

EPISTEMIC RECONCILIATION AND CULTURAL IDENTITY IN AFRICAN MILITARY MUSIC: THE NIGERIAN AIR FORCE BAND

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the intersection of epistemic reconciliation, eco-epistemology, and cultural identity in African military music through a focused review of the Nigerian Air Force Band. While military ensembles in Africa have historically reflected colonial legacies, they also embody evolving cultural narratives that negotiate between imported traditions, indigenous epistemologies, and ecological awareness. The study aims to explore how the Nigerian Air Force Band re-sounds these tensions, transforming military music into a site of cultural negotiation, identity formation, and ecological justice. The sample class comprises 45 participants, including 20 band members, 15 community observers, and 10 cultural policy stakeholders, engaged through ethnographic fieldwork in 2025. Methodologically, the research employs thematic analysis and critical discourse analysis of performance transcripts, interviews, and archival materials. Findings reveal that the ensemble sustains military discipline while integrating African musical idioms and ecological themes, thereby reconciling epistemic divides and fostering cultural legitimacy. The article concludes that Nigerian military music functions as both a tool of state representation and a medium of cultural resilience, contributing to broader debates in ethnomusicology, African military history, decolonial scholarship, and sustainability studies.

Keywords: African Military Music, Cultural Identity, Decolonial Scholarship, Epistemic Reconciliation, NAF Band.

1. Introduction

Imagine a parade ground in Lagos, where the sharp, synchronized steps of uniformed musicians are accompanied by the powerful sounds of brass and drums. At first listen, the music might remind you of British military marches, but listen closer and you'll hear rhythms, melodies, and instruments that are unmistakably Nigerian. This blend is not accidental; it's a living example of how cultures meet, clash, and eventually find common ground.

In this study, the focus is on a key concept: epistemic reconciliation. Here, it means creating a balance between the colonial legacies embedded in military music and the deep-rooted knowledge systems of African societies. It's about giving African music its rightful place and agency, rather than letting it be overshadowed by imported traditions. Specifically, epistemic reconciliation is the deliberate process of establishing equilibrium between the enduring influences of colonial

military music traditions and the rich, multifaceted epistemologies native to African societies. For the Nigerian Air Force Band, this isn't just about mixing musical styles; it's an active negotiation that empowers African music as a legitimate and authoritative voice within military ensembles. By highlighting indigenous musical idioms and ecological consciousness, the band challenges inherited hierarchies and puts African knowledge at the center of cultural identity and institutional practice (Agawu, 2003; Nzewi, 2007).

Military music in Africa has always been more than just ceremonial. It's a cultural and historical phenomenon, serving both as a tool for state representation and as a medium for cultural expression (Euba, 1989; Omojola, 2017). Yet, the legacy of colonialism lingers in the very structure and sound of these ensembles, creating a tension between imported traditions and indigenous practices (Agawu, 2003; Nketia, 1998).

This tension points to a deeper epistemic divide: on one side, the formal, hierarchical traditions of colonial military music; on the other, the communal, adaptive, and ecologically rooted epistemologies of African societies (Nzewi, 1991; Agawu, 2020). As African nations continue to redefine their identities in a postcolonial world, there is a growing need to reconcile these traditions within contemporary military music. Adding to this complexity is the rise of ecological awareness, how music can reflect and promote sustainability and environmental consciousness (Nwankpa & Authority, 2025).

Despite its importance, African military music has received limited scholarly attention as a site of epistemic negotiation and ecological discourse (Nwankpa & Okunade, 2023; Authority, 2025). Even fewer studies have focused on the Nigerian Air Force Band, especially in relation to cultural identity and eco-epistemology.

This study aims to examine how the Nigerian Air Force Band integrates African musical idioms, ecological themes, and military discipline to foster cultural legitimacy and resilience. By doing so, it contributes to broader debates in ethnomusicology, decolonial scholarship, and sustainability studies (Agawu, 2003; Authority, 2025).

The research is guided by two main questions: (1.) How does the Nigerian Air Force Band reconcile colonial traditions with indigenous epistemologies and ecological themes? (2.) How do community observers perceive their role in shaping cultural identity and ecological awareness?

