

Chapter 3

A TAXONOMY OF TRADITIONAL MEDIA IN AFRICA

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Introduction

This chapter draws largely from field data gathered from the south eastern Nigerian states of Akwa Ibom, and Cross River. However, there are similarities which cut across all of Nigeria, Cameroon and the west coast of Africa with some slight variations in east and south Africa. The prevalent mode in a particular region is largely dependent on the fauna and flora of the area as well as mineral and other resources available. These are essential to the manufacture and construction of communication devices as are the relevant skills needed for their production.

The various modes of communication are broadly divided into six classes. The classification may be contested by other scholars. However, one will contend that they at least provide approximations which can prove useful in the quest for an understanding of indigenous communication systems in Africa. The six classes are: instrumental media, demonstrative media, iconographic media, visual media, extra-mundane media and institutional media. These are in turn subdivided into sub-classes of media instruments which are as diverse as there are villages and clans in Africa. These classes and sub-classes are discussed fully in the following pages.

Instrumental Media of Communication

Instrumental modes of communication include idiophones, aerophones and membranophones. These are instruments or media which when beaten, blown or scratched produce diverse sounds and messages based on the expertise of the traditional newsperson and on the nature of his or her message.

Idiophonic Communication Instruments

Idiophonic communication involves the use of instruments which are self-sounding. Such instruments include the metal gong, woodblock, wooden drum, bell and rattle. These instruments are capable of producing their own messages as well as producing signals which serve as attention-directing devices prior to the delivery of the actual communication message.

Idiophonic communication devices that were identified during this study included the wooden drum, the metal gong, and the bell.

The Wooden Drum

Among the most important of the idiophones is the wooden drum, which is known in south eastern Nigeria as *obodom* (wooden drum). The people have a saying that the *obodom* is the message-bearer of the ethnic group. It is a very common instrument in most of the southern states of Nigeria especially in the states across the River Niger to the east. It speaks the drummed language. Most African people use it both as a musical instrument and as a medium of communication. Akpabot (1975) describes the wooden drum as a

drum, a hollowed out tree trunk made to produce two tones. It comes in different sizes and it is played with two beaters made out of bamboo. . . . It can be played as a solo instrument by a specialist musician to transmit messages from the chief of the village, in groups of two or three in an orchestra.

Akpabot (1975) adds that it comes in various sizes and performs different functions. Among the Ibibio of south eastern Nigeria three major kinds are identifiable namely, *obodom ubong* (royal drum), *obodom mbre* (common drum used by masquerade groups), and *obodom usuan etop* or *obodom ikot* (drum for message dissemination). *Obodom ubong* is a two-piece medium for disseminating information that has a direct link with royalty. One of these drums is smaller than the other. It is known to be used on three specific occasions, namely, at the installation of kings, a royal celebration and at the death of kings. The language of the *obodom ubong* which is based on the tonal patterns of the local language is understood by those who have been brought up under the traditional system. As it is usually played by specialist drummers, its language is not readily accessible to most members of the younger generation. To make this possible, the present generation has to be taught its system just as they learn the letters of the alphabet.

The *obodom mbre* consists of *obodom idion* (*idion* cult drum), *obodom ekpo nyoho* (*ekpe* masquerade drum), *obodom ekong* (*ekong* society drum) and others named after the cultural groups which make use of them. These drums are also carved out of logs of wood. Omibiyi (1977: 25) says this of them:

These are hollowed out and slit open at the top to create a pair of lips which are struck with beaters. The two lips give contrasting tones. . . . They are used to accompany various music and for verbal communication.

Obodom drum messages are addressed to specific individuals by calling their names and summoning them to the chief's home, or the whole community may be so informed through this medium if the message is meant for public consumption. This very vital function is performed by the *obodom usuan etop*. By its very name the *obodom usuan etop* was meant for sending messages. It is also the *obodom ikot* which was mentioned earlier. Some informants reported that because this type of *obodom* is very large its message could cover distances of over twenty kilometres. Chief William Ufot of Ete in Ikot Abasi (Nigeria) explained that when played at night its message could be received in very distant places. In some cases, he claimed, the message can only be understood by the elders and chiefs for whom the message is usually meant; and that in the past the *obodom* could be used to invite everyone to the village square within a very short spell of time. Then at the village square the message was delivered to everyone in a manner similar to what obtains at today's mass rallies.

The *obodom* used in the different masquerade groups produce esoteric messages meant for the ears of members. For example, only members of the Ekpo Nyoho society understand the speech formula used to deliver special messages to its members. The playing of the *obodom* to produce messages is an intricate affair which demands a high level of professionalism and expertise and such is found among those who have been trained to play it. No outsider nor one without prior training is allowed to do so.

In Mbarakom, Akamkpa Local Government Area, the *Obodom* plays out a call signal to farmers in the bush and this hurries them home to hear the message behind the urgent call of the village elders and chiefs. The first port of call of the home-coming farmers is usually the home of the village head or other chiefs. An informant reported an experience in which villagers ran into the forest when Federal troops entered the town during the Nigerian Civil War, and all appeals to them to come out and return to their homes failed. It was not until the village head ordered the playing of the *obodom* that the citizens mustered up courage to come out, thus giving credence to the claim that traditional media of communication have credibility and reliability.

