



Encoding, Decoding And Ethnographic Twitches Among The Cross River Igbo: A Historicization

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ABSTRACT

The issues of encoding and decoding have been rife. Indeed, the two-in-one concept has denominated communication over the years. But have all the issues raised in the processes of human relations and development been effectively communicated? In this era of the World-Wide Web (www), it is observable that certain pre-modern facts of communication, such as ethnographic twitches and audio-visual forms have hardly been disserted on regarding the Cross River Igbo communities. This paper consequently, undertakes documenting these aspects that gave these traditional communities resilience and sustenance in pre-coloniality and presently (2021); and especially, since these have been hidden under anecdotes, proverbs, the didactic and ironical, among others. Oral interviews were conducted in the discerning and interpreting all un-surveyed means of communication in the Cross River Igbo. These modes ranged from the verbal, non-verbal to the audio and non-audio, and signages.

Keywords: *Encoding, decoding, ethnography, twitches, signs, signages and communication.*

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INTRODUCTION

*If what is said is not what is meant;
And what is meant is not what is said;
What ought to have been done remains undone.
- Osuagwu [1]*

The conceptualization and establishment of the implications of communication vis-à-vis what this paper undertakes to achieve has been, first, difficult among individuals to give clear-cut definitions of the term; and, foremost, of the great variations in the meanings of the same term. The sociological definition of communication which is that it is the mechanism through which human relations exist and develop has been overviewed as encompassing of the other averred definitions.

Rehearsing Seema Hasan, communication is construed as the act and process of the transmission of information and messages, ideas, emotions, skills and knowledge, among others. These are achieved through the use of symbols, words, pictures, figures/figurines, graphs/graphics and/or illustrations. Yet, a distinction has been made to implicitly state that the act of communication is the 'transmission' while the process of the transmission is termed 'communication' [2]. Furthermore, it is observed that communication in history regulated and shaped all human behavior [3]. Consequently, certain questions have been raised in order to have clearer understanding of what communication is all about *vis-à-vis* why it is important to us; how it works in the processes of its transmission; and the different types of communication that have, and are, engaged in, in all its variations.

Contextualized to this paper, distinctions have to be made from existing definitions made by various individuals, schools of thought and/or by practitioners of certain disciplines other than Mass Communication. As stated earlier, and from a sociological point of view, communication remains the connection between human relations and development. Still anchoring a definitive platform for the encoding, decoding and ethnographic twitches, otherwise communication, a journalist defined communication as the "process whereby one person tells another something through the written or spoken word" [3]. Other definitions of communication have been adduced and adjudged to fall between the above definitions, especially the sociological and the journalistic. Yet, from the psychological point of view, Carl Hovland has defined communication as "the process by which an individual (the communicator) transmits stimuli (usually verbal symbols) to modify the behaviour of the other individuals (communicates) [3].

From the historical point of view, communication must go beyond all the already averred definitions, and accommodate what the intents of the communicator are. This contention raises further questions to include: who communicates and who receives the communicated intent; to what purposes are the interactions; and what interpretations would be ascribed to the communication given. Contextualized to this paper, the communication of intents by the communicator and the required execution of the decoded messages (intents) by the receiver is the sum total of communication. If the intent of the communicator (the encoder) is not properly interpreted and implemented (the decoded by the decoder), then there has been no communication [4].

Of particular interest to this paper is the encoding and decoding of what have been communicated and their execution in order to achieve desired results and intents. Whatever definitions are acceptable or have been given, they are intended to influence persons to actions and to modify behaviours or actions for security in contradistinction to the perception and understanding of indigenes and non-indigenes. Ethnographic twitches are pervasively used in traditional societies as communication codes to forewarn and sensitize indigenes against possible dangers; and to also generally preserve certain intents or traditions.

Meanings, Importance, Functions, Features and Scope of Communication

Communis et communicare means a communication made common from their Latin derivatives. It encompasses a variety of experiences, actions and happenstances; and even technologies. The technologies presently used in disseminating information have cleft communication into the traditional and modern. The obvious events and media of communication in modern times are meetings, conferences and political, economic and social events; while the media are through newspapers, radio and television platforms, video and journalism, generally. The technology in traditional societies were, and still are, the wooden xylophones that come in various shapes - the **Ekwe** (specially used by town criers for announcements), **Ikoro** (for summons) and **Ese Ike** (in Ngwaland), on the one hand, and the use of the eyes in ethnographic twitches, mouth in utterances, legs and hands in gesticulations, on the other.

Other than in the sense of involving two or more persons, one or two groups, coming together for festivals or family gatherings, communication could be metaphysical. It could be with oneself, dreaming, and/or with the Gods and nature. At another level [3], communication has been defined as the process:

Which increases commonality [that] also requires elements of commonality for it to occur at all. A common language, for instance, does not necessarily bring people together. There are other factors too at play, such as shared culture and a common interest which bring about a sense of commonality and more significantly, a sense of community [to attain commonality].

In linear terms, Hasan [3] while rehearsing Denis McQuail said that:

Human communications [is] the sending of meaningful messages from one person to another. These messages could be oral or written, visual or olfactory. [Included also are] laws, customs, practices and ways of dressing, gestures, building, and gardens.

