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THE PARAPHERNALIA AND SYMBOLISM OF UVIE DRUM AS AN IDIOPHONE OF TRADITIONAL RELIGIOUS COMMUNICATION AMONG THE IGBO OF EASTERN NIGERIA: THE AGULERI EXPERIENCE

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ABSTRACT: *The ritual decoration of the Uvie sacred drum is highly impregnated with its ritual symbologies that are imbued with mystical powers and these nurtures the cosmological Aguleri people's belief system. In Aguleri culture and tradition, white chalk (nzu), alligator pepper, fowl feathers, blood and kola-nuts are parts of valuable ritual paraphernalia which acts as a power house for the ritual decoration of the sacred drum of the Uvie drum which imbues it with the mystical powers in order for it to speak ritualistically. This paper examines and equally predicates these ritual items from the Aguleri cosmological paradigm in order to bring out its symbologies and ritual implications through an ethnographic method to demonstrate that ritual is part and parcel of decoration of the Uvie sacred drum for it to speak ritualistically in traditional religion of the Igbo people as a study in musicology.*

KEY WORDS: cosmology, culture, decoration, imbues, rituals, symbolism, sacred.

INTRODUCTION

The Problem of Semantics among the Igbo People

Considering the various royal uses, carving of *Uvie* soon became an art form (Idigo, 2001). Thus Okafor writes that "*Ikolo* [slit drums] come in various sizes and under different folk terminologies. Sometimes the folk terminology is determined by size, at others by usage" (1998: 183). The only difference is that of the size and this different size emits different sounds (Idigo, 2001:120). According to Joy Lo-Bamijoko (1987:23) "there has been always disagreement on the names of the largest and medium slit drum. The Igbos of Anambra State call the largest slit drum *Ikolo* and the medium one *Ufie*. The Igbos of Imo state call their largest slit drum *Uhie* and the medium one *Ikoro*. The only agreement among all the Igbos is that the small slit drum which is called *Ekwe* by all''. Basden (1966:359) in *Niger Ibos*, described the largest slit drums as *Ikolo*, and the same author in one his book: *Among the Ibos of Nigeria* (Basden, 1966:187) again referred to the same drums as *Ekwe*. Lo-Bamijoko (1987:23) argues that to reduce this confusion, slit drums would be described in this study according to their sizes. Genevieve Dournon affirms that "confusion of this nature could be considerably reduced if the generic term referring to an organological definition of the instrument were distinguished from the vernacular term peculiar to a particular country or ethnic group" (1992:286). Nonetheless, to my own analysis, Achebe's reference to *Ekwe* instead of *Ikolo* or *Uvie* is not a mistake but primarily it is a matter of language choice, terminology or

semantics because "the traditional program of semantic analysis provides a set of meanings for the individual lexemes of the language and then provides a set of rules of composition whereby the individual meanings of the lexemes are combined to form the meaning'' (Rumelhart, 1979:81). This is a locally made instrument that is carved out from a log of wood. It is a talking-drum which when beaten with sticks, it invariably gives rise to melodious sounds. It comes in different shapes and sizes and this depends on the description of the town. It is basically made from mahogany trees. In view of this, (Nabofa) opined that:

Talking-drums and horns of different makes are often used in many parts of Africa to transmit cultic verses and messages. Expert drummers and horn blowers, use these sacred communication instruments to disseminate religious messages and beliefs. Those who are knowledgeable in this area can easily decode the meanings from their various sounds and rhythms" (1994:39).

Consequently, some other Igbo speaking communities that does not have the *Ikolo* resorted to put *Ekwe, Ufie* or *Uvie* as a communicative system to occupy the vantage position of the *Ikolo* as an idiophone of Igbo indigenous communication system and on this position. Ayantayo (2010:4) argues that "it is important to note that some of the communication systems are peculiar to specific societies because they are borne out of the people's culture, religious conviction, and experiences. Thus, their interpretation may vary from one society to the other. In any case, they do reveal the ethics of each society''. Mary Nooter (1993:32) argues that considering of sacred and secular aspects, sacred drum like the *Ikolo* as an African art in the context of secret knowledge provides a more nuanced understanding of both the art's function and its form. She asserts that not only would an outsider's view of art differ from an insider's, but interpretations of art by members of a given society would vary according to age, gender, status, and many other factors (Nooter, 1993:32-33). According to Sulaiman Osho (2011:11) "indeed oramedia is culturally based as it is natural with the tradition and customs of the people. It involves their language, dialect, individual occupation or family occupation or communal occupation. So, people of another culture may not necessarily understand the message within a particular oramedia, because it is culturally situated and conditioned''. Although, we should not forget the fact that it is only in Aguleri one can still see the use of both the *Ikolo* and *Uvie* as being used side by side as indigenous communicative systems within which both play complementary roles because they are each a type of locally carved wooden idiophone.. However, it is meant to showcase continuity in its use, symbol and official recognition in the place of its origin (Nnamah, 2002:8). The *Ikolo* or the *Uvie* as an instrument of indigenous religious sacred sound is used only in Igbo land to summon special meetings, proclaim arrival and departure of important visitors to the palace, arrival of traditional rulers to public functions, announce serious acts of sacrilege and disasters, alert the community against invasion and in war, advertise the presence of war chiefs and sacred or ritualized festivals respectively (Nwuneli, 1983). *Ekwe, Uvie, Ufie, Uhie*, *Ikoro* or *Ikolo* is the same instrument but only the sizes and the shapes differ and they play the same functions in what Idigo (2001:44) refers to as "Igbo autochthony'' because "these facts are of great significance as they help us to put history and tradition in proper perspective'' (Nnamah, 2002:7). Idigo (2001:46) argues that neither Aguleri people nor any group of people in Igbo land can convincingly claim this autochthony.

