

***ÉGWÚ ÀMÀLÀ: WOMEN IN TRADITIONAL PERFORMING ARTS IN
OGBARULAND***

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Within the complex dynamics of gender relationships and roles among African peoples, women often exercise power through song and dance. Such is the case among the women of Ogbaruland in southern Nigeria who, in their performance of the dance drama *Égwú Àmàlà*, act as custodians of knowledge and tradition and as transmitters of culture.

Apart from being a repository of information about artistic traditions, the genre also documents and enacts the history and culture of the Ogbaru people. *Égwú Àmàlà*, which is the subject of my dissertation, is the most popular of all Ogbaru women dance genres. The term *Égwú Àmàlà* literally means “paddle dance” or “paddle drama,” but it is often referred to as the “mermaid dance” or *égwú mmili*, that is, “water dance” because of its ritualistic associations with *Onye-mmili*, the water divinity. This genre is predominantly performed by women of all ages, with men playing secondary roles such as *òpì* (gourd horn) player and paddlers of canoes when the genre is performed in the river setting.

My study of *Égwú Àmàlà* will add to a small but growing body of literature demonstrating how gender, a *locus classicus* for debates in contemporary scholarship, relates to other domains of culture such as musical performance, and how gender constructions can be articulated as well as negotiated in the genre and through the performing arts in general. Since the origin and performance of *Égwú Àmàlà* revolves around rituals and water, this dissertation also discusses the religious dimensions of the genre, stressing the importance of water to the

dance, to the Ogbaru people and to African traditional religion as well. Considering the fact that women have for decades preserved *Égwú Àmàlà*, which epitomizes the culture and traditions of the Ogbaru people, the present investigation represents a significant contribution to ethnomusicological, gender, and cultural studies.

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PREFACE

*Bonum est confiteri Domino et psallere nomini tuo Altissime (Ps. 91: 2)*¹

My interest in researching traditional Nigerian music was inspired by my years of study and experience in Rome, Italy. During this period, I had the opportunity to visit and study in notable libraries, including Stiftsbibliothek St. Gallen (Saint Gall), Bibliothèque Municipale, Laon (France), Benediktinerabtei (bibliothek) Einsiedeln (Switzerland), Biblioteca Vaticana, Biblioteca Ambrosiana (Milan), and Biblioteca Universitaria Bologna, holding centuries of Gregorian chant manuscripts in Europe. I was fascinated by the amount of musical traditions that had been preserved over centuries and began to think about how these experiences in Europe could be applied effectively in the research and preservation of traditional Nigerian and African music in general.

This quest for the documentation of traditional music was further encouraged by the late Dr. Joshua Uzoigwe, the then Chair of the Department of Music, University of Uyo, where I lectured upon my return from Rome. He suggested that I research traditional women's music and dance. Uzoigwe introduced me to some ethnomusicological tools: fieldwork and the principle of participant observation, to enable me to collect materials directly from performers. He supervised my first attempt with *Ebre*, an Ibibio women's dance of Akwa Ibom State.

¹ "It is good to give praise to the Lord and to sing to your name, O most High." The Latin text is from the Holy Bible: Latin Vulgate; the translation here is by the author.

Uzoigwe's encouragement sufficed to turn my attention to women's music outside Uyo, where I resided. In 1999, I started a more in-depth research on *Iwali*,² another example of women's music and dance from Ogoja, Cross River State. I am indebted to Dr. Joshua Uzoigwe for reinforcing my desire to document Nigerian traditional music but particularly for imbuing in me the awareness and exigency to research women's music, an area that is understudied by Nigerian scholars.

Pursuing graduate studies at the University of Pittsburgh opened more avenues and gave me opportunities to nurture my musical interests. Gradually, I developed a strong interest in gender, particularly aspects of it that relate to women and music. This interest inspired my choice of *Égwú Àmàlà* as the subject of investigation for my doctoral dissertation.

Égwú Àmàlà is the most popular of all Ogbaru women's dances and every girl and woman of this culture is encouraged to learn and take part in the performance of this dance. It is a genre that utilizes a combination of music, dance, and drama as medium for enacting the belief, social, cultural, and political systems of the Ogbaru people. Although an all women's genre, *Égwú Àmàlà* has in recent times allowed young men into its dance space, thus engendering a forum for gender negotiation. By discussing the various facets of *Égwú Àmàlà*, this study elucidates the musical activities of women as custodians of tradition and transmitters of culture through the performing arts.

This dissertation was facilitated by a number of people to whom I owe a debt of gratitude. I am thankful to the University of Pittsburgh for the Teaching Fellowship awarded to me through the four years of my graduate study. I am grateful for the Andrew W. Mellon Pre-doctoral Fellowship, which made it possible for me to conduct the formal research for this

² I developed this work into an article, "The *Iwali* Child Queen Dance of Ogoja, Nigeria," which was published in the journal, *The World of Music* in 2006.

project in Nigeria. I also thank the Department of Music for the Gluck Award and the Dean's office for the Dean's Tuition Scholarship that enabled me complete my studies in the University of Pittsburgh.

I am profoundly grateful to the members of my committee—Dr. Olatunji Akin Euba (Chair), Dr. Kofi V. Agawu (Co-Chair), Dr. Mary S. Lewis, Dr. Nathan T. Davis, and Dr. Leonard Plotnicov—for their commitment, constructive comments, advice, suggestions, and support, which have all enhanced and shaped this dissertation. I am especially indebted to Dr. Akin O. Euba for his guidance and insights, which have played an important role in shaping the direction of this work. My sincere thanks go to Dr. Kofi V. Agawu for agreeing to co-direct this dissertation. His sturdy and nurturing presence, his constructive criticism and motivation, have been a source of inspiration and encouragement.

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A number of my friends and colleagues have assisted me in numerous ways during the course of my study. I cherish the critical comments of Rev. Dr. Godfrey I. Onah, Rev. Dr. Eugene Uzukwu, and Dr. Anicet Mundundu, who read parts of my manuscript. I acknowledge Ayo Ogunranti and Stephen Kofi Ogbolonyo for their annotations on my transcriptions; Gladys Omefia Mogekeku for helping me with some difficult Aboh dialectic translations; Fr. Christopher

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My appreciation would not be complete without mentioning the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, Regional Community of Pittsburgh. During this last lap of my studies, you provided me accommodation and an awesome hospitality that has made it conducive for me to study and to write this dissertation. I thank you for your kindness and all your prayers. May God whom you serve in the poor and needy reward you abundantly.

This dissertation would not have been possible without the cooperation of four *Égwú Àmàlà* groups who allowed me to spend quality time among them and who willingly shared their experiences and provided me with information for this project. I owe an even greater debt of gratitude to the *Otu Ife Chukwu Deni*, Aboh, *Otu Aboh Nadi*, Ashaka, *Otu Égwú Àmàlà*, Ndoni, and *Otu Égwú Àmàlà Na-enye Anwuli*, Onitsha. I thank the leaders, patrons, and matrons of the various groups that worked with me: Chief I. N. Ozegbe (Ashaka), Onuah Nnojeli Ijeoma (Okom-Amskom), Mrs. Josephine Uti (Aboh), and Chief Ogbuefi Beauty Okaome Obi (Onitsha).

I owe a greater debt of gratitude to my collaborators in the field, Mary Jean Ejeoma, Clara Akubueze, Stephen Nwabueze Ogbuchi, and Amachi Ugboma. I wish to thank Mrs. Chinyere Odili for introducing me to the Ndoni *Égwú Àmàlà* group and for paying for their performance.

My research would have been most difficult without the people who provided me basic amenities. I am grateful to Chief Patrick (RIP)³ and Mrs. Elizabeth Uti in Ibuza and the New Evangelization Sisters in Issele-Uku for their hospitality and for providing me with accommodation throughout my research period in Ogbaruland. I acknowledge His Lordship Bishop Alex Makozi, Bishop of Port Harcourt Catholic Diocese, for giving me an SUV car that made movement to research sites easy and fast.

To my religious family, the Congregation of the Handmaids of the Holy Child Jesus, I say many thanks for all your love, prayers, and support. I am indebted to Mother Marie Therese Akwe, HHCI (RIP), Superior General of the congregation of the Holy Child Jesus, who was the first to perceive my musical talents and sent me to study Education and Music in the then College of Education Uyo and later Sacred Music at the Pontifical Institute for Sacred Music in Rome.

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to my family for their love and tireless support. I acknowledge the love of my father, who died on November 17, 2005. I was three hours drive away from home when he could no longer cling to this mortal body and his soul left to join the Creator. I will always cherish fond memories of you. Thanks to my sisters and brothers, especially Francisca Bissong, Immaculata Agada Akwaji-Kaura, Benedict Oshen Morphy, Patricia Ozah, and my cousins Michael Azubuike Oputa and Peter Chike Oputa for always being there for me. I am profoundly grateful to my grandmother, Chief Teresa Imaji Odey (RIP), my aunt, Comfort Ogbuchi, and my mother, Rose U. Odey. They taught me how to appreciate my African tradition while at the same time embracing Christianity wholeheartedly. A beautiful woman, my mother sacrificed everything and supported the education of her four children so that

³ Chief Patrick Uti, a father indeed, would always wait for me to return from the field before he went to bed. He died in 2006.

our choices in life might be wider than hers. Thank you mama. Finally, I thank God, by whose grace and providence I have achieved these accomplishments and have become the woman that I am today.

*Laudate et superexaltate eum in saecula.*⁴

⁴ “Praise and exalt him above all forever.” Daniel 3: 65b, The Latin Vulgate.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF STUDY

Throughout history, people's lives have been integrated into the environment in which they live and from which they derive their livelihood. But when such an environment is believed to be supervised by a spiritual being who is directly connected to the environment, and whose blessings must be sought for vital issues of life, such as healing and fertility, then a way of connecting to this being becomes crucial. Among the various ways of connecting to this spiritual being is music, which for ages has been indispensable to religious worship. Accordingly, some types of music are highly revered when they are believed to originate from the spiritual being, and they become fundamental to the lives of people in the society. However, when over the course of time the context of such music is practically altered, it becomes questionable as to whether the ideas and concepts associated with such music also change. A typical example of such music is *Égwú Àmàlà*, which was originally conceived as a religious music and has now found an additional new social context as entertainment.

Égwú Àmàlà is a traditional Igbo music and dance genre that is performed by the Ogbaru⁵ people of southern Nigeria. *Égwú Àmàlà*, literally “paddle dance” or “paddle play” but

⁵ The Ogbaru are called by various ethonyms, such as Ogbahu and Ogbasu, depending on the phonetics and/or dialectical differences of each Ogbaru town or village. All the same, in modern times, preference has been accorded to the form Ogbaru.

often referred to as the “mermaid dance” or *égwú mmili* (water dance) because of its ritualistic associations with *Onye-mmili* or *Mami Wata*,⁶ the water divinity, is the most popular of all Ogbaru women’s dance genres. This music and dance is predominantly performed by women of all ages, with men playing auxiliary roles as instrumentalists and paddlers of canoes when the genre is performed in a river setting. Apart from being a repository of information about artistic traditions, the genre also documents and enacts the history and culture of the Ogbaru people. As Johnson A. K. Njoku observed, “contemporary social, cultural, religious, and political events in the lives of the people provide occasions for musical performances, while musical events provide contexts for performers to narrate, enact and/or re-enact historical and cultural events as they live their memories.”⁷ The main thrust of *Égwú Àmàlà* is the portraying of the Ogbaru way of life through the combination of four dimensions of creative arts - music, language, dance, and drama⁸ - as well as aspects of their religious beliefs. In addition, *Égwú Àmàlà* is significant to the Ogbaru people for other reasons. It is believed to bring happiness, good fortune, wealth, fertility to barren women, and prosperity to all who perform it. This is because participants, by performing *Égwú Àmàlà*, honor *Onye-mmili* or *Mami Wata*, the divinity of the *Òshimìlì*, the River Niger, who is believed to be the originator of the genre and generous giver of the above mentioned gifts to her loyalists.

⁶ The Ogbaru people believe that the *Onye-mmili* (which means a “water person” or “water being” in Igbo language) or *Mami Wata* is a female divinity whose abode is the River Niger.

⁷ Njoku 1994: 68.

⁸ In discussing the “Creative Vision in the Plastic Arts,” Nzewi talks about five dimensions of creative arts: music, language, dance, drama, and plastic arts. Although two of these dimensions, that is, plastic arts and language, could be practiced outside the realm of musical situations and conceptions, they are interwoven and blended appropriately during performance. See Nzewi 1991: 11.

1.2 RESEARCH INQUIRY

My study of *Égwú Àmàlà* presents an analysis and documentation of the genre, through which the social, cultural, and political representation of the Ogbaru can be constructed. Given the multiple realms of culture expressed in the genre, Ogbaru people consider *Égwú Àmàlà* as a major asset that represents their traditional identity. Current studies in anthropology and ethnomusicology suggest that identities are constructed, maintained, and challenged in the context of manifold strata of power relations within a society. I explored the various types of identities constructed and the practice of maintaining and negotiating these identities in *Égwú Àmàlà*. Focusing on the music of the genre, I am attracted to how the *òkwà ábù* (lead-singers), while working within the parameters of their culture and the gradual urbanization of their society and those around them, compose and inculcate new ideas into their song repertoire.

Égwú Àmàlà was initially a ritual music conceived primarily as a symbolic accompaniment to the veneration of *Onye-mmili* or *Mami Wata*. This music and dance of the Ogbaru people is traditionally believed to have been originally taught to an Aboh (an Ogbaru town west of the River Niger) fisherman and his companion by the water divinity who herself performed the dance before the fishermen.⁹ Oral tradition has it that these fishermen then taught the music and dance to the villagers as a way to honor the water divinity. Thus from its

⁹ For another version of the origin of *Égwú Àmàlà* see Anna Adaeze Akubeze, “The Music of Egwu-Amala in Aboh, Ndokwa Local Government Area of Bendel State” B.A. (Ed) (Thesis, Bendel State University, Abraka, Bendel State, Nigeria, 1991). A similar myth of origin is also attributed to the Ohworu masquerades of the Urhobo peoples who live at Evwreni in Delta State, Nigeria. In this case, only one fisherman is said to have gone for a fishing expedition during which he found himself among the water spirits and spent a period of time with them observing their music making and dancing. On his return, the fisherman created a masked display in honor of the water spirits he had been staying with, using paraphernalia analogous to those he had observed among the water spirits. As in *Égwú Àmàlà*, the music and dance is in honor of a female, the senior wife of the fisherman, but they differ in the sense that the former is in honor of a female divinity and the latter was in honor of a female human being. (For more on the Ohworu masquerades see Euba 1988: 57-59).

beginning, the music had a ritualistic connotation and was performed during ritual worship ceremonies. Some of the questions, which remain relevant when we consider the mythical origins of *Égwú Àmàlà*, include: Who were the main exponents of the first group or groups that performed this music? How and why did women become the main preservers of this genre when, in fact, the divinity revealed herself and taught the dance to fishermen and not fisherwomen? My supposition is that originally, men occupied a greater space in the performance of *Égwú Àmàlà* while women played subsidiary roles as dancers, and that with the passage of time, women became more involved because they perceived the genre as belonging to women since a woman, the water divinity *Mami Wata*, initiated the tradition. Even so, in a patriarchal society such as Ogbaru, men still often find important spaces in this female sphere as *Eze égwú* (the king or patron of the dance) and as player of the *òpì* (gourd horn), the only melodic and talking instrument in the ensemble, giving the men a strong voice, as it were, in the dance.¹⁰ This power politics leads to the discussion of gender negotiation and relations in Ogbaruland.

Social power and political relations are vital variables that have influenced *Égwú Àmàlà* as well as other aspects of Ogbaru social life. My discussion with informants/collaborators during my fieldwork demonstrated that both men and women agree that social relationships have changed through the years. Most women argued that in *oge gboo*, that is, in former times,¹¹ a dual-sex organization principle and various gender ideologies governed the structure of the village as well as its economy. This principle and these ideologies prescribed the economic activities as well as the social status of men and women. But in these modern times, the women

¹⁰ In fact, musicians as well as dancers are always slow to perform *Égwú Àmàlà* without the *òpì* because, as they put it, the music does not really sound complete without this instrument.

¹¹ Also, in the good old days, refers often to the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Unlike other parts of Nigeria and Igboland, modern Western influences were late in penetrating these riverine areas (with the exception of Opobo Town) because they were locked in by water from the Niger Delta basin. Although they were involved in trade with the Europeans as early as the 17th century, they maintained their culture and resisted external influences from the West.

seem to do more work than they did in the past. In spite of this, the men still tend to lord it over the women. “In fact,” one of the women added, “women work harder now than our mothers did and women have to struggle for everything, even to maintain our social stance.”¹² At this point, Antonio Gramsci’s concept of hegemony¹³ informs my discussion of power relations between genders in *Égwú Àmàlà*. Although Gramsci’s theory was applied to a particular historic epoch of Italian social formation, his hypothesis is relevant to my analysis of power interactions in *Égwú Àmàlà*, an issue that Gramsci refers to as a *condition in process* which suggests a degree of “consensus” in which subordinate groups and classes seem to accept and “subscribe to values, ideas, objectives, culture and political meanings, which bind them to, and ‘incorporate’ them into the prevailing structures of power.”¹⁴ In this regard, I agree with Gramsci and argue that hegemony in *Égwú Àmàlà*, as I later explained in this work, is historically specific.

Symbolically, *Égwú Àmàlà* is associated with the women folk of Ogbaru society, an aspect that legitimizes the importance of women in this community as custodians and preservers of family and culture in Ogbaruland. Since its inception, *Égwú Àmàlà* has been disseminated by women and this legitimizes the genre as an ideal subject for the investigation of women as custodians of knowledge and tradition and as transmitters of culture through music and dance. Additionally, *Égwú Àmàlà* is privileged as an important women’s musical form and is historically constructed through the beliefs, ideas, and attitudes of the Ogbaru.

An instrumental ensemble comprising traditional musical instruments accompanies the songs and drama of *Égwú Àmàlà*. The main instruments of the ensemble are: *òpì* (gourd horn), *ùdùdù* (musical pot drum), *òkpòkòlò* (wooden block), *ìshàkà* (gourd rattles), *ogénè* (single metal

¹² Interview with a group of women in Oko-Amakom, 2005.

¹³ Forgacs 2000 [1999]: 189-221.

¹⁴ Ibid.: 124.

clapperless bell), and handclapping. In this ensemble, the *òpì* is used as a speech surrogate that “talks” to the dancers, musicians and the audiences. The organization and complex rhythmic structures of some of these instruments, the songs and the ensemble as a whole, will constitute an important part of my transcription and analysis. I am particularly interested in the relationships between music and dance, and the various levels of interaction between the musicians and the dancers. According to Judith Lynne Hanna, “dance contributes yet another rhythm to the distinct rhythm of each instrument in the musical ensemble accompanying the dancers.”¹⁵ In my discussion of *Égwú Àmàlà*, I contend that, on the contrary, rather than adding another layer of rhythm to the instrumental ensemble, dance picks up a resultant rhythm or main rhythm of the instrumental ensemble. In this study, I examine how music and dance are incorporated to form a unified genre, *Égwú Àmàlà*.

As an Ogbaru indigene, my interest in *Égwú Àmàlà* is due in part to its predominance in my environment and also as a result of my curiosity about cultural issues and gender studies, particularly aspects of these that relate to women and music.¹⁶ These have inspired my choice of *Égwú Àmàlà* as the subject of investigation for my doctoral dissertation.

¹⁵ Hanna 1983: 48-49.

¹⁶ My interest in this area with specific reference to music has been previously expressed in Ozah 2006 and Ozah 2004.

1.3 ETHNOGRAPHIC DATA

1.3.1 Geo-Cultural Scope of Study

The Igbo of southeastern Nigeria is one of the three largest ethnic groups in the country, the others being the Hausa in the north and the Yoruba in the southwest. Igboland is located in the north of the Delta Swamplands and covers a land area of about 15,800 square miles.¹⁷ In present day political distribution, the Igbos inhabit the Anambra, Imo, Abia, Ebonyi, and Enugu States east of the river Niger and a sizable part of the Delta, Bayelsa, and Rivers States west of the Niger delta. Igboland is bordered to the north by the Kogi and Benue States, to the south by the Rivers and Akwa Ibom States, to the east by the Cross River State, and to the west by Edo State.

¹⁷ Ibewuiké 2006: 35.

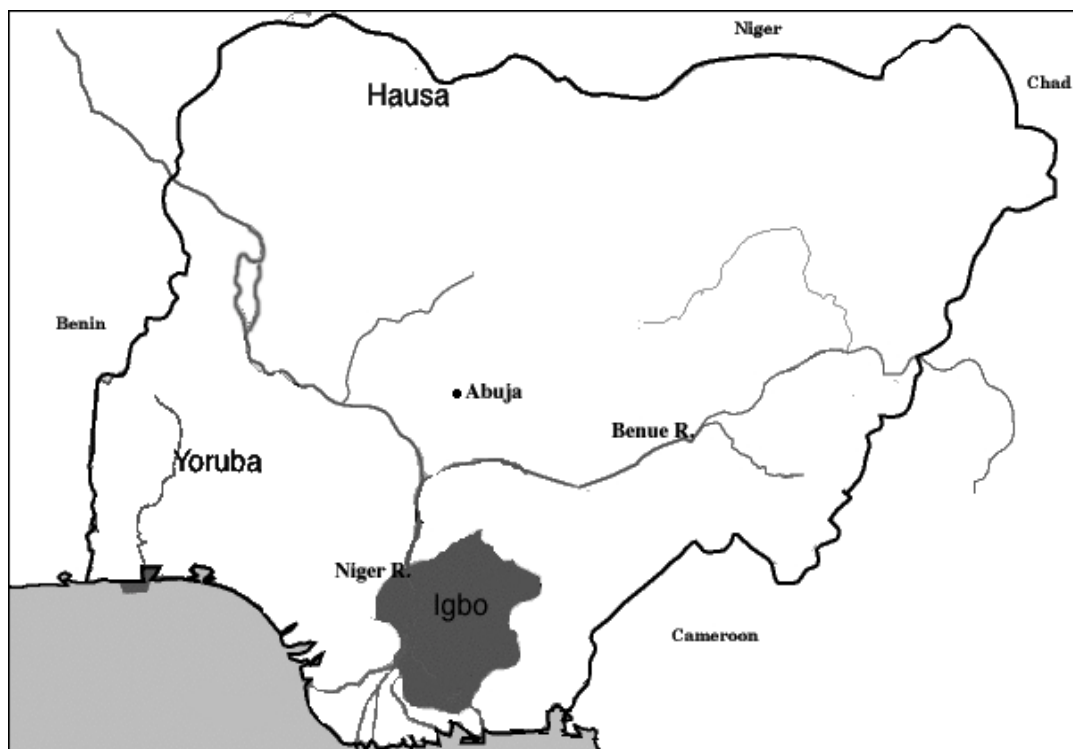


Figure 1-1 Map of Nigeria Showing Igboland

The population of the Igbo is about fifteen million, with about half a million living to the west of the River Niger.¹⁸ Igboland is located in the rain forest and fresh water swamp regions of southern Nigeria, with rivers such as the Niger, Anambra, Imo and Kwa Iboe running through the land and emptying into the Atlantic Ocean. While the main occupations of this people are farming, fishing, and trading, the thick forest produces mahogany and other kinds of wood that are valuable occupational resources for carving canoes and furniture.

The Igbo differ to a large degree in their traditions of origin and migration. These traditions vary from one group to another. Although all of the groups speak the Igbo language, they also have various linguistic dissimilarities between neighboring towns and villages.

¹⁸ Ibewuiké 2006: 35. Some scholars suggest that the population of the Igbo is up to twenty million. Although I have cited Victoria O. Ibewuiké's population estimate of the Igbo people, let me say immediately that because censuses have been over politicized in Nigeria, a correct and recent population estimation is not obtainable.

Furthermore, there are a lot of dialectical differences. For example, the dialects among the western Igbo are substantially different from those of northern and southern Igbo. Even among the Ogbaru, the main focus of this research, these variations in dialect can also be found between the Aboh and Oko people.

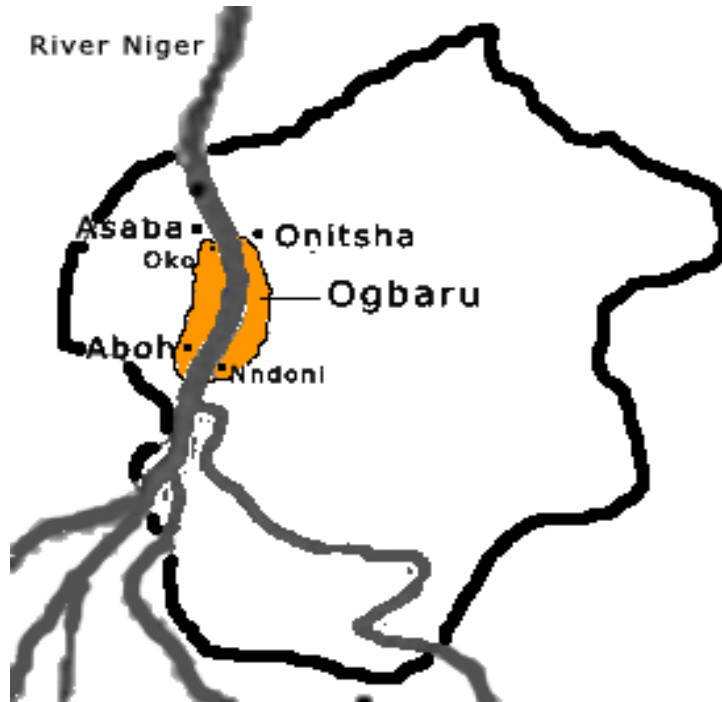


Figure 1-2 Map of Igboland situating Ogbaruland

The Ogbaru, a word which means “flowing downstream” or “flowing downward current of the river,” are a culturally homogeneous congregation of peoples that dwell on the east and west lower banks of the River Niger of southern Nigeria. They are regarded as homogeneous in the sense that they share similar cultural norms and traditions as riverine people or *Ndi Oshimili* as their neighbors often call them. The larger localities of Ogbaru fall within the Anambra and Delta States and adjacent sections of what used to be Ogbaru are now located within the Rivers

and Bayelsa States.¹⁹ Topographically, Ogbaruland is characterized by swampy rich area on both sides of the river Niger, stretching from the extreme south of Onitsha in Anambra State (east of the river Niger) and Oko²⁰ in Delta State (west of the river Niger) down to Ndoni in Rivers State and Aboh in Delta State (east and west of the river Niger respectively).

Although the Ogbaru people belong to the greater Igbo ethnic group of southeastern and southwestern Nigeria, they are distinctively known as the Olu ethnic group. They speak dialects that are variants of the central Igbo that belong to the Kwa language family.²¹

The local histories of the Ogbaru people tend to differ from town to town because they are a collection of people with varied roots who migrated around the sixteenth or early seventeenth centuries in pre-colonial Nigeria from different ancient kingdoms and empires, such as Igala, Nupe and Benin, to the arable and productive Niger Delta Basin.²² While the Akili, Ogbakuba, Ochuche Umuodu, Atani, and Aboh peoples of Ogbaruland trace their ancestry to the Benin Empire, the Oko, Odekpe, and Ossomala claim they are descendants of Igala who migrated from the Nupe and Jukun Kingdoms.²³ To date, the Oko, Odekpe, and Ossomala people of Ogbaru continue to maintain their Igala cultural heritage and lineage. For example the heads of these towns are called *Atamanya*, an Igala word for king, and are greeted as *Okakwu*. On the contrary, the heads of the Ogbaru towns east of the Niger are known as *Eze* and are greeted as *Igwe*, one of the Igbo words for king,²⁴ and some names of the titles they take show remnants of their Benin Kingdom origin. Similarly, the Ogbaru stratified political structure

¹⁹ The Ogbaru people are spread within four States - Delta Anambra, Bayelsa and Rivers in Nigeria - and it is difficult to determine the size of the area they occupy. They have always struggled to have a State of their own for the reason that, except in Delta State, the Ogbaru are often a minority group in the States they find themselves in.

²⁰ The Oko Towns consist of Oko-Amakom, Oko-Anala and Oko-Ogbele.

²¹ Isichei 1984: 9.

²² Isichei 1973: 31-38.

²³ See <http://www.ogbaru.org/who1.htm>. Accessed on January 10, 2007 and Nwadukwe 1981.

²⁴ The most popular Igbo word for a king is *Eze*.

shows their affiliations with their past kingdoms of origin. They are often ruled by a centralized government, unlike the mainland Igbo, which had a de-centralized government. Finding shelter along the fertile banks of the great river Niger and rain forest region of Nigeria, the main occupations of the Ogbaru are farming, fishing, trading and canoe building.

Music forms an integral part of the lives of the Ogbaru people. Almost all facets of Ogbaru life, such as life cycle events, ceremonies, and festivals, are accompanied by music. Important fiestas that incorporate music making include the *Ulọ* festival that celebrates the planting season, *Ufejiọku* and *Iwa Ji*, both yam festivals that celebrate the sanctification of the farmland and the new yam harvest and thanksgiving respectively, and *Omeli mmuọ*, a celebration that honors the ancestors of the land.

1.4 CONCEPTUAL PERSPECTIVE

The theoretical line of thought used in this study is eclectic and interdisciplinary in nature. This technique enabled me to deal with the complex analytical issues that I encountered while investigating a performance and verbal art form such as *Égwú Àmàlà* that transcends a single discipline.

1.4.1 Toward a Dynamic Model of Musical Culture

My analytical approach focuses on performance and resonates with theoretical developments in ethnomusicology dating from the early 1980s, when scholars emphasized the context of music-

making, viewing it as a process rather than as a product.²⁵ Since any significant study of music, dance or theatre cannot be separated from its socio-cultural context and the scale of values it signifies,²⁶ my research was guided by a cultural factor approach that focuses on procedures that are used in structuring music. In discussing culture, I borrow from Raymond Williams, who suggests three ways in which the term culture can be used, two of which are relevant to this work. Firstly, the word culture might suggest “a particular way of life, whether of a people, a period or a group.”²⁷ Secondly, it can also imply “the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity,”²⁸ what structuralists and post-structuralists would refer to as “signifying practices.” That is to say, and as Storey asserts, “those texts and practices whose main function is to signify, to produce or to be occasion for the production of meaning.”²⁹ While the former definition would refer to lived cultures or cultural practices, the latter would refer to cultural texts. In contextualizing *Égwú Àmàlà*, the first definition will allow me to discuss not only the intellectual and aesthetic factors, but also the development and practices of the genre, while the second definition will enable me argue that dance, drama, metaphors, visual arts such as body decorations and plastics employed in *Égwú Àmàlà* performances, are examples of culture and not mere aesthetics.

Ethnomusicologists with anthropological background such as McAllester (1954), Merriam (1964) and Blacking (1967) are of the opinion that music making is social behavior and action and that it articulates broader social values and ideologies. Detailed ethnographic studies provide accounts of integral relationships between music and other social domains in regard to

²⁵ Such scholars include Stone 1982; Seeger 2004; Waterman 1990.

²⁶ Hood 1971.

²⁷ Williams 1983: 88-90.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Storey 1998: 2.

style, practices, underlying dispositions, and worldview.³⁰ By the 1990s, the link between music, sound, dance, gender and social relations became a significant area of discourse in ethnomusicological scholarship. For instance, Jane K. Cowan (1990) focused on dance, among the Soho of Greece, as the scene for the contestation of gender identities. Thomas Turino (1993), on the other hand, examined how Andean immigrants in Lima, Peru, used music as a strategy to evoke their sense of cultural identity in a new urban milieu. Different techniques have been elicited by these studies, some of which have included cross-cultural comparisons.

Ethnomusicological cross-cultural comparison has had to do with regions, nations and societies, and ethnic groups. These comparisons “have been based on the assumption of cultural homogeneity within such entities” which permits their comparison as units.³¹ Given the socio-cultural implications of my study, I enlisted, among other perspectives, Turino’s theory of “subjective cultural positions”³² as implied in his study of the Andean immigrants in Lima, Peru, by analyzing similarities and differences between various *Égwú Àmàlà* performing groups of Ogbaruland. Such a comparison, which is the study of homogeneity as well as the differences among peoples of the same society, enabled me to observe the ways these similarities, differences, and contradictions are articulated, negotiated, explained, and utilized within a culture.

³⁰ See Keil 1979; Seeger 1980, 1987; Becker and Becker 1981; Feld 1982, 1984.

³¹ Turino 1993: 8.

³² Ibid.

1.5 LITERATURE REVIEW

1.5.1 *Égwú Àmàlà* Music and Dance

Although much has been written on various Nigerian popular music genres such as Highlife, Jùjù, Fuji, and Afro-beat, there is less documentation on traditional Nigerian genres including Oriki, Ese, Ukom, Ezeagu Atilogwu, and Abigbo.³³ Even more meager still is literature dealing with *Égwú Àmàlà* and women's music and dance in Igboland.

Prior to the 1980s, no systematic research was conducted on *Égwú Àmàlà*. In 1981, Anthonia Ndalaku Nwadukwe's research paper in the form of a Bachelor's thesis, the first in the study of *Égwú Àmàlà*, had as its scope the documentation of *Égwú Àmàlà* and its significance in Ogbaru culture.³⁴ The theoretical framework of Nwadukwe's study revolved around the Ogbaru cultural context. Although her thesis is entitled "*Egwu Amala: A Mirror of Ogbaru Culture*," she concentrated only on Ogbaruland east of the Niger. Nwadukwe seems to have taken the sub-regional stylistic variations of the genre for granted and presented *Égwú Àmàlà* as a monolithic discourse that placed the genre as a widely accepted cultural emblem. Her generalization of Ogbaru culture based on her findings in Ogbaruland east of the Niger problematizes *Égwú Àmàlà* as a representation of Ogbaru culture.

The first major scholarly work on an upper graduate level and an important contribution to the study of *Égwú Àmàlà* is Fidelma Uzoechi Okwesa's dissertation. As a choreographer, Okwesa's doctoral dissertation of 1987 focused on the dance-theatre constituents and structures

³³ See Vidal, *Oriki*, 1971; Nzewi, *Ese Music*, 1990 and 1977; Uzoigwe, *Ukom*, 1998; Okafor, *Ezeagu Atilogwu*, 1998; Onyeji, *Abigbo*, 2004.

³⁴ Anthonia Nwadukwe 1981: v

of *Égwú Àmàlà*. Accordingly, Okwesa's work gives a detailed description of *Égwú Àmàlà* dance-plays. In the ninth chapter of her dissertation, Okwesa discusses the musical resources of *Égwú Àmàlà*, but in relation to dance theatre. Since the ethnographic setting of Okwesa's investigation was only on the Aboh people, where the genre is traditionally believed to have originated, it does not give a broad and complete picture of this musical tradition as performed by other peoples of Ogbaruland. Given that all Ogbaru people engage in *Égwú Àmàlà*, a broad musical ethnography of Ogbaruland, east and west of the Niger, will better ascertain the similarities and differences of their musical practices as well as their conceptions about what the music means. Despite my critical comments, I believe that these early research works, initiated over two decades ago, provide an important foundation for a more comprehensive and representative study of *Égwú Àmàlà*. I have acquired useful skills from these works, especially in their explication of the Aboh culture and *Égwú Àmàlà* in Aboh traditional setting.

Joshua Uzoigwe took the examination of the genre in another direction. His study of *Égwú Àmàlà* was not based on ethnographic research, but rather on a close study of structural elements and a consequent appropriation of techniques in an original composition for piano, "*Égwú Àmàlà*," one of three in a set called "Talking Drums."³⁵

My exposé of *Égwú Àmàlà* is largely a reconstruction of events that occurred in the past based on the Ogbaru people's own oral accounts. This is further substantiated by corroborative data drawn from written resources and from still existing evidence of cultural continuity witnessed during my fieldwork. The present study overlaps with these initial written works on

³⁵ Joshua Uzoigwe, "Talking Drums," in *Senku: Piano Music by Composers of African Descent*. William Chapman Nyaho, Pianist. Recorded CD, Produced and Engineered by Gregory K. Squires (CD number MS 1091). In his unpublished paper, "Creative Ethnomusicology: A Transformational Zone Between Research and Composition," Akin Euba described this method, whereby information derived from research is used in composition as Creative Ethnomusicology (Euba, 2000).

Égwú Àmàlà, but the point of divergence is the musicological, gender and religious orientation of my research.

Contextual studies in dance and gender have played a major role in defining certain aspects of this study. I have gained insights from Judith Lynne Hanna's book, *To Dance is Human* (1987). Drawing on fields such as anthropology, semiotics, communications, folklore, sociology, political science, performing arts, religion and psychology, Hanna demonstrates the multi-sensory as well as the multi-dimensional behavior inherent in dance. Exploring dance from different parts of the world including West Africa, Mexico, the Caribbean and the United States of America, Hanna illustrates that dance is human thought and feelings that are expressed through the body. Two valuable sources in my discussion of gender and music in chapter two of this work are: a collection of essays, *Women and Music in Cross-Cultural Perspective*, edited by Ellen Koskoff, which deals with women's involvement and other women's issues in music, and Jane Cowan's study *Dance and Body Politic in Northern Greece* (1990). In this book, Cowan examines dance as a site for challenging culturally constructed gender studies.

Preliminary to a proper understanding of the ethnographic data of Ogbaruland, a clarification of gender and religious perspectives in Igboland in general is necessary. In this respect, Ifi Amadiume's book, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands* (1987), is indispensable in the discourse of gender negotiations, especially the place of women in pre-colonial and traditional Igbo society.

Little or no research on Igbo women was conducted before the colonial era. This attitude changed during the colonial administration, especially after the Igbo Women's War of 1929. As a result of this riot, British administrative officers provided funding and sent scholars to study the Igbo country, with emphasis on Igbo women, whose bravado had perplexed the colonialists. The

first seminal work in this line is Sylvia Leith-Ross's book, *African Women: A Study of the Ibo of Nigeria* (1938). In this study of the life and daily activities of Igbo women of the Owerri Province of Eastern Nigeria, the author described the roles of Igbo women in traditional village life. Important to my study is Leith-Ross's observation of gender conception among the Igbo, which was different from that of Western culture.

Scholars such as Kamene Okonjo have also studied the political, religious, and economic systems of the Igbo people. Her article "The Dual-Sex Political System in Operation: Igbo Women and Community Politics in Midwestern Nigeria" (1976), also informs my work. In this paper, Okonjo discussed traditional Western Igbo political institutions, which differ to some extent from that of the Eastern or Mainland Igbo. She posited and described in detail the nature of the dual-sex system comparing and contrasting it with the predominantly single-sex system that obtains in Western cultures. Okonjo also contended that with the introduction of colonial rule to Igboland, active participation of women in political and economic spheres diminished.

Works such as Judith van Allen's "'Aba Riots' or Igbo 'Women's War'? Ideology, Stratification, and the Invisibility of Women" (1976) are important contributions concerning the social activities of Igbo women. In describing the Igbo Women's War, Allen pointed out the injustices done by colonial administrators to Igbo women and the subsequent loss of their political rights. She also questioned the justification of calling the *Ogu Umunwanyi* or Women's War, "Aba Riots," especially since none of the colonialists or their allies were killed, while fifty Igbo women were shot and killed during this uprising. The author also argued that colonialism brought about the demise of Igbo women's political activities.

My study presents a comprehensive analysis and documentation of *Égwú Àmàlà*, through which the social and cultural representation of the Ogbaru east and west of the Niger can be

constructed. Furthermore, it examines how gender is negotiated in the performance practice of the genre. Considering the fact that women for decades have preserved this music genre which mirrors the culture and traditions of the Ogbaru people, the present investigation represents a major contribution to gender, cultural and ethnomusicological studies and adds to other growing works on the participation of women in the music of their societies,³⁶ especially in Africa.³⁷

1.6 METHODOLOGY

1.6.1 Formal and Informal Study

Some of the materials for this study were gathered from formal and informal encounters with the genre in Ogbaruland. My first informal experience of *Égwú Àmàlà*, as an Ogbaru indigene, was when I was fourteen years old and had to learn preliminary aspects of the genre.³⁸ It was my first long stay of twelve weeks in the village, Oko-Amakom, as a young girl. As an Ogbaru young girl, it was not sufficient for me to simply know about *Égwú Àmàlà*; it was pertinent that I be able to participate as a dancer or instrument player when youngsters of my age, usually referred to as *otu-ogbo* (age-grade) were performing. As a result, my aunt, Mrs. Comfort Ogbuchi nee Ozah, herself a talented dancer of *Égwú Àmàlà* and whose husband was the *eze égwú* (Patron of the dance) of the dance group in the village, insisted that my siblings and I learn the music and dance. This exposure, and subsequent experiences that took place whenever I

³⁶ Koskoff 1987.

³⁷ Opondo 1991; Ampene 2005; Nannyonga-Tamusuza 2004.

³⁸ Although I am from Oko-Amakom, a village in Ogbaruland, I did not grow up in the region or I would have learned these initial aspects of *Égwú Àmàlà* much earlier.

visited the village, enabled me to be part of *Égwú Àmàlà* as well as to inquire about the genre. My experiences and knowledge of *Égwú Àmàlà*, as Agawu (1995) emphasized and contended, for his study of the Northern Ewe, will also be incorporated in my discussion of this most popular women's music and dance of my people.

My formal research on *Égwú Àmàlà* began in 2000, when I first interviewed Mrs. Patricia Odiocha, alias Ogbuefi Beauty Okaome Obi, a significant performer of *Égwú Àmàlà*, who at that time lived in Asaba, now the capital of Delta State. This study was part of my endeavor to collect and record women's music and dance in southern Nigeria, which up until then and even still, has received very little scholarly attention.³⁹ During this visit and interview, Ogbuefi Beauty Okaome,⁴⁰ played some rhythms on some of the musical instruments used during an *Égwú Àmàlà* performance and also elucidated their cultural significance in the ensemble. She further explained to me that her melodies come to her as inspirations, to which she integrates texts describing events, social developments, and ethical concerns of the community. Sometimes, though, both melody and texts are given to her in a dream. She gave me a recent video of her performance that included her most recent composition, *okada bulu nwunye-m* (the motorcyclist has carried my wife away). This composition will be useful in the discussion of melodies in chapters three and six of this dissertation.

