

Ethno Methodology a Suitable Method in Traditional Religion for Research Findings in the Study of Ethnomusicological Studies: A Personal Experience

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ABSTRACT

In the methodological framework of this study, the two approaches that I have used 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 paper, 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 because this paper is structured on the study of the Uvie as an Igbo idiophone as it concerns African Traditional Religions with specific reference to sacred sound in religious practice and scholarship where ethnomusicology as a suitable method in traditional religion for research findings in the study of ethnomusicological studies is concerned: a personal experience.

Keywords: Ethnomusicology, Tradition, Religion, Research.

INTRODUCTION

In this section, the meaning of ethnomusicology is explained and also I described how the interviews would be used to conduct interview while carrying out research. The apparatuses that would be used will also be described. Equally, included is the reason for the use of this method and also the use of the interlocutors. This study is structured on the study of indigenous instruments like Igbo idiophones in the African traditional religions with specific reference or focus on sacred sound in religious practice. In this study, the two approaches that are very suitable to be used are ethnographic approach to the study of religion and ethnomusicological approach to the study of idiophone.

What is Ethno Methodology?

Ethnography is a method identifying and explaining a structural system through analyzing the core principles and values that actually constitutes the system of investigation (Clifford & Marcus, 1986:2-3). In ethnomusicology on the other hand, according to Nettle, one must study each, music 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 recently 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, 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. 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 method of research forces the researcher to enter the world of the people investigated. It involves in certain cases, ritual and celebrations which would be examined properly and then draw a general evaluation and infer something about its meaning and significance. This method does not exclude interviews around specific questions but are largely done using unstructured interviews which will make/push 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). In that case, the researcher makes use of participatory and observation methods which will afford him the opportunity to act as an observer-participant during any ritual process.

Ethnomusicology is the fieldwork method, thus a method concerned with investigating situations and 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 (1988:12) calls fieldwork, qualitative research. He opines 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).

A researcher's programme is very limited and it is subjected to the felt questions of the interlocutors. The objective of the research might actually to negotiate with the interlocutors. This is why Agnew and Pyke (1982:45) comments that 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 indigenous idiophones of religious practice, the researcher can comfortably use observation, description, and interpretation methods as (Agnew & Pyke, 1982:45) advised because they requires no manipulation and no controlled experimentation.

The research would be conducted in the form proposed by Mouton & Marias (1988) and Agnew and Pyke (1982) in that the researcher

would observe the natural behaviour of people in the field as they perform traditional religious rites and ceremonies. According to Dunbar-Hall (2006), this would be achieved "through various means: physical positioning of audiences, timetabling, subtle suggestions of when it was appropriate to leave" (2006:63). Observation method would be used to carry out this in an ordinary societal activity and also during ritual festivals where such indigenous idiophones featured most prominently.

Ethnomusicology as Method

Ethnomusicology according to Merriam was once defined as the study of music in culture (1964:6) and later he argues that this definition did not go far enough, that it is the study of music as culture (Merriam, 1977a:202, 204). Myers (1992:30) asserts that ethnomusicology includes the study of folk music, Eastern art music and contemporary music in oral tradition as well 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. These definitions as adopted here are significant as the realization that the indigenous sound of idiophone is a significant cultural product that was "derived from man's creative imagination" (Hammond-Tooke, 1982:72) and the study of such indigenous sound in relation to ritual festivals has something to add in consideration of its role in that context.

It is also clear that method does not operate in limbo/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). Nettle (1973:151) asserts that one must "study each music in terms of the theoretical system that its own culture provides for". My interest in idiophone music as a sacred sound is not simply as a structural form but as a creative human phenomenon which primarily functions as part and parcel of traditional culture and identity of the Igbo people.