Origin of the *Ikolo* That Eventually Metamorphosed *Into Uvie*

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

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

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

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

Symbolically, the sticks are believed to be imbued with ancestral powers and the *Ikolo* drum is fed in order to keep the spirits pleased (Obi, 2008:143). *Ikolo* comes in different shapes and sizes based on the prescription of the town (Okafor, 1998:183). A typical *Ikolo* described by Michael Nabofa (1994) suggest that such talking-drums of different makes are regularly used in many part of Africa to transmit cultic verses and messages. He goes on to argue that "expert drummers use these sacred communication instruments, to disseminate religious messages and beliefs. Those who are knowledgeable in this area can easily decode meanings from their various sounds and rhythms" (1994:39).

To master how to use the *Ikolo* in indigenous society like Aguleri, "one needs to understudy experts in beating the talking drum'' (Nti, 1990:115). It is on this ground that Onwuejeogwu (1981:91) asserts that "the musicians are all members of the Eze's minimal lineage". The *Ikolo* drummers like the *Jenbe* players of Bamako are specialists who use their acumen, expertise and knowledge handed over to them from tradition, personal competence, privately owned instruments, and even their own labour and potential creativity in individual performances (Polak, 2006:161). They play only when engaged for a specific occasion like in ritual festivals, and earn their livelihood in this way which Caleb Dube (1996:99) describes as 'cultural work'. He argues that such cultural workers like indigenous talking drummers would be classified as "professionals and non-professionals, commercial and non-commercial, rural and traditional, urban and modern individuals whose occupation or part of their occupation involves culture who make their living from music-making" (Dube, 1996:99–100). Veronica Doubleday (2006:120) argues that "those who make or use the drum professionally give it value''. Nonetheless, according to Edith Wyschogrod this is not measured from "its monetary worth but the value is to be construed as aesthetic, cognitive, religion or moral" (1998:365).

The playing of the *Ikolo* like the artistic in ritual dramatic performance shapes the connection between the musician and his audience (Ayu, 1986). But through the mediation of its symbolic sound for the initiates, "it means the ability to translate the rhythm of the drums smoothly and faultlessly into the appropriate dance-steps" (Horton, 1963:98). Iyorchia Ayu argues that in this context "the public is not just a passive consumer; a mere audience with no influence on the direction and development of the art. The public is a conscious and participatory audience or consumer enriching products" (1986:22). The number of times, a talking drum like the *Ikolo* is beaten or the intensity of the beating can be varied to convey different symbolic messages and meanings whether in religious or secular such as meetings, funerals or announcing a death, warnings of intruder's presence or emergencies (Nti, 1990:115). Blench (2009:7) asserts that "it is used for signaling major events to the population and still relevant in an area without electricity or mobile phone coverage". No wonder Robert Rattray notes that "one never ceases to hear wonderful accounts of how this or that item of news has been conveyed over immense tracts of this continent by means of drums" (1923:302).

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

The style and repertoire of the *Ikolo* drumming in any other place is quite different from rural *Ikolo* traditions of Aguleri because "each sound is imbued with its own lexical code: sound as sign, symbol, index, as ostensibly defining a personal territory" Arkette (2004:160). In fact, the Aguleri repertoire and style of the *Ikolo* celebration music actually represents a tradition of its own because it operates as "a prayer, a recognition, a mark of solidarity and a symbol of unity amongst our people'' (Ojukwu, 2002:v). Judith Ballard (2006:1) affirms that "oneness, community, unity, and harmony are the very heartbeat of every sacred drum and drummer". Sounding of the *Ikolo* sacred drum actually demonstrates and dramatizes the totality of Aguleri tradition and hegemony in Igbo land which marks Aguleri identity. Emeka Ojukwu (2002) writing on Igbo traditional ceremonies suggests that the sounding of the sacred drum is intimately tied to the life of the community, and goes on to assert that it "symbolizes our comings in, and our goings out, our joy and our sadness. It symbolizes our positions in the society and our achievements and our failures" (2002: v). He argues that it "remains as a door through which our individual Igboness passes in to an assemblage of Igbo community" (Ojukwu, 2002:v). The Aguleri repertoire and style of the *Ikolo* celebration music represents a tradition of its own – a unique "musical epistemology" Ayu (1986:9). He argues that it is out of this genre of popular music that a critical artifact was erected (Ayu, 1986:9). Let us start with Richard Okafor's well illustrated description of the origins of the artifact:

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

Buttressing this, James Eze (2015:1) asserts that "beyond these totems and profound meanings lies another oasis of symbolisms and unspoken communication". Ballard noted that "the great *Ikolo* was fashioned in olden days from a giant Iroko tree at the very spot where it was felled. Since those days it had lain in the same spot in the sun and in the rain. Its body was carved with men and pythons and little steps were cut on one side; without these the drummer could not climb to the top to beat it" (2006:1). Carole DeVale reminds her readers that sacred musical instruments like the *Ikolo* "are commonly anthromorphised and zoomorphised. This can be observed at many levels from the carving, sculpting or decoration of instruments with human or animal forms to the naming of their parts" (1989:100). Similarly, Roger Clarke asserted that "the hewing of a drum is considered an art, or even a closed profession. One who has not learned from his family will not attempt such a project" (1934:35). As such Margaret Drewal argues that "despite great variation in form and medium and despite multiple shades of meanings, these projections share a basic principles of Igbo religious thought" (1977:43). She goes on to explain that in Igbo view "all organic matters as possessing a vital force [that] can be manipulated to regulate the quality of man's life" (Drewal, 1977:43). Nonetheless, *Ikolo* as a sacred instrument and a talking drum is found worthy because is actually based in Aguleri which houses Eri-Aka, the seat of origin of *Ikolo* (Idigo, 2001:123).

Metamorphoses of the *Ikolo* to *Uvie* drum

The status of the *Ikolo* as a sacred drum is linked to the fact that Eri-Aka was the first settlement of the Igbo – that is Eri the father of the Igbo people in diaspora in Anambra river basin (Xrydz-Eyutchae, 1986:18). According to Wyatt MacGaffey (2000:246) the activation of musical instruments like the *Ikolo* "were often exquisitely carved and converted into large drums works of art". To become a sacred and symbolic object, an ordinary *Ikolo* drum must first be consecrated ritualistically by the most senior sacred spiritualist in Aguleri by carefully following what Luc De Heusch (1994) refers to as a "cosmological code'', in order to imbue it with "godlike attributes'' (Ohadike, 2007:2). Finally, the sacredness of such artifact, according to Durham, "lay in the fact that it conferred sacredness on whatever is marked with it'' (2001:2). Behague (2006:94) argues that this force does not appear spontaneously; it must be transmitted and all objects, all beings or consecrated places can only become sacred through the acquisition of such supernatural power. Behague (2006:98) further suggests that a concrete example of consecration of such sacred drum like the *Ikolo* would be the use of water in what he described as "baptism" of the drum. In order to be purified with water, in that situation, "the priest or priestess takes holy water, obtained from..., and speaking entirely in the African tongue employed by the group in its rituals, blesses the drums while sprinkling them with sacred liquid" (Herskovits, 1966:189). Behague (2006:98) argues that in doing this, the drum becomes, therefore, the main vehicle of communication with the god and the baptismal ritual is placed under the sign of that god. No wonder, Michael Zogry (2011:20) reaffirms that this kind of ancient ritual is "a ceremonial landscape imbued with sacred significance". Through these kinds of special rituals, the *Ikolo* ceases to be called *Ikolo* but *Uvie* drum.

Ritual Activation of the *Uvie* Sacred Drum

Although, in Aguleri cosmology, it is during the ritualization and activation of the *Uvie,* according to Mark Clatterbuck (2012), that its authority is acquired through the mediation of "transfer of spiritual medicine". Alongside with the ritual breaking of Kola-nuts [*Cola Acuminata* or *Cola Nitida*] and some alligator pepper [*Aframamum*], Nichols summarizes the ritual as such: a "chicken is sacrificed and its blood and feathers are daubed on the instrument and it is fed with the fresh blood of animals with the belief that this will maintain its sonority" (Nicholls, 1988:199). Symbolically, the sticks are believed to be imbued with ancestral powers and the *Uvie* drum is fed in order to keep the spirits pleased (Obi, 2008:143). Equally significant is the fact that feathers are applied on the *Uvie* with the firm belief that they act as protective mechanism in rendering it powerful. This is done in order that the *Uvie* can "speak in deep-tongues, and the messages it convey may be shrouded in secrecy and only those that have been initiated into the ancestral cults can comprehend them" (Ohadike, 2007:3). Nabofa (1994:37) affirms that these kinds of rituals are rigidly and 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).

According to Ohadike (2007:2) it is important to explain that sacred drums like the *Uvie* are at the heart of most African music, dance and religious worship. He argues that such sacred drums like the *Uvie* are charged with supernatural forces that make the drums to speak the language of the deities (Ohadike, 2007:2). *Uvie* sacred sound cannot be simply a thing or object plucked from its environment, but rather, sacred sound that is "created in a constellation of action that is multiple in nature'' (Stone, 1994:391).