³⁹ Since the year 2000, I have documented other women's music and dance from Southern Nigeria such as: Ozah 2006: 67-82; My other unpublished essays include: "Ebre Dance" from Ibibio, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, 2000; "Constructing Body Appeal: Ejagham Maidens and the Moninkim Ritual," Paper presented at the Society of Ethnomusicology (SEM) Conference, Honolulu, Hawaii, 2006; "'When Men Dance Like Women': The Negotiation of Gender and Performance Space in *Égwú Àmàlà*," Paper presented at the Society of Ethnomusicology (SEM) Conference, Columbus, Ohio, 2007.

⁴⁰ Henceforth, Beauty Okaome, as she is popularly known.

1.6.2 Fieldwork

The fieldwork specific to this research of *Égwú Àmàlà* was conducted between October 2005 and February 2006. Immigration policies in the United States of America that did not allow international students to stay out of the country for more than five months restricted the length of my stay in the field. A period of four months may appear insufficient for fieldwork related to a study of this nature. Even so, my socio-cultural background as an Ogbaru person and my familiarity with the music significantly complement the months that I dedicated to documenting the music of my indigenous culture. Furthermore, my previous contacts and arrangements with collaborators in the field made it possible for me to achieve much within a short span of time.

On my arrival in Nigeria, I spent the last week of October and first two weeks of November getting in touch with my field collaborators and confirming appointments for interviews and *Égwú Àmàlà* dance performances. I enlisted the services of research assistants/collaborators, among whom I must single out the following:

Stephen Nwabueze Ogbuchi, my cousin and a teacher by profession, from Oko-Amakom. His father, Chief Ogbuchi, was the *eze égwú* until his death in 2003 and his mother, Comfort Ogbushi nee Ozah, was a skilled dancer in the *Égwú Àmàlà* group in Oko-Amakom. Mary Jane Ejeoma was introduced to me by Dr. Joseph Ofori Ofosu, a professor at the Music Department, Delta State University, Abraka, Delta State, Nigeria. Mary Jane is a graduate of music and an Aboh indigene. Currently, she is residing in Ashaka, where she teaches music in the Model Secondary School. She was very helpful, particularly in translating difficult language structures, sentences and phrases of the Aboh dialect during interviews and performances. Sister Rosemary Ugboma, NES, also from Aboh was helpful in enabling me to penetrate the Aboh dance group. Clara Akubeze, a social worker from Atani in Ogbaru east of the Niger, was instrumental to my

meeting Beauty Okaome. Living in Onitsha, the same city where Beauty Okaome resides, Clara initiated contact and made an appointment with Ogbuefi Beauty Okaome for me. My work in the field at Ndoni would have been very difficult without the help of Mrs. Chinyere Odili, the sister-in-law of the then governor of Rivers State, Chief Peter Odili. Within a short period of time, she was able to schedule interviews and a performance in Ndoni to “greet” me on my arrival to the town, and she even paid for their cost.

I chose field sites in Ogbaruland located in different States that represented *Égwú Àmàlà* traditions. My attention was focused on selected groups of musicians and ensembles in Aboh, Oko-Amakom, Ndoni and Ogbuefi Beauty Okaome’s dance group in Onitsha that typify Ogbaru west and east of the River Niger. Since *Égwú Àmàlà* is said to have started in the Aboh area, I began with interviews in Ashaka, a town traditionally within the Aboh kingdom and Aboh. In Ashaka, Chief I. N. Ozegbe, the Omordi Nwadei of Aboh, the *Ezediosa* (father or patron) of the *Égwú Àmàlà* group, narrated and explained the origin and performance practice of the genre. After the interview, a date was scheduled when I could meet the group in performance. In Aboh, among others interviewed was an elder, Chief Enebeli Ogu. He participated in the early dances, which, as he elucidated, engendered *Égwú Àmàlà*. From Aboh, I went to Oko-Amakom where I interviewed the elders Oduah Nnojeli Ijeoma (*eze égwú*), Ijele Ben Oba and Okita Denis Egonu as well as some dancers of the genre.

In my discussions with the above persons, more than three quarters of the interviewees mentioned Madam Beauty Okaome Obi as the most popular composer, dancer and an advocate of modern *Égwú Àmàlà* and its commercialization. I made several visits to Beauty Okaome during which I interviewed her and recorded a performance by her group. During this

performance, Beauty Okaome composed a song on the spot, using my traditional praise name.⁴¹ She invited me to dance by calling me to dance in song and by dancing herself. Although I was not dressed for performance, I could not resist such an invitation as it would be an insult and disrespectful to the musician and even more so to an elder. My findings will be discussed in the third chapter of this dissertation. The last site of my field trip was Ndoni in Rivers State. Here I asked that the performance be informal. As a result, young girls performed *Égwú Àmàlà* with very minimal stage dressing, as an entertainment to welcome me to the town.

1.6.2.1 Negotiations in the Field

The field is a space open to “fluidity of experiences”⁴² and the researcher ought to be ready to tackle the challenges posed by various encounters in the field. It is therefore important that the researcher be aware of his or her identity and position in the field and consequently be prepared to adjust to new ones so as to bridge the gap between the researcher and the informants/collaborators.

The fact that I am from Ogbaru and familiar with the geographical milieu of my research made my entry into the field space easier. Moreover, the status of my immediate and extended family and the fact that I am a native speaker of Igbo language and its dialect, Ika-Igbo, also enabled me to establish an affable relationship with my informants/collaborators in the field that eased interaction and the conducting of interviews. To the Oko-Amakom people, I am a “daughter of the soil” seeking to know and document the tradition of her fatherland, an act that

⁴¹ In my Village, Oko-Amakom, as in all Ogbaruland, formal greeting words as conceived in the West are not used when dealing with members of the village. Every clan has a praise name by which each member is greeted. Within the clan, each person has a praise name by which s/he is greeted. For example, my praise name is Nwaezekibea (meaning, a king’s child is greater than her peers). This is not my native name but my greeting name. Thus when anyone wants to greet me (in the morning, afternoon or evening, or even saying thank you), the person will simply call me by my praise name and I will reply by calling the person by his or her praise name.

⁴² Bohlman 1997: 141.

will in the long run be beneficial to the future generation. In Ashaka, introducing myself to Chief I. N. Ozegbe, the Omordi Nwadei of Aboh brought some surprises. He got up and simply said to me, “Welcome my sister, you are in your house.” At first, I did not understand why he spoke to me in that manner. But he went on to explain that his mother was from my clan, Idokomadu, in Oko-Amakom. I was, thus, in the hands of my brother and he went to great lengths to make my fieldwork in the area a success. During our (with Mary Jean and my cousin, Stephen) visit, the Omordi Nwadei’s wife brought gifts to entertain us. The gifts comprised kola nuts, a bottle of Guinness stout beer, some bottles of soft drinks (soda) and the sum of twenty Nigerian Naira (N20. 00). The inclusion of money in the “welcome gifts” was new to me. But Mary Jane told me it was the Aboh tradition. In fact, this gesture was re-enacted in all the families and by all the persons we visited in the Aboh area. I likewise found a similar cordial rapport with Beauty Okaome. She had visited Oko several times, taught the *Égwú Àmàlà* dance group of Oko-Anala, and also knew some members of my immediate family.

Despite all these advantages and my privileged position as an indigenous scholar, I still experienced other challenges and sometimes needed the help of influential people, such as Mrs. Chinyere Odili to pave the way for my data collection, especially in Ndoni.

The first difficulty I encountered in the field arose from my Christian faith and my vocation as a Roman Catholic nun. Most often, my collaborators saw me as a “judge” of the sincerity of and their devotion to their new Christian faith.⁴³ Some performers told me their pastors and priests had banned them from singing *Égwú Àmàlà* songs that honor and/or ask the *Mami Wata* for a favor (of a child). Yet others wondered if I was not part of that religious class

⁴³ Although a lot of people from this area are Christians, it is not uncommon to find some who would revert to traditional religion or occultism for convenience. As a result, some people who are members of the *Mami Wata* cult may actually be active “Christians.”

from whom they should take instructions. How could I be different in my role as a researcher? Consequently, they declined to perform certain sections of *Égwú Àmàlà* dance in my presence. Some even shied away from discussing aspects of *Mami Wata* in *Égwú Àmàlà* with me. Others could not understand my interest in *Égwú Àmàlà* and were not comfortable about my seeing them, who profess the Christian faith, engage in this tradition; nor would some of them even want me to insinuate that they were *Mami Wata* cult members.

Ogbuefi Beauty Okaome was also slow to tell me about her association with the *Mami Wata* as a cult member. In Ndoni, a woman⁴⁴ affirmed to me that she gave birth to her baby girl only after, upon advice, she joined and danced *Égwú Àmàlà*. But she quickly added, “I believe though that it was not the *Mami Wata* that gave me the child but God.” Was her second sentence merely an addendum to impress the nun? Although I would be considered an “insider” by birth, it became apparent that I was considered an “outsider” by virtue of my religious vocation. Conscious of these difficulties, I changed my technique of investigation. I spent time explaining to my informants/collaborators and various performers that I was interested in preserving our culture for the benefit of our children. I told them that if *Égwú Àmàlà* were properly documented, the future generation would have the possibility to read, compare and contrast the *Égwú Àmàlà* of their era with those of the past. They would also have a clear notion of the traditions of the past through this music and dance that epitomizes the culture of our people. As a result, the genre would be more appreciated and would have a better chance of surviving. These clarifications changed the attitude of my informants/collaborators, who then became more open to me and with some even sharing their personal experiences of the music and dance with me.

⁴⁴ The woman referred to here requested to remain anonymous because of her social status in her community and for the fact that she did not want her comments to scandalize anyone.

The situation was a little different in my village, Oko-Amakom, where my informants/collaborators were more outspoken and shared whatever religious aspect of *Égwú Àmàlà* they were aware of with me. To them, I was a daughter of the soil, an “insider” seeking to know more and to record aspects of our tradition. Thus, in the field, I was neither an “insider nor outsider, neither fully emic nor fully etic”.⁴⁵

1.6.3 Research Tools

My methodology is based on inductive inquiry. This method, which is often associated with a technique called triangulation, uses multiple means, such as observations, interviews, and archival materials, to collect data from a range of sources. With such a variety of data, I can “close in on the ultimate general explanatory model from the widest possible set of perspectives.”⁴⁶ Thus in the field, I used the following methodological tools: interviews and observation of *Égwú Àmàlà* dance performances, field equipment and archival research.

1.6.3.1 Interviews

I gathered the information needed for my research through focus group interviews, oral history interviews,⁴⁷ and “in-depth individual interviews”⁴⁸ with elderly people, traditional rulers, performers of *Égwú Àmàlà*, and other knowledgeable persons in Ogbaruland. While focus group interviews enabled me to ascertain the link between individual situations and social positions, oral history and in-depth individual interviews facilitated my obtaining historical evidence,

⁴⁵ Herndon 1993: 77.

⁴⁶ Angrosino 2005: 15.

⁴⁷ Stroh, 2000: 199.

⁴⁸ Bernard 2000: 174-175.

personal opinion and perceptions of the music genre. During exploratory in-depth interviews, I dealt with certain issues such as traditional religion, origins and dance styles of *Égwú Àmàlà* in great detail so as to deepen my understanding of the themes in question. Hence, the interviews were open-ended in the sense that I avoided “forced-choice,” yes-or-no questions, using only those that tended to make way for extended narrative responses.⁴⁹ However, I often resorted to the use of semi-structured interviews when I needed to verify particular issues, to confirm or reject ideas engendered by in-depth interviews. In addition to these, informal conversations with friends, visitors who had lived in Ogbaruland, members of the surrounding neighborhood such as Asaba, Ibusa, Issele-Uku, and Ishiagu, to mention a few, provided useful information about ideologies of religion, gender, and traditions of the Niger Delta people in general.

Before I went into the field, I thought I would be able to get into one of the training sessions with Beauty Okaome. Unfortunately, that was not feasible, because the period of my research coincided with her rest period, during which, though she could perform with her group, she did not teach beginners. Furthermore, the training period would usually include at least seven months of intensive work, a length of time, as I mentioned earlier, I was not by law allowed to stay outside the U.S.A. Nonetheless, I had the opportunity to observe a performance by, and in one instance dance with, Beauty Okaome and her group. Also, I was able to observe performances by three other *Égwú Àmàlà* groups from Aboh, Ashaka and Ndoni.

1.6.3.2 Field Equipment

To enable successful detailed transliteration and transcription of information collected during my fieldwork, I recorded *Égwú Àmàlà* live performances and interviews with a Sony DCR-TRV 33

⁴⁹ Angrosino 2005: 44.

digital video camera recorder, a Sony tape recorder, and a Canon Power Shot A620 digital camera. The Sony DCR-TRV 33 recorder provided adequate and reliable recording of the performances that will constitute the base of my analysis. I also purchased a tripod VCT-D480 RM. This equipment was very handy when my hands were tired and could no longer hold the video camera recorder. The still pictures, which I took with the Canon Power Shot A620 digital camera, will supply iconographic information about musicians, performances, musical instruments, and interview sessions. Some of the pictures taken with the Canon digital camera will be used in the body of this work to provide visual examples where needed.

1.6.3.3 Archival Research

Historical, cultural, and other relevant data were collected from secondary sources including the Department of Music at the Delta State University, Abraka. It was on my second trip to the university that one of the professors in the department, Dr. Joseph Ofori Ofosu, introduced me to Mary Jane, who later became a vital liaison between the Aboh, the Ashaka peoples, and myself.

Information about the various cultural aspects of the Delta people such as statistics and maps were collected from the Ministries of Population and Lands and Survey, respectively. But none of these departments in the Delta and Anambra States could provide me with a map that showed Ogbaruland east and west of the Niger. Although I got some general information about the culture of the people of the region from the Delta State Ministry of Culture and Information as well as from the Arts Council, no official source had any written documentation about *Égwú Àmàlà*. In fact, they requested that I send a copy of my dissertation to the Ministries so that other scholars may have a source to work with when researching *Égwú Àmàlà* in the future. As

archival material, my dissertation will in the future serve to “support the analysis of cultural processes through time.”⁵⁰

Beauty Okaome also gave me four cassettes of her recorded music.⁵¹ These include her early compositions. Comparing the early recordings with recent ones, including those I recorded in the field, has given me the opportunity to examine the historical development in *Égwú Àmàlà* as well as enabled me to establish the extent of musical change in the genre, at least with regard to Beauty’s career.

1.7 ANALYSIS OF DATA

Data analysis and formal dissertation writing, which started simultaneously upon my return to the United States, are a synthesis of my ideas and all materials collected during my fieldwork. My analytic method follows an inductive approach based on a “grounded” approach, in which codes are allowed to appear from the data,⁵² thus enabling me to identify and interpret outstanding categories and develop concepts therefrom.

I have used two main types of translations in this work. Firstly, I have transcribed the recorded music using the Western notational system, which is more widely used in music scholarship. But it must be noted that this form of notation is not without its problems. Thus the reader should bear in mind that the pitches in the transcriptions are sometimes approximations of

⁵⁰ Angrosino 2005: 57

⁵¹ Ogbuefi Beauty Okaome gave me the following cassettes: *Ezi Oyi Special* by Chief Ogbuefi Beauty Okaome and her Beat Wright Dancing Group; *Egwu Amala: Okada Part One*, by Chief Ogbuefi Beauty Okaome and her Beat Wright Dancing Group, printed by Petal Press, 18 Enweonwu St. Osha. (Onitsha); *Okada Part Two*, by Chief Ogbuefi Beauty Okaome and her Beat Wright Dancing Group; *Okada Vol 6: Oso Worri* by Chief Ogbuefi Beauty Okaome and her Beat Wright Dancing Group. Unfortunately, these cassettes do not have any dates on them; thus, there are no indications of when they were recorded or produced.

⁵² See Lévi-Strauss (1987) in Matt Stroh, 2000: 210.

the actual pitches. Secondly, the transliteration of recorded interviews and the texts of the songs have been translated into the English language to make them more accessible to a wider audience. For the interview texts, I have transcribed them using the Standard Igbo dialect that is understood by many people of this ethnic group. Nonetheless, I have retained the Ogbaru Igbo dialectic versions of the song texts so as to demonstrate the role of verbal processes in melodic construction.

The views of my informants/collaborators also form an important part of this work. When necessary and with their permission, I have directly quoted them; in other instances, some have asked to remain anonymous for certain social reasons, which I have respected. The analysis thus presented in this dissertation is a synthesis of both my personal interpretations and those collected through discussions and interaction with my informants/collaborators, albeit the manifestation of my views and conclusions are evident throughout the study.

1.8 KEY TO THE PRONUNCIATION OF SOME IGBO WORDS

Since this is a study of indigenous tradition, I have endeavored to maintain many of the Igbo names and terms used in *Égwú Àmàlà* as well as in the Igbo culture. However, I always offer the English translations of these Igbo words or phrases immediately after they are used for the first time. In addition, I have provided a glossary of Igbo terms with their English meanings at the end of the dissertation.

Like many African languages, Igbo is a tonal language. This implies that the lexical meaning of a word is dependent on the variation in the relative duration and pitch or inflection of the syllables. There are two distinctive tones in Igbo language: high / (as in *égwú*, play, dance)

and low \ (as in *àmàlà*, paddle). Dots are also used under some syllables to indicate a closed sound. For instance *Ọ* sounds like the first syllable *O* in the word *Orlando* (as in *ọkpọkọlọ*, wood block). A dot under the letter *U*, such as *Ụ* does not have an English equivalent, but this sound is found in Igbo words like *ụgbọ* (canoe).

I have provided below the closest pronunciation of the Igbo phonetics of vowels in English. The underlined English syllable(s) or letters correspond to the pronunciation of the letters of Igbo alphabet. Consonants are pronounced as in the English language, with the exception of combined syllables that have no English equivalents, for example, *gb* (*égbè*, gun), *gh* (*ígha mghigha*, turning bed), *kp* (*àkpà*, bag), and *gw* (*gwám*, tell me).

Table 1-1 Igbo vowels and their English equivalent

Vowels		English Equivalents	Igbo Examples
A	á	<u>a</u> we, <u>a</u> nimal	<i>ákwúkwọ</i> (book)
	à	<u>a</u> rrangement	<i>àmàlà</i> (paddle)
E	é	<u>a</u> te	<i>égwú</i> (play)
	è	<u>e</u> nd,	<i>égbè</i> (gun)
I	i	<u>e</u> at, <u>m</u> e	<i>mmili</i> (water)
	ì	<u>e</u> quality, <u>i</u> mportant	<i>ìgbo</i> (language)
O	ọ	<u>O</u> rlando	<i>ọkpọkọlọ</i> (wood block)
	o	T <u>o</u> ronto	<i>ogénè</i> (metal bell)
U	ù	d <u>o</u>	<i>ùdù</i> (clay pot)
	ụ	no equivalent	<i>ụgbọ</i> (canoe)

This is not meant to be a lesson in Igbo language, but rather only a guide for the approximate pronunciation of some words used frequently in this work.

2.0 GENDER CONCEPTUALIZATION IN NIGERIAN SOCIETY

You may take evidence for many days, but unless you come to a conclusion, which will satisfy the women, we will follow you wherever you go. Formally we never made demonstrations in this manner, but we do so in order to show you that women are annoyed.... We will continue fighting until all the chiefs have been got rid of, but until then the matter will not be settled.⁵³

Gender discourse is a complicated subject in a multicultural country such as Nigeria with over 300 different ethnic groups and languages. Apart from their linguistic differences, these ethnic groups are often distinct from each other in their beliefs, economic, and socio-political activities. In the context of the Nigerian society, therefore, gender is culture specific, and its definitions often differ from culture to culture as well as from one period to another. That said however, some common aspects apply to the majority of cultures in Nigeria.

The concept of gender in Nigeria is a composite of social roles that the biological sexes play in society. Hence gender is mapped in biology, and what is society-specific is the kind of roles the different genders perform. This means that the societal values allocated to men and women embody the gender role of male and female respectively in that particular culture. For example, women are expected to be agents of peace in the family in most cultures in Nigeria. It is the role of the mother to educate the children and introduce them to the fundamental aspects of

⁵³ Evidence given by a female witness at the Aba Commission of Inquiry in 1929. For the complete citation see Bastian 2002: 274.

the tradition and norms of that culture. While she teaches the girls the importance of their roles and strength as mothers in the society, the boys are taught by both parents, but particularly by the father, to be brave and manly because they will grow up to be protectors and advocates of their parents in the future. Such behaviors of mothers, who are the early educators of children, demonstrate that hegemony is often obtained by broad cultural consent rather than force of the male over the female.

The above rhetoric, or rather observation, corroborates Rosaldo's theoretical discussions on the similarity of sexual differentiation and sex-role asymmetry in most cultures of the world. Rosaldo posits that while the domestic orientation of women is considered to be the decisive factor in understanding their social status, the contrary is the case with the extra-domestic, political, and military areas of activity and interest usually associated or even attributed to men.⁵⁴ Accordingly, men are often regarded as the locus of cultural values and ascribed the public spheres while women are relegated to the domestic spheres of activity.

Gender is also constructed based on social status, which is determined by factors such as age and class. For most Nigerians, class is determined by the conferring of titles, and these titles are bestowed on individuals often by merit of their achievements but sometimes also by birth. For example, a woman, by virtue of her being born into a royal family, is distinguished from the so-called commoners, that is, from other women who are not of royal birth in the society. The age factor in Nigerian society cannot be overemphasized. Elders are respected and are considered as embodiments of wisdom. In southern Nigeria in particular, an old woman⁵⁵ may

⁵⁴ Rosaldo 1974: 24.

⁵⁵ In most Nigerian societies, age is easily calculated based on age grades. Each age-grade comprises people born at a particular period, for example children born in 2000 will belong to a group. These children, of course, will be given more respect than children born in 2004, who belong to another age grade. An old woman, such as discussed above, would belong to the oldest age grade. However, it is pertinent to note that the traditional Igbo calendar is

assume a high status in the society and be consulted during decision-making, but may not be permitted to be the head of a clan, village, or town, a position customarily reserved for men.

British colonial rule and the introduction of Western cultures to Nigeria in the nineteenth century had very profound effects on the Igbo culture which cannot be overlooked. European education and the Christian religion introduced new social relations, and in some instances, legitimized already existing traditional ones, ultimately creating new structures for gender constructions. In recent times, the acquisition of Western education and/or Western professional status by women has served as criteria for the stratification and construction of an elite class.⁵⁶ This group is on the increase, especially in contemporary times. By their acquisition of Western education and of some other aspects of Western social culture, these “privileged” few assume social roles previously dominated by men, becoming lawyers, doctors, speakers in the House of Assembly, commissioners, ministers, governors and military personnel. In this way, they achieve significant social status and power that place them on a higher stratum than most women in the society and sometimes an even higher level than some men. Within the female folk, these elite women (by Western standards) situate themselves in an advantaged level with regards to a good number of other women, thus creating yet another form of social categorization and gender construction in which power is negotiated.

Politics has also exerted its influence on gender. From the traditional cultural perspective, gender relations, as conceived in Nigeria, differ significantly from those of the West in general and America in particular. Traditions that appear to be male-dominated to the Western eye actually included detailed negotiations of power between genders in the Nigerian

different from the present Western calendar. Age grades are usually flexible and can contain people born within a two-year period.

⁵⁶ For further reading on modern elite class in Nigeria and Africa see Adian Southall’s article, “Stratification in Africa” in Plotnicov and Tuden (eds), 1970.

society. Contrary to the opinions of many Western scholars, women in traditional Nigerian culture were effective power brokers in areas such as farming, trading, marketing and politics.⁵⁷ They were the strongholds of their families (in terms of raising and caring for their children and family), and they were not silent when intruders trespassed into these spheres. One of the most intriguing examples of resistance in Nigerian and African history is the *Ogu Umunwanyi* (Women's War) in colonial Southeastern Nigeria in 1929.⁵⁸ This war demonstrated, to a considerable degree, the status and role of women in the administration of their society, particularly in Igboland.

Throughout pre-colonial Nigeria, women were directly involved in politics. They also played remarkable roles in the socio-political, religious, as well as economic institutions of Nigeria. Women rulers such as Bakwa Turunku and her daughter Queen Amina of Zaria in northern Nigeria were distinguished for their astuteness and achievements. Bakwa Turunku founded the modern city of Zaria in the early sixteenth century. Her daughter, Queen Amina, was popular and "renowned for her military prowess and for extending Zaria's domination over a wide area right to the confluence of the Niger and Benue rivers."⁵⁹ Queen Amina turned Zaria into a famous commercial center. The rulers and people of Kano and Katsina paid tributes to her.

⁵⁷ See Amadiume 1987; Nadel 1952.

⁵⁸ Also referred to as the "Aba Women's Riot," this insurgence started when a British official in Southeastern Nigeria decided to check the accuracy of the population of Oloko in the Bende Division. He delegated the local Warrant Chief, who in turn entrusted the job to a schoolmaster. The women saw this action as an insult because in the Igbo culture, to count people means death. This was offensive to women, who are regarded as agents of life. The women also saw the action as a means of collecting more taxes from them. Although the British Officer imprisoned the Chief and the schoolmaster for instigating an uprising, the women's movement radicalized and spread to other areas. The movement developed into a rejection of colonialism and of colonial administrative oppression and economic injustice. For more readings on this subject, see Bastian 2002; Allen 1976.

⁵⁹ Aig-Imoukhuede 1991: 19.

Among the Yoruba of southern Nigeria, the female heroine called Moremi of Ile-Ife is still celebrated today with an annual festival of songs lasting seven days. Moremi is remembered for playing the very important role of saving her people and the Yoruba kingdom from Igbo invasion. Yoruba women in commerce and agriculture also formed sturdy organizations. One such group was the *Egbe Iyalode*, whose leader was the *Iyalode* of Ibadan. She was in charge of organizing and directing market activities in the town and was a member of the Council of States until 1914.⁶⁰

In the Edo area of Midwestern Nigeria, and particularly among the Benin people, the female heroine, Emotan, was very influential in the restoration and sustenance of the tradition of the Oba of Benin's heirship. As a result, she occupies a vital place in the coronation of the Oba of Benin. For example, all chieftaincy processions must pass by her graveside as a sign of homage to her.⁶¹ And in Ossamari of the Delta region, Omu Okwei was known to have dominated the commercial scene.

The history of the Asaba, the capital city of Delta State, (originally Ahaba or Asagba), is incomplete without mention of Ojife, the daughter of Nnebisi, the hero and legendary founder of Asaba. Oral tradition has it that Princess Ojife's sacrifice of her albino child saved the Asaba from drought and consequently from death. Today, Princess Ojife's statue adorns the Delta State capital city of Asaba. She is immortalized as an epitome of feminine chivalry, motherhood, and patriotism.

Pre-colonial traditional Nigerian society attributed greater political power, in certain contexts, to women than became possible for them later within colonial and postcolonial political structures, within which women have had to struggle very hard to make their presence felt and

⁶⁰ Ibewuiké 2006: 19.

⁶¹ Salami 2001: 7.

their voices heard. This is not to say that sexism was not present in pre-colonial Nigeria. Rather, it is true that “colonialism with its male-dominated political institutions went a long way toward weighing social balances in favor of men.”⁶² With colonial conquest, traditional Nigerian women were marginalized and their powers eroded, leading to new constructions of gender and gender relations. Accordingly, gender identity is constantly being re-enacted and renegotiated based on social, cultural, and political structures, which in turn change over time.

2.1 GENDER PERSPECTIVES IN IGBOLAND AND OGBARULAND

Although Nigeria’s traditional cultures had been characterized by some degree of male dominance and masculine centeredness even before the arrival of the Westerners, the real, widespread and prevalence of female subordination as well as the image and sense of helplessness, unproductiveness, and dependence on the male by the Nigerian woman was ushered in primarily by European patriarchal gender ideologies and imperialism.

2.1.1 Socio-cultural Construction of Gender

While traditional Igbo society, for the most part, was patrilineal and segmental,⁶³ political power was diffused and leadership was fluid and generally informal. Public policy was made publicly and all shared germane knowledge extensively. For example, community decisions were made and disputes settled through assemblies, which included village gatherings, women’s meetings,

⁶² Veal 2000: 108 and Amadiume 1978: 119.

⁶³ Traditional Igbo society is also matrilineal, see Nsugbe 1974.

age grades, secret and title societies, lineage groups, congregations at funerals, and meetings of other professional groups, and also through appeals to oracles and diviners.⁶⁴

Historical evidence from the *Ogu Umunwanyi* of 1929, mentioned above, shows that Igbo women were held in high regard and they formed part of the decisionmaking process in their towns and villages. It further demonstrates that although Igbo women had previously accepted the new cultural way of life introduced by colonial authorities, this new system exploited women and deviated drastically from traditional norms. The women were not used to keeping quiet, so they voiced their discontent in song and then in action because they had had enough of colonial imperialism. The Igbo women complained about being oppressed by the colonial masters as well as by the Igbo men, who had been influenced and energized by these masters and seemed to have forgotten the importance of women both conceptually and materially.

The testimony of Nwoto of Okpuala, from the Aba Commission's *Notes of Evidence* that documented some of the investigation of the 1929 uprising, succinctly describes the exasperations of the women:

Our grievances are that the land is changed – we are all dying. Our object in coming here is because the news we heard last year has never been heard before. That is what we sang about. We sang so that you might ask us what our grievances were. We had cause for grievances before the taxation was introduced. It is a long time since the chiefs and the people who know book [who can read and write] and the Nkwerre people have been oppressing us. We said that we thought the white men came to bring peace to the land. We were annoyed because men are born of women and they marry women. All the towns were opened so that people might enjoy peace and you now suggest that tax should be paid.... We meet you here so that we might settle matters. We are telling you that we

⁶⁴ Allen 1976: 64-65; Okonjo 1976: 47.

have been oppressed. If this oppression continues, how are we to praise you?⁶⁵

Colonial and postcolonial gender divisions are based on sex categorization, as male and female, and masculine persons are considered superior to the female folk. This kind of ideology engendered the emergence of a social system that is doubly patriarchal. And women, who previously had enjoyed peace and freedom, in the new colonial dispensation that favored men became gradually marginalized and even oppressed.

Conversely, in traditional Igbo mores, as in the Ogbaru culture, gender construction is flexible. That is to say, gender is separate from biological sex. Women could be males, and thus could be husbands to wives; therefore, women could be “males in relation to their wives.”⁶⁶ Let me add instantaneously that this relationship is not homosexual or lesbian. Such wives of other women have sexual relationships with designated men for procreation while their “husbands” have their sexual needs taken care of by their own male husbands. This suppleness of gender was also observed among Igbo women by the anthropologist Leith-Ross.⁶⁷ Unable to place this phenomenon within the Western ideologies of gender taxonomy, she simply stated that there was “some peculiar conception of sex or of a thread of bisexuality running through everything... or of a lack of differentiation between the sexes – or of an acceptance of the possibility of the transposition of sex – which it would have been interesting to study.”⁶⁸

The occasion of male daughters would arise when a man had no sons but only daughters. Not wanting his lineage to be extinct or/and his properties lost when he died, a father would

⁶⁵ Bastian 2002: 268.

⁶⁶ Amadiume 1987: 15.

⁶⁷ Leith-Ross 1939: 112-113. Sylvia Leith-Ross was one of two female scholars (the other was, Margaret M. Green, also published her findings in the book, *Igbo Village Affairs* 1964) awarded Leverhulme Research Fellowships and sent to study Igbo women and Igbo social organization in the wake of the Aba riots.

⁶⁸ Amadiume later conducted this research as described in her book, *Male daughters, female Husbands*, 1987.

invest on his *Ada* (first daughter) the right of inheritance. Even if such a daughter was married, her father would refund her bride price to her husband and his daughter would then return to his compound to assume the role of a male and all the subsequent rights accorded to a son. Thus in the Igbo culture, gender is not conceived only as a biological construct. It is different from sex; and it is this severance of gender and sex in Igboland that Leith-Ross could hardly comprehend. In this context, gender is more of a social category than a biological one. This flexible gender conception infiltrated almost every facet of Igbo culture. And in no aspect of life is this so explicit as in the political system where women as daughters play male roles in ritual matters or in positions of authority over wives.

The general patterns discussed above apply largely to the Igbo east of the River Niger, or mainland Igbo as I sometimes call them in this work. In addition, the western and riverine Igbo (Ogbaru) distinguish themselves because of their singular political system, which Adiele Afigbo terms a “constitutional village monarchy,”⁶⁹ a system that bears traces of the Kingdoms of Benin and Nupe from where they migrated to the Niger Delta basin. Although hierarchically organized, the Igbo west of the River Niger are not stratified by sex. On the contrary, their society has a women’s hierarchy parallel to that of men, what Kamene Okonjo characterizes as “dual-sex organization.”⁷⁰

Okonjo explained women’s participation in the Igbo social system by contrasting the dual-sex organization among the western Igbo with the single-sex system of most of the Western world, “where political status-bearing roles are predominantly the preserve of men ... women can achieve distinction and recognition only by taking on the roles of men in public life and

⁶⁹ See Okonjo 1976: 47; Allen 1976: 65.

⁷⁰ Okonjo 1976: 47.

performing them well.”⁷¹ Within the dual-sex system, the male as well as the female sexes administer their individual affairs; as a result, women’s interests are represented at all cultural and social levels. The society is constructed and structured as an organization of parallel gender institutions that function collaboratively. This implies that in economic, political as well as religious decision making, women and men were granted specific equal rights by virtue of their respective biological sex. The women, like the men, have their institutions⁷² to settle a number of important issues within these realms.

2.1.1.1 Igbo Women in Politics

In the political sphere, the distinct place of both sexes in the management of village affairs is visible and pronounce. There are two main types of political systems practiced by the Igbo. East of the Niger, the mainland Igbo have a democratic village republic type of government that is not centralized. The political organization is structured on the village level and the system of rule is direct democracy. This kind of governance allowed for the opinions of all adult men and women in the decision-making, and each village is autonomous in affairs that affected it. A statement made by one of the witnesses during the investigation of the *Ogu Umunwanyi* clearly revealed the participation of both sexes in the deliberation of village or town matters in pre-colonial Igboland. Bastian quoted a witness called Ahudi as saying:

If a new man be appointed, then all the women should be present, and all the men should be present, and both should approve his appointment. And he shall be the man to judge our cases until the

⁷¹ Okonjo 1976: 45.

⁷² Examples of such female institutions include the *Omu* (female monarch), *Umu Ada* (first daughters of the lineage and/or village), and *inyemedi* (outside their village these daughters are co-wives of the village or lineage).

end of the world. ... If you do not come to a satisfactory conclusion we will fight again. When we become annoyed we neglect our ordinary farm work. We should be engaged on ordinary duties, but we are here in this matter. When peace is restored we shall then see whether mothers and fathers of young girls will get their proper dowries.⁷³

The Igbo west of the Niger, on the other hand, practice the constitutional village monarchy system of governance. As mentioned earlier, this system of administration is a legacy of their land of origin in the kingdoms of Benin and Nupe. There are often two local monarchs who manage the affairs of the village or town: the male *Obi* or *Asagba* or *Okakwu* or *Eze*⁷⁴ who is acknowledged as the father and head of the village but who concerns himself mainly with issues of the male folk of the community and the female *Qmu* or *Qganwanyi* or *Ogie*,⁷⁵ who is recognized as the mother of the community and takes particular charge of the women concerns.

The *Obi* is the spiritual head of those entrusted to his care in the village or town. He and his cabinet settle disputes; he makes sacrifices to conciliate the divinities and for the general welfare of his people. As the mediator between the living and the dead ancestors, the *Obi* holds the *ofọ*, a symbolic staff of the authority of the ancestors.

Parallel to the *Obi* among the western Igbo is the *Qmu*. Like her male counterpart, the *Qmu* has her cabinet that assists her in the daily deliberation of women's issues. She is the head of the women of the community and does not owe her position to any relationship to the *Obi*. That is, she is not the *Obi*'s wife, nor is she necessarily a member of the *Obi*'s family. The many

⁷³ Bastian 2002: 275.

⁷⁴ All four names designate the same person and function within the village setting. The difference is only a matter of dialect. For example in Aboh, Issele-Uku, and the other surrounding towns, the monarch is referred to as *Obi*; in Asaba, *Asagba*; In Oko, *Okakwu*; in Ogbaruland east of the Niger, *Eze*. I will be using these names synonymously throughout this work.

⁷⁵ The institution of *Qmu* is absent in the Igbo mainland east of the Niger. In Oko-Amakom, the female monarch is called *Oganwanyi* or *Ogie*.

functions of the *Ọmu* in the village or town included the social job of settling disputes involving women and between women and their husbands, and counseling. It is also her duty to confer titles on commendable women of the community.

2.1.1.2 Igbo Women and Religion

Igbo women also provide both health care and spiritual services to members of their community. Traditional religions feature immortal females as divinities, and in Igboland, especially the rivereine Ogbaruland, river divinities are often portrayed as female. And most often, it is women who create music, songs, and dances that honor these female divinities. A good example of such music and dance is the *Égwú Àmàlà* of the Ogbaru people, the subject matter of this work. Igbo women officiate as priestesses, healers, and diviners. In addition, they acted and a few still act as traditional birth attendants.

Among the Ogbaru and the Igbo west of the Niger, the *Ọmu* is responsible for making medicine to protect the village or town from harm and for the offering of sacrifices to appease the spirits of the land. It is her duty, and that of her cabinet, to make sure that traditional rules regarding taboos are maintained and the worship of the divinities of the land is carried out appropriately. The *Ọmu* is thus a custodian of morals and a religious leader.

2.1.1.3 Igbo Women and Economy

In the economic field, women contribute immensely to the production and distribution of goods and services. They produce culinary staples such as palm oil, palm kernel oil, and were dynamic in pottery making. Women are also involved in food processing such as fish drying,

garri processing,⁷⁶ and salt production. They take part in local and long-distance trade.⁷⁷ Locally, women control and dominate the *afia*, or market place, a designated open space for buying and selling. It is the women's sphere, and women are the main actors.⁷⁸ As Rachel Nenenta testified, " [The] market is our main strength. It is the only trade we have. When the market is spoiled, we are useless. ... All those five markets have been closed on account of Government employees, Court messengers."⁷⁹ Trade and commerce have always been the main concern of Igbo women and they jealously guard the market.

As the female monarch, the *Qmu* is also the chief of women's sphere and activities, which are centered on the *afia* or market. The *Qmu* used to launch the market for the day's transactions and prescribe the prices for the goods sold in the market. She and her council made the rules that guided the activities of the market and made sure that they were implemented, and it was her responsibility to ensure that market taboos and prohibitions were kept. According to Basden,

The council, ... prescribes the rate of cowries exchange, what markets shall be associated with them and it exercises its authority in other directions as demands arise. Also, it decrees what articles are forbidden entrance to the market under tabu law, if any. A prohibition of this nature is largely influenced under the patron

⁷⁶ Garri processing takes about three to four days to complete. It begins when raw cassava is ground, put in a bag, and tied using logs of woods as support to press out the fluid. At the end of the third or fourth day the quasi-dried cassava is sieved. The powder is fried with little or no palm oil. The length of time for processing garri has been reduced as a result of modern technology. Today, there are machines that are capable of pressing the ground cassava in less than an hour.

⁷⁷ For more references and readings on local and long-distance trade, and other economic and political activities of women in Igboland see Achebe 2005.

⁷⁸ As a result of urbanization, the markets, especially those in the cities are no more under the control of women, nor do they dominate the sphere. However, women's active participation in the market, in the level as it used to be in pre-colonial Igboland, is seen more at the village level.

⁷⁹ Bastian 2002: 267.

‘alusi’ of the market. This is not often brought into operation, but the council has the right to act when they feel justified.⁸⁰

It was the responsibility of the *Qmu* to guarantee that the moral code was observed by the women in the market, and she took disciplinary action against any who transgressed the rules and observances.

As can be deduced from the above, the market was the women’s space in pre-colonial Nigeria. Women exercised their authority in the market and were responsible for all marketing decisions. They controlled the activities of the market and as legitimate members of that locale, attended market even when they had nothing to buy or/and sell. This is because in the market, the Igbo woman met her friends and got the latest news and gossip in town. It was a place where important messages concerning women could easily be circulated, a recreational place as well as “a place of entertainment in the life of the village.”⁸¹ It was indeed a woman’s world where among the western Igbo, women were the dominant actors and where their leader, the *Qmu* reigned.

When the women sold their commodities, they kept the income. Consequently, they were, to a large extent, economically independent from their husbands. This self-sufficiency gave them power to act autonomously of their husbands. It is clear, then, why the Igbo women went to war in 1929, when they were threatened with taxation and their market was jeopardized.

The *Obi* and *Qmu* mutually administered the socio-political, religious and economic affairs of the village or town. These two administrative systems did not have lucid demarcations between the judicial, legislative and executive functions, nor between the religious and the

⁸⁰ Basden 1938: 335.

⁸¹ Ibewuiké 2006: 80.

political realms in the governmental process.⁸² There was essentially no difference between the religious and the political since both rituals and political discussions were sometimes interlaced in patterns of action for the good of the community.