In Ikot Obong village in Ikot Abasi Local Government Area, (Nigeria), Chief Ben Ikwot also spoke of the significance of the *obodom ubong* of which he said, when the citizens heard its sound they would exclaim: *Iya nkpo atibe!* (Ah! something has happened) and would then hurry to the village head's residence or to the *efe* (traditional shrine or traditional meeting hall) where they were told of the events that led to the call.

Thus, apart from being used as musical instruments, the *obodom* is also used in rural areas for the dissemination of information. Communication through the *obodom* is two-way. The audience responds to its messages. The response, which may come from an individual or a group in the community is always simultaneous and spontaneous.

From the evidence adduced from the field interviews, the following were observed as the functions of the *obodom*:

- i. It is used at the installation of kings.
- ii. It is used at royal celebrations.
- iii. It announces the passing away of kings.
- iv. It informs the citizens of grave danger.
- v. It is used in various masquerade groups, namely; *ukwa*, *ekombi*, *ekong*, *ekpo nyoho*, *ekpe* and many other musical entertainment activities.

Metal Gong (Nkwong)

Akpabot (1975:15) described the character and functions of the gong (*nkwong*), which shares a lot of characteristics with the Akan *dawuro* described by Ansu-Kyeremeh, as such:

Next to the drum the gong is the most frequently used in Ibibio music. It is very prominent in the music of secret societies, where it can be used as a solo instrument to announce the impending appearance of a masquerader . . .

According to Akpabot (1975), there are three types of instruments by the generic name, gong. Even though they are all closely related, the *nkwong* (metal gong) which is the largest of them all, is also the most frequently used. It is used in most female societies both as a musical instrument and a medium of communication especially in announcing dates and times of meetings and festivals.

The *nkwong* is a large conical metal gong which is normally beaten with special sticks or carved bamboo rods. It belongs principally to the Ebre Society, which shares the characteristics of the precursor to the Mityana women's clubs discussed by Nabasuta Mugambi. The *nkwong* is meant to be played on very important festive occasions and during the death of one of the female members of the society or an old, dignified, prominent and reputable woman who on account of old age no longer was able to participate actively in the activities of the society. In the earlier days whenever it was played it was an indication that something of importance had happened to a member of the Ebre society. Its sound served

as a rallying point for all other women in the village.

In other circumstances, the smaller gong, the *ekere* (a ritual gong), is used to announce the death of an old reputable woman. The Ebre Society (a cultural association of virtuous women) also has an appointed messenger whose duty it is to go round the streets and paths of the village mainly in the evenings and in the early hours of the morning to announce the news of an event that had either taken place or was about to take place. It is important to note that whatever announcement or information the women have to make or share does not affect the men or women who do not belong to the society. It is easy for rural dwellers to determine from the medium used and the voice of the "broadcaster" whether the message is meant for all the citizens or not.

The announcer, who must be a female, beats the *nkwong* as she goes round the village delivering her message. She does this with a stick similar to the one used along with the *obodom*. The sound of the instrument attracts attention to her person. She then announces the message by reciting whatever information, news or instructions to the womenfolk who would constitute the target audience.

Esen (1982: 127) writing of the royal significance of the *ekere* and its use as a musical instrument says it "is used mainly by the Ibibio chiefs on very special festival or ceremonial occasions." It is important to note that some of the instruments which have so far been discussed had varied uses to which they were put, each locality determining the expedient function of each instrument. Thus, when Esen (1982) says that the *ekere* is used principally by Ibibio chiefs, such a generalization should be seen within a specific social context about which he wrote. Esen (1982: 127) also says about the *ekere*:

Its sound, smooth and mellifluous, denotes joy, victory and the gladness of success: When a chief is installed he sounds the *ekere* as a symbol of the joy of achievement.

Other uses to which it is put are listed by Esen as including the celebration of war victory by war chiefs, and eulogy at a public oration on the passing away of a hero. And he sums up his views thus:

The *ekere* is therefore in a very real sense the musical instrument of Ibibio royalty and priesthood.

The *nkwong* is also known to be used to spread news that is of minor importance especially that which involves social clubs. The double-bell shape of the gong variety used for this purpose makes it possible for it to produce two tones thus making it an appropriate musical instrument.

Traditional rulers in the area have identified the following as functions of the two main varieties of the gong used in the area:

- i. It is used to speak to ancestor-spirits during *idiong'* performances.
- ii. Female societies, especially in Ebre society, use it for disseminating information, news, and messages related to other social activities.
- iii. The *ekere* is used by men in Ekpo society.
- iv. It is used to call the dead during one's funeral.
- v. The *akpan ikpo* (the successor to the deceased king) holds it at his coronation.
- vi. It is used by chiefs at their installations as a symbol of the joy of achievement.
- vii. It is the musical instrument of Ibibio royalty and priesthood.

Woodblock (Ntakrok)

The *ntakrok* (woodblock) was primarily used as a musical instrument but it is also used for minor information dissemination duties. It is made from wood and is hollowed inside but flat on its sides and it is played with a stick. It is used in much the same way as a metal gong. It is used to announce community projects, to place injunctions against the harvest of economic trees in the village, and also used by family groups to announce their programmes.

