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OKANGA ROYAL DRUM: THE DANCE FOR THE PRESTIGE AND INITIATES PROJECTING IGBO TRADITIONAL RELIGION THROUGH OVALA FESTIVAL IN AGULERI COSMOLGY

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ABSTRACT: *No literature I have found has discussed the Okanga royal drum and its elements of an ensemble. Elaborate designs and complex compositional ritual functions of the traditional drum are much encountered in the ritual dance culture of the Aguleri people of Igbo origin of South-eastern Nigeria. This paper explores a unique type of drum with mystifying ritual dance in Omambala river basin of the Igbo—its compositional features and specialized indigenous style of dancing. Oral tradition has it that the Okanga drum and its style of dance in which it figures originated in Aguleri – "a farming/fishing Igbo community on Omambala River basin of South-Eastern Nigeria" (Nzewi, 2000:25). It was Eze Akwuba Idigo [Ogalagidi 1] who established the Okanga royal band and popularized the Ovala festival in Igbo land equally. Today, due to that syndrome and philosophy of what I can describe as 'Igbo Enwe Eze'—Igbo does not have a King, many Igbo traditional rulers attend Aguleri Ovala festival to learn how to organize one in their various communities. The ritual festival of Ovala where the Okanga royal drum features most prominently is a commemoration of ancestor festival which symbolizes kingship and acts as a spiritual conduit that binds or compensates the communities that constitutes Eri kingdom through the mediation for the loss of their contact with their ancestral home and with the built/support in religious rituals and cultural security of their extended brotherhood. It is a three day festival. This festival is usually an occasion for jocundity and thanksgiving; people appear in their best and give of their best. Such occasion serve as a catalyst in cementing people's solidarity, and in other words making Aguleri as a community of 'one people – one destiny'.*
KEY WORDS: ancestors, communion, eri, festival, *ovala*, initiates.

INTRODUCTION

The ritual festival of *Ovala* is a commemoration of ancestor festival which symbolizes kingship and acts as a spiritual conduit that binds or compensates the communities that constitutes Eri kingdom through the mediation for the loss of their contact with their ancestral home and with the built/support in religious rituals and cultural security of their extended brotherhood. It is a three day festival. This festival is usually an occasion for jocundity and thanksgiving; people appear in their best and give of their best. The offerings are mostly thank-offerings, and the meals constitute an opportunity of communion between the divinity and his 'children'. The renewal of this covenant relationships between communities is done to reunite their intimate brotherhood and to show how the Igbo communities uses this festival to show their gratitude to their gods and ancestors for various reasons known to them and consequently commemorates Eri

as their great ancestor in order words under sacred ordination reasserting Aguleri leadership over other Igbo communities as the head of the Igbo race in diaspora.

A Brief History of Aguleri [Igbo] Culture and Religion

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

Origin and migration

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

According to traditional and popular legend on the history of Aguleri, Victor Eyisi (2010:3) comments that Eri and his entourage continued their migration southward until they finally settled at a place known to us today as Aguleri, the ancestral home of the Igbos around 1303 B. C. at the confluence of two rivers *Ezu* and *Omambala*- a tributary of the great River Niger. He argues further that in Aguleri today, there is a place called *Agbanabo-Ezu-na-Omambala* [the confluence of the rivers, *Ezu* and *Omambala*, which form the Anambra River]. Here it is believed, Eri landed with his entourage before moving to settle in *Obu-Gad*, Aguleri. The *Obu-Gad* [that is Gad's memorial palace] is apparently visible and this remains a tourism site in Aguleri town (Eyisi, 2010:3-12).Igwah et al (2014:1) argues that this particular place is very symbolic because it is believed that "it was at this point that Eri had a divine revelation thatthey had reached their ordained place of settlement". Isichei (1976:4); Onwuejeogwu (1981:22) &Xrydz-Eyutchae (1986:11) equally affirm that it is "from this point each settlement pursued its own separate existence and development, owing allegiance to Aguleri, where the collective ancestral temple of Eri still stands to this day". As part of coronation ceremonies of the Igbo

King's, there is a divine injunction that official ritual ceremonies must first take place in this sacred place (Jeffreys, 1935:348). To ascertain the authenticity and significance of this site to the tradition, culture and hegemony of the Igbo race, Onwuejeogwu (1981:87) asserts that "this is why before any Nri traditional ruler is installed, the king is led to Aguleri where he performs sacrifices to the sacred temple of *Obuga* before being given the scepter of authority or *Ududu Eze* by the Igwe of Aguleri". This depicts that Aguleri people have a strong belief in the existence of one God, the creator of all things whom they call *Chi-Ukwu*, the Supreme Being, but ancestor worship is also practiced where the people offer sacrifices to their dead fathers (Idigo, 1990). Apart from *Chi-Ukwu*, the Supreme Being, there are other divinities or deities own by Aguleri people as a whole and these deities acts as mediators or intermediaries between them and the Supreme Being. Likewise, the King is believed to serve as an earthly representative between God and his people, and this demonstrated convincingly that the concept of God is indigenous to the Igbo religious traditions (Metuh, 1981:7). Victor Uchendu affirms that "the number of Igbo deities, spirits, and oracles is enormous and their anthropomorphous character is well recognized. He argues that "Igbo attitude towards the gods is not of fear but of friendship, a friendship that lasts as long as the reciprocal obligations are kept" (Uchendu, 1965:101).

Settlement

Eri, the founder of Igbo race was among the first migrants and he was believed to have moved and settled temporarily with his followers, in an area near the confluence of the Niger and Benue Rivers (Ikeanyibe 1999; Idigo 2001). From there, Eri moved to the Anambra valley and quickly settled near the bank of the River *Omanbala* [corruptly called Anambra by the Europeans] at a place known as *Eri-Aka* near *Odanduli* stream, which is presently today located between Ivite and IgboezunuAguleri respectively. Over time, Eri went out on war raids and captured many men and women and his settlement began to grow (Idigo, 1990:3). Eyisi asserts that "by the 1280 B. C they had fully established the first Igbo settlement in Aguleri with distinct culture, religion, tradition and language" (2010:4). To avoid over-crowding and to prevent a situation where all of them could fall prey in an attack which was then the order of the day, the son's dispersed to different parts of the region. The children of Agulu, the first son, remained in their grandfather's [Eri] home, and together with Adamgbo's children, evolved the town, Aguleri. To Agulu's name was appended to his father's name Eri, making Agulu-Eri.

It is pertinent to mention here that some scholars like Afigbo (1983:8) in his article claims that "this special creation of Eri was said to have taken place in the area where Aguleri is now situated". According to Afigbo again "this site should have been inherited by Nri, the first son of Eri but, for no reason mentioned in the legend, Nri moved out of the ancestral home that should have been his right, and settled in an open plain named Agukwu" (1983:6). Reviewing this assertion, I must say that this paragraph is highly mitigated; filled with fabricated liars, misinterpretations; misrepresentations and distortion of time honoured historical facts because in Igbo culture and tradition it is a known fact that Aguleri is the first son of Ancestor Eri. It is also a known fact under inheritance traditional laws and customs of the Igbo's that the first son must take over his father's house after the death of his father due to that sacred ordination bestowed on him directly or indirectly. Now for Afigbo to claim that Nri is the first born of Eri is unsubstantiated, fallacious and totally unacceptable and which is tantamount to academic fraud /

deceit. I advice that he should carry out his research properly. No wonder Williams (1988:79) warns that this kind of formulation about inheritance is "misguided and wrong, but that such crookedness must finally be rejected out of hand".

