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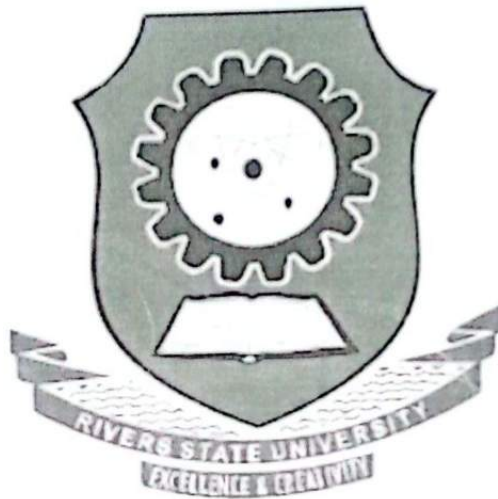
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MUSIC, SACRED PRACTICE, AND SOCIAL MEANING IN THE IGOGO FESTIVAL OF OWO, ONDO STATE, NIGERIA

by

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Abstract

Music as an integral aspect of the African cultural life is associated with social and sacred ceremonies such as festivals, rituals and religious worship. However, the advent of western civilization, modernization and industrialization has eroded several aspects of the African culture and caused many to suffer neglect and in the danger of becoming obsolete and not appreciated by the people within the culture that produced the music especially the youths. Some of these cultural heritages have however survived and adapted despite the pressure of civilization. Documentation, preservation and publicizing the traditional African musical culture and associated festivals is therefore important so that they do not go into extinction. It is on this premise that this study examines music, sacred practice, and social meaning of Igogo Festival of the Owo people in Ondo State, Nigeria.

This study adopts participant observation and descriptive methods to document facts and data on this festival with oral interview tool, and review of related literatures as our secondary source. The study adopts the Cultural Relativism and African Performance theories as a theoretical underpin.

It is observed that Igogo festival is a major festival among other festivals of the Owo people with its innate sacred, social and musical intricacies. Further findings also reveal that the proliferation of other foreign religions has not deconstructed the sacred rites of this festival as the sacred nature of this festival is protected, maintained and held high by the people.

This study concludes that Igogo festival over the years is a communal festival which has been used for socio-economic and cultural promotion among the Owo people and therefore recommends that the high socio-economic potency and cultural intricacies of the festival should place it on a pedestal for national and global tourist attraction.

Key Words: *Music; Sacred practice; Social meaning; Igogo festival*

Introduction

Festivals are communal celebrations, carefully planned by the traditional institution in the community. It is the Obas (kings) and his chiefs that approve traditional festivals, which involves pouring of libations, rejoicing, winning and dinning, general fun fare, and merry making. In some cases, cultural groups, corporate organizations and non-governmental organizations sponsor traditional festivals. The festivals of many ethnic groups are credited with the presentation of unique customs, folktales, costumes and culinary skills. Festivals involve various activities such as pouring of libations, sacrifices, incantations, prayers, rejoicing, established by custom and usually sponsored by the traditional institutions of the community.

It is part of the customs and tradition of the Yorùbá people to celebrate various festivals yearly for merriment, prayers and social interactions. Depending on the central purpose of a festival, the celebration may be solemn or joyful. Okediji (2025, p.15) submits that:

Among the most culturally expressive and populous ethnic groups in Nigeria are the Yoruba, whose worldview is profoundly socio-centric, prioritizing the collective well-being over individual pursuits. This communal ethos finds its most dynamic expression in the annual cycle of socio-religious festivals that honor deities, commemorate ancestors, and celebrate pivotal moments in the community's history.

In Yorùbá speaking South West Nigeria, traditional festivals are observed to serve the need of the various communities to honor their dead heroes. Awolalu and Dopamu, (2005, p.153) states categorically that:

Most festivals are associated with specific divinities, spirits or ancestors and they are, therefore, religious in outlook. Among the Yoruba, for example, each divinity has an annual festival associated with him or her and this is called Odun (festival). Odun also means year and when used in relation to festival it means an "annual festival".

This means that major festivals among the Yoruba come up every season or year. In Owo land, festivals are re-current religious drama, which feature at regular intervals among the people. Festivals are held in memory of the divinities to re-enact important events of the past. Oduyoye, (1983, p. 150) points out that, their significance lies in the fact that they illustrate among other things, historical events, coming of age, harvesting of crops and appeasement to various gods for protection against enemies, evil or epidemic disease. According to Opoku, (1990, p. 71):

Festivals are rituals which recur at regular intervals and which have as their purpose the expression of beliefs held by a particular community. There is also the conscious expectation that certain very specific ends will come about as a result of the performance of the festivals and the performance is motivated by the desires to gain some form of satisfaction and is expected to be effected. Festivals take place at special times set aside by a community in order to commemorate some events of historical, cultural or religious significance and by the performance of certain rituals; such events are re-enacted, giving both individuals and their communities a sense for meaning and cohesiveness.

