

SOUNDS AND SYMBOLS: A LINGUISTIC AND VISUAL ANALYSIS OF UMUCHU FUNERAL DIRGES IN ANAMBRA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study undertakes an acoustical analysis of dirges among the Umuchu people of Anambra State, Nigeria, to document and explain their sound structures and communicative functions within the funeral context. Methodologically, the research adopts a mixed qualitative–quantitative approach. Primary data were generated through ethnographic fieldwork involving participant observation and in situ audio recordings of dirge performances during funerary rites in selected Umuchu communities. High-fidelity digital recorders were employed to ensure accurate capture of vocal and instrumental sounds, while informed consent and culturally appropriate protocols guided data collection. These measurements were complemented by qualitative interpretations derived from interviews with performers, elders, and cultural custodians to contextualise the acoustic patterns within Umuchu cosmology and mourning practices. Some of the musical instruments used in chanting these dirges were also identified, including *ngede-egwu*, *ogene*, and *ichaka*. Data triangulation was achieved by correlating acoustic findings with performance contexts and participants' explanations. Through this methodological framework, the study demonstrates how Umuchu dirges encode emotion, social meaning, and ritual significance, while also contributing empirical data to the documentation of Igbo musical heritage.

Keywords: Dirge, Acoustics, Umuchu, Funeral

Introduction

Language is one of the most important and distinguishing characteristics of human activity. Humans have used language to communicate in a variety of ways, including visual, sign, and written forms. Obviously, written language (words) is heavily used in songwriting, serving as the primary raw material. To speak or write, one must use words. The lyrics of a song affect its essence. A song is one of the most common elements of music. There are different types of songs. Each has a unique feeling and feel. A rap song, for example, can be Christian, while a ballad can sound like metal music. Songs can, however, be broadly classified by lyrics, music, tone, culture, and other similar characteristics (Onwuegbuna & Ikwemesi, 2019).

This research focuses on dirges in Umuchu, an Igbo-speaking hamlet in Anambra State's Aguata Local Government Area. A dirge is a type of song that is traditionally sung and played to show sadness, especially when someone has died. In Africa, for example, the death of a loved one is always a sad occurrence, and dirge is one of the symbols used to symbolise the melancholy in the environment. Can someone talk about dirge without referencing culture or art?

People have defined culture and arts in many ways, but there is agreement that while the former relates to the general way of life of a people and how they do things, the latter refers to the creativity engaged in these activities. For example, Baldwin *et al.* (2021) and Spencer-Oatey & Kádár (2021) agree that culture encompasses the totality of a people's way of life, while arts represent the creative dimensions of these cultural activities (Adejumo, 2020). Art can take many forms, such as literature, poetry, dance, drama, music, and sculpture. It can also be interpreted as referring to creativity,

aesthetics, and emotional expression. It is widely defined as the act of creating things that, like the concept of creation, are driven by the creative impulse. Art encounters are valued in practically every part of people's sociocultural lives. The creation of music, as well as the feelings it evokes, is integral to artistic creativity. Again, the influence and quality of the sounds created depend on the instruments' quality and the overt manipulations applied. These vast arrays of instruments are works of art.

Sounds and their manipulations have evolved into efficient means of communicating messages or expressing feelings and emotions. In truth, depending on how they are used, they can be a valuable and successful mode of communication. For example, sound produces speech, music, and noise. Even species, in their various ecological contexts, express themselves through noise. Uzoagba, Ogboji, and Ezejesi (2012:29) state that "musical sounds are produced by regular vibrations in the body and transmitted by pressure waves in the air." They further grouped the musical instruments into categories such as idiophones—rattles, bells, gongs, and wooden slit drums; chordophones—such as the Igbo harp, guitar, etc.; and, finally, electrophones. All of these are for proper and meaningful sound production.

Death and grief in traditional and contemporary African societies have contributed to highlighting the various emotional responses. This generation is accompanied by works of art, both visual and theatrical. The calculated body dispositions, interlaced with the rhythm of musical instruments, go a long way toward eliciting feelings of sorrow and solace, displays of wealth, and even the rewriting of biographies. For example, Bascom (1953) notes in Chukwu (2011:3) that there is an actual drum language, in which the drums actually converse by recreating the melody and rhythm of phrases.

