

## **Uvie Sacred Sound: Idiophones and The Religious Identity of The Aguleri as an Expression of Igbo Traditional Religious Soundscape.**

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**Abstract:** *Among the Aguleri people, the sound of the Uvie – an indigenous idiophone – is regarded as a central aspect of African indigenous religious practice through which they engage questions about the meaning for life. Through an ethnographic study conducted in recent years, I propose to explore the symbolic functions of this indigenous sacred drum with specific reference to its religious, cultural, political, ethical and social significance, a method by which the indigenous community keeps in constant religious communication with their deities and ancestors. While embodied religion as well as the sensory aspects of religious has been widely explored in most monotheistic religions, the sensory has remained largely under-researched in African studies. However, I propose to not only examine the various ways in which sound has been used to mediate religious beliefs and practices in African religion, but to specifically focus on the idophone as an instrument of religious mediation. Through an evaluation of significant Aguleri religious practices involving Uvie as a sacred drum used in ritual dance performed by men, I wish to suggest that the Uvie sound has two significant and related functions. The first one is that it enables the Aguleri to bridge the gap between the visible and unseen world of the ancestors and thus making possible an Igbo understanding of those forces that are believed to control the destinies of man. Secondly, the sacred sound of the Uvie is believed to uphold and sustain the Aguleri religious system, and a complex of traditional religious rituals which uphold the privileges of those men who have been initiated into the ancestral cult. This paper point to particular understandings of sound as integral to African religion, and proposes to illustrate this through an examination of Aguleri (Igbo) religion, sacred sound and ritual dance as part of the broader socio-sacral order.*

**Key words:** *Dance, Festival, Identity, Rituals, Sacred, Symbolism, Sound, Traditional.*

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### **I. Introduction**

The main focus of this paper centers around the issues on religion, ritual, and identity-construction as mediated through the sound that emanates from the sacred drum of *Uvie*. I propose to delve into this study to examine the social, political and religious belief system that are sustained by the use of the *Uvie*, an Igbo idiophone used among the people of Aguleri. The *Uvie* and the sound that it produces are intimately tied up with Aguleri social and religious identity. As a religious artifact and symbols 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). *Uvie* is said to help to structure their relationships with their deities or ancestors and its sacred sound have been regarded as an embodiment and the hall mark of Aguleri culture and tradition (Idigo, 2002:24). Michael Marcuzzi (2010:151) asserts that “its mythical connection to an ancient patriarch establish the cult as the arch through which devotees approach the reproduction of the gerontocracy and the fecundity of the collective of male ancestors”. More so, the *Uvie* sound “represents more of a process than a product, based on this, it carries its own rules of etiquette” (De Jong, 2010:199).

This paper is located at the intersection between African Religion, ritual, and identity, with a particular focus on how the sound of the *Uvie* is implicated. I propose to investigate the social, political and religious beliefs that are mediated through the use of *Uvie*, an Igbo idiophone among the Aguleri people. Also, I will draw on ethnomusicology as a discourse and as a framework for exploring *Uvie* as an idiophone in African religious communication. However, because of this study, 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 frame work/ambit of its contexts—historical, political, sociological, and economic, as well as aesthetic. Equally,

through this method, some participants were interviewed in order to have a general view of what an ordinary Aguleri person thinks about *Uvie* because they are not initiates.

## II. Origin of the *Ikolo*

Patterning to 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 has come to show 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, no wonder 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) affirms 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. Really, 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 on 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 in religious or secular such as meetings, funerals or announcing a death, warnings of 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 affirms 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) believes that drumming has significantly shaped African religious heritage.

### **III. Ikolo Sound and Aguleri Interpretations**

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). It is on this note that Judith Ballard (2006:1) affirms 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). He 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 principles 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 is actually based in Aguleri which houses Eri-Aka, the seat of origin of *Ikolo* (Idigo, 2001:123).