Generally, communication is the interchange of thoughts, ideas, wishes and intents. It equally includes all those aspects that have been subsumed in others; and the totemic and symbolisms. It entails a system or systems through which messages are sent (encoded) and feedbacks are expected and received after prompt, immediate and direct interpretations are made or would have been made (decoded). "It is, therefore, the process of transferring particular information or message from an information source to desired, definite or a particular destination" [3].

Another denominator in the act and process of transmission of messages, in whatever form, is perception. The effectiveness of communication at the decoder's end is dependent on the ranges of his/her perception, especially against the fact that people perceive only what they expect and will understand. Additionally, the message sent across elicits some emotional preferences on the recipient, even of rejection [3]. Thus, communication is not to be confused with information which is logical, formal and impersonal which unlike communication is perception-led or oriented. Summarizing the meaning or the averred definitions of communication, it transfers or conveys meanings of messages from one person to another; of one mind affecting the other; and the exchange of meanings, messages and intents between individuals, groups and cults, among others, through a common system of symbols and/or totems [4].

On the importance, functions, features and scope of communication, it is as strong and basic as the need to eat, sleep and love. It is needfully a requirement for social existence and a resource in the sharing of experiences through a 'symbol-mediated interaction'. This is even so because isolation is the severest punishment for human beings. Communication educates, informs and entertains through discussions, persuasion, socio-cultural promotions and other integrative processes and systems in the cultural milieu.

Re-emphasizing the intent of this paper, the features and scope of communication would include the forms and systems of communication (encoding and decoding) and the effective use of human faculties, such as the ears, eyes and brain. Referred to as arbitrary symbols, communication is predicated on three human faculties, such as the ability to think, the innate capacity to communicate and the human species' competence to acquire and use the arbitrary symbols and systems of languages. This has equally been enhanced through relationships built and strengthened through communication. From pre-coloniality, humans have engineered communication gadgets that ranged from gongs, **Ogele** and xylophones, **Ikoro**, to modern equipment, such as the radio, television and satellite. From the earlier hominids to the homo sapiens, the media of communication have evolved alongside humans; and like the five stages of economic growth and development, the evolution of communication have equally moved from:

- i. The age of signs and signals;
- ii. The age of speech and language;
- iii. The age of writing;
- iv. The age of print; and
- v. The age of mass communication [3].

Regarding the categorized stages of evolution of communication, one could add the clandestine and security systems ages as the sixth, which existed in the traditional societies of the Abam and Ohafia, and heightened in modern societies during the World Wars and Cold Wars between, especially, the United States of America and the defunct Soviet Union. Yet, it is mere anachronism to point at any one time and milestone as when the traditional stopped and the modern started. Suffice it to state that most societies have clung tenaciously to what remains the most effective means of communication even in modernity. Since man has portrayed absolutely conservative propensities vis-à-vis adoptions and adaptations of universalizing concepts, no one society has evolved away from the practices that could be regarded as traditional in its entirety. It is not fashionable in rural communities to use modern systems of communication, such as vehicles mounted with loudspeakers to pass messages across to the people at the beginning of the day or at dawn. In fact, the mode of communication is depictive of sources of messages and indicative of the extent of urgency from either the village head or from the Local Government Chairman in present times.

However, a consideration of ethnographic twitches in traditional societies especially of the Cross River Igbo would require a background overview of the development of forms of communication; or more appropriately, the traditional modes of communication. One would be puzzled or consternated if cows understand the utterances of the herders. The answer would be an easy yes and guesses. Over the years, the herders have become accustomed to the behaviours of the cows, and the cows, from infancy, the nuances of the herders. These have been achieved through the processes of inbreeding. The grunts, body movements and signs made by the herders have often elicited responses of directionality and, indeed, of obedience from the cows.

From antiquity had evolved the primates that were later to mutate to the hominids - the *Australopithecines*, the *Homo erectus* and *Homo sapiens* who attained flexibility with their hands and in movements. They equally developed senses of territoriality and communication, either in moving/migrating or sedentary communities. The human evolutionary process and the evolution of civilizations went *pari-pasu* because of their greater abilities at communication. This ability, according to Hasan [3], helped the early hominids "to invent, borrow solutions from others and most importantly to accumulate knowledge". Although scientists have been able to categorize the chronology of the development of human communication, it is still anachronistic to clearly point at any of the itemized stages that human communities still operate in or have completely exited from. However, the descriptions of the stages will pigeon-hole the communities and their stages of adaptation. The stages are:

The Age of Signs and Signals

At this stage of development, humans communicated through inaudibilities (noises) and body movements/gestures. This was, however, an extremely difficult communication process that was probably caused at this stage by an underdeveloped voice or larynx, making groups communicated through noises, such as growls, grunts and shrieks. They made sounds which were intended to communicate intents, and not words. Referred to as kinesics (science of body language), there evolved simple concepts and ideas of communication between individuals and groups. In addition to the practice of kinesics, there were overt symbolisms, such as in the use of smoke and fire to convey actions, happenstances and intents [3].

The Age of Speech and Language

This age has been associated with a certain evolutionary stage which was typified by the Cro-Magnon hominidae that succeeded the Neanderthalis. The Cro-Magnon community evolved communicative abilities that enabled them to develop their mental resources and could as a result engage in some planning and management of their affairs. This stage would equally have marked the point of shift from wandering, hunting and gathering to sedentary life and evolution of civilizations.