In Owò land on which this study is focused, there are various festivals which include the *Òrẹ* festival (Ugbade), the *Ilabi* festival (a new cola nut festival), the *Èró* festival (age barrier festival), the *Ògún* festival (the god of smithy and lord of iron) and Igogo festival, a major festival held in Owò in honor of Oronshé, which is the focus of this study. Various dates are fixed for the festivals and there is no clash in the dates. These festivals are of special importance in the collective life of the Owò community. Festivals through its corporate rituals help to create peace and harmony in the society, to prevent war and other social disorder.

As observed by Nirmal, (1976, p. 79): "Feasts and festivals are an important aspect of any religion. They serve a twofold purpose of keeping religion alive and affirming some religious or theological truth connected with them...almost invariably all festivals are celebrations of some important religious principle of theological truth". Corroborating these

views Ogunba, (1987, p. 88) opines further that: "Festival rites are important for several reasons: first, they are the chief media of the religious expression of the people. Secondly the institution of the festival is in itself a giant cultural establishment which can accommodate virtually every experience of the community and mould it into its own special idiom".

In practice, therefore, the festival often achieves more than mere religious expression and has material that can be an important source for the reconstruction of Yoruba history once the idiom is understood. To this end, this study unravels music, sacred practice and social meaning in Igogo festival of Owo, Ondo state to unravel the interconnectedness and interdependence of music, sacred practices and social meaning in Igogo festival with a view to contribute to the ethnographic documentation and ethno musicological discourse in African cultural studies especially on the resilience of indigenous cultural practices in the face of modernization and religious change.

Literature Review

The indigenous music of Africa, given the vastness of the continent is historically ancient, rich and diverse, with different regions and nations of Africa having many distinct musical traditions. Africans have a rich background of music and dance, where these form the integral part of life and punctuated milestones in the life of the community and individual. Music is found in every known culture, past and present, varying widely between times and places. Since all the people of the world, including the most isolated tribal groups, have forms of music, it may be concluded that music is likely to have been present in the ancestral population prior to the dispersal of humans around the world.

African music generally, and festivals among the Yoruba people of the Southwestern Nigeria specifically, have received scholarly attention and documentation in various aspects of its performance, history, structure, management, sociology, rituals, economics, and so on. Nketia (1974) defines African music as, "A public performance that take place on social occasions when members of a group or a community come together for the enjoyment of leisure, for recreational activities" (p. 21). In this case, many scholars agree on the definition of African music as it is viewed as that kind of music that celebrates culture and group gathering. Barz (2004) also defines music simply as "a social event" (p. 5). Chernoff (1979) seem to concur with Nketia when he defined African music as, "A cultural activity which reveals a group of people organizing and involving themselves with their own communal relationships" (p. 36). Here, music is viewed in terms of communal gathering, where people share the cultural activities of a particular society, but it is more than a mere social event because it carries deeper spiritual implications.

Adeoye C.L (1979) has stressed that music has from the onset been an integral and important parts of Africa's culture. Having an interesting mélange of folklore, arts, music and traditional beliefs, the continent has been regarded as a cultural melting pot. Many communities and tribes in Africa used music to send across messages and to showcase the uniqueness of their traditions. Badru et al (2024) observes that Folksongs and traditional festivals, as manifestations of oral literary genre, possess the remarkable ability to simultaneously entertain, educate, heal and provide solace in individuals. Through them, virtues of the community are upheld and cultural values are projected. Thus With a deep rooted music culture, music festivals are fast

becoming a popular concept, with the continent hosting some of the world's best music festivals.

Fayenuwo et al (2024) discusses the Egungun and Sangojimi festivals of Ede land as performance with emphasis on the history, structure, hierarchy, and administration of the cyclic ritual, providing an action plan in terms of committee set-up, publicity, and media coverage and with the assertion that the modern celebrations of Egungun festivals is based on the inherited ancient structure established by the people's ancestors and whose management approaches are in tandem with basic management principles. This assertion is generally true of festivals in Africa because they are handed down from one generation to another with fundamental structures, rituals and taboos that must not be altered for any reason.

While Oyedokun (2024) investigates the different ways in which Yoruba cultural indigenous identities are presented to the world in contemporary times through the Oranyan festivals, Okediji's (2025) contribution is on the socio-economic implications and challenges of the annual socio-religious traditional festivals in Yoruba land. Oyedokun gives an in-depth analysis of the historical development of the Oranyan festival among the Yoruba and its impact on global assessment in the African past and Okediji's emphasis is on the economic impact on both local communities and the broader national economy. Okediji concludes that the Yoruba people in Nigeria continue to attach significant importance to traditional festival observance being enhanced by modern communication technology, the festivals now have a broader reach and global audience. Notably, several of these festivals have emerged as viable income-generating platforms for host communities and the country at large.