There is a ritual connection that binds the Aguleri and Nri together because in the any ritual coronation of any King of the Nri people, there is a divine mandate that they must visit Aguleri for certain rituals to be performed before the acclaimed King would be recognized through the mediation of the confluence of two rivers that mystically produces the mythical pot of *Ududu Eze*. As a point of emphasis, it is in this sacred shrine known as [*AgbataEzunaOmanbala*], the confluence of *Ezu* and *Omanbala* rivers that Eri prepared and buried the covenant pot of clay called "*Ududu Eze"* which he handed over to Aguleri as the first son for the identification and coronation of kings among the Igbo speaking tribes in Nigeria (Eyisi, 2010:10). In fact, the coronation ritual ceremony of an Nri king would not be complete if '*Ududu Eze*' is not handed over to the acclaimed king to be by the traditional ruler of Aguleri (Idigo, 2001:42). Nabofa (1994:55) describes such sacred or mythical pot as "the power house of power in the home or community''. This sacred or mythical pot called *Ududu Eze* would be idiomatically compared to a griot which is described as a musical accompaniment/object without which, no celebration or ritual would be complete (Babey, 1976:24).

As a point of emphasis, it is significant to mention here that the claim of Aguleri as the cradle of Igbo civilization (Isichei, 1980:2), and the head of the lgbo people is by virtue of being the first born of Eri, the father of the Igbos who at the death of his father, was given the scepter of authority to rule Eri settlement. Therefore, a centralized authority like Nri had no authority over settlements towns established by his offspring (Idigo, 2001:82). This sacred object which stands for authority, justice and leadership among the Igbo people serves as a binding force among the communities that constitutes Eri kingdom to their common ancestor (Idigo, 2001:42). These types of shrine serve also among the power points of expressing the believer's sense of the sacred and the orderness of the divine realities (Nabofa, 1994:45). Idowu (1962:128-130) describes such shrine as "primarily the face of the divinity. There the divinity is represented by the emblems which are regarded as sufficient reminders of his attributes". Mary (2002:121) pragmatically and symbolically, describes such sacred shrine as the "place where the heaven comes down to earth''. Nabofa (1988:78) posits that such places are as "they are, as they were spots where the spiritual come down to the earthly and the earthly is elevated to the spiritual''. Mbiti (1975:144) argues that such places are not for common or careless use, because they are considered to be sacred or holy. Chidester (1992:10) explains that such sacred place is inhabited by the dead, a domestic space in which the ancestors resides or visits. He argues that in ancestral ritual, death is not a barrier between the living and the living dead who continued to interact and communicate with the descendants (Chidester, 1992:11). Olsen (2004:13) observes that something magical happens at such a sacred place that triggers an unconscious memory and to learn about the world of sacred place is to learn about ourselves. He affirms that such sacred places and intersections are the locations where humans first erected temples, pyramids, shrines, churches and cities (Olsen, 2004:13).

Nonetheless, through the institutions of royal ordination and ceremonial rituals and spirit manifestation, Aguleri reasserted her authority over other Igbo's in diaspora to "represent the headship of Igbo race'' (Nnamah, 2002:9). Nnamah (2002:9) again asserts that "it is also very vital to mention here that Aguleri is strategically located at the point of origin of Igbo land from where Igbo land spread further into the hinterland". He argues that the significance is that Aguleri as a town, represent the boundary of Igbo land from where Igbo land stretched eastwards to the rest of its heartland and equally, it is important to note that every major cultural expression in Igbo land in terms of arts, artifacts, symbolism, and names of different types and so on are found in Aguleri (Nnamah, 2002:9). It is on this position that Neuman (1980:12) argues that ancient towns like Aguleri is "the birth place, ancestral home, and a historical centre of culture. Other areas, important as some have now become, are nevertheless derivative from tradition''. Insofar as some of the areas deriving their art music from the great tradition of Aguleri became, themselves, "great centers for the dissemination of musical culture, though geographically distant from its original place and surrounded by different local traditions, other areas remained little centers of the great tradition'' (Capwell, 1993:96).

Isaiah Uzoagba (2000:38) affirms that societies like Aguleri are famous for different art formations such as sculptor, painting, carving, graphics and design and they equally demonstrate these arts on their musical instruments. Nonetheless, because it is believed to be the dance for the prestige and initiates the *Okanga* drum "dance overshadows sculptures, painting, architecture, and literature as the leading traditional art" (Horton, 1963:112). It is on this position that William Bascom maintains that "most African sculptures appear to have been associated with religion, which pervades most aspects of African life. The religious genres included, votive figures, which adorned shrines, reliquary figures, charms, figures, stools, used in initiation to the cults. The apparatus for divination, dance staff, musical instruments and a variety of other ritual paraphernalia" (1973:11).

Ancestral Worship

According to Idigo (1990:60) "Aguleri people have strong belief in the existence of one God, the creator of all things whom they call Chi-Ukwu, the Supreme Being, under whose control is the spirits both good and bad. Ancestor worship is also practiced and the people offer sacrifices to their dead fathers, where the King is believed to serve as an earthly representative between God and people, and this demonstrated convincingly that the concept of God was indigenous to the Igbo religious traditions (Metuh, 1981:7), which promises concrete blessings and protection (Isichei, 1980:4). Uchendu (1965:101) affirms that "the number of Igbo deities, spirits, and oracles is enormous and their anthropomorphous character is well recognized. He argues that "Igbo attitude towards the gods is not of fear but of friendship, a friendship that lasts as long as the reciprocal obligations are kept" (Uchendu, 1965:101). Besides, Idigo (1990:60) affirms that these deities owned in common there are individual deities whom each person keeps and worships through the carved wooden images or idols.

Dance as a Communicative System in African Traditional Religion

The communicative value of music is however more apparent in Africa where music forms a very important part of their rich cultural heritage (Ohadike, 2007:9). Ohadike (2007:9) again

argues that "Africans on the Continent and in the diaspora use music and dance to express their feelings and to preserve their culture and history'', and as a communication device, they "serve as a form of record keeping'' (Ohadike, 2007:11). Rodney comments that:

Music and dance had key roles in uncontaminated African society. They were ever present at birth, initiation, marriage, death, as well as appearing at times of recreation. Africa is the continent of drums and percussion. African peoples reached the pinnacle of achievement in that sphere. Because of the impact of colonialism and cultural imperialism…Europeans and Africans themselves in the colonial period lacked due regard for the unique features of African culture. Those features have a value of their own that cannot be eclipsed by the European culture either in the comparable period before 1500 or in the subsequent centuries. They cannot be eclipsed because they are not really comparable phenomena (1973:41-42).