Scholars who studied pre-colonial women in Nigeria, especially Igbo women, assert that Nigerian women in traditional times had a high social position, legal and political rights, and were not a deprived group as they became after colonization in the nineteenth century.⁸³ Similarly, Annie Lebeuf affirmed: “There are no valid historical grounds for explaining the present lack of interest in political matters so often found among African women as being a heritage of the past.”⁸⁴ In her study Lebeuf noted the historical importance and autonomy of African women’s organizations and the public importance of African women. Her knowledge not only prompted her indictment of her own society’s anti-female history and values but also led her to caution that this Western anti-feminist attitude “should not allow us to prejudge the manner in which activities are shared between men and women in other cultures, more particularly, so far as we are concerned, in those of Africa.”⁸⁵ Like Okonjo, Lebeuf observed public participation of women as the distinguishing factor between African political systems and European state systems.⁸⁶

In traditional Igbo society, both women and men had access to political and social participation, and public status is achieved rather than ascribed. A woman’s social status was often determined more by her achievement than by that of her husband and the same was

⁸² Ibewuiké 2006: 55. For further reading on women’s and men’s socio-political activities see Okonjo 1976; Uchendu 1965; Basden 1938.

⁸³ Some such scholars include Allen 1963; Green 1964; Basden 1966; Thomas 1914.

⁸⁴ Lebeuf 1963.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*: 93.

⁸⁶ According to Herskovits (1962) “psychologically and functionally the position of women in African society has been high.”

applicable to men. Accordingly, it is not uncommon to find women who ranked higher among women than their husbands did among the men.⁸⁷ Women, like men, would take titles if they could afford it. For example, Madam Patricia Odiocha Obi, through her musical performances, is today a rich woman and thus was able to take one of the highest titles in the Ogbaru society, *Ogbuefi*, literally “killer of cow”; simply put, this signifies that she was able to feast the village with enough food (which included at least one slaughtered cow) and drink in recognition of her contributions to her community. She is thus addressed as Ogbuefi Beauty Okaome, meaning the “killer of cow, Beauty, the one who does what she says.”

Previously, the numbers of women who were able to take such high titles were few compared to the men in their society. This was because these prestigious titles require high fees and expenses, which were often not too easy for women to acquire. Women’s petty trading of food crops and products of women’s special skills such as clay pots, woven cane baskets and processed salt generated relatively low income. This made it difficult for the women to amass the amount of money that was required to pay for the taking of titles, thus restricting their access to those aspects of leadership and decision-making that were open only to titled persons of the village. Besides, much of this income went into the daily up-keep of the family.

The situation was different with regards to the men. Through patrilineage, men owned most of the quality goods that could easily generate money, such as land property, received the bulk of the money and other goods from bride wealth when their female children were given in marriage, and engaged more in long distance trading.⁸⁸ This made it easier for the men to acquire money faster and to take titles. Consequently, almost all those who took titles were men

⁸⁷ In my article, “The *Iwali* Child Queen Dance of Ogoja, Nigeria” (2006), I discussed extensively how in the Bekwarra and Yala cultures the status of the man is determined by that of his wife, the *Iwali*.

⁸⁸ On women and long-distance trading see also Achebe 2005: 146-147.

and most leaders and/or decisionmakers came to be men.⁸⁹ Although women had no formal limits to political power, men, by virtue of their patrilineal privileges, obtained resources that gave them advantages over women. With these privileges, men were gradually able to segregate themselves from the women by virtue of their high status and wield power in the society. Accordingly, political power was prescribed and equally disseminated by a male hierarchy that was able to articulate its patriarchal ideas.

Also in Igboland, music, dances, and other plastic arts are gendered. As a result there are women's music and dances, on the one hand, and men's music and dances on the other. Although women do not participate in *mmo* or *egugu*, that is masquerades, there are female and male masquerades in Igbo culture. Egodì Uchendu in her article, "Women, Power, and Political Institution in Igboland,"⁹⁰ argued that the *mmo* cult was an instrument for subordinating women. I contend that this practice can rather be seen from the perspective of a "dual-sex" system and parallel organization, particularly as women also have their cults that excluded men's participation.

2.1.2 Some Aspects of European Cultural Influence in Igboland

With the declaration of Southern Nigeria as a protectorate in 1900 and the introduction of "native administration" derived from the European system of government as well as the experiences of chiefs and emirs in northern Nigeria, the British introduced an indirect political system that was not in congruence with the Igbo ideas of government. The Igbo lived in small village decentralized democracies. And the new system of governance introduced by the British

⁸⁹ Green 1947: 169; Allen 1976: 67.

⁹⁰ Uchendu, 2005: 203-214.

violated the Igbo concepts of rule. The mainland Igbo would typically not have just one man represent the village without consulting with the villagers and/or without their consent; nor would one man give orders to everyone else in the village, or, worse, neglect the opinions of the women. This European system disregarded the women and the men stood to gain because the British chose them as heads to fill newly created positions. Consequently, women in southeastern Nigeria suffered significant loss of power and dignity. They were exposed and forced to accept a system that was strange to them, a system that dictated what they should do and determined a new life style that was not in favor of the women. Bastian quoted Enyida, one of the women who testified during the investigation on the *Ogu Umunwaanyi*, of 1929 as saying:

Don't you agree that the world depends upon women – that it is the women who multiply the population of the world? We suffer at the hands of the Chiefs. They do many evil things and want to place the responsibility therefore upon women. We are not prepared to accept it.⁹¹

The *Ogu Umunwanyi*, as has already been noted earlier, can be seen as a demonstration by the women for the right to be consulted on matters that pertain to and affected them. The women wanted to take responsibility for their decisions. The British, however, did not often respect the women's rights and their complaints were overlooked.

Because of the already existing monarchical system of rule amongst the Igbos west of the River Niger, the British found it much easier to establish the indirect system of governance. They recognized and gave a monthly paycheck only to the authority of the male monarch, the *Obi*, encouraging him to rule his people in accordance with the newly introduced European system rather than following traditional norms. They ignored the powers of the *Qmu*, the female

⁹¹ Bastian 2002: 280.

counterpart of the *Obi*, and relegated her to the background. And to her disrespect, the *Qmu* found herself taking orders from the *Obi* rather than making policies, as had been the case before the arrival of the British. She also lost her hold on the market as new trade systems and different rules, basically European oriented, monopolized by men were introduced. With the introduction of courts, the *Qmu* also lost her juridical powers as cases were taken to the courts for settlement and not brought to her. Worse still, when in the 1930s the British instituted local government reforms, no reference was made to the *Qmu* institution.⁹²

Apart from the political system, the Europeans also enforced their form of trading in Igboland. As the European firms and companies⁹³ dominated the market economy, so also did men begin to find their way into the market system that was previously dominated by women. Scholars such as Onwuteaka have argued that one of the factors that instigated the women's War was Igbo women's resentment of the monopoly, which the British firms had in the buying. This control allowed these men the right to fix prices and adopt methods of trade that maximized their personal profits at the expense of Igbo women.⁹⁴

2.1.2.1. Christianity, Western Literacy, and Gender Construction

The advent of missionary activities played a major role in the stratification of class and sex in the area.⁹⁵ Christianity reached Igboland through the Delta towns in Ogbaruland. Their proximity and accessibility to the trade route of the River Niger and Niger delta made transportation to the southern inland towns easy.

⁹² Okonjo 1976: 55-56.

⁹³ The Royal Niger Company, which was established in Asaba in 1886, is worth mentioning here because of its impact on the lives of the Asaba and Onitsha people and their environs.

⁹⁴ Allen 1976: 78.

⁹⁵ For more insight into the issue of gender, patriarchy, and the influence of Christianity and European structural system on Africa, see Diop 1989 and Amadiume 1997.

The first contact between the Christian missionaries and the Igbo took place in the Ogbaru town of Aboh in 1841. By the late nineteenth century, Christian missions were established in Igboland east of the Niger via Onitsha in 1857.⁹⁶ In addition to setting up and building churches, the missionaries established schools that they also made the locus for preaching the new Christian faith and educating their converts.

The first converts were mainly outcasts and slaves, those who had no social status in the Igbo society. Elizabeth Isichei observed that the “bulk of the first Christian converts were drawn from the poor, needy and the rejected.”⁹⁷ The freeborn did not think it necessary to go to school. Those who were rich among them were content with staying at home and taking titles that prepared them to procure traditional administrative roles in their community. As time progressed, the Igbo people, including the freeborn, began to see the educational benefits of Christianity and many started to embrace the new faith. Being educated meant a possibility for political leadership. But this had its consequences. In spite of how nominal their membership was, they had to abide by the rules of the Christian faith and one such rule was to avoid “pagan” rituals and stay away from anything that perpetuated them.

But perhaps the most drastic effect of Christianity on the Igbo social system was the fact that women had little or no access to this new education which men had. Boys, not girls, were generally sent to school for a reason related to the former’s favored position in patrilineage. In the mission schools, girls received a different kind of education from the boys. The few girls who eventually went to school were trained and taught “European domestic skills and the Bible,

⁹⁶ Isichei 1976: 160; Amadiume 1987: 119.

⁹⁷ Isichei 1976: 162.

often in vernacular”⁹⁸ that prepared them for Christian marriage and motherhood and not for politics or white-collar jobs.

This new system of education, to say the least, was at variance with what obtained in the Igbo society before the arrival of colonial and missionary activities. Traditionally, all “Igbo children were taught appropriate moral behavior, which enabled them to differentiate right from wrong, good from bad.”⁹⁹ The education was carried on informally and the understanding of cultural values and moral codes was often reproduced in proverbs and songs. Music was fundamental in the transmission of messages and for maintaining social control. Traditional musical instruments such as *igba* (drums) and *ékwé* (slit wooden drum) were played to call the attention of the people before a town cryer would relate a message or make an announcement. Also, the lyrics of songs more often than not contained salient moral admonitions and philosophical nuances of the Ogboaru people. For example, the text of the song *onye si ya nwe uwa* (the person who says s/he owns the world) challenges the proud person, who thinks s/he has everything (the world and money), and thus does not need his/her neighbor, to use a basket and fetch water. If such a person cannot use a basket to successfully fetch water, then that person is deficient, does not have everything, and needs his/her neighbor. In reality, no one can fetch water with a basket, especially with the kind of basket the singer has in mind; therefore we all need each other no matter our situation or position in life. The kind of basket mentioned above is made of stripes of cane woven together. The finished basket thus has lots of spaces between the stripes and cannot hold liquid. The text of the song is as follows:

⁹⁸ Allen 1976: 76.

⁹⁹ Ibewuiké 2006: 174.

Igbo language

English Translation

Solo:

Oh! ya welu nkata kulu mili o

Oh! Let the one use a basket and fetch water

Onye kulu si naya nwe ego nuwa o

Let the one who says he has money in the world

Chorus:

Onye kulu si ya nwe uwa e,

Let the one who says he/she has the world,

Ya welu nkata kulu mmili o

use a basket and fetch water.

In view of the fact that the Igbo did not advance a written language, knowledge was transmitted orally from the old to the young. In Igboland, it was the responsibility of all knowledgeable adults, especially of all the adult members of the family, (in the full sense in which the family is understood in traditional African communities), to educate a child. As the Igbo would say, *otu onye adi azu nwa*, which means, “One person does not raise a child” or, better still, “it takes a village to raise a child.”

As has already been mentioned, the arrival of colonialism and the missionaries, and the subsequent introduction of modern literary education initiated basic changes in the Igbo social system. The acquisition of western education brought about changes in the way in which gender structures are viewed. As the men obtained western educational qualifications that granted them access to jobs in urbanized locales, they came to regard themselves as superior to the women, whose limited access to the new western education basically kept them at home. Thus, education became a means of gender construction in Igboland.

During the nationalist movement period that heralded the independence of Nigeria, political parties such as the National Council for Nigeria and Cameroons (NCNC), encouraged women to participate in politics with the establishment of a leadership course for women in 1959. In the years between independence from 1960 to 1966, some progress was made in the education of women.¹⁰⁰ Since then, there has been a steady increase in the active involvement of women in the politics, religion and economic development of Nigeria.

Igbo women have been visibly present in politics from the time of the first republic, in spite of the limited access they had to Western colonial education. Today Igbo women occupy government posts as State commissioners, Federal ministers, members of the State and the Federal Houses of Representatives, Senators, and Ambassadors. Most recently, an Igbo woman became for a brief period the first, and so far the only, female governor in the history Nigeria. Her Excellency Virginia Ngozi Etiaba was sworn in as governor of Anambra State on November 3, 2006.¹⁰¹ This is a sign of the gradual empowerment of women in Nigeria.

Although women have not been made bishops in any of the main Christian denominations in Nigeria, they have played important roles and made their presence felt in the Christian religious spheres. Since their arrival in Eastern Nigeria, Catholic missionaries have concerned themselves with the improvement of women's status in the area. The establishment of the Catholic Women's Organization (CWO) in Igboland, as elsewhere in Nigeria, has provided Igbo women with a forum to discuss and deliberate on issues of interest to them in the Church. Today, this organization is a nationwide women's organization in the Catholic Church and it exerts a lot of influence in the policy and decision-making in the Church.

¹⁰⁰ Allen 1976: 83.

¹⁰¹ Until her new role, Mrs. Virginia Ngozi Etiaba was the deputy governor of the state and replaced the governor when the latter was impeached. Her position as governor lasted only for a very brief period because a court of law later reversed the impeachment and returned the former governor to his office.

Another opportunity for women's active participation in the Catholic Church and society in Igboland is the institution of women's religious congregations. Although the first female congregation to reach Igboland was the Congregation of the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Apostles, it was not until 1931 that an Irish Sister of Charity, Mother Mary Magdalen Charles Walker, popularly known as Sr. Magdalen, founded the first indigenous female Congregation in Calabar.

With the ecclesiastical permission of the Holy See, Mother Mary Magdalen Charles Walker left her home country of Ireland in response to the request of Bishop Joseph Shanahan to serve the people of God in Calabar, southern Nigeria. Her focus was the education of children and helping to improve the lives of women in the area. She established the first Montessori School in Calabar – Convent school, which became an exemplary educational institution in West Africa. Margaret Green and Sylvia Leith-Ross¹⁰² visited Mother Mary Charles Walker's Convent school regularly and worked closely with her. Because of her view that only a native would understand the natives, and in order to be more relevant to the people, she founded the Congregation of the Handmaids of the Holy Child Jesus. With these indigenous women, who understood the culture of their people, she reached out to the natives.¹⁰³ Today, the Sisters of this order have established houses in various countries in Africa, Europe and America,

¹⁰² Earlier on in this work, I mentioned the contributions of these scholars in documenting the affairs of the Igbo people of southern Nigeria. Although Mother Mary Charles Walker did not write or publish any book, she was a commendable educationist and many in West Africa, including Green and Leith-Ross, benefited from her educational system and organization. For more on the interaction between Sr. Magdalen and Margaret Green and Sylvia Leith-Ross see Cooke 1980: 92-96.

¹⁰³ For a detailed account of Mother Mary Charles Walker's works and achievements in southern Nigeria see Cooke 1980.

ministering in schools, hospitals, engaging in social works, and working closely with children and women.¹⁰⁴

In spite of these western influences on Igbo culture and social system, there has been an increase in cultural revival and revitalization in Igboland since the Nigerian independence, particularly with regard to the position of women in the society. Okonjo cited the installation of a new *Ọmu* in Ogwashi-Uku in 1972, the first since Nigeria gained independence in 1960, as an example of the resurgence of some female cultural practices.¹⁰⁵

2.1.3 Divinities: Gender in Traditional Religious Practices

It is the general opinion of scholars that the Igbo believe in the existence of a supreme being called Chukwu, or Chineke or Osebuluwa, or Obassi. As the one and great God, Chukwu usually has no shrine or cult symbol and can be reached directly or through the lesser divinities, who act as intermediaries between Chukwu and humans. Often, prayers and petitions are made to Chukwu through the lesser divinities, and when these fail in their duties, humans address Chukwu directly. This notion of Chukwu permeates the daily lives of the Igbo people.

In his classic novel, *Things Fall Apart*, Chinua Achebe discussed the Igbo belief system, especially in its contact with the Europeans. In one episode, the white missionary, Mr. Brown, accused Akunna of worshipping false gods. But Akunna retorted: “That is not so. We make sacrifices to the little gods, but when they fail and there is no one else to turn to we go to

¹⁰⁴ The writer is a member of this religious congregation. The interest my foundress, Mother Mary Charles Walker took in the culture and people she worked with has continued to inspire my musical education. My focus is on sacred music, women and music, and gender studies.

¹⁰⁵ Okonjo 1976: 56-57.

Chukwu. It is right to do so. We approach a great man through his servants.”¹⁰⁶ Chukwu is regarded as the father of all, including the lesser divinities such as *Anyanwu* (the sun divinity), *Igwe* (the sky divinity), *Amadi oha* (the divinity of lighting and thunder), and *Ala* or *Ani* (the divinity of the earth and spirit of fertility). In Igboland, divinities can be male or female. In addition, there are priests and priestesses who serve these male and female divinities. However, I must add that it is normal to find priests who serve female divinities and vice versa. For example, while among the western Igbo of Asaba the *Omu* is the intermediary between the people and the river goddess *Onishe*, the *Orehene* is the priest of *Onishe*, whose main duty is to make the prophesies of the female divinity known to the people.¹⁰⁷

Thus even within religious institutions in Igboland, the “dual-sex” system posited by Okonjo, or “parallel organization”¹⁰⁸ suggested by Ibewuiké, was functional. Women, men, or both equally perform rituals. In some parts of Igbo west of the Niger, female and male ancestors are venerated equally in the Igbo weekdays, namely, *Ekke*, *Orie*, *Afor*, and *Nkwò*.¹⁰⁹ The female divinities and ancestors are worshiped on *Orie* and *Nkwò* and their festivals are celebrated on these days of the week, while their male counterparts are celebrated on the *Ekke* and *Afor* days of the week.

Female divinities and spirits are often associated with environmental areas that produce food and water and often protection. For example, in Igboland, *Ala*, the divinity of the earth and fertility is female as in older European cultures, where the earth is referred to as “mother earth.”

¹⁰⁶ Achebe 1958: 126-127.

¹⁰⁷ Ibewuiké 2006: 93.

¹⁰⁸ Ibewuiké 2006: 127.

¹⁰⁹ In *Iguafo Igbo*, meaning the Igbo Calendar, there are four market days, namely, *Eke*, *Afor*, *Nkwo* and *Orie* that comprise one week (and not seven days as we have it in the Western weekday). Seven Igbo weeks make one month, and thirteen months make one year. There are only twenty-eight days in a month, with the last month having twenty-nine days. Each month begins on the same day as the previous.

In Oko, for example, the female divinity *Agadi-nwayi*¹¹⁰ (old woman) is believed to protect and watch over the village. Her shrine is on the way to *ose*, the river, and sacrifices are often made to appease her and implore her protection. Women are the custodians of this shrine and once a year, the women in the village visit the shrine. During this visit of honor, they perform a dance, *égwú Agadi-nwayi*, the music/dance of the old woman.

Spiritual beings are venerated in various environmental spheres. But as Kathleen O'Brien Wicker observed, water divinities and spirits are the most adaptable, flexible, and innovative of all African divinities. According to her, they are characterized by a fluidity that is the essence of their being, "shifting dispositions, gender, and representation."¹¹¹ Because of this flexibility, devotees have an ambivalent attitude towards these divinities. On the one hand, in the case of women, they are believed to be beneficent providers of wealth, good health, children, creative inspiration and beauty. On the other hand, they can also cause disaster, kill, make women barren, and take away riches if offended or affronted.

Female divinities are linked to most rivers and lakes in Igboland. Elizabeth Isichei described these divinities as "stern authority figures, swift to punish infringements of their decrees but ready to protect the local community."¹¹² This characteristic of these divinities instills fear in their devotees, especially those who believe that they have received material gifts from the female divinities. Examples of female divinities often revered as protectors of the village in Igboland include the female divinities *Ala* (earth divinity, the spirit of fertility), *Idemili* (divinity of the river Idemili, the spirit of prosperity), *Ogwugwu* (divinity of the *ogwugwu* river, a lesser divinity and in some Igbo villages an associate of Idemili), and *Ekwu* (the health spirit,

¹¹⁰ During my interview with Mrs. Kalia Ngodi on January 29, 2006, she insisted that the *Agad-nywayi* was "*ogwu umu nwayi gwuolu*," medicine made by women.

¹¹¹ Wicker 2000: 198.

¹¹² Isichei 2004: 233.

which is women's domestic spirit). In Asaba, the river divinity *Onishe* is the tutelary divinity of the town.

In most riverine areas of West Africa, as in Southern Nigeria, particularly amongst the Igbo, the pidgin term *Mami Wata* is now used to describe locally named water divinities to people not conversant with the practice and/or language of the area. *Mami Wata* also depicts a complex of beliefs and practices of water divinities that give good fortune or wreak disaster for undue behaviors or unfaithful relationships.

Music is often used in the ceremonies that honor these divinities. Just as they are said to provide material benefits to their devotees, these divinities are sometimes credited with inspiring, especially through dreams, and giving their followers specific musical compositions and dances. In most cases they are said to dictate songs and even teach specific dance steps to their special devotees, who are then commissioned to teach the music to other followers or anyone who is interested. This is the case with *Égwú Àmàlà*. In answer to my question on its origin, many of those I interviewed during my field trip simply told me: “*Égwú Àmàlà sina mmiri bia*,” that is, “*Égwú Àmàlà* came from the water.” Consequently, the music belongs to the water divinity, *Mami Wata*. All the performers of this music know this, and some songs used in *Égwú Àmàlà* directly address the benignity of the water divinity.

2.1.4 Conclusion

Although pre-colonial Igboland was a gendered society where women's spheres were distinct from that of the men, it was a system with diffused authority, fluid and informal leadership, and a more or less stable balance of male and female power. It is a truism that most Nigerian societies, including the Igbo society, are patrilineal and patrilocal. But what is often overlooked

is the existence of the “dual-sex” systems and the shared rights of enforcement that characterized the Igbo west and east of the river Nigeria.¹¹³ As a result, many observers have concluded that the position of women was subordinate to that of men, a misconception that has produced a distorted picture of the African woman as deprived and relegated to the background in the society.

The seeming invisibility of women in both politics and social activities in Nigeria, especially in Igbo society today, is a legacy of the colonial past which undermined the traditional empowering structures of the Igbo women’s cultural systems. But since Nigeria gained independence, there have been significant changes in women’s status within Igbo society with a return to more traditional structures. In spite of the western political system adopted today by the Nigerian people, traditional ruling systems are still been practiced in the village levels and town unions.

In Ogbaru, as in nearly all Igbo culture, the earth and river, facets of nature that provide and sustain life, are revered mostly as female divinities. Without the earth and water, no life would survive. The Ogbaru who are located along the banks of the river Niger and whose lives are nourished and revolve around this river and its tributaries venerate the water divinity who is celebrated with the music and dance, *Égwú Àmàlà*.

¹¹³ For more on the on this shared rights see Agbasiere’s (2000) discussion on “matrifocal” system in the Igbo society.

3.0 ÉGWÚ ÀMÀLÀ MUSICAL CULTURE

Égwú Àmàlà si na mmili bia; Égwú Àmàlà si na idei bia
(*Égwú Àmàlà* is from the water; *Égwú Àmàlà* came from the river)
- Ogbaru popular saying.

Music permeates all the facets of the Ogbaru social life. It serves to unify the people and helps to preserve their cultural heritage. It adds significantly to the fulfillment of their social as well as their religious needs. It is used to herald the birth of a child and plays an important role in the life-cycle ceremonies of the child until death. As Meki Nzewi states:

African musical arts were conceived and developed to nurture humane living: They transact virtue, endure values, perform morality, and transform abnormal dispositions and attributes. Hence the African musical arts do not connote entertainment, but rather front entertainment as a tool for social-political-religious-mental health objectives.¹¹⁴

In Igbo language, the concept of music is expressed in the word *égwú*. The term *égwú* is the generic name for all human artistic endeavors like music, dance, song, play, drama, and impressive plastic arts display.¹¹⁵ Both Nzewi and Uzoigwe distinguish *égwú* from *nkwa*, is used in southern Igboland. Although both terms are used synonymously, “*nkwa* subsumes and

¹¹⁴ Nzewi 2005: 1.

¹¹⁵ Nzewi 1991; Uzoigwe 1998.

defines vocal music, especially when vocal music is derived from an instrumental model.”¹¹⁶ However, when there is need to specify melodic and vocal music, *uri* and *avu* (also *abu*) are used respectively. *Égwú* stresses the event and associated media of communication for which the sound element and its attributes constitute a part, for example, *égwú mgbà* (wrestling dance). This music is used and performed during wrestling performances in the village or town.

Dance types are implicit in the Igbo music categories, and a dance form takes the same name as its music for social-contextual references.¹¹⁷ For example, *Nkwa (égwú) Umuagboghọ* of Afikpo means “maiden’s dance.” This music is a ritual dance performed by young girls. The costumes are designed to show the beauty of the young girls’ bodies. The dance style centers on the belly, the cradle for children. Likewise, *Égwú Àmàlà* denotes the paddle dance because the canoe and the act of paddling which are so vital to the Ogbaru are depicted in the genre. The Ogbaru use the canoe to fish and to row themselves to and from their farmlands. They believe in the water spirits that give them protection as they go through their daily tasks. All these activities form the crux of *Égwú Àmàlà*. Generally, therefore, the term *égwú* is used to include all artistic forms as well as all classes of Igbo music.

3.1 ORIGINS OF ÉGWÚ ÀMÀLÀ

There are varied speculations on the origin of *Égwú Àmàlà*. There are those who believe that the genre is a product of the water spirits personified in the *Mami Wata*. They contend that the genre, even in present times, is taught directly by this divinity to faithful devotees who perform

¹¹⁶ Nzewi 1991: 24.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.: 33.

the dance in her honor. Others hold that *Égwú Àmàlà* metamorphosed over a period of time from existing Ogbaru dances.

Dance is the main avenue of expression in *Égwú Àmàlà*. As Judith Hanna observed, “dance is ‘read’ in light of knowledge of the historical development of the dance genre and other expectations and experiences that color a participant’s perception and interpretation.”¹¹⁸ Tracing the origin of *Égwú Àmàlà* is pertinent especially to this work because it provides a broad picture of the initial performance context of the genre and thus proffers a point of departure for an analysis of gender negotiations as well as continuity and change. The path taken in the various attempts to map out the origin of *Égwú Àmàlà* from the early nineteenth century to the present day has been shaped by two main factors. On the one hand, there is the spiritual and religious attitude that makes people attribute mythical origins to the music and dance. On the other hand, there is the more historical approach that prefers to locate its origin within the general context of the evolvement of the genre from pre-existing Ogbaru dances.

3.1.1 Mythical Origin of *Égwú Àmàlà*

The use of myth to account for the origins of various cultural phenomena is common in most African traditions. Mythical narratives tell the origins of great cities, towns, villages, and even music genres, of which *Égwú Àmàlà* is not an exception. But typically, myths do not have any accredited author or authors, and their origin and precise date of commencement are obscure. According to the philosopher Bartholomew Abanuka, a “myth is narrated anonymously; its message is dogmatically formulated and is characteristically so forcefully expressed that its main

¹¹⁸ Hanna, 1983: 17.

aim is to produce immediate conviction and acceptance.”¹¹⁹ Abanuka argues that because myths are not narrated in logical terms and their meanings are often ambiguous, they are susceptible to various interpretations.¹²⁰ What such a myth achieves is to define and legitimate for the people the divine along with the rights and privileges that the group enjoyed among the Igbo and its vicinity. During my fieldwork, I was told several versions of the mythical origin of *Égwú Àmàlà*. Although each of these stories vary to some extent, I would like to present one version which bears almost all the strains inherent in the others.

A fable has it that *Égwú Àmàlà* was first performed by the water divinity, or *mmọ-mili*, also referred to as *Mami Wata*, in the presence of a fisherman and his companion, who were on a fishing expedition. The occurrence started when these fishermen noticed a drastic change of weather. While they hastened towards the banks of the river so as not to be caught in the storms, these men noticed they were being followed by a strange phenomenon. On reaching the shores, they watched in astonishment this unusual incident. They recognized the female entity, the water divinity or *Mami Wata*, who approached them performing the characteristic dance steps of *Égwú Àmàlà*. Although the fishermen were unable to see the musicians, they heard the music that accompanied her dancing. After this demonstration, the water divinity gradually retreated as she continued her dance and disappeared into the river.

On arriving at the village, these men told their story to the perplexed and curious listening ears of the villagers. The fishermen collected various instruments that sounded like those they had heard during the *Mami Wata*'s performance, reproduced the music and dance they saw and

¹¹⁹ Abanuka 1999: 2.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

then taught it to members of the village. The music and dance was then called *Égwú Ojeni*,¹²¹ but over the course of time came to be known as *Égwú Àmàlà*. Throughout this early period, the dance was performed exclusively in honor of the water divinity.

When I recounted this story to Beauty in order to verify the authenticity of the myth, she told me that the story was incorrect. But, she continued to explicate, it is true that the music and dance belong to *onye mili* or the water divinity, who teaches it to a selected few of her devoted followers.

3.1.2 Historical Origin of *Égwú Àmàlà*

My quest for information about *Égwú Àmàlà* led me to Aboh, the Ogbaru town where the genre is said to have been created. When I arrived at Aboh, I was given a different perspective about the origin of the genre. Although the Aboh people acknowledged the religious aspect of the dance form and its association with the water divinity, they insisted that *Égwú Àmàlà* had a historical beginning that had evolved and been preserved and transmitted orally through the years.

The main problem I encountered in noting this historical evidence is that my informants could not recall the exact dates of the various events they narrated to me. Most of them were unable to read and/or write and depended solely on the proficiency of their memories. As a result, we often either speculated on dates or even omitted them completely. This obstacle notwithstanding, I was able to get a constructive and logical historical development of *Égwú Àmàlà*.

¹²¹ A similar story was recorded by Anthonia Ndalaku Nwadukwe in her Bachelor's thesis, "'Egwu Amala': A Mirror of Ogbaru Culture," University of Nsukka, Nigeria, 1981.

3.1.2.1 *Égwú Isha*

In Aboh, my informants simply laughed on hearing my mythical tale of the origin of the genre. *Égwú Àmàlà*, I was told, had evolved from a dance called *Égwú Isha*, that is, the shake dance. It is, in fact, this dance form that had a mysterious beginning involving the water spirits.¹²²

Égwú Isha was performed by both men and women; the women often outnumbered men. While the dancers and singers were arranged in a circular structure as they clapped their hands and sang in a call-and-response form led by a solo lead singer, the instrumentalists, on the other hand, positioned themselves at one section of the circle. The foremost exponent and lead-singer of *Égwú Isha* was a male called Opiah Nnunu.

The main characteristic of *Égwú Isha* was the climax of the dance, popularly termed, *isù égwú*, that brought a section of the music to a close. *Isù égwú* featured a couple, usually a man and a woman from the group, who entered the dance loop and danced vigorously to the music. The upper part of the body from the waist is tilted forward, the torso is moved briskly in and out, and the hands move concurrently with the torso. This section of the performance entailed a simultaneous rise in density and intensity of the music and dance, which ended when all the musicians stopped at the same time. In *isù égwú*, individual expression was stressed and encouraged. There was also room for the dancers to make elaborations of the basic dance movements in relation to the rhythmic patterns played by the instrumental ensemble.

The song texts for *Égwú Isha* were short and simple. The themes encompassed everyday life activities of the society such as merriment, admonition, morals, and praise. *Égwú Isha* groups quickly proliferated in Aboh with many versions of the dance developing.

¹²² I will not narrate the story of the origin of *Égwú Isha* as it would not be relevant to this work.

3.1.2.2 *Égwú Ojeni*

The continuous sociological changes resulting from the penetration of Western ideas and culture in the 1940s¹²³ as well as the large female participation in *Égwú Isha* propelled the creation of an all women dance form called *Égwú Ojeni*, meaning the maiden's dance/music. Its counterpart for men was called *Égwú Ozalla*, young men's dance/music.

The originator of this new dance type was a man called Gold nwa Ebije,¹²⁴ from *ogbe* Onuobiukwu, that is, the Onuobiukwu quarter in Aboh. Gold, as he is still popularly called in this area, was a prolific composer and dancer. His many musical achievements included the introduction of new features to his new dance form. For example, he initiated the use of *ngwu* and always carried one during performance. The *ngwu* is a carved wooden statuette measuring approximately 12 to 15 inches in length and 18 inches (including the base) in height. The *ngwu* often illustrates and represents something of the leader or dance group. In the case of Gold, Mary Jane¹²⁵ explained that his *ngwu* was said to symbolize his *alusi*¹²⁶ (a personal divinity), which guided his dance and empowered him to attain such a prodigy in his art. The *ngwu* is usually balanced on the head of a dancer during performance.¹²⁷

The musical instruments used in an *Égwú Ojeni* performance were simple. They included the *òkpòkòlò* (made of bamboo), *òpì* (a gourd horn), and *ishàkà* (two dome-shaped wickerwork of cane with convex bases. Trapped within each dome-shaped wickerwork were pebbles or seeds. Both were attached together by a handle). The lyrics of the songs employed for

¹²³ This European infiltration and colonization began in the eighteenth century. Although Nigeria gained independence from the United Kingdom in 1960 and was declared a Federal Republic in 1963, the country is so westernized today that deliberate and conscious actions to revitalize traditional cultural activities and expressions are being undertaken.

¹²⁴ Gold died in 1978.

¹²⁵ Mary Jane was one of my collaborators and my contact person in Aboh.

¹²⁶ In mainland Igbo the word *chi* is also used to refer to a personal divinity.

¹²⁷ See Plate 3-1 for an example of the *ngwu*. The *ngwu* in this picture (positioned here on the ground in front of the group) is that used by Beauty's group.

this dance type were also simple and dealt with everyday life themes such as marriage, peace, praise, and admonitions.

With this advent of an all-women dance came the use of a specific uniform for the dancers and musicians. Furthermore, each dancer held a pair of white handkerchiefs (one on each hand). During performance, the dancers waved their white handkerchiefs adding color to the presentation. The use of handkerchiefs in this dance was adopted from the mode of the day when it was fashionable to visibly hold a handkerchief. Some dance forms of the *Égwú Isha*, such as *ísù égwú*, were still retained in this new genre. However, instead of two dancers entering the loop, only one dancer sometimes entered the ring to extemporize during *ísù égwú*. This dance quickly became famous and spread to other quarters. According to Odogu Obi, *Égwú Ojeni* was the first women's dance to be performed outside the Aboh milieu.

3.1.2.3 *Égwú Ekwè*

As the popularity of *Égwú Ojeni* reached its apex and began gradually to wane, another dance came on the scene. This new dance, *Égwú Ekwè*, was the first of its kind to be started by a woman, Ojeibo Odili, popularly called by her professional dance name Ojeibo Double. She was a composer, dancer, and choreographer from *ogbe Ùmụ Onya* (the *Ùmụ Onya*, that is, children of Onya, quarter) in Aboh.

Égwú Ekwè was not very different from its predecessors. Like *Égwú Ojeni*, it was a maiden's dance, and the song texts revolved around issues related to young women. Ojeibo Double added the *ùdùdù* (pot drum) and *ogénè* (metal bell) to the existing *ishàkà* (rattle), *òpì* (gourd horn), and *òkpòkòlò* (wood block) found in previous ensembles. She is remembered for her great interest in teaching her music to maidens in Aboh as well as those living outside Aboh.

Ojeibo Double is also credited for traveling to neighboring towns such as Onitsha¹²⁸ and teaching her music to Aboh maidens and young married women living there.

It was towards the end of Ojeibo Double's fame that yet another dance form, namely *Égwú Àmàlà*, evolved. According to my informants in Aboh, the dance specifics of *Égwú Àmàlà* were derived from *Àmàlà Bu'uyọ*.

3.1.2.4 *Àmàlà Bu' uyo*

Àmàlà Bu' uyo was developed and propagated by Oneé Alagoa in the 1950s. Born Oneé Akpanuka Obi, she was popularly known as Oneé nwa Ajugo Obi (her professional dance name) by her contemporaries and townspeople. She married a polygamist, Alagoa Obi, from Enembe, and moved from Aboh to stay with him in Port Harcourt, an important oil city of Nigeria. It was in this urban town that Oneé nwa Ajugo was said to have had a dream during which she observed a dance performance by the water divinity, the *Mami Wata*, and her entourage. In the course of this performance, she learnt the songs and the specifics of the dance steps. One of the songs sung by these water spirits became for Oneé an endorsement to teach mortals what she had seen, heard, and experienced in her dream. The song text is as follows:¹²⁹

Igbo

Égwú Àmàlà

Oneé we se ne e

Égwú Àmàlà bu'uyọọ

English

Égwú Àmàlà

Oneé brought it

The paddle dance is entertaining/beautiful

¹²⁸ Onitsha is the biggest commercial city in Igboland. Because of the job opportunities found in the area, the city is highly populated with people from other cities and towns in Nigeria.

¹²⁹ This song text was taken from Okwesa (Unpublished work) 1987: 83. This work also provides more details concerning Oneé nwa Alagoa.

Acting on this mandate, Oneé nwa Ajugo started a dance group called *Àmàlà Bu'uyọ*, that is, the paddle dance is entertaining/beautiful. The group consisted of young maidens and women from Ogbaru. With this dance group, Oneé recreated all the scenes that she saw in her dream. The group also wore uniforms designed by Oneé nwa Ajugo that were similar to those worn by the water spirits of her dream. The fabrics used were wine-red “George” wrappers and white blouses.

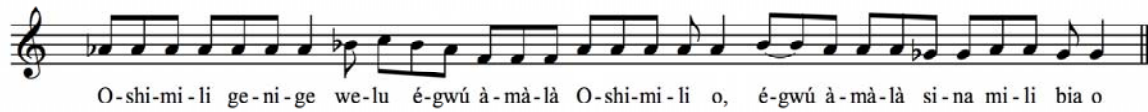
The dance style was relaxed and graceful. During performance the dancers maintained an angular posture with the upper torso slanted forward and the pelvis tilted downward. Flexibility of hand and feet movements, smoothness in the act and mime of paddling, and stamina in dancing, especially as there were as many as ten dance scenes to be enacted in each performance, was characteristic of this dance style. The dance was elegant, joyful, and portrayed the daily activities of the Ogbaru people.

One of the main attributes of Oneé’s new dance form was the feature that is commonly referred to as “*égwú* line,” that is, the line dance. With this trait, the *Égwú Àmàlà Bu'uyọ* became known as *Égwú Àmàlà* (the second half, that is, *Bu'uyọ* is often left out), with its main characteristics being dancing in two symmetrical lines. According to Madam Agnes Odili,¹³⁰ *Égwú Àmàlà* came from *Oshimili*; Oneé was given this dance structure in a dream and she shared it with her dance group. This made the group different from the previous ones and to change the status quo of having one or two dancers enter into the ring to perform the *ísù égwú*. The dancers perform in two parallel lines that delineate the structure of a canoe. Agnes sang the song (see

¹³⁰ Madam Agnes Odili and Beauty Okaome were both married to the same man, Mr. Odili from Aboh. She told me during the period of my research in the area that both of them learnt the *Égwú Àmàlà*, though they belonged to two different groups.

Example 3-1) that was commonly sung by most people in the area, indicating that the genre came from the river Niger:

Example 3-1 Song by Madam Agnes Odili from Ashaka



Oshimili genige, welu égwú àmàlà Oshimili o, Égwú Àmàlà sina mili bia o

Oshimili (River Niger) *genige*¹³¹ take *Égwú Àmàlà* Oshimili o,

Égwú Àmàlà came from the water.

¹³¹ Genige represents the winding nature of the River Niger, particularly in the delta region of Nigeria as it begins to empty into the ocean.

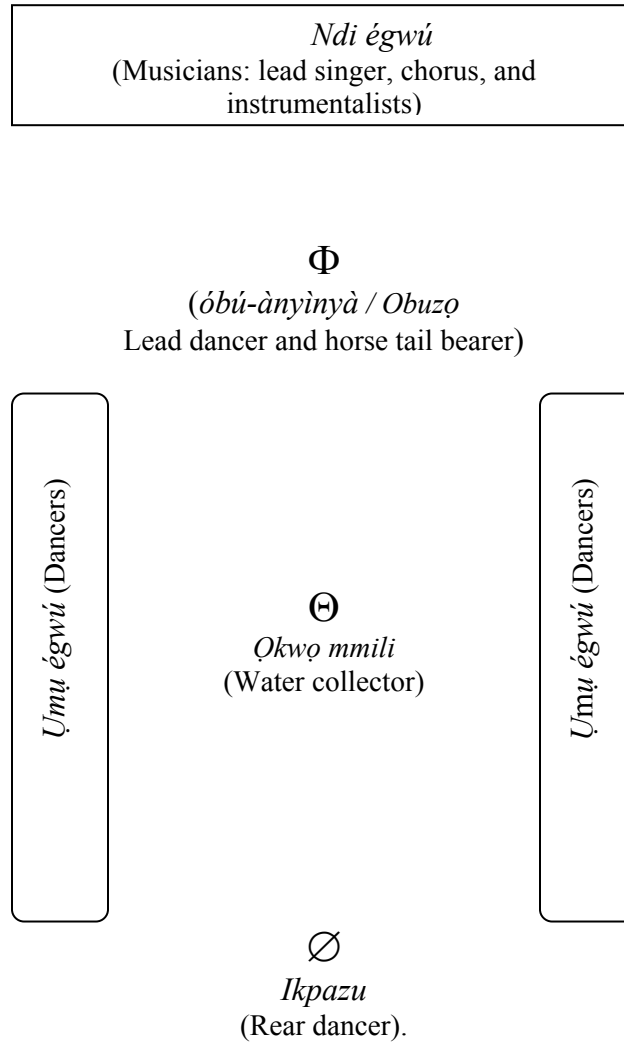


Figure 3-1 "Égwú Line" (Line dance)

Inasmuch as Oneé claimed to have received her dance structure in a dream, I speculate that the new city environment in which Oneé nwa Ajugo lived induced the formalized structure of this dance. My view resonates with Judith Hanna's assertion that "processes in the urban area

affect processes in dance role, function, and form regardless of the dance category.”¹³² In a city like Port Harcourt, it is almost impossible to put up a dance, especially in public, without some formal structure that would make it easy for the seated spectators to watch. For example, occasions such as wedding parties that would call for the performance of *Égwú Àmàlà* would take place in a hall where space on the stage is restricted. Performing *Égwú Àmàlà* in such a milieu requires a formation that would fill the stage and bring the audience face-to-face with the performers. The *Égwú Line* (line dance), as *Égwú Àmàlà* is often called, achieved this goal, thereby enabling the audience to appreciate the various scenes acted by the dancers. Performing the dance in two lines that depict the shape of a canoe also gives the spectators a visual representation of this music and dance said to have come from the water, the river, a gift from the water divinity.