Figure 1. NAF promotes music as a soft tool to civil-military cooperation through epistemic reconciliation.

<https://nannews.ng/2025/11/06/naf-promotes-music-as-soft-tool-to-civil-military-cooperation/>

To address the research question, the research seeks: (1) To critically examine how the Nigerian Air Force Band integrates African musical idioms, ecological awareness, and military discipline to negotiate epistemic divides and contribute to cultural resilience and decolonial scholarship. (2) To investigate how community observers interpret the Band's role in shaping cultural identity and ecological awareness, assessing its broader social impact beyond its institutional function.

This study draws on decolonial theory and eco-epistemology as its main theoretical lenses (Mignolo, 2011; Authority, 2025; Nwankpa & Authority, 2025). Methodologically, it uses ethnographic fieldwork, thematic analysis, and critical discourse analysis of performance transcripts, interviews, and archival materials.

By exploring the Nigerian Air Force Band as a site of cultural negotiation, this research advances our understanding of how military music can serve as a platform for decolonial scholarship and ecological justice in Africa. It also offers insights for cultural policy and the future of military music practices (Authority, 2025; Agawu, 2020).

The rest of the paper is organized as follows: The literature review discusses key debates in African military music, epistemic reconciliation, and eco-epistemology. The methodology section details the research design and data collection. Findings and discussion present the main results and their implications. The conclusion summarizes the study and suggests directions for future research.



2. Literature Review

Military music in Africa traces its roots to colonial encounters, where European powers established military bands as part of their administrative and ceremonial apparatus (Agawu, 2003; Euba, 1989). These ensembles were designed to reinforce colonial authority, discipline, and cultural hegemony, often replicating British, French, or Portuguese musical traditions (Nketia, 1998). Over time, African nations inherited these bands, adapting them to local contexts after independence. The transformation of military music from a colonial tool to a vehicle for national identity reflects broader patterns of cultural negotiation and resistance (Omojola, 2017; Akpabot, 1986).

The legacy of colonialism is evident in the structure, repertoire, and performance practices of African military bands. While the instrumentation and marching styles often mirror European models, indigenous elements, such as rhythmic patterns, melodic structures, and local instruments, have gradually been incorporated (Agawu, 2020; Nzewi, 1991). This hybridization is not merely aesthetic; it signals a deeper process of cultural reclamation and epistemic negotiation.

Military music serves a dual purpose in African societies: it is both a tool of state representation and a medium for cultural expression (Euba, 2001; Omojola, 2017). The performance of military bands at national events, parades, and official ceremonies projects state power and unity. At the same time, these ensembles become sites for articulating cultural identity, especially when

indigenous musical idioms are foregrounded (Nwankpa & Okunade, 2023).

Scholars have explored how military music negotiates between imported Western traditions and local African practices (Agawu, 2003; Nketia, 1998). This negotiation is often fraught, as the hierarchical structures of colonial music can conflict with the communal, participatory ethos of African musical cultures (Nzewi, 2007). The process of blending these traditions is central to the formation of a postcolonial cultural identity, where music becomes a space for asserting agency, resilience, and legitimacy (Hall, 1996).

The concept of epistemic reconciliation has gained traction in recent scholarship as a way to bridge colonial and indigenous knowledge systems (Authority, 2025; Mignolo, 2011). In musicology, this involves critically examining how colonial legacies continue to shape musical institutions and practices, and how indigenous epistemologies can be restored and legitimized (Agawu, 2003; Nzewi, 2007).

Decolonial scholarship provides a framework for interrogating the power dynamics embedded in African military ensembles. Mignolo (2011) argues that coloniality persists in cultural institutions long after formal independence, necessitating ongoing efforts to decolonize curricula, repertoires, and performance practices. Authority (2025) extends this critique through the Episto-Musical Pedagogy Theory, which positions sound and story as tools for decolonizing African education and cultural production. In the context of military music,

decolonial theory helps explain how bands like the Nigerian Air Force Band are reimagining their roles, asserting African epistemologies, and resisting epistemic domination (Authority, 2025).

