

# Performance as Address: The Interface between Folks and the Rulers

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## Abstract

Indigenous people had a peculiar way of measuring the pulse of the society before the advent of writing. Equally tending towards what could be considered the gadfly roles of the media in modern society is the prevalent of the same measure through which authorities could be put in check by the folks when the machinery of governance seems to be derailing. A demonstration outside the home of the personality may reveal his excesses during the passing years. Through such performances such as Oramfe and Igbaghare both in Ondo State, the voiceless could air their views and criticise the machinery of governance without any fear of reprisal attack from the aggrieved. This paper considers such a critical role deployed by the folks at the arena to be instrumental in the maintenance of cohesion and filial bond over the years.

**Keywords:** orality, interface, sanction, performance, folk, institutions, traditional, address.

## Introduction:

It is suspect if communication could be tied to a timeframe in Nigeria. This might, however, be considered possible when viewed against the backdrop of communication in terms of publishing and electronic that takes the form of news reportage. However, dissemination of news is an age-long convention in the country and pre-dates writing. It equally pre-dates the onslaught on the people and the land by the imperialists. Its location may be found in the ingenuity of the people especially the need to address salient anomalies in the system and indigenous people addressed such issues bordering on good governance through performance.

Apart from the inter-personal aspect of communication between the authorities and the led, the annual performances of Oramfe in Ondo and Igbaghare at Erinje in Okitipupa Local Government area of Ondo State place the need for informing and educating the people on the threshold of well-informed members of the society. The annual performances are held at night and the hallmark of indigenous artists was the leeway provided for ordinary members of the settings to air their views annually. And this they did to an appreciable level, as all the ills in the societies are highlighted and appropriate blame apportioned especially to the supposed eminent members without any fear of reprisal in whatever form.

In this paper, attempt will be made to consider communication in indigenous societies through oral performances, which fulfilled the twin role of promotion of culture, education of the people and regeneration of the society through the application of salient criticisms of perceived foibles in the people. If, in the words of MacBride (1981) as cited in Ekeanyanwu (2009) “the role of communication may be regarded as that of a major carrier of culture” where the means of communication “serve to promote or influence attitudes, to motivate, to foster the spread of behavioural patterns and to bring about social integration,” (30-31) then performances in indigenous societies are equally veritable instruments for shaping and acculturating the folks. Ogun-Pipe at Ode Irele, Oramfe in Ondo and Igbaghare at Erinje are performances that will be employed as tools of analysis towards isolating the communicative capability in indigenous festivals.

## Concepts and Definition:

Communication presupposes the transmitting and receiving of ideas, information, and messages, which could be in form of codes, signs, gestures and symbols. It is the visible transmission of information among human beings over the years that distinguishes the human race from animals. This process is very unique that mass transmission of information that is consciously designed to sensitise or educate, indoctrinate or brainwash the receiver is salient to human beings. Within the purview of the present study, dissemination of information within an enclosure, or widespread geographical location is attended by a peculiarity which is designed to delimit and achieve the desired goal by influencing the receiver and bringing about a change in the perception as a result of the exposure to the critical disposition or news items that may constitute the tool for reforming leaders. From hieroglyphics, voice calls to cuneiform writing, attempts have been made over the years to engender communication especially with the growth that is inherent through it as society witnesses a widespread leap in the interaction among peoples of the world.

Literacy refers to the ability to internalise the series of developmental processes in the field of knowledge. Literacy may involve but it is not limited to reading, writing, and appreciation of the techniques in the field of information and communication technology. Where minimal communication ability is the case especially as a result of the linguistic barriers across geographical divides, limited literacy may be claimed even where the possessor is adjudged a professional. The power of literacy is assumed to be capable of conferring possible correspondence through such values that have been internalised in the language and culture of the folks. The use of folks in this context is to show that basic limitations are still to be found in the personality whose level of

literacy does not permit a total grasp of salient issues and peculiarities attestable in other environments. In other words, there emerges a need to redefine literacy in the light of modern realities where demand for the appreciation of some corollaries is salient in the quest for literacy. To this extent, literacy has a degree and total literacy may not be applicable even to the supposed literate. It thus becomes necessary to redefine literacy in view of current realities that make absolute literacy a mirage. This is in view of the fact that no man may claim knowledge that cuts across geographical barriers. In this regard, it may be difficult to consider some people illiterate in the face of their glaring inadequacies in the norms and values of other unexplored folks, the world over.