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 these idiophones 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 the study which any researcher can utilize is the critical/interpretive method. The method made possible the comprehensive interpretation and evaluation of what the idiophones music as sacred sound means with all of its forms—historical, political, sociological, and economic, aesthetic forms. Although, deploring what the musicology critics perceived as a reasonable demarcation between academic musicology and that of human experience of music, Kerman (1985:154) 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”. Nonetheless, the notion of transcendence would be an underpinning theory of any ethno musicological research which has to focus on the significant functions of the idiophones sound in enhancing spiritual experience/possession.

I found John Blacking’s (1967:17) ideas about transcendence through music to be suitable for my research, although, Sager (2012:30) argues that Blacking did not focus upon trance per se but rather upon the whole experience of music. According to Sager (2012:31) again, “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 behaviors, including getting a spirit [or the spirit]”. From the context in which Rebecca Sager (2012) observes this state of transcendence, in northern Haiti and in Austin, Texas, 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”.

Using Participant Observation Research Method

As a member of any indigenous community in traditional setting, the researcher is expected to be embedded in the community for an extended period proposed to use this method postulated by Agnew and Pyke (1984). Participant observers are researchers who are directly involved in the socio-cultural life and activities of the group or community within which is undertaken. 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 1984:49). According to Research Methods (2003:1) 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 method argues that the “participant observer, therefore exploits the human ability to empathise – the main objective being to participate in a social group while, at the same time, employing the insights and understanding of a sociological observer. The point, therefore, is to observe and experience the world as a participant, while retaining an observer’s eye for understanding, analysis and explanation” (Research Methods, 2003:1). Van Maanen (1988:4) asserts that “ethnography is the result of fieldwork, but it is the writing report that must represent the culture, not the fieldwork itself”. Achebe (2012:55) affirms that as a researcher, “one should be on the sidelines with his notepad and pen, where he can observe with objectivity”. In this wise, my understanding of people’s behaviour during the *Ovala* festival was very paramount, this is because, “participation is indispensable to the interpretation of human conduct” (Research Method, 2003:2).

Agnew and Pyke (1982:48) warns that “the possible distortions of 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". To avert this, Hammersley and Atkinson (1983:2) advised that the ethnographer participates overtly during the period of event, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions; collecting whatever data that are available which he is concerned. DeMarrais (1998:x) sums it up by affirming that ethnographers relies heavily on observational-knowing through participant observation, and the writing of detailed field notes to capture the whole behaviours of people within the culture. More so, in successful fieldwork, an ethnomusicologist gains the perspectives of both insider and outsider (Nettl, 1983:260). However, as a researcher and as a specialized listener and interpreter of music that emanates from indigenous idiophones, the researcher must learn the difference between listening from the insider or the outsider. This is why Yamada Yoichi (2002) who is identified as one of the "next generation of rain-forest sonic researchers" by (Feld & Brenneis, 2004:466), has not himself recorded the sound of the Bosavi. However, in his review in *The Contemporary Pacific* of Feld's recording of the Bosavi, he understood that the recording was produced with Feld's opinion as an insider (Yamada, 2002:532). All in all, Nettl (1964:64) remarked that fieldwork is the "most personalized aspect of ethnomusicological research". Barz & Cooley (1997:208) exemplifies such a point by asserting that contemporary ethnomusicology is challenged in many unique ways, most importantly to listen, feel, question, and represent in ways true to one's own experiences.

However, in order to reduce the problems of reactivity and suspicion, I and my interviewers were all complete participants. In this wise, Hammersley and Atkinson (1983:97-98) asserts 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". Mernissi (1991:viii), argues that it is only a member of Muslim community that is in the better position as an insider to research issues among the Muslim rituals/activities and to outsiders, this shift appears as sign of instability (Venkatesh, 2006:105). Nonetheless, while accepting the fact that Western outsiders have played a significant role in the

development of African religions, Africans are suspicious of their motives [whether Christian or secular in origin], critical of their academic methods, and favour – by extension – the contribution of insiders to such studies (Knott, 2005:244). Singh argues that:

The Western writers' attempt to interpret and understand Sikhism is an outsider's of non-participant's endeavour ... 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).