Égwú Àmàlà has remained the signature dance for the Ogbaru people, particularly the Ogbaru women. However, *Égwú Àmàlà* has not been confined to Aboh alone. The genre has spread to other Ogbaru towns east and west of the River Niger as well as to some towns in mainland Igbo such as Oguta in Imo State. But Aboh indigenous women, as well as women married into families, have dominated the scene when it comes to teaching “their” *Égwú Àmàlà* to other people. Examples of such women include Edeli and Beauty Okaome.

¹³² Hanna 1987: 201.

3.2 CHIEF OGBUEFI BEAUTY OKAOME OBI AND *ÉGWÚ ÀMÀLÀ*

The history of *Égwú Àmàlà* is not complete without mention of the name of Chief Beauty Obi. Investigations about the genre point to her so often that one begins to wonder if she is the originator of *Égwú Àmàlà*, an assertion she sometimes insinuates in her discussions about the dance. But who is Beauty and how did she acquire her art? What has made her name so synonymous with *Égwú Àmàlà* throughout Ogbaruland?



Plate 3-1 Chief Ogbuefi Beauty Okaome Obi (clockwise, first seated on the front row) and her group, *Otu Égwú Àmàlà Na-enye Anwuli*.¹³³ Photo courtesy of John Mark Efe

¹³³ Henceforth also Beauty's group.

3.2.1 Beauty: the Woman, the Composer, the Dancer, and her Art

Born Patricia Obi in a little town called Adiai in Ndoni Local Government Area, Rivers State, Nigeria to Nwolisa and Didiagu Obi, Beauty strongly affirms that she got all her art of performing *Égwú Àmàlà* from the water. Ecologically, most towns in Ndoni LGA are located along the banks of the river Niger, opposite Aboh in Ndokwa East LGA in Delta State.

Now about eighty-one years old (as of January, 2006, the time of my discussion and interview with her), Beauty resides at Onitsha in Anambra State. Although she could not recall the exact date of her birth, Beauty remembered vividly the story her parents told of her dramatic encounter with the river Niger as a little child.

She was only seven months (*ogwa' asaa*) when her mother took her to the river to bathe. In the process, she fell into the river and vanished. Having desperately searched for her in vain, her father alerted the fishermen and entreated their help in finding his daughter. But a seer told her parents not to worry, that she would emerge from the water after three days. As the fishermen searched desperately for this missing baby, they were advised by the seer to sing a song that Ogbaru fishermen would sing during their fishing expeditions. On the third day of her disappearance, fishermen from Isoko found her in Osele.¹³⁴ I asked Beauty if she knows or remembers the song and she sang the following:

<i>Ogéné mali nwanne</i>	Someone knows a brother/sister
<i>Chukwu nyene o</i>	God gave it o
<i>Àmàlà bu ike anyi o</i>	<i>Àmàlà</i> is our strength o

¹³⁴ Isoko and Osele are all small towns found along the creeks of the river Niger.

Due to this incident, Beauty attests to the fact that she fears the magnitude of the water.¹³⁵ But she believes in the water insofar as it was created by God and provides for the Ogbaru people. She venerates this body of water (the river Niger) because it did not destroy her when she got lost in it as a child; the river, she upholds, gives her the strength to perform *Égwú Àmàlà*. In order to clarify her attachment and obligations to the “water,” Beauty made a comparison between herself and me:

*Dika ginwa, imaarala na Chukwu etego gi ude, etu afu ka mmiri siri tee ufodu n’ime anyi. A nọro m na mmiri ubochi atọ ma anwughim, a putara m. Agam asi na obu ike nke mmiria zopotalum bia nye m onyinye égwú nkea.*¹³⁶

Like you, you know God has anointed you, so the water has anointed some of us. I was in the water for three days and I did not die, I came out. So I will say it is the strength of this water that saved me and gave me the gift of this dance.¹³⁷

Beauty has a close kinship with the river Niger. She makes votive offerings to it from time to time. However, like other *Égwú Àmàlà* performers that I encountered during my research trip, she pays allegiance to the river spirits before any performance. In fact, Beauty affirmed that

Mmiri nyere m ihe nile, [and speaking in the third person plural she continued], nyabù na túpú e mee ihe óbùla, anyi ga-ényé ya ihe ufodu, dika achicha, fanta [soda drink], mmanya oto bilibili, nzu oyibo, uli-oku oyibo, kweere ya ukwé. Anyi nwèrè ukwe puru iche anyi na-èkwèrè ya. M bido nyabù ukwe ugbua, i ga-ahu na mmiri siri ike, na Chukwu n’zie kèrè mmiri.

¹³⁵ Beauty used the term water here to mean the river Niger. In the Aboh and the Ndoni areas, the Niger is wider as it makes its entrance into the Atlantic Ocean.

¹³⁶ For interviews I will use the Centralized/Standard Igbo translation that is understood by the majority of Igbo people. Otherwise, I will use the Ogbaru dialect.

¹³⁷ The above is my translation of Beauty’s speech during an interview with her on January 14, 2006.

the water gave me everything, [and speaking in the third person plural she continued], Before any performance we give it [water] certain things, such as biscuits, Fanta [soda drink], powder, candles, sing to it. We have a special song that we sing to it. If I begin to sing that song now, you will see that water is strong, that God really created water.¹³⁸

Throughout the period of my interview with Beauty, she was careful with her choice of words when referring to *Mami Wata*. She preferred to substitute the word *Mami Wata* with just “water,” which refers to the river Niger. But she always insisted that the water gave her the dance and other things. Financially, Beauty is comfortable. She has a nice house and owns a car. Friends and devotees of the “water” are often ready to serve and respond to her call. And most importantly, the “water” blessed her with fruit of the womb. In response to my question regarding *Égwú Àmàlà* making women fertile, Beauty exclaimed:

Obu ézié! Mgbe m na-ebidobeghi égwú a [Égwú Àmàlà], imu nwa hiara m ahú. A mutara m s’otu nwa ma kwusi. Nyabu m bido igba Égwú Àmàlà mwere turu ime ma muta otu nwa m bara “Égwúnyelu” k’esi su ya, “Egwu-nyelu.”

That is true! When I hadn’t started this dance [*Égwú Àmàlà*], child bearing was difficult for me. I gave birth to just one child and stopped. So I started dancing *Égwú Àmàlà* and got pregnant and gave birth to the child I named “*Égwúnyelu*” literally, “Dance gave.”¹³⁹

She continued to explain:

¹³⁸ Ibid. Unfortunately, I could not persuade nor convince her to sing the song.

¹³⁹ Interview with Beauty on January 14, 2006 and translated by me from Igbo to English.

Nwanyị ọbuna ihe siiri iké imuta ùmù, nwèrè okwukwe wèré gbaa Égwú Àmàlà, Chineke ga-ényé ya umu màkà nà Égwú Àmàlà bu égwú màkà umuaka. Imarala na mmiri na-ewetara onye ọbula nwa maka na Chineke kere mmiri maka ọtutu ebu m n'uche ga. N'ime igba egwua, e nwetalam nnukwu anuri. Amabughimrii na Chineke chọrọ égwúa, anyi na-ékélé Chineke site n'egwu ma Chineke ka na-ényékwa ndi mmadu ezigbo ihega.

Any woman who has difficulties giving birth to children and has faith and dances *Égwú Àmàlà*, God will give her Children since *Égwú Àmàlà* is a dance for children. And you know water brings children to someone because God created water for many reasons. In the performance of this dance, I have had great joy. Little did I know that God wanted this dance; we thank God through dance and God continues to give good things to people.¹⁴⁰

Raising the tone of her voice, she endorsed her stance on the benefits of *Égwú Àmàlà* saying,

Onye ọbula na-enweghi nwa ma gbaa Égwú Àmàlà ga-amuta nwa! Site n'ike nke Chineke! Site n'Égwú Àmàlà m bidoro muba umu biari mutakwuo umu-ejima. A guputaram égwú ofuu n'ogea, égwú mmeri obi dika: Onyenuu ndi mmadu siri n'ogaghi amutanwu nwa, Chineke achinye ya abua. Égwú Àmàlà na-eweta ihe digasi iché; ọ na-weta ogologo ndu.

Anyone who has no child and dances *Égwú Àmàlà* will beget children! By the strength of God! Through *Égwú Àmàlà* I started giving birth to children and even had twins. I composed a song then on this occasion, the lyrics are as follows: “The one people say will not put to birth, God gave her double. *Égwú Àmàlà* brings different things; it brings long life.”¹⁴¹

Ojebo Odili Ajieh confirmed the above statement made by Beauty. Ojebo was Beauty's co-wife; both women were married to the same man. She told me in an interview I had with her in

¹⁴⁰ Interview with Beauty on January 14, 2006 and translated by me from Igbo to English.

¹⁴¹ Ibid. Interview with Beauty.

Ashaka on January 20, 2006, that Beauty had difficulties getting pregnant until she started dancing *Égwú Àmàlà*.

Why this emphasis on child bearing? Why not on material wealth? In the Nigerian and particularly in the Igbo culture, a woman without children is seen as a human being without any future and in some extreme cases, even as one without any worth. Unfortunately, the fault is almost always believed to be of the woman; hence, she would do everything humanly possible to get a child. The consequence of a woman not having any children could be divorce or her husband marrying another woman in order to get children from her. In most cases, life would be unbearable for the barren wife if the newly wedded wife begets children. The barren woman would be the object of ridicule in her husband's house. It is thus the wish of every married woman to bear a child, and more so, a male child. Beauty has had the experience of being derided for not having children. She firmly believes that *Égwú Àmàlà*, the music and dance from the "water," had made her proud by giving her children. No wonder she has dedicated her whole being and energy to developing and teaching this dance to others.

A woman, a close acquaintance of Beauty's who asked not to be identified, disclosed to me that Beauty is a priestess and a strong devotee of *Mami Wata*. She mediates between those who come to her for help and the water divinity. Beauty alluded to this fact when she explained to me her other tasks outside making her music:

*Eyee, eweputaram nnukwu oge na-akuzi [Égwú Àmàlà ma ọgugu
ma ọgbugba] Ma edobekwelum ogem iji nyere umunwanyị aka ka
ha muta umu. Ufodu ka m kpanyere ije ulọ ọgwu, ndi ọzo ka m
gbaziri n'onwem ma duo ha ka tukwasi obi na Chineke na ha ga-
amuta nwa*

Yes, I spend a lot of time teaching [*Égwú Àmàlà* music and dance].
But I also dedicate my time to helping women to have children.
Some I ask to go to the hospital, others I tell what to do myself and
I ask them to trust in God and they will have children.¹⁴²

According to Beauty, most of these women end up having children and more often than not bring both financial and material gifts to her in appreciation for her help. Although she engages in healing people, especially women, her main concern is her *Égwú Àmàlà*, for which she is popularly known throughout Ogbaruland and its environs.

3.2.2 Beauty's Effect on Continuity and Change in *Égwú Àmàlà*

African dance performs both religious and socio-economic functions, which recent changes due to the introduction of Western cultures, modernity, and post-independence attempts to revitalize cultural heritage have caused either to be modified or to disappear entirely.¹⁴³ Judith Hanna maintains that the purpose and occasion of contemporary African traditional dances in most urban areas have lost some of their original meanings and functions, but along with fusion and substitution, there is continuity.¹⁴⁴ While this may be true of some African dances, the situation is different with *Égwú Àmàlà*, where the genre has maintained most of its traditional meanings, and urbanization has provided a means for fusion of the traditional and the metropolitan. Despite the fact that the genre has been revived and its original religious purpose modified, the assimilation of modern perspectives into its performance practice and its continuous certitude as

¹⁴² Interview with Beauty on January 14, 2006.

¹⁴³ See Hanna 1965: 13-21.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

the embodiment of the Ogbaru culture demonstrate continuity and change in the dance. Beauty is one of the few exponents of this dance genre whose creative innovations have influenced *Égwú Àmàlà* along these lines.

Beauty's encounter with *Égwú Àmàlà* began as a young woman. She got married to a man called Odili Ajieh and relocated to his hometown, Aboh. In her new marital home, Beauty joined the emerging dance groups that performed *Égwú Isha* and *Égwú Ekwè*. According to Beauty, both men and women performed these dances.¹⁴⁵

Beauty agreed that she learnt and performed the various dances of her marital community that were in vogue during the era. Although, like her contemporaries, she performed *Égwú Isha* and *Égwú Ekwè*, she maintained that she engendered her own style of *Égwú Àmàlà*, which the “water” gave to her. Each of the above dances was popular during their time, but *Égwú Àmàlà* has remained a performance par excellence of the Ogbaru, who have shared this music with other people outside Ogbaruland.

Certain factors have enhanced the spread of *Égwú Àmàlà*. Firstly, the shared cultural traditions among most Igbo people ease the exchange of music and dance. Secondly, new styles of music and dance transverse ethnic boundaries quite easily, especially as the Ogbaru are known to intermarry with other Nigerian ethnic groups. For example, Madam Oneé Alagua, an Aboh indigene, was the first performer to take the *Égwú Àmàlà* outside the Aboh milieu to the capital of River State, Port Harcourt and her marital residence. Most indigenes of the northern Rivers State are believed to be descendants of Igbo, with whom they share boundaries to the north (Anambra, Imo, and Delta States), so it was not difficult for these people as well as the Ogbaru

¹⁴⁵ Beauty is the only one who mentioned that both men and women danced *Égwú Ekwè*. This makes me wonder if she was simply mixing up dance styles. Although the Ogbaru people still talk about *Égwú Ekwè*, it is no longer being performed.

people living in that city to be attracted to the genre. Furthermore, Beauty learnt the dance from her marital home in Aboh. After her divorce, she found a new home, first in Asaba, then second in Onitsha, where she taught the dance to members of her community and other Ogbaru towns. She also taught the dance to the people of Issele-Uku and to Ogbaru people living in other cities/towns of Nigeria such as Warri, Lagos, Kano, Obosi, Uli and Abapka Nike.

Beauty is not only the leader of her group but she is also the architect of her dance style. She remembered having started performing *Égwú Àmàlà* circa 1956. And in the history of the genre, she is the most prolific composer and leading choreographer. In reply to my question of how she goes about composing, Beauty disclosed to me that she gets her inspirations through dreams and rumination.¹⁴⁶ Then she memorizes all the tunes she receives during these sober moments and elaborates on them during performance. While some of her compositions are derived from dreams and meditation, others are spontaneous and relevant to the specific occasions that prompted their creation. For example during my field trip in 2006, she performed for me by the banks of the river Niger. At the end of her performance, she did not send someone to tell me she was done. Rather, she spontaneously composed and sang a song in which she called my praise-name, Nwezekibea, and told me they were about to leave.

Anyi a ga na o ne *égwú* ...

We are about to go for our dance

Beauty has not written down her music because the Igbo have no form of musical writing; neither is she conversant with the western notational system. Traditional musicians

¹⁴⁶ Interview with Beauty in 2006.

compose and preserve their music orally and in recent times, especially with the advancement in technology, record their music on cassettes, CDs, videos, and DVDs. In spite of the fact that she has not scored any of her works, Beauty is credited with commodifying *Égwú Àmàlà*. For example, within the span of about three decades, she has produced more than fifty percent of the existing *Égwú Àmàlà* music on LP records, cassettes, and videos.

As a shrewd innovator and businesswoman, she has incorporated Western popular musical instruments such as electronic guitars, synthesizers, and amplifiers, into her compositions. These Western popular instruments play side by side with the traditional instruments during performances. She owns three different *Égwú Àmàlà* troupes, which enables her to respond to the great demands of her music at very short notice. The first of these groups comprise expert instrumentalists and singers whose main job is recording in or outside the studio as well as performing for large audiences. The instrumental ensemble is a mixture of western and traditional musical instruments. The second group includes musicians who could be called to perform at very short notice (about one month). Members of this group include people who are almost always available by nature of their job or the proximity of their school (in the case of students) to where Beauty lives. The third of these groups is made up of musicians who would require a longer period of notification, approximately three months. The instrumental ensembles of the second and third groups consist only of traditional musical instruments. Thus, there is always an opportunity to make a choice as to what group/instrumental type one wants at a particular occasion. When during my field trip I asked Beauty to perform for me, she gave me the option of a totally traditional ensemble made up entirely of traditional instruments or a modern ensemble comprising both traditional and Western instruments. I decided on a traditional ensemble because the main focus of my dissertation is on *Égwú Àmàlà* as the Ogbaru

people traditionally perform it. Furthermore, the other dance groups I researched in Oko-Amakom, Aboh, Ashaka, and Ndoni have not incorporated western instruments into their ensemble.

Also, Beauty has modified the costume worn by the musicians. Instead of the traditional laced white blouse with puffed-sleeves and “George” wrappers worn by other *Égwú Àmàlà* musicians, Beauty’s groups sometimes wear pink tops while maintaining the use of the “George” wrappers. The pink simple tops blend well with the wine red “George” wrappers. This was the costume the musicians wore when they performed for me in 2006.

A great dancer herself, Beauty has incorporated aspects of present day life into *Égwú Àmàlà*. Traditionally, the genre demonstrates through dance and music the occupations as well as the life of the Ogbaru people. *Égwú Àmàlà* songs such as, *ọlu ogo* (farm work) and *égwú alushi* (my divinity’s music) demonstrates the occupation and belief system of this people. With the advent of Western culture and urbanization, Beauty has integrated features of city life affluence and courtship into *Égwú Àmàlà*. For example, in the song “Okada,”¹⁴⁷ Beauty illustrates how an “Okada” rider who, having acquired some money from his trade in the city, comes to the village and lures a young woman, who was already engaged to another man, into marrying him. The woman accepts the “Okada” man’s proposal and is carried away by the rider in the presence of her fiancé. Desperate about his inability to save the situation, he laments in song:

¹⁴⁷ In southeastern Nigeria, particularly in the Delta and Edo States, the word “Okada” refers to a motorcycle that is used for public transportation. The word was first used in Nigerian colloquial language in the then Bendel State, and was derived from the name of the first public airliner, OKADA Airlines Limited, owned by Lucky Igbinedion, an indigene of the State. The use of the motorcycle as a means of transportation is very effective in most Nigerian cities and towns. “Okada” can take you fast to areas where, because of bad roads and/or traffic, a cab or public bus is unable to reach. It is comparable to the airliner because it is fast. In addition, it is relatively cheap and the average Nigerian can afford its cost. The use of motorcycles for transportation is not exclusively a Nigerian or African phenomenon. It is also a usual occurrence in some Asian countries such as India and Vietnam.

“Okada” ebulu nwenye mu o

“Okada” has carried away my wife

The props used in this song include a real motorcycle rider who proudly rides around as the dancers accentuate the pandemonium by abandoning their structured performance lines and dance ad lib. As he rides off with the young woman, the frantic fiancé runs after him in an attempt to stop him from taking his fiancée away.

Since *Égwú Àmàlà* depicts the life of the Ogbaru, this new trend of modern city life and its effect on rural areas was a welcome idea of continuity and change. The audience is able to view and appreciate the traditional way of life as well as the modern trends and influence of Western urbanization that have permeated the fabric of the Ogbaru social culture and structure.

Beauty is the most traveled and exposed of all the *Égwú Àmàlà* composers/choreographers. She was the first to perform *Égwú Àmàlà* on radio and television. Although this places her at an advantage over her contemporaries, she has often not found favor with some colleagues, who complain and criticize her for making *Égwú Àmàlà* “cheap” by teaching the dance to non-Ogbaru indigenes, integrating new forms into the dance, and popularizing the genre. Her critics think that her including modern trends like the “Okada” into *Égwú Àmàlà* is not in conformity with “our” Ogbaru culture and may be misleading to the audience, who may be unaware of the dynamics of the Ogbaru people.¹⁴⁸ Beauty on the other hand, sees her bringing *Égwú Àmàlà* to “the others” as a way of teaching and allowing them learn the Ogbaru culture through music and dance. Such knowledge will help them value and respect the Ogbaru traditions, she insists. One can appreciate Beauty’s view knowing that

¹⁴⁸ This stems from the focus group interview I had with one *Égwú Àmàlà* group in Ashaka, Delta State in 2006.

among the larger Igbo ethnic group, the Ogbaru, and Western Igbo as a whole, are noted for their adherence to their tradition. In spite of all these, Beauty will always be remembered for spreading *Égwú Àmàlà* to non-Ogbaru indigenes in other States of Nigeria.

3.3 THE SOCIO-CULTURAL SETTING OF *ÉGWÚ ÀMÀLÀ*

3.3.1 The place and importance of *Égwú Àmàlà* in Ogbaruland

Égwú Àmàlà is the most important and most celebrated women's dance in all Ogbaru. Since the Ogbaru populace is geographically located along both sides of the river Niger, this largest river of Nigeria is their main source of living. From the river Niger and its basins they get their food (fish and crops such as yams, vegetables, etc), occupations (fishing, farming, and trading), and transportation. Prior to the dissemination and use of cars, canoes were the main means of transportation in this area. As a teenager, in the early 1970s I had to learn how to paddle the canoe. In fact, my aunt, Comfort Ogbuchi, who always insisted that all her "city nieces and nephews" know the *omenala* (the traditions of the land), was of the notion that I should have learnt how to use the canoe at a younger age. I was also taught the safety measures of rowing in the river. For example, I was instructed on what to do if I were alone and the canoe capsized, as well as how to help others if we were in a group and the canoe overturned. Finally, I was taught some techniques of swimming in the event of a change of weather conditions giving rise to high tides in the river. Even to this day, some people find it more convenient to use the canoes than cars or "Okada" as the case may be. It is not surprising, then, that the act of paddling the canoe forms the essence and is the most significant prop of *Égwú Àmàlà*.

Because of the importance of this genre in the life of the people, almost every Ogbaru town has at least one *Égwú Àmàlà* group that performs during ceremonies and festivals in their hometown and/or goes to nearby towns to compete for a prize.¹⁴⁹ All the *Égwú Àmàlà* groups I interviewed during my research were quick to enumerate the prizes they had won in competitions and the places outside their hometown where they had performed. For example, the *Égwú Àmàlà* group of Oko-Amakom told me that they had traveled to other cities such as Lagos and Asaba performing the dance and have even won competitions in Asaba.

This proliferation of *Égwú Àmàlà* is credited to Aboh women, who have made it a point of duty to form *Égwú Àmàlà* group(s) in whatever city, town, country, or continent that they find themselves. As a result, during any important ceremony or event, the dance is performed not only for entertainment but also as a reminder of cultural value. The underlining concept of *Égwú Àmàlà* music and performance style is distinct from all other dance forms in Igboland such as *Uloko*, *Izomo*, and *Abigbo*. These characteristics have given *Égwú Àmàlà* a cultural identity that every Ogbaru desires to be associated with.

3.3.2 Performance Context and Uses of *Égwú Àmàlà*

Égwú Àmàlà performance takes place within the context and environment of festivities such as *Iwa-ji* (New Yam festival), commemoration of historical events, weddings, social gatherings, and funerals. While the genre continues to be performed at the above-mentioned significant occasions, it is also enjoyed as entertainment and appreciated as cultural heritage through which the Ogbaru disseminate their values to younger generations.

¹⁴⁹ These competitions are often organized by the Local Government to enhance the revitalization of cultural activities, which include music, dance, and drama.

3.3.2.1 *Égwú Àmàlà* and Identity

The use of music and dance in the construction of urban, and particularly migrant, identity has been a common theme in scholarly discussions.¹⁵⁰ According to John Baily, music is a “potent symbol of identity; like language (and attributes of language such as accent and dialect), it is one of those aspects of culture which can, when the need to assert ‘ethnic identity’ arises, most readily serve this purpose.”¹⁵¹ Baily continues to specify the twofold effectiveness of music. He claims that 1) it acts as a ready means for the identification of different ethnic or social groups, and 2) music has effective “emotional connotations and can be used to assert and negotiate identity in a particularly powerful manner.”¹⁵² Music and dance enable people in a singular way to feel that they are in touch with the vital parts of themselves: their emotions, their society, and their community. Furthermore, musical dance styles can be made emblematic of regional identities. *Égwú Àmàlà*, which embodies dominant Ogbaru communal values, is a perfect example of a symbol of identity for all Ogbaru people, but particularly for Ogbaru women.

In the Diaspora, *Égwú Àmàlà* not only acts as an agent of identity but also fills the vacuum and nostalgia of being far away from home. Nostalgia, as Stewart points out, “can bridge the present with the past in such a way as to ameliorate tensions arising from a spatially and temporally fragmented terrain of new experiences.”¹⁵³ Moreover, “by resurrecting time and place, and a subject in time and place, it shatters the surface of an atemporal order and a prefab cultural landscape.”¹⁵⁴ Because they have a keen sense of communal affinity, the Ogbaru tend to

¹⁵⁰ See Mitchell 1956 and Kerman 1985.

¹⁵¹ Baily in Stokes 1994: 48.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Stewart 1988: 277.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

form associations in order to retain and highlight their culture. For instance, in the United States of America, Ogbaru indigenes have four Chapters in Georgia, California, Maryland, and Texas that congregate under the umbrella of the Ogbaru National Association (ONA). This body meets to deliberate on social and political issues that affect them as a people at home and abroad. They hold a yearly conference, “Ogbaru International Convention,” during which invitations are extended to Ogbaru dignitaries in Nigeria.

As an Ogbaru, I attended one such convention in Washington DC in 2005. One of the dignitaries invited was Chief Stephen Osita Osadebe, the Ogbuefi Ezeafulukwe of Atani,¹⁵⁵ an Ogbaru popular highlife musician. Unfortunately, he was not able to attend. On the second day, as the evening session came to a close, my cousin-in-law whispered to my ears that it was time for *Égwú Àmàlà*. I looked around as a few women stood up and began at one end of the hall to form two parallel lines. They also encouraged their female children to join the group. I realized, however, that there were no traditional musical instruments and as I wondered what would happen next, the sound of the *Égwú Àmàlà* music boomed out from a sound box. The atmosphere of the conference changed to a very joyous one. Other women who had not noticed when the others left their seats got up and joined the group. As they danced, the men stood up, dipped their hands in their pockets and brought out money to spray¹⁵⁶ on their dancing wives, children and/or friends to show their appreciation and to encourage the dancers. I asked Dr. Gabriel Ogbugbulu, an Ogbaru elder living here in the U.S.A., why this spontaneous and joyous reaction when the people heard the music of *Égwú Àmàlà*. “This music,” he replied, “is the heart

¹⁵⁵ Stephen Osita Osadebe was a popular musician from Atani in Ogbaru. He was very famous. He died in early 2007 during his visit to the United States.

¹⁵⁶ Spraying dancers with money is a common phenomenon in most Nigerian performances. This occurs when one or more members of the audience place money on the foreheads or bodies of a performer as a sign of admiration and gratitude for a good performance. Depending on the norms of the group, such monies may be given to the individual performer or put in the general purse of the group.

of Ogbaru culture and touches the heart of every Ogbaru. When we hear this music, we are spiritually transported home and automatically feel as though we are at home.”¹⁵⁷ As one would expect, most of the women present left home when they were very young and could hardly dance *Égwú Àmàlà* well. Also, a good number of the children have never set foot in Nigeria, not to mention Ogbaruland. However, perfect dancing is not the issue here. Rather what is at stake is the bond they feel performing a dance genre that satisfies their nostalgia for their homeland. Performing *Égwú Àmàlà* places them in a scene to make an interpretive space relational in which meanings have direct social referents. Furthermore, this genre is a re-enactment of the Ogbaru values, which serves to maintain the Ogbaru identity. By inference, therefore, the function of music is to give the people a sense of identity, and so promote the successful continuation of the values and culture of the Ogbaru. This explains why this riverine people of Delta region of Nigeria cling tenaciously to their traditional music when they migrate to areas other than their Ogbaruland.

3.3.2.2 Agent of education

Inherent in *Égwú Àmàlà* are features that are designated to educate, enlighten, and glorify the Ogbaru culture, past and present, as well as entertain the public. It functions as an extension of the mythology and cultural conventions associated with the Ogbaru and also as an artistic activity that people, even those outside this culture, derive pleasure from watching. The norms and values of the land are taught through the music/dance of this genre, thus fostering self-efficacy as well as facilitating the performance of expected roles in wider society. Songs include those such as *égwú ọlu ogo* (music for farm work), which teaches the dignity of farming; *égwú*

¹⁵⁷ Discussion with Dr. Gabriel Ogbugbulu at the Ogbaru International Convention, Washington DC, in 2004. Dr. Ogbugbulu died in January 2008.

alusi (music for a divinity) is a reminder of the spiritual dimension of the Ogbaru; and *égwú nwa* (music for a child), which is a prayer asking the *Mami Wata* for a child. *Égwú nwa* is rarely performed today because most dancers are now Christians and would not beseech “false gods” for any help or favor. *Égwú Àmàlà* continues to maintain its vitality in providing requirements essential to the society such as upholding cultural patterns, inculcating cultural values, and adapting to environmental phenomena.

3.3.2.3 Music, Dance and Healing

The ideas and beliefs of music penetrate the Ancient Greek doctrine of ethos. According to the Greeks, music is an art that has the power and capability of penetrating into the very nadir of the soul. The use of music for healing was known and practiced by most traditional cultures in the world. Music of various genres can be used to enhance and foster healing as well as the mind/body connection. Also the use of healing mantras, chants, incantations, toning, and dances from major cultures of the world such as Hinduism, Muslim, Native American, Polynesian, Asian, and African societies have been known throughout history. Over the past two decades, toning and chant have made their way into contemporary mainstream culture.¹⁵⁸ In the same vein, Darko Breitenfeld in reviewing Penelope Gouk’s edited book titled, *Musical Healing in Cultural Context*, noted that,

In whatever language we use (psychoanalytical, religious, artistic), the embodied act of making music opens up realms within and beyond individuals, thus providing access to the unconscious, to

¹⁵⁸ An example of chant music that has demonstrated such great spiritual and healing effects is the popular recording by the Benedictine Monks of Santo Domingo de Silos, Spain. This recording from the early 1990 sold over four million copies by 1994. It was widely reported in the popular press that this recording had healing effects and was used for meditation.

the soul, to the divine, thus mediating between the material and immaterial worlds.¹⁵⁹

Music is a powerful sensory stimulus that can affect and work simultaneously on the spirit, mind, and body. *Égwú Àmàlà* is a braid of ritual and entertainment. Originally the music was performed in honor of the water spirit or *Mami Wata*. The dance reveals the overall cosmology of the people of this culture and gives some insight into their conception of the universe. Even though the music honors the *Mami Wata*, it ultimately also pleases Chukwu, the Supreme Being, to whom these divinities implore for help on behalf of their devotees.

Embedded in this music is the strong belief that any barren woman who believes and dances *Égwú Àmàlà* will beget children. All the groups I worked with during my research in Nigeria and even in the Diaspora North America upheld this assertion. Apart from Beauty, most women who testified that they begot children after dancing *Égwú Àmàlà* requested to remain anonymous. Previously in this genre, there were specific song(s) dedicated to entreating the water divinity or *Mami Wata* for a child. These songs are gradually becoming extinct because most *Égwú Àmàlà* performers have been converted to Christianity and singing such songs would go against their newfound faith of beseeching God for their needs and not any “strange gods.” In fact, one of my informants from Aboh told me that they risk being debarred from their Church if their Pastor should hear that they sang and performed these songs. This is because they would be violating the Ten Commandments, “you shall have no other gods before me.”¹⁶⁰ They could perform the dance as mere social activity but with no reference or spiritual nuance to the water divinity. With such admonitions from Christian Spiritual heads, the practice of performing *Égwú*

¹⁵⁹ Breitenfeld, (Reviewed) Dec. 2000: 206.

¹⁶⁰ Bible: New Revised Standard Version. Exodus 20:3 see <http://www.devotions.net/bible/00bible.htm>

Àmàlà in its entirety, including the appearance of the *Mami Wata* mimer, is gradually dying away.

Having danced *Égwú Àmàlà* myself, and having watched its performance over the years, I can attest to the healing facet of the music. According to most Ogbaru people, *Égwú Àmàlà* is a spiritual force that enriches the mind and, energizes and relaxes the body. It unwinds the emotions and awakens the feelings to joyous and calm sentiments, which is conducive to women getting pregnant. The remedial effects of music as therapy are today a popular part of education in many areas in the world, but particularly in the United States of America.

3.3.3 Conclusion

It is a common assertion in Ogbaruland that *Égwú Àmàlà* is from the river, given to the people by the water spirit or *Mami Wata* for the benefit of the people, particularly to those who dedicate themselves to her service. Nevertheless, oral historical and unpublished written evidence demonstrate that the genre gradually developed from already existing Aboh traditional dances. Each stage of this transmutation had concomitant prominent composers/choreographers who effected a particular change in the existing dance, thus engendering a new form. The major epitome of the *Égwú Àmàlà* in recent times is the composer/choreographer Chief Ogbuefi Beauty Okaome Obi. Her contributions to the genre make her stand out among her contemporaries.

All the artists that have been discussed so far all brought in different features, ranging from dance styles to costumes that gradually shaped *Égwú Àmàlà*. However, all of them assert that they got their music through dreams and from the water divinity. According to an elder from Aboh, Chief Enebeli Ogu, the *Omodi* of Aboh

Ha (ndi obu-uzo) ha ncha na-agwa anyi na ukwe ha m'obu igba ya, na égwú ha, bu ihe ha natara n'aka onye mili, mmuo mili m'obu chi. Anyi kweere ha maka omaricha égwú ha gosiri anyi. Ha bu ndi oji anya afu mmuo; mu na-owe m ejibeghi anya m fu. Anyi nabatara ihe ha gwara anyi bia buputa égwúa ma gbaa ya."

They (the group leaders) all tell us that their singing or dancing and music were given to them by *onye mmili*, the water spirits or divinity. We believe them because of the beauty of the dance they show us. They are the ones who see these spirits; I have not seen any myself. We accept what they tell us and perform the music and dance."¹⁶¹

Chief Enebeli Ogu who was ca. ninety years old when I met and interviewed him in Aboh in January 2006, participated in the various Aboh dances that engendered *Égwú Àmàlà*. These accounts of the music have lived with the Ogbaru people since the late nineteenth century. In the twentieth century, *Égwú Àmàlà* has integrated modern traits as seen in the performances of Beauty. Thus *Égwú Àmàlà* is a manifestation of continuity and change, an aspect that is inherent in many African music and dance. The genre is the quintessence of the Ogbaru culture.

¹⁶¹ Interview at Aboh, 2005. Chief Enebeli Ogu is popularly known as *Omodi* Record.

4.0 THE RELIGIOUS DIMENSION OF *ÉGWÚ ÀMÀLÀ*

Religion is very much and always with us. It is with us at every moment of life – in our innermost beings and with regard to the great or minor events of life. - E. Bolaji Idowu, 1973.

Religion is deep in the nature of every person and is unavoidable as a facet of human life. In most societies as in Africa, religion forms part of the fabric of the cultural life of the people. Common to almost every traditional African religion is the concept of a Supreme God who, though the creator of the universe and all it contains, is often believed to be remote from man. This Supreme Being is known by various local names such as Chukwu among the Igbo of eastern Nigeria, Olodumare among the Yoruba of West Africa, Atabuchi among the Bekwarra of south eastern Nigeria, Qameta among the Xhosa of South Africa, Nyame among the Akan of Ghana, Andriamanitra among the Madagascans, Chilenga and Urezhwa in Zambia and Botswana, respectively. The African approaches the Supreme Being through the mediation of lesser divinities, who are very personal and relentless in aiding those who venerate them.

The focus in this chapter is on Igbo traditional religion since this is most relevant to this work. However, I must say immediately that writing on the traditional religion of a non-homogeneous Igbo society is a complex activity. One has to draw upon many parameters, examine the structure, and be explicit in the discourse in order to convey concepts that would otherwise be misconstrued. Also problematic is the strain between the Igbo explanation of

worship of the Supreme Being, which gives agency to ancestors, spirits, and divinities, and the strictures of Christianity and Western academic discourse, which are sometimes biased and often consider Igbo traditional worship as “pagan.” These attitudes have been unproductive and even counterproductive in understanding the indigenous perception of their relationship with the Supernatural. What is often forgotten is that many elements of indigenous belief and practices are not irreconcilable with Christianity. For example, the belief in the Supreme Being and spirits, divinities, and ancestors as mediators between man and the Supreme Being, is similar to the Christian belief of the Almighty God and comparable to the Catholic belief in and veneration of saints. Traditional dances, so closely bounded with religion, were often regarded by the European Christian missionaries as manifestations of heathenism and were not to be performed by believers or “civilized people.” Yet these dances often had origins and universal themes that are analogous to the folk dances of other cultures of the world, including those of Europe.

Given the scope of this work, it is not possible to offer a thorough examination of these issues. Suffice it to say that Igbo traditional religion is a sacramental religion based on symbolism. It is not a prophetic religion even though there are mediums as well as prophets. It has no written script; rather, its essential doctrines are transmitted through a rich and complex oral tradition, which includes storytelling, (poetry) music, and dance. Consequently, the interpretations given to one section or aspect of worship could be different even within the same town.

Chukwu, the Supreme God, who is considered to be too great to be worshiped directly, is approached through intermediary divinities and spirits. As canalizations of abstract spiritual power, these divinities and spirits, which may be anthropomorphically conceived, assure man of Chukwu’s benevolence by obtaining and granting their needs. As noted by Bolaji Idowu,

Africans believe that “spirits are ubiquitous; there is no area of the earth, no object or creature, which has not a spirit of its own or which cannot be inhabited by a spirit.”¹⁶² Therefore, it is not uncommon in most African cultures to find that there are spirits of trees, rocks, mountains, hills, forests, watercourses and rivers. And these spirits are often revered with ceremonies that include music and dance. One such spirit or divinity is *Mami Wata*.

4.1 MAMI WATA: THE MYSTERIES OF THE UNDER WATER

Ancient Africa possessed a host of water spirit traditions before the first contact with Europeans. Studies indicate that the worship of the mermaid/mermen and nymphs, which people believed to be born in the sea, was prevalent in ancient African societies, history, and mythology.¹⁶³ The majority of these spirits were regarded as women with a twofold nature and attitudes of good and evil. This dualism is reflected in the very nature of water as means of food, drink, trade, and transportation, but also a source of danger that can drown people, flood towns, cities, villages, fields, and provide passage for intruders.¹⁶⁴ The names of water spirits differ from region to region. However, most often they are today known by a common generic name *Mami Wata*, or *Mami Water*, or *Mammy Wata*, in the west coast of Africa (Nigeria, Ghana, Burkina Faso, and Ivory Coast [Cote D’Ivoire]) and its diaspora. These spirits, as has already been noted, are mostly female, though they are also sometimes male. But, since they are believed to be non-

¹⁶² Idowu 1973: 174.

¹⁶³ This trend dates back to 1700 B.C. Ancient Egypt. See Winters 1985, Massey 1994, Griaule 1997, and Temple 1999.

¹⁶⁴ Stipriaan, 2005: 324

human, the issue of their gender and race is usually not problematized. Among the Igbo, however, *Mami Wata* is generally believed to be female.

Many Western scholars such as the anthropologist Misty Basian have proposed theories about *Mami Wata*.¹⁶⁵ Some, such as Salmons as paraphrased by van Stipriaan, Drewal, and Hecht, argue that the mermaid image became popular in Africa after the Continent's contact with European sailors and explorers whose ships often had the carvings of a mermaid on their prows.¹⁶⁶ These scholars give evidence that the oldest known *Mami Wata* carvings found in the coastal regions of southern Nigeria around 1901 were reproductions of from "Der Schlangenbandinger" (The Snake Charmer), an 1880-87 chromolithograph printed in Hamburg. Others still suggest that the origin of the *Mami Wata* was a product of interculturalism and syncretism, the complex and changing interface between African societies, the Western world and Asia.¹⁶⁷ This assertion is based on the fact that copies of the above-mentioned lithograph that were sold in West Africa in the 1950s originated in Bombay and England.¹⁶⁸

In her article, "Mami Water in African Religion and Spirituality" (2000), Kathleen O'Brien Wicker systematically discussed the cultural exchanges and accretions that engendered *Mami Water* which, she posited, occurred in varied epochs and places and "had the complex cumulative effect of creating a distinctive new tradition."¹⁶⁹ Wicker traces the *Mami Water* tradition to the mermaids and mermen of Western tradition through its associations with the New World. She cites the example of Paxson, who recorded a secret dance in honor of *Watra Mamma*. This clandestine dance, according to Paxson's data, was infact performed by African

¹⁶⁵ Misty L. Bastian, "Nwaanyi Mara Mma: Mami Wata the More Beautiful woman," <http://server1.fandm.edu/departments/Anthropology/mami.htm>. Accessed December 3, 2007.

¹⁶⁶ Stipriaan, 2005: 324; Drewal 1988: 160-85; Hecht 1990: 80-86.

¹⁶⁷ Isichei 2004: 238; Wicker 2000: 199-214.

¹⁶⁸ Salmons 1977: 11-13.