Hudgens&Trillo (1990:52) affirms that "nowhere in the world is music more a part of the very process of living than in Africa'', without it "the efficacy of the people's worship are reduced to nothing'' (Akinfenwa, 2013:6). Pratt (1914:60) echoes that "of these artistic appeals, none is on the whole more penetrating or more intense than music. Nothing that can be urged by those who profess themselves to be insensible to musical impressions, or by those who have become righteously exacerbated by the misuse of sacred music here or elsewhere, can break the force of this general truth. There is no artistic means of getting at the internal springs of feeling in popular heart that can compare with music''. Leonard (1906:429) argues that "the religion of the natives [Africans] is their existence and their existence is their religion. It supplies the principles on which their law is dispensed and morality adjudicated. The entire organization of their common life is so interwoven with it that they cannot get away from it''. No wonder, Shorter (1978:49) affirms that "…Africans are notoriously religious'', while Isichei (1976:24) particularly asserts that through the music like the *Okanga* "the Igbos are nothing if not profoundly religious, and all accounts of their life reflect the fact''. Stephen Ezeanya (1980:324) posits that in Africa, "life is religion, and religion is life''. Ekeke (2013:3) argues that "this means that religion could not be explained away in Africa and whoever tries it will be seen as a stranger to Africa''. Mbiti (1975:9) asserts that religion is by far the richest part of the African heritage. In this wise, Chernoff describes African religion as a "danced belief'' (1999:172), and as a form of worship that is visible and inherently attached to bodily action (Heuser, 2008:35). Buttressing this further, James Early posits that:

Throughout world history sacred sounds have served as a medium for human cultures to raise queries, advance beliefs, give praise, and inspire others to join in exploration of the mysteries of earthly existence and the greater universe. These sacred sound traditions encompass a broad range of expressive forms: melodic and repetitive vocalizations called chants; sharp, passionate, emotions-filled hums, groans, shouts; percussive, rhythmic hand claps and foot stomps; and extended song, sermon, and instrumental arrangements. Instrumental music, sung prayers, and mystical chants have been used to communicate with the divine, to unite religious communities, and to express moral, political, social, and economic aspirations. Sacred sounds in many traditions are the central means for invocation of spirits. The utterance of particular sounds is thought by many cultures to form a connection to all the elements of the universe. In some belief

systems music and sound vibrations are pathways for healing body, mind, and spirit. Among the wide range of human expressive behavour, the capacity to infuse the joys, sorrows, and humility that characterize religious and spiritual beliefs into oral poetry, chants, songs, and instrumental music is certainly one of the most powerful and inspirational ways all peoples and cultures acknowledge the spirit of the Supreme in their lives (1997:1).

Akinfenwa (2013:7) asserts that "the origin of music and dance is a mystery, but their importance cannot be over emphasized in religious circle''. According to Nti:
In the olden days, during the Stone Age, records show that Africans were mostly wanderers moving from place to place and living inside caves. Their major occupation was hunting for animals which served them for food. When the man comes home in the evening he tells his family stories of his exploits for the day. Imitating the movements of the animals that he encountered in the forest. Some scholars believed that it was from his imitation of the movement of birds that dance was born (1990:20).

Buttressing this further, Wosien (1992:17) affirms that "man was taught how to dance by the animals, which he observed closely and learned to imitate. He depended on them for his food, clothing, tools and weapons, and therefore needed to study their habits and characteristics''. Akinfenwa (2013:7) argues that "people specialized on them and earned their daily bread. Music and dance cannot be replaced by anything in the world. A world without music and dance will face trouble. This is because of the important position they occupied in worship. Man was made to worship the Supreme Being and the worship is not complete without music and dance''. Music infuses all the activities of the African from the cradle to the grave (Hailey, 1957:67). Awolalu (1991:132) affirms that "the Africans are a singing race. A lot of their music is of a religious nature. In these songs, they portray their joy and sorrow, their hopes and fears. In each song there is a wealth of material for the student who will patiently sift and collate. Ritual songs and dancing follow prescribed patterns and a study of them will reveal a lot of the people's beliefs''. According to Ruth Stone (1994:391) "religious aspect of music is fundamental to the very being of many musical acts and cannot be stripped from the performance. Thus, it is only for analytical ends that we can, to any extent, pull the religious from the performance bundle from temporary scrutiny''.

Reaffirming this affirmation, Gorer, (1935:289) cited in Doob (1961:73) posits that Africans allegedly dance for joy, and they dance for grief; they dance for love and they dance for hate; they dance to bring prosperity and they dance to avert calamity; they dance for religion and they dance to pass the time. Mutua (1999:173) argues that "that is why the degradation of African religions should be seen as the negation of the humanity of the African people''. Onwochei (1998:286) explains that "there are so many ways Africans express their musical heritage''. Nketia (1989:119) argues that interacting and rejoicing with music and dance in the context of ritual and worship is also an important aspect of the African concept of religious expression and may be given free reign at religious festivals. It is in this wise that Lucas (1948:110) posits that feasts like the*Ovala*festival where *Okanga* music is played is followed by general merriment, including processions and dances. No wonder Okafor (1994:130) affirms that "the Igbo would

appear to be a people perpetually celebrating because in every moon of the 13 moons in the year, some communities somewhere are celebrating in Igbo land''. According to JafotitoSofola:

Music is used in African lives in various forms even in spurring farming people to action as is done when the farmer is cutting his field; it is used in folktales that is told the children under the night's moonlight; it is used during wrestling with composition that spurs or disarm the wrestlers as the case may be; it is used in social and religious activities, to name some uses. The music form has its dissonance and consonance, characteristics that make it African music that need not be forced into the Western or oriental moulds which have their own respective characteristics. It is left for the students of African music art forms to conduct researches into them and propagate and preserve them in their distinctive forms having, of course, the possibilities for adventurism as they wish to have (1973:102).

Buttressing this further, KwasiAduonum notes that:
In Africa, music is life; that is, it permeates all daily activities. Music in Africa is the soul which is ultimately concerned with various customs and religious practices. The African is born, named, initiated, fortified, fed, nurtured, buried with music. In Africa, music heals the sick, music directs and guides the blind, music comforts the widow, and music stops tribal warfare. Music is in the office … Finally, music accompanies every single daily activity (1980:19-20).
In furtherance of this assertion, John Mbiti asserts that:

A lot of African music and songs deal with religious ideas and practices. The religious rituals, ceremonies and festivals are always accompanied by music singing and sometimes dancing. Music gives outlet to the emotional expression of the religious life, and it is a powerful means of communication in African traditional life. It helps to unite the singing or dancing group to express its fellowship and participation in life. Many musical instruments are used by African peoples (1991:71).Music has universal appeal especially African and Nigerian music are sang or produced in local language and that is why Euba (1977:13) argues that "Nigerian tone language usually had its own inherent melodic structure and the imposition of an imported melody resulted in a conflict with the natural melodic structure of the text, thereby distorting its meaning''. The spirituality of sacred sounds, bodily movement, chanting, incarnations, and divinations are literarily, in tandem throughout the African diaspora, no wonder Melville Herskovits asserts that:

The African past must be included under the rubric traditions of the past, whether these traditions are held overtly or not, becomes apparent when the religious habits of Negroes in the Caribbean and South America are anchored to both ends of the scale whose central position they comprise—to Africa, the aboriginal home of all these varieties of religious experience, on the one hand, and to the United States, on the other, where the greatest degree of acculturation to European norms has taken place (1941:224).

