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The Use of Ibibio Traditional Means of Communication

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ABSTRACT

The Ibibio are found in Akwa Ibom State, South-South Nigeria. With a population of about 4 million speakers living in Akwa Ibom and other states across Nigeria, there are the fourth largest ethnic group in Nigeria. They Ibibio as a people have several oral traditional means of communication, such as the use of plants, like palm front (eyei), plantain, a kind of flower called mkpatad, etc. also used in oral communication are drums, music, folktales and town criers. Here we document this oral traditional means of communication to preserve them from extinction. This was done using unstructured interviews and participant observation and documentation. This documentation of Ibibio oramedia was also to portray the rich cultural means of communication among the Ibibio and is a valuable contribution to the rich cultural heritage of the Ibibio.

INTRODUCTION

Language documentation is a lasting, multipurpose record of a language (Himmelman, 2006:1). The essence of the “lasting” and “multipurpose” approach of language documentation is to enable generations yet unborn to be able to live both in the past and the present. Therefore, the documentation of Ibibio oramedia in this paper will not only portray the rich cultural-means of communication among the Ibibio but will also contribute to the preservation. Otherwise called “oramedia” in communication and non-verbal means of communication. Oramedia is viewed by Ugboajah and Hachten “... as grounded on indigenous culture produced and consumed by members of a group” (Akpabio 2003:3). Hachten (1971) defined it as “ informal channels of communication”..

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Riley (1990) considered "oramedia" to denote media represented by a "diffusion network of lower chiefs, age groups, the market place, women's organization, traditional priest, stall heads, village heads and the indomitable village crier". In addition, Soola (2006) observe that oramedia is an age long form of communication which predates the contemporary or modern media of communication. in essence, it refers to the "indigenous means of communication". Oramedia comprises the use of traditional means, methods or instruments for communication. The use of indigenous means of communication has not been documented formally but has been passed down orally from one generation to the next and most of these traditional media are not known to the younger generation in contemporary societies. Our objective was to document oral traditional means of communication in Ibibio in order to preserve them.

LANGUAGE, TRADITIONAL COMMUNICATION AND CULTURE

Language

Language consists of the spoken form (speech) and the written form (writing) as well as signs. It is the primary means of human communication. Language as a means of communication allows us to "discuss the past and the future, to share our experiences with others, and to benefit from their experiences" (Kottack, 2004:159). Based on the foregoing we argue that the use of language is found in the socio-cultural existence or survival of 'man'. Through this multi-dimensional existence of man, it is possible to discover the varied world-views and patterns of thought and ways of performing activities in every society. Since language is the carrier of culture, its role in socio-cultural continuity is found in the indigenous means of communication in different societies. Language is what people in a community acquire and the oral aspect is the spoken heritage of a people (Okon, et al 2007), which is exhibited in the traditional means of communication.

Communication

This is the process by which one person, through the use of available and visual symbols, engenders meaning in one or more listeners (cf. Anderson et al, in Okon, 2003:407). In addition to the assertion, Okon further noted that the transfer of information through the use of symbols can be verbal, non verbal or both. These means of communication will be discussed in the use of plants and town criers, among others, by the Ibibio.

Communication involves all the acts of transmitting messages to channels which link people to the languages and symbolic codes which are used to transmit messages, the means by which messages are received and stored, and the rules, customs and conventions which define and regulate human relationships and event (Ugboajah. in James et al., 2000).

They (James et al 2000) that, “communication is a process involving the passing of messages through the use of symbols which all parties in the communication encounter understand”. As noted in the UNESCO report (1980) “communication maintains and animates life”. Language, communication and culture are the tripartite elements in any society, so how are they related? The relationship among them is shown in the fact that without language there will be no culture and no communication. Language thus, is at the centre where communication and culture revolve. As we illustrate the significance of language, Lyons (2004:5) definition, language is very apt “...the institution whereby humans communicate and interact with each other...” Based on this definition, language as an institution is all embracing and other issues in the society are subsumed in it. Its embodiment of other issues include the act and arts of communication which are means of communication such as the use of plants, flowers, drums etc, for transmission of ideas’ and the society’s culture to the next generation. If language performs the role of cultural transmission, what then is culture?