¹⁶⁹ Wicker 2000: 199.

slaves in Surinam and other colonies in 1750.¹⁷⁰ Wicker further discussed the Indian component in the *Mami Water métissage* before elaborating on the cult's arrival and practice on the continent of Africa. Wicker's article illustrates the varied constructions of this divinity within traditional, Hindu, Christian, and Islamic communities while showing the creative reinterpretations of these cultural strands in the course of its absorption, assemblage, and adaptation.

Mami Wata is the subject matter of contemporary art history, paintings, carvings, literature, music, and film. For example, Flora Nwapa's novel "Efuru" (1966) and her Children's Book, "Mamywater" (1979), deal extensively with issues on *Mami Wata*. In her ethnographic documentary film, *Mammy Water: In search of the water spirits in Nigeria* (1995), the anthropologist, Sabine Jell-Bahlsen recorded rituals and ceremonies of water spirits in West Africa with a focus on Nigerian divinities.¹⁷¹ Perhaps the most outstanding mention of the *Mami Wata* in the arts in Nigeria is found in the music of Uwaifo. Sir Victor Uwaifo, a scholar and celebrated Nigerian Highlife musician, produced a song as a tribute to *Mami Wata* because she called him "Guitar Boy," thus acknowledging his musicianship. According to Uwaifo, he physically saw the water divinity in Lagos Bar Beach in the 1960s and she said to him, "Guitar boy, if you see *Mami Wata* never run away Victor Uwaifo." This sentence formed the crux of his highlife release "Guitar Boy."¹⁷² The complete lyrics of the song:

¹⁷⁰ Paxson 1980: 201.

¹⁷¹ See also Sidney Littlefield Kasfir, 1994: 80-82+96; Arcy Art Original Oil, <http://www.arcyart.com/mami1.htm>. Accessed November 7, 2007.

¹⁷² This number appears in more recent collection albums of Sir Victor Uwaifo, namely "Guitar Boy/Mammy Water: Collection of Greatest Hits" (2002) and "Africa Evergreen Album" (2006). For a complete biography of Sir Victor Uwaifo see *Timeless Legacy: The Story of Victor Uwaifo*

Guitar Boy,
If you see *Mammy Water* oh,
Never, never you run away,
Eh never run away Victor Uwaifo
If you see *Mammy Water* oh,
Never, never you run away,
Sing a song of love, sweet melody.

Almost all references to the *Mami Wata* on the West African coast denote a spirit that assumes a female nature and body structure. The *Mami Wata* that I discuss and allude to throughout this work is a feminine creature because she is the most famous water spirit in the area. In Ogbaruland, the many local Igbo names of the water divinity or divinities - *Uhamiri*, *Onye'mili* (water person), *mmuo mili* (water spirit), *Ezenwanyi* (Queen), *ndimili* (the water people), and *Ezebelamiri* (Queen who lives in the waters) - have become synonymous with the term *Mami Wata*. Despite the tendency of most Western anthropologists to regard *Mami Wata* in West Africa as something introduced from outside, it ought to be remembered that belief in the water spirit and its cult predate the region's contact with European sailors. As has already been noted, the Igbo have always believed in water spirits whose names often coincided with the names of the rivers. It is nevertheless obvious that the name of the water spirit/divinity and her representation in art have been greatly influenced by the cultural contact with Europe. In some parts of Igboland, the river or stream is greeted as mother, given the importance of water to life. This may therefore explain the gradual shift from the proper names of these spirits/divinities in some riverine areas to the generic name *Mami Wata* or *Mammy Water*, a term whose meaning seems to be "water mother," especially since in some areas there were also generic names for the water spirit/divinity. Thus, the *Onye mmili* (water person) or *Mmuo mmili* (water spirit) became *Mata Wata* (water mother).

4.2 *ONYE'MILI AND ÉGWÚ ÀMÀLÀ*

Water divinities are typically the most popular divinities in Igboland, particularly among the riverine Igbo, who live along the banks of the river Niger. The mermaid commonly referred to as *Mami Wata* typically represents the generalized form of a multitude of traditional local water spirits of the area.

4.2.1 *The Mami Wata Icon and Ogbaru/Igbo Cosmology*

The mystical pantheon of these water divinities is often portrayed in their primordial features as a mermaid whose body is half-human and half-fish. Water spirits are believed to occasionally make an appearance before humans. During these manifestations, *Mami Wata* is often recognized by her overabundance of beauty and wealth.

The contemporary image of *Mami Wata* is of an exceptionally beautiful, fair, and light-skinned maiden with long flowing black (sometimes blond) hair, bold-dark and commanding eyes and accompanied by snakes. Two large snakes intertwine about her body with one of the snakes rising up the middle of her body to cradle its head between her breasts pointing to her compelling eyes. The snakes that wrap her body are pythons, which in most (ancient) West African beliefs were sacred animals.

4.2.1.1 *Snakes as a Cultural phenomenon*

The association of *Mami Wata* with snakes corroborates the traditional roles snakes play in Igbo cosmology. Snakes, especially *éké*, the royal pythons, represent supernatural power and are thus considered messengers and manifestations of divinities. Pythons are regarded as sacred

and mysterious; they are feared and venerated in most parts of Igboland. These non-venomous colorful snakes often live in pairs. Because they symbolize the divine, it is a taboo to kill them. In fact, if a python crawls into one's house, one is expected praise it and beg it to leave. People who have encountered them affirm that the snakes will normally go away without harming anyone. If a royal python is killed accidentally, it must be buried like a human being, according to Igbo traditional rites.

Mami Wata as well as the royal pythons that symbolically coil around her body are esteemed and feared for their beauty and powers. Emblematically, these pythons assert the divine powers of this aquatic spirit.

4.2.1.2 Colors in Igbo Tradition

The two colors that typically adorn the shrines of the *Mami Wata* are white and red. These are apparently the favorite colors of this fair water spirit. Devotees of the *Mami Wata* cult would usually wear white and red colors in recognition of the spirit's potentials.

In Igbo tradition, *ocha*, or the white color, signifies fertility as well as transition from life to death and *vice versa*, a crossroad between the human and the spirit worlds. The color white apparent not only in white cloths but also in the form of *nzú*, white limestone found underwater. *Nzú*, or white chalk, is used to paint the priest's and priestess' eyes and face – a sign of their being in communication with the spirit world. *Nzú* is also utilized for other purposes such as healing. Because of its cooling effects, it is applied to a feverish body. Additionally, in rituals of birth, initiation rites, and funeral ceremonies, the Ogbaru people paint their bodies with this white chalk that generally denotes spirit association and participation. *ocha*, or white, thus delineates the boundaries between the spirit and the human worlds. The other common color usually associated with the *Mami Wata* is red. For the Igbo, red or *ocha obara* or *obala* means

life force and virility; it symbolizes blood. This color stands for sacrifice, which is the archetypal duty of males in rituals. The *ocha obala*, or red, is represented by *uda* or red chalk.

White and red are present in all *Mami Wata* ceremonies and rituals. The color combination also expresses the dual nature (male and female) of this water spirit. It is part of the ambiguities inherent in the nature of divinities that even when they are conceived as male or female, in reality, qualities of both genders are often attributed to many of them. *Mami Wata* devotees always make these colors part of their dressing code, especially when celebrating the spirit. This could well explain their use in *Égwú Àmàlà*. The main outfit for *Égwú Àmàlà* performers is a wine-red “George” wrapper. The George cloth, an imported fabric often from the Netherlands and India, has formed part of the Ogbaru dress code since the early twentieth century. In performance, the women tie two pieces of George material, one above the other around their waist, and wear a white blouse. Each piece is approximately three yards long. The men tie a piece of George cloth around their waist and wear a white top or jumper. This has been the clothing used for this dance since its inception. The instruments used in the ensemble of this dance genre are also very often deliberately painted red, white, or red and white, although there are shades of blue, green, yellow, and indigo on some of the instruments.



Plate 4-1 *Égwú Àmàlà* musical instruments painted red and white. Notice that the broom as well as the long stick are painted red and the small basket is also painted red with a strap of blue. Photo: courtesy of the author.

Before Christianity became a household religion in this area in the late 1960s to early 1970s, *Mami Wata* shrines could be seen along the banks of the river and even in noticeable areas around homes. A typical *Mami Wata* shrine is adorned with *nzu*, foodstuff, bottles of soft drinks such as “Fanta,” white and red strips of cloth, and a portrait of *Mami Wata*, usually the popular German chromolithograph poster of this female water spirit. Also present at the shrine are testimonies of the gifts and favors received from the water spirit. They include photographs of children, of mothers with their babies, and of people who are believed to have been healed of their serious ailments by the water divinity.

Today, very few, if any, of these shrines are visible in such public places as most devotees have been converted to Christianity. This does not mean that the practice and

reverence of these water divinities does not exist. On the contrary, some new Christian converts still retain their ties with *Mami Wata*. Others have refused to be converted to Christianity. These fervent devotees overtly express their belief in *Mami Wata* by venerating her in shrines often located in or near the homes of the priestess/priest, *eze mmili*. These loyalists or traditionalists sometimes dedicate an inner room in their houses for the purpose of worship. The priestess/priest preside over the shrine, initiate new members to the cult, and offers appropriate sacrifices to appease the divinity. Their members believe many of these priestesses/priests are prophets or mediums of the water spirit. They mediate between the *Mami Wata* and the devotees or anyone who comes to them in need of help. Such assistance is sought by people asking for protection, wealth, and/or healing, as well as by women seeking to have children. As Nwapa noted, this spirit herself was barren,¹⁷³ but often will agree to heal her devotees of this affliction.

Mami Wata's aficionados assert that they are given extraordinary talents and even powers by the divinity. Those that are performing artistes exhibit prolific ideas and forms, which they claimed were received directly from the water divinity. For example, Ogbuefi Beauty Okaome is a *Mami Wata* priestess. She is physically beautiful and has retained her beauty in spite of her age. In addition, she possesses great musical talents and performance skills. Beauty attributes all her musical potentials to *onye mmili*, the water divinity, for whom she is a medium and whom she serves faithfully in return.

Mami Wata is the central phenomenon in *Égwú Àmàlà*, and this dance genre is attributed to her. In a complete *Égwú Àmàlà* recital, therefore, a section is performed in her honor. During such performances, one of the dancers is clad in a white dress with silver decorations, long hair

¹⁷³ Nwapa 1966: 221

(usually a Caucasian type wig), and a fake snake coils around her waist and her neck. According to Fidelma U. Okwesa,

there is no limit to how creative the Mamiwata costumes can be since folk traditions about sightings of mermaids by ‘privileged’ individuals are quite rich in the description of these mermaids. But the overall appearance has a very strong Asian, specifically Indian, flavour.¹⁷⁴

The dancer representing *Mami Wata* comes in during performance with her consort, sometimes holding a doll to signify her ability to give children to barren women. Her consort is usually dressed in a typical Ogbaru tilted-man’s clothing, that is, expensive wrapper tied around the waist and knotted at the side and a velvet red jumper. His neck is garlanded with traditional large beads and he carries a large fan in his hand. Both dance onto the stage, but not in the typical *Égwú Àmàlà* dance steps. Rather, they make slow walking foot movements while moving torso gently and rhythmically to the beat of the music. Unfortunately, most dance groups rarely perform this part of *Égwú Àmàlà* today because most of the performers are Christians. All the groups that performed for me during my research gave one reason or another why they could not perform that section. For example, the group at Ashaka told me that if they performed *Égwú Àmàlà* in its entirety, we would not be able to go home, because it would be too long. But when I reminded them that it used to be done in the past, they replied: “Yes, that was in the past, times have changed now.”¹⁷⁵ This comment notwithstanding, they were unwilling to perform the complete dance because of their Christian faith.

¹⁷⁴ Okwesa 1987: 177.

¹⁷⁵ Interview with *Otu Aboh Nadi* (“Aboh is Great” group) at Ashaka.

4.3 POSSESSION-TRANCE IN *ÉGWÚ ÀMÀLÀ*

Of the four groups I worked with during my research, only Beauty accepted to have her group perform at the River Niger. The other groups simply told me it entailed “a lot” and they were not ready for such an escapade. The closest any group came to my request, except Beauty and her group, was the Aboh group, who performed at the banks of the River Niger without venturing inside. However, when Beauty danced *Égwú Àmàlà* in the Niger, it became evident to me why the other groups did not want to take the risk.

Possession and trance are familiar notions in many western and non-western cultures. References to possession are found in comic contexts (Pogo by Walt Kelly, 1973¹⁷⁶) and serious aspects of life, such as religion. In the Christian Bible, for example, there are several indications of possession and trance (Mathew 12: 22; Luke 13: 10-13; Acts 10: 10, 11: 5, and 22: 17). In all these examples, the central focus is an unconscious alteration of a person’s will.¹⁷⁷

The relationship between music and trance and possession has often featured in ethnomusicological as well as anthropological discourse. These studies have proposed several theories. Andrew Neher claims that effects and impact of repetitive rhythmic stimuli played at a rate of about eight to thirteen cycles per second could influence brainwave pulsations that induce trance;¹⁷⁸ Sheila Walker assumes that loud and repetitive drumming leads to trance through sensory overload.¹⁷⁹ However, Veit Erlmann and Gilbert Rouget challenged both assertions.

¹⁷⁶ Bourguignon 1976: 2. Erica Bourguignon’s book, *Possession*, was suggested to me by one of my dissertation committee members, Dr. Leonard Plotnicov, after my defence when I had finished writing my dissertation. I read the book and found a lot of close similarities between my discussion on trance and possession and that of Erica Bourguignon. Since I had written my work independent of Bourguignon’s book, I have not made reference to her in some sections of my discussion.

¹⁷⁷ For further readings on possession see Bourguignon, *Opus.cit.*

¹⁷⁸ Neher 1961: 449-51.

¹⁷⁹ Walker 1972.

Using the *bori* possession music of the Hausa as case study, Erlmann contested the speed proposed by Neher that could engender trance. He argued that only 6.1% of the 179 tunes recorded in the context of *bori* possession had tempos in Neher's range.¹⁸⁰ As regards claims on the relationship of loud drumming and trance made by scholars such as Walker, Rouget noted that if they were true, then "half of Africa would be in a trance from the beginning of the year to the end."¹⁸¹ In his study of the diversity of trance, ecstasy, and particularly possession music throughout the world, Rouget called attention to the paradoxical relationship between music and trance. Even though trance more or less cannot occur without music, he maintained that there are no formal qualities (rhythms, modes, tempos, frequency, instrumentation, etc.) of music that appeared necessary for trance. Rather, any relationship between music and trance is first and foremost culturally conditioned.¹⁸²

The terms "possession" and "trance" are used as two words that can coexist as one in this section of the work. I have done so for the simple reason that although trance can occur without possession, possession is almost inconceivable without trance. In addition, when I use the word trance, I do not refer to an unconscious motionless state; rather, I use it to mean a semi-conscious state that includes motion, in this case dance. Thus the term possession-trance can best describe the phenomenon that I witnessed during my research. Witnessing the occurrence, it is difficult to say if it was merely a trance as a result of the intense concentration on the dance, which may have led to a psychological change of state. It is also possible that there was an embodiment of the water spirit that manifested in dance, since the water divinity or *Mami Wata* is said to be the performer *par excellence* of the dance. Since possession and trance can take place

¹⁸⁰ Erlmann 1982: 46-58.

¹⁸¹ Rouget 1985: 175.

¹⁸² See also Jankowsky 2007: 185-208 for more information on trance and possession.

concomitantly, and since it is not evident which of these states occurred independently, I use the term possession-trance to refer to the episode that transpired on January 31, 2006 in the river Niger.

Let me clarify one point before discussing possession-trance in *Égwú Àmàlà*. The genre is not performed primarily to induce trance or possession. Rather, there is a possibility that one or more dancers might be possessed during performance. It is still not clear why and at what point a performer is possessed since the music does not change nor is there a definite dance style or mimicry to elicit or induce possession-trance during performance. In this case, it would no doubt be difficult to draw precise boundaries between when a dancer is possessed and when s/he is not. However, it is evident through the activities of the person that something beyond her/his control is happening to her/him. I watched one of these incidents during my fieldwork with Beauty's group.

The dancers were out on a canoe in the river Niger dancing when suddenly, Beauty asked that they begin to return to the shore. Still dancing, the group rowed the canoe towards the banks of the river. They were about two feet from the sands of the shore when one of the dancers fell into the river. While the onlookers panicked, the dancers, unruffled, stepped out of the boat and continued dancing on the beach. The young lady who fell into the river did not seem to struggle to get out nor did she show any sign of being in trouble or drowning. One could see that she just continued dancing submerged in the water. The *ologba* that is, the man blowing the *òpì* (gourd horn) moved closer to her. He stepped into the river Niger and started praising her with his horn. As she made no sign of coming out but continued dancing, one of the dancers went in and tried to pull her out. "We were just concerned that she should not disappear," she later told me. When she came out of the water, one would expect that she would begin to dry herself or show

some sign of exhaustion and take a rest from dancing. On the contrary, she came out of the river, went down on her knees to join the other dancers who were at this point on their knees dancing, and continued to dance with the group as if nothing had happened to her. Maria Ojie, a member in the audience said to me,

*Ma ifugo! Ihea kpatara na ndi madu anaghi achọ igba égwúa na oshimiri Anyi isi awele na onye mmilli ebughi ya jewara. I nyoputakwara na Beauty huru ihea ka ọ na-abia ya mere o jiri yoo ka ya laghachi n'ala. Okara ibu ihe oke égwù na ọburu na ofunara.*¹⁸³

You see! This is why people don't like dancing this dance in the river. We are lucky *onye milli* did not carry her away. Did you notice that Beauty saw "it" coming? That was why she asked them to return to the ground. It would have been terrible if she had disappeared.

Maria's wee and side talk kept me pondering. All the dancers were dancing to the same music and dance demonstration. Why was this one dancer chosen to embody the water divinity, who herself is said to have originated and performed the dance? Why was she not afraid? I will not pretend to give an explanation to what really happened except to describe the event as I have done above. One thing is clear though: the said dancer could not explain what transpired. Concerning the occurrence, she simply said she did not know herself again; all that the possessee remembered was that *égwú bayem n'isi*, literally, "the music entered my head;" she was enjoying the music and dance with her whole being.

What incited this possession-trance? Was it the music or dance? Or was it because the dance and music were performed in the domain of the water divinity, giving her the opportunity

¹⁸³ Conversation with Maria Ojie during Beauty's performance on January 31, 2006.

to show off the beauty of her dance, thus reinforcing Rouget's assertion that "music incites the gods to dance, but in order for them to dance, they must have a visible support, and this forces them to become embodied"¹⁸⁴? *Égwú Àmàlà* is inconceivable without the music. And the ultimate fulfillment of *Égwú Àmàlà* is the dance that forms an integral part with its music. All the groups I worked with during my research performed this music and dance; however, only Beauty's group danced in the River Niger. When the groups from Aboh, Ashaka, and Ndoni performed *Égwú Àmàlà*, no visible psychological change of state was observed. On the contrary, when the music was executed in the river Niger setting, this change was noticed. Water therefore becomes an important catalyst in this genre, even as it is a source of life for the Ogbaru people.

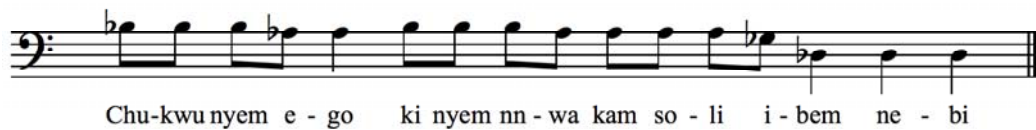
4.4 *ÉGWÚ ÀMÀLÀ* AND CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

The introduction of Islam (between the seventh and twelfth centuries) and Christianity (in the nineteenth century) into Nigeria brought about changes in the conception and even practices of religious behaviors embedded in traditional dances. In most cases, including southeastern Nigeria, Christianity drastically affected and even supplanted traditional forms. As is the case with a good number of African traditional dances, some aspects of *Égwú Àmàlà*, including songs and plays, are not performed today because most performers have been converted and would not trade their new religion for the traditional one, which has been defined and viewed as antagonistic to the "true faith," and its practice as unbecoming of Christians. There are some

¹⁸⁴ Rouget 1985: 116

converts, though, who have advanced in their merging of the tradition and Christianity. Peter Amachi Egonu, a catechist in the Catholic Church in Oko-Amakom, explained that in the *Égwú Àmàlà* groups where he often performs, he insists on substituting most references to the water divinity in songs with God – Chukwu. And new songs have been composed that exclusively use the name of God. He sang an example:

Example 4-1 Amachi Peter Egonu's song



God give me money and a child so that I can follow others and live

These changes do not affect the songs and they enable the converted members to perform the dance without having a guilty conscience of deviating from the Christian norms. It is usually not a difficult endeavor to make these alterations because the Ogbaru, like the majority of Africans, are a very religious people. This presence of God, which permeates African life, as observed by Pope Paul VI, during his several visits to the continent, was well expressed in his message *Africae Terrarum* of 1967,

The most important element in this spiritual outlook is the concept of God, the first and last cause of all things. This concept is grasped intuitively rather than analyzed, lived experientially rather than examined in the abstract. It finds different forms of expression in different cultures groups; but this notion of God, of a personal, mysterious, Supreme Being, is deeply imbedded in the conduct of African life.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁵ The Pope Speaks 1968: 8. This message was reported in L'Osservatore Romano on November 1, 1967 in Latin. John Drury translated the English version for the Quarterly: *The Pope Speaks*. This is the first magisterial document to make mention of the religious traditions (and in a positive way) of the African people.

I have discussed issues of European and Western influences in other sections of this work; it remains to add that the Catholic Church has since revisited some of her views concerning the continent of Africa and her culture, particularly the aspects that deal with religion.

The Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican, also known as Vatican Council II, was the twenty-first Ecumenical Council of the Roman Catholic Church. It started in 1962 and closed in 1965. This council was constituted as a response to the changes in the modern world, changes which the Church could no longer ignore as it faced challenges arising from the political, social, economic, and theological changes of the time. The Council was open to delegates from other Christian denominations – Protestants and Orthodox Churches alike. Issues deliberated upon during the four sessions of this Council included the liturgy, mass communications, the Eastern Catholic Churches, and the nature of revelation. The discourse that interests us here is the liturgy.

The central idea of the liturgical discussion was from the *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy), which stated that:

Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful should be led to that full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy, and to which the Christian people, “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a redeemed people” (1Peter 2:9, 4-5) have a right and obligation by reason of their baptism.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁶ Vatican Council II, The Constitution of the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 4 December 1962, 14 in Flannery 1992: 7-8

The Council Fathers further encouraged “active participation” in the liturgy and established guidelines for the revision of the liturgy, which included the use of the vernacular, art and sacred music.¹⁸⁷ With this promulgation, African languages, local elements in sacred art, music, and musical instruments came to be used in the celebration of the liturgy, including its highest form – the Mass.

I have written elsewhere about the use of traditional musical instruments in the liturgy¹⁸⁸ and wish now to consider the possibility of using the *Égwú Àmàlà* dance in the liturgy. I am inspired to think in this line because of the on-going writings of the Church leaders and theologians, the adoption of other African rites and dances into the liturgy, and the affinity noticeable in the use of an element such as water, which plays a vital role in Catholicism and in *Égwú Àmàlà*.

There are some aspects of Christianity that are found also in the African traditional religion and culture and are expressed in *Égwú Àmàlà*. Amongst these is the idea of community life that this dance genre elicits in its performance practice. Here, however, I shall limit myself to discussing water, which *Égwú Àmàlà* shares with Christianity as an important element, without in any way suggesting that this shared element is necessarily conceived theologically as having the same meaning and significance as in *Égwú Àmàlà*.

4.4.1 Water

In the Bible, the historical and spiritual book and guide of Jews and Christians, there are various references to water and the diverse ways water was utilized. In the opening chapter of the book

¹⁸⁷ For the Instruction on Music in the Liturgy (*Musicam Sacram*) see Ibid. [Flannery]: 80-97

¹⁸⁸ Ozah 1993: 71-77

of Genesis, it is recorded that God already created water on the second day. But it was not until the third day that God separated the land from the waters.¹⁸⁹ On the fifth day, Scriptures note that God created the living things that the sea contained when he said,

“Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let the birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky.” So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good. God blessed them.¹⁹⁰

Throughout the Old Testament, water was important at diverse periods for different intentions: at the Red (Reed) Sea, it was used to save the children of Israel from bondage and to destroy the Egyptians;¹⁹¹ it was used to heal Naaman the leper;¹⁹² water was also used for the cleansing of the body.¹⁹³ Through the baptism by John the Baptist in the river Jordan, water was employed as a sign of repentance and spiritual revitalization.¹⁹⁴ And later, after the coming of Jesus, baptism with water assumed a new dimension of spiritual deliverance from sin and incorporation into the Church. In addition, Jesus brought joy and more merriment to a couple at a wedding feast by changing water into wine.¹⁹⁵ Thus according to Biblical accounts, water accomplished both physical and spiritual roles.

All through this work, I have emphasized the importance of water to the Ogbaru people. Water is an important aspect of *Égwú Àmàlà*. This stems from the fact that water is the life force of the Ogbaru, whose culture is articulated in this dance genre. Thus, as in the Church and in the

¹⁸⁹ Genesis 1: 9-10. All biblical references are from the New Revised Standard Version.

¹⁹⁰ Genesis 1: 20-22a

¹⁹¹ Exodus

¹⁹² 2 Kings 5

¹⁹³ Exodus 29: 4; Mathew 27: 4

¹⁹⁴ Mathew 3: 11 and 16

¹⁹⁵ John 4: 46

Biblical accounts, water is used as a means of survival and cleansing. Among the Ogbaru, water is the main source of food; it is from the river they get their seafood and water to irrigate their farms. The river Niger is the main means of transportation. Although motorcars, motorcycles, and bicycles are in use today, many Ogbaru people still feel comfortable using their canoes in the river Niger. It is also used in a sacred way; it is revered as the habitat of the water divinities who are servants of the Supreme Being but who can also be advocates of the evil one.

4.4.2 Inculturation: *Égwú Àmàlà* in the Catholic Liturgy?

Since Vatican Council II, the leaders as well as theologians in the Catholic Church have focused considerable attention on the Church in Africa from where, as historical evidence shows, have descended Doctors of the Church, early Christian writers, and theologians, first founders of monastic life, and Popes. For example, in his message to the countries of Africa entitled, *Africae Terrarum*, Pope Paul VI noted that the African culture is much more than the “animist” concept ascribed to it for centuries. African culture, he observed, is rich in individuality, spiritual and social experiences. He went on to state:

Many customs and rites, once considered to be strange, are seen today, in the light of ethnological science, as integral parts of various social systems, worthy of study and commanding respect.

In the light of Vatican II, and with a much better understanding of the African culture, the Church has made room for the incorporation of commendable traditional elements into the liturgy. Today, for example, the Zaïrean Mass, the Ndzon Melen Eucharistic Rite or the Cameroonian rite of bringing the Book of the Gospel to the pulpit, is commonly found in the

celebration of the Mass. The above-mentioned rites have dance incorporated in them. The use of traditional dances in the liturgy is also a common phenomenon in the present day Catholic Church in many parts of the world. Can *Égwú Àmàlà* be performed in the Christian setting without losing its essence and scandalizing the faithful? Can the Catholic Ogbaru perform *Égwú Àmàlà* without violating her/his Christian belief? Can *Égwú Àmàlà* be incorporated into the Catholic liturgy?

One of the results of the Second Vatican Council was inculturation. For decades, it has remained an important subject matter for discussion among theologians and liturgists. The discourse was later popularized by Pope John Paul II who, in his *Catechesis of our Time*, marked the first official use of inculturation in a Roman Catholic document. He relates the neologism to the “mystery of the incarnation”: “to bring the power of the Gospel into the very heart of culture and cultures.” This offers the cultures on the one hand “the knowledge of the hidden mystery” and on the other hand helps them “to bring forth from their own living tradition original expressions of Christian life, celebration and thought.”¹⁹⁶ In his encyclicals, *Slavorum Apostoli*, and especially *Redemptoris Missio*, he came up with ideas that could be used to describe inculturation. For example, in *Slavorum Apostoli*, John Paul II defined inculturation as “the incarnation of the Gospel in native cultures and also the introduction of these cultures into the life of the church.”¹⁹⁷ And in *Redemptoris Missio* he defined it as “the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity and the insertion of Christianity in the various human cultures.”¹⁹⁸ In the discourse on inculturation, therefore, culture and faith are essentially the issues at stake that mingle with each other in a “give and

¹⁹⁶ See Pope John Paul II *Catechesis of our Time* 1977 – no. 53

¹⁹⁷ Pope John Paul II *Slavorum Apostoli* 1985 [21]

¹⁹⁸ Pope John Paul II *Redemptoris Missio* 1990 §52-54

take” manner, enriching each other. In this sense, inculturation could be perceived as the transformation of a culture by faith and the re-expression of faith in culture. Applying this notion to Christianity and the African culture, inculturation is thus not just Africanizing a Western sacramental or liturgical rite but also the Christianization of some African rites and ceremonies.¹⁹⁹ The African brings his/her culture to enrich and be enriched by his/her Christian faith. As a result,

the teaching of Jesus Christ and his redemption are in fact, the complement, the renewal, and the bringing to perfection of all that is good in human tradition. And that is why the African who becomes a Christian, does not disown himself [herself], but takes up the age-old values of tradition “in spirit and in truth.”²⁰⁰

The Nigeria Church is yet to come out with the “Nigerian Rite” of the Mass that is the Roman or Latin rite for the dioceses in Nigeria. However, some serious work is being done in the area of inculturation. There are some traditional ceremonies, such as marriage ceremonies, that have been almost totally Christianized. Most if not all these ceremonies make use of music and dance, and it is here that *Égwú Àmàlà* could enrich and be enriched by Christian/Catholic celebrations and values. Since *Égwú Àmàlà* expresses the way of life of the Ogbaru people, it can also fulfill and accomplish the goals of its Christian religious dimension. Already, some songs have taken very strong Christian overtones, as exemplified in Amachi’s song (Example 4-1). Other texts of some songs could be changed to mention God instead of *Oshimili* (River Niger). For example the Ashaka group sang this song:

¹⁹⁹ <http://www.afrikaworld.net/afrel/shorter.htm>. Accessed January 2, 2008.

²⁰⁰ Pope Paul VI *Africae Terrarum* 1967: 19

Oshimili bikoko ki nyem ife m'elio

(Oshimili please give me something –food to eat)

that could well translate to

Chukwu (or Olisa) bikoko ki nyem ife m'elio

God please give me something –food to eat

The Christianization of some of these song texts will make it possible for converts to perform the music without the “guilty conscience” of violating their Christian commitment. Such changes of texts are, however, not enough in themselves to alter the religious conviction of the people. They should be preceded by proper catechesis in which Christians are brought to accept that it is God (*Chukwu* or *Olisa*) who gives food and the other things in life, not *Oshimili* or any other divinity. Only then can the use of the music in Christian celebrations be a sign of true inculturation and not just a form of syncretism.

The genre can also be used within and outside liturgical celebration. In a typical *Égwú Àmàlà* performance, different aspects of the daily life of the Ogbaru are demonstrated in dance, including working in the farm, fishing, and paddling the canoe. A performance in its entirety would include about fifteen different plays. Experience shows that hardly are all of them executed in a performance. This gives room for selected sections to be used in the liturgy. For example, during baptism, the newborn could be brought to the altar accompanied by *Égwú Àmàlà* dancers, thanking God for the neonate. The dance could also be used during harvest thanksgiving as a processional dance for ushering in the faithful and the gifts. The song, *Ọlu ogo*

(farm work) fits this celebration. In the performance of this song, the dancers demonstrate how they work in the farm with short knives. The climax of the music is when the dancers drop their farm tools and praise and thank God for the harvest.

My first thought after making these suggestions was to consider the prospect of *Égwú Àmàlà* disturbing the quietude and “decorum of a Catholic worship.” This questioning was calmed by a second thought that the dance steps already in use in the Church today were derived from existing traditional dances. There will be the need to modify and re-construe some aspects of the genre so as to make it suitable for use in the Church. This re-interpretation, rather than destruction, will result in the enhancement of authentic meanings of the genre. Instead of losing the genre, as is often the case with traditional music and dance, the tradition will survive within its changing religious environment. When used with moderation, *Égwú Àmàlà* can be performed in the liturgy as well as within other Christian settings without losing its essence of praising the Creator of all things, including the waters and spirits.

4.4.3 Conclusion

In Ogbaruland, as in many coastal towns of Nigeria such as Calabar, *Mami Wata* has been adopted to represent the traditional water spirits. Two main colors, red and white, are often associated with her and her followers adorn themselves with these colors during ritual sessions and dance performances in her honor.

In this chapter, I drew attention to how Igbo traditional religion permeates the cultural life of the Ogbaru people as well as to the impact made both on the culture and the people by the contact with Christianity. While there were some negative effects of Christianity on aspects of African culture as a result of misinterpretation of the concept of African traditional religion,

efforts have been made, particularly by the Catholic Church, to re-assess its stance on cultural matters. These endeavors were articulated in the re-interpretation and adoption of some African values and traditional expressions into the Catholic liturgy and ceremonies. I argued for the incorporation of some *Égwú Àmàlà* dance music into the liturgy. The moderate use of the genre in liturgical celebrations and the modification of some song texts to suit liturgical actions would enhance their meanings in the new religious context of the performance and save the genre from extinction. This is in line with the Gospel message and Christianity, which all through history has been inculturated in various societies and had led to the enrichment of both Christianity and the different cultures it had touched.

5.0 MUSICAL COMPONENTS OF ENSEMBLE PRACTICE

When you hear the *okpokolo* you cannot sit down, it takes you off your seat; and if you still persist on remaining where you are, the sound of the *ogénè* will force you to stand; if you are lazy to move when you stand-up, the *ishàkà* with its multi-sounds will give you strength; the sound of the *ùdùdù* echoes in your soul, giving you an inner peace and joy; and who will not dance with her whole heart when praised by the *òpi*?²⁰¹ – Josephine Uti, 2006

Égwú Àmàlà is mainly ensemble music with none of the instruments playing a solo part within the group. The ensemble is divided into three main sections. Each section represents an important and fundamental yet integral part to the music. These components are: instrumental, vocal, and dance. Since each section is vital to the genre, it is almost impossible to stage a good performance without all facets being present.

5.1 INSTRUMENTAL ENSEMBLE

All the instruments used in this genre are locally made with materials that are commonly found in the area. The instruments used in *Égwú Àmàlà* are drawn from local resources;

²⁰¹ Interview with Mrs. Josephine Uti, the *ochiligwe/Nne égwú* of *Otu Ife Chukwu Deni* of Aboh, on January 21, 2006. Her description indicates that the musical instruments of this ensemble have different emotional effects on the performers.

however, it is the combination of these instrumental types employed in this genre that makes it remarkable and gives the music the soundscape by which *Égwú Àmàlà* is characteristically known.

The Ogbaru, like most Igbo people, classify their musical instruments mainly by their sounding material and/or the method of sound production. This provides “two conjunct folk systems for the classification of musical instruments.”²⁰² Following this assertion, Ogbaru traditional musical instruments are grouped into: percussive, blown, and plucked instruments.

The percussive instruments include wooden, membrane, metal, rattle and clay instruments. Although they do not produce definite pitches, some of these instruments have a wide range of phonic manipulation that enables them to “talk” or be used as speech surrogates as well as play percussive roles in an ensemble. On the one hand, instruments like the *ékwé* (wooden slit-drum) and *Igba* (membrane drums) can be made to “talk” and can also be used as a percussive instrument during a performance. On the other hand the *okpokolo* (wooden block), *ùdùdù* (clay pot drum), and *ishàkà*, or *ichàkà*, (gourd rattle) play solely percussive roles in an ensemble. Thus, we have some instruments within this category that, by virtue of the technique in which sound is produced on them, execute only percussive roles in the ensemble. At the same time, there are others that perform dual roles as percussive and speech instruments. Amongst all these instrumental types, percussive instruments are the most popular and varied musical instrumental types in Ogbaruland.

The blown instrument resources in this area are treasured for their melodic effects in the ensemble. These instruments, including the *òpì* (gourd horn) and *oja* (vertical notched flute), are

²⁰² Nzewi 1991: 57

capable of a range of pitches that enables most of them, if not all, to be popularly used as spoken-language simulation instruments during performance.

Plucked instruments found in this area, such as the *une* (musical bow) and *ubọ aka* (thumb piano, lamellaphone) are soft-toned melodic instruments that are played mainly as solo instruments. Most often, the instruments in this category are used to accompany solo singing.

Not all the aforementioned instruments are utilized in *Égwú Àmàlà* performance ensemble. In fact, no plucked instrument is used in this repertoire. The instrumental ensemble consists of a combination of only blown and percussive instruments. There are five main types of instruments used in *Égwú Àmàlà* ensemble. These instruments fall within the percussive and blown types discussed above and can easily be categorized into two groups: idiophones and aerophones, using the Hornbostel and Sachs (1914) taxonomy.²⁰³ The instruments that belong to the percussive or idiophone type are melorhythmic, but are not used to stimulate spoken language. They are the *ogénè* (metal clapperless bell) and the *ọkpọkọlọ* (wooden block). The other idiophones in the ensemble are the *ìchàkà* or *ishàkà* (shaken rattle), *ùdù* or *ùdùdù* (the musical pot or pot drum), and hand clapping, which I will refer to as corpophones. These instruments execute percussive roles in the ensemble. The only blown instrument or aerophone in this ensemble is the *òpì*, which is always used to “talk” during performances.

The number of each of these instruments in an *Égwú Àmàlà* ensemble varies, depending on the size of the group. A standard ensemble would be described as including at least one of each of the instruments mentioned above, while an enlarged ensemble would comprise two or more of each instrument. An ensemble may be enlarged in two main ways: (1) by duplicating some of the instruments found in a standard ensemble and/or (2) by adding a varied size of an

²⁰³ I have used Sachs and Hornbostel’s classification of African musical instruments to facilitate the understanding of these instruments to a wider audience of readers as these categorizations are dominantly used in books.

instrument contained in the standard ensemble such as the *ùdù*. The table below shows the possible compositions of each ensemble.

Table 5-1 Ensemble Composition

INSTRUMENTS	STANDARD ENSEMBLE	ENLARGED ENSEMBLE
<i>Ọkpọkọlọ</i>	1	1
<i>Ogéné</i>	1	1
<i>Ìchàkà or Ìshàkà</i>	3	5 or more
<i>Ùdù</i> (small)	1	2 or more
<i>Ùdùdù</i> (large)	1	1
<i>Òpì</i>	1	1

In the following paragraphs, I will describe each of the instruments used in *Égwú Àmàlà* repertoire.

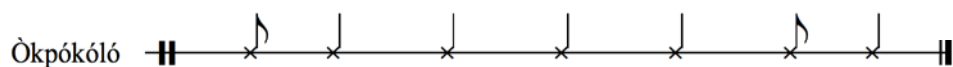
5.1.1 *Ọkpọkọlọ* (wood block)

The *ọkpọkọlọ*,²⁰⁴ or wooden block, is made of hollowed wood about six inches long. A section of this wood is slit open to provide it with two lips of varied pitches. Sound is produced on the *ọkpọkọlọ* by striking it with a wooden beater. Only one *ọkpọkọlọ* is used in the *Égwú Àmàlà* performance and it serves as a phrasing referent thereby functioning as a metronome in

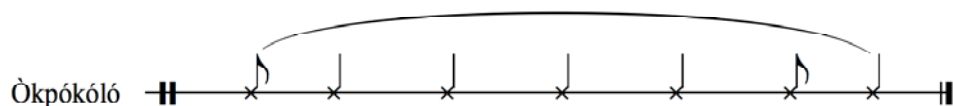
²⁰⁴ Phonetically, the above is the correct way the word should be written. But because the Sibelius musical program and the ETD template do not accept the use of dots under a word, I have provided the alternative spelling *òkpókóló* whenever the word is used in a footnote and in Sibelius.

the ensemble. This instrument, and not the bell as is utilized in many African musical ensembles, plays as the standard rhythm of the gong/bell, known as Bell Rhythm or Time Line. The *òkpòkóló* provides the time line and remains consistent throughout a performance. Hence the person who plays this instrument must not be distracted because its steady beat is the main stay of the ensemble. Unlike those who play other instruments in the ensemble, the person who plays the *òkpòkóló* is not allowed to improvise or play alternative rhythmic patterns throughout the performance.

Example 5-1 Time line pattern played on the *òkpòkóló*



When viewed in terms of a rhythmic cycle, which I elaborated on later, this time line pattern features as:



During the course of field research, the musicians of the different *Égwú Àmàlà* groups I worked with told me that the most significant instrument in the ensemble is the *òkpòkóló* and emphasized that without it, they would not be able to perform. Furthermore, the dancers take

their main steps from this instrument. As the “lead instrument,”²⁰⁵ it is the sound of the *òkpòkòlò* that initiates the entire music performance, and at the end of a dance theme or cadence of a song, it maintains a steady beat while the other instruments and voices make a cadential formula. At the end of a formula, the *òkpòkòlò* continues to play the focal beat as the other instruments join in and the *òkwà ábù* (lead-singer) intones the next song that also initiates the subsequent dance theme. In this manner, the *òkpòkòlò* provides a continuum between one song and the next, between one dance theme and the next.



Plate 5-1 A decorated *òkpòkòlò* from Ashaka. Photo: courtesy of the author

²⁰⁵ I do not use the term “lead instrument” in the sense of how the lead drummer is conceived in a typical African musical ensemble. Rather I use the term to denote the *òkpòkòlò* as the instrument with the most consistent rhythmic pattern over which the other instruments play.