Uzuku (1988) and Rings, Nancy C. (et. al) (1998) cited in Kyalo (2013) have also discussed rites of passage and rituals in African festivals respectively. Uzuku says that rites of passage are a way of expressing the aspiration of a community. Through them, society hands on cultural values and beliefs to the young generation for transmission to posterity. It is in and through this ritual action that the being of the community comes to manifest realization. Uzuku's conclusion is that rites of passage are rituals and according to Rings, Nancy C. (et. al) rituals are found in communities and are a primary means of social communication and cohesion. This is because rituals are often communal, consisting of prescribed actions performed periodically and or repetitively. Rituals are symbolic, routine, and repetitive activities and actions through which we make connections with what we consider to be the most valuable dimension of life.

In Owo, according to Mr Orimolade Temitayo who is in the second age grade of the town age group, the initiation of the youths into the adulthood is in seven stages, the group is usually upgraded every nine years to be able to attain another ladder till they get to the highest grade which induct them into the "Ero" stage which usually falls within the age of seventy years and above. The Ero stage is what they celebrated as Ero festival in Owo. To be part of this group, there are some rites/rituals that are performed; anyone who wants to join must prepare food including the traditional soup (obe ogun), give money and wine (schnapps, palm wine and bush meat) to the group he/she wants to join before gaining acceptance.

In the African cosmology families build shrines on the burial sites of those considered to be Ancestors, deceased prominent members of the family or community, to honor their spirits

and to seek their favor in the ongoing life of the community. The place (UgbóLàjà) where queen Oronse disappeared is now a sacred grove where a terracotta sculptured image of her has been erected and worshipped yearly.

Despite the vast research and available literature on African festivals and Yoruba festivals in particular, there is much work to be done on Igogo festival especially focusing on its music, sacred practices and social meaning. This is the gap that this study seeks to fill.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on cultural relativism and African performance theories. These theories intersect in understanding performances as culturally embedded practices. Cultural relativism emphasizes evaluating cultures on their own terms, without imposing external standards. In African performance theory, this means analyzing performances within their specific cultural contexts recognizing their unique meanings and features. The key connections between these theories are contextual understanding, avoiding ethnocentrism and performance as cultural expression

Historically, cultural relativism has had a twin theoretical approach, historical particularism. This is the notion that the proper way to study culture is to study one culture in depth. The roots of cultural relativism go to the rejection of the comparative school of the nineteenth century on the basis of exact and specific ethnological information. Cultural relativism also rejects value judgments on cultures, in this view, no single scale of values which holds true for all cultures and by which all culture can be judged. Beliefs, aesthetics, morals and other cultural items can only be judged through their relevance to a given culture. This indicates that every culture determines its own ethical judgments to regulate the proper behavior of its members. For example, the song, 'Tiroko tiroro o ee' in Igogo festival, is a song used to instill moral rectitude or to uphold moral uprightness amongst the citizens of the community and there are several practices engaged in Igogo festival among the Owo people which are not acceptable to other cultures and vice versa.

Some anthropologists associated with cultural relativism are Franz Boas and, his students, Alfred Kroeber, Robert Lowie, Melville Herskovits, Ruth Benedict, Paul Radin, Margaret Mead, Ruth Bunzel and others. Franz Boas is the key theoretician in this group. Boas published his views on the comparative method in 1896. The article, "The Limitations of the Comparative Method of Anthropology," was the first exposition of cultural relativism. Boas (1896) identified four major limitations to the comparative method. According to him, 1. It is impossible to account for similarity in all the types of culture by claiming that they are so because of the unity of the human mind; 2. The existence like traits in different cultures is not as important as the comparative school claims; 3. Similar traits may have developed for very different purpose in differing cultures; and 4. The view that cultural differences are of minor importance is baseless.

Recently Aydin (2025) presents a critical philosophical and sociological examination of cultural relativism. While acknowledging the empirical fact of cultural diversity, he argues that drawing normative or epistemic relativism from cultural differences constitutes a logical fallacy. He analyzed the core principles of cultural relativism to expose their internal

contradictions and conceptual ambiguities. Specifically, Aydin submits that the descriptive claim regarding cultural variation does not necessarily lead to the normative assertion that all moral systems are equally valid. Rejecting radical relativism, Aydin advocates for a balanced approach that neither impose cultural uniformity nor endorse moral indifference.

We agree with the general concept of cultural relativism and submit that an evaluation of a culture by values outside of it will amount to a wrong evaluation because the basis of the evaluation is wrong. Each culture's set parameters of acceptable and non-acceptable values should be the grounds for its assessment.

The African performance theory is an interdisciplinary field that examines the diverse performance traditions of Africa, encompassing oral traditions, music, dance, theatre and masquerade, ritual and ceremony, and other embedded practices. It explores how performance shapes and reflects African cultures, identities, and histories. The influential thinkers of this theory are Victor Turner, an anthropologist who explored ritual and performance; Richard Schechner, a theatre practitioner and theorist who applied performance theory to African and other cultures, and Kofi Agawu, a musicologist who analyzed African music and performance.