Jonathan Friedmann (2009:9) argues that sacred sound then operates primarily on the level of analogy and that some musical moods are similar to those aroused by the encounter with the holy, and can, by association, inspire within the listener a sacred experience. According to Behague (2006:99) "the ritual takes place shortly after a new set of drums has been constructed. There is no basic difference between this first ceremony and the subsequent annual feeding of the drums, with the exception of the painting and occasional naming''. This explains the reason why not only the sound object must be prepared or consecrated but also the persons who play or manipulate it (Behague, 2006:95). In this wise, "it serves as a manual of pomp, which codified past practice, specified exact performance, and sought to promote ceremonial aggrandizement" (Cannadine, 1987:9). However, once the sacred drum like the *Uvie* has been hollowed and consecrated, "it is then rendered exclusive in a number of significant ways: [1] protected and set apart, [2] endowed with sacred symbolism, and [3] physically modified'' (Doubleday, 2006:124). It is from these forms that sacred drum like the *Uvie* attains its sacredness in the behavior and characteristics it elicits or imposes upon the people around it (MacGaffey, 2000:245). Such behavior and characteristics range from:

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

According to DeVale, there are only a few reported cases where by musical instrument like the *Uvie* is thought to have "malevolent spirits'' (1989:97). She argues that "there are cases in which a normally beneficent spirit becomes temporarily malicious, primarily as the consequence of the omission of a prescribed ritual in its honour. This may be a reason why few cases have been reported: such rituals are rarely omitted because of dire consequences'' (DeVale, 1989:97). Musical instrument like the *Uvie* according to Behague (2006:95), "perhaps more than the sound instrument, the ritual song texts possess the dynamic power of sound, since it transmit and convey a power of action and mobilize the ritual activity''. The *Uvie* sacred sound is widely used in rituals and ceremonies, "and may be said to possess supernatural powers'' (Doubleday, 2006:111). DeVale (1989:94) posits that power meanings are invested in sacred musical instruments like the *Ikolo* throughout the world, "it is ascribed to musical instrument essential to the efficacy of rituals of all kinds, from those ensuring fertility to those of royal courts. Thus, meaning in musical instruments often lies along a physical-metaphysical continuum from the earthly to the divine''. According to Adegbite (1988:19) when the drum makers like the *Uvie* drum perform rituals to the spirits of the materials from which the drum is made, they are merely repeating a primordial gesture. Adegbite (1988:18-19) again posits that "each of these steps of drum making requires certain

rituals which must be performed so that the spirits in the materials from which the drum is made may be placated and that the drum may function well; otherwise the drum will not speak well''.
The *Uvie* sacred drum is permanently kept in the king's palace, but in other Igbo speaking communities, it could be kept in the market places, in the shrines, or village squares and only be brought out during sacred and ritualized festivals/ceremonies for special functions because of its size (Nwuneli, 1983:6). For Adebgite (1988) talking drums like the *Uvie* - as a royal drum ensemble and an epitome of Igbo aristocracy - is primarily found in the palaces of Igbo traditional rulers which are played on important occasions that involve the rulers and their subjects. In reaffirmation these assertions, Conn affirms that such royal drums "took on a number of royal functions'', while "becoming the classifiers and interpreters of objects and the purveyors of legitimate knowledge'' (1998:24). Des Wilson (1998:30) asserts that such royal "wooden drums perform four functions — installation of kings and royal celebrations, announcement of the passing away of kings, alerting citizens of grave danger, and ushering in various masquerades".

Religious Symbolism in the Paraphernalia and the Ritual Authority of the *Uvie* among the Igbo Using Aguleri as a Case study

According to Nabofa (1980:389) "symbolism has found spontaneous expression and impression in several religions and secular practices among different peoples of Africa. These expressions can be seen in religious emblems, ideograms, rituals, songs, prayers, myths, incantations, vows, customary behaviours and personifications. The understanding of these religious symbols lends itself to rapid comprehensive and compact use; not only that, it also helps understanding and concentration''. As every fabric of culture is heavily charged and saturated with symbolism, as in all personal behaviour, adherents of African religion conceive symbols as tools used to communicate abstract ideas, values and inner experiences which would be difficult or even impossible to express directly (Nabofa, 1994:77). Samovar et al (2009:16) argues that "in human communication, a symbol is an expression that stands for or represents something else''. This postulation must have informed Omijeh (1983:195) to assert that the meaning of symbols, therefore, transcends the physical intrinsic property of the object, and can only be understood in terms of the meanings which the people of that culture invest in them. Leeming (1990:93) affirms that "there existence provides us with a sense of significance in an otherwise random universe".

It is on this position that Tillich (1959:65) argues that any object or event is sacramental in which the transcendent is perceived to be present. Nonetheless, in accordance with the customs and tradition of the Aguleri people as a case study representing the Igbo tribe in the decoration of the *Uvie* drum during *Ovala* ritual festival, there are certain features or looks the *Uvie* drum as a sacred instrument should wear to bring out those aesthetics and ritualistic beauties that are filled with symbolic meanings through what Nabofa (1994:11) describes as ritual "deification and mystical impregnation'', through which "aesthetic contemplation is achieved" (Brenkman, 1987:226). It is on this position that DeVale (1989:101) argues that the symbolism of sacred drum like the *Uvie* as a sacred instrument would be explored, and its meaning postulated along a physical-metaphysical continuum. It is then that the decorative geometrical patterns of sacred drum like the *Uvie* would have a more profound cosmological significance and symbolism than an anthropomorphic component of the same sculpture (MacGaffey, 2000:233). According to Nabofa:

Like many other pre-literate people, most adherents of African Religion have no written systematic theology nor any written organized body of doctrine through which their religious beliefs and practices can be meaningfully studied. What is most intelligent in African belief and thoughtforms cannot be fully extracted from the rituals alone but also from icons and other forms of symbols.The cultic rituals and practices in the religion are symbolic, hence their meanings must remain obscure to the student who confines his interest to the rites themselves. A thorough understanding of African Traditional Religion rests in everyday situation in which the same sets of symbols are used (1994:21).

