

THE ETHICAL DIMENSION OF AFRICAN INDIGENOUS COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS: AN ANALYSIS

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INTRODUCTION

From past studies of African Indigenous Communication Systems, we notice ambiguity which is associated with the manner in which indigenous communication systems were discussed. For example, scholars like Dobb (1961) and Wilson (1987) are found wanting because they mixed-up traditional communication systems with exogenous ones like radio and television, and hence they could not adequately identify or distinguish the boundary between traditional communication systems with modern mass media. Arising from this fact, is the neglect of some social issues such as religion, ethics, sociology messages which the indigenous communication systems intend to pass across to the peoples of African Societies. The fact is that human beings are greatly influenced consciously or unconsciously in their thinking behaviour, action, feeling and reflection by media of communication prevalent in their culture (Dasylva 1999:20). Given this fact, it is the aim of this paper to explore the ethical meaning, message, information and interpretation arising from African Indigenous Communication Systems found in African Culture. This will serve a dual purpose. First, it will debunk the view or opinion of many people that indigenous communication systems are inferior to the western mass media. More important for our purpose, it will also prove that indigenous communication systems can stand side by side with contemporary mass media because they exert great influence in the life of African people even in the contemporary period (Nabofa 1994:20). Second, this study will prove that indigenous communication systems are not local, archaic or rudimentary as many people assume; rather, they are reflections of African Culture which can stand the test of time (Bascom 1973:28). Therefore, this study will cover the following areas: Conceptual issues; Ethics and Communication; what is Indigenous Communication? Relation of Ethics to Communication; Ethical Issues in Indigenous Communication; and Indigenous Communication and Modernity.

Conceptual issues

To throw light on our topic of discussion, it is pertinent to explain briefly some key terms in the essay, bearing in mind the context in which they are used in the essay. These terms are ethics and communication. Ethics in simple language is concerned with the question of right and wrong in human behaviour. It deals with how men ought to behave, and why it is wrong to behave in certain ways and right to behave in other ways. In other words, ethics studies the reasons why certain kinds of actions are morally right and commendable. In the light of this, Dyck (1977:22) defines ethics as a systematic reflection upon human behaviour with expectations on how they ought to behave and what they ought to do. Human behaviour in this context

refers to human conduct which is made up of all voluntary actions such as intentions, motives, desires (Lillie 1961:8). Ethics studies conducts with reference to how conduct of individuals affects other members of the society. That is, the conduct which ethics reflects upon and judges is not only conduct which affects society mainly as a whole, but also conduct which affects one member or other members of the society. It is because of the social background of conduct that a human being is able to perform right or wrong actions. This is the reason why society reflects and passes judgement about the behaviour or actions of its members. In other words, ethics is part and parcel of every society. In the words of Winter (1988:21)

"The social world is a world of values, norms, patterns of behaviour, social rules and corresponding sanctions which are already there before our birth and persist with gradual modification during the span of our life. "

The above shows a need to apply ethics to our day-to-day social reflections. This brings about society's standard of behaviour which is exemplified in its ethical principles or ethical values. Ethical values are the standards of moral behaviour and the norms with which man's conduct should conform. They provide guides for human conduct indicating certain things or certain ways of behaviour, which should be avoided and other things or ways of behaviour which should be adopted (Omoregbe, 1993:62-63).

In African Society, like other societies in the world, ethical principles are of two types: positive and negative. The positive values include justice, gratitude, honesty, loyalty, truthfulness, tolerance, responsibility, hard work, cooperation, generosity, kindness, fidelity to one's duty (Ayantayo 1999:123). The society expects its members to apply these values to all social relations. Conversely, negative values, which are just direct opposites of positive values, consist of actions and ways of behaviour which are considered wrong and which people should abstain from. They include idleness, laziness, injustice, selfishness, greed, avarice, intolerance, stealing, exploitation, oppression, hatred, falsehood, dishonesty, irresponsibility and many other social vices (Brandt 1961:20).