Bell (Nkanika)

The bell has a way of forcing its presence on the audience. It cannot be said to be typical of any particular society since it is present in almost any known part of the world in its various shapes and sizes and also performing closely related functions. In Old Calabar traditional society, the bell attennis strongly associated with secret societies like *Ekpe* (a male-dominated cultural society which also performs judicial functions of the type performed by judges and magistrates), *Ekpo Nyoho* and *Ekong* societies. The bell today transcends this function of forcing itself on the people and reminding them of the presence of any of the traditional masquerades mentioned above through tintinnabulation. Today it is generally used at social gatherings to draw the attention of the participants to an on-going activity. It is also used by itinerant advertisers in rural and urban areas to attract the attention of the passers-by to the wares that are being sold. It is frequently used at bazaars in conducting sales.

With regard to its effectiveness as a medium of communication it has a great potential which has perhaps not been fully tapped especially when the communicator rings it round the village on a bicycle or motorcycle or even on foot. Just as the other media already mentioned are used in communication as attention-directing devices, the bell also serves this purpose.

Aerophonic Communication Instruments

Aerophonic communication involves the use of instruments which produce sound as a result of the vibration of a column of air. The sounds may be messages on their own or they may serve as signals. The instruments used for this purpose include flutes and horns from plants and animals, and whistles. Some of the most popular ones are cow, ivory and deer horns.

Ivory Horn (Nnuk Enin)

This medium is regarded in most parts of Ibibio land as the most dignified and royal medium of communication. It has a sacred, definitive function in traditional communication. Its importance also lies in the fact that it is used in rare circumstances. Unlike those media which speak in coded "languages" its messages are simple enough to be easily understood and related to events that are usually associated with their use. Again, this can be likened to the Akan *abentia* (short horn) which Ansu-Kyeremeh describes later. They are both made from elephant tusk and are elitist, exclusively owned by chiefs.

This medium is made out of the tusk of an elephant and it has a hole made at its tail-end through which the message is blown. This is one medium that is not handled by the ordinary messenger of society unless one's role as communicator has been enhanced by that individual's personal status in the society. Its message could be cryptic and also meant for the masses of the people. It plays a very vital role in rural society. It is used as an instrument of peace and also used for information dissemination purposes. Under these broad roles the following specific functions have been identified:

- i. It is blown to settle quarrels.
- ii. It is used on very important occasions to inform citizens of the death of kings, serious calamities and other grave occurrences.
- iii. It is used for placing injunctions over disputed land or property.
- iv. It offers the final word or judgement on issues.

- v. It is used by secret societies to inform members about important festivities like offerings to the deity.

In times of war it is blown to alert the people and also to mobilize the young men and women in society. On such an occasion the blower climbs to the top of a tree or house to make its sound get to very long distances.

In cases involving communal or ritual killings as was the case with the dreaded *Ekpe Ikpauskot*, the chiefs and elders of the society took the elephant tusk and stood at the village centre of the erring group and blew a warning message against a repeat of such murders which occasioned the activities of the *Ekpe Ikpauskot*, otherwise known as "Man Leopard." This action of the elders meant that an injunction had been placed over the community. When they returned to their homesteads they were somewhat sure that those rituals would not be repeated. But in cases where the breach of the injunction occurred, Chief William Ufot of Ete in Ikot Abasi asserted, a second visit to the erring community led to the land being turned to scorched earth. Wives and children of the recalcitrant community were also taken away and shared. All these gave the tusk the image of a final arbiter in all matters of state. In a sense, it is an example of a McLuhanite medium-derived message. Today, the tusk still retains some of its aura of importance but the convention and circumstance that make it the final arbiter are no longer in existence, yet it is still regarded as a powerful instrument or medium of communication especially for its rarity.

Perhaps the importance of the tusk in the past and today is borne out of the fact that it is a highly-prized and cherished economic product and hence it is only found in the homes of kings, chiefs and the rich. Talbot (1923) says Afaha Eket Chiefs in Eket exacted it as tribute and royalty from the early Ibeno settlers until the practice was abolished in the late nineteenth century by the early British Missionaries.

Today the tusk no longer commands the same royal dignity that was accorded it in the past but it still retains its royal significance on the death of kings. When it is blown, the citizens know that something serious is amiss. This symbolism is not totally lost on the people.

Wooden Flute (Uta)

The *uta* is a conical instrument made from a special kind of gourd whose natural shape makes it possible for the instrument to be made and used for the purpose for which it is now famous. The *uta* instruments are of different sizes. Akpabot (1975) distinguishes four different sizes but this excludes the very small *uta* which is of the size of the mouth organ. *Uta* is also the

name given to a dance troupe which uses this instrument as the predominant musical instrument. It does not seem to have been originally fashioned out as a communication instrument and was only discovered for this purpose during its "talking" sessions in music. Its use was not visible during the time of the investigations in the villages except during musical entertainment. However, oral evidence showed that wherever the *uta* was blown in the village, citizens trooped out to listen to the message which was intended for them. Chief Japhet A. Udoh of Ikot Ekpaw, the paramount ruler of Ikot Abasi, noted that the *uta* was never played except at very important events like the death of a "good" old woman. He also asserted that such a woman must have been a member of the Ebre society and that the Efik-Ibibio expression: *Men uta for kefit ko* means "go and blow your news elsewhere." This interpretation if valid gives an indication as to the communicative use of the *uta*.