#### **IV. The Metamorphoses of the *Ikolo* to *Uvie***

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-Eyutcha, 1986:18). Today the sound of the *Ikolo* drum which has metamorphosed into *Uvie* drum because of its size has become the choice of sacred sound in other Igbo communities. Clearly, the ritual activation of the *Uvie* sacred drum stems on its symbolic ethos it commands which upholds its patriarchy. Therefore, on this note it stands that the metamorphoses of the *Ikolo* takes place during the ritual activation of the *Uvie* through the mediation of the ritual application of some ritual paraphernalia that imbues it with the spiritual potency that upholds its socio-sacral order in Aguleri cosmology. 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 the *Uvie* sacred drums 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.

Consequently, some other Igbo speaking communities that does 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 idiophone 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 of 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).

#### **V. The Sacred Activation of the *Uvie* Drum**

According to Wyatt MacGaffey (2000:246) the activation of musical instruments like the *Uvie* “were often exquisitely carved and converted into large drums works of art”. To become a sacred and symbolic object, an ordinary *Uvie* 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 *Uvie* 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, obtained from..., 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 *Uvie* 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 *Uvie* drum is fed in order to keep the spirits pleased (Obi, 2008:143). Equally significant is the fact that feathers are applied on the *Uvie* with the firm belief that they act as protective mechanism in rendering it powerful. This is done in order that the *Uvie* can “speak in deep-tongues, and the messages it convey 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) affirms 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.

As a point of emphasis, it is believed in Igbo cosmology that if an unauthorized persons like women that menstruates comes in contact with the *Uvie* that the spirits that guards it can attack them by making them to bleed to death; invariably not able to conceive and also that the spiritual potency of the *Uvie* would be affected, in this way it cannot speak mystically. In the tradition and culture of the Igbo people, the *Uvie* 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 *Uvie* or from dancing to its tune. This is the reason why Joy Lo-Bamijoko (1987:23) affirms 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. Bruce Lincoln (1989:89) posits that integration of such laws “is necessary for the smooth and harmonious functioning of society is regularly sought and accomplished through numerous overlapping systems and mechanisms – among them law, pedagogy, etiquette, aesthetics and ideology, particularly religious ideology”. Reed & Hufbauer (2005:135-136) argue that through such sacred drum as the *Uvie*, 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 & Hufbauer affirms 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, participant 015, 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 *Uvie* 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). Participant 014, Mr Peter, a forty-five year old non-initiate affirms that:

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

From the above assertion of my participant, women generally are exempted from participating in anything that concerns the rituals of the *Uvie* 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 *Pororo* a secret

society in Sierra Leone, affirms 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, affirms 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 affirms 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 *Uvie* “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 *Uvie* 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).

The interpretation of this is that the *Uvie* abhors human blood of women. It is on this ground that John Picton (1996:252) affirms 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, in this form “the royal anniversaries are commemorated liturgically” (Nelson, 1987:173). Simon Price (1987:57) asserts that “the ceremony is an important part of the symbolism that defined the imperial house and rooted its power in tradition” of the Aguleri.

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). *Uvie* sacred sound cannot be simply a thing or object plucked from its environment, but rather, 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 has 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 *Uvie* 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 *Uvie* attains its sacredness in the behavior and characteristics it elicits 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 *Uvie* 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 *Uvie* 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 *Uvie* 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 *Uvie* 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 *Uvie* 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 *Uvie* sacred drum is permanently kept in the king's palace, but in other Igbo speaking communities, it could be kept in the market places, 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 *Uvie* - 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 reaffirmation of these assertions, Steven Conn affirms that from this angle, 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). Des Wilson (1998:30) asserts that such royal "wooden drums perform four functions — installation of kings and royal celebrations, announcement of the passing away of kings, alerting citizens of grave danger, and ushering in various masquerades".

Considering the various royal uses, carving of *Uvie* soon became an art form (Idigo, 2001). Thus, Okafor writes that the "[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 this different size emits different sounds (Idigo, 2001:120). 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 his book: *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 in this study according to their sizes.