Court (2008:414) affirms that a researcher from inside the tradition can both: ask good questions, and also truly understand the answers. 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 of Western religious studies and methods which can only hinder true understanding. However, Knott (2005:247) 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". Fukuyama (1992:323) affirms 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 method of participant observation as postulated by Hinsley (1983:56) and Hammersley and Atkinson (1983:97-98) is equally supported by Lewis (1976:24-26) who asserts that "the participant observers must fully immerse themselves in the community, and must know their language".

Here, in the case of an Igbo researcher, Igbo language is his first language and his mother tongue. The same applies to all his fellow participant's observers. In his own case, he is expected to engage in his research during any ritual festival celebration where traditional indigenous musical idiophones features prominently and thus, it is text bound. Nonetheless, the researcher should apply the

concept of observer-participant—someone who normally would be a participant but as a researcher, the researcher will retreat so as to consider/observe the ritual practices critically. An ethnomusicologist provides a great way for operating 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 festivals. Barz (2003:24) suggests that observing and performing in cultural performance and ritual with the people like the Igbo would be the most rewarding and productive approach. Performers and listeners of traditional idiophones of sacred sound can therefore act simultaneously as insiders and outsiders. Nettle (2005:186) observes that this ambiguous demarcation between the insider and the outsider is due to the fact that each person “possesses numerous identities, and thus [has], as it were, numerous music”. However, as a researcher and as a specialized listener and interpreter of the sound that emanates from idiophone musical instruments, the researcher navigates the space between being insider or the outsider, this is because the researcher is “a man of the community, a community man” (Venkatesh, 2006:279).

My personal experience during my research work as a researcher, in my own case, my insider status needed particular attention, however, I comported myself by the way I talked and dressed casually and not as an initiate. In fact, I carried out my research as an ordinary person and not as a titled man in the community. This actually made my position not to affect the classical information I intended to get. By this, the voices of the informants spoke for themselves, thus I acted as a participant/observer. As an initiate, *Ogbuevi*¹ (Isichei, 1980:4) 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, but fieldwork was conducted in the Aguleri community between July-September, 2013 during the period of *Ovala* festival when the *Uvie* features most prominently. Dziva (1997:224) is equally concerned about the depth

of intrusion that researchers make in the communities they are investigating. He is also concerned about 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).

According to Lewis (1976:25-26) ethnographer 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 the researcher must do 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 *Uvie* as an Igbo idiophone of indigenous religious sacred sound.

Data Collection

The hierarchical social class in Aguleri tradition, culture and hegemony is that of complex organizational structures, whereby access is restricted to people of a certain level (Research Methods: 2003:7). In my data collection, in order to get classical information, I applied the concept of mediator or what the sociologists describes as “sponsor” (Research Methods, 2003:5) to get my information. By concept of mediator/sponsor—I mean that I used my father [as a middle man] who is one of the High Chiefs in the community to break through the tension of power dynamics that exist in the social ranking in Aguleri culture, tradition and hegemony. The advantage of this is that the other group members are less likely to show hostility to the researcher if his presence is both explained and justified by the mediator/sponsor. By using a high powered mediator or sponsor, I allowed all protocols to be observed but interestingly, none of my family member was interviewed. Also, I equally used another concept the sociologists calls “go native” in recording my data.

By this concept, I mean a situation whereby I as the researcher ceased to balance the roles of participant and observer and instead, simply participates like any other group member and in that case, I effectively stopped being a researcher by fully immersing myself (Research

¹*Ogbuevi* means cow killer in traditional Igbo set up. A person that is addressed with this title is known to be a traditional red cap chief. In Aguleri, it is only this category of individuals that are permitted to dance *Uvie* music. Equally significant, during such people’s death, *Uvie* music would be used to announce their death and after their burial. This symbolizes dignity and respect. The idea is that *Uvie* is used to announce their death to the ancestors and commune with the spirits in the extra-terrestrial realm.