Sam Akpabot (1975) adds however that an identical expression which he recorded during his field studies: "*Men uta for kefit ke Annang*" (Go and blow your *uta* in the Annang country) refers to the cultural origin of the *uta* itself as an important medium either for music or for communication. But while Obong Japhet Udoh saw the *uta* as a symbolic referent or synonym for news, Akpabot (1975) saw it as a representation of the medium itself. If the Annang origin is true, certainly the expression does not in any way make this clear as there is a strong suspicion that this could have been a derisive parlance at a particular time as is common in the language with all such expressions beginning with "*Men . . .*"

Nevertheless, the *uta* is a symbolic medium of communication in the sense that it conveys only one meaning, and that is, it calls the attention of the people to an on-going event or that which has occurred. Such an event could be the death of an important lady of the community or in some instances it could be an indication of some revelry going on in the house of an important citizen. In these circumstances the blower first sounds the *uta* and then announces the news.

In spite of its communicative capabilities the *uta* was not generally accepted as an important medium of communication. It was clear from the evidence that it was not generally acknowledged for this purpose. It was actually found to be of limited use to some communities. Its unpopularity as a communication medium is perhaps embedded in the apparent irritation in the remark "*Men uta of kefit ko*" (or "*. . . ke Annang*") which is also an indication that it may have been employed by some social clubs to carry out their communication activities in the past and through overuse it acquired its seeming notoriety and irritability.

Finally, the following can be said of the *uta*:

- i. It is a cone-shaped medium of communication made from the gourd, slit to enable the blower "play" whatever message is intended.
- ii. It is now usually used at public festivals and rallies to sing praises about the leader or the event being celebrated.
- iii. It is played for deceased old ladies usually members of the Ebre Society. In this respect it is never played for deceased young ladies.
- iv. Social clubs use it to inform their members of activities.

Thus, the *uta* is significant in many respects as an instrument of communication even though it has not attained the same level of popularity as the other more commonly used ones.

The Obukpon

The *Obukpon* is made from the deer horn and it is used practically in the same manner as the elephant tusk and *uta*. Significantly, one of the early newspapers published in the Old Calabar Province took its name from this medium. It was called *Obukpon Efik* and belonged to the Presbyterian Mission. Its use could be equated more with that of the *uta* rather than with the elephant tusk, although Edidem Atakpa (1981)² claimed that *obukpon* is sometimes used as the symbol of the Supreme Being and that when blown the rainbow appears; and this, he said, is done twice in a year. *Obukpon* as an instrument of communication is mainly used as an attention-directing device and its prominence as enunciated in the Itu area was not supported by other areas. It became clear that its importance and function have been eroded through the use of other local instruments.

Membranophonic Communication Instruments

The membranophonic communication instrument is that which uses skin or leather drums to produce signals and messages through the vibration of the membrane which is beaten by hand or struck with a stick. They serve as signal source and produce messages of their own. The skin drums are found in all Nigerian, and indeed African, cultures and they come in different shapes and sizes.

In the location of this study they were known by various descriptive labels which tended to define the functions they performed for the various

groups. They were also seen as musical instruments. Their descriptive labels actually derived from their musical function. Portability was important if they were to perform communication functions. The ones used for the purpose of disseminating information were usually small in size to enable the newpeople to carry them about. They are generally known by the name *Ibit*. Some call them *ekomo*. In the Ikot Abasi area the ones used in information dissemination matters are called *nkomo* while a similar drum in the Onna area of Eket is called *ikpeti*.

A specific drum is beaten by the traditional newsperson as s/he goes round the community delivering whatever message s/he has. As information on the second question schedule showed, this drum is the most used of the various media of communication in rural communities.

Many respondents (65 percent) identified the skin drum as the most frequently used instrument of communication in rural areas. The traditional newsperson who is always known in the community plays it as s/he delivers or broadcasts his/her message. S/he has always been a kin relation of the community whom the citizens or receivers of his/her message can relate to and do relate to. His/her credibility is instantaneously verifiable. The audience can easily confirm or dispute (if need be) the information. This factor is probably what Schramm (1963) alludes to when he wrote that:

At present among many transitional people there is still a strong tendency to appraise the reliability of various media mainly on the basis of the strength of their personal relationship with the source of information.

The skin drum is thus a very important instrument of communication in rural societies.

Symbolographic Communication Instruments

Symbolographic communication instruments entail the use of cryptic representation in the form of writing (pseudo-writing) made on surfaces — hard or soft — like the rind of the bamboo, walls, cloth or the ground and sometimes these may be in the form of signs. This is symbolic writing or representation which may be employed in communication among members of an exclusive club.

Nsibidi Writing

The best known of the symbolographic form of communication is the *nsibidi* writing of the Efik-Ibibio, Ekoi, and Ejagham people of the former Cross River State. This form of writing is also found among the Mom of the Cameroon, the Vai, Basa, Mende and Kpele in Sierra Leone and Liberia;

and also among the Igbo of Eastern Nigeria who are the neighbours of the Old Calabar people. As Alexandre (1972: 110) pointed out,

The Nsibidi writing . . . seems to be in a transition phase, its character sometimes representing a complex notion and sometimes a sound.