The cultural relativism and African performance theories are relevant in this study because the Igogo festival is discussed as a unique festival of the Owo people of Ondo state with all the dynamics of the African performance traditions. The Igogo festival is studied in its peculiar context of existence and implications of the sacred beliefs and practices of the people of Owo within the acceptable cultural values bringing to the fore the music, sacred practices and social meaning of the festival.

Methodology

This study adopts participant observation and descriptive methods to document facts and data on this festival with oral interview tool, and review of related literatures as our secondary source. The research was conducted in Owo, Ondo state where the Igogo festival is hosted every year in the months of September. The researcher participated and observed the festival in the month of September, 2019. Two purposively selected custodians of the Igogo festival who served as the major informants on this research as well as other participants in the festival were interviewed. These custodians facilitated the researcher's access to participate in all the facets of the festival. Audio and video recordings of the festival were taken for the purpose of documentation, transcription of songs, and analysis. The translation of the song text from the Owo dialect which would have been a major challenge was overcome through the help of the research assistant who hails from Owo. Existing literature on the Igogo festival were also consulted to know the extent of research already done on the subject and determine the gap to fill.

History of Igogo Festival of Owo People

Ebuka Jeferson (2025) has observed and rightly so that the Igogo festival is the symbol of the connection between Owo people's past and present communality. In his words

Igogo remains an emblem of Owo's ritual and community life, a performance of memory, covenant and social order that ties present-day Owo to a long, multilayered past. Its mixture of taboo, costume,

metallic sound, and processionally enacted obligations renders it one of the most evocative festival traditions within the Yoruba cultural sphere.

One of the custodians of Igogo festival, and informant, Bámídó Oluwádámílólá Oláwólé, says that the Igogo festival began over six hundred years ago during the reign of Olówo Rerengejèn. The monarch married Ọrónshẹ, a beautiful and affluent queen who, unknown to the king, was an ọrisha (goddess). She was powerful to the extent that she excrete beads, instead of passing out feces as a waste product, this is one of the reasons Ọwọ is richly embedded with beads, which boosts the economy of the town. She enriched the monarch and she was dearly loved by him. Queen Ọrónshẹ being a goddess has certain taboos, She insisted that nobody should grind okro in her presence or pour water into the yard. In addition, anyone who arrives from the farm with load of firewood on their head must not drop it in her presences. King Rerengejèn cautioned his other wives not to carry out any of these activities. Out of jealousy, because Queen Ọrónshẹ is the king's favorite, the other queens are always looking for means to put up a fight with her. One day, the other wives of the King had a disagreement with Queen Ọrónshẹ, they conspired against her with the intention of violating her taboos while Rerengejèn was not in the palace. Her taboos were duly violated and she subsequently fled from the palace.

While she was running out of the palace, some palace guards and chiefs ran after her to bring her back, an effort that proved futile. On her way running, her head gear (gẹlẹ) fell on the floor and the head gear (gẹlẹ) turned to water which is now called 'aisẹnwen' river and now being worshipped. She later felt tired and waited at a place called "UgbóLajà" where she was found and persuaded to return to the palace. Her refusal frustrated the guards, who forcefully captured her thereafter but she disappeared into "Igbó Oluwá", now a sacred forest, leaving her head ties (oja) at UgbóLajà which the guards later returned to King Rerengejèn. "UgbóLajà" is now a sacred grove. Queen Ọrónshẹ's terra cotta sculptured image from "Igbó Oluwá" by EkpoEyo stands at a distance to inform the Ọwọ people that nothing will bring her back to the palace because of the conspiracy against her among her co-wives by performing all her taboos in her presence in the palace. She pronounced that she must be celebrated annually in her remembrance by making sacrifices of different items, such as dried fish, kola nut, alligator pepper, bitter cola and many more for ritual and in return she promised to protect the kingdom forever but if the festival is not done in remembrance of her, there will be conspiracy (people conspiring against each other which will lead to fight and separation) and disorderliness among the people.

Igogo festival lasts for 17 days and begins with Upẹlì proceedings by the Ilóro chiefs. The chiefs are led by a chief known as Akówa of Ilóro, who is the traditional head of the Ilóro chiefs. This Upẹlì procession lasts for 12 days and features several activities including Utẹgi, Ugbabó, Uyanna and Ugbate. It is also a period for the celebration of new yams. During this procession, beating of drums by individuals or associations is forbidden and the use of caps by men and head ties by women at close range to the Ọwọ monarch. The festival features the dance of bare-chested men, the Ilóro Quarter men called Igharẹs. They often wear white caps with two horns of buffalo in their hands. They strike these horns together while dancing around the town and visiting some sacred places in the town.

During this rite, any animal that crosses their paths automatically becomes food for them. The chiefs plait their hair and dance round the town, and visit their loved ones who give them gifts in return. The monarch often dresses like a woman and dances round the town as well. Dancing in the market by the monarch is also one of the rites performed during the festival.