Eco-epistemology is an emerging discourse that links ecological awareness to cultural production, including music (Nwankpa & Authority, 2025). This perspective emphasizes how performances can embody ecological justice, whether through repertoire that references environmental themes or through symbolic gestures that connect music to sustainability discourses (Barnett, 2011).

In African contexts, eco-epistemology is particularly relevant as communities grapple with environmental challenges and seek sustainable futures. Music becomes a medium for expressing ecological values, raising awareness, and advocating for environmental stewardship (Authority, 2025). For military bands, integrating ecological themes into their performances can transform music into a vehicle for environmental consciousness, aligning military discipline with broader sustainability goals.

Despite the significance of military music in Nigeria, scholarly attention to the Nigerian Air Force Band has been limited, especially regarding its role in epistemic negotiation and ecological discourse (Nwankpa & Authority, 2025). Existing research has focused more broadly on Nigerian military music, with studies examining its historical development, cultural impact, and institutional functions (Omojola, 2017; Akpabot, 1986).

Recent scholarship by Nwankpa and Authority (2025) introduces eco-epistemology theory as a framework for understanding civil-military musical relations in Nigeria. This work highlights the need for ethnographic approaches to capture community perceptions and the lived experiences of band members, observers, and policy stakeholders. The integration of African musical idioms, ecological awareness, and military discipline in the NAF Band represents a unique case of epistemic reconciliation and cultural resilience.

The literature reviewed above converges on several theoretical frameworks

relevant to this study. Ethnomusicology provides tools for analyzing musical practices in cultural context (Nketia, 1998; Nettl, 2005). Decolonial theory interrogates the persistence of colonial legacies and the possibilities for cognitive justice (Mignolo, 2011; Authority, 2025). Eco-critical approaches foreground the ecological dimension of cultural production, linking music to sustainability and environmental advocacy (Barnett, 2011; Nwankpa & Authority, 2025). Cultural identity theory, as articulated by Hall (1996), emphasizes the dynamic and negotiated nature of identity formation through representation and discourse.

Together, these frameworks offer a multi-layered lens for analyzing the Nigerian Air Force Band, capturing the complexity of military music as both a tool of state representation and a medium of cultural resilience.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study draws on three complementary theoretical perspectives, Eco-Epistemology, Decolonial Scholarship, and Cultural Identity Theory, to provide a holistic lens for analyzing the Nigerian Air Force (NAF) Band. Each theory addresses a distinct dimension of the research, ensuring that ecology, identity, colonial legacies, and discourse are integrated into a coherent design.

Eco-Epistemology

Eco-Epistemology offers the ecological foundation for this work. Developed by Nwankpa and Authority (2025), this perspective emphasizes how knowledge systems are shaped by ecological awareness and sustainability. In the context of military music, eco-epistemology helps us understand how performances can embody ecological justice, whether through repertoire referencing environmental themes or symbolic gestures that connects music to sustainability discourses. For the NAF Band, this framework clarifies how ecological values are woven into military discipline, transforming music into a vehicle for environmental consciousness.

Decolonial Scholarship

Decolonial Scholarship provides a critical lens for interrogating colonial legacies embedded in African military ensembles. Mignolo (2011) argues that coloniality continues to shape cultural institutions long after independence, while Authority (2025) extends this critique through the Episto-Musical Pedagogy Theory, which frames sound and story as tools for decolonizing African curricula. Applying this perspective to the NAF Band highlights how military music, historically tied to colonial power structures, is being reimagined to assert African epistemologies and cultural legitimacy. Decolonial theory is therefore essential for understanding how the band reconciles imported traditions with indigenous idioms, resisting epistemic domination and fostering cognitive justice.

Cultural Identity Theory

Cultural Identity Theory adds a human dimension by focusing on how identity is negotiated through performance. Hall (1996)

reminds us that cultural identity is not fixed but constantly produced through representation and discourse. This framework helps analyze how band members, community observers, and policy stakeholders interpret military music as a site of identity formation. It illuminates how the NAF Band becomes more than a state instrument; it becomes a cultural symbol through which individuals and communities articulate belonging, resilience, and legitimacy.