It is on this position that Genevieve Dournon affirms that "confusion of this nature could be considerably reduced if the generic term referring to an organological definition of the instrument were distinguished from the vernacular term peculiar to a particular country or ethnic group" (1992:286). Nonetheless, to my own analysis, Achebe's reference to *Ekwe* instead of *Ikolo* is not a mistake but primarily it is a matter of language choice, terminology or semantics because "the traditional program of semantic analysis provides a set of meanings for the individual lexemes of the language and then provides a set of rules of composition whereby the individual meanings of the lexemes are combined to form the meaning" (Rumelhart, 1979:81). 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".

## **VI. The *Uvie* in Aguleri Imagination**

This section will be dealing with the Aguleri experiences and perspectives on the *Uvie* 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 general impression of my participant's feelings and responses to the interview questions and the inquiry about the functions of the *Uvie* was satisfactory. Generally, the overall impression of the people thinks that the *Uvie* is important and as it acts as a link to the ancestors. Some believe that the *Uvie* is important because it portrays Aguleri identity, while others see it as satanic. Others perceived it to be archaic and pre-modern. Most people felt that it is important because it aid in ritual festivals. Nonetheless, people were excited about functions of the *Uvie* because it makes them happy, while some, especially women feel they were being marginalized. Among these some general views on the *Uvie* were expressed as follows. According to Participant 03:

*Uvie* is very important for the Aguleri due to its significances and various symbolic functions it plays in the community. The importance of the *Uvie* is very numerous; firstly, *Uvie* is the voice that speaks for the Aguleri people. Secondly, *Uvie* is the voice of the ancestors and at the same time the voice of our deities. It announces; entertains; summons the warriors for war, and it acts as a social control for the community.

It has clear from the above that the *Uvie* serve a range significant function for the Aguleri. Joy Lo-Bamijoko (1987:22) posits that “it is important to mention here 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). *Uvie* as a sacred instrument is basically made sacred by the people of Aguleri community due to its symbolic functions it plays social and ritual announcement. The *Uvie* is regarded as a sacred instrument that not only connect the Aguleri with their ancestors but also that it binds the entire community together insofar as they share in the symbolism of the *Uvie*. 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 practice. And yet inasmuch as the *Uvie* is used to mediated the Aguleri religious world, it is also used to order and regulate the temporal world – the everyday, and annual life-cycle of the community. The social and religious identity of the Aguleri community is portrayed through the sound of the *Uvie* that upholds Aguleri as an auditory community in the aspect of Igbo traditional soundscape. With the sacred sound of the *Uvie*, the relationship between the community, their deities and ancestors are structured, managed and mediated. In Aguleri worldview, the *Uvie* is said to speak the languages of the ancestors and to be the voice the voice of the community. It is on this position that Bruce Smith (1999:47) comments that “people dwelling in a particular soundscape know the world in fundamentally different ways from people dwelling in another soundscape”.

### **Social and Ritual Announcement**

The participants indicated or reflected a view that the *Uvie* is primary for social and ritual announcement. 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, participant 07 asserts that:

It is the sound of the *Uvie* that is used in gathering the community for meeting and in this wise; it is used as an authoritative voice in controlling and gathering the community.

Basically, from these assertions it has been observed that *Ikolo* is used for calling the attention of the community. This is why Robert Gluck (2005:37) describes such sacred drum like the *Uvie* as the “sounds of a community”, while Ohadike (2007:3) asserts that “the town crier’s authority issues from the power invested in the sacred drum”. From my own understanding, it can be observed that the sound of the *Uvie* is still very important even in this modern age. This is because it still serves the community even in the advent of other technologies. Reaffirming this assertion, James Agbogun (2011:2) posits that politically the *Uvie* sacred drum is used “as a kind of provost, an authoritative voice, to keep order in community meetings”. For David Garrioch, instruments such as the bell, or in this case the *Uvie* allows the villagers “to locate themselves in time and in space, and making them part of an auditory community” (Garrioch, 2003:5).