Sociology of Igogo festival

There are several sociological implications of the festival to the people of Òwò in Ondo state. The seventeen (17) days long annual festival contributes to the cultural and socio-economic development of Òwò. It is a communal activity, hence, indigenes of Òwò home and abroad, far and near come home as point of duty to celebrate this festival. The people believe that, they will use the festival to renew and reaffirm Òrónshè's promise to protect the kingdom forever only if they keep celebrating her annually. The festival holds every September in Òwò since over six hundred (600) years ago when it started.

Today, Òwò indigenes are dominated by both Christians and Muslims; nevertheless, their religious affiliation has not eradicated their indigenous beliefs, rites and deference to the Igogo festival. This festival is peculiar to Òwò people in particular and it is a major tourist attraction to the town as tourists from far and near visit the town during the festival to have a feel of the cultural aura and appeal.

The festival also brings the neighbouring towns together as a symbol of peaceful coexistence. It is a means of bonding the unity among Òwò and the Ìjẹbú, Òwò, Ìyẹré, Ùpẹmẹ, Emùré-ilé, Ùsò, Ìpelẹ towns. These towns are neighboring towns under Òwò. They all come together during the period of the festival to identify their peculiar problems, issues and conflicts with the aim of resolving them and chatting a way forward.

During this festival, there is usually an economic boom in the town, especially for small and medium scale business owners. For instance, the coral beads and beaded gowns which the King and High Chiefs are adorned with are sold by these business owners. It is usually a moment of joy for the residents of Òwò people during this festival period because of much sales they are going to make from the festival for those that are into one business or the other, even those not previously engaged in business see it is an avenue to pick up something to sell during this period because there's always much to buy in the course of preparing for the festival and on the day of the festival. During this period of the festival, the owners of hotels are happy because the festival brings in people from different places, home and abroad to come and lodge in their hotels which as a result gives their hotel more recognition and provides more referrals of people.

The cloth sellers usually have more sales during the Igogo festival period because all the chiefs are going to put on white clothes which require many yards because of the ambiguous style they are going to sew from it. The chiefs will not want to repeat what they wore the previous years, they will go for another white material which will differ from the previous year and also not lesser in texture and price as well so this gives room to those selling clothes to make more sales. Not only the chiefs buy new clothes, everyone that wants to attend the Igogo festivals always want to appear nicely and look beautiful by getting new things (clothes, shoes, bag, make up materials) to enhance their beauty.

The hair dressers are not left out because both male and female will make their hair during the festival period. There are some particular hairstyles that are being plaited during this period by different set of people. According to Mrs Kemi Adékewé, (one of the *iyawó ilé* in the palace of *Ọ̀lówò*) 'the *iyawó ilé*'s, and the queens (*Oloris*) usually make the same hairstyles. The hairstyles are made with wool and not all hairdressers can make this hairstyle, it is made by *omo ilé oḡa* (descendants of the king) and some particular stylists, it is plaited in the inner palace. The other group of people that are permitted to make this hairstyle are the cultural troupes.



Fig 1: The Queens (Oloris) hairstyle Picture credit: picture taken during the Igogo festival at the palace by the researcher, September 24, 2019.

Also, the festival serves as tourist attraction to the town and the state in general. During this festival, people travel from home and abroad to come and witness this festival celebration. All the neighboring towns in *Ọ̀wọ̀* and the states find their way to *Ọ̀wọ̀* because they see this festival as a means of uniting with people they have seen for a very long time, catch up with old memories and helping each other if needed. It is also a means of entertainment for the visitors and every partakers of the festival. It is also a means of displaying and showing the tourists some ancient artifacts and some historic images which promotes the Igogo festival.

The festival period is also believed to usher in prosperity, it is the time where people pray for the king, themselves, and whatever they want and it is believed that their prayers will be answered.

Rites and Ritual Aesthetics in Igogo Festival

There are significant rites and rituals performed during Igogo festival. These rites portray the culture and the belief of the *Ọ̀wọ̀* people. Some are sacred, while some are secular. The secular aspects also form part of the spectacle which appeals to the audience. One of the key aspects of the African performance theory is the ritual and ceremony that suggests that performances are tied to spiritual, social, and cultural practices. During the festival, the King, *Ọ̀lówò* of *Ọ̀wọ̀* and the Chiefs are usually dressed in female attire with hair plaited to match. This rite is done in honor and deference to the commandments of *Ọ̀rónshẹ̀*, the female goddess. In this visual appeal, the King and the Chiefs dance round the town and pay visits to their loved ones

who give them gifts in return. Significantly, the King dances around in the market during the festival. In an oral interview with one of the custodians of the Igogo festival, Bamidó Oluwadamilola Olawolé, he stressed that the momentary transformation of men into women during the festival with the feminine costume and accessories is a symbolic appeal during the festival. Men also pad up their chest and buttocks to further enhance the female look and mannerisms to mimic and honor *Oronshẹ*. For this reason, High Chief Ojumu, the second in command to Olowo of Owó describes Owó as the town where men dress-up like women once a year all in honor of the goddess who lived among them long ago.