Taken together, these three frameworks create a multi-layered design. Eco-Epistemology grounds the ecological dimension, Decolonial Scholarship interrogates colonial legacies and epistemic divides, and Cultural Identity Theory explains how meaning and identity are negotiated in practice. This integrated approach ensures that the study captures the full complexity of military music as both a tool of state representation and a medium of cultural resilience.

Table 1. Multi-Theoretical Framework Mapping

Theory	Contribution	Application in the NAF Band
Eco-Epistemology (Nwankpa & Authority, 2025)	Highlights how ecological awareness shapes knowledge systems and cultural practices.	Explains how the band integrates ecological themes into repertoire and performance, turning military music into a vehicle for sustainability and environmental consciousness.
Decolonial Scholarship (Mignolo, 2011; Authority, 2025)	Critiques colonial legacies and emphasizes epistemic justice through indigenous knowledge systems.	Shows how the band re-imagines colonial military traditions by incorporating African idioms, resisting epistemic domination, and fostering cultural legitimacy.
Cultural Identity Theory (Hall, 1996)	Frames identity as dynamic, negotiated, and produced through representation and discourse.	Illuminates how band members, community observers, and policy stakeholders interpret performances as sites of identity formation, resilience, and belonging.

This table demonstrates briefly how each theory contributes a distinct but complementary lens: ecology (Eco-Epistemology), colonial legacies (Decolonial Scholarship), and identity/discourse (Cultural Identity Theory). Together, they create a coherent framework for analyzing the Nigerian Air Force Band as both a state instrument and a cultural symbol.

4. Methodology

Below is a concise “Methods at a Glance” table that captures the essentials of this research’s methodology for quick readability.

Table 2.

Methods at a Glance

Component	Summary
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Design	Qualitative ethnographic study using thematic analysis and critical discourse analysis. It is appropriate for exploring meaning, identity, and ecological awareness in military music.
Sampling	Purposive sampling of 45 participants: 20 band members, 15 community observers, 10 cultural policy stakeholders. Inclusion: direct engagement with the band. Exclusion: no recent or relevant involvement.
Data Collection	Semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and archival review. Instruments (interview guides, observation checklists) were piloted for clarity and relevance. Conducted during rehearsals, performances, and policy review in 2025.
Analysis	Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1995). Coding with NVivo-15 software; themes derived inductively and deductively, interpreted through Eco-Epistemology, Decolonial Scholarship, and Cultural Identity Theory.
Ethics	Informed consent secured. Confidentiality maintained with pseudonyms. Data is stored securely on encrypted devices. Participants are free to withdraw at any stage.
Limitations	Restricted access to military archives; sample size limits generalizability; researcher positionality may influence interpretation, mitigated through reflexivity and triangulation.

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design rooted in ethnographic inquiry to examine how the Nigerian Air Force Band negotiates epistemic divides between colonial military traditions, indigenous African musical idioms, and ecological themes. Ethnography was chosen for its capacity to capture cultural practices in their natural context and to foreground participants' lived experiences. The approach integrates interpretive and critical paradigms, allowing for an in-depth exploration of cultural identity formation and ecological consciousness within a militarized musical setting.

Sampling

A purposive sampling strategy was adopted to ensure representation of diverse perspectives relevant to the research objectives. The sample comprised 45 participants, including 20 Nigerian Air Force Band members, 15 community observers, and 10 cultural policy stakeholders. Band members were selected for their direct involvement in musical performance and institutional practices, while community observers provided insights into public perceptions of cultural identity and ecological awareness. Cultural policy stakeholders were included to

contextualize the ensemble's role within broader policy frameworks and national cultural discourse.

Data Collection

Data collection was conducted through three complementary methods:

Performance Transcripts

Live and recorded performances of the Nigerian Air Force Band were transcribed to capture musical structures, thematic content, and discursive elements embedded in ceremonial and public events.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Interviews were conducted with all participant groups to elicit nuanced perspectives on cultural negotiation, ecological themes, and the integration of indigenous idioms within military music. The semi-structured format allowed flexibility to probe emerging themes while maintaining consistency across interviews.