Methods, 2003:7). All these: ‘mediator/ sponsorship/go native’ actually aided me in getting first hand information from these class of people who are regarded as the custodians of Aguleri tradition, custom and hegemony because it is believed that such people in the community knew the entire ceremonial musical repertory of *Uvie* sacred drum. Also, significant is my ethnographic experience that demonstrated some kind of power relations that mediated between some of the gatekeepers/ custodians of Aguleri tradition and I during the course of my data collection. The fact was that there are certain tributes the king made to enable the ancestors and the spirits of the fallen heroes of Aguleri to come and take control before anything should be done. By this, I mean that the breaking of kola-nut, putting some amount of money to support the kola-nut [*Ime ego oji*], and pouring of libation [with gin], along-side with prayers followed simultaneously. Before the drummer of the *Uvie* sacred drum was able to play the *Uvie* for me, I was asked to put down some amount of money, kola-nut was broken, some pieces was thrown outside with some particles of native white chalk [*nzu*] for the gods/ancestors to eat and eventually we ate the remaining lobes along side with some seeds of alligator pepper. From my observation, all these, has some kind of symbolism in Aguleri culture and tradition. In fact, in African tradition many people who use kola-nut for ritual purposes accept and believe in the Igbo philosophy/*dictum* of “he who brings kola brings life” (Nabofa, 1994:40-41) which is very imperative in this kind of scenario and that the presentation of kola-nut is a validation and “a good indicator of welcome to a home” (Dike, 1985:166). Ray (1976:79) affirms that “the kola-nuts themselves signify friendship and reconciliation”. Nabofa (1994:59) sees kola-nut “as an embodiment of wisdom and knowledge, and its presentation and acceptance in rituals give vent to expressions and reeling out of proverbs, wise sayings, idioms and ancient wisdom”. Ezekwuugo (1992:85) 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”. Nabofa (1994:40-41) posits that “it is so conceived because it is considered to be one of the most favourite delicacies of the spiritual forces and through it the divine could communicate his wishes to the devout”. 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). On the aspect of symbolism of alligator pepper, it is “believed to lubricate the mouth, and a lubricated mouth is endowed with the power of fiat which can produce effective prayers” (Nabofa, 1994:41).

Nonetheless, the collected data for my document study, through my key informants, and focus group discussions during the interviews were analysed 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). Thus, 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) affirms 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. According to Strauss and Corbin:

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. Therefore, data collection, analysis and theory

go hand in hand but one does not start with a theory, then, prove it. Rather, one begins with an area of study and what is relevant to that area is allowed to emerge (1990:23).

Babbie and Mouton (2001:499) argues 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”. 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 *Uvie* sacred sound to the postcolonial lens – of recovery of indigenous practices. In identifying the two processes to grounded theory analysis Babbie and Mouton (2001:499) affirms 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]. The way in which you do this in grounded theory is by asking certain questions” (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:499). Also, in order to make my work more reliable and valid, the translation of my entire data was transcribed by an independent person to avoid being biased in the course of transcription/translation because according to Hood (1957:6) “this may prove to be an advantage in achieving an open-minded and unbiased attitude towards all musical cultures”. He argues that this method would specifically be advantageous when “the individual seeks a specific area of concentration, genuine enthusiasm for his subject is essential” (Hood, 1957:6).

Sampling

Sampling basically means choosing research participants that suits one’s study. 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 for the study of a specific and local phenomenon, a purposive sample method was used. This sampling method actually assisted me in a great way 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 groups of six [18] individuals of different social backgrounds were interviewed. These 18 individual groups between the ages of 20 to 65 years old includes non-initiates like ordinary men, women and Christian converts in order to know what they know, think, believe and understand about the *Uvie* as a sacred drum. The 7 key informants between the ages of 65 to 95 years are key persons who participated in the *Ovala* ritual and the use of the *Uvie*. These are those initiated members who pay homage to the deities and ancestors on behalf of the community. These key informants are the King, 2 Princes – Hands of the King, 2 Chiefs and 2 Sacred Specialists.