During the build-up to the festival, a group of men called the *Ayóyos* stand in twos at some strategic places in the town, bare chest, wearing a metallic cap on their head with a long cane in their hands. They are aged between forty (40) and Seventy (70), and they belong to three traditional age-grades, tying only traditionally-woven wrappers around their waist. The first group, called *Ologho* comprise of the fairly old ones who hold two buffalo horns which they strike intermittently to create sounds. The second set referred to as *Eléténtén*, a bit younger men, hold metal gongs, which they also strike to produce sounds, while the youngest group, called the *Kaya* are armed with long canes, which they swing threateningly in the air. The canes are symbolically heralding the festival. At this stage, the townspeople are made to be aware of the festivities in the air and the forbidden practices which must be avoided during the festival. Subsequently, those in the *Eléténtén* age group promote to *Ológhò*, while the youngest group, *Kaya* promotes to *Eléténtén*. These age groups also serve as disciplinary officers and traditional policing functions.

During the festival, *Olówó* shares twenty-eight kola nuts significantly during this period, four of which goes to the *Ugbamas* while the remaining twenty-four kola nuts go to the *Ighare*. Beating of drum during Igogo festival has also become a thing of the past. Instead of drums, metal gongs (*agogo* or *igogo*) in *Owó* dialect are used during the festival.

During the festival, there are some forbidden things that must not be carried out which is seen as a taboo and must be avoided at all cost so as not to attract punishment of any kind. The taboos to avoid include the following:

Ban on beating of any kind of drums: during this festival, it is expected that no one must beat any kind of membranophonic instrument so as not to incur the wrath of *Oronshẹ* the goddess and that is why idiophonic instrument (*Agogo*, *Osẹwẹ*) is the only acceptable instrument used to accompany songs by the musician during the festival.

No ceremonious event must take place: during this period of the festival, burial ceremony is not allowed to be conducted. However, the Muslim who buries their deceased on the same day are considered to do so on the condition of not making use of any form of musical appliances that can project sounds or use of microphones, speakers. However, prior to the coming of the Islamic religion, this rite is observed to the letter. Wedding ceremony is also restricted during this period because of the flamboyant social activities attached to the event. Nevertheless, as long as it can be conducted without projecting sounds and playing of instruments, the wedding can go on, but in most cases people prefer to shift their event till the end of the festival.

Use of musical instruments in churches or mosques: the churches and mosques are also not excluded from observing the taboos of the festival especially in the aspect of the use of musical instruments. During this period, microphones, speakers, drums and other instrument that can enhance or project sound are not allowed in the church or mosques during the period of the festival.

Sound of gunshot: It is a big offense during the days of the festival to fire gun shots. No hunter or any paramilitary personnel is allowed to shoot a gun during this period as it is believed that it will chase away the spirit of *Ọ̀rónshẹ* the goddess, prevent her from accepting their sacrifices, and holding back her blessings.

Use of scarf, headgear and caps: Women are forbidden from tying scarf or headgear while the use of caps by the male counterpart is also forbidden. For this reason, the *Ayóyos* stay at strategic point in the town holding a long cane to beat and also remove the scarf and caps from whoever covers their head during these days.

Pouring of water, throwing log of woods down, and pounding okra: these activities are seen as taboos during this festival. To the people of *Ọ̀wọ̀*, whosoever commits any of it faces dire consequences. This is because; they are the major taboos of *Ọ̀rónshẹ* the goddess while she was still living among the people.

It is noteworthy that, in consonance with the cultural relativism theory, these taboos are peculiar to Owo and specifically in relation to the Igogo festival and it is believed that there will be repercussions for the violation of these taboos. For example, there are other festivals within Owo, and the neighboring communities during which heads are covered without negative consequences. This reinforces the cultural relativism theory that advocates evaluating each culture on their own terms.

Music Ensemble in Igogo Festival

A major feature and crux of the Indigenous African music is the African musical instruments. African instruments as described by Ogunade (1991, p. 2) is the African's "passport of telling the world of her rich musical past and the brave new global vision". Onyekwelu (2011, p. 119) agrees that "musical instruments are an aspect of the African life through which African cultures develop their symbols of identity, and express themselves in their own way".

The above assertions are not farfetched as African music is known globally for the innumerable variety of musical instruments in the African culture. Africans are known for the complex and hot rhythms found in their music. This is usually exhibited in their art of drumming. As it connotes that in the Igogo festival of the *Ọ̀wọ̀* people in Ondo state, their drumming is replaced with gong (*Agogo*) whenever the festival is ongoing.