The Age of Writing

Having developed speech and language in previous stages, there developed the need to make communication or communicated messages more permanent. These are evidenced by the pictographic representations in caves and tarvans; and to the pervasive phonetic systems in pre-coloniality. "Pictography represented ideas with pictures or drawings" while the phonetic system used simple symbols to imply specific sounds". Evolved generally within the age of writing were pictographs, such as the Nsibidi of Southeastern Nigeria, the hieroglyphics of the Egyptians and the cuneiform of Southwest Asia and the Sumerians. There were also the phonetic and alphabetic writings; and the development of portable media, such as the use of the papyrus reeds, stone and clay platforms for writing [3].

The Age of Print

The age of print was evidenced by the preparation of printing plates by carving, engraving and chiseling on wooden blocks, stone tablets and/or metal plates. The "text or message to be printed was transformed into a raised and format reversed. This was referred to as relief printing. Presently, this system has been improved on through lithography and plating, direct imaging and transfers.

The Age of Mass Communication

This is simply the globalization of information and messages through the concepts of satellite radio and television; computers and computing which have transformed to a network of connecting people all over the world; and has been referred to as the World-Wide Web (www) [3].

Traditional modes of communication

It is pertinent to survey traditional modes of communication vis-à-vis the incorporation of what have been termed ethnographic twitches.

The modes of communication among the Cross River Igbo have been divided into several categories, namely, the interpersonal or face-to-face type of communication, at the intergroup and mass levels. Further observable distinctions are the verbal and non-verbal modes of communication; and at another stage a combination of the verbal and non-verbal. In pre-modern times, these modes were sometimes plagued by degrees of noise, poor fidelity and at times a total break-down during rendition.

A verbal or non-verbal mode would be used in each of the communication situations mentioned above depending upon what type would ensure message fidelity or complete and effective communication goal achievement. Communication is perhaps man's second most important need after biological needs. In fact, to satisfy some biological needs man must employ verbal or non-verbal communication. This is why a face-to-face system is, and, indeed, all other systems of communication were developed in traditional Cross River Igbo communities in particular and the Igbo in general.

Non-Verbal Mode of Communication

In any given society, if two or more persons expect to understand each other, to hold some kind of meaningful discussion, first, they must have a common object or event to which they attach a mutually intelligible and accepted meaning. Second, one universal purpose of communication is to influence/ stimulate reaction (or feedback as it is now called) from the person to who the message is addressed. For these two reasons a variety of non-verbal modes of communication developed among early time's humans. Descriptions of the factors that affect non-verbal communication are:

- i. Noise, which in communication theory, is anything which interferes with message fidelity;
- ii. Another is poor fidelity. In communication theory if the message received is less than that sent or unclear at reception it is said to be of poor fidelity; and
- iii. Break-down. If there is a misunderstanding of the message sent at reception, for any of many reasons, there is a breakdown of communication. For example, if a person is addressed in a language he/she does not understand [5].

Ethnographic Twitches

The essence of ethnography to studies in traditional societies cannot be over-emphasized. According to V. C. Uchendu, ethnography discerns "flecks of culture" which often lead to cultural misrepresentation and misinterpretation. Historians are warned to be careful in the processes of data collection if the received ethnographic materials are to be objectively interpreted and utilized [6]. For instance, in the 'Voluntary Eye Twitching' - **Ikpi Anya** - traditional Igbo game among children which is to determine who does it faster and for more times, care has to be taken in finding out when it is no longer a game, especially since it could also be involuntary or premeditated. Whether it is voluntary or involuntary, a wink or a conspiratorial action, they are all movements of the eyes and are identical.

Consequently, Uchendu advised that the historians should always quickly discern in communication and cultural analyses of the difference between a twitch and a wink which has been found out to be vast. The winking encoder is communicating precise information in a unique medium. His message is deliberate; it is addressed to someone in particular and intended to convey a specialized message. The contents of the message will be specific; and the mode of communication connotative of the socially established code. The message also is strictly interpersonal and not public. The historian and/or communicator should be able to discern a twitch or a wink as an established public mode of communication by the public to pass on confidential and purposeful information. For instance, during warfare the warrior commanders of the communities of the Cross River Igbo area usually advised the warriors to “Take the small one and leave the big one” during battle. The small one is the human head while the big one is the body from which the head is decapitated. Other examples existed, and still exists. Uchendu, therefore, concluded that “... the object of ethnography is to reveal a “stratified hierarchy of meaningful structures” that are embedded in simple human acts and social designs”; and which are not easily discernible by the non-indigene [6].

Instruments of Communication

In almost all parts of Igboland a number of instruments were, and still are, produced for the purposes of communication. Among the array of instruments are the talking drums and xylophones, such as the **Ikoro, Opi, Oja, Ekwe, Ogene** and the **Igba**. In all cases, each of the Cross River Igbo community attaches specific meanings and importance to the sounds that emanate from the instruments when beaten.