In analysing the interment scenario, Ikwuemesi and Onwuegbuna (2013) note that the heavy presence of sounds, words, visuals, gestures, and images transforms the tragedy of death into a creative drama. As a result, the creation, transmission, and interpretation of dirge rely on artistic works. In Umuchu, a town in Anambra State's Aguata Local Government, art objects are essential for suitable music during interments and funerals. This community will serve as a case study for the inquiry.

Umuchu is one of the towns in Anambra State's Aguata Local Government Area. Onwuejeogwu (1981) claims that Umuchu, the birthplace of the Igbo people, is the biggest town in the local government region. According to Nnolim (1953), Umuchu is a confederation of three minor towns—Ihite, Amanasaa, and Okpu-na-Achalla—that united to form a political union to protect themselves from the cruelty of the slave trade. Because their land is fertile, the Umuchu people rely on a variety of agricultural activities to exist.

Death and Its Announcement in Umuchu

A person's bio-physical being ceases during death. Idemili-Aronu and Ugwu (2013) observe that death in the traditional Igbo society is a transition from the physical to the spiritual. According to Nwaozuzu (2013), this has also contributed to the belief in reincarnation in African cosmology. In Umuchu, death announcements are gender-sensitive. Agbo (2013) asserts that the sociopolitical structure of a particular setting determines whether a death is confirmed or announced. Until the relevant authorities verify it, knowledge of someone's passing remains mere conjecture.

In Umuchu, a man's death is first announced to the eldest man in his extended family, who then shares the heartbreaking news with his relatives before the public is informed. In other nearby towns, such as Oko, for instance, the public is informed by members of the deceased's immediate family using metal gongs (*ogene*) or slit drums *ekwe*, after which funeral arrangements begin. In the case of

an older woman, her first daughter, accompanied by any of her sisters, takes the news of her mother's death to their family.

This tradition underscores the importance of familial ties and communal support during times of loss. The gathering of family members often leads to shared stories and memories, fostering a sense of unity amidst grief. This collective remembrance not only honours the deceased but also strengthens the bonds among the living, reminding everyone of their shared reflections. As they recount these cherished moments, laughter often mingles with tears, creating an emotional feeling that encapsulates the complexity of love and loss. This shared experience can catalyse healing, encouraging individuals to express their feelings and support one another in meaningful ways. The act of coming together serves as a poignant reminder that even in sorrow, love and connection endure, providing solace and strength to those left behind. The use of musical instruments not only conveys the message but also honours the deceased, allowing the community to come together in remembrance and mourning. This they do using euphemistic language to mitigate the impact of the news.

Methods

This study employs a qualitative ethnographic research design, integrating multimodal discourse analysis to examine the linguistic, acoustic, and visual dimensions of funeral dirges among the Umuchu people of Anambra State. The research adopts an interdisciplinary approach that combines methods from linguistic anthropology, ethnomusicology, performance studies, and visual anthropology to capture the holistic nature of dirge performance as a communicative and cultural practice. A purposive sampling technique is employed to select participants based on their expertise, experience, and active involvement in funeral rituals. The sample includes 15 primary dirge performers (predominantly women aged 45 and above), as well as 10 community elders and cultural historians from Umuchu. Instruments for data collection included audio-visual recording equipment and devices, an interview guide, an observation checklist, a field notebook, and still cameras. The researcher engages in prolonged ethnographic fieldwork, attending and observing multiple funeral ceremonies where dirges were performed. This method allows for documentation of naturally occurring performances in their authentic cultural contexts. Observations focus on the interplay between linguistic utterances, acoustic patterns, gestural movements, spatial arrangements, and symbolic objects used during mourning rituals. Again, complete funeral ceremonies and specific dirge performances were recorded using multiple camera angles and high-quality audio equipment. This multimodal documentation captures the synchronisation of verbal, vocal, and visual elements, enabling detailed analysis of how meaning is constructed across different semiotic modes. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants to elicit indigenous knowledge about dirge texts, performance conventions, symbolic meanings, and cultural significance. Interview questions were structured to explore the linguistic structure and content of dirge texts. Regarding ethical considerations, participants provided informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity were maintained, and sensitive personal information was protected.

