

African Culture of Communication in the Global Village: The Experience of Ogba People in Rivers State Nigeria

Uche A. Dike

Niger Delta University, Wilberforce Island, Nigeria
Email: ucheuad@yahoo.com

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The contemporary world today has evolved into a global village. This civilization owes its existence to fast means of communication systems. Thus the global world is knighted into one political economy. Distances are reached under seconds. Notwithstanding the fast means of communication gadgets in our time, African traditional means of communication has survived the test of time. What then has been the connection of Africa traditional means of communication and politics? The answer to this question, specifically as operative in Ogba land is the main thrust of this paper. The issues in discourse include communication and the socio-political sphere, the town crier and Ogba socio-political culture using the literature approach.

Keywords: Africa; Culture; Ogbaland

Introduction

The Ogbaman is a man of adventures (Ofoegbu, 1982: p. 212). He is most open (compared in general terms with the other peoples of Nigeria) to other cultures and faster in the acceptance of western ideas. Despite the “open culture” of the Ogba and his mobility in the world, which cannot totally be a credit, we note that he sticks to his rural communities and heritage. The modern trend now is quite indicative of the point in question. Rural development as a new economic and political trend in Nigeria, has flourished very well in Ogbaland. In spite of this modern trend, we notice that over 70% of the Ogba still live in the rural areas. In this regard, those in the rural areas (despite development projects like rural electrification, water and road construction schemes) depend mostly on what we call tradition communications for the dissemination of information. This is so since decree No. 24 of 1st April, 1976 has not yet been completely revoked. This decree assigns the ownership of the electronic media to the Government. No community, No matter its political and economic strength, may own any of such media. The recent development permitting private electronic media is yet to work out. To this effect most communities, as said above, still depend on traditional communication media.

As Dukor (2010: p. 88) has stated:

Oral tradition is one of the theistic animistic elements of African folk literature which serves as a vehicle for historiography and communicative actions consist of folk tales, ballads songs, epic narratives, myths and legends, riddles, proverbs, recitations and chants.

For Dukor a tradition is oral if it has no written literature or sacred scriptures and this is the case with the Ogba people whose traditional mode of communication with the masses are not written down. The town crier is a veritable instrument of communication with the people. Intergovernmental conference on communication policies in Africa” held in Yaounde from 22-31 July, 1980 defines traditional communication as follows:

Traditional communication appears in various forms of artistic expression: verbal art (dialogue, story-telling, singing, proverbs; corporal expression (dancing, music, mime); dramatic art (plays, rituals); visual or graphic expression (drawings, decorations, costumes, etc.); games and rite; gatherings (religious feasts, markets, meetings, ceremonies); musical instruments and craft tools. All these media may be used for socio-cultural purposes, such as the transmission of the cultural heritages and the passing-on of skills and knowledge. They are often used by adults in the education or training of young people; they may also be used to encourage popular participation in decision-making” (Inter-governmental Conference on Communication Policies in Africa, 1980: p. 22).

When we talk of the Ogba traditional communications, we mean in this regard the modes of communication that are aboriginal in the traditional geo-politics of Ogbaland (Okonkwo, 1985: p. 20). The Yaounde Conference duly emphasized that the traditional communications function most in what it called oral tradition. According to the conference;

The oral tradition has its roots in the people and implies active participation by the community. It gives the individual a frame of reference, based on the realities of his own society, and creates in general the images of myths of a vaster world. It provides an immense framework for artistic creation and the dissemination of culture and information needed for everyday life and the struggle for survival (Intergovernmental Conference on Communication Policies in Africa, 1980: p. 22).

The traditional communications will continue to play vital roles in every social context of the rural Ogba society of today. No matter the degree of modernization, traditional communications cannot be overlooked without a serious harm and a lasting effect on the Ogba rural life and system. These traditional media, as mentioned above, constitute today the vital elements of

the Ogba cultural identity. The main functions of traditional communication among others include: medium for the democratization of communities; medium for the participation of the people in their community affairs; medium for the struggle against foreign occupation and medium for the efforts to consolidate national unity. The relationship of these four points to the political mind of the traditional Ogba is the interest of this paper. Before we focus on the political life of the Ogba, let us first of all explain the relationship between communication and politics in general (Dukor, 2010).