Equally confusing too is the fact that literacy attracts a feature that is tied to reading, writing and conversation in the English language, French or the languages of the colonialists generally. It is arguable if a high level of awareness in all ramifications that is not backed with the ability to read and write may not be considered a form of literacy. If the listener cannot read or write but could listen to news and discern the imports of the reportage, a degree of literacy may be inferred. Societies, the world over parade such folks with uncanny capability that could contribute meaningfully to arguments and even compare best standards the world over. Such men and women of repute that are probably considered to have crude ingenuity dot indigenous societies and they carried out revolutions with the intentions of achieving a significant change in the affairs of the states and communities.

Communication, in relation to indigenous societies, involves oral dimension of performance when folks may dare the governors without any form of reprisal from the latter. This involves the deployment of the tool of scatology to unveil the foibles in the governors. At times, outright insults are heaped on policy makers while singing and dancing in the compound of the folks whose foibles are being discussed. The aim is an attempt at reviving the ideology of the founding fathers of the communities when the 'learned men and women' consider the actors and gladiators to be derailing from accepted standards. This licence amounts to the relaxation of moral codes in order to empower the voiceless folks.

Every trade has its register and this is quite true of the field of communication and a nexus seems to be applicable to the mass media finding expression in the print and electronic, on the one hand, and the oral perspective through performance, on the other hand. In journalism, communication is brought to a unique dimension especially in the task of making an impression on the readers where the attempt at captivating the audience is consciously designed to arouse interest in the case of electronic media as well as the readers in print journalism. This quest is brought to an alarming tempo in both, that the delivery takes the audience to the height of a journey, quite unprepared. The tool of presentation marks a departure from the rule of grammar and of course, journalism does not pretend to constitute a part of the compendium of the language in its purest form.

Nowhere else is the rule of grammar brazenly consigned into the dungeon of irrelevance on the altar of professionalism than in journalism. This situation alarms the supposed experts in the language of delivery, especially the English Language, at the way rules are trampled upon and an outright twist is brought into the usage of the language. The composition of a news item, for instance, may kick off with an introduction that may be totally unacceptable to teachers of English such as: "Arising from a three-day meeting with leaders of the Nigerian Trade Union yesterday... Mounting pressure from the Students' Union body of the University of Ibadan" are examples of such display of sensationalism.

### **Theoretical Framework:**

Eclecticism shall constitute the tool of analysis of this study. This is an attempt at locating meaning within various strands of opinions. In this case, tools of analysis of oral items shall be juxtaposed with other relevant models as cited in Ekeanyanwu (2009): McLuhan (1964) theory of technological determinism, Joseph Klapper (1960) phenomenistic theory and Everett Rogers (1962) information diffusion theory. If the apprehension of meaning is central to poetics, the attempt may not be confined to a monolithic criterion as text harbours diverse imports capable of further freshness upon every delimitation; depending on the explorer's available tools. Therefore, no critical method may unilaterally unravel meaning, as it is "intertextual" and subject to the linguistic peculiarities of every community.

According to Hadin (1989), the text, artist and the myths are instrumental in the deconstruction of a text as well as the formation of normative judgements on any work of art. The wisdom in locating the text within a number of factors in which norms and milieu are significant aspects stems from what Hadin's (1989) considers the text to be: drawn mainly from a "family portrait", and its being a mere "face in the crowd, a dot in the diagram" (46)

*A tribal dance in an indigenous society can be simultaneously a political activity, a source of conviviality and aesthetic pleasure, and a guarantee of crops, fertility, or rain. The same dance can also communicate with the spirit (49)*

As it is in modern societies and indigenous communities, both cultural homogenisation and cultural synchronisation are salient to them. In indigenous communities, however, cultural imperialism might not be applicable. The goal of the demonstrations against the ills of the state is to harmonise the milieu against developments that could be considered anathema to its growth, maintenance of cohesion and filial bond. In plain language, McLuhan technological determinism theory as an offshoot of Innis is hinged on the influence of the pervasive influence of the media technology permeating a particular society at a particular time. The phenomenistic theory according to Klapper relies on the claim that the mass media have a limited influence on people except through a form of collaboration with other factors in the milieu through the reinforcement of existing attitudes and behaviours.