- 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 proceedings of the *Ovala* festival and the use of *Uvie*.
- Princes – Hands of the King, they act as the guardian and custodians of *Uvie* and general administrators of *Ovala* festival where *Uvie* features most prominently.
- Chiefs – they enforce traditional laws and also partake in *Ovala* rituals and *Uvie* dance as initiates.
- Sacred specialists – One of them is the person who performs sacred rituals that pertain to *Uvie* and its decoration during the *Ovala* festival, while the other person is the one who plays/beats the *Uvie* sacred drum and interprets messages sent through the *Uvie*.

Interviews

The second categories of interviewees were the eighteen focus group participants who were interviewed in focus groups. 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 *Uvie* as a sacred instrument. Members of these focus groups were drawn from those between the ages of 20 to 55 years old. My reason is because these categories of people are regarded as adults who are mainly not initiates and they are the back bone of the community for the preparations for the ritual festival of the *Ovala* where the *Uvie* features most prominently.

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.

- General Citizens – to have a general view of what an ordinary Aguleri person think about *Uvie* because they are not initiates. These groups 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.
- Business/local government officials – to understand the socio-political and economic impacts of *Ovala* rituals during which *Uvie* is used, and how the *Uvie* 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.
- Women – traditionally women are not allowed to participate in *Uvie*-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 *Uvie*. This group was developed through a process of self-selection after meeting members of the community.

Ethical Consideration

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 to 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 *Uvie* 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 participant 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 “confident and trust to disseminate information useful to the study” (Churchchill, 1991:54).

This is because “in fieldwork, ethics is the light of the scholar’s responsibilities to his client” (Slobin, 1992:330), while 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 participate or 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 front of the measuring instrument (Strydom, 1998:25).

In the course of this thesis, I tried to handle and minimize generalized opinions as it concerns issues on religious and cultural views on *Uvie* as an idiophone of sacred sound among the Aguleri people of Anambra State, Nigeria. Nonetheless, my research equally acknowledges that that if any similar research is eventually conducted in future in the same area, it might produce

different research result. There were series of limitations or constraints that confronted me in the course of this work. Nonetheless, because the interview was done in Igbo language, the issue of transcription from the digital recorder was challenging and time-consuming. Another problem which I was presented with during fieldwork was the issue of some of the local women who did not want to participate because of the fear that participation in the research may further alienate them.

Reflexivity

According to Research Methodology (2003:1) 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 report that must represent the culture, not the fieldwork itself” (1988:4). Chinua Achebe (2012:55) affirms 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 possible to put everything that happened down into my field journal note book. By doing this, it helped me drastically when I was trying to analyze the entire data collected from the field. The recording of field notes 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

the 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

However, as a researcher and as an initiated listener of the *Uvie* 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/observer. Of course, as an initiate, *Ogbuevi*²- 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 *Uvie* features most prominently. However, I was equally concerned about the depth of intrusion that researchers make in the communities where they are investigating. I was concerned with keeping a

²*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 these categories of individuals that are permitted to dance *Uvie* music. Equally significant, during such people’s death, *Uvie* music would be used to announce their death and after their burial. This symbolizes dignity and respect. The idea is that *Uvie* is used to announce their death to the ancestors and commune with the spirits in the extra-terrestrial realm.

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 ethnographer 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 *Uvie* as an Igbo idiophone of indigenous religious sacred sound. All together, my position did not affect my intention but instead, I was regarded as student. Also, very significant is the fact that my participants were very happy that this would be the first time the concept of the *Uvie* sacred sound would be recorded because in oral history it is there but technically it is not there.