The *Uvie* drum like every other work of art commands an entire vocabulary, centred on the specification of the aesthetic: a work of art is designed for, and/ or has aesthetic properties and effects (Williams, 1981:122). Buttressing this further, De Maret (1994:183; 184) asserts that archaeologists prefer any other explanation of sacred instruments or artistic work like the *Uvie* sacred drum as *''dues ex machine*" – "it must be symbolic'' or "it must be for ritualistic or symbolic purpose and adornment is regarded as a symbol of ethnic membership''. Nonetheless, Horton (1963:112) argues that sacred drum like the *Uvie* "belies the easy and often-heard generalization that in traditional West African culture there was no such thing as Art for Art's sake''. He posits that "its performance is intimately associated with religious activity and belief, here it is the religion that serves the art, rather than vice versa. It is possible that some studies of West African culture have not found art practiced for its own sake, simply because they have not looked for it in the right direction'' (Horton, 1963:112).

Nonetheless, in Aguleri custom and tradition, the *Uvie* decorative sequence can be described as a simple pattern that appears purely decorative which conveys a basic cosmological idea that is also the key to a profound philosophy called "the rising of the moon,'' it consists of a row of isosceles triangles arranged in such a way that their bases form two parallel lines (MacGaffey, 2000:233-234), which serves as an instrument for securing the presence of a spirit, and not something produced as a work of art (Horton, 1963:112). During celebration like the *Ovala* festival, indigenous decoration is also part of the *Uvie* drum "making process as a sacred drum'' (Adegbite, 1988:18), although, such features has their symbolisms as the case may be (Ekeke, 2012:8). The *Uvie* as an indigenous material object symbolically mediate the relationship between spirituality and material culture, particularly those material objects use during such festivals like the *Ovala* festival (Hazzard-Donald, 2011:204). These features/items include: colours, feathers, natural white chalk (*nzu*), blood, alligator pepper and so on which "designates the invisible, magic-sacred force of all deity, of all animate objects, of all things'' (Maupoil, 1943:334). These items, more than any other, has a close mediating relationship with ritual activity like the *Uvie* sacred drum (Hazzard-Donald, 2011:204) and "when such elements are fused, the result may well be something altogether new'' (Turner, 1968:21).

According to Dike (1984:70) "these objects are royal because they belong to the King, but the King is royal because he has these objects''. He argues that "if we consider the way objects are activated in ceremonies, it is possible to separate their aesthetic, political, and ritual power in theory, but it is impossible to do so in any specific concrete situation. African royal art, when seen in its ceremonial context, does not disdain aesthetic appeal, but its aesthetic is always motivated

because they are basically intended to mystify, to horrify, to startle, to create aura and awe'' (Dike, 1984:70-71). It is on this position that Nketia, (1962:2) argues that the research studies of semantics of African aesthetic judgment and appeal may proudly hold that for African, the beautiful, the terrifying and amazing are far enough closer than they are for European observers. Harnandez (2004:1479) asserts that "it is important to note that some of these elements can be reduced to either a spiritual or mundane dimension''. Fozi (2007:180) argues that these material elements use in decorating sacred drum like the *Uvie* "are significant for enhancing its sacred quality, maintaining a sense of traditional continuity, producing the desired sound and consequently creating a superior instrument''. On the theme religious and theological meanings of the *Uvie* as it regards to the socio-sacral validation and symbolism of the items used in decorating the *Uvie*, participant 01 affirms that:

...they can induce the *Uvie* to speak ritualistically. These items aid the spirits that guard the *Uvie* in order to enhance its power for the spirit possession to mount on the initiates when they are partaking in the ritual dance. ... it is believed that the white chalk [*nzu*] and the blood are the food or delicacies for the ancestors and the deities. ...the feathers symbolizes the clothes for the gods, this shows that when one have a critical look over all the shrines in Igbo land and the generality of African continent, one will discover that such shrines are decorated with feathers in other to venerate them.

Participant 012 maintains that:

...it increases its potency to enable it speak. ...once such items are applied ritualistically, it is believed that the spirits have been fed because such items are believed to be the delicacies of the gods and ancestors in traditional Igbo religion. ...the native white chalk [*nzu*] and blood symbolizes the food of the gods and ancestors, and when they are applied, it is assumed that the ancestors have been fed too, the feathers symbolizes the clothes of the gods and ancestors.

Participant 013 argues that:

...when applied simultaneously and ritualistically it aid the *Uvie* to be able to speak, and without the application of such things, it is believed that it would not speak mystically. The native white chalk [*nzu*] symbolizes the food of the gods and the ancestors; the blood represents part of their delicacies also, while the feathers are the representation of the clothes for our deities and our ancestors. ...it is believed that it imbues the *Uvie* with the spiritual potency to be able to speak and it is equally believed that the spirits that protects and guides the *Uvie* would be very happy when such items are applied.