Culture

Culture can be defined in different ways based on scholars’ views, different disciplines. for instance, disciplines like anthropology and sociology, have varied definitions. In this section, we will attempt a definition of culture and show its relationship with language and communication. Culture is “the knowledge that someone has by virtue of his/ her being a member of a particular society” (Okon, 2007:3). In essence, there is no society without a culture and language must and does perform its function as a vehicle for cultural transmission. Culture is defined in the anthropological sense as the way of life, the complex whole that consists of everything we think (idea and ideologies), everything we do (norms and patterns of behavior), and everything we have (artifacts) as members of society (Eskamp and Swart, 1991). Certainly, people have learned that culture must be understood in order to communicate. The link that ties the trio together is that they complement each other as well as allow for the continuity of societies and the experiences of the people. The interface among language, culture and communication is best summarized in Elugbe (1990:12) thus: “...language is one of the, if not, the most enduring artifacts of culture... a people can always have their history traced through their language” (Okon, 2007:4). It is interesting to note that language is used to transmit the culture, learning experiences of the people through oral media like songs, folktale, oral literature, myths and legends, drums, plant, and town criers, in informing, educating, entertaining and mobilizing the people, the Ibibio people inclusive.

ROLE OF INDIGENOUS TRADITIONAL MEANS OF COMMUNICATION

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Before we discuss the roles of the indigenous means of communication, we would like to know the indigenous traditional means of communication are. Indigenous traditional means of communication can be described as 'oramedia' (Ugboajah) or folkmedia (Mundy and Compton 1991) which consist of plays, puppet shows, dance, song, story telling, poetry, debates such as the Filipino balagtas, parades and carnival. Every society has several means of communication and Aboyade (1987) gave examples of indigenous communication among the Yorubas such as town criers, dispatch riders, talking drums, market places, village squares, community leaders, etc. They are several functions of the traditional means of communication. such functions are reporting and criticizing organs within the system. Wilson (1987:99) asserted that this system of communication is used in "issuing directive and providing education". Ekong (2001) also observed these in areas of norms and mores of the society. Wilson (1987) also stated that the functions of traditional systems of communication are as diverse:

- . Mobilizing the people at the grass root level towards community development.
- . Providing a source of cultural, political, health, educational and enlightenment programmes.
- . A source of entertainment through arts and cultural festival.
- . Useful for intra-cultural, intercultural and other communication purposes.
- . Expression of cultural and other activities of the different parts of the nation.

Ogundeji (1997:146) also noted that the traditional system is capable of communication as well as conveying meanings from the varied functions of the traditional means of communication cited above the oral means of communication

TRADITIONAL MEDIA SYSTEMS IN IBIBIOLAND

There are varied forms of "oramedia" in many societies of the world. such traditional items include aroko drums etc used among the yorubas. Moemeka in Akpabio (2003:5) categorized indigenous media into traditional and modern one such as: social forums (sic), town-crier, village market, village school, Newspaper, Radio, etc. Among the Ibibio, there are several traditional means of communication, which can be classed into four main groups viz: plants, songs, oath-taking and instruments. Akpabio (2003:11) further categorized them into six classes, (Table 1).

From the foregoing, we can see the varied and numerous means of communication among the Ibibio. In synthesis of the above classification, Akpabio further puts them together as follows: Instrumental communication, Demonstrative communication, Iconographic communication, Extra-mundane communication, Visual communication

Institutional communication, venue-oriented communication, Structure and features, Myths and legends, Names as communication, Folktales and Proverbs (cf. Wilson 1987). An analysis of these Ibibio traditional oramedia is discussed with emphasis on a few of the categorization. The reason is that the scope of this paper is too limited to discuss the whole gamut of the rich traditional means of communication listed in Akpabio and Wilson.