Communication and the Socio-Political Sphere

The connection between communication and politics is clear. Every political philosophy is a “blue-print” of the cultural identity and communication heritage of any given people (Okonkwo, 1985: p. 58). This made Schram (1963: p. 34) to say:

... the structure of social communication reflects the structure ... of society. The size of the communication roles of traditional society to organizations, the stretching chains reflect the economic development of society. The ownership of communication facilities, the purposeful use of communication, the controls upon communication these reflect the political development and philosophy of society. The content of communication at any given time reflects the value pattern of society. The patterns of communications networks, which determine where information flows and who shares it with whom reflect the homogeneity of culture and geography within a society.

There is always a perfect linkage between communication and politics. Communication has always played formative and informative roles in the society. It aims at directing the individual in society. The political impact of communication is noticed in the society when we understand that politics and communication serve the same purpose in the motivation and promotion of immediate and ultimate aims of the society. Communication and politics act jointly onto the personal choice-changes fostering and gearing the individual in society towards the pursuit of agreed or non-agreed aims and objectives of the said society. The Macbride Report of 1980 rightly notes that communications are indicative of political systems in any given society. According to this document:

Communication, taken as a whole, is incomprehensible without reference to its political dimension, its problems, and cannot be resolved without taking into account political relationships. Politics, to use the word in the elevated sense, has an indissoluble relationship with communication (Macbriede, 1980: p. 18).

Talking about communication in this paper, we mean to emphasize that the Ogba traditional media of communication are by implication, instruments of politics. The crucial point is that any given societal operation between power-struggle and freedom of speech is politics. In this respect, mass media are so allied to the power structure of society. Inevitably, they serve to support and maintain power structures and dominant ideologies. The mass media present a world view to members of society which regenerates continually and a world view to members of society which regenerates continually and pervasively the ideological structures that are required for the maintenance of the existing power structure (Howitt, 1982: p. 16). Macbride

further explained the inseparability of politics and communication:

The framework within which communication takes place is ultimately determined by the political and social struggles which have shaped the prevailing social consensus in a given society. The way communications are organized in a ... society is basically a political decision reflecting the values of the existing social system. At a pragmatic level, solutions to the political problems of communication depend on finding a balance between the legitimate interest of the state and the rights of access to information that may be extended to diverse sections of opinion. These solutions will necessarily vary according to the political structure, the degree of development, and the size and resources of each nation” (Macbride, 1980: p. 21).

At close-range observation, we can further underline the relationship between communication and politics when we review in general terms two concepts under which any given communication medium can operate. The two key concepts include: 1) authoritarianism in communications; 2) libertarianism in communications. Under the authoritarian communications concept:

We understand that the essential characteristics of the given society is that the state ranks higher than the individual in the scale of social values. The individual achieves his goals and can develop his social attributes only through his subordination to the state. This means that the individual can only do very little since the state ranks higher and also the state has a certain amount of caretaker function and the individual has a degree of dependent status. In a case like this the information access is restricted only to those members of the community or state that would operate the “bonum commune” as conceived, and planned by the rulers, party-politicians and ideologists on power in the time in question” (Peters, 2012: p. 13).

Communication and politics of this nature is fashioned by censorship—as in the Soviet Union, Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy etc. When we talk of the libertarian communication we mean that public communication is expected to serve the individual as a “human right”. According to this concept, the individual is an independent rational being, able to choose between alternatives. The community in this case exists to provide for the individual the fertile milieu in which he can develop his natural endowments or potential so as to enjoy maximum freedom of expression. In this context, communication-politics would be measured by the gratification and use from the base: a down-to-top and not top-to-down publicity i.e. a “horizontalization” of communication.

The Town Crier and Ogba Political System

We want to use the example of one of the methods of communication (the town crier) which is still common in most traditional Ogba communities to explain the Ogba communicating culture. According to research findings (Okonkwo, 1985: p. 26), the Town Crier is the custodian of the society’s information media: It is most important to note that the Town Crier, although having the right of freedom of speech, disseminates the information only in the sense he has received it from the “Con-

cillium". The message he disseminates is that born out of the common agreement of the council of chiefs head by the Oba of Ogba Land, Oba Nnam chukwumela Obi II. He acts on instructions precisely given him by this administrative circle.