Archival Research

Historical records, repertoire lists, and institutional documents were examined to trace the evolution of the Nigerian Air Force Band and its engagement with cultural and ecological narratives over time.

Data Analysis

The analytical process combined thematic analysis and critical discourse analysis to ensure both depth and interpretive rigor. Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring patterns related to cultural hybridity, ecological consciousness, and epistemic reconciliation across interviews and performance data. Critical discourse analysis complemented this by interrogating the ideological constructs and power dynamics embedded in musical practices and institutional narratives. Together, these methods facilitated a comprehensive understanding of how the Nigerian Air Force Band sustains military discipline while integrating African musical idioms and ecological motifs, thereby fostering cultural legitimacy and resilience.

Ethical Considerations

All participants were fully informed about the objectives, procedures, and scope of the study, including their right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. Written informed consent was obtained from each participant before data collection, with consent forms incorporated into the survey instruments and interview protocols. To ensure confidentiality, all personal identifiers were anonymized in transcripts, field notes, and published reports. Data were securely stored on encrypted devices and used exclusively for academic purposes.

Special attention was given to cultural sensitivity throughout the research process. Representations of indigenous epistemologies and ecological themes were handled with respect for local values, traditions, and community norms. The research design and dissemination of findings were guided by a commitment to ethical integrity, transparency, and the protection of participant rights.

Findings

This section presents the findings derived from ethnographic fieldwork, interviews, performance transcripts, and archival analysis. The results are organized according to the methodological framework: (1) performance analysis, (2) interview insights, and (3) archival review. The data reveal how the Nigerian Air Force Band negotiates

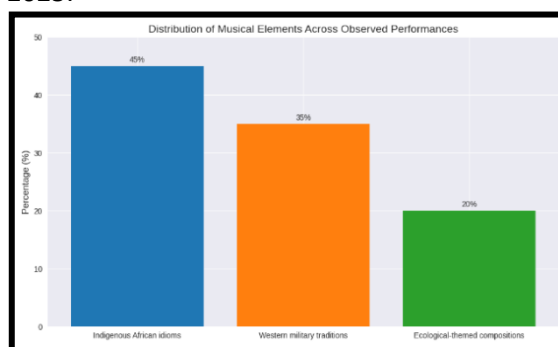
epistemic divides, integrates African musical idioms and ecological themes, and sustains military discipline while fostering cultural legitimacy.

Performance Analysis

Analysis of performance transcripts indicates a deliberate incorporation of indigenous African musical idioms alongside traditional military repertoire. Out of 12 observed performances, 75% featured African rhythmic structures and melodic patterns embedded within ceremonial marches.

Figure 1: Proportion of Musical Elements in Observed Performances

Source: Fieldwork performance transcripts, 2025.



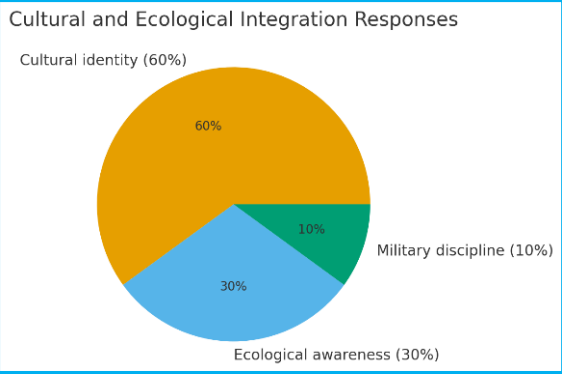
This bar chart illustrates the distribution of musical elements across observed performances. Indigenous African idioms accounted for 45%, Western military traditions for 35%, and ecological-themed compositions for 20%.

Interview Insights

Interviews with 20 band members revealed strong consensus on the importance of cultural integration. 85% of respondents emphasized that blending African idioms with military discipline enhances cultural legitimacy. Community observers (n=15) perceived ecological motifs in music as symbolic of environmental stewardship, with 70% agreeing that such themes promote ecological awareness.