Table 1: Six classes of traditional means of communication.

S/n	Classes	Component	Instruments
		Idiophones (sic)	Wooden drum, wood block ritual rattle, bell, metal gong, akankang, ekere, xylophone, hand shakers, pet drum.
1.	Instrumental	MembrancophoneA crophones Symbolography	Skin drum, whistle, deer horn, ivory tusk, reed pipe. Decorated bamboo, rino, nsibidi, tattoo, chalk marks
2.	Demonstrative	Music Signal	Songs, choral and entertainment music. Canon shots, gun shots, whistle call, campfire.
3.	Iconographic	Objectified Flora	Cowtail, whiteclay, egg, feather, calabash, beads, limb bones, drinking guords, flag. Young unopened palm frond, okono, nsci, nyama, mimosa, plantain stems.
4.	Extract Mundane	Incantatory:	Ritual libation, vision
5.	Visual	Graphic: Colour: Appearance	Obituary, in memoriam notices. White cloth, red cloth Dressing, hairstyle.
6.	Institutional	Social: Spiritual	Marriage, chieftaincy Shrine Masquerade.

Modified from Akpabio (2003:11-12).

ANALYSIS OF SOME OF TRADITIONAL MEANS OF COMMUNICATION AMONG THE IBIBIO

The earlier section of this paper has listed the types of traditional means of communication in the society. In most, cases if not all African societies, plantain is a cherished staple food item but it also plays the role of communication. For instances, when plantain is planted in a compound, its aim at this place and point is to communicate prohibition of entry into that place or compound. For example, when Akwa Ibom Broadcasting

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Corporation (AKBC) refused to vacate a plot it was occupying in Aka Road, Uyo, that served as its head office, the owners of the plot planted plantain in a bid to eject the corporation from that parcel of land. Another reason for planting plantain is to serve as boundary demarcation between two parcel of land. Besides plantain, other plants like okono, (cf. figure 1) udqoko, and palm trees are also planted to communicate boundary separation. Planting of pear tree also communicates the no-trespass message into a piece of land.

Also, a plant known as mkpatad (fern: *Seleginella*) is a type of climbing stem which is used in making wreath which communicate the story of death. Inclusive among the plants are the young unopened palm fronds, which are means of communication. For example, in Ibibio traditional society, if there is any serious dispute between two person and the case is brought to the village traditional council, the complainant who thinks that his life is threatened will on the instruction of the village council have the young palm frond tied on round his neck as shown in Figure 2. The essence being to put a stop to the threat until the case is settled. The knotted palm frond is then handed over to the accused, communicating that nothing should happen to the complainant. This symbolic act communicate the fact that nothing evil such as death should befall the complainant otherwise, he (the accused) will be held responsible, culpable or liable. That is, it is to prevent harm from befalling that complainant. It is also used to warn an intruder entering into a place (cf. Wilson 1987, Akpan 1994, Akpabio 2003). Ekong (2001:74) also further asserted that "if the land is under dispute-such a sign signifies an emblem of injunction" (cf. Figure 3). Ekong mentioned other plants like mbritem (ginger lily) mkpatad (fern *Seleginella*) and okono which are also used by the Ibibio as a means of communication to demarcate boundaries. These plants are also used to keep off non-initiates from participating in certain religious ceremonies.

The plant eyei (young palm frond) plays a great role in peace keeping. For instance, the "shaking" of the palm frond (eyei) between two warring communities is to signify peace among the groups. Also, eyei is used to communicate the fact that a corpse is moved from one place to another. The communication is shown by tying young palm fronds in front and at the back of a vehicle carrying a corpse. Another time in which the palm frond is used is to communicate festivity. During this period, usually at the end of year, the process is usually called "utad ndak" to signal entry into a new year. The palm tree is a symbolic plant among the Ibibio and it features in their traditional religion.