Again, Participant 015 affirms that:
Those things are what makes and mark out the *Uvie* as a sacred object. At times, it is decorated with white and red clothes. After all, human beings wear clothes. These are regarded as the delicacies of the gods and ancestors. When you go to the shrines where the '*Ofo*' [the symbol of authority] in Igbo land is kept, you would see those things. It is still believed and assumed that

such places are regarded as Holy places and that our ancestors are still living irrespective of the fact they are no more.

Participant 011 posits that:
Blood and Native white chalk [*nzu*] signify the sacredness of the *Uvie* and that it is the food giving to the instrument for the deities. Feathers represent the clothes that the deities and the ancestors wear. Those elements are equally used to decorate the shrines of the deities and shrines across Igbo land. ...it is the night of the eve of the *Ovala* that ...such items are made use of.

Participant 05 affirms that:
All these symbolize the sacredness the *Uvie*. ...such special food such as white chalk [*nzu*], feathers, and blood of animals like fowls are used in performing sacrifices especially during the eve of the *Ovala – Ula Ovala*. This is reason why every African shrines are decorated with such things.

All these play significant roles in commemorating *Ovala* festival along side with *Uvie* as an instrument of religious sacred sound, this is because, "in all things they are religious'' (Idowu, 1962:5). According to Mbiti, for the purposes of ritual he [man] uses almost everything at his disposal, including symbols and colours, incantations, oral formulas – especially invocations and prayers – and the help of mystical powers if necessary (1975:126-127). In fact, each of the component elements of these items or materials symbolizes some attributes, qualities and capabilities of the divine essence that is encoded, enshrined and domesticated in it (Nabofa, 1994:56). More so, all these are referred to as an "objectified'' (NOUN, 2009:55) or "symbolography'' (Ibagere, 1994:88) elements in religious practices/communication. Gilbert (1987:307) argues that such items are 'valuable ritual paraphernalia' of sacred drum like the *Uvie* which are "the visible loci of its power, spiritual energy and source of its authority that would make it speak'' because the ritual "drum language has not entirely disappeared'' (Nicholls, 1988:199). By this, I mean a method of communication whereby part of an object is used to convey sacred and symbolic messages and in this context, I am going to explain some of these items used in decorating the *Uvie* sacred drum during such sacred and ritualized festival like the *Ovala*.

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

Figure 1: Chief, Lord Palmer George Akwali Madukasi (Ezekwesili Aguleri) dancing the Uvie ritual dance during an Ovala festival (Courtesy of Madukasi Francis Chuks).

This is why Onimhawo & Adamu (2011:37) affirms that after divination the white native chalk is given to the client signifying that the venture would be successful. Nabofa (1994:56) argues that "when people travel to their places of origin for festivals, especially the traditional ones, such as the new yam festivals and those held in honour of some divinities, some of them return to their places of work with some sacred materials obtained from the priests in-charge of the community shrines. White chalk is one of such sacred things given them to carry to their places of sojourn''. It is has been observed that such sacred items serves as a "psychological devices for communicating and personalizing religious ideas'' (Nabofa, 1994:46) and the idea is that the carrier of such items believed that "he has been insulated against all possible unwholesome external influences'' (Nabofa, 1994:51).

According to Nabofa (1994:57) again "there is a relationship between the white chalk and the divinity from whose shrine it was obtained and they are so inter-related that sometimes the chalk itself is regarded as the divinity itself or the food of the ancestors, with the result that certain taboos observed in the presence and honour of the divinity are equally seen or noticed while trying to use it''. Buttressing this further, Nabofa (1994:57) again affirms that "it is often narrated that those devotees, especially mediums who are divinely mounted can live on the chalk alone for several days without eating any other food and that they will not feel hungry. Such is believed to be possible because the divine power that has infused the white chalk has transformed it from ordinary white chalk to a divine and a very nutritious food''. The meaning of the native white chalk smeared on the body of the sacred instrument like the *Uvie* symbolizes that "the divinity is summoned to attend and be a witness to the worship, festival, celebration and also, with it prayers are directed to the deities and ancestors'' (Nabofa, 1994:57). Emeka (1998:390) asserts that the "*nzu* is also a symbol of mystical power and so of the *dibie* – the healer, mystics and diviners of the Igbo society''. In this position, Emeka (1998:390) again argues that "a *dibie* paints the region of his eyes with *nzu* to symbolize his ability to see beyond the visible''. Uwah (2010:89) affirms that "the spirit world

is seen as part of the human world and the mediators between these worlds are culturally called the chief priests [*Dibia]* in Igbo language] and [*Babalawo* in Yoruba]".

(b). Alligator Pepper: In traditional Igbo community, "diviners combine the alligator pepper with bitter kola when they are performing some delicate rituals and the idea is that these items facilitate the potency and efficacy of prayers and curses during some ritualized activities (Nabofa, 1994:61). He affirms that the combined powers of fiat inherent in these symbolic items are believed to act as propellers or catalysts to the priest's supplication (Nabofa, 1994:62). Nabofa (1994:61) again argues that "it tastes hot and peppers when chewed and it lubricates the mouth and at the same time it arouses the psyche and elates one's mind, though momentarily. The belief is that most of the pronouncements one makes at that short period of altered state of consciousness will come to pass. Hence, most of the priests love to use it while officiating at the shrine".