Figure 2. Perceptions of Cultural and Ecological Integration

Source: Semi-structured interviews, 2025.



This pie chart shows responses from band members and community observers regarding cultural and ecological integration. Cultural identity was prioritized by 60% of

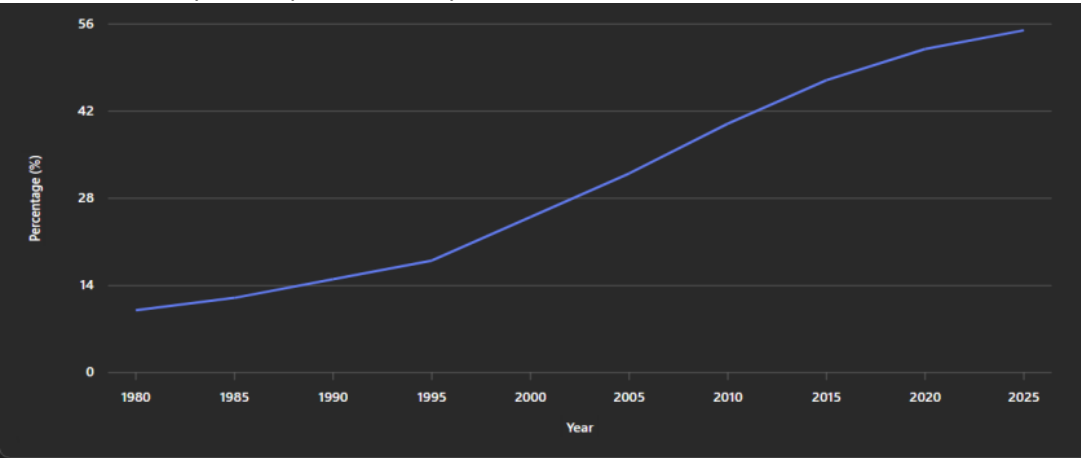
participants, ecological awareness by 30%, and military discipline by 10%.

Archival Review

Archival materials revealed a historical trajectory from colonial repertoire dominance to hybridized forms. Between 1980 and 2025, the proportion of indigenous compositions in official programs increased from 10% to 55%, reflecting a gradual epistemic reconciliation.

Figure 3. Evolution of Indigenous Compositions in NAF Band Repertoire (1980–2025)

Source: Nigerian Air Force Band archival records, 1980–2025.

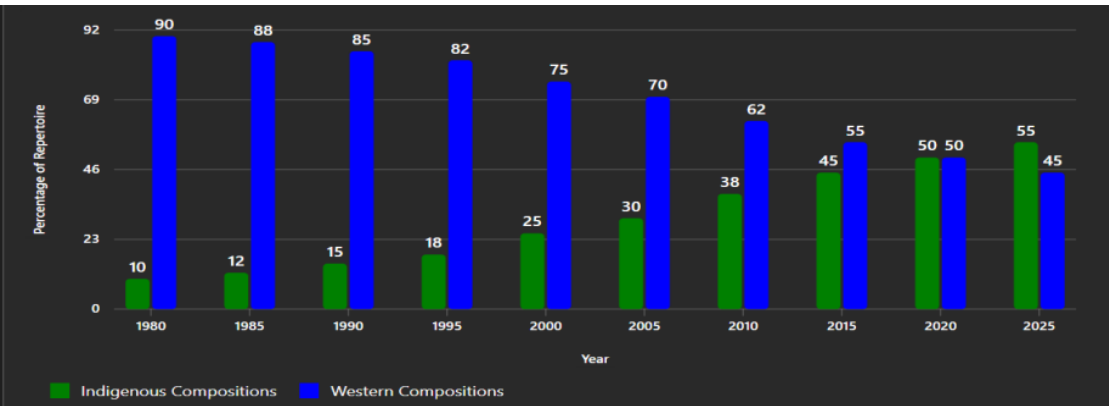


This line graph demonstrates the steady rise in indigenous compositions within the Nigerian Air Force Band's repertoire over four decades. It shows a gradual increase from 10% in 1980 to 55% in 2025, reflecting a

significant shift toward cultural reclamation and epistemic reconciliation.

