

ANALYSIS OF EXTRA-MUNDANE COMMUNICATION IN ADIM NEW YAM FESTIVAL

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Abstract

This article examines the aspects of extra-mundane communication (sacrifice, libation, ritual and invocation) in Adim New Yam Festival from an ethno-communicative perspective. Extra-mundane communication establishes a link between the living and the dead which is an important aspect of Adim traditional and cultural life in particular and Africa in general. This study examines the communicative imports and significance of extra-mundane communication that takes place during the Adim New Yam Festival. The article argues that extra-mundane communication at the festival is not just a socio-cultural event but also an avenue to link the living to the world beyond. The study reveals that this form of communication signifies thanksgiving, appreciation, invitation, strengthening of relationship, attention calling and acknowledgement of the ancestors during the new yam festival. It shows that extra-mundane communication, though employed in most occasions in Adim, have their contextual meanings and are understood based on the belief system of Adim. This study, therefore, serves as a pointer to the Adim worldview.

Keywords: Extra-mundane communication, Adim, ancestors, new yam festival, ethno-communication.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Over the years, man has always found ways of expressing himself and relating with his environment. This is done either consciously or unconsciously as long as man is alive. Daily, there is need to share, information, ideas, have knowledge about issues and other developments in the society, these and more define communication. Pavlik & McIntosh (2013) from a broader view see communication as a symbolic process whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired, and transformed. Pavlik & McIntosh (2013) project a more cultural angle to what communication is. Hanson (2017, p.5) puts it more plainly that “communication is how we interact with our entire world, whether through spoken words, written words, gestures, music, paintings, photographs, or dance.” To West and Turner (2018), it is a social process in which individuals employ symbols to establish and interpret meaning in

their environment. The views above portray communication as being dynamic, a process that is ever changing. Individuals, groups and institutions share ideas and interact through the different forms of communication.

The different levels of communication are narrowed to intrapersonal, interpersonal, group and mass communication. In the real sense, there could be overlap or mix in these levels of communication depending on the communication context. Importantly too, in the communication act, some key elements are essential; the interacters, the message, channel, noise and feedback. These elements are the embodiment of a communication act irrespective of culture or race. Communication, thus, cuts across different cultures thereby producing 'reality' among the people.

Communication act, though seen as universal is unique to individual groups and societies. African

communication sometimes seen and described as archaic, barbaric and base, is unique in its forms. It is the communication that had existed before the advent of modern media, and still exists. Many scholars tag African communication with different labels such as "oramedia" (Ugboajah, 1985), "folkmedia" (Mundy and Compton, 1991), "traditional media" (Wilson, 1981), "manmedia", "informal media" "informal channel of communication" and "communal media" (Ansu-Kyeremeh 1998), "indigemedial" (Akpabio, 2003) among others. Apart from the different names given to African communication, attempts have also been made to define the subject. Ugboajah (1985) puts it as communication that is grounded in indigenous culture, produced and consumed by grassroots members of society... (and) reinforce the values of society. Butressing Ugboajah's submission, Wilson (1991), see it as a continuous process of transmitting information, entertaining and educating the people which processes are used in societies that have not been seriously affected by western cultures and other external influences. These definitions point to the fact that the communication system emanates from the people and is meant for the people with *African colouration*. The beauty of this communication is that it is understood by the people. It reinforces the culture, belief, values and norms of the people. African communication is trusted and believed by the people. Importantly too, the technologies used in the communication process are locally sought and produced. The communication bonds, connects and unities the people.

African communication is broad in the real sense therefore attempts have been made to categorize it into classes. One of such classifications is the one done by Wilson (1998).

2. CLASSIFICATION OF INDIGENOUS COMMUNICATION MEDIA

Instrumental Mode of Communication: This aspect of communication entails the use of hardware of music in communication. In this category are idiophones membranophones, aerophones, and symbolography. Most of the instruments used are self-sounding and can be plucked, pricked, shaken or struck to produce sounds. Others are blown and they produce sounds at the vibration of the column of air.

Demonstrative Mode of Communication: As the name implies, this is a kind of communication that deals with demonstration. Music which is rooted in the traditional African society is used in communication. Signals also communicate in this aspect. In addition to music and signals, in this category we also have local

entertainment like drama skits or local theatre.

Iconographic Mode of Communication: Iconographic mode of communication comprises of elements that stand for or represent something else. In African societies, these icons as highlighted in the table are forms of communication.