As earlier observed, membranophones are forbidden during the Igogo festival, hence they use more of idiophones and just few out of the numerous aerophone instruments which are bugle and whistle. The bugle is used to introduce the coming of the king or to create awareness that the king is about to come out to see the audience and also blown at intervals to praise the

king. The whistle is usually blown by one of the group of singers to accompany the other metallic gong. During the festival, different group of singers assemble with their group members, singing different songs and accompany the song with playing of the metal gong and the metal stick which they use in smashing the metal gong to produce musical sound. Each chief have group of singers following them to sing and play instruments for them while they dance round the town and also back to the palace for the other events that will take place.

Musical Instruments Used in the Festival

The major musical instruments used during the Igogo festival come under the Idiophone and aerophone. The major instruments that are used during the Igogo festival are:

- The metal gong (Agogo) with small stick (Idiophone instrument)
- Bugle (Aerophone)
- Osewe (Idiophone)

Odudu (Folded wrapper is used as an idiophone instrument. It is taken out of its original context to be used as a self-sounding instrument.) It is used to accompany Osewe while playing it.



Fig 2: The Àwa Ùkòjú Òlówò displaying the metal gongs with sticks Picture credit: The picture was taken at the Òlówò palace by the researcher.

Sacred implications of music in Igogo Festival

Music in indigenous African culture is diverse in functions and utilities. It transcends and permeates all aspect of the African people's life. Hassan (2012, p. 14) explains that "African Music has a utilitarian function used in vital aspects of life such as, a child's naming ceremony, initiation rites, agricultural activities, national ceremonies, war times, religious ceremonies, and ceremonies for the dead". Through music, Africans articulate and objectify their philosophical beliefs. These philosophical beliefs are detailed in the performance forms and styles, song lyrics, language use, ensemble and even the costumes worn by the African musicians. As it has been discussed earlier, some musical instruments and songs alike are allowed during this festival while some are forbidden; this is because the festival in itself is sacred in nature and to be

MUSIC, SACRED PRACTICE

held in high esteem, it is to be revered, for instance, musical instruments such as Agogo and stick, *Ọṣewẹ* and *odudu* are used for performances while musical instruments such as gangan, *iya-ilu*, *omele*, etc are forbidden. Anyone who violates the sacred nature of this festival in terms of these instruments, calamities such as abrupt sickness, death and set back is believed to befall such person if atonement is not done with immediate effect.

As it is known that songs are the soul of any festivals, songs set the mood for any performance. The songs used in Igogo festival are products of creativity, people's experience, also serve as a means of exposing evils that people do which they think is a secret but known to others and also a means of correcting the ills in the society. Example is given below:

Song 1: Text:

Tírokò tíróró o eee
Tírokò tíróró o ahh
Adesola şolè èbèrúwa ooo
Ómí burá kolèşè ooo
Ègbè rerànyá yíbanpa ooo

with gun

Èrò Ọghò èwà wàyé Adesola lode ooo

outside

Chr

Call: *Olíburá*Ans: *Èwòbè 3x*

Translation

Tírokò tíróró o eee
Tírokò tíróró o ahh
Adesola stole, she fear us not
She uses bra to learn how to steal
Take her to prison and shoot her

People of Owo see Adesola life

Bra stealer

Look here people

This song is sung to expose the above named person that stole bra and thinks nobody knows about it, during the festival, group of singers goes to the front of her house to sing the song for her and for everyone so as to shame, ridicule, expose, chastise her and also to correct her of her bad doing and its implications if she continues with the act. This song is to instill fear in the mind of the people that commit punishable sin and to remind them of the consequences which is being sent to the palace prison or exile depending on the gravity of the offense committed.

The Igogo festival of *Ọwọ* employs specific music for various activities in the festival. For example there are specific music used for rituals, creating awareness, public appearance and entertainment. A song used to announce and welcome the presence of a king is given below:

Song 2:

Èwòbè wá oo,

see who is coming

Èwòbè wá oo eee

see him coming

Onẹ (ọba) yó rẹ e mí jù

the king we love most

Èwòbè wá oooooo

see him here

Chr

Onẹ (ọba) yó rẹ e mí jù

the king we love most

Èwòbè wá oooooo

see him here

4x

The song above is used to herald the presence of the king in the festival, the performance of the song is sung by all on the day of the festival but restricted to be performed on other rare occasions by only the court musicians at the king's palace.

Songs are also engaged in mockery of people of bad moral characters to expose their immorality. The next song illustrates this:

Song 3:

*Tíbọ seré èşin tí'mòbọ sùn**I'm playing with her not like I'm sleeping with*

her

Tibò sùn èsin tìmòbò já 2x

I'm sleeping with her not like I'm fighting

her

The above song was a conversation but turned into a song in mockery of a man who was caught having an affair with a girl young enough to be his daughter, he first denied that he was only playing with the girl and not sleeping with her, after much threat, he later confessed that he was sleeping with her and not like he was trying to harm her.