However, Tagg (1989:285-298) argues that the distinction between Africans and Europeans are often based on essentialist ideas about music and people which are often ascribed racist stereotypes and assumptions. Buttressing this further, Roman-Velazquez (2006:298) equally made a reference to this assertion by concluding that "racism has often resulted in blacks being

thought of as more authentic in terms of musical sexual expression of the body, whilst Europeans have often been associated more with the mind and less spontaneous type of musical performance''. Apparently, ethnicity basically often linked to national identity is invariably used to equate, shared features or characteristics simply due to a belief in what Shelemay (2001:249) describes "as common ancestry, memories of a shared historical past, and elements in common, such as kingship patterns, physical continuity, religious affiliation, language, or some combination of these''. It is on this position that Ohadike (2007:2) argues that "every sacred drum has a name, and can be conceived as belonging to a particular clan or family unit, albeit a family of drums [sic]. He asserts that "a sacred drum cannot be treated as the property of an individual. Instead, it is a member of a lineage organization. Like any other member of the lineage, it is treated with certain amount of respect, and it enjoys certain rights and privileges. This explains in part why an African clan could go to war if its sacred drum was violated, seized or stolen by another clan'' (Ohadike, 2007:2-3). James Clifford idiomatically states that:

Groups negotiating their identity in contexts of domination and exchange persist; patch themselves together in ways different from a living organism. A community, unlike a body, can lose a central organ and not die. All the critical elements of identity are in specific conditions replaceable: language, land, blood, leadership religion. Recognized, viable tribes exist in which any one or even most of these elements are missing, replaced, or largely transformed. The idea of culture carries with it an expectation of roots, of a stable, territorialized existence (1988:338).

Conversely, the sound emitting from the *Okanga*drum of the dance group as an indigenous musicians is believed to be the sacred sound of the initiates of the cult in Aguleri cosmology in the sense that it is "created by the people, sustained by the people, and is for the people'' (Araki, 2004:214). Nettle (1983:156) affirms that music like that of the *Okanga*dance group "supports tribal integrity when many peoples, whites and other Indian tribes, because of the onset of modernization and Westernization, come into a position of influencing each other's culture".
In order for the ritual convocation of the spirits and ritual of spirit manifestation to occur according to Boston (1964:45-46) "the gong is normally kept in the owner's ancestral shrine, where it receives a share of the offerings and libations that are made to the ancestors. Ritual tokens of these gifts are tied to the handle of the gong, in the form of strips of white cloth, *okpe*, and chicken feathers. When the gong is brought for an investiture or funeral ceremony kola nuts offered by the appointee's family are broken over it, with an invocation to the dead". This is done with the belief that this will maintain its sonority" according to (Nicholls, 1988:199). Symbolically, the sticks are believed to be imbued with ancestral powers and the gongis fed in order to keep the spirits pleased (Obi, 2008:143).

Equally significant is the fact that feathers are applied on the gong with the firm belief that they act as protective mechanism in rendering it powerful. This is done in order that the gong 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 meticously followed so that they can retain their ancient, ritualistic and spiritual values as revealed and decreed by the divine in order to avoid sacrilege. For this reason, some Igbo ethnographers of the South-Eastern region

of Nigeria concludes that Aguleri as an ancient kingdom for "so long is respected for clinging to the ways of their ancestors" irrespective of the fact that they embraced Christianity which encompasses civilization and modernization (Paredes, 1995:355).

*Ovala*and Its Royal Dance

Nonetheless, at the conclusion of the *Ovala* festival, it is believed that the king has acquired the symbolic and political authority to rule and the power to face his enemies and preserve his realm (Ray, 1976:97). Apparently, the *Ovala* festival has acquired so much significance and relevance in Aguleri in the sense that the Idigo royal dynasty as the ruling monarch of Aguleri for over a hundred years is evidently one of the longest monarch in the world today (Nnamah, 2002:7). Nnamah (2002:7) again argues that the rise and fall of kingdoms usually mark the demise of most monarchs and to have remained the ruling house unbroken, speaks volume in terms of acceptability, love and respect the people of Aguleri have for the Idigo royal family. According to Nnamah (2002:7) "from the time of recorded history, man has not lived for a very long time. Historians point out that man may have lived perhaps for not more than 500 thousand years or so. Even at that, history is replete with wars, violence, anarchy and communal disharmony". He argues that for Aguleri "to have lived together as one people in peace and harmony under one monarchy for a hundred years plus, is worthy of celebration. Therefore, the people of Aguleri have every reason to roll out the drums in celebration of their worthy achievements" (Nnamah, 2002:7). Buttressing this further, Nnamah (2002:7) significantly maintains that Aguleri have had an organized kingship system and government and not the typical acephalous society structure commonly associated with Igbo before the advent of colonialism. He asserts that these facts of great significance as they will help us to put history and tradition in proper perspective (Nnamah, 2002:7). Ifemesia (1970:50) argues that Aguleri "...kingship is an institution of antiquity in Igbo land, where through centuries, it influenced and was influenced by events and developments in its cultural ecology''. He affirms that "the concept of Kingship is…so traditionally entrenched in Igbo culture, so deeply built into the Igbo language that it cannot have been alien or recent provenance" (Ifemesia, 1970:53).

Figure 1: Here,HRH (Engr) Christopher NwabunwanneIdigo IV (Ogalagidi II) Eze Aguleri is excorted out of the palace to the king's square (Amaeze) with the OkangaRoyal drum and his cabinet chiefs. (Courtesy of Madukasi Francis Chuks).

Figure 2:Here, HRH (Engr) Christopher NwabunwanneIdigo IV (Ogalagidi II) Eze Aguleri dancing the Okanga Royal drum during an Ovala festival in the King's Squre (Amaeze). Courtesy of Madukasi Francis Chuks.

According to Stone (1989:73) traditionally, a festival like *Ovala* ritual has been corporately created by the people like the Aguleri community to express their beliefs in the supernatural and reflect both in ancient and modern adaptations. She argues that communities like the Aguleri people explain the significance of the *Okanga* sacred sound as the result of a "longing for times past and a desire to recreate that past'' (Stone, 1989:77). No wonder IyorchiaAyu (1986:114) argues that sacred sounds like *Okanga*sound "are not just social explosions; they are time bombs

that tick through history. Hence, they can only be understood and appreciated in their historical context'', "and its historical record'' (Mernissi, 1987:61).
Ayu (1986:114) stresses that they "are not only social and political events; they are outcomes of a complex interplay of socio-economic relations whose opposing polarities have elasticated social and political forces to a point of rupture. Hence, for a correct reading and translation, one has to understand the dynamics of this complex combination of social, political, economic and cultural factors through historical time''.

During such ritualistic performance, the diviners or cultic functionaries and other participants act out in symbolic mimic forms in line with the attributes of the divine and the doctrines of the cult (Nabofa, 1994:34-35). Nabofa (1994:35) again affirms that such sacred music/dance or ritual drama primarily add an aura of reverence, sacredness, dignity, splendour and grandeur to the traditional acts/system of worship. Apart from its mystical innuendo which can easily pass as opium for the oppressed (Ayu, 1986:42), such sacred sound as an element of religious practice can induce the altered state of the worshipers during ritual performance (Chidester, 1992:3).

According to Nabofa (1994:35) in such a situation, "they entice both the initiates and non-members, who may practically play the roles of participant on-lookers''. Nabofa (1994:42) again argues that different messages are usually encoded into the non-verbal expressions and the different on-lookers decode different meanings from such symbolic ritual dance and drama. He asserts that non-verbal communication impinges the minds of many spectators more than the verbal expressions, while people can easily forget the words and phrases used during ritual drama, the impressions created by the non-verbal communication techniques seem to linger and are indelibly in the minds of most spectators (Nabofa, 1994:42-43). Buttressing this further, Richard Schenchner (1993:228) argues that it is also clear that rituals are not safe deposit vaults of accepted ideas but in many cases they are dynamic performative actions in new ways. Jeffrey Alexander (1988b:93) asserts that "action can be conceived of as a flow within the symbolic, social, and psychological environments. These environments interpenetrate within the concrete empirical actor; who is no longer identified with purely contingent action as he or she typically is in the traditions of micro theory''.