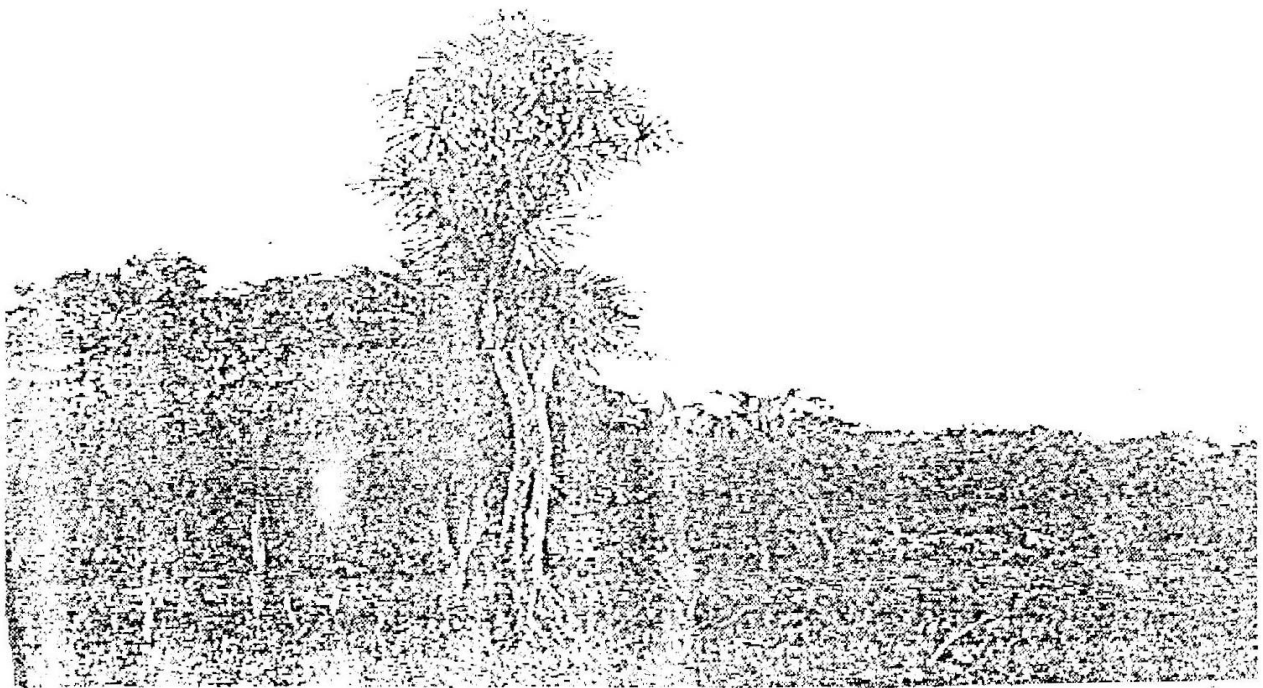


Fig. 1: *Urochloa* in Ikorodu, Lagos.