*Uvie* as an idiophone, normally uses a hollowed-out tones, its communication method is by patterns, and one has to be schooled in the patterns of the *Uvie* language to be able to understand it “when they talk” (Lo-Bamijoko, 1987:22). The idiophone as an “identity marker” (Royce, 1977:155) helps to construct Aguleri identity and to structure their relationships in their beliefs as it pertains to issues such as God, spirits, ancestors, human life, magic, hereafter.

So far, it has been observed that the *Uvie* as a sacred drum of the Aguleri people is a medium or link by which the community use in connecting their deities and ancestors. The *Uvie* sacred sound from (Idigo, 2001:126) observation would be regarded as the pride, the epitome, an embodiment and the hall mark of Aguleri tradition and culture. The *Uvie* sound is central to the lived experience of Aguleri social space and crucial to the mediation and negotiation of spiritual space. The point is that the participants believe that the 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 *Uvie* during ritual occasion does not rely on only in 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 binds the community or the devotees of a god.

From my own perspective, I believe that the participant view the symbolic functions of the *Uvie* as a comprehensive outfit that encompasses communication generally and 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.

### **Sustaining Aguleri Ritual Order**

The *Uvie* also serve as a mechanism of sustaining and maintaining Aguleri rituals. It accompanies most key rites of passage which means that without the sound of the *Uvie* no important ritual would take place in the community. In this regard, the participants discussed several vital rituals that pertain to the *Uvie* sound. Some referred to the use of the *Uvie* during a coronation, burial ceremony for the initiated, the conferment of Chieftaincy titles and other designated festivals. This is captured by the observation of participants 01 that:

The period or the occasion for the use of the *Uvie* is diverse in Aguleri tradition and custom. First and foremost, the *Uvie* is used during the period of initiations of the *Uvie* members like the *Ozo*, *Oba*, *Ogbuanyinya*, or when the community is performing burial ceremony of a well known personality in the town. Amongst all is that *Uvie* is used during the period of *Ovala* festival or commemoration of new yam festival respectively. In fact, if the *Uvie* sound does not feature in these occasions, such occasions will not take place.

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 *Uvie* is used to produce the aura of sacrality to validate the rituals and to invoke the ancestors through its mediating sound to seek for their favour. Also the significant moment for this kind of ritual validation is during the Chieftaincy conferment titles and in this regard conferment of Chieftaincy titles are regarded as a significant moment in the Aguleri ritual calendar.

The significant function of the *Uvie* 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 *Uvie* is used to support the privilege of the titled men, it ultimately serves to reinforced and validate the authority of the King. In this regard the *Uvie* serve very much the same purpose as ancestor ritual in among the Xhosa (Chidester 1992) or Bruce Lincoln’s account the Swazi Nqwala 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). It is on this ground that participant 012 comments that:

*Uvie* is the indigenous instrument that wakes up the King and every other Aguleri indigenes from sleep in order to herald a new dawn. When the *Uvie* is beaten early in the morning, the entire people of Aguleri community wakes up from sleep, this shows that is a new day.

So far one can comfortably infer that through the function of sustaining the Aguleri ritual order the *Uvie* 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* Festival in Aguleri would happen as a means of passing message from man [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 use the *Ovala* festival annual

calendar as high point of the annual ritual calendar during which time the initiated 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.

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 fortune of the community. It is through the sound of the *Uvie* that people would get to know that festivals like the *Ovala* celebration is about taking place. It is also through the sound of the *Uvie* that various activities either secular or religious are performed in the community and it is through it that the community is communicated.

It is clear from these beliefs that the sound manifestation of sacred sound like the *Uvie* as an indigenous talking drum has 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 *Uvie* a mark of the Aguleri identity? It has been discovered that it is during the *Ovala* celebration that spirit invocation due occur.

### **Ritual Festivals and Aguleri Identity**

With regards to ritual festivals and Aguleri identity, some of the participants expressed the view that the *Ovala* festival is also a period for entertainment, relaxation and which invariably upholds and show cases the cultural identity of the community and that of the initiates to be custodians of sacred position. The celebration of such festival like the *Ovala* and new yam festivals would not be complete if *Uvie* 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 culture. 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).