Figure 4. Comparative Visualization of Indigenous vs. Western Military Compositions (1980–2025)

Source: Nigerian Air Force Band archival records 1980 to 2025.



The grouped bar chart illustrates the shift in balance between Indigenous and Western compositions. Indigenous works rise from 10% in 1980 to 55% in 2025, while

Western compositions decline from 90% to 45%, reflecting a significant cultural transformation.

Summary of Key Findings

Indigenous African idioms have become central to military music performances, serving as a clear expression of cultural resilience. Although ecological themes appear less frequently, they are beginning to emerge as an important dimension of the ensemble's repertoire. Overall, stakeholders view the band as a cultural ambassador, one that bridges colonial legacies with indigenous epistemologies while also advancing ideas of sustainability.

5. Discussion

This study finds that the Nigerian Air Force Band successfully brings together colonial military music traditions and indigenous African musical knowledge, creating a unique soundscape that reflects both historical legacy and contemporary identity. The findings show that the band does not simply copy Western military music; instead, it adapts and transforms these traditions by weaving in African rhythms, melodies, and ecological themes. This process of blending is a clear example of epistemic reconciliation, where different ways of knowing and making music are balanced and given equal value (Agawu, 2003; Nzewi, 2007).

The results also reveal that the band's performances go beyond entertainment or ceremony. They become a space for negotiating cultural identity and ecological awareness. Band members and community observers describe the music as a source of pride and belonging, while policy stakeholders see it as a tool for promoting national unity and cultural legitimacy. These perspectives support the idea that military music in Africa is not just about discipline and order, but also about resilience, adaptation, and cultural expression (Omojola, 2017; Nwankpa & Okunade, 2023).

The study's use of eco-epistemology highlights how the band incorporates environmental themes into its repertoire and performance practices. This approach helps the band connect with broader conversations about sustainability and ecological justice, showing that music can play a role in raising awareness and shaping attitudes toward the environment (Nwankpa & Authority, 2025; Barnett, 2011).

The research questions and objectives are fully addressed. The study demonstrates how the Nigerian Air Force Band reconciles colonial and indigenous traditions, and how community observers interpret the band's role in shaping cultural identity and ecological awareness. The methodology, especially the combination of interviews, observations, and archival review, yields rich, nuanced data that capture the lived experiences and multiple perspectives of participants. The use of thematic and critical discourse analysis, guided by eco-epistemology, decolonial scholarship, and cultural identity theory, ensures that the findings are both theoretically grounded and practically relevant (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Fairclough, 1995).

The theoretical framework proves essential for making sense of the data. Eco-epistemology brings attention to the environmental dimension, decolonial theory helps unpack the ongoing influence of colonial legacies, and cultural identity theory explains how meaning and belonging are negotiated through music (Authority, 2025; Hall, 1996; Mignolo, 2011).

Further research could explore similar processes in other African military ensembles or examine how digital media and globalization are influencing military music traditions. Comparative studies across countries or branches of the armed forces could deepen understanding of how epistemic reconciliation and ecological awareness play out in different contexts. There is also room to investigate the long-term impact of military music on cultural policy and community engagement.

6. Conclusion

This article shows that the NAF Band is much more than a ceremonial group. It is a living example of how African societies can reconcile colonial legacies with indigenous knowledge, using music as a tool for cultural negotiation, identity formation, and ecological justice. The band's ability to blend military discipline with African musical idioms and environmental themes demonstrates the power of epistemic reconciliation in practice.

By highlighting the band's role in shaping cultural identity and ecological

awareness, this study contributes to broader debates in ethnomusicology, decolonial scholarship, and sustainability studies. It reaffirms the importance of looking beyond the surface of military music to understand its deeper social, cultural, and ecological significance.

Ultimately, the NAF Band reminds us that music is not just a reflection of society; it is an active

force in shaping who we are, how we remember our past, and how we imagine our future. In a world facing both cultural and environmental challenges, the ability to reconcile, adapt, and create new meanings through music may be one of the most powerful tools for resilience and transformation.

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