Among the Cross River Igbo communities, such as the Abam, Ohafia and Abiriba, and as in the other parts of Igboland, the **Ikoro** (a big tree trunk hollowed out and slit open in one small area which gives a "dum dum" sound when struck with a stick) represents what the telegraph is to the modern and industrialized world. From the pre-colonial to present times (2021), the **Ikoro** is still the quickest means of transmitting messages of community or clan-wide importance. It serves on occasions, such as festivals, funerals and war/emergencies. It is a totem of communication that occupies a central position in the governance of the community. It was used to eulogize war heroes (in pre-colonial times) and, presently, of people who have distinguished themselves in academics, civil service and in business [5].

Usually beaten at nightfall, everybody in the community and in nearby villages and towns would know that something is amiss or that the moon has been sighted and/or for the New Yam Festival to commence. The identification of each of the messages being conveyed depends on the rhythmic intensity and interval of the sound emitted. This instrument is sacred and is neither owned individually nor beaten for frivolous reasons. *Significantum* of prowess, the **Ikoro** usually cordoned off with the palm frond - **Omu**, line during festivities, the line is not normally approached or crossed by men who are not titled either as a result of bravery or great heroism, and never by women. The **Ikoro** beats heralds the coronation of Cross River Igbo village Chiefs [5].

The **Ekwe**, a wooden gong which is carved and hollowed out of wood is beaten with a small stick to produce a dry and piercing sound. The **Ogele (Ogene as pronounced among northern Igbo communities)** is a metallic contraption and a disc with a folded rim that gives a resonant sound when struck with a small stick. They are used by town criers in disseminating messages in traditional or pre-modern societies. The main function of the **Ogele** is to demand attention for verbal communication. When it is struck in any area of the community, usually at night, absolute quiet which the sound is expected to incur descends. The town crier then delivers his message. This is an example of the combination of verbal and non-verbal types of communication [7].

Another instrument of non-verbal communication used in traditional societies among the Cross River Igbo is the Talking Drum which comes in many shapes, sizes and given different names in many parts of Igboland. Referred to as the **Ikpirikpe** among the Abam, Abiriba and Ohafia, in the other parts of Igboland, such as among the Awka of Anambra State, it is referred to as **Igba**. This is a drum made of a hollow cylinder with especially hardened leather parchment that is used to cover either one side of the hollowed wood or, in some cases as in Yorubaland, at both ends. The **Ikpirikpe** plays a similar communication role to that of the **Ikoro**. The talking drum is, however, less sacred in perception than the **Ikoro** in many parts of Igboland. It is mostly used to summon young men to communal labour or for praise singing. Regarding sacredness, the women can participate in the **Ikpirikpe**, such as in the **Ikpirikpe Ndi Iyom** among the Abam and Ohafia, and would have nothing to do with the **Ikoro** [5].

There are two types of **Opi** (horns) which are blown during festivities. The smaller one made from the horn of an antelope is used like the modern trumpet to summon the youths, encourage them during communal labour, and in praise of brave deeds during ceremonies. It conveys an emotional message that excites the men to undertake daring ventures, such as wrestling and warfare. There is a story that once in Achalla, in the Awka Local Government Area of Anambra State, a man skilled at blowing the **Opi** was engaged to do so. As was the practice, he started blowing the **Opi** before the venue, and on reaching the compound where the ceremony was held, he found out that the occasion was the burial of a

dead woman; and he quickly pocketed the **Opi** and cried profusely. “The **Opi** is not meant to be blown for women” no matter the extent of achievements or heroism.

The bigger type of the **Opi** is usually carved from the elephant horn, and blown by titled men during the burial ceremonies of equally titled and wealthy men. The bigger horns are also blown by men during festivals in order to show off their wealth and the fact that they were able to purchase them. In some areas of Igboland, such as Enugu, Nkanu and Awgu, the elephant tusk horn announces births and indicates the birth of a male child by mentioning a typical masquerade [5].

The **Oja** (wooden flute) and **Ogele/Ogene** (metallic gong) serve the same purposes as the **Opi**.

The gun is also one of the universal non-verbal instruments of communication throughout Igboland from the time when European and Arab/Muslim traders. A gun shot at night like the ‘double’ clanging of the Church bell conveys the unmistakable message that an important person or someone has died and that burial obsequies are to commence. The firing must be done repeatedly and at intervals and can last for days when a very important person dies. The execution of the ‘21 gun salute’ to herald the arrival of visiting foreign heads of State of a friendly country may have derived its origins and significance (message) from this use of gun shots as a mode of non-verbal communication [5].

In some areas, the firing of a gun behind a woman being led to her father's compound by her husband means that she is being divorced; and the man will never remarry her or accept entreaties to do so. The tradition of communicating final divorce of a woman has an exact opposite in some other parts of Igboland. Among the Abam for instance, one gun shot when the bride goes into the compound of the bridegroom, concludes marriage ceremonies; it pronounces a man and a woman married [5].