As a writing form, it is not well-known on account of the restrictive usages among members of a secret cult which "uses it both to enable its members to communicate among themselves and to fashion amulets and magic charms." But among the Igbo it has been used to express more modernistic ideas by avant-garde painters and artists. *Nsibidi* writing is closely associated with Ekpe cult and represents perhaps what would have been one of the earliest forms of writing in these parts of Africa. But because of the secrecy which surrounds most of its activities Ekpe society members left this potential writing form undeveloped outside the confines of secret society esotericism.

Bamboo Writing (Nsadang)

This is a small, decorated stick made from the dry branch of the raffia palm tree. It is often marked to represent different codes. It has a limited usage although its specific use in times of disputes could spark off fratricidal conflicts, and intercommunal or interpersonal violence. Aspects of its secret codes are lost and perhaps this accounts for its indiscriminate use by individuals in certain rural societies today. Chief Anangabo Effiong of Mbarakom Clan in Akamkpa Local Government Area was of the view that it used to be a powerful instrument of communication in his area in the past but that it has been replaced today by other instruments. Slave messengers, claimed the Chief, conveyed the *nsadang* from one chief to another when the messages were destined for distant places. Although other interviewees disputed the use of slave messengers over long distances because of the possibility of their escape, others insisted that such slave messengers would have lived long enough in the host areas to have planted roots through marriage and the bearing of offspring and could thus be trusted not to escape. This, in fact, is the view of Noah (1980: 17).

Whatever was the case, slave messengers were a rarity when the message involved a long distance. Nevertheless, the notion of slave messengers still suggests humble beginnings for an information dissemination vocation and not necessarily a lowly profession. Its beginnings were simply humble. On the whole, it was clear that only trusted members of the society were made message bearers in traditional societies,

and this pattern exists till today even though traditional practitioners may be fewer.

In a different sense, when the cryptographic marks on the *nsadang* are considered, it does not seem as if it commanded the same mass function as other media instruments which have been discussed so far. Perhaps it could be said that the information received through the *nsadang* prompted the use of another medium to amplify it. Besides, the *nsadang* does not have the information capacity of saying much beyond the cryptic marks made on it and this language is clearly understood by both the sender and the receiver. In spite of this, the bearer sometimes had to say a few words in explaining or introducing the mission. Whatever its merits then, *nsadang* combined the written and spoken word; it was a form of writing that was supplemented with verbal communication in its multimedia format.

Today *nsadang* can perform the function of private communication between leaders as is often found in diplomatic circles. It is a powerful medium for delivering messages from one leader in the village to another, or from one family to another. Even though it has been trivialized by the frequent recourse to its use by people in conflict, it still maintains its potency. Thus today, the following functions are still discernible:

- i. declaring disputes between two villages, clans or families.
- ii. summoning parties in disputes just as *eyei*, another potent medium of communication which belongs to another category of media.
- iii. indicating a warning by those who feel offended by others.

Its sharp end is said to be indicative of the acuteness of the problem in relation to which it is used. When both ends are sharpened it is said to represent a very serious quarrel which may be difficult to resolve and when one end is sharpened it is said to indicate the possibility that though the quarrel may be serious there is still room for an amicable settlement.

Demonstrative Communication

This form of indigenous African communication is more of an aural communication. It uses music and signal as modes of communication. Many of the media already discussed in this chapter are used as musical instruments, and music in itself is a mode of group and mass communication in all societies. Music, as Jacobson (1969: 334) pointed out, is "an

unconsummated symbol which evokes connotation and various articulation, yet is not really defined." From the inaudible music of the spheres to today's high fidelity stereophonic systems, music has played a significant role in ordering, re-ordering and generally shaping human society. Dietz and Olatunji (1965: 1) noted that

music is part of everyday work, religion, and ceremonies of all sorts. It is . . . used for communication. Many tribes have no written language, so they send messages by word of mouth through singing, blowing signal whistles, or by talking drums which imitate the pitch of the human voice.

In a similar tone, Ekwueme (1983: 4) stated that "Functionality is a known feature of music and the arts in Africa" and that,

In this functionality, communication becomes a primary or at least secondary objective.

African music, in the Hornbostelian sense is the 'life of a living spirit working within those who dance and sing' and this view readily applied to its function as a means of communication. Besides, Akpabot (1981) sees such music as a vehicle of social change capable of being used for religious change, social order change and educational expansion. Euba (1982) also agrees that music can be used as an instrument of social change.

In some traditional societies, grapevine stories are presented in songs by cultural groups and other social groups. Among the people of the Old Calabar, for example, itinerant music entertainment groups use satire, criticism, moralization, praise, symbolism, didacticism, suggestion, labelling and name-calling to communicate with individuals, groups and the society at large. Such groups may include the *akata*, *ekpo*, *itembe* and age grades. Current events (gossips) are presented in their lurid details especially when they are about the rich and proud. Today, the phonograph record and cassette tapes, mostly through radio, television and video have contributed to make music a mass medium of communication, whether in its recorded form or in a live performance. And music has become a powerful instrument for interpersonal, extramundane, intra-personal and mass communication.

Instrumental modes of communication thus produce sounds that signify or symbolise a communication event within the context of a specific setting. The sounds of the different drums, flutes, horns, bells and gongs serve as signals of communication. Signals are often accompanied by oral or visual messages depending on the communication context.