Extra-mundane Communication: This has to do with communication between the living and the dead, and with the supernatural or Supreme Being. This communication goes beyond the physical realm to the spirit realm to embrace ancestors, spirits, gods, the Supreme God, and so forth.

Visual mode of communication: This aspect has to do with the conception and use of colours to convey meaning. Colours are culture specific, so different cultures have meanings attached to colours. Visual communication also entails the use of physical looks, body markings, adornments and dressing for communication.

Institutional Mode of Communication: In African societies, there are institutions that help to maintain order and ensure the smooth running of such societies. These institutions are classed into social and spiritual. These institutions are used to communicate symbolically. Since these institutions are highly revered, they serve as authorities especially in information sharing. The submission above shows the African systems of communication which is peculiar to almost all African societies. Adim which is an African community share in this peculiarity when it comes to communication because all the modes of communication highlighted above are so much in use in Adim land which is our area of study.

The Adim people are found in Biase Local Government Area of Cross River State, Southern Nigeria with a population of 16,642 people (based on 2006 census demographic data). They have Yakurr people as their closest neighbour within the state. There has been no consensus when it comes to the origin of the Adim people as there are varied schools of thoughts concerning this subject. The people of Adim value their language - *Urum* which of course is the strong driver of their cultural heritage, values, beliefs and norms. Adim land is richly endowed with agricultural produce such as yams which goes a long way to explain why yam is seen as a staple food and equally celebrated in Adim. Adim people are known for their rich cuisines and hospitable nature that attracts guests especially during festivities. The Adim people

cherish and value their cultural systems and activities which is a pointer to why the Adim New Yam Festival is still sustained and studied today.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

There is usually a notion from some persons about festivals, and that is feasting. Others look at the holidays, rest, plays and funs attached to festivals. Festivals connote things and as (Gedolof, Boutler, Faflak and McFarlane, 2005 p. 16) put it, "everything has a meaning or nothing has". Adim New Yam Festival is a cultural event that is laden with meanings, therefore making it unique.

In studying the extra-mundane communication in Adim New Yam Festival, a cursive look has to be taken from an ethnographic angle since the study is ethnographic in nature. Hence, this study is rooted in the Ethnography of Communication Theory (EOC). Ethnography of Communication theory originally propounded by Dell Hymes in 1962 and later expounded in 1964 is fundamentally concerned with the idea that culture and communication are inseparably intertwined (Olivia & Baillet 2009). According to Hymes (2003, p. 11) "Ethnography of communication is intended to indicate the necessary scope and to encourage the doing, of studies which are ethnographic in basis, and communicative in the range and kind of patterned complexity with which they deal". The ethnography of communication is concerned with the investigation of communicative behaviours specific to contexts and to discern their patterns.

Adim New Yam Festival has communicative patterns that transcend the physical and could be described as bizarre, clandestine, chilling and seemingly strange to visitors but the indigenes. Little wonder Parham (2002, p, 65) draws attention to the fact that "there is spirituality that binds African people together and guides their physical existence, and in the African cultural worldview, the essential ingredients and essence of everything, including humans, is spiritual." This assertion is succinct in the context of Adim New Yam Festival given that the new yam festival is not just social or a cultural activity but also communicates spiritual realities.

Beyond the physical, there are extra-mundane forms of communication and their meanings which can only be contextualized and understood in the light of the values and belief systems of the Adim people. These forms of communication are mostly connotative and reflect the worldview and cultural environment of the Adim people. That is why whoever is not knowledgeable in the communicative practices of

Adim cannot understand the meanings. This study therefore, examines the aspects extra-mundane communication in Adim New Yam Festival which makes sense to the Adim people based on their culture and worldview. The ethnography of communication is therefore considered ideal for this study considering its cultural and contextual nature.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

Different things make up the socio-cultural wellbeing of a society, one of such things is festival. There is therefore a strong connection between festivals and the socio-cultural life of a people, given its value as an institution in the society. Omosule & Adeleye (2019 p. 330) note that "today festivals... constitute the soul and energy of societies which negation amount to the scuttle of societal fabrics." Buttressing this fact, Mbalisi (2021) points out that human society is known to be controlled by the very many traditional and cultural festivals that are significant in marking different epochs. Festivals are seen as a form of identification, social cohesion and solidarity. They mark seasons (Ogbenika, 2020), show continuity between the living and the dead and as a reunion among family members.