In the observations inferred from the oral interviews conducted on Ayi Ayi, Douglas Kalu and Augustine Okechukwu Nwalu, the importance of the use of instrumentation in non-verbal communication vis-à-vis encoding and decoding in traditional societies is key. The **Egbe Kurutu** (canon - type of explosive) buried beneath the surface of the earth and detonated to produce heavy and far reaching sounds is the highest form of gun shooting used to convey to distant villages and communities that an illustrious son of the village from where the shooting is occurring has died and that formal burial obsequies are in progress, and detonated at the commencement of certain festivals, such as the Ekpe masquerade dance. [5]

Among the Abam, there is the **Egbele** meaning ‘don’t do’. The **Egbele** notification is produced from a talking drum with its full rendition as: **tigbom tim, egbele ubi eje, gbom**. This is translated in English to simply mean - No one should go to the farm. This is especially at the death of men and women who have completed all maturity rites. Similarly, among the northern Igbo communities of the Mgbowo and Nnenwe of Enugu State are similar notification processes collectively referred to as: **Oji naka togbo**, translated to mean: all should hands off whatever they were doing and answer to an emergency. Comparatively, the **Oji naka togbo** beating generates the same degree of excitement and trepidation as that of the **Ikoro** wooden xylophone among the Cross River Igbo. [5]

Gender Specificities and Instruments of Communication (Encoding)

When the Ikoro wooden xylophone is beaten, it signals an emergency to great lengths. There are usually no verbal accompaniments stating why the **Ikoro** has been sounded and what the required responses by members of the community would be. It is an automatic summons to the village square, **Ebele**. Of course, the **Ikoro** summonses are not, and have never been, for the womenfolk to obey but for the adult males who, in pre-coloniality, came armed with machetes and Dane guns, if any, to the village square, even before what was, and is at, stake was discussed. The ‘**Ufiem**’ too was, and still is, not beaten just for all male members of the Abam and Ohafia communities, but for their warriors; and not just for the warriors, but for those who won laurels in warfare in pre-colonial times, having returned home with ‘genuinely’ cut human heads as trophies.

Similarly, the **Ekwe** hand-held wooden xylophone was, and still is, women-specific. It is a standard of authority for the womenfolk, whose affairs are run by the **Uke Ekwe**, the female counterpart of the male **Ukerabuo Cheogo**. The **Ekwe** is used to inform the womenfolk of what to do, when to go and not go to the farm, and when not to harvest cassava and fry garri. The **Ekwe** and **Uke Ekwe** direct and control the activities of the womenfolk, and set the price of certain products in order to protect the womenfolk from outside and cheating traders.

Yet, the **Egbele ubi eje** beating informs all members of the community to stay at home, before those actually concerned are specified - whether males or females, young or old [7].

Other Symbols

Apart from instruments, other symbols of communication abound in the Cross River Igbo communities. These instruments include the palm frond - **Omù**, facial marks, dress patterns, hair styles, a pot of palm wine (with some leaves in it), eagle feathers (**Abiba (Abuba) Ugo** in Igboland), and chalk, **Nzu**, (black and white), among others. If it takes a gunshot to convey the successful conclusion of marriage negotiations in some parts of Igboland and the same gunshot to convey the conclusion of divorce proceedings in some other parts, other forms of non-verbal communication exist for bride-price discussion and initiation of divorce proceedings.

Among the Nnewi of Igboland, for instance, young girls at puberty communicate their readiness for marriage by decorating their young supple bodies with cam wood powder and beads. They then troop out to the village square to entertain the men with dances and looks which say, "look at me, I could be yours if you play it right". The message is usually taken because by the next outing ceremony none of the same group of girls is usually still available [5].

If this outing ceremony took place among the Zulus and Swazis of southern Africa, the girls would then be "promised" to the boys and a new set of non-verbal kind of communication would ensue. This time would be beads of different colours. At betrothal, the courting couple would exchange beads of different colours - called **ucu**. After the sealing ceremony the 'beads would become love letters. A string of red beads would mean "I love you" while the white beads would mean "I am proud of you" and green ones would convey the consoling message, "I am thinking of you".

Apparently, the traditional methods of buying and selling by long bargaining in words are too shabby for the institution of marriage. So when the families of the courting bride and bridegroom meet to negotiate the bride price, it is forbidden to haggle with spoken words. Instead, haggling is conducted in a different style in Yoruba land, as in some parts of Igboland. On such occasions, there is an exchange of **Ugba**, a calabash with a number of short pieces of broomsticks put inside it. The one from the bride's parents represents the unit of money they are asking for in exchange for their daughter, while the number of sticks in the calabash sent to them from the bridegroom's parents represents the amount they are prepared to pay for the bride. This exchange continues until an agreement is reached and the young Yoruba bride is married [5].

Among the Ozubulu, for instance, if a man does not like the wife arranged for him by his parents, he gives her a pot of palm-wine stuffed with some green leaves to go home to her parents with. Anybody who sees her carrying this pot understands at once that she has been rejected by her husband and that divorce proceedings have just started. If she carried that pot of wine with another type of fresh leaves, people would know that she has just been accepted by the man going to become her husband, and is going to tell her father so.

The most common symbol of non-verbal communication in most parts of Igboland is the **Omù** (palm frond) or the plume of the oil palm tree. A knot of it in anyone's mouth means he will neither talk nor should he be talked to. Tied on the front and back of a lorry, it means the lorry is conveying a corpse. If the messenger of an Arochukwu chief offers an **Omù**, he has summoned the man to a meeting with the chief without fail. In, yet, another sense, if the **Omù** is kept among raw food items in some parts of Igboland, it would mean that those items are for sale.