Iconographic Communication

Iconographic communication involves the communication of ideas or information through the use of objective or concrete reality in inanimate or animate form. The two main modes employed in this category are objectified and floral communication.

Objectified Communication

Objectified communication (or objectics) is a signification in which the object refers to a thing, event or concept. This concrete representation may have a limited meaning or may have a universal application or significance. The presentation of a bowl or saucer of kolanuts to a visitor has significance within the context of the presentation and also has symbolic meanings. Such meanings are more powerful than what words could ever convey. The same goes for the presentation or exchange of charcoal, white pigeon or fowl, white egg, feather, cowries, mimosa, flowers, sculptures, pictures, or even flags in modern ceremonies.

Floral Communication Instruments

Floral communication involves the use of selected flora of the local vegetation for the purpose of communicating specific meanings or ideas to members resident in or who may pass by the particular place where these media are used. They often act as traditional billboards. The most common ones used among the Old Calabar people include the boundary tree, a species of elephant grass, mimosa, *eyei*, *nyama*, *isara* and flowers. For example, the plant usually used to demarcate boundaries between plots conveys strong cultural meanings in relation to land matters. In addition, the young unopened frond of the palm tree (*eyei*), referred to by the Ibibio as *nwed Ikpaisong* is used in many ways to convey various meanings and it also performs various functions.

Young Palm Frond (Eyei)

The *eyei* is one of the most important media of communication of the past which still retains its potency and effectiveness. Johnson (1932) as district officer in Abak wrote about clan meetings which were always convened by the Clan Ayaraufot, who sent round *eyei*, a fringe of palm leaf, to every village as a sign of authority for the messengers who delivered notice of the meetings.

Two things come out clearly here; the first being that the *eyei* is a symbol of authority; secondly, it could not be issued by anyone else except

the village or Clan head. It is still considered a symbol of great importance and urgency whenever it is used to communicate a message publicly or privately. Akpabot (1975: 22) offers some explanation in connection with its use in Ekpo Society (a predominantly male cultural group which also performs some judicial functions), which in the past and to a lesser degree today, was considered part of the traditional judicial system, adding that whenever,

the chief of a village did not want a piece of land cultivated for some time, he would send out a musician of the *Ekpo* society who would go round the village playing an *Ekpo* drum (*ibid ekpo*) to announce the chief's decision.

This action was then followed by another symbolic announcement which in this case was in the form of "a branch from a palm tree (*eyei* . . .) no one dared cross that mark." And if anyone defied this mark or symbol of traditional authority, Akpabot (1975) says "he would be found dead under mysterious circumstances, a victim of the ancestral spirits." Whether in fact this happened or is capable of happening is one of the assumptions that are couched in traditional myths and beliefs and may be extremely difficult to prove. But one thing is clear and that is the authority of the *eyei* which comes from the village head has some divine backing and if the chief in his human manifestation cannot punish the offender against tradition, tradition alleges that the supernatural forces who are in communion with humans punish such a person in whatever way they deem fit. This notion of divine intervention in human affairs and communication between humans and deities is a popular view in sub-Saharan African cosmology. For, as Wilson (1975: 6) points out in another context,

There is territorial contiguity . . . one world merges into the other like the upper and middle streams of a river.

This world view is still very strong and is responsible for the level of social stability in the society, although some have mistaken this fear of powerful and unknown spirits for illiteracy, ignorance and superstition. Today, it is not uncommon for the poor illiterate supplicant and the western-educated Christian priest to meet at the traditional soothsayer's shrine seeking protection from the powerful spirits which they fear their enemies are about to unleash on them.

Some of the interviewees in Eket and Ikot Abasi spoke of how federal legislators and other important sons were invited to crucial meetings by enclosing *eyei* in their letters of invitation. Some considered the enclosure

of *eyei* as the strongest factor in getting people to respond to such invitations since previous open invitations were ignored. Perhaps it can be surmised here that a fear not unrelated to that of the supernatural forces in the symbolic presentation of *eyei* may have propelled the invitees to attend those meetings.

Yet *eyei* on its own does not convey any specific meaning but acquires meaning within the context it is used. For an example, an *eyei* presented to a suspected witch or wizard is a sign of notice of ostracism. An *eyei* hung around a disputed land is an indication that an injunction has been placed on the use of the land until the dispute is settled. *Eyei* has religious as well as judicial functions. In its communicative function it is a sign of peace.

In rural areas where farmlands still constitute potential trouble spots, *eyei* is strung around disputed farmlands. Passers-by understand the message whenever they see it. Although the message is limited to only those who pass by this does not in any way reduce or diminish its effectiveness, because it is meant to speak to those who pass through the area. As many as pass by receive the silent message loud and clear. *Eyei* is never issued by just anybody or without the authority of the head of the village or community. The head of the family may also, in some special cases, use the *eyei* for special effects in matters involving two or more families.

One important advantage this form of communication has is that, like Western modes of communication, its message can be amplified through other media or channels of communication for a wider coverage.