Here, we should remind ourselves of the fact that African traditional religion is characterized by the absence of written sacred documents, this is because with the exceptions like Egypt and Ethiopia, pre-modern African societies were illiterates (Ohadike, 2007:20). Ikenga-Metuh (1987:12) regrettably argues that:

The greatest handicap in the study of African Religion is that unlike the world-religions like Christianity and Islam, it is not a religion of the book. There are no written Sacred Scriptures which are regarded as repertoires of authentic beliefs and practices of African Religion. Most traditional African society did not develop the art of writing. So in no traditional African society were the tenets of their beliefs found, collected and presented in any written form. However, Africans are very deeply religious. Religion permeates every aspect of their life.

Ojukwu (1998:32) asserts that "it is very pertinent to note that traditional societies usually have no written constitutions. What fulfils the functions of the constitution is the culture of the people – their habits and ways of doing things''. Crim (1989:665) argues that "sacred scriptures express and provide identity, authorization, and ideals for the people of the tradition''. Mathews (2007:4) clearly asserts that the reason why such word sacred is used is that "each religion believes its sacred writings have divine or spirit-inspired origin. They were either written or spoken by God, written by divinely guided humans or spoken by teachers of deep spiritual insight''. Soyinka (1999:vii) argues that the observers of traditional religion beliefs that "this ancient system of belief did not qualify for consideration as religion because it had no written scripture, but the scholars of a society which never ceases to extol its oral culture actually attempt to deny its most fundamental intuitions because they are not printed, annotated and marketed".

No wonder the description of Arthur Leonard (1906:429) about the tribes of the lower Niger basically applies to most African societies whom in its strict sense of it are completely and deeply religious. He argues that Africans are known for their religiosity, of whom it can be said, that "they eat religiously, drink religiously, bathe religiously and dress religiously'' (Leonard, 1906:429). Ohadike (2007:20) argues that "the absence of written documents did not mean the absence of records. Instead, their sacred manuscripts were embodied in their music, oral history, religions, rituals, and ceremonies, as well as in the hearts of the people, their priests, their elders, and their chiefs. This explains why Africans exiles, that did not carry any written documents when they boarded the ships, were able to reproduce their traditional African cultures in the Americas''.

No wonder Kajikawa (2012:138) affirms that "African religion and black popular music are related and they share a common spiritual function'', "with strong resonances in the Afro-Caribbean'' (Brackett, 2012:118). Kajikawa (2012:139) argues that because of its aesthetics which are grounded in soul, funk, and gospel, they use black musical tropes to evoke a musical, spiritual connection to Africa and Caribbean. According to Glocke& Jackson:

As African people to explore various geographic areas outside of the continent and later forcibly brought against their will to places such as America during enslavement, they were obviously unable to bring much [in the case of exploration] or any in the case of enslavement physical property with them. Instead, what they were able to bring with them was the music in their heart and the movement in their soul. Yet, when these African dances were brought to different geographic areas outside of Africa, they underwent a period of transformation and adjustment in order to fit into their new surroundings. Regardless of how these dances have changed on the surface, their foundation [i.e. their purpose, their function and their movement base] still links Black Dance in places like America directly back to African dance on the continent (2011:2).

Buttressing this further, Postma (1990:33-34) affirms that when these black prisoners came to Curacao, they brought with them the assorted Creole cultures of their local New World regions. The resultant effect was that this cultural transfer had a significant effect on the scope of Curacaoancreolization (De Jong, 2010:206). Insofar as the enslaved West African people who arrived on Curacao already adept at manipulating their culture in accordance to newly imposed

variables; the borrowing and manipulation of deities was already an established tradition with people who might worship the same deity under several different names or embrace the characteristics of several deities within a single entity (De Jong, 2010:205). It is on this position that Paul Mercier (1954:166) argues that one cultural group might worship a given deity as a male *persona*, while a nearby community might perceive the same as female. Putting the whole arguments together as regards the convergencies that existed among the diverse West African nation groups, Sidney Mintz and Richard Price (1992:20-21&52-53) categorized them as "underlying values and beliefs'' or "deep structures", that enabled the West African slaves to transcend more easily to the immediate circumstances to perceive a deeper shared identity, and allowed them interact/connect at the grass root level. Buttressing this further, Katrina Hazzard-Donald posits that:

Enslaved Africans brought their traditional dances to North America with them. Primarily sacred, these dances, upon arriving here, quickly underwent modification which broke with specific ethnic African traditional cultural meaning. The original African institutional and ceremonial context, as well as the structure and function of the dance, were disrupted by enslavement. Independently reconstituted by bondsmen who clung to cultural memory as a means of psychological survival, the dance was reconfigured and adjusted to the new physical and social environment. African traditional dance was modified and forced to adjust to both the new conditions of labor imposed by enslavement and the psychological necessities imposed by its attendant practices (2011:195-196).

From the perspective of Dopamu:
African traditional religion has no written literature of sacred scripture or creedal forms. It is an essentially oral tradition. All we know of the religion, therefore, comes to us through oral traditions-myths and legends, stories and folktales, songs and dances, liturgies and rituals, proverbs and pithy-sayings, adages, and riddles. Some of these oral traditions are preserved for us in arts and crafts, symbols and emblems, names of people and places, shrines and sacred places. Works of art are not merely for entertainment or for pleasing the eyes. But they usually convey religious feelings, sentiments, ideas or truths (1991:22).

Buttressing this further, Njoku (2007:xxxi) affirms that in the absence of sacred documents, the indigenous charms and amulets, oral history, rituals, and poetry served as sacred documents. African ignorance of writing came not from inability to express thoughts but isolation from inventions made elsewhere (Parrinder, 1987:126). The significance of sacred music like the *Uvie*in African religious life according to Geoffrey Parrinder (1969:77) is that it gives expression to the deepest feelings, but it is not only feelings, for it points to belief in the life force that underlines religious thought. Such festival like *Ovala* is an occasion for religious revival activities in the community and it is a strategic period for the adherents of African traditional religion to showcase their religious activities (Nabofa, 1994:81). The different traditional religious groups stage/display ritual dances and drama, not only within the ambit of the sacred places, but also in the processions through the major roads of the town or villages (Nabofa, 1994:81).

It is on this position that Hanna (1992:323) opines that "dance in many societies is an integral part of religious, social, economic, or political life. Irrespective of time and place, however, dance is a powerful means of communicating a group's values and beliefs and transmitting them from one generation to the next''. Nabofa (1994:81) asserts that this is the time they evangelize and communicate aspects of their sects. Ikenga-Metuh (1987:263) argues that "African traditional religion is not a prophetic religion nor is it a redemptive religion. There is no call to embrace doctrines different or in conflict with traditional customs and ways of life. Religion is not meant to lead man to obtain salvation. Rather African religion is anthropocentric, and cosmocentric".

De Witte (2009:196) argues that in this way they thus try to find out other ways into the media, most notably speaking in radio and TV talk shows, inviting the press to newsworthy traditional events and press conferences, sending letters to editors, and being the subject of TV documentaries. He further stresses that these media formats of the adherents of African traditional religion depends on the goodwill and interest of journalists and media houses because it has hardly any control over the messages and images they produce, nor over the audiences and possible clienteles that the media production reach (De Witte, 2009:196). Nonetheless, Jeremy Stolow (2005:125) argues that media and mediation always constitute "inherently unstable and ambiguous conditions of possibility for religious signifying practices''. Buttressing this further, Nabofa (1994:38) argues that "ceremonies involving dance and drama offer the opportunity for expressing and disseminating a sense of fellowship and unity within the group of believers and non-believers. It is during the public performance of ritual celebrations that the religion is communicated essentially both internally and externally. It is an ideal time for evangelism when more converts are made''.