(c). Fowl Feathers: Feathers features prominently in the decoration of *Uvie* during the *Ovala* festival in Aguleri which Nabofa (1994:65) sees as an "instruments of protection''. The use of fowls feathers and other domesticated animals as sacrificial victims is a very common practice in African traditional religion, no wonder Awolalu (1979:166) affirms that "people use fowls very regularly as victims of sacrifice not only because they are easily available but also because certain parts of these creatures have distinct meanings for those who offer them. For example, the chest-feathers of a hen are believed to give protection when ceremonially used". Also, the eagle feathers that are used in decorating the crown of the king during the *Ovala* festival have some symbolism attached to it and in a simple term, it symbolizes "royalty and dignity'' (Nabofa, 1994:62) in Aguleri culture and tradition respectively. According to Drewal (1977:47) "these feathers are said to be symbols of extraordinary power and in another form, the feathers are actually plucked from the first bird sacrifices made for the priests upon acquiring their positions as mediums''. Thompson (1970:10) argues that to avoid exposing efficacious medicines, the very sight of which can be dangerous there is a prohibition against looking inside the hat, not unlike that preventing the king from gazing inside his beaded crown.
(d). Blood: According to Nabofa:

It is a common belief among the adherents of African traditional religion that there is a mysterious power in every blood because of its close connection with the vital force which permeates all things, both animate and inanimate. This belief gave vent to the idea that when blood is misused, it could be dangerous, and at the same time efficacious when it is properly and reverently handled. The perils of blood are clearly demonstrated in the precautions taken by many groups of Africans when innocent blood is believed to have been shed, …In their thinking, when blood is shed a mysterious spiritual power is let loose, capable of destabilizing the murderer and the society to which he belongs. In order to guard against such danger the actual shedding of blood, in any form, within the Kinship group is taboo. The strong belief that the sanctity of every human life is found in his blood is one of the major reasons why most African societies do not take kindly to the legalization of abortion at whatever stage (1980:390-391).

Buttressing this further, Behague (2006:99) affirms that the ritual use of blood is clearly an African trait in this context. He argues that as the most manifest symbol of life, blood, especially running

blood, is necessary in the most liturgically significant Afro-Bahian rituals (Behague, 2006:99). In sacred and ritualistic activities like *Ovala* festival in Aguleri, the *Uvie* sacred drum is smeared with the blood of a fowl and this ritual has symbolic meanings because it should noted that the above animal is used for burial rites do to the fact that its natural characteristics is associated with the spiritual content of the blood (Nabofa, 1980:397). The idea is that blood with some feathers from the chest of a fowl are applied to the object of worship, the worshipper then prays that his own hardship or fault should not be so grievous as to be known to all men (Awolalu, 1979:166). Also, as the psalmist points out, he is thus praying, "blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered'' (Psalm, 32:1). In *Ogboni* cult of the Yoruba people in Nigeria, their sacred drums are rubbed with blood of sacrifices; only initiated members might see their carved decoration (Ojo,1972:51), while in Aguleri tradition non-initiates/outsiders are frightened by it, but "it reinforces the collective solidarity of the initiates, who engage in various forms of law enforcement'' (MacGaffey, 2000:246).

Insofar as in the practice of indigenous religion, symbolic art objects and processes are basically utilized in expressing religious practices be it beliefs and ideas, nonetheless the ritual art intend to suggest the reality and character of spirits is not universally distributed in the sub-Saharan African (MacGaffey, 2000:246). MacGaffey (2000:246) again argues that these beliefs, and ideas including the cosmological pre-supposed in them, are very different from those we have been considering, and their spirit entities are not generally represented or addressed in sculptural or masquerade form. However, it is on this notion that Nwoko (1961:16) writes that "it is the natural human urge to give the best to the gods [sic]. Hence worked objects in varying forms are used on public shrines, family and personal shrines and in cults and secret societies where masks are effectively use too''. There is no-gain saying that today an average African man is to some extent a highly deculturalized person wallowing in a no-man's land and imbibing cultural values that are not African (Sofola, 1973:11).

Negative Mentality towards African Traditional Religion

Frankly speaking, this development is brought about by several factors such as colonization, introduction of foreign religions which are Christianity and Islam, social change, political ideology, urbanization and so on (Lyold, 1975:65-66). All these make Africans to look upon themselves, their culture and religion with what has been termed as "grasshopper mentality'' (Idowu, 1973:80). This is why Jahoda (1961:115) asserts that the Western educated African "now come to look at Africans and African culture to some extent through the eyes of those European educators who determined the manner and content of the teaching he received''.