Data Analysis and Discussion

Dirges are sorrowful, emotional songs, mainly used to console the bereaved, neighbours, and relations on the death of their loved ones. In Umuchu, according to Nkwo (1984:165), the composing and singing of death songs mostly fall within the domain of the womenfolk, especially the *Umuada* (daughters of the town married within or outside the community) and *Alutaradi* or *Nludi* (women married from other communities). Men do not seem to have not only interest but also time to be involved in such 'trivialities.' Nkwo's opinion contradicts that of Amadi (1966) in *The Concubine*, where he maintains strongly that death songs are mainly composed and sung by men. The wording of these dirges and the acoustic effect that accompanies them affect, in no small measure, the effects

each of them has on the mourning audience. Most of the dirges analysed here are similar to those used in general Igbo, but with slight differences. They shall be arranged in groups depending on their functions.

Dirge of Consolation

Table 1: Dirge of consolation

S/N	Dirges	Translation
1.	₁ Ọnwụ ị mara buru ego ₂ rapurụ mụ otu nwanne m ₃ Ọnwụ ị mara buru ego ₄ Rapurụ mụ otu nwanne m	Death if you had known, You would have taken money and left my only ‘brother’ (twice)
2.	₁ Ọnwụ ee, ana m aju gi na onye ga-ebi? ₂ Ọnwụ ee, ana m aju gi na onye ga-ebi? ₃ Ọnwụ gburu nwoke gbuo nwanyi, gi na onye ga-ebi? ₄ Ọnwụ gburu nwanyi n’afọ ime, gi na onye ga-ebi?	Death, I am asking: ‘Whom will you live with?’ (twice) The death that killed a man and a woman, who will live with you? The death that killed a woman in childbirth, who will live with you?
3.	₁ Dibe dibe dibe ₂ Ndidi ka mma ₃ Onye o mere ya dibe oo ₄ Ndidi ka mma	Endurance is better If you are affected, it is better to endure.

The above dirges are apostrophic. An apostrophe is a figure of speech that directs speech to an imaginary person or an abstract idea. Death in (1) above is addressed as if it were a person that can be seen and discussed with. The feeling evoked in the listening mourners is one of defeat. They feel that they have been adversely affected by the incorruptible nature of death. Perhaps, if Death had thought like a man, he would have preferred to take money rather than a human being. Still addressing Death, the songwriter wonders what Death benefits from killing people, even when it could collect money and leave the person. When this feeling of defeat is evoked in the mourners, they seem to raise the tempo of their weeping.

For (2), from the type of question directed at ‘Death,’ the singer sounds as if she needs an answer from ‘Death.’ For example,

_{1/2} Ọnwụ ee, ana m aju, gi na onye ga-ebi?

When no response came from the addressee, the song continued with other heart-rending lines. If death can kill a woman at childbirth, who then cannot be caught by the cold fangs of death?

*₃Ọnwụ gburu nwoke gbuo nwanyi, gi na onye ga-ebi?
₄Ọnwụ gburu nwanyi n’afọ ime, gi na onye ga-ebi?*

This dirge can be sung for anybody, no matter the type of death s/he had, following lines (3) and (4) of the above. The type of feeling it evokes in the bereaved is similar to the one in (1)—defeat, having been beaten by death. Death kills without considering sex, age, social status, affluence, etc.

Dirge (3) is usually sung to remind the bereaved that one has to endure the pain of loss once death occurs, since that is the only option left. If one decides not to endure, what will one do? Since death does not visit a household based on ‘his’ friendship with them, but does his job as a faithful messenger. Behaving in the light of (4) below will only complicate issues because loud cries have never in history woken a dead person.

