the *Ikolo* sacred drum, Aguleri has become an auditory community in time and space occupying the soundscape in Igbo traditional religion.

Nonetheless, I postulate a theory of sacred sound in African Traditional Religion in which the transcendent power of the sound of the *Ikolo* is a foundational force that ties individual believers through socio-cultural formations, to connect to selves, to others and to their deities.

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APPENDICES

Appendix One (A): English Version.

Individual interview schedule

1. (a) Do people think that the *Ikolo* is important for the Aguleri?
(b) When do the *Ikolo* get used?
2. What is the purpose of the *Ikolo* for (1) politics (2) beliefs (3) social event?
3. (a) Women are not allowed to dance *Ikolo* music, why is it so?
(b) What makes *Ikolo* sacred?
4. (a) How did the *Ikolo* come to be a special instrument for the Aguleri?
(b) How did it come into being?
5. In beating the *Ikolo* sacred drum during any festival, it makes a unique sound.
How does this make you feel?
(b) How do people generally feel about the sound of the *Ikolo*?
6. What does it mean when the drummers say or use certain languages when playing the *Ikolo*?
7. How do they choose the drummer of *Ikolo* sacred drum?
8. What are the symbolism of blood, feather, and white chalk use in decorating the *Ikolo* during the festive mood period?
9. How is the *Ikolo* a mark of Aguleri identity?
10. (a) What is the connection between Idigo dynasty and *Ikolo*?
(b) *Ikolo* is sometimes called ‘*Ikolo* Idigo’. What is the reason for that?

Appendix one (B): (Ihe mgbakwunye nke otu/mbu) – Igbo Version.

Individual interview schedule usoro emume igba ajuju onu

1. (a) Ndi mmadu e chelu n' *Ikolo* di nkpa nyere ndi Aguleri?
(b) Kedu oge ejiri *Ikolo* eme ihe
2. Gini bu iheeji wee meputa *Ikolo*, obu maka (1) Ihe ndoro ndoro ochichi (2) ihe okwukwe (3) Ihe mmerikote mmadu n' ibeya.
3. (a) A dighi ekwe ka ndi iyom gba egwu *Ikolo*, gini kpatara ya?
(b) Gini mere *Ikolo* jiri were buru ihe e debere aso?
4. kedu ka *Ikolo* siri nwere buru ihe puru iche na Aguleri?
(b) Kedu ka osiri nwee bido?
5. Oge a na eti igba *Ikolo* di aso n'oge mmeme, o na-enweputa uda puru iche, kedu k' Uda ahu si emegi na ahu?
(b) Kedu otu ndi mmadu siri nwere n' afuta uda *Ikolo*?
6. Mgbe ndi na eti *Ikolo* kwuru okwu ma obu suru asusu di iche oge ha n' eti *Ikolo*, gini ka oputara?
7. kedu usoro e jiri aroputa onye na eti *Ikolo* di aso?
8. Gini ka oputara bu obara, ugbene, na nzu ejiri acho *Ikolo* nma n' oge mmemme oriri n' onwunwu?
9. kedu udi *Ikolo* jiri buru ihe ejiri mara ndi Aguleri?
10. (a) Gini jikotere *Ikolo* na ochichi/ezi na uno ndibe Idigo?
(b) Oge mgbe a n'akpo *Ikolo* "*Ikolo-Idigo*", gini kpatara ya?