APPARATUS

Digital Sound Recorder

In every first approach or encounter with the interlocutors, I ensured confidentiality with which I handled sensitive information. Lewis advises that researchers must follow what is going on around them, and must then record them with accuracy and subtlety. The recording did not interrupt or disturb the flow and volunteering of information from willing interlocutors. As a researcher, I have learnt how to use both electronic and manual implements and facilities in a way that no one in the community would feel threatened or suspicious because Dawson (2007:31) advised that in order to keep good track of the group deliberations, all discussions will be recorded using audio recording equipment and note taking since audio recording may sometimes be “problematic due to background noise” (Blanche et al, 2006:307), although, they are valuable both for their musical content and for background information (Post, 1992:405). Nonetheless, I did most of

writings in my private period, as Dziva (1997:235) proposed, and used the digital sound recorder during discussion sessions as Lewis (1976:24) asserted. I made sure that they understand that the materials would be used in the compilation of this thesis. I got their consent approved to use the recorder to capture information. I made use of the methodological approach which Agar (1980), Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) articulated regarding the use and the analysis of information from tape recorded cassettes. However, the recordings, all of which was in Aguleri community which were transcribed verbatim. This research was not meant to impose any obligation on the people. By this, I mean, that it was a learning process. According to Frostin (1988:220), the researcher should not impose a modern thought pattern especially in relation to *Uvie* and sacred music in African traditional religion on the analyzed body of the texts before rendering justice to its internal logic. The oral information I gathered from the community, the reading and the audio materials that I used, actually generated/served as a text from which I extracted the ideas about *Uvie* as an idiophone of indigenous religious sacred sound.

Camera

A digital camera was used to capture available scenes, personalities and ritualistic activities that took place during such festivals like *Ovala* where *Uvie* features most prominently. It served as a visual record of the event which provided primary data for my analysis. Data collected included (a) images of *Uvie* (b) performance of the King or any of High Chiefs dancing the *Uvie* music (c) the past pictures of Aguleri Kings [Idigo dynasty] who popularized *Ovala* festival and use of *Uvie*. The video recording served as a resource for primary data against which to evaluate, authenticate and verify the oral or “popular history” (Denis, 2008:8) of the *Uvie*. These photographs serve as records/evidence of where I have been, whom I met and what I saw and did.

Discussion and Data Analysis

From my data analysis, it has been observed that the sacred sound of the *Uvie* drum is used as an instrument of social and ritual authority because *Uvie* is assumed to be the voice of the people, the voice of the ancestors; and the voice of the deities for the Aguleri people. Interpretatively, it is used in locating the community morally and

socially through the mediation of its symbolic sound. The *Uvie* plays dual functions either religious or secular. In terms of secular, whenever the *Uvie* is played during certain periods that are not expected it to be played; it makes the community to be apprehensive of such sound because the people would be wondering what has happened. Its call summons the people to gather anytime its voice demands. This means that it is used to disseminate information in the community, and not only that, *Uvie* sacred sound helps the community in mediating with their gods and ancestors. Also, for the fact that it abhors menstrual blood from women, it becomes a taboo for any woman and young boys that are not yet initiated into the practices and institutions of patriarchy not to partake in its ritual dance all in the service of upholding the authority of the King and this makes it sacred.

Nonetheless, it has been observed that some of these rituals that pertain to the *Uvie* are somehow dangerous for neophytes. For the mere reason that its sound and esoteric speech are used in satirical commentaries by the *Uvie* drummer through the coded secret language of the Aguleri people in order to inform the evildoers to desist from their evil ways and equally used to praise or elate the well behaved in the community. It means that the initiates are being reprimanded of their abuse of power or privileges. Nonetheless, while the *Uvie* speaks through the issues of evil-doers and affirmation of the faithful, such complaint only happens during *Ovala* festival or new yam festival respectively, thus this is not generally applicable every time. The ritual dance of the *Uvie* performed only by the 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, *Uvie* sacred drum would be 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 *Uvie* for the Aguleri community is so distinct from that of other Igbo communities because of what Nzewi et al (2001:95) 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”. It is believed that sacred sound of the *Uvie* makes the initiates to feel as if they are holy individuals by making

them to develop that aura and investing them with the power of spirit possession. *Uvie* is played every morning in order to use it to wake up the King and the entire community and to herald a new day, but symbolically, it is a way of handing over the entire community to the hands of the ancestors, deities and gods that are believed to be guiding and protecting the town. This actually relates to social and ritual order/hierarchy and authority whereby there is a synergy between the King, the ancestors and the gods where the King plays the role of a conduit that connect to the people with the world of seen and unseen.