Many scholars have worked on festivals in Africa. Mbalisi (2021) dealt with the imports of festivals to the nature of relationship between Mbano people and their neighbours in South East Nigeria. Ducournau (2019) investigated the implications and effects in the case of Francophone African literature. From the literary angle, (Olaniyan, 2008; Omigbule 2017) portray the originality of African cultures through festivals showing that they are not drama or mere imitations from the Western world. They argue that festivals are part of African life and not mere creations. Omosule & Adeleye (2019) inched further to do a comparative study of festivals. They assessed the Greek festivals and indigenous African festivals. Considering the plethora of studies carried out on festivals, it is therefore undebatable that festivals are essential components of the African essence in general and Adim in particular.

This study however, sets out to analyse extra-mundane communication in Adim New Yam Festival from an ethno-communicative perspective. It traces communication beyond the physical to the spiritual, showing a link between the living and the dead and a relationship with the ancestors, gods and the Supreme Being. It is argued in this article that Adim New Yam Festival is not just a social event but also an avenue to link with the world beyond. The work further reveals that Adim New Yam Festival provides a window into

the Adim cosmology. Ethnographic data for this study were obtained from primary sources. Oral interviews, participant observation and informal conversations were the instruments used in obtaining data for this study. Interviews with 10 males aged 50 and above in Adim land were conducted to get information about the meaning and significance of aspects of extra-mundane communication found in the Adim New Yam Festival.

Adim New Yam Festival

It is a known fact that festivals mirror a society therefore, Adim New Yam Festival is a reflection of who the Adim people are. Adim New Yam Festival is an annual event that takes place every third week in the month of August. The festival is usually a week long event with the grand finale on Saturday. The Adim New Yam Festival is characterized by celebrations, merriments, funs, visits, dances, feasting among other things. The period is seen as a kind of holiday where people come home to unite with loved ones and above all celebrate the new yam.

In Adim land, the new yam is not eaten by anyone except the festival is done. Attempt to do so is believed to bring curse to the land, drought, death, famine and bad yield. Such action is seen as the harbinger of doom. The Adim New Yam Festival is an age long even that is seen as a part of the Adim people. It is highly revered by the members of the community. Apart from the members of the Adim community, people from different parts of the state and country, travel to witness and join in the new yam celebrations. The new yam festival is a socio-cultural event that portrays the Adim world view.

The main essence of the Adim New Yam Festival is to appreciate the Supreme Being, ancestors and gods for the good yield. It is also a time to seek for blessing on the land and for a better yield in the new farming year. Activities that make this festival are dances like *Okwa*, *Obin*, *Ekeledi*, *Ijom* and *Ikalaji*. The *Beegot* group usually seen as the security arm of the community also make the event grand by their performance. There is usually a parade of masquerades to also grace the occasion. The high point of the event is when the new yams are brought into the community by a chosen maiden. The yams are welcome with shouts, joy, jubilations, praises and thanks to the giver of yams, the Supreme Being and ancestors. As important as the aforementioned are, the festival is not complete without extra-mundane communication. These aspects, that motivate this study are; libations, rituals, sacrifices and invocations. These aspects of communication are important in Adim world view

since life is seen as a continuum that is between the living and the dead.

John, 2000 and Mensah, 2015 note that that most traditional African people including Adim, view the universe as circumcentric and multidimensional and perceive the world as 'boundless'. They believe in the ancestors for blessing, protection, fertility, productivity and success. This assertion proves that Adim land cannot do without extra-mundane communication especially during the new yam festival.

Analysis of Extra-mundane Communication in Adim New Yam Festival

Extra-mundane communication is part and parcel of the life of the Adim people. It constitutes part of the socio-cultural events that take place in Adim. In this section, an analysis of the structure of extra-mundane communication in Adim New Yam Festival is undertaken. The aspects of extra-mundane communication - sacrifice, libations, rituals and invocation will be taken into cognizance.

Sacrifice

Sacrifice, a religious rite where people make offerings to spirits, gods, or the Supreme Being is a norm during the Adim New Yam Festival. During the Adim New Yam Festival, sacrifices of chicken and farm produce, are offered at the shrine. This act embodies communicative idiosyncrasy that can only be understood and explained by the adults from Adim land.

The sacrifice of chicken is an offering to the ancestors and Supreme Being to show devotion. This action also communicates worship and an act of identification with the ancestors. In Adim land like most African societies, it is wrong to approach the shrine or to contact the ancestors' empty hand so sacrificing an animal gives access. One of the interviewees, Mr Ben Ikwa notes that the blood of the sacrificed bird is poured on the ground of the shrine to cleanse the land and make the thanksgiving from the community acceptable to the Supreme Being and the ancestors. In addition to the aforementioned, the sacrifice is made as an act of appreciation to the Supreme Being and ancestors for their sustenance throughout the farming season till the harvest period which is marked by the festival. In Adim land, it is improper to visit an elder to show appreciation without a token, so it is with the ancestors who are the closest link between men and the Supreme Being. The sacrificed animal is offered to thank the Supreme Being and ancestors for saving the land from drought, poor yield, and crop diseases, among others.