Song 4:

*Òghò jò o koko
Òghò dabò o 2x
Òghò dabò o do dayé yéewa
Igba ituwa
Omi yò torò ò jínpan
Dọ daa bọ' tẹ oo
Omi yò torò ò jínpan
Dọ daa bọ' tẹ oo*

*Owo people we beg you please
We beg you
Owo people let our time be peaceful
Settled
Clean water is fetched in the morning
Let's stop conspiracy
Clean water is fetched in the morning
Let's stop conspiracy*

The above song is sung by the women of Òwò in form of appealing to the people to allow peace to reign and shun conspiracy among each other. The song is sung to remind the people that the conspiracy made by the other wives of king Rẹnrẹgẹjẹn to send queen Òrónshẹ away out of jealousy was what is still affecting them till today.

Song 5:

<i>Orí mó sẹn gwa ní ooo</i>	<i>my head is better today</i>
<i>Orí mó sẹn gwa eeeee</i>	<i>yes my head is good</i>
<i>Ese nẹ ohun lùkà mǎrẹ</i>	<i>there's no one that doesn't like good things</i>
<i>A fẹnẹ orí rẹ maasan eee</i>	<i>except the person that his/her head is not correct</i>
<i>Ẹyí o rẹwá ooooo</i>	<i>we like this one</i>
<i>Orí mó sẹn gwa eeeee</i>	<i>indeed my head is good</i>
<i>Ẹyí o tó dáwa yọ ní ooo</i>	<i>the festival calls for celebration</i>
<i>Ẹyí o tó dáwa yọ eeeee 2x</i>	<i>indeed it calls for celebration</i>
<i>Ese nẹ ohun lùkà mǎrẹ</i>	<i>there's no one that doesn't like good things</i>
<i>A fẹnẹ orí rẹ maasan eee</i>	<i>except the person that his/her head is not correct</i>
<i>Ẹyí o rẹwá ooooo</i>	<i>we like this one</i>
<i>Ẹyí o tó dáwa yọ eee</i>	<i>the festival calls for celebration</i>

The above song is sung by everybody in Òwò, it is the most common and known song sung by both old, young, male and female everywhere. It is a joyous expressing that life is good and can be better. The people also sing the song in appreciation that the festival met them in good health. This song is also not restricted only to the festival days, there's liberty to sing it anywhere.

Song 6:

<i>Ìbẹyí mò sìn ẹ tó</i>	<i>this is where I can see you off to</i>
<i>Ibẹ i moti dẹyìn ọ</i>	<i>this is where I take my leave</i>

The above song is sung only between the Òlówò and ọba lẹbù (Ọjọmọ Olúdà), as it is known by the tradition that the king of Òwò and king of lẹbù are brothers. During the festival, the Òlówò will trek from his palace to visit his brother's palace too. In return, Ọjọmọ will also dance with the Òlówò back to his palace. After greeting and addressing the people together, Òlówò of Òwò will see Ọjọmọ Olúdà off back to a point called Ùdẹhìn where the song will be sang by the two of them to bid each other goodbye. After the song, the two of them turn to the direction of their

palaces and never look back until they get to their palace. This song is sacred such that nobody must sing the song with them and it is sang once in a year during the Igogo festival. Anyone who is found singing it will be penalized and given some ritual items to bring to the palace for cleansing.

Conclusions

We have discussed the music, sacred practices, and social meanings in the Igogo festival of the people of Owo in Ondo State, Nigeria. We have given the historical background and context for the celebration of the festival, the music and the sociological and sacred implications of the festival have also been discussed.

The Igogo festival of the people of Owo in Ondo state is a yearly occasion done in reverence of the goddess Oronshe who was one of the wives of the then king, king Rengejen. This festival is done to usher in good things for the people in the land and also to protect them from evil as the goddess has promised them if they also keep to their promise by honoring her every year.

The Igogo festival has survived for over six hundred (600) years despite the emergence of Christianity and Islam to which many citizens of Owo are proselytes. It is observed that adherents of these two religious faiths still participate in the Igogo festival as a means of bonding and community cohesion, as well as cultural heritage that is not to be lost to modernity or civilization. The festival is a means of transferring the people's culture from one generation to the other orally and through the yearly participating, the festival will not go into extinction. It must however, be noted that although Christianity and Islam has not displaced the festival, it has moderated the observance of certain aspects of the taboos in the name of tolerance.

Music is engaged at different phases and stages of the festivals employing both vocal and instrumental idioms of expression. Songs are used as well as musical instruments to express the sacred and social meanings of the Igogo festival. The positive economic impact of the Igogo festival on the immediate and surrounding communities is one of the factors of excitement and sustenance of the annual festival. The tourist attraction and the home coming of the Owo citizens from far and near to attend the festival is a yearly economic boost to individuals and the community at large. The spiritual impact of the festival is inherent in the set sacred practices observed during and after the festival which goes on to regulate the communal living as these practices are sustained year round.

The study recommends that there should be a proper documentation of the festival aesthetics so as to promote the heritage of the people which can serve as a global economic boom, cultural and tourist promotion, keeping alive the people's culture and to set basis for further research. Suggestion for further research on Igogo festival can be in the area of notation and analysis of the musical structures of the songs used in the festival.

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