Most *okpokolo* that I found among the *Égwú Àmàlà* groups I researched were simple. But that used by the Ashaka group was decorated with the figures of two human beings: a woman and a man (see Plate 5-1). The female figure is seated on one end of the *okpokolo* with the slit lips while the male figure was placed on the same end but on the closed part of the instrument. The symbolism of these female and male figures on this instrument demonstrates the “dual-sex” socio-cultural aspect of the Ogbaru people, an issue I discussed earlier in this work.

5.1.2 *Ogéné* (Metal clapperless bell)

The *ogéné*, or *ibome* or *ubome*, is a portable clapperless metal bell. It is made of two pieces of iron welded together into a somewhat conical shape and measures about 14 to 15 inches in length including the handle. The most common types found in Ogbaruland are the single and the twin *ogéné*. The former type is used in most *Égwú Àmàlà* performances.



Plate 5-2 *Ogénè* (the single clapperless bell). Photo: courtesy of the author

Sound is produced on the instrument by striking its body with a wooden stick or beater. In performance, the player opens and closes the bell's open end on her/his lap, thus producing different effects on the instrument. The player may also close the *ogénè* on her/his lap while the instrument is being struck, consequently producing a muted sound. Sometimes, though, s/he strikes the bell and cups it immediately on her/his lap while it is still vibrating. This action engenders a scintillating tonal glissando and overtones, which adds brilliance to the music as the *ogénè* responds to the metronomic sound of the *okpoko* and plays with the other instruments. Below is a transcription of a few rhythmic patterns played on the *ogénè*. The player randomly combines these patterns, and others that s/he may create, in actual performance.

Example 5-2 Some rhythmic patterns of the *Ogéné*



KEY

- 1) The *ogéné* is open and struck.
- 2) The *ogéné* is cupped on the lap without striking, thus creating a glissando or portamento sound.
- 3) The player cups the *ogéné* on the lap and strikes it at the same time, creating a muted sound.

In a typical *Égwú Àmàlà* performance, one artist plays one *ogéné* and unlike the *òkpókòlò*, s/he is allowed to improvise on the instrument. There are instances when two clapperless bells are used in the ensemble, but this is not common. *Égwú Àmàlà* is one of those few Ogbaru dance forms that does not make use of any drums in its instrumental ensemble. Thus the discussion of a “master drummer” is uncalled for. Nonetheless, this does not mean that there is no instrument that serves the purpose. On the contrary, the player of the *ogéné* is the

master percussionist. The rhythmic patterns s/he creates energize the dancers, who often perform to its complex rhythmic structures.

5.1.3 *Ìshàkà* (Gourd rattle)

The *ishàkà* or *ichàkà* is a rattle that has a convex dried calabash (*agbe*) or gourd as its base. The elongated neck of the calabash forms a handle. Around this calabash a mesh material on which little beads or seeds have been attached is latticed. These beads are often multicolored. The example shown bellow has two colors: green and white. The sizes vary between 30 inches and 34 inches in circumference. The *ishàkà* is shaken or beaten by the palm of both hands. It serves to provide density to the music during performance.



Plate 5-3 *Ìshàkà* (beaded gourd rattle). Photo: courtesy of the author

In performance, these rattles act as supporting instruments, adding density to the rhythmic patterns of the bell(s). Sometimes the *ishàkà* imitate the rhythmic patterns of the hand clapping. It often regulates the tempo and texture of the music by intensifying the rhythm structures. This phenomenon, *isù égwú*, takes place towards the end of each dance theme, when all the instruments build up a density in a crescendo and accelerando form that brings the section to a climax before it ends.

5.1.4 *Ùdùdù or Ùdù (Pot drum)*

Ùdùdù or *Ùdù* is an Igbo term for a small utilitarian water pot made of clay. However when used as a musical instrument, it has a longer neck which tapers from the spherical pot and opens slightly at the top. About 2.5 inches from the base of the neck a second smaller round hole is made. *Ùdùdù* come in two sizes: a big one, which measures about 22-25 inches in height with a central circumference of about 51-53 inches and a small one about 15 inches high and 35-38 inches in circumference at the center. The latter is placed on the lap of the artist and played by beating the two openings alternatively with both palms of the hand. The former, because of its bulky size, is seated on a round pad on the ground and played with a soft beater. This large type is popularly used today in *Égwú Àmàlà* performances. For clarity's sake in this work, and this has no cultural foundations nor did I get this information from my collaborators/informants, I will use *ùdù* to refer to the small pot drum and *ùdùdù* for the large one.



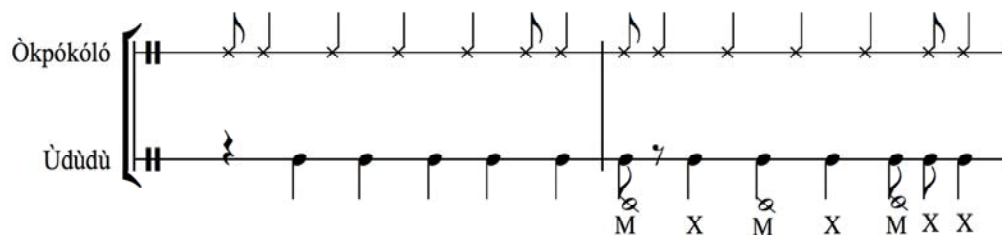
Plate 5-4 *Ùdùdù* (large musical pot made of metal) used in Ashaka. Photo: courtesy of the author

When the performer plays each of the openings, sound is produced because of the vibration of the air inside the pot, thus producing variations of pitch and tone spectrum. The big *ùdùdù*, which is played by striking the top opening with a piece of fibrous beater, emits a deep, reverberating sound similar to the sound of a bass drum that is beaten lightly. With this bass sound, the *ùdùdù* maintains the basic pulse of the ensemble. Because of the peculiarity of the mode of performance and sound production, the *ùdù* may well be classified as an idiophonic

aerophone.²⁰⁶ This instrument is played mainly by women in Igboland and “it plays a rhythm-of-dance role in specialized women’s dance groups.”²⁰⁷

Since this instrument is made of clay, it is fragile and breaks very often and easily. To take care of this handicap, contemporary *ùdùdù*/*ùdù* are made of metal rather than clay. This, of course, has some slight effect on the sound quality. The sound from the *ùdùdù* made from clay is deeper than that made of metal. However, this difference is often not noticeable during performance since the sound emitted from the instrument is deep enough to fulfill its role. The *ùdùdù* is the only instrument with a deep bass sound quality or resonance in the ensemble.

Example 5-3 Rhythmic pattern of the *ùdùdù* and the *òkpókóló*



KEY

- M Muted sound
- X Normal hit sound

²⁰⁶ Euba 1977: 4-5; Norborg 1992: 98. Nzewi 1991 refers to the *ùdù* as aero-idiophone.

²⁰⁷ Nzewi 1991: 68.

5.1.5 *Òpì* (Gourd horn)

The *òpì* is a short conical side-blown horn made from a gourd tube. It measures about 12 inches in length and about 2 inches in diameter at the wide end. There are no finger holes; rather there is an embouchure in the form of a small round or elliptical cut close to the apex of the horn. Both ends of the *òpì* are open. The *òlogba*, or *òpì* player, produces sound on this aerophone by cupping both ends with the palm of his hands, and releasing them intermittently while he blows air through the mouthpiece into the tubular gourd. These actions enable the *òlogba* to produce varied pitches on this instrument during performance. The art of playing the *òpì* is a difficult and complicated one and requires a lot of skill for a performer to emerge as a professional.



Plate 5-5 *Òpì* (the gourd horn). Photo: courtesy the author

5.1.5.1 The Speech function of the *Òpì*

Òpì is the only melodic and spoken-language simulation instrument in the *Égwú Àmàlà* ensemble. The pitches produced on the *òpì* can be manipulated in such a way that they are capable of imitating the inflection of the Igbo tone language. With its tonal range of about a fifth, this instrument fulfills the unique role of functioning as speech surrogate in the ensemble.

There are two ways in which materials are utilized in *òpì* performance. Firstly, the instrument is used to imitate the voice singing a literary text. That is, the *òlogba* simply reproduces the tonal as well as the rhythmic patterns of speech on the instrument. In this form, the *òpì* sings part or all the melody and text with the chorus.

Example 5-4 Melodic tone range of the *òpì*



Secondly the *òpì* is used to “talk” in “musical” as opposed to “speech” rhythm.²⁰⁸ This form occurs when the *òpì* “talks” in the context of the other instruments within the ensemble playing in strict rhythm and performing a purely musical function. However, I must say that the rhythms played on the *òpì* when isolated from the ensemble context are not danceable.

5.1.5.2 The importance of the *Òpì* in the ensemble

The place of the *òpì* in *Égwú Àmàlà* performance is quite interesting. As a speech surrogate, this instrument repeatedly holds a musical conversation with the *òkwà ábù* or lead

²⁰⁸ Euba 1990: 192.

singer and the other performers. It acts as an energizer to the *òkwà ábù* when the *òlogba* praises her on the instrument in the course of the performance; it calls the dancers by their praise or dance names and this stimulates the called dancer to show off her best dance moves. The *òpì* sometimes acts in direct collaboration with the *òkwà ábù* in praise of the performers or special guests attending the performance. For example during a recording session with Ogbuefi Beauty Okaome, she called me by my praise name and the *òlogba* subsequently echoed her praises.

One of the performers of the dance, Ngozi Oba, emphasized the importance of the *òpì* during an interview when she said that, “when you hear the *òkpòkòlò*, then the *ùdùdù*, then the *ogéné* and you do not hear the *òpì*, the dance sounds flat and loses its fire and spirit and this affects the musicians – everybody.”²⁰⁹ The Aboh group who refused to perform on our first appointment because the selected day and time was not favorable for the *òlogba* echoed this assertion. They would not perform without the *òpì* in the ensemble; the performance would not have any “life.”

Young Egwuodili, a celebrated *òlogba* from Odekpe (in Ogbaruland), has been playing the *òpì* since he was a child. He learnt his art from a relative through apprenticeship. When I met him in January 2006, he told me he was about sixty years old and had not stopped playing his instrument because of his passion for it. He is an independent professional who is not attached to a particular *Égwú Àmàlà* group. He is called upon whenever his services are needed and paid for by the group. Young has performed with Beauty’s group on several occasions, including when the group performed during my field trip in Nigeria. Concerning his role in the ensemble, Young explained that, during performance, he corrects the dancers and praises Beauty

²⁰⁹ Interview with Mrs. Ngozi Oba in Oko-Amakom, 2006.

and the *óbú-ànyìnà*; this, he said, “makes them to be happy and dance well.”²¹⁰ Every time the *ọlogba* calls a dancer by her praise or dance name, she shows off her very best dance moves. In spite of all of these great qualities of this instrument, this renowned *ọlogba* laments:

“Many people do not want to learn to play this great instrument. They are more concerned with going to school to enable them acquire European jobs. Even those who have not had the opportunity to attend school would rather go into other more Western business than play the *òpì* either for a living or for a paid extra-curricular activity. Others try to play the instrument and get discouraged because of the technicalities involved. But this is really a fun instrument. And I am willing to teach anyone who is ready to learn.”²¹¹

Very few men play the *òpì* today. For example, Aboh and Ashaka towns depend on the services of the same *ọlogba*. This is quite inconvenient if both groups are to perform on the same day. This was apparent when I worked with the *Égwú Àmàlà* groups from these towns. Although the distance between the two towns is less than an hour’s drive, the performances had to be scheduled on different days because the *ọlogba* needed to rest and take care of other private engagements. The situation could have been different if each town had its own *ọlogba*.

5.1.5.3 *Òpì* and Gender

While all the other instruments of the *Égwú Àmàlà* repertoire discussed above can be played by both women and men, the *òpì* is a strongly gendered instrument that is played only by a male. The questions that came often to my mind during my research in Ogbaruland, which I asked the performers of *Égwú Àmàlà*, were: why is this singular instrument in a women’s dance

²¹⁰ Interview with Young Egwuodili in January 2006.

²¹¹ Ibid.

genre played by a man? Why and how have men found their way into this predominantly women's music space and now are towering as the only loud voice in the genre? How did the women feel about this entire invasion as it were? Would women want to play this instrument?

Interestingly, the women in the groups I worked with were perplexed at my questions and my "*onyeocha*," that is, "white man's," frame of mind. The issue of men playing the *òpì* was looked upon from an aesthetic perspective. To my questions, the women retorted with aesthetically based answers. According to them, it would be improper for a woman to blow the *òpì* for the simple reasons that her cheeks would protrude and that would make her look ugly. Furthermore, the *ologba* exerts a lot of muscle tautness in the stomach area so as to be able to blow the *òpì*. According to the women, "such stomach tightness is not good for a stomach that carries a child." I went on to inquire from the men (not the *òpì* players) if the women were simply not capable of tackling the difficulties embedded in the performance of this instrument. But they were emphatic in their response that if women wanted to play the *òpì*, they could and are allowed to do so, but they would rather not because of the reasons stated above.

The men who blew the instrument did not have much of a different answer to my question. They did not doubt the women's capability of playing the *òpì*. But, as Young Egwuodili explained, "it will make a woman look unattractive." And with a tint of laughter and ridicule, he added, "when you see a woman dancing *Égwú Àmàlà*, you should see beauty and not puffed jaws."²¹²

The instruments of the *Égwú Àmàlà* ensemble, then, have been specially selected because of their effectiveness in performing the necessary musical roles and fulfilling specific musical purposes. The *okpokolo* functions as the principal instrument that provides the time line. The

²¹² Interview with the *ologba*, Young Egwuodili on January 31, 2006. He started playing the *òpì* as a child and is today very versatile on the instrument.

ùdùdù and *ogéné* articulate the pulse structure as well as emphasize the rhythmic aspects of the music respectively. The *ishàkà* and hand clapping enrich the texture of the music by increasing its density. While all these instruments are percussive and have indefinite pitches, the *òpì* is the only melodic instrument in the ensemble with definite pitch ranges. In the subsequent chapter, I will discuss in detail the roles of these instruments in the ensemble.

5.2 VOCAL ORGANIZATION

Vocal music is the most widespread mode of musical expression in Ogbaruland. Singing marks many formal and informal activities within the community, whether or not the occasion itself is viewed as a musical occasion. Vocal music is cultivated both as a group activity and as a means of individual expression. Generally, all singing is accompanied either by musical instruments, hand clapping, or some body movements. Songs can be performed in different styles: solo, two solo singers, and/or solo(s) and chorus. Since singing is so prevalent in this society, there are many different kinds of songs. These range from *égwú ọlu* (work songs) and *égwú ngba* (wrestling songs) to *égwú ọnwa* (moonlight or recreational songs). At the nucleus of *Égwú Àmàlà* is a compendium of various types of songs (which accompany plays) that represent the vocal unit of Ogbaru society. Such song types include, but are not limited to, *égwú alushi* (divinity song/dance), *égwú ázízà* (the broom song/dance), *égwú ízú afiá* (trading song/dance), and *égwú ípa nnwa* (child caring song/dance). The vocal form employed in *Égwú Àmàlà* consists of solo singers and a chorus that chime in at appropriate moments singing the response.

The general choral organization of *Égwú Àmàlà* is that of the *ọkwà ábụ* (a lead-singer) and *nde égwú* (chorus). However, the way this form is rendered differs to some extent among

the four groups who performed the dance during my fieldwork. Also diverse was the positioning of the lead singer in the group during performance. Among the four groups that I studied, the lead-singers in three groups (Aboh, Ashaka, and Ndoni) were seated amongst the *nde úkwé* (chorus), and *nde égwú*, (instrumentalists) and did not move around. In the fourth, the group leader and *òkwà ábù*, Ogbuefi Beauty Okaome, also took her position among the chorus singers and instrumentalists. At various intervals during the performance, however, she made some dance moves towards the *umú égwú* (dancers) as if to affirm their dancing, thus asserting her position as the leader of the group. During these occasional dance cavorts, Beauty would call out ethno-panegyric appellations or give a very short instruction in song such as, “*amú bia*” (bring in some smile) or *ogénè bia* (let’s hear the bell), or *úkwù lue ànì* (let your waist reach to the ground) a way of asking the dancers to bend low but from the waist. In one such moment, a member of the audience called Monica Obi, who was standing just behind me, exclaimed, “Ah! Beauty.” When I asked her why she spoke, as it were, in such a pathetic way, she said to me,

*Hapụ okwou a fụ nwannem nwayni, i tosiri i fụ Beauty oge ọbu
Beauty. Ala a mamba anyi nine.*²¹³

“Leave that talk my sister, you needed to see Beauty when she was
Beauty. This ground could not have been enough for us.”

Monica went on to tell me how wonderful a dancer Beauty was when she was younger, a fact anyone who knew her affirmed. But now she was becoming old and weak although this

²¹³ Monica Obi during Beauty’s performance with her group on the west banks of the River Niger in Oko-Amakom, 2006.

weakness is not perceived in the strength of her voice. I did not observe this kind of action by the lead-singers of the other groups that I studied. This suggests that while Beauty is the *okwà ábù* as well as the leader of her group, the other dance groups may belong to the community at large, with Matrons and Patronesses administering the groups.

5.2.1 The role of the *Okwà ábù* or lead-singer

The role of the *okwà ábù* in *Égwú Àmàlà* can never be overemphasized. The *okwà ábù*, who is generally a woman, is expected to be versatile in her art as composer, performer, chronicler of traditional norms and functions as a repository of oral tradition. What then are the attributes of this artist?

To assume this vital role, the *okwà ábù* should have a clear ringing voice like that of the “*okwà*,” the “bush fowl,” the literal meaning of her name. In Ogbaru description, her voice should be *onu na égóló égóló*, that is, a voice that rings sweetly. With these voice qualities and her knowledge of the Ogbaru tradition, the *okwà ábù* is vested with the necessary materials to call, lead, and end a song during any *Égwú Àmàlà* performance. Also, a lead-singer who has or acquires this quality of voice is well respected in the society. Francis Bebey noted something similar in Cameroon with his claim that “in African communities where art is a living and popular birthright, the artist, far from being scorned, usually occupies an enviable position in society.”²¹⁴ Since the *okwà ábù* is expected to have a vast knowledge of the Ogbaru culture and the ability to manipulate words as well as compose during performance, her training takes several years of patient apprenticeship and diligent study.

²¹⁴ Bebey 1975: 26

5.2.1.1 The Training of the *Ọkwà Ábụ*

Most Ogbaru prolific lead-singers believe that their talent comes from the “divine.” Exponents of the genre such as Beauty told me during my fieldwork that her ability to compose and sing well is but a gift from the “divine.” These lead-singers claim that songs are taught to them in their sleep, through dreams, which they remember vividly when they wake up. Furthermore, their memories of these songs are so lucid that they are able to teach them accurately, as they got them, to members of their group. It must be understood that the “divine” so often alluded to is the *Mami Wata*, the water divinity. However, in recent times, and due to the fact that most performers of this dance have been converted to Christianity, this divine figure, though covertly ascribed to *Mami Wata*, is overtly referred to as God, who, as Beauty affirmed, “is the creator of the world, the river and all that is in them.”²¹⁵ When, however, a lead singer’s ability to sing is not directly from the “divine,” then she has to learn her trade. The period for scholarship is often about two or more years, depending on how astute the novice is.

Voice timbre is the fundamental consideration in choosing a potential *ọkwà ábụ*. Once she has been ascertained as having a “good” voice (qualities that I discussed earlier), she is assigned the apprentice role of *nghọlụ* (response). She is tutored privately by the *ọkwà ábụ*, also known in this capacity as *onye na kuzi úkwé* (the song teacher). The neophyte singer is expected to make appearances in public performance in order to enable her to practice her art. On such occasions, the main *ọkwà ábụ* teaches her by imitation. Given that the singing form in *Égwú Àmàlà* is call-and-response, the dynamics of this form are strongly maintained. The “song teacher” *ọkwà ábụ* calls the song; the “apprentice” *ọkwà ábụ* echos her musical phrase and the chorus then sings the response. The Ogbaru people delineate the musical activities of these

²¹⁵ Interview with Beauty at Onitsha in January 2006.

artistes in traditional terms. The part of the instructor *okwà ábụ* is described as *ikpọ ábụ*, meaning calling a song; the trainee *okwà ábụ*'s activity is referred to as *ighọlụ ábụ*, literally, catching the song or responding to the song; the chorus section is termed *ikwe ábụ* or *ikwe úkwé*, that is, singing the song which, in this case is the chorus part. The trainee continues in this method of echoing the instructor singer until she becomes well acquainted with the technique of singing herself. She will then be authorized to perform the role of *ikpọ ábụ* that is, calling a song. During this learning period, she familiarizes herself with the act of making direct and indirect statements in song, the use of proverbs, and the incorporation of instructions, admonitions and praises in song. If she performs this role satisfactorily, she will obtain the consent of her teacher to be an *okwà ábụ* in her own right. The training of the *okwà ábụ* is thus on-the-job, and this is consistent with the African tradition of learning music and dance in general.

5.2.1.2 *Okwà ábụ*: The Creative Ensemble Director

The role of the *okwà ábụ* in *Égwú Àmàlà* goes beyond starting or calling and ending songs. She enjoys the prime place in the group as the person who, by virtue of her position, coalesces, the various features and activities of the music and dance performance.

The *okwà ábụ* is the most versatile person in the ensemble. She combines the role of a lead-singer, director, and musician with, quite often, that of dancer and choreographer. She supervises and orchestrates all artistic concerns of the group such as rehearsal and actual performances. When she is the leader of the group, such as is the case with Beauty, the *okwà ábụ* takes the initiative to choose and recruit her team of talented collaborators: *nde nkwa* (instrumentalists), *nde úkwé* (singers – chorus), and *umụ égwú* (dancers). She continues to tutor these musicians during rehearsals until they attain the perfection that qualifies them to perform in

public. There are exceptions, though, such as with the *ọlọgba*, who join the group as professionals. The *ọlọgba* does not usually belong to any specific *Égwú Àmàlà* group, albeit he may be associated with particular group(s) because he plays frequently with them.

In concert, the *ọkwà ábù* is also responsible for administering the performance by assuming the combined roles of stage and music director. As director, it is her duty to ensure the quality and completeness of the show as well as to lead the creative team into realizing her artistic visions and goals. These objectives she actualizes in songs through which she constantly communicates to and with the musicians and the audience.

Although the *ọkwà ábù* is not required to professionally play any musical instruments, she is conversant with the various instrumental parts and is capable of detecting errors and anomalies and correcting them accordingly. These corrections she makes by persuasively asking the instrumentalist to correct a mistake without breaking the flow of the song and/or music. For example it is common to hear the *ọkwà ábù* sing (in speech-rhythm):

Aka n'ukwe yili

Let both hand clapping and singing synchronize.

With the above, the *ọkwà ábù* corrects the hand clappers by asking them to listen and coordinate with the chorus. In reply, the hand clappers will make the necessary corrections and then clap loudly and polyphonically as if to convince the lead-singer of their ability to clap well. Sometimes, she calls for extemporization on a particular instrument by simply saying inbetween her singing:

Ogéné bia

Bring on the bell (or literally, let the bell come).

In response, the *ogéné* player would improvise on the bell creating dense and complicated rhythms. The adroitness of the *okwà ábụ* is also manifested in her ability to focus on the activities of all in the ensemble. The singers and dancers are not left out in this instruction/correction scheme. She listens intently to the instrumentalists and chorus while watching the dancers. Likewise, she corrects and instructs them in performance. At the beginning of the dance, the *okwà ábụ* often asks the *óbú-ànyìnà* to bring the dancers into the arena. She also instructs them to change their dance steps. This instruction is reliant on the song she introduces to mime the movement, that is, the dance theme.

The lead-singer's rapport is not restricted to the *umu égwú* and *nde nkwa* alone. She strives to maintain a relationship with the audience whose presence forms a significant element of *Égwú Àmàlà*. The dignitaries present in the audience most often provide inspirational thoughts that are realized in song by the *okwà ábụ*. For example, there are many instances during performance in which Beauty made reference to me because I invited and paid her to perform. In one of the verses of the song *Olisa kenu madu nuwa*, Beauty sang the following:²¹⁶

Anyi na Sista di na égwú o, égwú na ri bu égwú Sista o o

We are in dance with sister o, this dance is Sister's dance o o

²¹⁶ See Example 6-12 for the transcription of the above-mentioned song, *Olisa kenu madu nuwa*.

This was one of Beauty's ways of acknowledging my presence in the audience as well as informing the audience that the performance was for me, at my request. The *okwà ábụ* also reaches out to and speaks to the audience through *atutu inu* (parables, proverbs, and metaphoric speeches) and *akikọ* (narratives and praises). All of these verbal elements or *okpulukpu okwu* (gems of speech), which the *okwà ábụ* cleverly factor in song, raise her status in the community as a prolific artiste worth listening to when she performs in public. Furthermore, these figures of speech that reflect the belief system and values of the Ogbaru are culturally used in philosophizing and in embellishing poetry and songs. Thus, poetry develops as speech and song. Song is the main means by which the *okwà ábụ* communicates with the ensemble, albeit, as a choreographer, she sometimes does so through dance. In this regard, song serves as a medium for communicating oral poetry and text to the entire society.

Songs are important to the *okwà ábụ*, particularly in her tripartite role as artistic director, musical director, and choreographer as they are utilized to communicate with the instrumentalist, singers, and dancers. A good lead-singer must be able to energize and maintain a high spirit in the musicians throughout the performance. This she does not only by observing tactfully the activities of the entire musicians, but especially by the kind of songs she composes during a creative process in performance. She composes her own songs, and even when she performs pre-composed or pre-existent songs, she never simply reproduces the song; rather, she re-creates, or better still recomposes it, and bestows a personal touch on it, engendering a new personalized song. For example, the song, *Ọlu ogo* (Farm Dance) was rendered by all the lead-singers of the four groups I worked with in the field. Yet each *okwà ábụ* sang the song differently. The same is applicable to the song *égwú àmàlà*. The accompanying dance theme used by all the groups was basically the same that is, paddling the canoe. However, while the Aboh, Ashaka, and

Ndoni groups mimed this dance on land, Beauty's group demonstrated the dance in the river Niger.

Let me return to my previous discussion about groups personalizing songs. Using some example of melodies performed by the groups I researched, I will illustrate how songs were contextualized and thus acquired different meanings. The following Examples 5-4, 5, and 6 are examples of the chorus melodic phrases used to mime the paddle dance from three groups: Aboh, Ashaka, and Beauty's.

Example 5-5 *Égwú àmàlà bu uyọ* from Aboh

E - gwu'a - ma - la bu' - yo n'A - boh nwe sa - na e - gwu a - ma - la bu' - yo

Égwú àmàlà is elegant

Aboh owns it

égwú àmàlà is elegant

Example 5-6 *Aboh nwene ugbọ yana àmàlà* from Ashaka

A - boh nwe - nu' gbo ya na' - ma - la o - bo - do e - ze nwe - nu' gbo ya - na' ma - la o

Aboh owns the canoe and the paddle

the King's town owns the canoe and the paddle

Example 5-7 *Àmàlà bu uyọ* by Beauty's Group



Àmàlà is elegant Beauty owns the beautiful dance

The above three songs talk about ownership, while the second and third emphasize the fact that *Égwú Àmàlà* is elegant. In terms of proprietorship, the first and second melodies (from Aboh and Ashaka) state that Aboh owns *Égwú Àmàlà*. But in the third example, Beauty (and her group), appropriated the first part of the text, *àmàlà bu uyọ* used by the Aboh group, but went on to substitute the second part of the phrase *Aboh nwesana* (Aboh owns it) with a new appendage namely *Beauty nwe égwú oma* (Beauty owns the beautiful dance). Although Ashaka maintained its allegiance as a territory that belonged traditionally to the Aboh kingdom by ascribing *Égwú Àmàlà* to Aboh, Beauty breaks from her marital home, Ashaka (Aboh), and makes *Égwú Àmàlà* her creation, her beautiful dance.

As can be observed from the transcription, the melodies of these songs differ considerably. They are similar only in the sense that they all have a descending contour and they are used to demonstrate the same dance theme – paddling the canoe.

5.2.2 Chorus Organization

An important aspect in this genre is that all in the group, especially those in the chorus section are encouraged to learn to perform more than one musical activity within the group. It is common, therefore, to find an instrumentalist who also sings and a singer or dancer who is capable of playing an instrument: *ùdùdù*, *ùdù*, *ishàkà*, and/or *awalaka*. The only instrument where this exchange is not possible is the *òpì*, which requires additional skills for a player to emerge as a professional *ọlogba*. Even when dancing, the *umu égwú* (dancers) sometimes join in the chorus singing. The boundaries of this segment are quite flexible. All the same, those designated as belonging to the chorus sector in the ensemble are *nde úkwé* (singers) who are also *nde awalaka* (hand clappers).

All the songs employed in *Égwú Àmàlà* are sung antiphonally in *ikpọ ábù–ikwe ábù* (call a song – answer a song), a call-and-response form. In this form the *ọkwà ábù* sings a phrase, which is answered by the chorus with a set response. This response remains the same until the lead-singer changes to the song. The lead-singer introduces a chorus line to the group by singing a short solo phrase at the end of which she attaches the chorus melody. The chorus quickly picks up this phrase that they continue to sing until a new one is launched. For example, Beauty more often than not begins her singing with the chorus phrase, when she feels that the cantor and chorus have grasped the melodic line, she goes on to sing her improvised section and at the end, she cues in the chorus. At the end of the chorus melody, a solo voice (whom I refer to as cantor) restates the chorus phrase, after which the *ọkwà ábù* comes in again while making substantial variations in the lead section that often arise from the changes in the text or audience participation. The resultant structure is: *ọkwà ábù* (introducing the chorus line) – Chorus – solo voice – *ọkwà ábù*. This style gives rise to the performance form $A_B - B - B^1 - A^1$.

Since the chorus often consists of both male and female singers, the response melody is often sung in parts (by two voices: male and female) with improvised harmonization in thirds and fifths. The *ɔlogba* sometimes adds harmonious sounds with his *òpì* by playing a third below the chorus melody. The lead-singer frequently joins the chorus but hums or sings to an open “ahh” or a syllable. Also it is not uncommon to hear the *ɔkwà ábù* sing different texts above the standard chorus text and at the end, join in singing the last word of the chorus phrase. Example 6-6 illustrates this interaction between the *ɔkwà ábù* and the chorus.

The chorus melodies are usually in short motifs so that the singers can easily remember them. To alleviate anxiety during performance, all the chorus melodies are previously learned during rehearsal and no new line is introduced during actual performance that the singers do not know already.

5.3 DANCE ORGANIZATION

Music that is integrated with dance is prevalent in African societies. Dance is not only an avenue through which emotions are expressed or released but it is nonverbal visual sign of cultural ideas and ideals as well. Accordingly dance “can be used as a social and artistic medium of communication. It can convey thoughts or matters of personal or social importance through the choice of movements, postures, and facial expressions.”²¹⁷ Reinforcing this view, Judith Hanna defined dance as

²¹⁷ Nketia 1974: 207

human behavior composed, from a dancer's perspective, or purposeful, intentionally rhythmical, and culturally patterned sequences of nonverbal body movements other than motor activities, the motion having inherent and aesthetic value.²¹⁸

Dance, as nonverbal communication, is a patterning of the body to express ideas and emotions, attitudes, cultural norms, and tradition. It interlaces with numerous aspects of life such as communication, belief systems, art, and social and political dynamics. Joan Kealiinohomoku gives a more cross-cultural definition of dance as,

a transient mode of expression, performed in a given form and style by the human body moving in space...dance occurs through purposely selected and controlled rhythmic movements: the resulting phenomenon is recognized as dance by both the performer and the observing members of a given group.²¹⁹

These definitions emphasize the communicative, cultural, and rhythmic movements inherent in dance. The main avenue for articulating the Ogbaru culture in *Égwú Àmàlà* is in dance. It is a culturally constructed sequence of body movements that is integrated with the accompanying music. Through *Égwú Àmàlà*, daily activities, chores, religious, political, and gender roles are enacted. The genre deals with these different attributes of Ogbaru life and culture on two levels: firstly, on the level of conceptualization (the song texts) and secondly on the level of actualization (the dance drama). This means that the dancers actualize in movement the various themes stated in the song. The unifying symbol of these levels is the “*àmàlà*,” that is, the paddle, whose significance lies at the heart of the Ogbaru culture and whose meaning goes beyond song and dance. The *àmàlà* is a sign of the people's proximity to and dependence on the River Niger

²¹⁸ Hanna 1979: 19

²¹⁹ Kealiinohomoku 1983: 541.

for livelihood. Before talking about the dance features of this *Égwú Àmàlà*, let me briefly discuss the dress code used when performing this dance, as it plays a significant role in establishing the identity of the genre as a whole.

5.3.1 Costume

When we think of the term costume, the first impression that comes to mind is a particular style of dress worn to portray a character other than the wearer's regular persona, for example, costumes worn during Halloween or carnival. Costume is also used to refer to a unique style of clothing of a particular people that expresses their identity and emphasizes the singular traits of their culture. The latter is the description that I have in mind as I discuss the dress code of *Égwú Àmàlà*.

The predominant colors of the clothing used in this dance genre are white and red. Earlier in this work, I indicated that white and red are regarded as the favorite colors of the water divinity, also known as *mmọ mmili* or *Mami Wata*. In order to maintain some affinity with the water divinity, the members adorn themselves with clothing in which these colors are prevalent. It is thus not surprising that the major attire for this genre consists of wrappers sewn from "George,"²²⁰ a wine-red fabric that is worn by both women and men of the ensemble. Over the wrapper the women wear white-laced blouses sewn in the same style while the men wear white-laced jumpers sewn in the same style.

It is pertinent to note that the costume of *Égwú Àmàlà* performance groups is a slightly modified version of contemporary everyday Ogbaru dressing. Nor is there necessarily any

²²⁰ Oral tradition has it that this cloth derived its name from King George V of England (1865-1936). He was the reigning monarch of Great Britain when the British introduced the fabric to coastal southern Nigeria.

changing of clothing during *Égwú Àmàlà* performance. As a result, the musicians are always comfortable dancing in them; they are focused and do not need to worry about going off the stage to change. On the whole, all the musicians dress alike (wrapper and white blouse for the women and wrapper and white jumpers for the men) except for the *Mami Wata* theme dance, where, as mentioned earlier, the person depicting the mermaid is clad in a distinctive white and glittering costume.

5.3.1.1 *Nde Úkwé, Nde Awalaka na Nde Nkwa* (Chorus, Hand Clappers and Instrumentalists)

Although the above description is the general dressing style of the group, the way the dancers dress differs to some extent from that of the instrumentalists. The dress style of the female members of the chorus and instrument groups is basically the same, as a typical Igbo woman would dress for an occasion, namely two wrappers, a blouse, and a head-tie. However, the members of the *Égwú Àmàlà* ensemble would use the assigned uniform of the group. They would tie two George wrappers, one draped from their waists to their ankles and the other tied over their white-laced blouse from their waists to the knees or a few inches below the knees. They also wear headgears locally called *ichafu'isi* or head-ties. The fabric used for the head-tie today is made of light silk damask measuring about 30 inches in width and 72 inches in length.



Plate 5-6 Ashaka: *Nde úkwé na nde nkwa* (Instrumentalists and singers) of *Otu Aboh Nadi*. The women are clad in double George wrappers white blouses, and headgears. The men are dressed in a single George wrapper and a jumper and hats. Photo: courtesy of the author.

5.3.1.2 *Umụ Égwú*

A dancer would typically dress in one George wrapper draped from the waist to about 2.5 – 3 inches above the ankle and a white-laced blouse with baby puffed short sleeves fitted at the waistline and a low neck cut. Her hand is bejeweled with *èsùlú áká*, that is, red coral bracelets, and she wears one or two strands of *èsùlú onu*, literally, red coral bead necklace.



Plate 5-7 *Otu Aboh Nadi* from Ashaka. Note that the dancers permed their hair.
Photo: courtesy of the author.

In addition, she wears a pair of colorful cummerbunds, usually of the same fabric as the head-ties worn by the chorus and instrumental groups. These cummerbunds are tied over the blouse at the waistline; one is knotted to the right, while the other is knotted to the left (Plate 5-7). These cummerbunds not only prettify the dancer, they help to emphasize the waist and upper body movements during performance. This style of wearing the cummerbunds was observed in the Ashaka and Aboh groups. Beauty's group, on the other hand, had just one cummerbund that was knotted at the back (Plate 5-8).

A dancer also carries a pair of white handkerchiefs. They function as extensions of the arm and hand movements during dance (Plate 5-7). When not in use, they are carefully tucked into the cummerbund, thus they are easily accessible when needed (Plate 5-8).



Plate 5-8 *Otu Égwú Àmàlà Na-Enye Anwuli* performing the walking dance style as they move towards the canoe. Photo: courtesy of John Mark Efe.

Finally, all the dancers are expected to wear the same hairstyle. There is no fast rule about a particular style. This is left for the dancers in consultation with the leader of the group to decide. They may either plait their hair the traditional way with black hair-thread and decorate each plaited tress with multi-colored bands (Plate 5-9) or they may permanently relax their hair (Plate 5-7).

One of the most important figures in *Égwú Àmàlà* is the *óbú-ànyìnà*.²²¹ She is officially named best dancer and lead dancer of the group. Her dressing is characterized by a horsetail, which she holds in her right hand. Being the lead dancer, she additionally wears *obe*

²²¹ Let me mention here that the *óbú-ànyìnà* can be a female or male as exemplified in Aboh. Nonetheless, I am using the pronoun “she” since this genre is generally regarded as a female one.

mgbilingba, a belt of small bells around her hips (Plate 5-8). These mini bells chime as she makes her dance moves. The sounds of these bells add density to the accompanying music as well as accentuate the rhythmic flow of her dance steps. Plate 5-8 also shows the *óbú-ànyìnà* leading the dancers into the canoe for a performance in the river Niger.



Plate 5-9 *Otu Égwú Àmàlà Na-enye Anwuli* paddling the canoe on land in a kneeling position.
Photo: courtesy of John Mark Efe.

Uniformity is enshrined in *Égwú Àmàlà*. All the performing members are required to wear the same shade and style of clothing. However, I observed that Beauty has also made some changes in the group's dress code. Instead of the usual white blouse, her dancers and musicians wear pink tops. Beauty distinguished herself as leader by dressing in green attire. Also the *ọlọgba*, Young, wore a white jumper, a clear indication that he did not belong to the group but was hired for his professional skills. Due to economic constraints, some dancers in the other

groups, I observed, had different style of blouses, though the color white was always maintained. Whatever the dissimilarities in their dress codes were, all the groups used the famous George wrapper identified with this genre.

The present code of dressing for *Égwú Àmàlà* is far from being traditional: the George wrapper, handkerchief, cummerbunds, and white-laced blouses are all evidence of the Western influence which had taken root in the coastal regions of Nigeria more than a century before the genre was fully established.

5.3.2 The Various Parts of the Dance

The dancers in *Égwú Àmàlà* are categorized according to their functions in the dance, which reflects the rowing of a canoe in the river. Because it is a dance genre, the most important person in the group is the *óbú-ànyìnà*. I will discuss this figure later in the chapter. The other significant persons of the group are the *Ikpazu* and the *okwọ mmili ugbọ*. In an actual canoe ride in Ogbaruland, the *okwọ mmili ugbọ* sits in the middle of the boat and scoops out any water that might enter the canoe. The *Ikpazu* sits at the tail of the canoe; he controls and directs the canoe.

These two figures maintain their position in the performance of *Égwú Àmàlà*. The *okwọ mmili* rarely partakes in the theme movements performed by the other dancers. Her role in the canoe is more important, and she does not need to do what the other dancers engage in. She focuses on making sure the canoe is not filled with water and thus saves it from capsizing.

The *Ikpazu* maintains her position as a rear dancer. She always has the paddle in hand, even when the other dancers are performing other dance themes. She also has to be attentive so that the canoe is not mis-directed, as it were. The *Ikpazu* is also expected to be a very good dancer in order to compliment the *óbú-ànyìnà* or *obuzọ* who is always positioned in front of all

the dancers. As a result of this arrangement, the audience sees the best dancer as the group enters the stage and also sees a good dancer as they leave the arena.

The other dancers, called the *umu égwú*, are positioned on both sides of the *óbú-ànyìnà*, *okwọ mmili*, and *Ikpazu*. (See Figure 3-2 for the dance formation typically called *Égwú Line*). The team of dancers follows the cues of the *okwà ábụ* and *óbú-ànyìnà* in changing from one set of movements to another.

5.3.3 Recruitment and Training of Performers

Most African traditional dance performers pass through a ritual of recruitment before they are fully incorporated into the group. Some initiation rites are simple while others are complex. This requirement for enrollment is understandable when one remembers that most African dances and even music are cult and/or ritual based. As the status of most of these musics changes from ritual to entertainment, their rites of initiation also take up a simpler dimension.

The principal qualification for joining any *Égwú Àmàlà* group is good musicianship and dance ability. An important quality is a good ear and the ability to concentrate. The lack of musical concentration could prevent a performer from keeping to strict time and from coming in at the exact moment. Most importantly, the person must have a command of the Igbo language so as to be able to understand the proverbs used in the songs as well be able to understand the “speeches” of the *òpì*. Other prerequisites for membership are nonmusical. To be admitted into the *Égwú Àmàlà* group, the person must be of good behavior and dedicated. Furthermore, she must have the ability to work harmoniously with others in the group. All the groups I worked with stressed this aspect. *Égwú Àmàlà*, they explained, is a peaceful, joyful dance, and it would be ironic to find troublemakers in it.

I have previously discussed how the *okwà ábụ* is trained and will later in this chapter explain how the *óbú-ànyịnyà* receives her/his mantle as lead-dancer and bearer of the horsetail. How do the other dancers acquire skills or learn their art? The principle is that of learning through social experience. I recounted earlier in this work how my aunt, Mrs. Comfort Ogbuchi, encouraged me to learn to dance *Égwú Àmàlà*. Generally, exposure to musical situations and participation are emphasized. Moonlight plays, new yam festivals, *egwugwu* celebrations, funerals, and marriage ceremonies are all occasions that involve music from which the novice could learn to play an instrument and/or dance. This helps the future musician to acquire her/his skills gradually until s/he is absorbed into a social group. When the neophyte is admitted into a group, s/he is tutored through imitation to perfect her/his art.