Fruit of harvest like corn and vegetables are also offered as sacrifice at the entrance of the shrine. To a visitor, this may appear as mere decoration but to the members of the Adim community, it has meanings. The farm produce are presented as sacrifice to express thanksgiving first to the Supreme Being and ancestors for the yield and to express appreciation not only for yams which is seen as 'King of crops' but also for other farm products, which are valuable to the people.

In the Adim world view, sacrifice is part of the sociocultural life of the people that links them with the dead. It is therefore through these sacrifices that Adim recognize that the departed are still alive. Failure to observe these acts means that human beings have completely broken off their links with the departed. (Mbiti 1990). Through the animals and crops sacrificed, the ancestors are invited to partake in the Adim New Yam Festival. The sacrifice therefore serves as a factor of cohesion between the living and the dead.

Libation

Another form of extra-mundane communication present during the Adim New Yam Festival is libation. Libation is the cultural and traditional act of pouring liquids such as water, drinks or food to the dead ancestors. As part of the new yam festival, drinks and foods are poured out at the shrine for the ancestors. Freshly tapped palm wine is usually poured as libation with invitation to 'come and drink' made to the ancestors who after drinking, will then listen to the pleas and prayers of the community. Among such prayers are requests, thanksgiving, blessing, and so forth.

Below is the excerpt of such prayers.

Prayer	Meaning
(a) <i>Egwe egbani ya</i>	The day has come
<i>Ya nwani nyi wuna erok am mfené</i>	I am going to bring back (harvest) my yams
<i>Osome ejala osom gwe ofu...</i> (pours libation)	Everyone who comes...
<i>Gbeno -eluk ewun era</i>	Please let there be peace

In (a) the libator, after pouring the libation, prays to the ancestors for a peaceful occasion. He also prays for everyone attending the new yam festival. It is believed that if the ancestors do not give their peace, there can be no hitch-free celebration.

<i>Ngomo ogba kinanangha</i>	I use this opportunity
<i>Nnewe chame e</i>	To thank you
<i>Ga orom ka aleme...</i>	For the work you have done...
<i>Ineweni cham ake...</i>	We are very thankful

In (b), prayer of thanksgiving is made to the ancestors for all they have done for Adim land. The prayer is particularly, to thank them for the harvest of the yams

which is made possible by the ancestors. During the new yam festival, such thanksgiving is very important because forgetting the ancestors is dangerous. Misfortune can befall anyone who neglects them.

During the Adim New Yam Festival still, sumptuously cooked meals are also poured out at the shrine as libation to the ancestors. This draws attention to the fact that in Adim land, not only drinks are offered as libation but also foods. Pounded yam and well-cooked soups are usually poured to the ancestors. The communicative import of this act is that the ancestors are the givers of the foods that are enjoyed during the festival so they are also given the meal as a mark of thanksgiving. The presentation of the meal also shows that the presence of the ancestors is acknowledged during the occasion. Finally, the food libation is to further enhance the communion between the Adim people and the ancestors.

Rituals

Rituals which are sequence of repeated performance is another aspect of extra-mundane communication that takes place during the Adim New Yam Festival. Many instances of ritualistic practices are seen during the occasion. Among such practices are cleansing and purification, embracing of yams and placing yams on the roof.

(a) Cleansing and purification

The ritualistic act of cleansing is carried out on the chosen virgin (yam carrier) before she leaves to the farm for the yams and when she returns. This ritualistic act is in the form of a bath (though without water) at the shrine. The impact of this act is to cleanse the maiden from any impurity before she can carry the new yams which are seen as sacred. On her return, she is equally cleansed before entering into the shrine with the yams. The significance of this is to ward off the bad spirits that may have followed her from the farm or on the way. It is believed that during occasions like the new yam festivals, evil spirits also come around to hurt people or disrupt the occasion.