In contrast, Mazrui (1991:77) argues that "African religions are communal and non-universalists; unlike Christianity or Islam, they do not seek to convert or remake the other in their image'', "because their identity is their religion, their way of life'' (Long, 1988:3-4). Eliade (1957:87) affirms that "it is the periodical reactualizations of the divine acts—in short, the religious festivals—that restore human knowledge of sacrality of the models". She argues that "in the festival the sacred dimension of life is recovered, the participants experience the sanctity of human existence as a divine creation" (Eliade, 1957:89). According to Drewal (1992:164) as a reconstituted ritual based on disparate of other festivals, the annual *Ovala* festival like every other sacred ritual festivals has been contextualized alongside its various models in the yearly calendar. She argues that the reason why communities like Aguleri community is performing the "annual rally'' is to bring all their people abroad home to see each other once a year. The majority of them like to spend three days, four days, and see all their culture, all their performances, like the *Ijele* masquerade, and their deities (Drewal, 1992:164).

This is the reason why Aniakor (1978:42) asserts that "*Ijele*maequerade is seen only on very special occasions such as yam festivals or in the case of the Northern West Igbo in Aguleri area, the *Ofala* festival of *Eze*Idigo, a use pattern that dates back to the nineteenth century''. He argues that "more recently, the mask has come out during the *Uzoiyi* festival of Umoji and it is possible that in the past, *Ijele* appearance was associated with some major celebrations of *Eze*Nri''

(Aniakor, 1978:42). Aniakor (1978:42) again explains that it is in *Ovala* festival that "the mask performs to *Igba Eze* music, the music of Kings, named for its association with major events in those Northern Igbo areas that have a tradition of Kingship''. No wonder then that Dike (1987:75) affirms that the King's "*persona* has been built up by his association with certain objects and his controls of certain festivals and masquerades''. Festivals like the *Ovala* celebration in Aguleri cosmology has become what Alexander (2010:154) refers to as "cultural magnets", "which make the people to travel from far and wide to relate with their kith and kin at home and from other places" (Idigo, 2002:24) while the rest of the events marks what Nnamah (2002:8) refers to as "*AzuOvala*" – the closing ceremonies. Idigo (2002:24) argues that this provides the rare opportunity or limelight to witness such events as: the inaugural outing ceremony of nascent age grades being integrated into the community's trado–social structure, official outing ceremony of new dance groups and troupes, cultural entertainment, masquerade displays and conferment of honourary chieftaincy titles to individuals. Buttressing this further, Flora Kaplan (2004:190) posits that in Aguleri kingdom unlike in some Igbo towns today where Chiefs invent and award titles anyhow, only the King with the advice of his cabinet Chiefs has that power. She argues that the proliferation of titles that is common among the newly rich, seeking instant recognition and statue in Nigeria is absent in community like that of the Aguleri kingdom, where such recognition must be earned over time. The King rewards humble as well as wealthy men with titles based on performance and merit (Kaplan, 2004:190), and such titles are given to "deserving individuals in order to cement social relationships" (Perani& Wolff, 1999:83). In that wise, Kaplan (2004:190) argues that such a title is not expected to be bought but "must be earned because titles conferred by the King are for the lifetime of an individual and cannot be taken away, even by the King himself''.

Horton (1963:111) asserts that "in addition to all this, the ideals of the institution forbids its members to bring into it the struggles for status and influence which rage in the village outside; so as an arbitrating group, it has all the formal trappings of impartiality. And where the successful resolution of many disputes lies in persuading people that can climb down from extreme positions without loss of face, such an appearance of impartiality may be crucial – whatever the reality behind it". In that wise, Brown (2004:169) argues that once initiated into the brotherhood "a person acquires long life connection to a family-like network of temples'', and "should someone later prove disloyal or disgrace himself, he may be declared an enemy of the king and banished from the court, while the title he was given is his unto death'' (Kaplan, 2004:190). This is the more reason why in Aguleri tradition and custom, Chieftaincy titles are bestowed on individuals according to meritocracy and not measured according to wealth.

Nonetheless, dance and drama entertainments are usually the most vibrant channels of communication because, out of human curiosity and their aesthetic values, they attract a great deal of audience (Nabofa, 1994:82). Thus, in traditional religion the general idea of dance is to communicate with and glorify the deities (Heuser, 2008:40).

Figure 3: This is the IjeleMasqurade of the Aguelri people performing during an Ovala festival. (Courtesy of Madukasi Francis Chuks).

Buttressing this further, Nabofa (1994:39) asserts that "music, dance and drama are outlets and vehicles through which religious ideas are overtly expressed. In fact, they reflect every kind of emotion in the human mind. These religious communication resources radiate religious pleasures''. Nonetheless, Kinni-Olusanyin (1993:54) posits that music and drama are cultural focii, they permeate and affect the psyche and the being of the community. Heuser (2008:40) argues that insofar as, sacred dance is a medium of a wary approach to the divine, it narrows this distance by legitimate human agency, therefore, festival like the *Ovala*celebration in combination with its ritual composition empowers community like the Aguleri people.

Nonetheless, such dancing and drumming during *Ovala* festival has been described as "love feast for the whole community'' (Long, 1992:132). Festivals like the *Ovala* celebration according to Naomi Janowitz (2004:24) is purely a symbolic activity whose practitioners like the Aguleri indigenes do not expect a particular outcome from their activities instead they are participating in a symbolic expression of cultural concepts. Buttressing this further, Turner (1968:8) asserts that it is not necessary that symbols should be verbally explained or to be comprehended; its significance is often understood at preconscious, or even unconscious, levels. He argues that to

Figure 4: HRH Late Eze AlphonsusEzeuduIdigo III (1914-1995) IgweEzennia of Aguleri Eze Aguleri conferring Chieftaincy title on late Chief Lord Palmer George AkwaliMadukasiEzekwesiliAguleri during an Ovala Festival in 1986. (Courtesy of Madukasi Francis Chuks).

crack the cultural code which explains the symbols of ritual, the king is in any position to relate the semantic assemblage – which may be discovered to be a system – to the social system, and to the dynamics of that system (Turner, 1968:8). Nonetheless, people only come together to perform ritual in terms of beliefs so powerfully held that they overcome all the forces that under other circumstances divide them from one another and set them at odds (Turner, 1968:8). Nabofa (1994:39) argues that music and dance are used to incite or to exhibit emotion. He stresses that emotion is aroused by praise music or chanting, singing, drumming, horning, *et cetera*. In fact, music and dance communicate deeply vertically and widely in terms of time and space (Nabofa, 1994:39).