A person wishing to join any *Égwú Àmàlà* group will be expected to pay a fee and go through a formal training. All the groups I researched told me that each group would customarily decide the appropriate amount of money to demand from new members. This amount is contingent on the person's social status, job status, and what the individual can afford. Often, the musicians are clustered around a professional who is knowledgeable in *Égwú Àmàlà* music and dance to teach them. When a village, however, wants to start a group, they will resort to the help of professionals such as an *okwà ábụ* and *onye-na'kuzi égwú* (dance teacher or choreographer) to teach their dance group. The period of teaching and learning takes about two years. When the group has mastered their art, they inform the village, through their patron and patroness, that they have a dance to show the village. This public appearance takes place during the *omele* celebration. With the consensus of the village, the new *Égwú Àmàlà* group becomes established. It is thus given the rights to represent the village; it becomes the *Otu Égwú Àmàlà* of the particular village.

5.3.3.1 Administrative Structure in *Égwú Àmàlà*

The formation of an *Égwú Àmàlà* group goes through some formal processes, which begins with a thought and desire. Ogbaru people do not just begin to perform the dance unsystematically. There is always a calculated predisposition to start one, a predisposition that arises from the yearning to enact, transmit and preserve the Ogbaru culture in dance.

The women in the village usually express the desire to initiate a group. In Oko-Amakom for example, the women told me that a few of them came together and decided to begin a group because all the surrounding villages but theirs had an *Égwú Àmàlà* group. They started by organizing themselves under the *Ezediosa* (a patron or dance father), Ijele Nwachukwu Ogbuchi, the *Akajiaku* of *Égwú Àmàlà*.²²² They also chose an *Ochiligwe* (matron or dance mother). The *ochiligwe* and *ezediosa* are carefully chosen and must be highly respected persons of the community. Attachment to a patron and/or matron or some elder whom the members of the group obey, serves not only as a point of reference but also helps to keep the group together. The *Ochiligwe* and *Ezediosa* are the administrative heads of the group. Activities that the group engages in such as meetings and rehearsals are held in their courtyard. Invitations requesting the group to perform are directed to the *Ochiligwe*. It is also their responsibility to settle any misunderstanding within the group, and they defend the group in the public sector when necessary. The group also chooses an *Ode-akwọkwọ* (secretary), *Onye-na-edebe-ego* (a treasurer), *Onye-na-akpọ o-okwu* (caller, who passes on information to the members), and *Polisi* (police, who maintains order during meetings, rehearsals, and performances). When this administrative structure is established, a dance teacher is then invited to instruct and train the

²²² Ijele Nwachukwu Ogbuchi was my Aunt, Comfort Ogbuchi's husband. He died in 2001. He gained his title "*Akajiaku ni Égwú Àmàlà*" because he was very generous to the group and celebrated by killing a cow for them when the women launched their dance.

group. In the case of Oko-Amakom, the service of Edeli, an exponent of *Égwú Àmàlà*, was employed. Edeli is from Aboh but now resides in Obosi in Anambra State with her family. She is an *Égwú Àmàlà* composer and choreographer.

The administrative body oversees the affairs of the group. It is their responsibility to supervise the recruitment of new musicians and dancers and make sure that the troupe has adequate instruments and correct uniforms for performance. All the groups I studied had this body with the exception of Beauty's group. It does not have an *Ochiligwe* or *Ezediosa*. She is the leader of her group and has attained high social status in her community and has made sufficient money to take care of her troupe herself.



Plate 5-10 Chief I. N. Ozegbe, the Omordi of Aboh, Patron of *Égwú Àmàlà* group at Ashaka and his wife. Photo: Courtesy of the author.

5.3.3.2 *Óbú-ànyìnà*: The Living Dancing Among the Living Dead

The *óbú-ànyìnà* is the most important dancer in *Égwú Àmàlà*. She is the lead-dancer and directs the pace of the dance in collaboration with the lead-singer. She acts as a mediator, communicating the wishes of the lead-singer to the dancers. At the cue of the *òkwà ábu*, that is, lead singer, the *óbú-ànyìnà* conducts the dancers into the arena and leads them out at the end of the show. Her position during dance performances is always in front of the dancers. As a symbol of her preeminence in the dance group, she carries a horsetail whist in her hand. With the horsetail, she acknowledges the praises of her audience as she dances; she also waves the tail around an exceptional dancer to encourage her or him.

5.3.3.3 The Selection of the *Óbú-ànyìnà*

Because of the importance of the lead-dancer in the group, picking one is not left to the acumen of mortals alone; the spirits and ancestors are consulted. When a new group has learnt the various dance-plays of *Égwú Àmàlà*, they fix a day to present their dance to the public. On the eve of this public display, the group holds an *iche àmàlà* or *iche abani*, that is, an all night vigil of singing and dancing. The location of this all night vigil is the compound of the *onye-na' kuzi égwú* or dance teacher. It is during this performance that the *óbú-ànyìnà* is selected.

All the dance groups I researched narrated the same story of how the *óbú-ànyìnà* is chosen. At the early hours of the all night vigil, the newly formed group goes to the *amuzo* or *ofia oma*, literally “good bush” (cemetery) where they sing and dance. All the dancers perform brilliantly while searching for the horsetail whist, which was hidden earlier in the cemetery by a third party. The dancer who finds the horsetail becomes the *óbú-ànyìnà* of the group. The Ogbaru people believe that it is only through spiritual guidance and intervention that the right dancer finds the horsetail. While other roles such as the *Ikpazu* and *òkwò mmili* are selected with

the consensus of the group, the *óbú-ànyìnà* is one role in *Égwú Àmàlà* that the protagonist is not chosen according to the choice of the leader of the group or by the votes of members of the group.

As I listened to each group tell me how the *óbú-ànyìnà* in their cluster was elected, I questioned why the *amuzo* or *ofia oma* was chosen as the local for this important selection. I inquired of my collaborators, namely the members of the various *Égwú Àmàlà* groups, why this ceremony was not conducted elsewhere other than the burial ground? My collaborators were unanimous that *amuzo* was the suitable place to choose the *óbú-ànyìnà* because it symbolized the spirit world, whose assistance was needed to select the lead dancer of the group.

Like all Africans, the Ogbaru people have a sense of the sacred and a sense of mystery. The invisible world of spirits and the ancestors is always present in all religious activities and rituals. These spiritual beings are believed to help the people in their approach to Chukwu, the Supreme Being. Members of the spirit world include divinities, spirits of nature, and human spirits whom J. S. Mbiti called “living dead.”²²³ Before their death, these human spirits were members of the human family: kings, chiefs, clan founders, elders, sisters, and brothers. These disembodied spirits of people are lower than Creator God, but are by far superior to and higher than ordinary human beings. They are bilingual, that is, they speak the language of human beings among whom they lived until their death and they speak the language of the spirits and the Creator God. Thus, in order to reach the Creator God easily, it is recommended that one approach him through the mediation of these spirits, whom the people feel are closer to him and to them. These invisible members of the community are believed to help people in all aspects of life, both individual and communal. The people, therefore, believe that it is appropriate for these

²²³ Mbiti 1973: 63.

disembodied spirits of the land to choose the *óbú-ànyìnà*, the lead-dancer, of *Égwú Àmàlà*, which depicts the life of the Ogbaru people in dance. These spirits know the intentions of human beings and are able to dictate who will be dedicated to this task. All the dancers that perform in the *amuzo* or *ofia oma* were previously selected by the dance teacher of the group, but the choice of the lead-dancer is reserved for those in the spirit world. This collaboration demonstrates the affinity the Ogbaru have with their ancestors. The role of the *óbú-ànyìnà* is a privilege reserved for those the ancestors consider laudable. As a result, the Ogbaru believe that these disembodied spirits always guide and guard their candidate, who remains the best dancer in any *Égwú Àmàlà* group.

5.3.4 Gender and Performance Space in *Égwú Àmàlà*

Égwú Àmàlà developed as a female dance genre. Traditionally, men who participate in it are mainly instrumentalists and chorus members. In her research work on the genre, Fidel Okwesa noted that

all roles, whether male or female, are played by Umù Égwú who are all female. The male members of the group may play music and also dance during intervals when Égwú òfú òfú (pas seul) is called for. They do not participate in Égwú Line that is, the dramatization of various Égwú Àmàlà.²²⁴

Okwesa's research was completed in 1987. From this work it is obvious that men were not allowed to perform together with women in their space – the *Égwú Line*. Although *Égwú Àmàlà*

²²⁴ Okwesa 1987: 130.

remains exclusively a women's dance in most Ogbaru towns, a lot of changes have been effected in the dance in contemporary times. One of these transformations includes the pulling of men from their auxiliary position as instrumentalists in *Égwú Àmàlà* and placing them in the "all women dance space." Ogbuefi Beauty Okaome Obi, who has made extensive changes by incorporating new musical approaches into the dance, explained that these young men are also inspired and flexible; some of them even dance better than the women. "Moreover, in our culture, we (men and women) always do things together; there is nothing wrong with it."²²⁵ Beauty even claimed that she introduced men into women's dance space in *Égwú Àmàlà*.

In Aboh, Oko-Amakom, and Onitsha, where boys share women's dance space, the women share Beauty's opinion but insist that the men dance like women. But in Ashaka, a town previously under the Aboh kingdom, the women criticize this innovation as going against "tradition." These women are still reluctant in allowing men into their dance space. They contend that in *Égwú Àmàlà*, people have their assigned functions and this situation should not change; the dance space is for the women, just as the blowing of the *òpì* is for the men. Through dance, therefore, women may set limits on male assertiveness.

Both in the mythological and historical constructs of *Égwú Àmàlà*, the water divinity is gendered and perceived as female, and this could be one reason why Ogbaru women find great affinity with the water divinity. The common understanding of the etymology of *Mami Wata* in West Africa and among the Ogbaru is, mother/wisdom of the waters. The inherent meaning of *Égwú Àmàlà* is thus a religious performance to beseech the benevolence of a divinity who, by virtue of her gender, understands the plight of barren women and provides for them.

²²⁵ Interview with Beauty Ogbuefi Okaome Obi in January 2006.

But what are the attitudes of young men when they enter women's dance space? What does *Égwú Àmàlà* mean to them? I interviewed two boys, Amachi Ugboma and Peter Amachi Egonu, from different *Égwú Àmàlà* groups in Aboh and Oko-Amakom, respectively. Both youngsters told me that they love and are attracted to the aesthetics of the dance and hope that good fortune will come their way as they grow up. According to them, performing *Égwú Àmàlà* is an inspiration; they are usually carried away and hardly think they are encroaching on women's dance space. Yet, Amachi Ugboma from Aboh admitted that his peers sometimes laugh at and tease him because he dances with women. "But," he continued, "I don't even care. I love *Égwú Àmàlà* and the women appreciate the fact that I am the best dancer in the group and I am the *óbú-ànyìnà*, the horse tail bearer and the lead-dancer of our group."²²⁶

And what is it like to "dance like women" in *Égwú Àmàlà*? The characteristics of the dance include flexibility of hands, lightness of feet on the ground, smiling and joyful facial expressions, slow and elegant (torso and hand) movements, smoothness in the act and mime of paddling, and stamina in dancing, especially as there are as many as ten dance scenes to be enacted in each presentation.

²²⁶ Informal conversation with Amachi Ugboma during fieldwork in Aboh in February 2006.



Plate 5-11 A young man beautifying himself during performance.²²⁷ Photo: courtesy of John Mark Efe.

In performance, these boys do not exhibit any virile dance movements, as one would expect. Rather, they adhere to the dance features of *Égwú Àmàlà* and actually perform with the feminine suppleness intrinsic in the dance. For example, in miming the act of paddling a canoe, these boys do so with the gracefulness and gentleness usually associated with feminine actions in the area. There are also instances in *Égwú Àmàlà* when the female dancer performs actions of beautifying herself in imitation of the *Mami Wata*. Today these boys do the same; they act out looking in a mirror, powdering and painting their faces while smiling with content at their beauty (see Plate 5-11). These actions are not concomitant with maleness in Igboland. But by allowing men to perform these actions in women's space, *Égwú Àmàlà* is breaking boundaries and creating new avenues for the redefinitions of maleness and femaleness in Ogbaruland.

²²⁷ A young man dancing like a woman. The *óbú-ànyìnà* appreciates his dance moves and shows this by dancing with him and waving her *ànyìnà* (horse tail) over him.

Égwú Àmàlà remains the signature dance of the Ogbaru people, particularly Ogbaru women. With stylization, metonymy, and metaphor, the dance movements and the costumes define and elaborate the attributes and styles of women and so epitomize femininity. This genre, whose dance space has been ardently guarded by women, has in recent times opened up to the male folk. Men dancing like women in *Égwú Àmàlà* work contrary to dominant ideologies of gender in this society, where men rarely dance in women's dance groups. And even when they have to take part in women genres, they executed masculine styles and men's roles.

5.3.5 Conclusion

Unlike in other cultures, where dancing is often viewed and understood in “terms of erotic female display,”²²⁸ *Égwú Àmàlà* is, rather, an expression of the Ogbaru culture in dance. It is cultural behavior, determined by the values, attitudes, and beliefs of the Ogbaru people.

Égwú Àmàlà has undergone dramatic changes in the last two decades. Most of these changes involve the way that a formalized traditional belief system and an accompanying set of ritual musics were challenged by the advent of Christianity and Western culture. As the rituals were prohibited, some of the old songs have been forbidden, others have their text substituted with Christian or Biblical ones, and new songs have been composed. The decontextualization of ritual songs has further led to some artistic changes. The song styles in the areas I researched differed slightly from one town to the other, implying a strong-shared regional taste that is often at the core of folk music.

The genre was initially performed in honor of the water divinity. As ritual dance, it is an

²²⁸ Thomas 1998: 30; Koritiz 1995

example of what Agawu referred to as “serious dance,” one whose performance adheres strictly to ritualistic cultural rules. It had maintained its boundaries and dance space as reserved only for women. Nonetheless, as the genre has moved from being a “serious dance” to a “social dance,” it has lost some of its religious values and made room for flexibility, which accorded men the opportunity to enter women’s dance space.

6.0 PRINCIPLES OF MUSICAL ORGANIZATION

How do the components of *Égwú Àmàlà* fit together to form a unified whole? The instruments, songs, and dance are all an integral part of this genre, giving it a character that distinguishes it from other forms in the area (*uloko* and *Izomọ* women's dances)²²⁹ and even beyond. Nevertheless, *Égwú Àmàlà* displays, one no doubt can see, some stylistic traits that define other African musical forms. Foremost among them is the use of the call-and-response singing style that is archetypal for most African music genres. Other common traits include the use of polyphonies and polyrhythms that result from the interlocking and overlapping of the participant's contributions, the preference for dense rich sounds, and the use of a time line (ostinato). By analyzing the music of this dance form, I will bring to bear these traits as well as other musical aspects of the genre.

6.1 FORM IN *ÉGWÚ ÀMÀLÀ*

Broadly speaking, the components of this genre, that is, instruments, song, and dance, can be divided into two functional groups according to whether they perform verbal or non-verbal

²²⁹ Unlike *Égwú Àmàlà*, these dances are performed in cycles and they do not enact the varied aspects of culture as is found in *Égwú Àmàlà*.

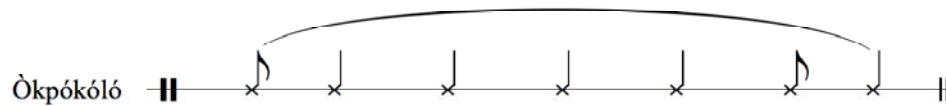
roles.²³⁰ The verbal group consists of vocal music, which includes songs (solo and chorus singing), song text, and the phonology in the song unit. The non-verbal group comprises instrumental accompaniment, hand clapping, and dance. The typical performance structure of *Égwú Àmàlà* begins with a brief instrumental non-verbal introductory section, which is followed by the song. After the song (of the soloists and chorus), which always ends with a climax or *isù égwú*, comes a short instrumental interlude during which the prop(s) used for the preceding dance theme are removed and different ones placed on the ground beside each dancer in preparation for the next dance theme. In addition, the interlude gives the lead-singer ample time to prepare and begin the next song. The syntagmatic chain of *Égwú Àmàlà* is thus open, with a fixed beginning and the prospect for a prolonged continuation. This scheme thus aligns with the succession: non-verbal—verbal—non-verbal.

6.1.1 Introduction of the Music and Dance

Égwú Àmàlà performance always begins with a brief instrumental part one, however, that is long enough to enable all the instruments of the ensemble to make their entrances. It often starts with simple rhythms played by the instruments as they come in one after the other. The first instrument to be heard is always the *òkpòkòlò*. The initial sounds of this instrument tell all the musicians that the performance has commenced. It provides the tempo and time-line over which the other instruments extemporize and by which the rhythmic motion of the ensemble is sustained. It is this ostinato part that not only distinguishes the genre from the others in the area,

²³⁰ My use of the terms verbal and non-verbal components in *Égwú Àmàlà* is informed by Kwasi Ampene's discourse on compositional conventions of Nnwonkoro songs. See Ampene 2005: 51.

but also enables any Ogbaru person to easily identify the music as the fundamental pattern of the genre (see below).



Also, it is pertinent to note that while in most African musical traditions, the metal bell is used to play the time-line, in *Égwú Àmàlà* the *òkpòkòlò* or woodblock is used to perform this function. This phenomenon I also found in another women's dance, *Ebre*, from Ibibio in Akwa Ibom State in Nigeria, which I researched in 1999.

Following the sound of the *òkpòkòlò* is the *òpì* that reinforces the message of the *òkpòkòlò*. The *òlògba* calls the attention of the *òkwà ábù* and the other performers by praising them. The *ùdùdù*, whose deep bass reverberation but soft sound keeps the pulse of the ensemble, immediately follow. Given the technique of sound production, it is almost impossible to improvise on the *ùdùdù*.²³¹ That said, though, the player can create simple rhythmic patterns by muting some of the sounds while maintaining the base pulse. This enriches the music and prevents a continuous thumping on the *ùdùdù* throughout the performance. Sequential to the entrance of the *ùdùdù* are *awalaka* (hand clapping) and the *ìshàkà*. These are trailed by the *ogénè*.

There is no fast rule as to what instrument should follow the other in the introductory part. However, no matter at what point each instrument is introduced into the emerging texture, all instruments must articulate the end of the cycle with marked expression. This ending also

²³¹ Example 5-3 shows a rhythmic pattern of the *ùdùdù*.

articulates the steps of the dance. Thus all the instrumentalists accentuate this end on a quarter note of the fourth compound beat of the measure (see example 6-1, A). They pick up on the eighth note of the next measure of the *okpòkòlò* (see Example 6-1, B) and proceed to make variations on their rhythms until they come to the end of another cycle. A more developed section, the main body of the music, follows the introductory part, and it is at this point that the soloist intones the song.

6.1.2 Main Body of the Music

The end of the introductory section is marked by the introduction of a song by the soloists. There are always two *òkwà ábù* during any *Égwú Àmàlà* performance. One of these, the *Ighòlù ábù*, I will refer to as the “cantor.” Her role in the choral group is to sing the chorus line at a specific point of the song. She is basically not allowed to improvise on her melodic line. The other singer, the *òkwà ábù*, I will call the “lead-singer.” I have earlier expanded on the role of the *òkwà ábù* in the ensemble. It remains to say that a deft *òkwà ábù* should be creative during performance. Her life experiences should act as a catalyst for the creative process.

In his book, *Yoruba Drumming: The Dùndún Tradition*, Akin Euba²³² discussed four broad sources of creative inspiration that stimulate creativity: the relationship between the *iyaalu* drummer and the *omole* drummers; the interaction between the musicians, audience and dancers; the *iyaalu* drum’s part as an embodiment of previously learned text; and the spirit of the *Ayàṅàgalú*, as well as the spirits of ancestor drummers. In addition, the *òkwà ábù* always ascribe their art of composition as a gift from God (or the water divinity), dreams, and personal

²³² Euba 1990: 387-417

experiences. Fundamentally, all these are factors that serve as catalysts during processes of performance composition. Among the groups I researched, Beauty demonstrated the use of these qualities to the greatest degree. Her ability to compose in performance using text that expounded a situation or her life was brilliant.²³³

This main body section is a period of much musical activity. Here, the lead-singer displays her vocal skills and the accompanying instruments develop and expound on their rhythmic structures. As mentioned previously, the *ogénè* is the master instrument of the ensemble. Unlike most master instruments in an African musical ensemble (typically the drum), the *ogénè* does not “talk” to the performers. Rather, its rhythmic patterns at specific points of the performance provide a stimulus for the *ishàkà* and *awalaka* to likewise play rhythms that evoke intensive dancing. In this sense, the *ogénè* communicates through rhythms to the performers.

Awalaka or hand clapping is another important component of *Égwú Àmàlà*. It is an effective way of increasing the density of the music, especially in the *isù égwú* (the climax or apex) of a dance section. There are several variants of the rhythmic patterns of hand clapping. These are usually combined in performance to further emphasize the polyrhythmic nature of the music. In the example below, I have transcribed samples of hand clapping from two groups: Beauty’s *Otu Égwú Àmàlà Na-enye Anwuli* (“Égwú Àmàlà gives joy” Group) and the Aboh group, *Otu Ife Chukwu Deni* (“What God has written” Group).²³⁴ Each rhythmic hand-clapping pattern articulates the end of the cycle with marked expression.

²³³ I discuss some of the ways Beauty uses texts, her experiences, and the audience in songs in the subsequent chapter.

²³⁴ Henceforth also Aboh group.

Example 6-1 Hand clapping patterns

Òkpókóló

Clap 1 (Beauty)

Clap 2 (Beauty)

Clap 3 (Beauty)

Clap 4 (Aboh)

Clap 5 (Aboh)

6.1.3 Ending a Section of the Music and Dance

The end of a section is very important in any *Égwú Àmàlà* performance. Usually the *òkwà ábù* gives a cue by incorporating some phrases into the song. Examples of these end cues include the following:

<u>Igbo</u>	<u>English</u>
(a) <i>Égwú ana</i>	The dance is gone
(b) <i>Ugbò amama aga eyi</i>	The canoe is about to land
(c) <i>Obulu ele wu n'oduwu nma</i>	If it is so it is alright

At that cue, the chorus sings their phrase for the last time. The *okwà ábù* now commences the *isù égwú*, the climax section. The style of the *isù égwú* differs to some extent from that of the main body. The instrumental ensemble that until now has been playing moderately loudly begins to play forte, increasing the tempo, and establishing more complex rhythmic figures. The *okwà ábù* reduces her melodic phrase and so does the chorus line (Example 6-5 see cadence, measure 20). The dancers demonstrate their best moves of the dance theme being performed. The *isù égwú* continues for a while until the *okwà ábù* gives a final cue and the singers then join her in singing what I refer to as the “final-end-pattern” of the song, that is, “*oyen-ye, oye*” (in Example 6-5, see last measure). This brings the song and dance theme to an end. However, instead of a final stop to show the end of a section, the music merely transits, with only the singers and dancers stopping briefly while the *okpokolo* and the other instruments continue to play as the soloist prepares and intones a new song. These characteristics distinguish *Égwú Àmàlà* from most Igbo dance forms, where the end implies the cadential close of a section.

6.2 ANALYSIS OF SONG REPERTOIRE

6.2.1 Song Styles

The general tendency of an Ogbaru melody is to descend from a high note sung at the beginning of the melody to a terminal low note.²³⁵ This characteristic is evident in all *Égwú Àmàlà* songs. Also to be noted in this genre is the fact that the soloist, cantor, and chorus sing in

²³⁵ See Agawu’s discussion of Northern Ewe music (Agawu 1995: 68). This characteristic is also demonstrated in Bela Bartók’s collections of Hungarian folk songs. See Bohlman 2004: 208-209.

two different ways. The cantor and the chorus sing virtually the same melody with the cantor echoing the chorus. The same melody is repeated by the chorus, most often in incidental harmonization. The text for both the cantor and the chorus change very minimally. Quite often, the cantor adds an expressive syllable or substitutes a word which is different but having the same inherent meaning with that used by the chorus. For example in the song “*Olisa kenu mmadu nuwa*,” the cantor begins with the expression *e-wo*, and then proceeds to use the word *Nna Chukwu* instead of *Olisa* in the chorus. Both words are Igbo designated words for God (see Example 6-12 measures 2 and 5). The melody is always in strict rhythm, that is, the text and melody are composed to fit a particular structure of the chorus line within the music.

The *okwà ábụ* enjoys more freedom in the use of a speech-rhythm²³⁶ as well as strict singing style. As a creative composer, she is boundless in the use of texts and *Òkpùlùpù okwu* (gems of wisdom) during performance. Thus, in this repertoire, there is a combination of strict and speech rhythms. Additionally, the *okwà ábụ* often uses a raised voice while singing some sections of a song. This is done to articulate the essence and to emphasize the meaning of the Igbo texts. Generally, syllabic texts are used in all the songs; this makes it easy for the audience to hear the words being sung and thus fosters comprehension of the texts.

The three songs I analyze in the following paragraphs demonstrate the above musical characteristics. These songs were all recorded from live dance performances. *Égwú Àmàlà* is intricately rhythmic with a lot of improvisation, especially in the instrumental ensemble. By “intricately rhythmic” I mean that the vocal lines and instrumental lines have independent rhythmic structures that are superimposed, giving rise to a complex polyphony. One does not

²³⁶ I agree with Agawu that “free rhythm” should be replaced by “speech rhythm” for songs rendered in heightened speech mode, reproduce speech and not free rhythm (Agawu 1995: 73).

clearly see or perceive the relationship between the *okpokolo* and the other instruments until it is related to the dancing; only then do we observe the connection between all the instruments.

Using Western notational system to transcribe a music that was not conceived, by the composers, in Western tonality no doubt poses some challenges. The first issue is the question of meter. Although I have indicated a time signature of 12/8, the Ogbaru think of *Égwú Àmàlà* in cycles, as I will illustrate later in this chapter. For example, the instrumentalists, singers, and dancers all articulate with marked expression on the last quarter note of a cycle that is outlined by the *okpokolo*. Moreover, the feel of a 19/8 in some *Égwú Àmàlà* songs (see Example 6-2 below) and Uzoigwe's use of the 19/8 in his piano composition further complicates the issue. This ambiguity of meter, however, is not uncommon in traditional African music, as Euba found and noted in his research on Yoruba drumming.²³⁷

Example 6-2 *Égwú Alushim* (My water divinity dance) sung by the Ashaka group

Tempo ♩ = 152

E - gwu'a - lu - shi-mo a - lu shi'm - mi - li o e - gwu'a lu-shi-mo

²³⁷ Euba 1990: 327-329. In discussing the metric organization in the *dùndún*, Euba noted some vagueness in the rhythmic organization of the secondary instruments, which made it “difficult to determine whether some of the patterns were in triplets or duplets” Ibid.: 328.

Below is an excerpt from Uzoigwe's *Égwú Àmàlà* piano composition in 19/8. Measures 2, 5, and 6 show the rhythmic pattern of the *òkpòkòlò*, which is similar to that used in the melody above, that is, *Égwú Alushim*.

Example 6-3 Joshua Uzoigwe's *Égwú Àmàlà* Piano Composition (mm 1-6)²³⁸

V. EGWU AMALA

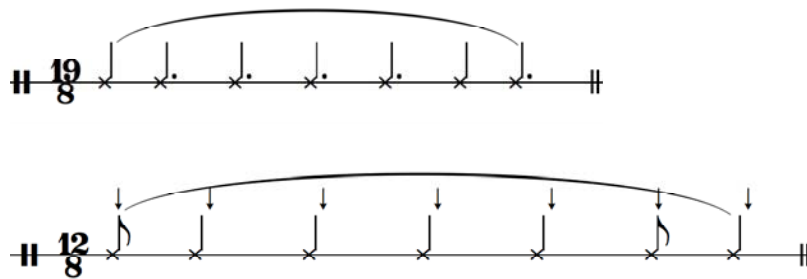
♩ = 152

This ambiguity in the rhythmic organization of the *òkpòkòlò* can be seen when the two time line patterns are placed side by side. There is an augmentation of the 12/8 meter, which in this case is done by the addition of an eighth note to every note of the 12/8 meter resulting, in a 19/8 (see

²³⁸ This excerpt is one of five compositions by Uzoigwe's in "Studies in African Pianism." In all these compositions, Uzoigwe draws themes from traditional folk music and dance. A complete bibliographic entry can not be made for this work because it is undated and is not published.

arrow indications on Example 6-4). Consequently, it is not uncommon to feel as though a song is in the 12/8 meter and in the 19/8 meter. However, in the above song, *Égwú Alushim*, the 19/8 meter is easily felt because the melody and the dance theme seem to be in a slower tempo than the other songs transcribed in this work where the 12/8 meter is evident.

Example 6-4 Two time line patterns of the *òkpòkòlò*



Second, some pitches of the melodies do not adhere to those of the twelve-tone equal temperament piano. Such pitches are evident when the soloist makes use of microtonal inflections. In addition, the singers unconsciously alter the melody and a few pitches slightly between verses of a song. These difficulties notwithstanding, my transcriptions demonstrate the varied ways the Ogbaru compose and use poetry in *Égwú Àmàlà*.

Also, I have explored the melodic structure of these songs. This part of my work is inspired by Nketia's melodic analysis and Ampene's discussion of compositional conventions of Akan songs.²³⁹ The analysis is meant to trace the intervallic sequences of the melodies and the resultant progression in the songs.

²³⁹ Nketia 1975; Ampene 2004

6.2.1.1 *Égwú Olu Ogo* (Farming dance)

The *Otu Ife Chukwu Deni* (“What God has written” Group, Aboh) performed the song, *Olu ogo*. The text of the song is simple and talks about working on the farm, a common occupation among the Ogbaru people. In performance, the dancers carry *mma* or knives (made of wood) and mime the act of weeding grass in the farm. During my field trip to Ndoni in Rivers State, the *Otu Égwú Àmàlà* (*Égwú Àmàlà* Group) of Ndoni also performed this song (the melody was different though) in dance. They used miniature hoes to act out this song type during their performance.²⁴⁰ In some cases, dancers use both, clearing the grass with the knife and later digging the ground with a hoe. These are normal activities of farmers in the area.

In this group, the cantor begins the song section by singing her melodic phrase, which is also the chorus line. The chorus immediately picks up this melodic phrase and sings it repeatedly but at specified intervals through the course of the music. At the end of their singing, there is a short instrumental interlude after which the cantor re-states the chorus line followed by the *okwà ábụ*.

When the chorus line has been established, the *okwà ábụ* introduces, or rather brings in, the dancers, into the arena, by ending her opening melodic phrases with “*égwú a bia*” (“the dance is coming” or “dance has come”). In the main body of the music we hear her sing the words, “*égwú elue*” (“the dance is here, it is at its heat”). At this point, the dancers are busy miming working on the farm. Her use of those words also indicates that she is pleased with the way the dancers are performing. When, at her discretion, she feels that a new song is to be introduced, she gives her last cue, “*égwú ana*” (“the dance is going” or “the dance is gone”) which prepares the group for the cadence section. The chorus responds to this call by prolonging

²⁴⁰ I met with this group in February 2006 at Ndoni.

the last syllable of the phrase, giving them enough time to reach the end of the cycle and begin a shorter version of the chorus phrase (Example 6-5, mm 19-20). This begins the *isù égwú* part. The dancers give the impression, through demonstration, of working hard on the farm; then they rejoice that they have done a good job and express gratitude to God. This is done by raising both hands, rubbing the palms together and extending the hands while opening the palms towards the heavens with the head thrown backwards and the face looking upwards. This is a typical Ogbaru gesture for saying “thank you, God.” It is an act of thanksgiving to Chukwu for strength and a good harvest. The lead-singer’s use of the speech rhythm singing style is very evident in this section as she interpolates with words and phrases praising the dancers individually as well as giving instructions. Following this part, the lead-singer cues in the final-end-pattern, “*oyen yen ye*,” which brings the song and dance theme to an end. Some lead-singers may use the words *ima, ima oye* for this ending.

Throughout the performance, the lead-singer plays the important role of communicating to the dancer what is happening and what should be done. This underscores the fact that there is always an element in the ensemble (the master drummer in most African ensembles) that signals important parts of the music such as preparing for a particular dance movement. It is not in all African music types that the master drummer is utilized for this purpose. However, in genres where drums do not play a master role or drums are not used at all, there is always an instrument or participant that accomplishes that role. In *Égwú Àmàlà* where drums are not used at all, the *òkwà ábù* is the bridge to cue and instruct the musicians on the different stages of the performance. It is accurate, therefore, to say that giving cues is not the preserve of drums or instruments in African musical performances.

The text of this song, as in most folk music of this area, is simple and emphasizes farm work. The lead-singer encourages the dancers with praise phrases and frequently asks them to get ready (*kele kele nu*). The melodic line of the cantor, lead-singer, and chorus are simple. At the cadence (*isù égwú*) there is a crossing of vocal lines of major second as the *òkwà ábù* sings below the *umú égwú*. This occurs as a result of the *òkwà ábù* prolonging the last note (E) of her melodic line (Example 6-5 m. 21). The same phenomenon occurs in measure 23 of the same song. In the last measure, that is, “final-end-pattern,” the lead-singer, cantor, and chorus all sing in unison (Example 6-5 m. 25).

Example 6-5 *Égwú Olu Ogo* (Farming dance) by the *Otu Ife Chukwu Deni*, Aboh

$\text{♩} = 100$

Òkpókóló

Okwà ábù

Cantor

Nde Úkwé

Q-lu ogo, o-lu ogo, o-lu

5

Òkpókóló

Okwà ábù

Cantor

Nde Úkwé

di uno o-lu ogo, o-lu ogo o-lu di u-no eh o-lu u-ogo

8

Òkpókóló

Okwà ábù

Cantor

Nde Úkwé

Ke-le ke-le nu o u-mu nna e gwu a-bia

o-lu og'o-bo-dò.

11

Òkpókóló

Okwà ábù

Cantor

Nde Úkwé

Ò - lu' ogo, ò - lu' ogo, ò - lu di uno ò - lu' ogo, ò - lu' ogo ò - lu di u -

14

Òkpókóló

Okwà ábù

Cantor

Nde Úkwé

Last time go to Cadence

Instrumental Bridge

no eh ò - lu u ogo ò - lu' og'o - bo - do.

18

Òkpókóló

Okwà ábù

Cantor

Nde Úkwé

ò - lu' gb'o - bo - do.

20

Òkpókóló

Okwà ábù

Cantor

Nde Úkwé

Q-lu ogo na ma-li nd'u - no

Ke-le ke-le nu-o

Q-lu ogo na ma-li nd'u - no

23

Òkpókóló

Okwà ábù

Cantor

Nde Úkwé

Q-lu ogo na ma-li nd'u - no

o - yen - ye o - ye o - ye.

yen - ye o - ye o - ye.

Q-lu ogo na ma-li nd'u - no yen - ye o - ye o - ye.

TEXT

Chorus: *Ọlu ogo, Ọlu ogo, Ọlu ndi'uno (twice)*
Ọlu ogo, Ọlu ogo obodo

Solo: *Kele kele nu umuna, égwú abia*

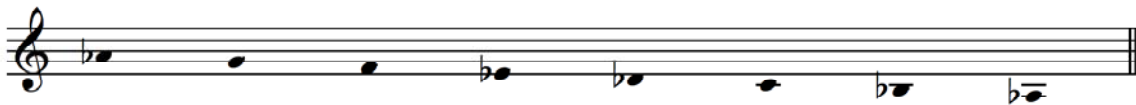
Chorus: Farming, farming, farming of the home people (twice)
 Farming, farming of the land

Solo: Get ready, get ready my people, the dance has come

Melodic contour and range

The melodic phrase of the cantor (and chorus) can be divided into three sections. The melodic outline of the first section (marked (1) in Example 6-5) is that of a gradual downward movement from A flat to C. In the second section (see (2) in Example 6-5), the cantor reverses the downward motion and moves up to F before descending. To end this section, she makes two disjunct movements from F – D flat and then E flat – C. In the third part of the melody (see (3) in Example 6-5), the cantor makes a downward movement but different from what she did in the first section. Here, she uses disjunct motions, culminating in the last leap of a perfect fourth from D flat – A flat (Example 6-5 m 8). Based on selected recurrent interval sequences, it is obvious that the cantor's (also the chorus) melodic phrase makes use of seven different notes with a repetition of the first note, A flat.

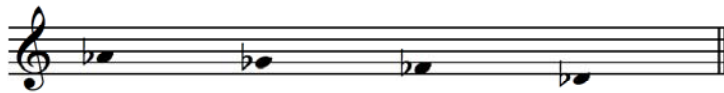
Example 6-6 A flat major (Heptatonic) scale in the song *Ọlu Ogo*



The successive repetition of G flat opens the lead-singer's melodic line, which I have divided into two sections 4 and 5 (Example 6-5 mm 9 and 10). The descending movements of the lead-singer's melodic line are often in conjunct motions. However, in order to heighten the tension of the melody, she uses disjunct motions and a rise of a perfect fourth from D flat – G flat. This rise is effective in shifting emphasis from *umu nna* to *égwú abia*, which is an instruction for the dancers to make their entrance. The melodic movement of the *ọkwà ábù* is limited to four pitches (Example 6-7), a tetrachord with two sequences of major seconds,

followed by a larger interval of a major third,²⁴¹ which she uses effectively in communicating the text to the performers.

Example 6-7 Pitches in the *Ọkwà ábù* (Lead-singer's) melody



The overall range of the melody still falls within an octave, as indicated in the example below:

Example 6-8 Melodic Range of the song *Ọlu Ogo*



From the analysis of the pitch collection of the cantor's line, there is a strong tendency towards A flat as tonal center. The song begins and ends on A flat and the intervallic movements conform with the descending motion of the scale of A flat major. However, although we see that the cantor/chorus melodies center on A flat, the entrance of the *ọkwà ábù* in measure 9 of Example 6-5 suggests a tonal shift to F flat major. Towards the end of the piece (Example 6-5 mm 20-28), the melody returns to A flat as tonic.

I have used this first song to demonstrate the form of singing inherent in all *Égwú Àmàlà* song repertoires. Yet it is easy to notice that the *ọkwà ábù* did not seem to be very creative in her

²⁴¹ According to Nketia's study of African music, the melodic line of the lead-singer will be classified as a four-step tetratonic scale.

composition. This is an example of a very simple form of improvisation by a lead-singer. The next example shows a more creative *okwà ábù*.

6.2.1.2 *Aboh Nwenu' gbọ yana Àmàlà* (Aboh Owns the Canoe and the Paddle)

In chapter three of this work, I attempted to trace the origins of *Égwú Àmàlà* and concluded that the derivation of the genre is rooted in Aboh. The song “*Aboh nwenu' gbọ yana àmàlà*” further crystallizes this assertion. The Aboh people pride themselves in their great kingdom of the period 1600 – 1900, when they were ruled by kings who wielded great power in the area.²⁴² This too comes through in this song (see chorus text phrase of the song below). The song shows how the lead-singer praises a dancer. She calls the dancer by her real name, then her praise/dance name and then salutes her (see solo line below). This song was performed by the *Otu Aboh Nadi* in Ashaka.

The song pattern is similar to the previous one described above, in that the cantor begins the song and is followed by the lead-singer and the chorus. However this song presents a new subject. When the chorus begins to sing its phrase, the *okwà ábù* makes an entry singing above them. This overlap creates some incidental harmonization of a perfect fifth (Example 6-9 m 7), a minor second, and a perfect fourth (m 8). Also, there is a crossing of vocal lines of a minor third (m. 8) and a major second (m 9) between the two parts. The melody progresses, with both parts singing in unison on the note F and later ending on the unison note D flat (Example 6- m 9).

²⁴² During my research trip to the Aboh area on January 26, 2006, I met and discussed with Prof. Prince Christopher Oputa, Rev. Fr. Oputa, and Prince Michael Oputa, three sons of the late King Obi Oputa II of Aboh. I was fortunate to meet Rev. Fr. Oputa, who was on vacation in his father's house in Aboh. He took me on a brief tour and showed me important historical remnants of the palace. None of the three sons reside in Aboh.

Example 6-9 *Aboh Nwenu' gbo yana Àmàlà* (Aboh owns the Canoe and the Paddle) by *Otu Aboh Nadi*

$\text{♩} = 100$

Òkpókóló

Okwà ábù

Cantor

Nde Úkwé

A - boh nwe-nu' gbo_ ya - na' - ma - la o - bo - do e - ze nwe - nu' gbo e

4

Òkpókóló

Okwà ábù

Cantor

Nde Úkwé

N - ki - li o - gbe-ne nwa O - ge-ne o - bo a - ma - la, wa - do

ya - na' - ma - la o

7

Òkpókóló

Okwà ábù

Cantor

Nde Úkwé

O - ye o - ye n - ki - li - be o a - ma - la a - ma - la o

A - boh nwe-nu' gbo_ ya na' - ma - la o - bo - do e - ze nwe - nu' gbo e ya - na' - ma - la o

TEXT

Chorus: *Aboh nwenu 'gbo yana àmàlà, obodo eze nwenu 'gbo yana àmàlà*

Solo: *Nkili Ogbene nwa Ogene, obu àmàlà waho! Oye oye nkikibe o àmàlà o àmàlà o*

Chorus: Aboh owns the canoe and the paddle, the king's town owns the canoe and the paddle

Solo: Nkili Ogbene, daughter of Ogene, carrier of the paddle well-done! *Oye oye* I am looking on (with admiration), the paddle, the paddle.