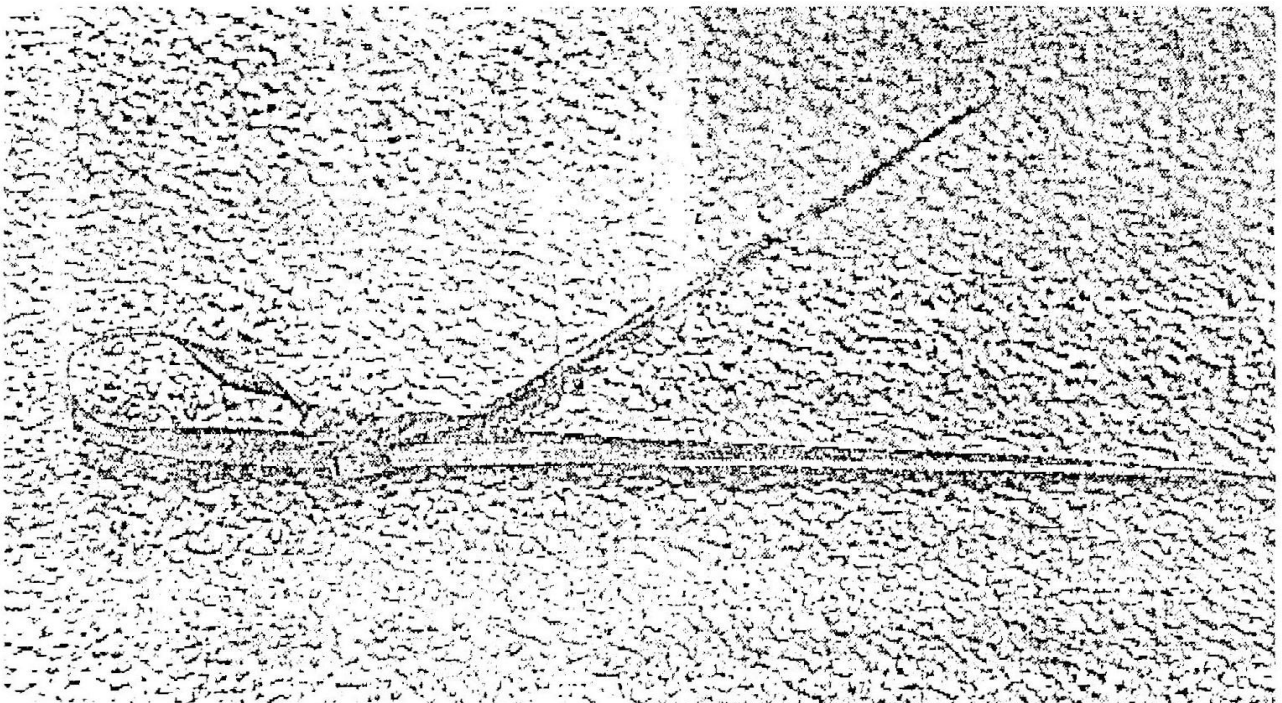


Fig. 2: *Eyedi* as summons.



Fig. 3: Eyei for prohibition water.

This is another traditional means of communication among the Ibibio. For instance, when there is dispute/factions between communities or people, aggrieved people are made to drink water from the same pot or cup. This sharing of water is meant to create and to put to a stop the dispute. It is also easy to know the boundary between two communities with the existence of water. The river between communities is usually taken as an indication of the border or boundaries between such communities. Water is also used as a means of purification. For instance, before the fattening room procedures begin, water is thrown on the roof and the girl is made to pass under the dripping water. Also, even after marriage, the same process is applicable before the bride steps into her matrimonial home and this process is indicative of her acceptability, welcome and a sign to invite good things and many children into her home (cf. Ekong, 2001:80)

Town crier

The town crier is a common feature in most traditional societies in Nigeria and in Africa as a whole. The town crier can go about with the "mkporok" or "ntakrok itakrok" (metal gong) (cf. Figure 4). In the present day he rings a bell to make announcement. For example it goes thus, the town crier goes around and hits the gong or rings the bell while at the same time verbalizing his message:

Ikpan utong -o-o-o listen -o-o-o

Ikpan utong – o-o-o listen – o-o-o

Eya ekwok usung idim mkpong there will be clearing/sweeping of
the road leading to the stream tomorrow

Eya ekwok usung idim mkpong there will be clearing/sweeping of
the road leading to the stream tomorrow

After giving the message, he hits the gong or rings the bell again and moves on to another part of the community. (cf. Figure 5).

Once the town crier hits any of the instruments, everyone in that community becomes alert and listens to what is being said. The use of the town crier is very important in communicating government programmes. For instance, the town crier has been used to announce the health immunization programme. He also communicates the time and the venue for the programme. The town crier is always given this task by the village head who has been briefed on the programme. Also, the town crier plays a role in conflict resolution in communities (Ifeduba et al 2006).