However, John Beattie (1966:65) argues that "myth dramatizes the universe; science analyzes it and even though men sometimes confuse these two procedures, and even combine them [as in astrology and alchemy] they could hardly be more different… Whatever its forms, is not science and is nothing like it; it operates not by trial and error, guided by observation, but by symbolism and drama. It is for this reason that its study involves a range of questions about meaning which do not arise when scientific behaviour is being investigated''. More so, Smith (1982) cited in Janowitz (2004:24) argues that ritual is not an attempt to assert human influence but a mediation on the limitations of being human. No wonder, Nzewi, et al, (2001:100) argues that "the African idea of using instruments of music making designed to voice human language has its logical extension in encoding the language of dance, in most African cultures dance is conceived and deployed as a nonverbal medium through which cultural narratives and metaphors are tacitly

depicted beyond mime''. Indeed, the *Ovala* festival has acquired so much significance and relevance in Aguleri, and has become so integrate and central to trado-social events in Aguleri that it has become the pride and symbol of Aguleri as a united people (Idigo, 2002:24). Sjoberg (2004:225) argues that the inherent dynamic of values behind such festivals like the *Ovala* festival as a religious tradition of community like the Aguleri people is exemplified by the fact that "its religious ideologies continue to exist not only in memory but also in practice''. According to Nabofa:

In view of the fact that the African belief system is primarily a celebration of life people sing and dance out their inner religious prompting and feelings. Such is done particularly during festivals, initiation rites, birth and naming ceremonies and all other rites of passage. Ceremonies involving dance and drama offer the opportunity for expressing and disseminating a sense of fellowship and unity within the group of believers and non-believers (1994:38).

Buttressing this further, NTI (1990:10) asserts that sacred music like the *Uvie* sacred sound functions as the height and the very end of a festival. The partakers in such festival dance to the music in order to entertain themselves and demonstrate the state of their minds as to their being alive and well enough to see the celebration of the festival (NTI, 1990:10).

Ameze:The Sacred Space

Equally significant, if not more important is the fact that the traditional monarch uses the *Ovala* festival as an avenue or occasion to commemorate his kingship, and also an occasion for the subjects to reaffirm their solidarity and loyalty to his Kingship, through paying of homage's and tributes (Idigo, 2002:24). Also, during this period, the Aguleri people gather around the kings square – *Amaeze* which has become a "gentrified space of entertainment and recreation'' (Ventakesh, 2006:110), the "center point of cultural activity and important source of innovation in music and other forms of performance'' (Wolcott, 1974:83), that "create the most festive atmosphere possible and therefore the most enticing environment to attract the spirits to come'' (Sager, 2012:38). Sharp (2001:51) argues that "this is the point where sacred sound and architectural space intersect contributes significantly to experience meaning in sacred performance''. He asserts that it is in this situation that "sacred performance within sacred architectural space creates a new, unique dimension in the sound in order to make it symbolic'' (Sharp, 2001:51). Nuckolls (1999:228) argues that "the term sound symbolism is used when a sound unit such as a phoneme, syllable, feature or tone is said to go beyond its linguistic function as a contrastive, non-meaning-bearing unit to directly express some kind of the meaning". Reichard (1950:257) asserts that it is in this kind of occasion/arena that sounds like that of the *Uvie* sacred sound has the power to attract and exorcise evil, through mediation of "the performance of its good works that produce immunity against all evil influences" (Arkin, 1989:7). Nonetheless, according to Wosien:

Sacred space offers a centre for communication with the power. It is the locality where its dramatic breakthrough into the world is commemorated. Sacred space, as the structured locality where man established the dominion of his gods, is the known space, the locality where the power manifests and repeats its revelation; it is the place where the gods has stopped in

movement and has created. This site, by virtue of man's acts of worship, becomes a centre for communion. Outside this enclosed area, beyond the known world, is the realm of chaos, the terrifying unknown space where forms disintegrate (1992:23).

Wosien (1992:21) again argues that such sacred space "symbolizes the union of time and space within evolution, the incarnation of timeless energy, which manifests in the dual aspects of nature''. Drewal (1975:18) asserts that such sacred place has "become a symbol of place at which the living and the spiritual can meet and unite''. It is in this king's square [*Amaeze*] that the Aguleri community shows their solidarity with the monarch, who makes himself available and accessible to be seen during his public appearances and cheered by his subjects while dancing his *Okanga* Royal Band and *Uvie* music respectively (Idigo, 2002:24). Idigo (2001:166) observes that for the fact that the King dances to the "*Okanga* Royal Band widely copied by the new generation Monarchs in Igbo land which has an Igala musical background" and his regalia that has an artistic connection "of Nupe origin for an audience of art connoisseurs' revealed that long standing patronage relationship existing between Nupe artists and the Hausa-Fulani aristocracy" Perani& Wolff (1999:123-124). Onwuejeogwu (1981:91) asserts that "the musicians are all members of the Eze's minimal lineage". Buttressing this further, Echezona (1963:26) affirms that "during the yearly *Ofala* ceremony, the performers usually sum up the progress of the previous year with the drums, praise the King and wish everybody well''. He argues that "the King does not come out to dance unless his royal drums invite him; then he appears with his senior cabinet ministers, *Ndi-ichie*, dancing while the excited crowds cheer for joy''. Felix Abugu (1998), in his description and illustration of the event, writes that:

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

As a point of emphasis, Onwuejeogwu (1981:90) asserts that the king is led around the King's square while dancing alongside by a dwarf – *aka nri*, because he serves as "an instrument of communication, symbol of power to the King and believed to be adept traditional doctor". In this king's square also "the *Eze* and his retinue dance around the open arena with rhythm and music that stir the crowd into unconscious emotion, nodding of heads and waving of hands, a sight which can be better felt than described'' (Idigo, 1990:34). This is because "its powerful effects defy analysis'' (Watkins, 2004:186) in the sense that "the blending vibration coming from the music sways the whole congregation and it is not difficult for any one, whether member or not, to be moved, while the lending dictates the various steps of the dance" (Nabofa, 2005:358). Nketia (1975:22) aptly observes that peoples' participation in music and dance is "an important means of strengthening the social bonds that bind them and the values that inspire their corporate life". It is on this position that Lawrence Grossberg (1995:370) argues that "there is little reason to privilege the live performance as if it were unmediated or as the only viable source of an authentic experience''. llesanmi (1996:5) argues that it is in this form that "these groups keep the

traditional religion alive, annually looking forward to what gods has in store for them. Practice keeps religion alive; oral tradition makes it lively; the potency of predictions reassures the members and forces them to renew their faith in the deities''. Buttressing this further, Wosien (1992:27) describes such ritual dance thus "the dancers, having danced into the labyrinth from right to left, the direction of involution and death, turn round the centre and, following their leader dance out again, now in the opposite direction, that of evolution and birth. The pattern of the spirals in the Geranos dance signifies the continuation of life beyond death, the intimation of immortality at the very core of human experience''.

According to Katrina Hazzard-Donald (2011:196) the kings square like *Amaeze* is "a sacred circle which represent a separate and sacred realm that connect one to the ancestors and reconfirm continuity through both time and space''. Wosien (1992:21) affirms that such sacred space becomes "zones where the sacred is experienced and worshipped. She stresses that "the beginning of both time and creation pertains to the centre. From this focal point manifestations radiate out in concentric rings. This universal experience has found expression in the many circumambulation rites and round dances of the sacred traditions of the world'' (1992:21-22). Hazzard-Donald (2011:196) argues that within such sacred circle, the interaction between the king, the initiates and Aguleri community is mediated through "sacred spiritual forces evidenced in spirit possession'' (2011:196) and while in that state they see themselves as "heros whose knowledge, mystic power, wealth and prestige equals that of any man'' (Guenther, 1975:165).