### **Application and Analysis:**

It takes the form of language. Performance and the attempt towards regulating the conducts of people in authorities in indigenous societies may take the form of renditions of flowery presentations at the arena. The arena in this case may be the compound of the culprit or the road leading to it. The conduct of the persona is brought to the open and corrective measures such as outright criticism of the negative traits are deployed to the chagrin of the personality but to the delight of the folks generally.

It later assumes another dimension by incorporating signs and codes. It is not unusual at the arena to deploy codes and signs to address any form of deviation in any member of the community. Here, eyes are brought to bear in this. The position of the eyes may have a direct correlation to the attitude of a personality to a situation. The desire for change comes immediately with the signs from the eyes and a quick adjustment is made by the personality whose behaviour is being castigated.

Its hallmark is demonstration. After series of failed attempts at making an impression especially when an eminent personality is concerned, a demonstration could be the last resort. As it is during Oramfe, Ogungun-Pipe and Igbaghare, the perversion in the individual is castigated and corrected. Where the personality is aggrieved in view of the revelation of his shortcomings, the last resort would be self-exile and this is rarely the case. The contemptuous licks his wounds and buries his head in shame till the community can recognise a change for the better in his attitude or an outright restitution is made.

The nocturnal performances are fixed for the hours of the night to shield the identities of the performers and even where the identities of such performers could be suspected, it would be a negation of the norms of the land for any form of attack on the personalities of the performers. The order is an obvious relaxation of rules that is meant to provide the needed voice for the voiceless. Omosule (2009) captures the essence of the interface between the led and the rulers in an atmosphere devoid of sanctions from any quarters thus:

*In addition, the relaxation of social mores equals the triumph of the majority as socio-political inadequacies of leaders and ordinary members are exposed without any fear of sanctions. This tendency for chastising immoral members is prevalent during Ogungun-Pipe in Ode Irele, Oramfe in Ondo; Osuuru in Otunja; Oorobo in Ifaki-Ekiti and Igbaghare in Erinje-Okitipupa. (89)*

No sooner are the authorities chastised in view of the perceived inadequacies or high-handedness than succour is found for them when royalty may be painted in glowing colours and becomes a cynosure of all eyes as the display of subservience is meant to show by the subjects. Buttressing the soft-landing second segment for monarchs, Omosule further asserts the need for cohesion in indigenous societies as the isolation of the ills of the state are not meant to truncate society or bring the personality of the monarch to disrepute.

*This is a negation of the grand performance of the royal personage who may assert its dignification and indispensability especially during Odun Oba in Ondo; Lijeebu in Ile Oluji; Oba O doro in Tede to mention but a few. (89)*

The wisdom surrounding the performance may be located within the recognition that the descent into the abyss of sin is a veritable feature of humankind and the fact that the commission of sin or what might look like a negation of the golden rule may be atoned through punishment from the divine throne. However, indigenous artists might have devised the scripts in order to take their destinies in their own hands once in a while without waiting for any divine punishment. As such, the folks could be likened to democrats and they build the machinery for regulating the excesses of their leaders within art.

The inherent objectivity in the performances of oral scripts reduces crises and the possibility of reprisal to a minimal level. This posture is negated by the mass media where language is deployed in order to accommodate parochial interest. Kehinde A. (2008) considers interest to be paramount in communication especially where the machinery is exhibiting parochial view in order to achieve an undue advantage in the North and South dichotomy for instance.