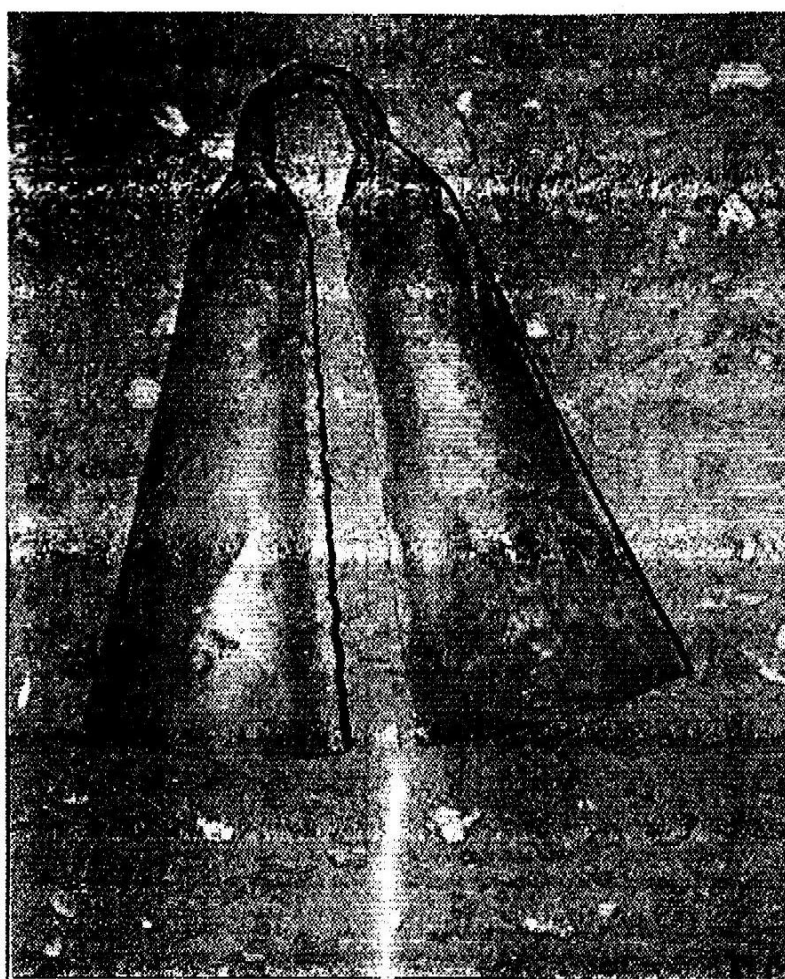


Fig. 4: Metal gong.