Conversely, it has been shown that the *Okanga* as a special dance for prestige invokes spirit possession on the initiates when played and danced during ritual festivals like the *Ovala* festival, this is why Koster (2011:177) asserts that "the community in this ritual is the victim, while other observers in the ritual serve as the symbolic representation of the community that needs healing, while simultaneously serving as witness to the ceremony''. Music sound like that of the*Okanga* drum dance is a "powerful medium for connecting to and accessing the effective power of spirits'' (De Witte, 2008:692). Nonetheless, Ohadike (2007:10) argues that "it is hard for Africans to go into spiritual possession without the help of instrumental or vocal music''. llesanmi (1996:5) writing in the on context of Yoruba women in the worship of *Orinlase* in Ilawe-Ekiti asserts that "before the ritual dance, they first pay homage to the deities individually and collectively. They kneel down, touch the ground with their heads almost in the…style without the other body gesticulations of...Then follows the praise song in honour of the deities'', thereby "creating an indelible impression in the minds of the individuals and communities, who also serve as a participating audience" (llesanmi, 1996:9). Echeruo (1975:60) argues that the traditional Igbo festivals like the *Ovala* holds on the position that ritual "drama is the externalization of archetypal relationships and issues; that behind the action of every drama, whether of gods or men, there is an essentially philosophic and even cosmic argument or statement dependent on or derived from the analogy of an antecedent or generic mythos". The *Uvie* sacred sound as a talking drum during the *Ovala* festival, "directs the king or the chiefs on dancing steps/skills to display during public outing to avoid mistakes and to enable them win public acclamations during their initiations in foot-work dances'' (Ogwezzy, 1999 cited in NOUN, 2009:79). No wonder, Michael Zogry (2011:20) reaffirms that this kind of ancient ritual is "a ceremonial landscape imbued with sacred significance".

Arguably, llesanmi (1996:5) asserts that it is during such ritual dance that "the deity himself possesses some of them, making them perform fits beyond the normal capacity of the generality of the people''. NTI (1990:115) argues that "as a dance of brave people, all parts of the body are used in the dance. The movements show sharp turns of the body, quick rising and falling linear and circular formations''. NOUN (2009:112) affirms that "the music tells of heroism, valiancy and intrepidity. Only those who could brave the night could foot-touch the drum or ascend it. No coward, however rich, can dare it. The dance is only for the brave''. In terms of the analysis of the *Uvie* ritual dance, Clavir (1996:100) argues that for the people like the Aguleri community, any "potent" object like the *Uvie* "commands respect and can give rise to prohibitions as to who may view, touch or use it'', because "it is an *Ozo* dance" — dance for the titled men (Achebe, 1958:41). It is through this method that the initiates who are also the custodians of the sacred canopies of the community "pursue practices and ideals embedded within a tradition that has historically accorded women a subordinate status'' (Mahmood, 2005:4-5), and confers "male religious authority" which upholds patriarchy in Igbo cosmology (Mahmood, 2001:217). African feminist scholar, Amina Mama (1995:12) laments 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).

No wonder Guenther (1975:164) asserts that such "great dancers are widely idolized – especially by boys and youths adults – their song, their idiosyncrasies of dancing and their exploits are talked about widely", and in that form they are "searching for spiritual ideal" (Warren, 2006:106), and "personal identity" (Alford, 1988:51). Guenther (1975:164) argues that "to a large extent the wealth, prestige and glamour of the dancers stem directly from the dance and its inherent affective, integrative and moral power''. Nkosinathi (2010:128) writing in the context of Shembe's new generation followers, argues that women accused men of using their new sacred dance style that was not taught by Shembe to attract women which is believed that if such sacred dance is performed incorrectly, the sacred dance would send or cause a person to go to hell. Kealiinohomok (1997:69) asserts that such dance "encodes and decodes myth and rituals and at the same time, danced rituals are always being invented, retrofitted, or re-invented either through revival or syncreticism".

Nonetheless, Nketia (1989:121) argues that the interaction that takes place on the ritual dance of the king during festivals like the *Ovala* festival is not "confined to musical behaviour that seeks to establish a relationship with the unseen or affirm the bonds of a common faith and shared values that bind members to ensure not only effective communication but also the required atmosphere for action and interaction''. According to Andreas Heuser, dancing of sacred music like the *Uvie* sacred sound "requires constant concentration, exact co-ordination and strict timing. It happens in ongoing repetitions of rhythmic and musical units that come close to a practice of meditation. The repetitive cycle, so to speak, harmonises all movements in the same control of action. The music has spiritual connotation and it is a way of interaction with the divine sphere" (2008:40). Sager (1993:106) argues that "the repetitions do not change anything, they only make it better''. Until recently during the *Ovala* festival, *Uvie* ritual sacred dance like every other sacred dance according to Benjamin Ray is the main religious festival/ceremony of

the Aguleri community "which they perform'' (2000:28). Sundermeier (1991:50) argues that sound emanating from such sacred drum like the *Uvie* "encode…memory with ritual aesthetics, and crystallize historical knowledge in religious performance''. Davis (2012:166) affirms that the sacred drum dance performed there is traditionally a "dance of respect''. The king's appearance on three different occasions respectively through the mediating sound of the *Okanga* royal music and alondsid of the *Uvie* sacred music, in the kings square [*Amaeze*], "to dance savagely in the courtyard of the impertinent'' (Gleason, 1980:165) and entertain his subjects during the *Ovala* festival marches Kuper's unforgettable, wonderful and well-illustrated description:

In this powerful costume, the king appears reluctant to the nation. He executes a crazy, elusive dance with knees flexed and swaying body. The movements are an intuitive response to the rhythm and situation, a dance that no ordinary man knows and that the king was never taught. The old teachers who trained him in all his duties explained: 'We do not know it, we are not kings, it will come to you at the time'. Suddenly he crouches low and disappears into his hole, and the tinsila follow close behind picking up any bits that drop off the sacred costume, lest they be used by enemies to ruin the nation. The princes spring forward crying: 'Come out, king of kings'. They draw back, pause, sway forward. At last he responds. At his approach they return, enticing him to follow, but after a few steps he turns back and they close behind him again. Everyone is urged to dance. The tindvuna {royal assistants draw from the commoner clans} bring down their batons and shout: 'Beat your shields'.The people dance with vigour, here more than at any other stage they keep their king alive and healthy by their own movements. The mime goes on with increasing tension, each appearance of the king making a sudden startling and unforgettable impact. His eyes shine through the feather as he tosses his head, his face is dark with black medicine, dripping down his legs and arms are black streaks-he is terrifying, and as the knife-edged grass cuts into his skin, he tosses his body furiously in pain and rage (Kuper,1947a:217-218).

CONCLUSION

In ritual festival like the *Ovala* in Aguleri cosmology, music and dance occupy important position in worship in Igbo Religion. Without these the efficacy of the people's worship are reduced to nothing. The significance of music and dance in the ritual festival cannot be underestimated in the worship among the Aguleri people. Through the mediation of music and dance the devotees always believe that their worship is acceptable and their prayers answered. Music and dance also boost people's health and give them the opportunity to serve the Supreme Being better. A lot of mysteries are revealed through music, which encourages the devotees to hold on to the divinities. When the musical instruments are played and danced to, it brings spiritual inspiration and relief to man. The origin of music and dance is a mystery, but their importance cannot be over emphasized in Religious circle. People specialized on them and earned their daily bread. Music and dance cannot be replaced by anything in the world. A world without music and dance will face trouble. This is because of the important position they occupied in worship. Man was made to worship the Supreme Being and the worship is not complete without music and dance.

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 dance of the *Okanga*royal drum dance. It is undeniable that African Traditional Religion reached its pinnacle in this aspect through the mediation of its ritual dance which ecumenism has not collapsed its formidable wall 'Jericho wise'. This becomes a significant success in the maze of cultural ecology in Igbo Traditional where Christendom possesses a great treat for its survival.

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