*If we illustrate with the CNN's general reporting of the 2005 invasion of Iraq by the US, we observe that the news reporting was often slanted in favour of the US. Since English is the*

*medium of broadcast of media organisations with the widest reach exemplified by SKY, CNN, and the BBC, the English-speaking world, (which includes Nigeria) was persistently fed with negative reports about the real and imagined enemies of the west. We can deduce from this that news reporting is influenced more by the side the media organisation belongs to than the principle of objectivity and balance. (160)*

The issue of subjectivity may not be applicable to indigenous societies. This is because where a dichotomy seems to be the case, the absence of politics from the arena may not permit gladiators to pick on their opponents while using the arena as a springboard. Soyinka (1982) recognizes the peculiarity of the annual performance and locates it within a deliberate attempt at relaxation of the rules of the state in order to give voice to the vulnerable members of the communities, mostly women. This, Soyinka considers as “the suspension of ordinary time, transformation of ordinary space, and a formaliser of ordinary behaviour” (241).

The poetics of Yoruba indigenous festivals will locate the performances of Oramfe and Igbaghare within the need to regulate behaviours within acceptable standards when the folks seem to be on the verge of indiscretion. This direction is easily perceived and order is restored as the folks whose existences are not driven by the lure of materialism could quickly identify a possible degeneration. This identification of a possible area of crisis is immediately followed with an address where performance is deployed for redress. An insider’s knowledge of indigenous performances will resolve this incomprehension and lay the scripts and the conflicts bare. If this accessibility can be achieved, such explications may determine the trend of future behaviours.

Ekeanyanwu (2009) situates technological determinism theory within the quest for an explanation of behavioural patterns found in any environment within the quality of the mass media at the time.

*The main thrust of the theory is to draw the attention of media audience to the hidden effects of/influence of communications technologies. This theory in essence regards our present cultural challenges as a direct result of the information explosion fostered by the television, computer and the Internet. (69)*

Meaning revolves around the deployment of language which nuances and references are instrumental in co-referentiality of shared codes between the performer and the audience. Various ingredients constitute the creative raw materials and apart from the imaginative well being, which, no doubt, may be informed by societal contradictions, the prevailing social climate and peculiarities are vital to communication. Omosule (2010) avers that “the identification of basic sociological tools for which Taine (1965) remains a rallying point is a reconciliation of the artist, the text and the milieu as fundamental vehicles for expressing “the image of the society, the social attitudes, mannerisms and their representations in literary creations.”

Chiluwa (2009) finds a correlation between the regulation of society by the print media and indigenous means of chastising people in authority.

*A study of media discourse will therefore demonstrate how in news texts mediates social action and as social communication is constrained by the social structure and practice. (115)*

It is not difficult to locate a nexus in the functions rendered by the print media and the performances of Ogungun-Pipe, Oramfe and Igbaghare especially when a similar view propels the scripts towards regenerating society.

Chiluwa (2009) locates the quest by the print media within the provision of direction for policy makers through the isolation, delimitation and explication of perceived irregularities in the polity.

*The print media is known for setting the agenda for national development through providing information for policy makers and the people. And because they enjoy access to the literate members of the society, they have the advantage to be used as ready and useful tool in the task of development (116)*

Apposite to what Chiluwa considers to be the need to set standards for policy makers is the apparent task of modifying the behaviours and activities of monarchs and other eminent members of indigenous societies when they seem to be high-handed or likely to pervert justice.

### **Conclusion:**

Communication is a veritable vehicle for the maintenance of unity where meaning is tied to co-referentiality especially in the desire for change. The audience’s membership of the Yoruba indigenous environment confers literacy on them especially the ability to decode signs and codes. The leeway provided by the environment accords total freedom of expression to the ordinary folks and the period becomes a moment of reckoning especially bordering on the right to take stock of the activities of the monarch during the passing year. The double standard found in the law of libel and law of defamation that purportedly grant the right to information to the folks later to erect a bulwark on the way to its full realisation may not be applicable to the performances of Ogungun-Pipe, Oramfe and Igbaghare as the objective is the apparent embarrassment of the eminent personalities involved so that they could be redeemed from the path of destruction through a timely check on

their excesses. Indigenous performances are, therefore, fluid and open-ended and these are their strong points through which cohesion was maintained in the societies over the years.

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