In sum, the following general functions of the *eyei* can be identified:

- i. It can be used to ban offenders from further participation in community affairs, or in preventing them from going out until they are found guilty or guiltless. The traditional judicial system is such that the accused is adjudged guilty until he proves himself innocent.
- ii. It notifies people of the presence of a shrine in a particular area and non-indigens and non-initiates are usually expected to keep off such shrines.
- iii. It also notifies the general public about certain routes they are expected to keep off if members of a secret cult were going to use them for a specific purpose and within a specified period. This kind of restriction is partly responsible for some of the clashes non-indigens and iconoclasts often have with traditional society.
- iv. When displayed around a piece of land, it serves as a warning

- over the use of such a land whether in dispute or not.
- v. It is used for arbitration in times of conflict and is thus used to restrain factions from continuing in their feuds.
 - vi. It is used to ostracise witches and wizards and other persons considered to be engaged in acts detrimental to the progress of society.
 - vii. It is used to indicate the importance of the event the receiver is being called upon to attend.
 - viii. It is used when one person is seeking assistance from another in a private matter.
 - ix. It is sent by kings to fellow kings or to vassals to point to the authority behind the message and the urgency with which it should be treated.
 - x. When issued by the crown it is delivered through a messenger, and the *eyei* is tied to indicate the message. In this form it resembles and imitates writing and it is thus regarded by traditional rulers and elders as the universal newspaper or literally "the book of the land" or *nwed ikpaisong*.
 - xi. During celebrations they are used as decor. Their mere presence conjures an atmosphere of solemnity or celebration depending on the time of year or occasion for which the palm fronds, including the more mature ones, are displayed.
 - xii. They serve as notices that a corpse is being conveyed in a vehicular procession. They are usually tied to such vehicles. A variety of other leaves are used by other societies for this same purpose.
 - xiii. They are used to warn against certain anti-social activities of individuals. In such instances they are presented to those who may be involved in such activities and they are either summoned or verbal warnings accompany their presentation.

Visual Communication

Visual communication is what happens to the receiver when a certain effect is produced by light on the eye and this brings about his realization of the different shades of colours as may be visible through a colour spectrum. This form of communication also involves the changes which the differences in the form of clothing, appearance and general comportment on the part of the communicator produce on the receiver. This sensation caused by light makes it possible for a person to carry out a differentiation

of colours and attach his meaning and symbolism to them in his cultural context. The individual receiver of visual communication has the advantage of utilizing the two major advantages of pictorial communication. These advantages lie in the speed of the impact of the message and the freedom of the visual information from linguistic barriers associated often with written and spoken language.

The use of colours for the purpose of communication has remained for a long time a very important mode of human communication. All societies have had a relatively common symbolism attached to the different colours produced by human beings or present in nature. But while others have retained theirs some have, through cultural imperialism, been deprived of their original notions or symbolisms. Racism and ethnocentrism have tended to obliterate the culture of many technologically-deprived nations.

In Western societies for example, light colours are associated with pleasure, and dark colours with sadness. Some of the racially biased anthropological reports like that of Turner (1969: 59–62) speak of "white symbolising milk, purity, health, [and] good luck, while black represents faeces and other grim things." This archetypal racist notion is derived from the Middle Ages where black was suggestive of material darkness and was symbolical of the spiritual darkness of the soul. Later, it was, as Hulme (1899: 28–29) points out, incorporated into ideas of the Devil — the Prince of Darkness, and witchcraft — the black art.

Yet in spite of this corruption of values and colour systems of some nations, the seemingly similar symbolic colour systems cannot be adduced simply on the basis of the existence of colour universals. Among the people of Old Calabar Province in general and the Ibibio in particular, there is some general display of agreement in the use of the following colours individually or in combination to depict certain cultural events, taboos or feelings.

Red expresses danger and spirituality. It is a favourite colour of the secret societies, namely, *idiong* and *ekpe*. It symbolises fire and blood. White also expresses spirituality and purity. At times it is used as a symbol of mourning in memorial rites pertaining to dead elderly persons or in similar rites within christian religious contexts. It is a colour also used in shrines and other religious institutions. Black is a favourite colour of the Ekpo society as well as Ekong and other masquerade groups used ostensibly to depict the fact that these are spirits or ghosts. It is also used to represent the dead as well as mourning. It is perhaps the most abused colour in racial disputes. Brown is the colour of the earth and it is used in "repainting" of homes during major festivals or periods of festivals. In rural areas most

houses wear the brown colour because it is the colour of the soil that is most used in so-called mud houses. Green is also the colour of Nature. The verdant leaves of plants are used in masquerade groups and for decoration during festivals and ceremonies. It is a colour representing our umbilical link with other things of nature (plants) as well as the earth from which they grow. Yellow is a fearful colour. It is associated with the deadly disease, yellow fever. The young unopened buds of the palm fronds have a mixture of this colour and green and are used for important communication functions. Blue as well as its different shades especially the dark blue is one of the principal colours used in dyeing native cloth. Since it is close to black it is often treated as belonging to that family and is consequently used for similar purposes as black.