Mere symbolisms, whereas some titled Igbo men (and women in some places) wear only a string or metal ring or beads on their ankles, others wear in addition, one or more eagle feathers on their caps to show that they are men of substance - an **Ozo** or chief of some rank. Their counterparts, the Oba, in Yorubaland wear voluminous embroidered gowns with many beads on their dresses and crowns. The Oba's messengers have one half of their hair cut lower than the other.

Traditional dress pattern in Nigeria, if not in most parts of Africa, indicates the ethnic group of the wearer. A more permanent ethnic identity in some parts of Africa is, of course, the ethnic facial marks that leave long scars on some Yoruba people's faces, holes in Fulani noses, and holes with ear-rings in the ear of a Masai of East Africa. There are equivalents among the Cross River Igbo.

Another symbol of wide use in traditional communication is white chalk - **Nzu**. Restricted use of the white chalk is made by oracular priests. When chalk is rubbed across the left eye, it conveys the information to all, especially prospective clients, that the men are operators of oracles of great powers, able to divine hidden mysteries, and also to remove evil spirits by remote control, by herbal medication, through talisman, sacrifices of some eggs, or live animals. On the other hand, in a traditional home in many parts of Igboland, the white chalk is offered to a guest to rub on his wrist or foot as a mark of welcome. A woman visiting another who had just had a baby expresses her joy by rubbing her face with white chalk offered by the new mother. If a community wants to declare war on another, they present such a community with the black chalk. But a messenger of peace clutches white chalk instead of an olive branch [5].

Non-Verbal and Verbal Combination Combined

A combination of the verbal and the non-verbal type of traditional mode of communication commonly used is the town crier and his **Ekwe**. As mentioned earlier, the town crier beats his instrument to induce attention. This they do,

some by standing right in front of him, thus completing the communication process. He then announces by spoken word his real message of a pending meeting or new laws.

The town crier's gong or **Ogele** goes like this:

Go-gom! Go-gom!

Go-gom! Go-gom!

Men and women of Obodo-o anyi-o

Hear the words of the ndi ichie!

Every able-bodied man, one big yam!

Every able-bodied man, one big yam!

Every woman, five cassava tubers!

Every woman, five cassava tubers!

Every village, one tin of palm oil!

Every village, one tin of palm oil!

First thing tomorrow morning!

All for our soldiers!

Whoever hears should spread the word!

Whoever hears should spread the word!

Go-gom! Go-gom!

If the town crier has announced communal work, he will also announce fines that would be imposed on absentees. Every sentence is repeated in order to lay emphasis. This type of communication is in two parts, verbal and non-verbal, but each segment is a complete communication approach by itself. Most Africans tug on their ear or point to their eyes for emphasis, which is an important factor in the communication process when saying "I heard it firsthand" and "I saw it happen myself". Body movement, which is constantly employed apart from relaxing the speaker and helping speech delivery, communicates thought and emotion among Africans [7].

Another non-distinct verbal and non-verbal form is the: **Ukwa anya ocha**. During the Obegu war and attack on the Ukwa, the Abam war strategy was leaked to the Ukwa who adorned themselves with the secret code of the Abam. The surprise was the adornment of the Ukwa with the white chalk rubbed on their left eyes. They became referred to as **Ukwa anya ocha**. The Abam warriors promptly changed their form of communication to each other by rubbing the Nzu (white chalk) in cross-like form on their chests [8].

Signages as Forms of Communication

Definitely pictographic, signages are kept in specific and strategic places in order to convey the required messages. The implications of the **Omu** being symbolic of peace and of war have been surveyed. The **Omu**, again, is used by the Ekpe secret cult to forewarn disputants to a piece of land, for instance, to keep away until the rightful owner is ascertained. If it is tied across a stream path means nobody should fetch water from it.

But the most pervasive and restricted for interpretation to the members of the Ekpe secret society is the **Nsibidi** system of pictography/signs which originated from the Ekoi ancestral home in the Cross River valley. According to Ogbu U. Kalu:

The Ekpe Society has spawned a large number of **Nsibidi** signs. Some of these appear on their cloth which is called Ukara, others are planted on walls of **Ekpe** halls. Members identify themselves by making these signs with their fingers, head movements, standing postures and other gestures. A new comer is quizzed with challenging signs and the higher one climbed in the ranks of the society, the more Nsibidi he learned. Messages are passed among **Ekpe** Societies with Nsibidi signs cut or painted on split palm stems, wood or skin parchment. However, these are often short, telegraphic messages: a sign or two carried a load of meaning. Intricate questions would be answered verbally by the messenger when duly escorted to the Society's hall [8].

Generally, the Nsibidi was used in pre-coloniality to inform, direct and forewarn the members of the **Ekpe** society on the situations along trading routes in Southeastern and South-south Nigeria. How the Aro of Arochukwu cultivated the Ekpe cult in Igboland to this end - trading in pre-colonial times - is street knowledge.

Verbal Communication: Language and Twitches

The three most important ingredients of language communication are thought, feelings and words. One must know (by thinking or feeling) what one wants to say and must have or know what symbols - words to use in expressing one's thoughts and feelings. Writing as it is known today is one of the skills of language communication which is a relatively

recent communication acquisition. Although it had its early beginnings in Africa, when writing became a communication skill acquirable through formal education, Africans did not participate for a long time in its nurturing.