Melodic contour and range

Unlike the previous song, the cantor and the chorus are singing exactly the same melody. Thus when I discuss the melodic phrase of the cantor, I am also referring to the chorus. The cantor's melody can be divided into two parts: 1 and 2, as shown in Example 6-9. The cantor commences her melody with a rise of a perfect fourth (F – B flat) and after making one conjunct step, she proceeds with a downward drop of a perfect fourth from A flat – E flat. The second part of the melody begins like the first with a rise of a perfect fourth. The cantor then reverses the motion by making two disjunct movements before proceeding stepwise to D flat.

The lead-singer makes an impressive entrance by singing repetitively the high D flat (see (3) in Example 6-9) at the end of which she makes a downward leap of a perfect fourth (D flat – A flat). This jump is trailed by rise of a major second and then the melody descends in disjunct motions to F after which it makes an upward movement before descending to D flat and ends with an upward leap of a perfect fifth to the dominant A flat. In the second half of the lead-singer's melody (marked (4) in example 6-9), she begins on the note B flat and moves downward in disjunct motions to the final note of her melody, D flat.

This melody presents interesting features worth mentioning. From this analysis, it can be deduced that the melody is in a six-tone or hexatonic scale with a half step (semitone) between the third and fourth notes (see slurred notes in Example 6-9) and whole steps (tones) between the other notes.

Example 6-10 Hexatonic scale in the song *Aboh nwenụ'gbọ yana àmàlā*



Yet the overall pitch collection of the song illustrates a sturdy tonal center. This assumption is based on the fact that the singers (especially the lead-singer) begin on D flat and all end on D flat.

Example 6-11 Pitch collection from the song *Aboh nwenụ'gbọ yana àmàlā*. The arrow indicates the octave D flat sung by the Lead-singer.



One could argue for the missing leading note - C after a close study of the transcription of the song. The entire melodic motion does not call for the use of the note C because there is no conjunct movement towards the tonic note, D flat, to necessitate the leading note. Unlike the previous song, *Ọlu ogo*, this piece is characterized by the recurrent use of leaps of perfect fourths and a perfect fifth.

6.2.1.3 *Olisa Keno Madu Nuwa* (God Created People and the World)

The texts of the two songs discussed above are common themes that one would find in many *Égwú Àmàlà* groups in Ogbaruland. As this music leaves its domain of origin, there are possibilities that change may occur. This is true of *Égwú Àmàlà* in the hands of Beauty Ogbuefi Okaome Obi. I have talked extensively about her in the early stages of this work, mentioning in particular her contributions to the transformation of the genre.

Beauty is so ingenious in her art as a composer and improviser that even when she sings already existent commonly known *Égwú Àmàlà* songs, she recomposes her songs and as a result gives them a different touch that makes them sound quite distinct from the norm. Since she is an entertainer and has recorded much of her music in the studio, Beauty has a wide range of songs. The solo parts of her songs are highly improvised while the chorus sections are previously known by the *Nde úkwé* (chorus group). Consequently, while the chorus group is confident and can determine what phrase and melodic line they will be singing, it is difficult to ascertain what text variants Beauty will use in a song. This is because she relies on stock verbal and musical phrases which she arranges in a particular order to fit a specific performance context. This feature is illustrated in the next song.

Textual Analysis²⁴³

Some textual explanation is required to clarify the way Beauty uses words in this song. Her first solo verse affirmed the chorus by saying that God created and owns us. In her next verse, that is verse 2, she turned her attention to me. In order to make it clear to the audience (for those, of course, who knew me) that she was talking to me, she called me by my praise name:

²⁴³ See Example 6-12 for complete text.

Nwaezekibea (meaning a king's child is greater than her/his peers). Then she acknowledged me as “head of the land” because the soil on which the group was performing belongs to my village; she saluted me, but she is older than me so she called me her child. This manner of respect for a person in the audience and affirmation of herself comes up often in Beauty's songs.

In the third verse, Beauty talked about herself and *Égwú Àmàlà*: “I have carried the paddle (*Égwú Àmàlà*) and taken trouble, but the paddle is my work.” Why did she make this assertion? The singer is aware that some of her colleagues in other groups are not too happy with her progress and opulence in the performance of the genre. So, was she referring to them, or was she thinking about the crowds that had gathered, against her will, to watch her perform for me?²⁴⁴ This sentence exemplifies how she uses words indirectly in her songs. Yet she is proud of the genre, which she called her “work” (see complete text below). But this same text, *ewelum àmàlà bulu okwu* (I have taken the paddle and carried talk, which can also mean trouble), was also used by the lead-singer of the Ashaka group. What are the cultural implications embedded in this phrase? The “trouble” or “talk” that *okwu* imply here is not of a negative connotation. Rather it is an expression of commitment to the adequate performance of the genre.

²⁴⁴ We had earlier gone to a beach on the Onitsha shores of the river Niger for Beauty to perform. But the crowd that followed us was so large that we had to drive across the Niger to my village area.



**Plate 6-1 The author dancing with Beauty, a dancer from the group and Sister Rosemary.
Photo: courtesy of John Mark Efe**

The melody also presents some features worth noting. The cantor begins her phrase with the expression *ewo!* And she continues to use the word *Nna Chukwu* instead of *Olisa* employed by the chorus. As I earlier explained, this is an example of some of the little improvisations the cantor can bring into the melody. Before the cantor ends her phrase, the *okwà ábụ* initiates her melody an octave above the cantor line. This overlap creates incidental harmonizations of parallel octaves and a major sixth before the cantor line ends (see Example 6-12 m 3). Another form of overlapping occurs at the end of the melody between the chorus and lead-singer who joins in the singing of the last words of the chorus line. Here we have a crossing of vocal lines with the *okwà ábụ* singing first a diminished fifth, then a minor third below the chorus melody (Example 6-12 m 6).

Example 6-12 *Olisa kenu madu nuwa* (God created people and the world) by *Otu Égwú Àmàlà*

Na-enye Anwuli

Òkpókóló $\text{♩} = 100$

Okwá ábù $\text{♩} = 100$

Cantor Chu-kwu ke - li ma-du o
E - wo Nna Chu-kwu ke - nu ma-du nu-wa na ja-yam - ma

Nde Úkwé

Òkpókóló

Okwá ábù

Cantor Ya ke-li ma-du o O - li - sa nwe a - nyi o
ja - yam - ma

Nde Úkwé
O - li - sa ke - nu ma - du nu - wa na ja - yam - ma

TEXT

Chorus: *Olisa kenu madu nuwa na ja yamma*

Solo:

1. *Chukwu keli madu o, ya keli madu o, Olisa nwe anyi o!*
2. *Nwaezekibea e! onye isi ani, me kene gi o nwam o*
3. *Ewelum àmàlà bulu okwo, ma àmàlà bu ohum o,
mu ne àmàlà ge me anyi o*

Chorus: God created people, the world is praising Him

Solo: 1. God created people o, He created people o, God owns us o!
2. Nwaezebibe e! Head of the land, I greet you o my child o
3. I have carried the paddle and taken trouble, but the paddle is my
work o, I and *àmàlà*, it will make us o

Melodic contour and range

The consecutive repetition of G sharp opens the chorus melody. This succession rises by a conjunct motion before descending gradually by stepwise as well as disjunct movements culminating in a final leap of a perfect fourth.

In order to accentuate the word *Chukwu* (God) the lead-singer begins her melodic phrase by introducing the highest note B in the entire melody. Although the melody makes a slight rise of a third, it reverses motion and descends gradually to A sharp in measure 3 of Example 6-12. In the subsequent measure (4), the *òkwà ábù* uses disjunct movements and leaps of perfect fourths to heighten tension in the melody and underscore some of the words such as *Yà keli madu Olisa* (he created people God). After a period of rests (of eleven beats, a beat is equivalent to an eighth note), the lead-singer joins the chorus line in measure 6. This entrance is with a downward skip of a major sixth, from F sharp – A sharp, and this is followed by a conjunct movement to G sharp.

This melody differ from the previous two songs in various ways. Firstly, it is the lead-singer, Beauty, who introduces the chorus line, which is picked up by the chorus and echoed later by the cantor after an instrumental interlude. It is the only one with a religious based text.

Also unlike others, the melody has a very wide range of a tenth, over an octave (see Example 6-13). This range is credited to the vocal range of the lead-singer.

Example 6-13 Range of the song *Olisa kenu madu nuwa*



Although the melody exhibits the potential for a hexatonic scale, it is similar to the other two songs in the sense that it has a strong tonal center suggesting a B major mode. Like the song in Example 6-9, this melody is also missing a note, namely C sharp. But unlike the previous song, the C sharp is the second degree of the scale of B major.

Example 6-14 Pitch collection (Hexatonic scale) in the song *Olisa kenu madu nuwa*



These three songs enable some comparative study of the text, melodic contour, and pitches employed in the *Égwú Àmàlà* song repertoire. As a result, several salient traits have emerged from the analysis of the melodic structure.

The texts span a broad range of themes from the secular to the sacred; sometimes lead-singers would affix text about God when singing a song that is secular oriented or *vice versa*. Thus there is a lot of allowance for creativity in *Égwú Àmàlà* song texts.

Because of the emphasis placed on the significance of the texts, the melodies are designed to enhance their rendition. The melodies follow very closely the inflection of the Igbo

tone language on the level of syllable, word, and phrase. For instance, in Example 6-9 m 2, the melody begins with the word *Aboh* pronounced *Abóh*: the pitches used for the word mirror the ascending speech-tone contour, rising from F to B flat. A similar thing happens in the setting of the word *wadó* (D flat – A flat). Again, in example 6-12, *Chúkwú* (God) is on B and the singer renders the high-low succession of the word *mádu* as B – A sharp. These instances also illustrate the strategy by which the beginning pitches of each song are positioned above the final pitches, thus creating an overall descending melodic contour from a high note to a lower one at the end of the piece. Example 6-9 though, shows a slight difference by starting on a low note (because of the intonation of the word) but ascending immediately to a higher note before making a gradual descent.

There is a preponderance of seconds and thirds in the melodies. This is not surprising since the emphasis is on the text and its clear interpretation and not on the melody. Sparingly we find intervals of fourths and fifths, which are utilized to heighten tension in the melody. Finally, and very rarely, in fact only once, we find the interval of a sixth in Example 6-12 m 6.

Of the three songs studied in this section, two, namely *Aboh nwen ugbọ*, Example 6-7 and *Olisa kenu madu nuwa*, Example 6-12, exhibit features of the hexatonic scale while the third, that is, *Ọlu ogo*, Example 6-5 is in a heptatonic scale. The songs in the hexatonic scale differ to some extent in their melodic structure. For instance, in Example 6-10 the half step is found between the third and fourth notes while in Example 6-14, they are between the second and third, and the sixth and seventh notes. However, these three songs demonstrate a strong sensitivity or drive towards tonality. Each song has a tonal bearing and a tonal center.

6.2.2 *Égwú Àmàlà* as Dance - Drama

Movements and themes are the main elements that make up *Égwú Àmàlà*. I use the word *movement* here to denote steps in the dance, which can be walking, running, jumping, kneeling, and shuffling of the feet as well as various hand gestures. There are also waist movements, but they do not involve any hip thrusts. Rather, there are flexible movements that enable the torso to move from side to side and tilt forward and backward. By themes I mean a division of dance movements that mime or demonstrate a particular action. *Égwú Àmàlà* dance steps are set and formalized. Each dance theme in this repertoire is defined by its characteristic combination of steps (footwork) and hand gestures.

In *Égwú Àmàlà*, the entire body is employed in the dance but most of the prominent movements are concentrated in the upper regions of the body: the head, hands, and torso all of which are expected to be flexible. Generally, the posture of the body is almost never erect in *Égwú Àmàlà* dance. Even when the upper body regions seem to be straight, the knees are slightly bent.

A good *Égwú Àmàlà* dancer should not have her/his head in one position throughout the dance. The dancer should tilt the head from side to side in admiration, *ime iyanga* (as the local saying goes); throw the head backward while looking above; bend the head down towards the earth. Also the facial expression should always convey joy and happiness to the audience.

The dancer's shoulder and shoulder joints should always be flexible and relaxed since this is vital for the free movements of the arms. Arm gestures are essential in this genre because they are indispensable in the transmission and expression of the various themes of *Égwú Àmàlà*. The arms ought to demonstrate a feeling of rounded softness and suppleness. For example, in mimicking the paddling of a canoe, both arms should smoothly move upward in a gesture of

lifting up the paddle and downward to the side of the body as if to push the water behind the canoe. A resilient wrist is imperative for active hands that are hardly ever empty during an *Égwí Àmàlà* performance. When they are not holding two white handkerchiefs, they are grasping a prop needed for the demonstration of a dance theme.

The legs of the dancers are almost totally covered by the George wrapper. As I wondered about this restrictiveness of the legs during my field trip, I asked some of the dancers why the legs were hidden. The answers I got could be summarized in terms of cultural dress code and aesthetics. The wrapper is the traditional way of dressing and the beauty of the George wrapper is apparent when the design is seen in full. However, what is important is that the feet are visible and give a clear picture of dancer's rhythmic movements.

In his article, "Structural Analysis or Cultural Analysis? Competing Perspectives on the 'Standard Pattern' of West African Rhythm," Agawu discussed extensively the importance of the relationship between meter and dance for a better understanding of the standard pattern, which "emerges primarily in the context of dance music, not contemplative, danceless music."²⁴⁵ In emphasizing the close affiliation between these two, that is, dance and meter, he noted that, "dancers are often guided by an emergent beat that embodies, reflects, or points to the metrical configuration."²⁴⁶ And he continued to identify the feet as the part of the body that provides the "primary locus of metrical articulation."²⁴⁷ Although the dancer may not necessarily step on every given beat in a measure, "the dancer conveys an essential component of the meter in foot movement."²⁴⁸

²⁴⁵ Agawu 2006: 18

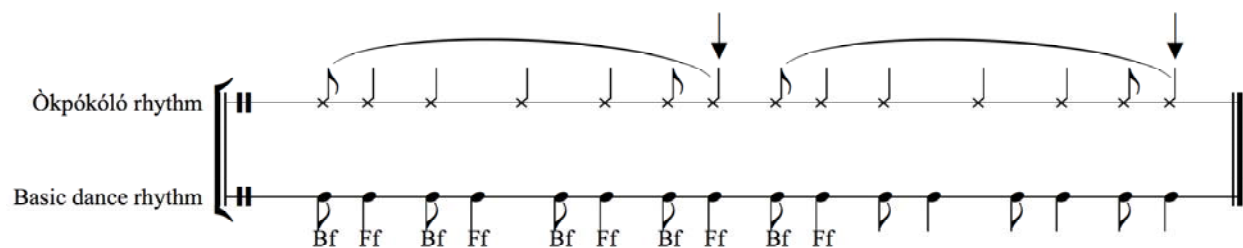
²⁴⁶ Ibid.: 19

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

During this section of my discussion, I will maintain the idea of the cycle, which means a constantly recurring period but free of predetermined accentuation. In chapter five of this study I mentioned the importance of the *òkpókòlò* in *Égwú Àmàlà* as the guiding instrument responsible for enunciating the time-line. While the other instruments in the ensemble improvise on this time-line, the close relationship between the rhythm of the *òkpókòlò* and the basic foot movements of the dancers is evident. Even as the standard pattern is playing, the dancer synchronizes with the eighth note of the time-line by stepping on the ball of one foot (Bf) and on the quarter note of the time-line she/he steps with the same foot flat on the ground (Ff). This is applicable to the second foot. The process continues until the end of the metrical cycle when the dancer marks even with body expressions of repose. In the example below, I have marked the end of the cycles with arrow signs.

Example 6-15 Standard pattern and dance (feet movement) pattern



KEY

Bf Ball of the foot

Ff Foot flat on the ground

It is this feeling of beat expressed in the dancer's feet that propelled my thinking of *Égwú Àmàlà* as being conceived in metrical cycles. However, the dancer never uses these steps

continuously throughout the performance. They are apparent at the beginning of a performance unit, when the dancers are collecting their props, or waiting for the intonation of the song. Once the *okwa ábụ* introduces the song, the dancers add other rhythmic patterns to the basic steps in order to demonstrate the dance theme. It is this basic pattern, though, that enables the dancers to synchronize with each other during performance. It is the referential pattern for *Égwú Àmàlà* dancers.

***Égwú Àmàlà* Dance Themes**

The dance themes of *Égwú Àmàlà* depict the daily life events of the Ogbaru people. There are in fact many dance themes, and each is significantly related to the core of their culture. I have selected some of the most common themes that almost every dance group would perform.

Furthermore, I have categorized them into the following groups in order to illustrate how they fit into Ogbaru life. In performance, each theme is demonstrated with the appropriate prop (Plate 6-2).

Religion: *Égwú Alishi mmili* (Water divinity dance)

Occupation: *Égwú Olu ogo* (Farming dance)

Égwú Iyọlọ (Fishing dance)

Égwú Ízù Áfía (Trading dance)

Social Life: *Égwú ugbọ àmàlà* (The canoe and paddle dance)

Égwú Njèko J'àsólú di (Choosing a husband)

Égwú Ípì Nwa (Childcare dance)

Égwú ọba (Calabash dance)

Égwú Ázìzà (Broom dance)

Politics: *Égwú Okpu eze* (Chief's cap dance)

Égwú Òlìnzèlè È-Sólú Ójì (Chiefs' dance (literally, the chiefs have picked up their walking sticks))



Plate 6-2 Some of the props used in *Égwú Àmàlà*.²⁴⁹ Photo: Courtesy of the author

As I earlier noted, none of the groups I researched was willing to perform complete dances because the performance would then be too long and exhausting. I will therefore describe the few that the groups performed during my research.

²⁴⁹ The names of these props are as follows, from the left: *okpo* (cap), *acupe* (fan), *obele àmàlà* (small paddle), *aziza* (broom), *obele ànyinyà* (small horse tail), *osisi* (long stick), *ofu* (medicine), *iyolo* (fishing basket), *mma* (knife), *àmàlà* (paddle used by the *Ikpazu*), *ànyinyà* (horse tail used by the *óbú-ànyinyà*), and *oche* (stool). Others not seen in this picture include *afele* (plates) and *ogu* (hoe).

Égwú Ugbọ Àmàlà (the canoe and paddle dance)

The *Égwú ugbọ àmàlà* theme defines the genre. The canoe is the mainstay of the Ogbaru people. The canoe, until recently, was the most popular means of transportation that these riverine people used to farm, to go to the market in other towns, and to fish. Previously, every Ogbaru was comfortable using this means of transportation. The situation has changed now with the advent and availability of cars, motorcycles, bicycles, and speedboats.

Every group I studied performed this dance theme. Each group had its own specific trait that it brought to the dance, but the basic aspects were the same. With this variety of choice, I have chosen to discuss one group's performance for the simple reason that its members actually went on a canoe ride on the river Niger when they demonstrated this theme in performance. This was Beauty's group.

Before the performance, certain preparations were made: the canoe was decorated with *omu nkwo* (fresh palm-fronts). In the Ogbaru tradition as in Igboland more generally, *omu* are used as a sign of respect for the sacred. The dancers were going into the domain of the water divinity and needed to adorn themselves with palms in order to protect themselves from the possible anger of the divinity. Once the boat was ready, the group danced into the canoe (Plate 6-3).



Plate 6-3 Dancers processing to the canoe. Photo: courtesy of John Mark Efe

As a reminder, when this dance theme is performed on ground, the *óbú-ànyìnnyà* is always in front and the *ikpazu* behind while the *okwọ mmili* is always at the middle to empty the water that collects occasionally in the canoe. But in a real life setting, the *ikpazu* is replaced by a man, *onye-onu-ugbo* (the one who pushes the canoe). He sits at the prow and as the pilot steers the canoe in the right direction. The *óbú-ànyìnnyà* maintains her position; so does the *okwọ mmili*. In this case, two of the dancers used real paddles and paddled on opposite sides of the canoe. The other dancers used props of wooden paddles and simply mimed paddling once the canoe was off shore.

After riding for about twenty minutes, they returned to the banks of the river, rejoicing and thanking Olisa for a successful ride. The *ọlogba* dipped his legs into the river to welcome them, praising them on his *òpì*. The *ngwu* carrier also met them, dancing in slow and majestic movements (Plate 62-4).



Plate 6-4 Dancers return from their canoe journey and are welcomed by the *ọlọgba*. Photo: courtesy of John Mark Efe

When the group alighted from the canoe the dancing and miming continued. Once on land, they assume their normal formation: the *óbú-ànyìnyà* in front of the dancers, the *Ikpazu* behind and the *ọkwọ mmili* in the middle (Plate 6-5). They went down on their knees and performed other dance styles such as tilting forward while shaking their upper bodies, bending backward leaning on the balls of their feet, and making undulating movements (*ilo égwú*). Even when all the dancers are on their knees, the *ikpazu* will always be in a standing position because she is the pilot of the canoe (Plate 5-9). In response to the lead-singer's cue, they all assumed a standing position and danced for about five minutes before Beauty intoned: “*imaaa, ima oye*” (same as, *oyen ye...* in previous songs) bringing the dance theme to an end.



Plate 6-5 The dancers miming paddling of the canoe on land. Photo: courtesy of John Mark Efe

6.2.3 Conclusion

In *Égwú Àmàlà*, instrumental music, song, and dance are closely interwoven. For any performance to be an effective representative of the genre, all these facets must be present. That notwithstanding, some parts take precedence when it comes to the discussion of stratification. Although the instrumental section is very imposing, the song texts are the most significant aspect of the music. The songs are thematised poetry that represents various components of the Ogbaru culture. The songs also illustrate how the Ogbaru use words and poetry in song. For example, during performance, the *okwà ábụ* creatively improvises on text, which is often contingent on the audience present as is evident in Beauty's recitals.

During performance, the instrumental music plays continually without any change, even when changes occur in the song text and dance theme. Therefore the dancers must be well coordinated and alert because the instruments only basically accompany; they do not give any further assistance such as cueing the dancers to change dance step. This is left to the lead-singer, who provides the necessary instructions and guidance during performance. The *òkwà ábù* inserts these directions in her songs without breaking or interrupting its flow.

Égwú Àmàlà is mimetic of specific Ogbaru actions and culture. The genre is most often staged on land but since it is a regatta dance, it can also be performed in the river Niger setting as Beauty did with her group. As this group paddled their canoe into the river, Beauty sang songs such as *Àmàlà bu uyi Beauty nweé'gwú oma* (*Àmàlà* is elegant, Beauty owns the beautiful dance), *Nde Oshimili nweé'gwú* (the Oshimili people own the dance), and *Ugbọ bumo* (the canoe has carried me away); all songs with themes related to the canoe and the river Niger.

7.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Égwú Àmàlà is the most popular of all Ogbaru women's dance genres. The genre is a performance intended for cultural education as well as the entertainment of the audience. It functions as an extension of the mythology as well as of the artistic and cultural conventions of the Ogbaru people. Although a handful of studies predate this work, my research is the most comprehensive in addressing issues of culture, gender, religion, transcription and analysis. Disciplinary perspectives adopted include cultural studies, gender studies and dance studies.

My discussion of *Égwú Àmàlà* began with an expantiation of gender conceptions in Nigeria, particularly among the Igbo west of the river Niger. I developed an argument which stressed that in religious as well as social life, including the politics and economy, of pre-colonial Ogbaru, a dual-sex system guided all aspects of life. I further contended that western ideologies as well as Christianity, which penetrated Nigeria in the twentieth century and favored patriarchy, effected significant changes in the social status of women. I also maintained that since Nigeria became independent from British rule in 1960, there have been visible and deliberate moves to resuscitate women's roles in public life. Both traditional women's associations and new organizations, especially those developed as a result of Christianity, have been enhanced to cater for the new needs of Igbo women.

In chapter three I sought to trace the origin of *Égwú Àmàlà* by exploring the mythical and historical origins of the genre. The discussion of *Égwú Àmàlà* cannot be complete without the

mention of its most illustrious exponent, Beauty Ogbuefi Okaome Obi. Among her contributions to the genre are her innovative skills in incorporating aspects of urban life style into this music and dance. In addition, I discussed the salient aspects of *Égwú Àmàlà* in enhancing cultural education, fostering identity, and serving as an agent of healing through music and dance.

Religion is fundamental to the Ogbaru, whose lives revolve around the river Niger, their main source of livelihood. Chapter four examines the traditional as well as the Christian religious factors as they affect and give agency to the genre. The river Niger is considered by the Ogbaru to be the abode of *mmọ mmili* or *onye mmili*, water spirits or water divinity whom they venerate as one of their advocates before the Supreme Being, Chukwu or God. In recent times, the water divinity has come to be called *Mama Wata*, a term which is prevalent among riverine peoples in West Africa (Côte d'Ivoire²⁵⁰ and Ghana²⁵¹) and the diaspora. Since *Égwú Àmàlà* is said to come from the water, *Égwú Àmàlà sina mmili bia*, the *Mami Wata* is greatly associated with this music and dance.

The importance of water in *Égwú Àmàlà* compels a comparison with the use of water in Christianity, where water is an important element for initiation – baptism and spiritual cleansing. Also the change in the discourse about traditional African religion and the African culture within the Catholic Church has paved a way for the discussion and use of African musical styles and instruments in the liturgy. This inculturation argues for a possible use and integration of suitable facets of *Égwú Àmàlà* music and dance into the Catholic liturgy. Such studies are an important contribution to Religious Studies, especially Catholic religious studies where recently the discourse on Traditional African Religion has dominated theological inquiry.

²⁵⁰ Opoku and Wicker 1994: 18-19.

²⁵¹ Wicker 2000: 209

The *Égwú Àmàlà* ensemble comprises three main sections: instrumental, vocal, and dance. In chapter five, I examined and described the various musical instruments used in the ensemble. The main feature of the vocal session is the *òkwà ábù* (lead-singer), who must be versatile in traditional poetry and be able to compose in the process of the performance. Dance in this genre is, on one level, the portrayal of religious experience since it is conceived as belonging to the water divinity. On a more practical level, dance is an enactment of the culture of the Ogbaru people, which includes social activities such as childcare and marriage, occupation, and politics. While discussing the main attributes of the genre, I elaborated on the important *óbú-ànyinyà* and how s/he attains her position. The other important figures in the dance section are the *Ikpazu* and *òkwò mmili*. In performance, the dancers assume a position that delineates a canoe as the most significant prop in *Égwú Àmàlà*.

The last chapter of this work deals with the transcription and analysis of some musical examples. Here, I analyzed the structure of the music and dance, which I subdivided into three parts: the introduction, the main body, and the end. Among the many songs of the genre that the various groups I researched sang and performed, I have chosen only a few for analysis in this work. The three songs that I transcribed deal with three themes that are relevant to the Ogbaru people, namely occupation (*Égwú Olu ogo*, Farming dance), history and ownership of the genre (*Égwú Aboh nwenu' gbọ yana àmàlà*, Aboh owns the canoe and the paddle), and belief system (*Égwú Olisa kenu madu nuwa*, God created people and the world).

What, then, are the implications of the issues raised in this dissertation? As far as the relationship between music and dance is concerned, we observe an interesting shift whereby the instrumental music accompanies but does not direct the dance. That is to say, the instrumental music does not compel a change of dance steps or dance themes. It only energizes the dancers to

intensify their dancing, particularly at the climactic section known as *isù égwú*, without in any way effecting a change in the basic dance patterns. The instrumental music thus attains a certain autonomy from the dancing and *vice versa*. The instrumental music is the same throughout the performance. All of this suggests that it might be fruitful to examine various degrees of dependency between dance and music, rather than assume a uniform dependency in Africa.

The concept of *Égwú Àmàlà* may not be found in the religious definitions of ritual, which according to the mythical origins of the genre was the sole purpose of its creation and even performance. Religious attitudes of the performers of *Égwú Àmàlà* have changed over the past years as a result of Western ideologies, but particularly as a result of Christianity. Rather, these ideologies could be located in the creative processes of the genre, which is articulated in dance.

Noteworthy is the fact that *Égwú Àmàlà* is women's dance that does not make use of any drums. Consequently there is no need for discussion of a master drummer as would normally be expected when discussing African music. Nonetheless, the concept exists in the genre. There is a master instrument, the *ogénè*, which albeit it does not "talk" to the dancers, communicates through loud and complex rhythmic structures, dynamics that the dancers externalize in intense body movements. Yet in the ensemble it is the *òkpòkòlò* rather than *ogénè* that is the most important instrument. With its impressive time-line pattern, the *òkpòkòlò* dominates the musical structure of the genre.

The songs employed in *Égwú Àmàlà* are poetic thematizations of such concerns as occupation, belief system and politics. The subject matter of *Égwú Àmàlà* songs includes valuable cues to pedagogy, critical expression and indigenous aesthetics. Thus the texts of the songs are the most important and basic part of *Égwú Àmàlà*; the melody is secondary. The dance is a visual accompaniment of the poetry embedded in the song. Thus dance accompanies poetry

and the way in which the dance movements interpret the poetry is an important aspect of the aesthetics of the genre. Through dance and song, aesthetic concepts and precepts are organized and verbalized.

The songs do not only provide a background and accompaniment to the dance, they also act as a medium for a subtler type of communication between the lead-singer (*òkwà ábù*) and the dancers and instrumentalists. The lead-singer's verbalizations take the form of praises, admonition or instructions to the musicians, which are often not apparent to the audience because they are subtly interwoven in the song and are mediated by indirect language.

My transcription and analysis of three songs from this repertoire illustrates some characteristics of *Égwú Àmàlà* songs, which include descending contour of the melodies, the use of disjunct motions to heighten the tension of the song, and the sensitivity of the three songs toward tonality. This analysis of only three songs may not represent a form from which statistical affirmations could be made. Still, an elaborate study of the *Égwú Àmàlà* song repertoire (text and melody) that would result in definite statistical conventions on the use of tonality and poetry in the genre can be inferred from what is offered here. Such a study would define how and why the Ogbaru verbalize their culture in poetry and song as well as in predominant tone structures such as pitch, scales, and range.

A special focus in this work has been on gender discourse. I have sought to complicate simplistic western understandings of gender by delving into the pre-colonial and subsequent transformational behaviors associated with gender. The dual-sex organization which permeates traditional Ogbaru plays off in gender negotiations in performance practices. In the instrumental ensemble, there is only one melodic instrument, the *òpì*. It is the only gendered instrument and is played only and solely by a male. Also, the *òpì* is the only “talking”

instrument in the ensemble. Why have women permitted this strong presence of a man in the genre? Interestingly, the women were not bothered about this presence nor did they ascribe it to a form of subordination. In fact, they justified the *òpì* being played by a man on aesthetic grounds. This suggests that the women were more concerned about their appearances than any ability to play the *òpì*.

Most striking is the fact that when men dance *Égwú Àmàlà*, they dance like women, not like themselves. The genre insists on female expression. In recent times, boys have been allowed into the women's dance space in *Égwú Àmàlà*, and for now, they too must dance like women. In this way, gender roles are enacted in performance. It remains to be seen what kinds of participation will take place in the future as the boys attain manhood. Will they still feel comfortable dancing with the women? Or will they want to carve their inner space within the genre? Or will both women and men redefine and renegotiate the music and dance, engendering a mixed group, a new *Égwú Àmàlà*? Be that as it may, *Égwú Àmàlà* demonstrates how performing arts can be used as spaces of gender negotiation as well as places where social change can take place.

As a contribution to ethnomusicology and African studies, the present study draws on African language concepts, belief systems, aesthetics, social structures, and performance. At the same time it borrows analytic tools of Western scholarship associated with metric analysis, rhythmic structures, notation, and tonality. Rather than work from assumptive generalizations about African expression systems, it seems better to focus on individual genres like *Égwú Àmàlà* that portray women in traditional performing arts. With the accumulation of such ethnographically specific studies in the future, our understanding of African creativity will be greatly enhanced and solidly based.

GLOSSARY

<i>Akiko</i>	Narratives, stories.
<i>Amuzo or ofia oma</i>	Cemetery or “good bush” also cemetery.
<i>Atutu inu</i>	Proverbs, proverbs and metaphoric speeches.
<i>Awalaka (nde awalaka)</i>	Hand clapping (hand clappers).
<i>Égwú Àmàlà</i>	Paddle dance or paddle drama.
<i>Èsùlú áká</i>	Red coral bead bracelets.
<i>Èsùlú onu</i>	Red coral bead necklace.
<i>Ezediosa</i>	Dance Father or Patron of the dance group.
<i>Eze-égwú</i>	Means, the king or head of the dance group.
<i>Igholu ábù</i>	Responding to the call.
<i>Ikpéázu</i>	Rear dancer.
<i>Íkpọ ábù</i>	Calling the song.
<i>Isù égwú</i>	Climax of the dance.
<i>Ndé áwáláká</i>	Those who clap in the ensemble.
<i>Ndé nkwà</i>	Instrumentalists.
<i>Ndé úkwé</i>	Chorus singers.
<i>Ndi Òshìmìlì</i>	The water people, riverine people.
<i>Ngholu</i>	Apprentice lead singer.
<i>Nna Chukwu</i>	God the Father.
<i>Óbú-ànyìnà</i>	Lead-dancer.
<i>Obuzọ</i>	Lead or front dancer.
<i>Ochiligwe</i>	Dance Mother or Matron of the dance group.
<i>Ode-akwokwọ</i>	Secretary.

<i>Ogbuefi</i>	Igbo chieftaincy title, literary “killer of a cow.”
<i>Òkpùlùpù okwu</i>	Gems of wisdom.
<i>Òkwà ábù</i>	Lead-singer.
<i>Òkwọ mílì ugbo</i>	Water collector, mid-canoe dancer.
<i>Olisa</i>	God.
<i>Ọlọgba</i>	Ọpì (horn) player.
<i>Omele</i>	Festival when also individuals or groups present.
<i>Onye mili or mami wata</i>	The female deity of the River Niger.
<i>Onye ná ákúzí égwú</i>	Dance teacher or choreographer.
<i>Onye-na-edebe-ego</i>	Treasurer.
<i>Onyeọcha</i>	White person, that is, a European.
<i>Òshìmìlì</i>	Large body of water. The term is used by the Ogbaru to refer to the River Niger.
<i>Otu Aboh Nadi</i>	“Aboh is Great” Group.
<i>Otu Égwú Àmàlà Na-enye Anwuli</i>	“Égwú Àmàlà give joy” Group.
<i>Otu Égwú Àmàlà</i>	Égwú Àmàlà Group.
<i>Otu Ife Chukwu Deni</i>	“What God has written” Group.
<i>Ụmụ égwú</i>	Dancers.

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEWS

Oko-Amakom, January 19, 2006

1. Onuah Nnojeli Ijeoma, Current Patron of *Égwú Àmàlà* Dance group in Oko-Amakom.
2. Ijele Ben Oba, Elder in Oko-Amakom.
3. Okita Denis Egonu, Elder in Oko-Amakom.
4. Joseph Nwanodi Ozah.
5. Nwabueze Stephen Ogbuchi, Teacher and my research assistant and collaborator. We are first cousins.
6. Mrs. Comfort Ogbuchi nee Ozah, my aunt, former *Égwú Àmàlà* dancer whose husband, Ijele Nwachukwu Ogbuchi was the Akajiaku of *Égwú Àmàlà* (Patron of the group) in Oko-Amakom. He died in 2001.

Oko-Amakom, January 20, 2006

7. Mrs. Queen Alanza, dancer.
8. Mrs. Ngozi Oba nee Ozah, dancer. She is my cousin.

9. Peter Amachi Egonu, male dancer.
10. Mrs. Kate Akpati, dancer.

Asaba, January 20, 2006

11. Mr. Udoma, Delta State Council for Arts and Culture, Asaba, Delta State.
12. Mrs. E. I. Patani, Delta State Council for Arts and Culture, Asaba, Delta State.
13. Mr. Friday Amaziah, Director of Culture, Delta State Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Asaba, Delta State.

Aboh, January 21, 2006

14. Chief Enebeli Ogu, Omodi of Aboh, Elder who took part in the various dances that engendered *Égwú Àmàlà*.
15. Amachi Ugboma, male dancer and *óbú-ànyìnà* – the horse tail bearer.
16. Rev. Fr. Oputa, Prince and son of the late King Obi Oputa II of Aboh.
17. Josephine Uti, *Ochiligwe of Otu Ife Chukwu Deni*, Aboh.

Asaba, January 26, 2006

18. Prince Michael Oputa, Journalist and son of the late King Obi Oputa II of Aboh.
19. Prof. Prince Christopher Oputa, son of the late King Obi Oputa of Aboh.

Ashaka, January 28, 2006

20. Mrs. Mary Jane Ejeoma, Teacher and my research assistant.

21. Chief I. N. Ozegbe, the Omordi Nwadei of Aboh, Elder and Patron of *Égwú Àmàlà* dance group in Ashaka.
22. Madam Agnes Odili, co-wife of Beauty Okaome.
23. Iyiochi Opene, *Ikpazu* (Rear dancer) of the *Égwú Àmàlà* group at Ashaka.

Onitsha, Anambra State

24. Chief Beauty Ogbuefi Okaome, Composer, dancer and innovator of *Égwú Àmàlà*.
25. Clara Akubueze, Social worker and my research assistant and collaborator, east of the Niger.

Atani, January 29, 2006

26. Mrs. Kalia Ngodi nee Ogbuanyashi, dancer from Oko-Amakom but married and living in Atani, Anambra State.

Oko (Head Bridge), January 31, 2006

27. Young Egwuodili, *òpì* gourd horn player.
28. Beauty Okaome Obi's performance.

Ndoni, February 11, 2006

29. Mrs. Chinyere Odili
30. *Égwú Àmàlà* group, Ndoni.

APPENDIX B

FIELDWORK QUESTIONNAIRE

These questions were formulated based on my previous knowledge of *Égwú Àmàlà* as a native of the area in which this genre forms an integral part of the culture. In the field, I did not adhere strictly to these questions. Rather the questionnaire served as a guide that directed my discussions with my informants and through which responses were allowed to develop. Sometimes, especially in in-group dialogues, I even abandoned the questions and concentrated on the flow of the discourse with my informants and collaborators.

Questions

1. What is the climate, vegetation geographical setting, occupation such as farming, fishing, trading of this people?
 - How do these features interplay in the construction and performance of *Égwú Àmàlà*?
2. How is gender constructed in Ogbaruland?
 - What do the women say about themselves? And in respect to the men?
 - How have colonial and postcolonial agendas affected gender conception in Ogbaruland?
 - What roles do men play in this dance genre?

3. Historical perspectives:

- Origin: How did the dance come to be?
- Which Ogbaru village was the first to perform this dance and how did it spread to other areas?
- What role did Madam Oneé Alagoa play in the origin and/or development of *Égwú Àmàlà*?
- What role and changes did Madam Okaome bring to this dance genre?
- Did the dance originate/develop from *Égwú Ekwe* (a maiden dance)? Or *Égwú Isha, Àmàlà-bu-uyo, Égwú Ojeni* (women's dance)?
- Was the genre men's dance?
- When and why did it become women's dance?

Tripartite model of *Égwú Àmàlà*: Vocal, Instrumental, and Dance music.

1. Vocal Music –

- Free Rhythm (speech)
- Strict rhythm (stylized Speech)
- Lead singer: her responsibilities as director of the dance, as composer/choreographer.
 - How does the lead singer go about composing her melodies?
 - What constitutes a good singing voice in this culture?
 - How does the community assess the lead singer?
- Texts of songs: parables, proverbs, philosophies, aphorisms, and narratives.
- How effective is this dance as an expressive medium of communication?
- What are the changes that have taken place in the vocal repertoire?
 - Has the singing style changed?
 - Why?

2. Instrumental Music – What is the instrumental constitution of the ensemble?

- *Òpì* language (speech rhythm)
- Dance music (Stylized speech rhythm).
- What roles do the other instruments play in the ensemble?
- Instrumentalists:
 - i. Who plays what instrument?
 - ii. Why do only men play the *òpì*?
 - iii. Are the other instruments gendered?
 - iv. What are the cultural criteria for this taxonomy?
 - v. How is the text of the *òpì* coded and decoded?

3. Dance – stylized gesture

- What is the cultural significance of the dance to the society and individuals – fertility,
- How are the musicians recruited and who recruits them?

- How long does a group learn the dance before it is performed in public?
 - Reconstruction from oral tradition of origins; its famous composers, dancers, structure, style, music, costumes, props and paraphernalia including changes and innovations of the dance genre.
 - Was the dance originally circular in form and when and why did it change to linear two columns?
 - Who and how is the *Égwú Àmàlà* taught to the performers?
 - How long does it take for a dancer to master the art of the dance?
 - Who ascertains when a dancer has learned the art of dancing?
 - What are the criteria for determining the aesthetics of the dance?
 - Does the structural disposition of the dance reflect the social structure of the Ogbaruans?
 - How are the dance groups formed, e.g. according to age groups?
4. Verbal and nonverbal means of communication in the genre
- Where do they perform?
 - How do they perform?
 - When do they perform?
 - Who performs?
 - What do they communicate through this dance?
5. Costume and stage properties (original and contemporary, symbolism).
6. Are any religious rites performed before or after the *Égwú Àmàlà* performance?
7. Who are the important personas in this genre?
- Matron?
 - Father/Mother of the dance etc.?
8. Audience participation:
- Restricted and controlled?
 - Free audience participation?
 - How does the audience participate in this dance genre?
9. Musical resources:
- The relationship between music and dance, music and song.
 - How do the musicians interact with one another?

OUTSIDE MY RESEARCH BOUNDARIES

1. Does the paddle dance exist in other riverine areas of Nigeria?
 - Cross River State: Name and gender perspective
 - Benue State: Name and gender viewpoint
 - River State: Name and gender relations
 - What are their names in each of these areas?

How different is *Égwú Àmàlà* from other dances of the area and how can we best construct differences?

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