Dirge of Lamentation

Table 2: Dirge of lamentation

S/N	Dirges	Translation
4.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1Onwụ a narawo m onye m ji mere nwanne n'ụwa 2Onwụ ị narawo m onye m ji mere nwanne n'ụwa 3Onwụ na-enweghị oyi anarawo m onye m ji mere nwanne n'ụwa 4Agụ na-enweghị oyi, ị narawo m onye m ji mere nwanne n'ụwa 	<p>Death has taken my brother away from this world Death, you have taken my brother away from this world Death that has no friend has taken my brother away from this world The tiger that has no friend, you have taken my brother away from this world.</p>
5.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1Onye bụ enyi Onwụ? 2Onwụ enweghị enyi ma ncha 3Ụmụ agboghọ, ha bụ enyi onwụ? 4Onwụ enweghị enyi ma ncha 5Ụmụ okorobia, ha bụ enyi onwụ? 6Onwụ enweghị enyi ma ncha 7Nne na nna, ha bụ enyi onwụ? 8Onwụ enweghị enyi ma ncha 	<p>Who is a friend to death? Death has no friend at all. Are young girls friends to death? Death has no friend at all. Are young boys friends to death? Death has no friend at all. Are mother and father friends to death? Death has no friend at all.</p>
6.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1Anyị ga-etibere onwụ mkpu? 2Anyị ga-ebere onwụ akwa? 3Anyị ga-eti aka n'obi ooo? 4Onwụ ooloooo onwụ. 	<p>Should we shout for death? Should we cry for death? Should we beat our chest? Death oolooo death!</p>

Dirge (4) is both apostrophic and lamentation-oriented in nature. The apostrophe is seen in the use of the presumptive pronoun ‘ị’ in lines 2 and 4, which addresses Death as if face-to-face. Death is even addressed as ‘a tiger’ because of its strength and vigour in taking people’s lives. This means that anybody attacked by a tiger is as good as dead. No wonder the metaphor.

3Onwụ ị narawo m onye m ji mere nwanne n'ụwa
4Agụ na-enweghị oyi ị narawo m onye m ji mere nwanne n'ụwa

Lines 1 and 3 (of 4), on the other hand, are lamentations. The bereaved expresses his pain and suffering in the loss of his beloved and the resultant loneliness. Consider the following lines:

- 1 Ọnwụ anarawo m onye m ji mere nwanne n'ụwa
 3 Ọnwụ na-enweghị oyi anarawo m
 onye m ji mere nwanne n'ụwa

Having known how brutal Death is, it becomes ironic for this dirge to pose such a question, asking whose friend is death. As expected from the answer, death has no friend at all, not among the young or even the old. No one, no matter how old, wants to die. Dirge (5) is somewhat consoling because a dead man did not die because he was a friend to death, but because death is a natural phenomenon that must take its toll on every man at one point or another. Therefore, the bereaved or mourning friends and relatives are consoled because the death of their relative was not an anomaly or misdemeanour but the will of the ancestors that such must occur at such a time. In such a case, the best thing to do is to heed the consoling words in (6). Not only are the lines in (6) thought-provoking, but they also evoke painful feelings in the bereaved or mourners. Death can be so wicked to take one's only sibling away from one. It is dramatic and is usually presented in a question-and-answer form.

Dirge of Affluence

The type of death song sung for the affluent is usually different from that sung for others. Typically, a man will rise from among the mourners and begin singing praises to the dead man. He jumps from place to place praising him with such names as "Okaa Omee," "Dike," "Ọchịrị Ọzụọ," "O Me Ka Nna Ya" (especially when the father of the deceased was great himself), etc. In another case, the women may sing such songs as (7) for the dead. Emphasis here is on the uprightness of the dead when he/she were alive. This song is not sung for dead criminals or adulteresses.

Table 3: Dirge of affluence

S/N	Dirges	Translation
7.	Ebulu n'obi Ebulu n'obi ooooo Ebulu n'obi Ebulu n'obi e kwe m ekeneeeee Ebulu n'obi	This dirge is literally translated to mean that the living will never forget the dead because of his/her good works while alive.