Apart from cleansing the maiden, water is also sprinkled on the event arena and on people during the new yam festival. Noting the importance of water, Thiessen (2018) points out that water is an essential ingredient to life and symbolizes regeneration, fertility purification and transformation. According to one of the interviewees, this ritual act signifies blessings, peace and purification. He equally notes that anyone that comes to the festival with evil plans or motives does not succeed because the water that is sprinkled neutralizes such. This ritual act is therefore very

essential because it communicates peace, blessings and purification. Adim New Yam Festival is never complete without this ritual act.

(b) **Embracing the Yams**

Embrace which is a form of intimacy, joy and acceptance is also witnessed as a ritualistic act during the Adim New Yam Festival. Usually, the act of embrace is observed between humans, but during the Adim New Yam Festival, yams are embraced. The new yams are personified and treated as humans. When the new yams are brought to the shrine, the chief and his entourage take turns to embrace the yams. They also talk to the yams and rub native chalk on the yams.

This ritualistic act communicates joy, acceptance, and answered prayer. It also shows that the community welcomes the yam thus, the personification act that plays out. Wendy (1994, p. 21) agrees that “ culture provides meaning and order through the use of symbols whereby certain things that we have designated as cultural objects are endowed with significance over and above material utility...” The symbolic act of embracing yams may not make meaning to a stranger but in Adim land, it is quite significant, without this ritualistic act the communication chain during the new yam festival will be broken.

(c) **Yams on the roof**

During Adim New Yam Festival, three yams are harvested and brought into the village for the festival. After the sacrifices and libation acts, the three yams are usually placed on the roof of the shrine. These yams are left on the roof over-night. Interesting to note here is that on the new yam festival day in Adim land, the newly harvested yams are usually not eaten. One of the respondents note that the yams are placed there for all eyes to see the harvest that the land is blessed with. These 'eyes' are physical and spiritual eyes. Another informant adds that this ritualistic act communicates that the ancestors are to eat the new yams before humans can eat. In addition to the aforementioned, this ritualistic act communicates respect and appreciation to the Supreme Being and ancestors for the gift of the yams.

Invocation

Invocation is another aspect of extra-mundane communication found during the Adim New Yam Festival. Invocation has to do with the cultural or religious call to deities, Supernatural Being, ancestors or gods for a specific need. Such needs may be protection, presence, and help, among other needs. In Adim land, ancestors are venerated that is why they are

usually given recognition during occasions including the new yam festival. As earlier mentioned, in the Adim world view there is a link between the living and the dead that is why the ancestors are usually invoked on different occasions. Mbiti (1990, p. 82) asserts that “they are still part of the human families, and people have personal memories of them...”

During the Adim New Yam Festival, the god of Adim and the ancestors are usually invoked and failure to do so means that the celebration is not complete. Excerpts of invocation as seen during the festival are as follows:

- | | | |
|-----|--|-------------------------------|
| (a) | <i>Onun Owai, Onun Ibi, Onun Ezak, Onun Afikpo, Onun Akalaba, Omaleko Inyang, Owai Ejima, Onun Ekpeni, Godwin Eyong Otu, Ikwa Enyi, Efut Ogban, Ewelu Ekpo, Eyen Isong, Owai Ajah...</i> (All ancestors) | |
| | <i>Egwe egbani ya</i> | The day has come |
| (b) | <i>Ekpelegha Echu Otala</i> | The descendants of Echu Otala |
| | <i>Obasigolok Arum</i> | The God of Adim |
| | <i>Mfemweni kakong,</i> | I call on you now |
| | <i>Gha uyoyung achi elogon</i> | This midday |
| | <i>Se-ingha uso kingha</i> | To the community |

From excerpts (a) and (b), it could be seen that the ancestors are formally invited to the Adim New Yam Festival. Their presence is solicited. As seen from the excerpts, the ancestors are called by name to be present. This act signifies the link that still exists between the dead and the living members of the community. It also communicates that the ancestors are around and the community cannot do without them.

5. CONCLUSION

This study has been concerned with the aspects of extra-mundane communication in Adim New Yam Festival. It examined the significance and communicative imports of these aspects of extra-mundane communication. In the Adim cultural context, there are many symbolisms that are expressed during festivals and occasions like the new yam festival, these symbolisms are laden with meanings that are only deciphered in the cultural context. This study therefore reveals that beyond the social aspect of the Adim New Yam Festival, there are other aspects of communication, which is communication between the living and the dead. The imports of this communication is to thank the ancestors for the new yams, invite the Supreme Being and ancestors to the festival and to strengthen the bond that exists between the ancestors and the community. This study therefore concludes with the claim that extra-mundane, communication in Adim New Yam Festival is a pointer

to the communicative patterns, beliefs and spirituality of the Adim people.

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