We cannot complete this section without explaining what we mean by the term "Ogba political system". We know that political system may not mean general culture. We know also that it is very difficult to create a boundary between them but specifically the political system underlines certain elements of culture that give orientation to the members to respond as actors or participants within the scope of their given political institutions. We can define a political system to mean the specific political orientation or attitude, towards the political culture in a given society and the role of the individual within this system. "It assumes that each individual must, in his own historical context learn and incorporate into his own personality the knowledge and feelings about politics of his people and his community" (Olisa, 1971: p. 16).

In this manner we can emphasize the fact that the Ogba communication culture permits commonness. When we talk of commonness, we mean an egalitarian attitude and lack of concentration or centralization of leadership. Ogba political system is primarily on a type of democracy in which consensus must be achieved before any decisions could be effective and binding. The traditional political authority depends totally on the "Concillium and Consensus." On the grounds of the above statement, Olisa (1971: p. 25) agrees that the mechanism of the political system of the Ogba is based on ideas reminiscent of the great statement of Edward III of Britain in summoning the First Parliament, namely that 'what touches all must be approved by all'. Traditional Ogba, in this regard, could thus be spoken of as practicing primary democracy similar to that of the classical Greek city states. At all levels of society every adult male is entitled to direct participation in the task of political decision making. Ofoegbu (1982: p. 218) supports the above statement when he asserts that; The Ogba cherish moral leadership and influence particularly when these flow from wisdom, knowledge and fairplay. At all levels of political and social organization, they seek to avoid *coercion* as an instrument of public policy. They haggle, bargain, persuade and conciliate, and expect from their leaders skills in negotiations and conciliation. Hence, in the formation of public personality profiles, the Ogba demand: moral attributes and leadership prowess; conciliatory powers; Popularity arising out of democratic behaviour; Personal magnetism, and a spirit of adventure particularly in other lands and in confronting challenges and difficulties. The socio-political system of a traditional Ogba village means "the equality of opportunity". Despite the heavy fragmentation or segmentary social order as a result of the Ogba world-view; respect and recognition of the common ancestry of the village group or town; political engagement is built on common participation and equality (David, 1965: p. 39,97,116). "Everyone can vote, oppose or ratify a decision. The imposition of any 'top-down' authority is in an Ogba traditional conception unwanted and abhorrent" (Joseph, 2011: p. 20).

Conclusion

From the above exposition, we can define the Ogba traditional communication to be: *Commonness*. Communication according to Schramm comes from the Latin "communis" i.e. common. When we communicate, we establish commonness.

This is to say that we are sharing information, idea, or attitude. We have noted that the Ogba town Crier says nothing of his making. His information is above his manipulation or he suffers social menace. As a communicator, he claims credibility among the audience. This is as a result of the "Concensus" behind his news. Sola says "if a broadcast system is to activate a people it must be trusted" (Sola, 1977: p. 136). The Ogba town Crier knows his culture and interprets his message to fit the common mind of his society. He is not only respected and revered by his audience but he is perceived as credible because he says the mind of the local "Concillium". In this regard, his communication medium, the gong or the drum is decoded appropriately and receives attention from the specific audience to whom they are addressed (Ugboajah, 1980: p. 50). Having noted the horizontally-layered process of the Ogba socio-politics, which directly implies the communication pattern, one could then say that while the Ogba are republican in their political philosophy their use of communication dimensions prove that they are access-minded and democratic. If democratization of communication means making the communication media to be more representative of the audience and allowing more participation by the audience, we can practically conclude that the Ogba traditional media and their communication patterns qualify in this connection. There is more or less no personal control by the leader of the community on the issues of a broadcast and information. There is equality. Finally, the homogeneity of the Ogba socio-political culture, their value patterns, information networks and participation are imbued in the said traditional media. The Ogba traditional communication therefore—through their human aspects, their direct contact and two-way (dialogue) communication (which is the ontology of the Ogba social operations) acts as regeneration factors for the Ogba cultural indices.

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