Invariably, what this means is that because some of these traditional religious practices and communication systems were totally condemned by Westerners and looked upon with disdainful eyes and "hence make the European colonizers a benevolent ruler who graciously filled a void and brought Africa into light and history (Ekeh, 1975:98). However, due to this negative impression or attitude, Africans became discouraged in putting such traditional religious practices and communication systems into use (Ikenga-Metuh, 2002:239). In fact, this non-chalant attitude and total condemnation arose from Western believe that Africans could have no idea of God and a well-developed religion and this made the Europeans to use some derogatory terms in describing

the high-rich religion of the Africans (Adelowo, 1990:162). Baudin (1885:9ff) cited in Idowu (1973:144) writes that:

The idea they [Africans] have of God is most unworthy of His Divine majesty. They represent that God, after having commenced the organization of the world, charged *Obatala* with the completion and government of it, retired and entered into an eternal rest, occupying himself only with His own happiness; too great to interest Himself in the affairs of His world. He remains like a Negro King, in a sleep of idleness.

Another foreign observer of African traditional religion Diedrich Westermann (1937:65ff) affirms that "the high-god is, as a rule not the object of a religious cult and is of small or almost no significant in practical religion. People acknowledge him but neither fear nor love nor serve him''. More so, Baker [the explorer], believed that the Northern Nilotes of Sudan had no religion at all by asserting that "without any exception, they are without a belief in a Supreme Being neither have they any form of worship or idolatry, nor is the darkness of their minds enlightened by even a ray of superstition'' (Baker, 1891:423-424). However, it is no wonder, then that when Christianity came to Africa, the missionaries banned the use of African drum, and African dresses by a few convertees in their churches (Ayandele, 1996:29). Ekwueme (1974:13) recounts that "early missionaries tagged all indigenous forms of arts as the work of the devil, especially as almost invariably those associated with some religious or quasi-religious ceremonies…The amount of damage done materially and psychologically to the culture of the Igbo ethnic group may probably ever be fully assessed". According to Adelowo:

It is to be noted that a good number of such scholars had over the years, taken appearance for reality, symbol for the symbolized, means for the end with regard to the religious situation in Africa. Reasons for this step are not far-fetched. A lot of them were staying behind the garden and at the same time trying to pontificate on the items in the garden. Some had not even touched the African soil. Rather, they relied on the reports of traders and missionaries in dishing out information on the religious situation in Africa (1990:162).

Buttressing this further, Nabofa (1994:5) argues that "it was the non-understanding of traditional African religious symbols and ideas that partly contributed to the way in which some of the early Western and Arab scholars investigating African thought forms, looked at the African indigenous belief in a derogatory manner". Clarke (1991:63) argues that "moreover, while the use of the label traditional can be somewhat misleading, it is perhaps less so than primitive which has been applied to these religions, not only in the sense of early or primeval, but also in the sense of 'lower' or less 'rational' than the religions of what have often been described as the more 'civilized', 'advanced' societies. He affirms that "this view of traditional religions was based on empirical data but on a theory of social and intellectual development or evolution current in the nineteenth century (Clarke, 1991:63). Invariably, little attention or emphasis rather is placed on African symbols, which serve as a channel or medium of communication in indigenous society (Nabofa, 1994:1), and this actually brings us to the discourse of the *Uvie* and its symbolism. The media instrument like the *Uvie* sacred drum have various social functions in the area of traditional and religious practices and even it acts as an accompaniment of songs (Nti, 1990:86) with either "exoteric and esoteric"

(Nabofa, 1994:3) languages. The *Uvie* sacred drum have a special social rule reserved for it and they have their symbolisms, also it plays the heralding sound and announcement of a festival like *Ovala* or traditional burial of any of the high chiefs or titled men (Achebe, 1958:84). No wonder Pinkerton (2011:190) idiomatically describes such sacred sound like the *Uvie* as "the sad sound of weeping bugles that announces the death of its founder". Buttressing this further, Nwabughiogu (2013:1) ironically asserts that the Pan-Igbo group known as *Ohaneze Ndi Igbo* at its secretariat in Enugu State, Nigeria used the *Uvie* sacred sound to salute and honour late Professor Chinua Achebe as a mark of last respect for their illustrious son before his burial. The *Uvie* sacred drum shower praises on the Royal family, the king and men of achievements and valours in the community both the living and the dead and the symbolic sounding of *Uvie* shows a mark of royalty, dignity and respect in all its ramifications in Igbo land (Nti, 1990:86).

CONCLUSION

From my analysis of the Aguleri beliefs and experiences of the *Uvie,* I was able to identity two overarching themes; (1) *Uvie* in Aguleri identity and ritual practice, and (2) *Uvie* as symbol for bolstering patriarchy. I found that Aguleri identity is intimately tied to the *Uvie* since it makes possible mediation between the living and the dead, as well as to the broader Igbo community, and upheld by a strict social hierarchy which holds the King (and the *Uvie*) at its epi-centre. Aguleri identity is further sustained through the symbolic decoration of the *Uvie* which serves to further, materially, the enactment and embodiment of unique Aguleri symbolism (cola-nut, blood, chalk and feathers). Finally, my analysis reveals that the *Uvie* also reinforces Aguleri religious identity through spirit invocation and possession activated by the sound and the vibrations of the *Uvie*. The auditory authority of the drum allows for the embodiment of ancestral spirits that connects contemporary Aguleri with the forefathers and traditions.

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

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

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