As it concern the method of selecting of the *Uvie* drummer, it is based on lineage system because it is genealogical, and this shows that the *Uvie* sacred drum cannot be played by ‘anyhow, anybody’. Not only that, the selection must pass through the process of *Igba-Ava* divination, through the officiating ritual ceremony that would be led by the head of the sacred specialists in the community which entails casting of lots and performance of certain sacrifices in order to thank the ancestors and the gods for choosing the right person. In this wise, there is 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. But, we must take note of the fact that the process of the interview by the King, with the assistance of his cabinet chiefs, *Ndichei* and *Ojiana* [these people act as custodians, diplomats and advisers to the King] to be able to choose or pick someone with high integrity which follows after the casting of the lots during the divination process actually stands to show total reaffirmation of what the ancestors and gods has sanctioned. This also goes to show that the drummer is not chosen because of any special thing but simply because of the statue and prestige that are attached to it and the person must be a titled man in the community— *Ogbuevi* [a title with literal meaning – cow killer, denotes custodian of tradition that privileges one to wear red cap].

However, from my data analysis, it has also been observed that the sacred sound of the *Uvie* drum serves as religious and theological meanings as it concerns spirit invocation and socio-sacral validation because it is assumed that it is the *Uvie* sound that is responsible for the development of the awe and wonder feelings that affects the people. No wonder, why it is

assumed that the *Uvie* ritual dance is for the courageous because to the thinking of the Aguleri people, if the initiates are not spiritually strong they might not be able to withstand such feelings. In another way round, one can interpret it to mean that it is the sound of the *Uvie* ritual dance that actually invokes the spirit possession because without the sound, there would not be anything like spirit possession. It is believed that the dance styles of the initiates through the mediating sound of the *Uvie* invokes the spirit possession to mount on the heads of the initiates during the ritual dance which serves as a validation of Aguleri identity. As a point of emphasis, this concept of spirit possession has a link with the concept of *Agwu* spirit in Igbo cosmology. In this case, the community sees their King as a powerful and symbolic representative or mediator between them and their gods in the spiritual world. This is because the *Uvie* 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 *Uvie* is more a validation of his social/ritual authority – the King is a ritual mediator but the *Uvie* sound make affective the spiritual link. *Agulerians* assumed that the sound of the *Uvie* sacred drum is a physical manifestation of the voices of their ancestors or the voice of the spirits that guides and protects the community. Some of the indigenes who assumed to be Christians are opting to denounce their faith because of this special eerie feeling – [*ima-akpata oyi*]³ they do experience through the mediating sound of the *Uvie* drum. It is believed to have a healing power and that it can invest spirit possession only on the initiates during traditional and religious rituals in the community.

From this, one can deduce that the *Uvie* ritual dance is a cultic ritual dance insofar as it is basically meant only for the initiates and no other individual. Insofar as its esoteric and coded speeches/commentaries are only known to the initiates and it cannot be understood and interpreted by any person apart from the members of the *Uvie* – *Ogbuevi/Ozo*, this basically implies that they are members of an indigenous cult movement in the community. Also, we should take note of the material elements used in decorating the *Uvie* during the

Ovala festival, that are believed to be imbued with spiritual properties without which it cannot speak ritualistically. As a point of emphasis, *Uvie* is decorated by the most-high ranked sacred specialist in Aguleri and this shows that there is ritual hierarchy in the socio-sacral order of Aguleri custom and tradition. Those materials are rigidly and ritualistically used in decorating and imbuing the power of the *Uvie* so that it would retain its ancient and spiritual values on the eve of *Ovala* night, the *Eke* day – the local royal calendar day. Such material elements are native white chalk [*nzu*], blood; and feathers which has their own symbolism. Native white chalk [*nzu*] and blood represents the delicacies of the ancestors and gods, while feathers symbolize the dress for the deities in indigenous African society.