Among the Cross River Igbo, it is observable that verbal communication are often terse and didactic statements that are indicative of the desire to pass on information or messages to persons who can decode them. Even so, for the person passing on the message to be sure it is being passed on to the right person or to establish ethnicity would ask: **Irara achi**. This is verbal identification of the communities of the Cross River Igbo. The **Achi** or **Obachi** is a common thickener used prevalently by the Cross River Igbo women to prepare soup.

Depictive of the high military lore and ethos of the Cross River Igbo in pre-colonial and early colonial periods, the Abam, Abiriba, Ihechiowa and Ohafia evolved several military codes although verbal. One of the pervasively used in the battle fields was: **Nara ya nke nta, hapuru ya nke uku**. It is translated to mean: Take the small part and leave the bigger part. One is immediately puzzled at about what the small and big parts could mean. The making of this statement was rife among the militarily-disposed communities. The warriors were not to bother about the decapitated and bulkier human body but cut off the head which was less bulky to carry home, especially since it was the major trophy that indicated how you fared in battle.

Other verbal forms were, and still are, intended to forewarn those that needed to be forewarned. Among these are: **Anya m afule nchi m** - my eyes have seen my eyes. The possibility of the eyes seeing the ears accounts for the mystery or uncertainty of a situation. In fact, it bespeaks of a situation or an occurrence that is ambiguous. Another is: **Lerua anya** or **saa anya**. These statements mean the same; and have occurred as a result of the phonetic differentiations between, for instance, the Abam and the Item/Alayi/Igbere. This statement calls for utmost vigilance especially at times of insecurity. Other verbal forms common among the Cross River Igbo are: **Okpara zere zere, ine eme, ga ana ada n'egbu nko**. This forewarns individuals have been adjudged careless and susceptible to a prevailing danger [5].

A Comparative of the Point of Transition from the Traditional to Modern Modes of Communication

The issue of tradition and modernity has been predicated on the influence of prejudice, ideology and the general social background of the scholars who have been engaged in the discourses, which in turn influenced their conceptions of the relations between the traditionalistic and modernistic modes of thinking and contextualized to this paper of also communication.

Consequent on the socially and experientially-contrived conceptions, J. G. Frazer [9], in studies on myth and religion contended that that spiritualistic (traditionalistic) worldviews were devoid of ideas concerning the basic regularity and, therefore, predictability of the forces that underpin the universe. But Frazer's contentions pale into insignificance when the principles and operations within African systems: the worldview, cultural and religious, is laid bare. Highly contestable were theories among which were Levy-Bruhl's [10] "Primitive Mentality" and the description of the African traditional man, from which was drawn the conclusion that religion and science do not represent fundamentally contrasted modes of thought. Both contentions portray hidden and orderly worlds that are not besieged by diametrically opposite and chaotic thought systems [11]. Both (the traditional and modern) have contributed eminently in "Explanation, Predictions and Control" (EPC) vis-à-vis theories concerning the causes of diseases and misfortunes that have been central to most European and African worldviews.

This paper surveys the salient features of these worldviews or thought systems. Certain questions have consequently been raised to include: What have been the contributions made from the contributions of rival theories as factors leading to the advancement of knowledge? What have been the contributions of other perspectives, such as the universalizing Western and internal African concepts? Are the concepts of nature and sources of knowledge peculiar to any worldview? Are the concepts of the traditionalist and the modernist diametrically opposite? What divides or at what point did the traditionalist separate from the modernist, and *vice versa*? To what extent did the evolution of writing and scientization influence the ways in which members of societies thought, and still think, about the world? Levy-Bruhl's primitive mentality was not peculiarity but universalistic. At what point then in time did some communities begin to think, explain and control events scientifically?

As human populations increased, they began to be organized in societies, faced different natural and historical challenges, and equally responded to them differently. Invariably, some societies have advanced more than others socio-economically, politically and technologically. Societies have consequently become polarized into the modernist: represented by some nations of the West; and the traditionalist: represented by African communities. This division is only tolerable for anthropological and ethnographic convenience; and is a mere anachronism. This is so since features of traditionalism could still be found in the countryside's of the West. Even when the Black nations of South America, such as Haiti, Columbia, Trinidad and Tobago, are regarded, and rightly so, as extensions of traditional Africa, that African cultures have survived in those places defies divisionism.

Western education which in its modern contexts is underpinned by philosophy evolved from the traditional. From all indices and in all its ramifications, philosophy is of practical relevance in mapping out a transition from traditionalism to modernity [12,13]. It attempts establishing points of departure from traditionalism and of arrival to modernity. There cannot be any justification for a discourse which is intellectual modernization without knowing what it is all about and its point of origin from traditionalism. Traditionalism itself is anchored on the cultural commitment of members of traditional societies, be it in Europe or Africa. A traditionalist views his ways of thinking as normal while the modernist looking at the same features perceives them differently. A traditionalist perceives truth about the world and human existence as factors handed down to him by his forefathers and these seem so natural that he feels obliged and without inhibitions to talk about them. The traditionalist finds it so natural to conceptualize words and symbols as having creative and mysterious powers over the 'things' and/or 'objects'/'subjects' they represent or stand for. Perhaps, unlike in traditional Europe, the modernist will be startled in beliefs in the magical powers ascribed to words and symbols.