Objectively, *Uvie* is regarded as more than just an ordinary instrument but it believed to be the instrument that possesses the very essence of the Aguleri identity. This is because of its symbolic functions that uphold ritual festival in one hand and Aguleri identity in another. In this way, *Uvie* is used to entertain and to celebrate the people’s well being through the mediation of its initiates. It has been also discovered that Aguleri is a community with very strong culture despite modernity and Christianity. The impact and significant of the *Uvie* music is still and no doubt felt in Igbo society today due to their cultural affiliation to the sacred sound of the *Uvie* which has deep root in their tradition. Buttressing this, participant 015 explains that:

*Sulugede* ritual dance is proverbially equated to *Uvie* 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.

In the above section, it has been observed that the spirits has taken control of the dancer’s body through the attunement in which the drum’s rhythms are being manipulated by the *Uvie* drummer with the view to invoke spirits to to take over the dancer’s movements and his body. From the views expressed by participants it is clear that *Uvie* 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 Aguleri tradition the sound of the *Uvie* sacred drum is seen as a symbolic object because it is a medium by which the indigenous community use in sanitizing the ethical issues within the community. In this form the *Uvie* act as 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 goddess. It is widely believed in Aguleri cosmology that the sacred sound of the *Uvie* is the voice of the ancestors that “communicate messages full of cultural meanings” (Nwauwa, 2007:xiii), which White Hylton (1995:47) refers to as the “letters from our forefathers” and “in African societies such sacred instrument can transform the voices

into a deity” (Montagu, 2007:6). On the reaffirmation of ethical issues as it has to do with *Uvie* as a sacred object that sanctions, mediates social order and relations, Participant 05 affirms that:

It is in this kind of social event that the drummer of the *Uvie* sarcastically uses certain linguistic innuendoes to jestingly criticizing 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 *Uvie* is used as a way to mediate social order and relations in African traditional context. This is largely articulated through references to the power of the *Uvie* to purify, to heal and reprimand the Igbo community. However, the *Uvie* 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. Apart from its primarily sacral use, the *Uvie* drum is also used for dance entertainment and competitions, as well as in the sacred drumming state. It is such occasions that it can speak in deep tone, mystically and metaphorically which “provide an elaboration of transgression in terms of negation and its connection with taboo” (Taussig, 1998:349).

From the above assertions, it has been observed that due to these ethical functions ascribed to the *Uvie* the community of the Aguleri has made the instrument to be sacred. Reflecting on the significance of drumming and rhythmic song, dancing, and other designated symbolic functions the drumming of the *Uvie* is considered to be the voice or influence of ancestral shades or other spirits that possesses the sufferer and give the cure (Janzen, 1994). He argues that it is in this form that rituals like that of the *Uvie* ritual drum of affliction “showed their inner workings and social contexts, their intricate ritual symbolism, therapeutic motivations, and societal support systems” (Janzen, 1994:162).

## VII. Conclusion

Basically, sacred sound has been discovered to be an element of African Tradition Religion and its significant functions cannot not be over emphasised comparing it with the symbolic functions of the *Uvie* as it pertain to the *Ovala* festival as has been expressed in Aguleri world view through my participants. The *Uvie* 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 *Uvie* sound, he acts are spiritual bridge between the ancestors and the community.

Today, sacred musical instruments have wide range of symbolic significance and uses, with or without other idiophones played in public or private performance context which are objectively or subjectively viewed as lawful, sinful, meritorious or divine. Sacred music and idiophones generally are mediums of religious practices in African religions especially during traditional rituals and drama like the *Ovala* where *Uvie* is one of such indigenous instrument use in religious rituals among the Aguleri people. Indeed, the *Ovala* among other ritual festivals has acquired so much significance and relevance in Aguleri and has become so central to trado-social events in Aguleri that it has become the pride and symbol of Aguleri as a people through other rituals and the mediation of the symbolic ritual sound and dance of the *Uvie*.

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