It is women who sing this song to this day. They sing it around the grave of the bereaved. As they do this, some wine, meat, and fowl will be given to them because the dead were both affluent and upright and did not mingle themselves with any dubious thing while alive. Again, it is not just affluence that makes the living remember the dead. It could be because they were so important to people in the community before their death.

Dirge of Warning

Deaths and funerals also create an opportunity for the living to talk to one another, either directly or indirectly, about their lifestyles. According to one of the participants, even the way a daughter-in-law treats her mother-in-law is usually used against her when the woman eventually dies. Consider the dirge below:

Table 3: Dirge of affluence

S/N	Dirges	Translation
8.	₁ Nwa agboghọ jiri shọrọpụ lee nne di ya ₂ orịa ₃ O jiri shọrọpụ lee nne di ya orịa ₄ O na-anwụ anwụ ya nwụọ ₅ O naghị anwụ ya ghara ₆ O jiri shọrọpụ lee nne di ya orịa	₁ Daughter-in-law attended to her sick mother-in-law with disrespect and poor commitment ₂ She attended to her sick mother-in-law with disrespect and poor commitment ₃ If she (mother-in-law) wants to die, let her die ₄ If she (mother-in-law) does not want to die, let her remain ₅ She attended to her sick mother-in-law with disrespect and poor commitment

When a woman who had sons and daughters-in-law dies but was maltreated during her lifetime by one of her daughters-in-law, a dirge (8) is usually sung for such a daughter-in-law as a punishment to her and a deterrent to other women who may have the same attitude towards their mothers-in-law. The picture in (8) shows a woman who did not take good care of her mother-in-law. However, the meaning of ‘good care’ is relative because there are some women who hate their sons’ wives, no matter what the younger women do to impress them. This means that there is usually a problem in determining what the *Umuada* will interpret as not taking care of, because some mothers-in-law are impossible to impress.

Some Musical Equipment Used in Umuchu During Funerals

In Umuchu, musical instruments such as the gong ogene, drum igba, wooden drum ekwe, and rattles ichaka are used to harmonise the dirge music and create the desired effect(s) on listeners. Below are pictures of some instruments used by the Umuchu mourners during funerals.



Fig. 1: Xylophone (*ngedegwu*)



Fig 2: *Udu*

@ C. Uzoagba (2015)



Fig 3: Slit drum (Ekwe)
@ C. Uzoagba (2015)

@ C. Uzoagba (2015)



Fig 4: Metal gong (Ogene)
@ C. Uzoagba (2015)



5: Gong (igba)
@ C. Uzoagba (2015)



Fig. 6: Ichaka
@ C. Uzoagba (2015)

NB: These pictures were taken from the archives of Madam Eshiole Ume, a traditional body decorator and dancer.

Acoustic Analysis and Cultural Contexts of the Instruments

Fig. 1 (Ngedegwu): The image depicts an Igbo traditional drum. In Umuchu, it is called *ngede-egwu* and holds deep cultural and acoustic significance in Igbo society — especially during burials and funerals. The drum shown is cylindrical and made from hollowed wood, covered with animal skin, and bound with rope or raffia for tuning. The drumsticks placed across the top are used to strike the drumhead, producing rhythmic, resonant tones. The painted surface and decorative patterns symbolise its Igbo identity. The sound of the drum depends on tension, size, and the material used for the membrane. Larger drums like the *Ikoro* produce deep, low-frequency sounds that can travel long distances. The resonant sound can evoke emotion, creating an atmosphere of solemnity, respect, or mourning during funeral rites. In Igbo funerals, drums like this are played to announce a death, especially that of a titled man or elder. The drumming pattern conveys specific messages, such as the deceased's social status. During the burial ceremony, drumming accompanies dirges, dances, and rituals, helping the community express grief, honour the dead, and transit the spirit to the ancestral realm. Acoustic vibrations that accompany the drum are believed to bridge the living and spiritual

worlds, guiding the deceased into the realm of the ancestors. The drum serves as both a musical and communicative instrument in Igbo burials. Its deep, resonant, and far-reaching acoustics embody the Igbo worldview, in which sound connects humans, community, and spirits, marking the solemn transition from life to ancestral existence.