From the various expositions on the traditional and modern, scientific and religious, certain deductions and suggestions have been made regarding how the West (modern) and African (inclusive of Black American nations) reacted and should continue to react to their environments. This is premised on the need for people to adopt deep-seated changes in their methods of thought that will in turn transit them from traditional beliefs. The need for thought modernization is based on three basic concepts, namely:

- i. A move away from a certain stage of affairs to another. For instance, it prescribes abandoning the traditional path of thinking in which magic and witchcraft play parts to a secular Western and more scientific approach;
- ii. That intellectual modernization is not peculiar to any part of the world. Traditionalism is the same all over the world and that African traditionalism is the same as the ones from which Western European scientization took off; and
- iii. That people modernize in order to bring about spectacular increases in efficiency in explanation, prediction and control (EPC) [14].

At what point, for example, asks Doob [14], "does a community or society in a developing continent like Africa begin rapidly to abandon traditional media of communication and to adapt modern mass media?" [15]. Schram [15] thinks that such a time is "when a society begins to modernize" Some traditional modes of communication are today still used in their own right and independently. Others have found their place in the mass media of communication. Some others no longer serve any function in the present state of communication. The **Ikoro** and talking drum are used in broadcasting for station and time identification. Our languages are the spoken and written languages of our electronic and print media.

Wilbur Schram has noted that "in a completely traditional and illiterate society, the effective environment extends about as far as one can see, although it does include folk wisdom and religious beliefs handed down from parent to child or priest to believer [whereas] with [a] larger world comes a profound psychological change [and man] is shown a world in which he has to depend on others to tell him about" [16].

Both the traditional and modern modes of communication have the same basic ingredients and the same purpose, that is, the aim of communication in each mode is to affect others. The concept of meaning is central in each case. This meaning of the message and its purpose acts as a link between the communicator and the receiver. The communication model for traditional modes of communication when compared with the model for the modern methods is rather simple, has no intervening channel, and the response or feedback of the message is often more immediate.

The communication model for traditional modes of communication when compared with the model for the modern methods is rather simple, has no intervening channel, and the response or feedback of the message is often more immediate.

It can unarguably be stated that the modern media of mass communication is new in Africa. The first newspaper established in the West Coast of Africa "was the Sierra Leone Gazette which was founded by officers of the Sierra Leone Company and which experienced alterations and restorations of name until 1827 when it was given up" [16]. In 1822, the Gold Coast Gazette was established in Accra and patterned after the Freetown Newsheet [16]. The Loveday Mission of South Africa established the Indaba (News) newspaper in South Africa in the Kafir language in 1841. In 1859, the **Iwe Irohin fun awon ara Egba ati Yoruba**, a newspaper for the Egba and the (Oyo) Yoruba, was established by Rev. Townsend in Abeokuta [16]. By 1939, a weekly, the Nigerian Catholic Herald was established in Calabar (Nigeria) and in Enugu, the Eastern Outlook, was established in May, 1951.

Cinema came to Lagos, Nigeria, in 1903, while radio broadcasting came in 1932 as a result of the British Broadcasting Corporation's empire service for West Africa. Television broadcasting was first established in Morocco in 1956 and failed for want of money. In 1959 it was established in Ibadan, Nigeria.

In early colonial and post-colonial periods, newspapers were printed by facsimile methods which enabled the New Nigerian newspaper to publish its daily issue in Lagos and Zaria simultaneously for quicker circulation. Today, there are colour televisions by satellite, coaxial cables and tethered aerostat balloon transmissions in Africa; and in Nigerian are multi-channel TV transmission and FM radio broadcasts. Africa of the 20th century has joined the "global village" and its concomitant world culture. She is no more the dark continent nor is she still the white man's grave, if she ever was in any objective sense.

A pertinent question then is: Why, when and how did this transition from traditional/ancient to modern modes of communication occur? The following have been discerned in answer, namely:

- i. Socialization: (transmission of the social heritage from one generation to the next);
- ii. Surveillance: (informing us of what happens in both our immediate environment and the larger world society); and
- iii. Entertainment: Traditional modes of communication did all these successfully, but with urbanization, the erstwhile closely-knit community or society is losing the ability to enforce its social norms. The modern modes of communication are now better able to carry on these functions [5].

When one amalgamates diverse communities into nations, when one must speak to plural societies of heterogeneous peoples in a common "world dialect" as it were, when one must try, with hope, the laws of combined development; one needs a technical form of communication which permits rapid transmission of information publicly to large, heterogeneous and impersonal audiences almost simultaneously. The technical form of communication that can do this is the modern mode of communication - the mass media. Mass media has taken over the role of the town crier because African societies are now large, complex, and diverse and information needs now require the sophistication of modern modes of communication.

CONCLUSION

This paper undertook to personalize the concepts of encoding, decoding and ethnographic twitches to the Cross River Igbo matrilineal and militarily disposed communities of the Abam, Abiriba and Ohafia, among others.

These concepts, again, have been mentioned elsewhere but subsumed under elaborated examples. These were without attending to the cultural peculiarities and specificities of and to the people. Consequently, localized examples have been given to underscore the claim of glossing over the ethnographic contents of the people's modes of communication. **Nara ya nke nta, hapuru ya nke uku** as the Abam and Ohafia would say, is a military code and mode of communication.

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