Extra-Mundane Communication

This is a mode of communication, real or imaginary, believed to take place between the living and the dead, or between the living and supernatural or supreme being. This mode of communication is significant from the point of view that there is no society where it does not exist in its different forms. On the surface it usually seems unidirectional but participants at religious crusades, *idiong* consultation prayer sessions, rituals and other religious and pseudo-spiritual activities know there is often a form of feedback which may come through intra-personal processes, physical revelations or magical, other-worldly verbalizations. Thus it is a multi-directional or multi-dimensional mode which has become pervasive in all societies. It is possible to evoke such intensity of spiritual feeling through a spiritual transmigration of the participants to another world. Such a performance may convey the elements of a cultural celebration, dedication and consecration as is often witnessed in marriage and funeral rites or at (the pouring of) libation. Obituary, in memoriam notices, and tombstone messages are the graphic forms of this mode of communication. Among some of the other well known forms of this mode are incantation, chant, ritual, prayer, sacrifice, invocation, libation, conjuration, witchcraft, exorcism, vision and contemplation.

Institutional Communication

This involves the use of cultural or traditional institutions to communicate symbolically and as an extension of the extra-mundane mode of communication. The most important of such traditional institutions are

marriage, chieftaincy, secret societies, shrines, masks and masquerades. There is a lot of communication in the enactment of activities of each of the institutions. For example, the marriage institution and all ceremonies pertaining to traditional weddings are a combination of a secular celebration, spirituality akin to christian ritual and a cultural communication of norms and mores of the society or group.

In addition, as Okita (1982: 9) pointed out,

The importance of shrines as a vehicle for transmitting a people's cultural heritage does not only emanate from the fact that shrines are an embodiment of socio-religious ideas that give meaning and sustain life in a traditional society. The objects kept in shrines, the worship or festival that takes place there, are all symbolic acts that sometimes deal with the tradition or origin of a people, the rather inexplicable natural forces or phenomenon that must be personified: or certain norms or laws considered necessary for the sustenance of society all of which are invariably connected with the life cycle.

The ways in which all the above modes operate in the society show that they are all interwoven with all other human activities such that sometimes it is difficult to distinguish between the role of the traditional communicator as a practitioner and as an individual acting in his or her private capacity in society. And Pye (1963) observed that:

Traditional communication processes . . . tended in general to be closely wedded to social and political processes that the very act of receiving and transmitting messages called for some display of agreement and acceptance.

This is true when a case like that of Chief Anangabo Effiong, of Mbarakom, is considered. He was a former traditional communicator who was so close to the political system and power base that he today is the village head of Mbarakom where he has served as media practitioner. The communicator, the medium, and channel in traditional society almost appear indistinguishable in their functions in society. The communicator can be seen as channel as well as medium; while the channel can be the medium as well as the message; so too can the medium be.

Thus, from the evidence on traditional modes of communication that have been identified above it is obvious that the various techniques and functions of communication in traditional society were not in themselves exclusive. Most media display the capacity for multi-social functions and the choice of each medium may be determined by the nature of the communication matter and the ability of the medium to get the message across to the audience in good time. The role of each medium of

communication is thus circumscribed by the institutional and social control exercised on traditional communicators who themselves seem to be deprived of their individualism or that they have to subsume it within the context of a collective communal fiat; and also in the performance of their duty have to acquiesce to the demands of their job which has no place for self-interest or competitive adventurism as witnessed in modern media practice.

It is a historical fact that the various traditional approaches as described by the scheme set out in Table 3.1, to communication were as effective in reaching the small populations of the rural societies as our modern media are able to reach the teeming populations of the present age in urban centres. Today not all of the media mentioned are as effective in their coverage and function as they were in the past. It is for this reason that there seems to be much sense in suggestions for a multi-media approach to our communication problems in Nigeria and in Africa in general.

In spite of this fact the traditional media and channels of communication operate independently and also complement one another in the communication network that exists in rural society. Nevertheless, it is clear that the presence of modern media in all sections of society — rural and urban — has not in any way diminished the role of traditional rulers as gatekeepers in the information dissemination process, mediating between the larger machinery of the state and the gentle but determined murmurs of traditional media, since a large majority of the people do not possess the means to buy newspapers, radio, television or books and magazines. So many factors are at play in both the rural and urban areas which are not within the ambit of this study. But if there is anything this researcher has learned in this study, it is that he has got so much to learn.

TABLE 3.1

Summary of Traditional Modes and Instruments of Communication

		Idiophones:	Wooden drum, Woodblock, Ritual rattle, Bell, metal gong, akankang, ekere, xylophone, hand shakers, pot drum.
A	Instrumental	Membranophones: Aerophones: Symbology:	Skin drum Whistle, deer horn, ivory tusk, reed pipe. Decorated bamboo rind, nsibidi, tatoo, chalk marks.
B	Demonstrative	Music: Signal:	Songs, choral and entertainment music. Canon shots, gun shots, whistle call, camp fire.
C	Iconographic	Objectified: Floral	Charcoal, white dove, kolanut, cowtail, white clay, egg, feather, calabash beads, limb bones, drinking gourds, calabash, flag. Young unopened palm frond, okono tree nsei, nyama, mimosa, plaintain stems.
D	Extra-Mundane	Icantatory: Graphic:	ritual, libation, vision. Obituary, <i>in memoriam</i> notices.
E	Visual	Colour: Appearance:	White cloth, red cloth dressing, hairstyle.
F	Institutional	Social: Spiritual:	Marriage, chieftaincy. Shrine, masquerade.

Notes

1. Idiong is the most powerful secret and sacred cult among the Ibibio.
2. Interview with Edidem Ekpe Obong Atakpa, Paramount Ruler of Itu.