Fig 2 (Udu): is a traditional Igbo musical instrument. It is a type of clay pot drum integral to Igbo musical and ritual traditions, particularly in dirges and mourning performances. *Udu* is a globular clay pot with a narrow neck and a side hole. It is traditionally hand-moulded and fired, and is often decorated with pigments and symbolic patterns, as seen in the image. It is played by striking the side hole or body with the palm, producing deep, resonant, and airy tones. In Umuchu dirges, the *udu*'s sound complements the vocal tone and often serves as a rhythmic and emotional foundation. The clay material signifies the earth (*ala*), a sacred element in Igbo cosmology associated with birth, death, and the ancestors. Thus, playing the *Udu* during funerals is not just musical; it is ritualistic, invoking the earth to receive and comfort the spirit of the dead. The *Udu*'s sound is also used to punctuate lamentations and to accompany chants or recitations of praise for the departed. It is often played alongside other instruments, such as the *ogene* (metal gong) and *igba* (drum), to create layered acoustic textures. While drums and gongs provide rhythmic clarity, the *Udu* supplies the emotional depth, reinforcing the sorrowful, reflective nature of dirges.

Fig. 3 (Ekwe): is typically made from a solid block of hardwood, hollowed out to create a chamber. It has two or more parallel slits cut on top, which produce different pitches when struck with sticks. The *Ekwe* functions as an idiophone, producing sound through the vibration of its body. During funerals, the *Ekwe* provides the rhythmic and tonal backbone of the dirge performances. Its sound often punctuates the wailing or singing of mourners, giving structure to the lamentation. The slow, measured beats create an atmosphere of solemnity and reverence. The wooden material of the *Ekwe* connects it to nature and to the ancestors, central elements in Igbo spirituality. The sound of the *Ekwe* conveys messages to both the living and the dead. Its deep tones are said to call forth ancestral attention, acting as a sonic bridge between worlds during funeral rites. The *Ekwe* also embodies communal grief; its resonance echoes through the village, signalling collective mourning and solidarity. It is often played alongside the *Udu* and *Igba* to create a layered acoustic effect. While the *Udu* provides soft, hollow bass tones, and the *Igba* offers rhythmic continuity, the *Ekwe* delivers sharp, articulate beats that cut through the ensemble. This combination allows the dirge's emotional intensity to come through, conveying both grief and spiritual transition.

Fig. 4 (Ogene): is a conical or bell-shaped metal instrument, usually forged from iron or bronze by traditional blacksmiths (*ndị nkà*). It produces sound when struck with a wooden or metal beater. The instrument in the image is decoratively painted in red, yellow, and black patterns. These colours often signify vitality, spirituality, and transition in Igbo symbolism. *Ogene* is an idiophone, since it produces sound from the vibration of its own material. When struck, it emits a sharp metallic tone that can be modulated by varying the striking position or intensity. Its bright, penetrating sound allows it to travel over long distances, thereby making it an effective instrument for communication and ritual signalling. The metallic resonance often cuts through other sounds in a dirge ensemble, creating an acoustic contrast to the softer tones of the *Udu* and *Igba*. During funerary rites, the *Ogene* serves both musical and communicative functions, as it may be used to announce a death, especially that of an elder or titled person; in dirges, its measured strikes mark the rhythm and tempo, guiding singers and dancers through the lamentation sequence. The pattern of *Ogene* beats can also convey coded messages or phrases, symbolically “speaking” to the community and ancestors. Its sound evokes solemnity and respect with punctuating moments of reflection or transition in the performance. In Umuchu, the *Ogene* is associated with authority and ancestral presence. Its metallic

timbre is believed to pierce the boundary between the physical and spiritual worlds, carrying human lamentations to the ancestors. The clarity and brightness of its tone represent truth, awakening, and spiritual calling. These are tripartite attributes that are essential to the ritual communication of dirges. By striking the *Ogene*, performers invoke not only rhythm but also spiritual attention, summoning the deceased's spirit and the ancestors who welcome it. The *Ogene* often works in concert with the *Ekwe* to provide rhythmic dialogue; the *Udu* to ground the performance with deep resonance; and the *igba* to maintain rhythmic pulse and continuity. The *Ogene* is an acoustic symbol of voice, rhythm, and ritual connection in Igbo dirges. Its sharp, metallic tone not only organises musical performance but also embodies the spiritual communication at the heart of Igbo mourning practices. Through its sound, grief is transformed into a vibrant dialogue between the living and the ancestors, affirming the continuity of life, death, and memory.