Consequently, from my data analysis, it has equally been observed that the sacred sound of the *Uvie* drum serves as an avenue of bolstering patriarchy and alienating gender because some of the voices from my participants are agitating that women should be allowed to be partaking in the ritual dance of the *Uvie* so long as the Queen Mother is allowed to partake why not allow other women in the community to do so. Arguably, the Queen Mother who has reached the stage of menopause⁴ would educate the new appointee on how to play the *Uvie*. As a point of emphasis, for the fact that the Queen Mother has attained the stage of menopause it is assumed and believed that she can no longer defile the spirit of the *Uvie* because the sacred drum of the *Uvie* abhor menstrual blood. It is a tradition that was handed over to the Kings after Kings in Idigo dynasty from generation to generation. This is a special place for the Queen Mother and this means that not all women are excluded therefore she practically symbolizes recognition and submission. Interpretatively, this kind of attitude is tantamount to partiality which equally leads to favoritism and nepotism as well. However, such voices are not saying that the tradition should be stopped but they are saying that such custom should be looked into and be changed to enable all parties to be partners in progress because without that it would mean that women are being segregated and marginalized and this attitude equally leads to male dominance in the community. In another

³ Is a kind of strange or unnatural state that generates goose pimples on people's body when one is somehow in an altered state watching the initiates partaking in their ritual dance of the *Uvie*.

⁴ Menopause is a stage women stop experiencing their monthly blood circle. In Igbo traditional religion, it is believed that any form of blood from a woman's reproductive organ is considered to be unclean, a taboo and capable to interrupt, interfere which makes for any ritual defilements.

development, *Uvie* is seen as an indigenous religious instrument that is used by traditional worshippers in communicating with their ancestors and gods; therefore, it is archaic, satanic, and in that wise, its rituals should be stopped because we are now in the era of civilization and modernity. Such voices are saying that the total object and the entire instrumentation of the *Uvie* is fetish which makes it an instrument of paganism and its rituals are cultic in nature. They argue that for allowing only the men to be part of the ritual ceremonies that pertain to the *Uvie*, it means that there is something hidden about their association with the membership of the *Uvie* group which would make non-initiates to have the belief that the initiates seek for extra powers elsewhere. But, the issue of defilement of the *Uvie* sacred drum raised by the initiates against the backdrop of women's menstrual periods is a serious case against the women on why they should not be allowed to partake in the ritual dance which results to male dominance.

Nonetheless, the *Uvie* drum is perceived to be sacred and an object that is made sacrosanct by the community that is the reason why there are some many by-laws that guide and protect the *Uvie* and these are the main reasons why women are not allowed to partake in its ritual dance. The king and his cabinet members/initiates rely heavily on the sound of the *Uvie* sacred drum during festivals like the *Ovala* because it is believed that through the mediation of its sacred sound that the community interacts with their deities in the socio-sacral order.

CONCLUSION

However, 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 or theoretical framework which helped me to achieve my desired objectives which investigated into the *Uvie*, 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 sub-headings presented the result of the research which were shown in thematic form and were inferred from transcript, to appropriate the initiates of the *Uvie* 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. In conclusion, it has become evident that African Traditional Religion as a body of scholarship emerged out of colonial imperial scholarship that denied African religion. Also, I have sought to demonstrate that although contemporary study of African religions remain highly contested but it has flourished to produce rich scholarship on issues such as ritual performance, indigenous healing practices and sacred sound to name a few. From this literature review I have also sought to demonstrate how sacred sound in world religions continues to be an integral part of rituals practices among adherents in African religion. Finally I have sought to argue that although some research has been conducted on sound in African religion, the topic remains largely under researched.

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