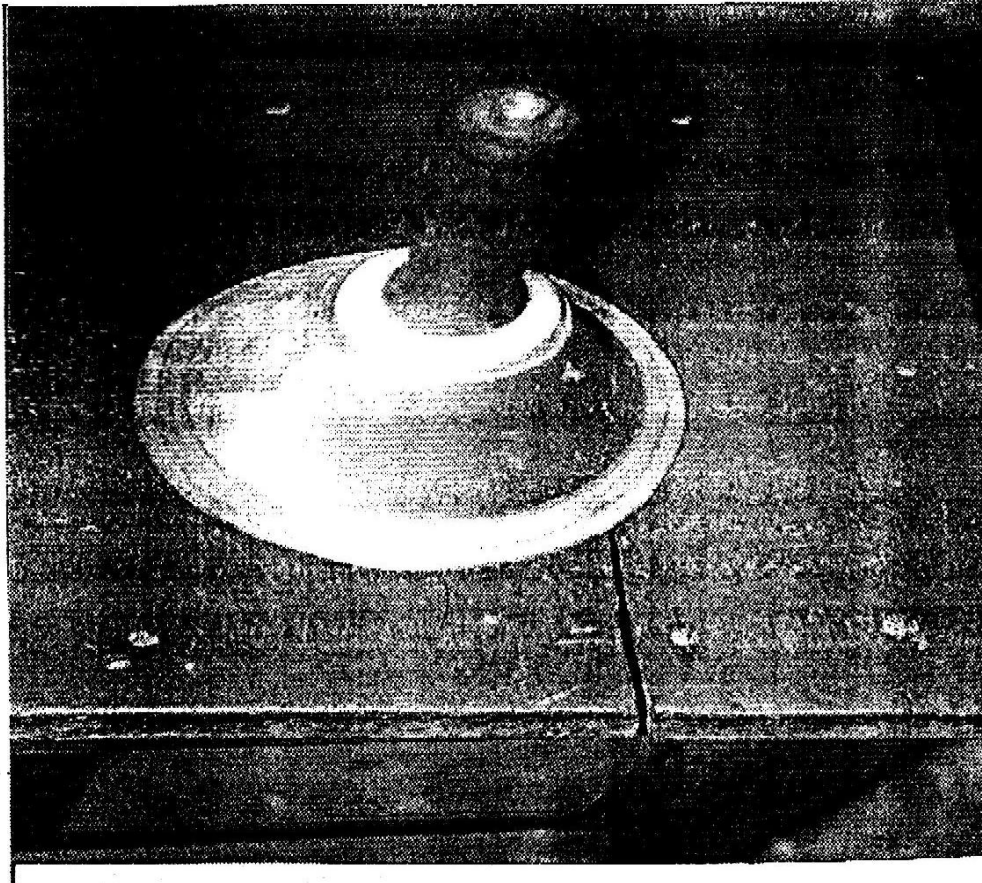


Fig. 5: Handbell.

Elephant tusk

The elephant tusk can be used in two ways; it can be used through an emissary and split “eyei” is handed over to the other group after the elephant tusk has been blown to signify war. On the other hand, the elephant tusk and ‘eyei’ could also signify a call for cease fire. Another way of communicating war is through the use of an emissary who goes to announce the intention of one community to wage war with another (cf. Wilson, 1987; Ekong, 2001; and Akpabio, 2003).

Bow and arrow

The Ibibio are not interested in waging wars but as peaceful citizens of the community, they are also interested in establishing dialogue rather than war. To achieve this, a bow and arrow can be sent back to the community so as to broker peace.

Talking drums

Talking drums are an integral part of the culture and lives of the Ibibio. They are an integral part of the culture and lives of the Ibibio. They are used to

instruct dancers on what to do at a particular time during the dancing. Similarly, the talking drum plays a significant role during a wrestling match. its sound keeps a wrestler on the alert, prepares him for moves from the opponent as well as warn him to take a cue from the misses of the opponent. This language of the talking drums as a means of communication is best understood by the initiates (Figure 6).