Fig. 5 (igba):

The *Igba* is a membranophone that produces sound through the vibration of a stretched membrane. It is typically made from hollowed wood, covered at the top with animal skin (often goat or antelope), and secured with raffia or leather cords. The drumsticks placed across the top are used for striking, producing a wide range of rhythmic tones. The *Igba* produces deep, resonant, and rhythmic sounds that can vary in pitch depending on the drum skin's tension and the force of the strike. Its vibration and resonance evoke both energy and solemnity, depending on the context and rhythm pattern. The drum's acoustics can fill open spaces, making it ideal for communal gatherings like funerals, where sound plays a key role in uniting participants emotionally and spiritually. In Igbo funerals, the *Igba* is one of the principal instruments used during funerary rites (*ikwa ozu*) and memorial ceremonies. It accompanies dirges, dances, and chants, creating the rhythmic backdrop for mourning and remembrance. Its rhythm is used to i) announce the death of a community member, ii) signal the start of ritual performances or dances, iii) accompany the procession of the deceased to the burial site, and iv) express grief and celebration. For titled men or elders, specific rhythmic patterns are played to reflect their status and achievements, effectively narrating their life story through sound. The *Igba* serves as a unifying force during funerals.

Fig. 6 (Ichaka): The *ichaka* is essentially a gourd or calabash instrument which is covered (or netted) with beads, seeds or small pebbles so that when shaken or tapped, it gives a *rattling* or *shaking* sound. It is classified as an idiophone in the Igbo traditional instrument taxonomy. It is used alongside other instruments, such as flutes, drums, and horns, rather than as a solo instrument. It is usually played by shaking, tapping against the palm, or moving it; the beads strike the gourd or each other, producing a rhythmic rattling sound.

Conclusion

The paper concludes, from the foregoing, that the various dirges discussed provoke different effects in listeners. The acoustic effects generated by the first and second dirges create a feeling of defeat where the mourners feel subdued by the personality of *Death* for snatching away a loved one. The third aims to create the effect of consolation in the mourners, recognising that the dead cannot be brought back to life by shedding tears; as such, the bereaved and the mourners should bear their loss. The fourth, though metaphoric, is also woven with lamentation and a great pain at the loss of a very close relative. The inclusion of lamentation elicits intense wailing and tears from the bereaved and mourners. Dirges five and six, unlike three, initiate the action of consolation because death has no respect for the great or small, old or young, etc and is a natural occurrence. They stress that being consoled is the only option the bereaved have.

The dirge of affluence does not provoke so much pain, defeat, or regret. Instead, it leads to several wishes and subtle pleas as to why death may be so inconsiderate as to take a man who had sacrificed

much for his people. The picture of the dead painted in the dirge could also lead to loud sighing, beating of the chest by men, shaking of the head and a few tears by the bereaved and other mourners. The acoustic effects of the dirge of warning during burials are thought-provoking for not only the daughters-in-law of the dead but daughters-in-law in general.

Again, the lyrics, when combined with the mournful or praise-filled sound effects, determine the responses of the bereaved and mourners. Conclusively, each of the instruments examined here contributes distinct acoustic textures: the Igba's heartbeat-like pulse, the *Udu's* haunting bass rumble, the *Ekwe's* hollow articulate calls, the Ogene's piercing metallic signal, the *Ichaka's* shimmering rattle, and the funeral drum's ritual cadence. Collectively, these sounds create a layered acoustic landscape that supports mourning, marks transitions, summons ancestral presence, and binds the community in collective remembrance. Through vibration, rhythm and resonance, they transform grief into ritual, bridging the living and the ancestral realm in Igbo culture.

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