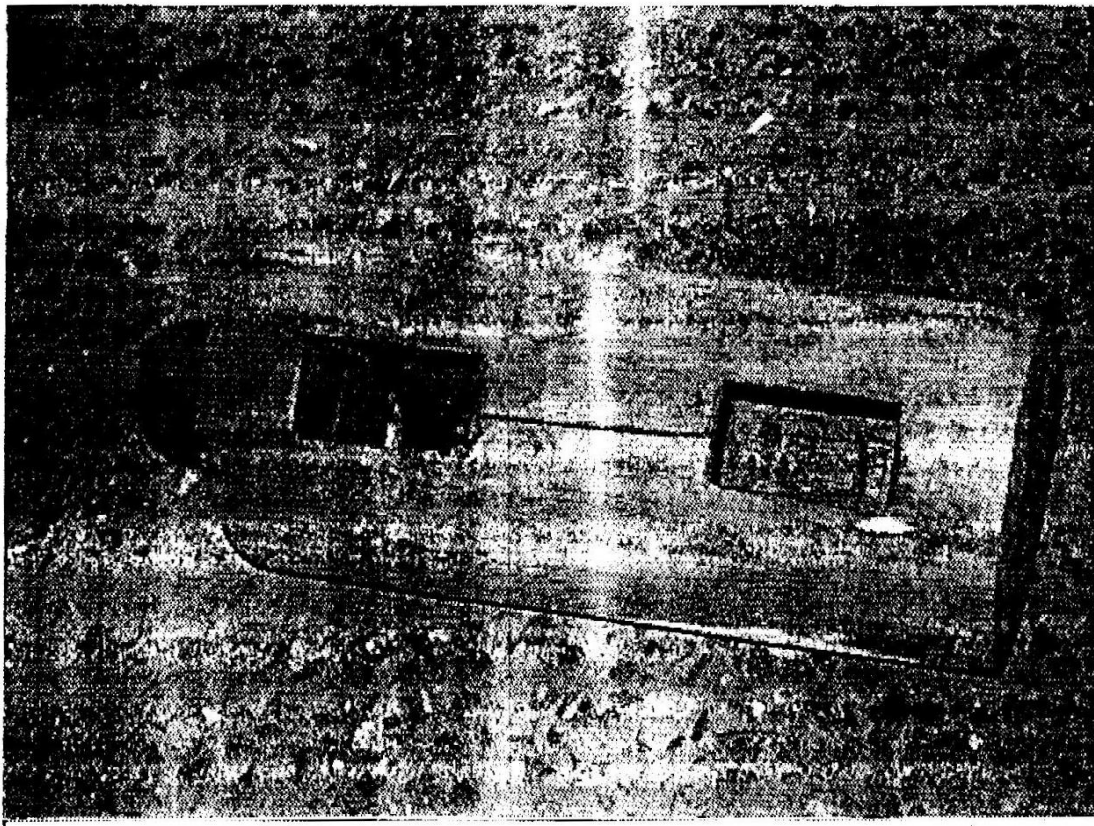


Fig. 6: Talking drum.

Gun shot

This means of communication is found in many societies around the world. In Ibibio land when people are being honoured, the communities will mandate a particular person to shoot guns. It is also used in anniversaries as well as during the burial of prominent people within the community. A gun shot also acts as a source of information to neighbouring villages on the events in the other society.

Fire

Is a common feature of communication found in many societies of the world. For example, the start of a sport activity is usually preceded with the torch bearing flame. For instance, the Olympic Flame travels round the world to

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signify the announcement of the commencement of the game. In Ibibio community, fire is lit when celebrations or sorrows occur that are of monumental degree.

Women going naked

This means of Communication is not peculiar to the Ibibio people, it is found in other societies, for example among the Efiks, the Yorubas and the Yakurrs. In this act of communication, women go naked or are scantily dressed and go round the village in a group to show their displeasure on issues that affect them and other members of the society.

Akata

This means of communication is quite dramatic. It is in effect a satire that criticizes social behaviour of individuals or groups within a society. The Akata starts off as early as about 1 a.m and dramatize until about 4 a.m to sing on the evil deed of an individual or groups. While this is going on a plantain stem is also planted in that person's compound. It serves to communicate to the person or group to desist from such acts of disgrace or shame.

CONCLUSION

There are several means of communication – oramedia - in Ibibio community such as the use of eyei, water, plantain, talking drums, songs, folklore, etc. These means of communication have existed from the early days in which man was thought to be primitive up till contemporary times. Government at different levels have realized that the traditional system of communication is effective in getting information to the largest number of people at the grass root level. The system is therefore used for mass mobilization for good governance. In essence, documenting these rich cultural artifact of the people not only preserves them but also provides records of the various means of communication. It keeps alive the rich cultural means of communication among the different societies whether in tradition or contemporary times as illustrated in the analysis of some of the Ibibio oramedia.

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INTERVIEW

Interview Chief Alban – Nsiak Ikot Ekpene LGA,

Interview with Chief Akpan Ikot Otu, Ikot Ekpene LGA.

Mrs. Christian Ita – Udua Ekpa Road – Uyo LGA

Interview with Mr. Edmund Otu Etim of Ibiaku Ikot Oku, Ibiono Ibom LGA