Given this background of ethics, society is free to pass judgement on behaviour of people in the society. This is done to protect and foster ethical values of the society. Ethical judgements of these values are concerned with actions or kinds of actions that seek to uphold or destroy the moral values. Ethical judgement is possible after a careful ethical analysis of an action. Ethical analysis according to Niebuhr embraces evaluating moral values, goals, purpose and moral claims and aspirations, underlying human thought or actions. (Niebuhr 19963:12). Ethical analysis goes hand in hand with ethical dimension of an action in which a person seeks to know ethical content of or ethical values inherent in an action such as speech, communication, etc. The major concern of ethics is examination of implications which an action has on individuals and the entire society; hence, such ethical questions: Who is performing an action, what action does he perform, why is he performing it and what are the implications of the action for him (the performer) and for others (that is, people whom the action is directed to)? In all, every society expects its members to conform to the approved standards of behaviours.

The second important term to be discussed is Communication. The word 'Communication' comes from the Latin Verb *Communicare* : "to talk together, confer, discourse, and consult one another." {Barry et al, 1965:16}. It is intimately related to Latin word *Communitas* which means not only community, but also fellowship and justice in men's dealings with one another. Since society consists of men living and working together for common ends in a world of cooperation, communication becomes essential to society. Means of communication are of varying types, which include facial expression and gesture, touch, pictures and visual signs, music, dance, words-spoken and written. Most of these are common to all communities, even the most primitive and some others depend on technological devices. Whichever way we look at it, communication serves as a medium of expressing the story of human development, civilization and progress. For example, speech was the first to leap forward in the development of human communication. It was followed by invention of writing and finally by the invention of printing. Today what men thought to themselves or said to one another could be recorded, read by others, stored for the benefit of future generations, reproduced and distributed in quantity, thus spreading information and learning among ever-widening circles of the community.

African indigenous communication systems

As the name suggests, African Indigenous Communication systems are means by which African people communicated with one another in the primitive era. (Dobb 1961:94-97). These systems of communication are passed from one generation to another (Finegan 1970:22). Such communication systems are derived from society's experience and thoughts over a long period of years. It must be noted that the expression indigenous communication in this context is not a substitute for archaic, barbaric or rudimentary communication systems. Rather it represents traditional and ancient communication systems (Emenegu, 1966:328).

From the scholarly perspective, African Indigenous Communication has been variously defined or described. For example, Dobb (1961:95-97) describes indigenous communication media as ranging from conscious activities like dancing and drama to unconscious and involuntary ones such as belching and even growing. In addition, Dobb outlines the following as constituting African indigenous communication: Speech, non-speech sounds like whistle, belch, skin colour, body growth or acquired characteristics like callused hand, rugged skin, spitting, sitting position, gesture, contrived face or dancing. Others, according to him, include imagination, dreams, fiction, drama, poetry, and music, scarification, tattooing, piercing of the ear etc. Also on his list are: drums, public address, radio and television, preserving symbols, such as carving, footprints, writing, masks, print, drawing etc. Other examples given are hunting, fishing, agriculture, money, hut arrangement, rainbow, certain birds, animal rainfall etc. (Ojebode 1998:4). It is important to quickly point out that it is erroneous to classify certain occupations like agriculture, fishing, hunting, etc as means of communication. Again, it is also a mistake to classify public address, radio and the television as part and parcel of African Indigenous system. For Ugboajah, F.O, indigenous communication could be called 'oral media' According to him these media include:

Mythology, oral literature (poetry, storytelling and proverbs), masquerades, rites of passage and other rituals expressed through oracy, music, dance, drama, use of costume, social interplay and material symbol

which accompany people from womb to tomb and beyond. (Ugboajah, F.O, 1985b:116).

Wilson (1987:24) agrees with Ugboajah, F.O, but re-classifies African Indigenous communication in the following order: *Idiophones*: These are self-sounding instruments or wares that produce sound when beaten; *membranophone*: These are media whose sound comes from the vibration of beaten membranes, e.g. drums. *Aerophones*: These produce sound that has the result of the vibration of a column of air e.g. flutes, pipes and horns; *Symbolography*: This refers to representation using objects and symbols understood within a particular cultural context; *Signals*: These are physical embodiment of a message. These include fire, gunshots and drum beats; *Objectifies*: These are media presented in concrete forms which have significance for a specific society only. These include kolanut, unopened palm frond, charcoal, flag and sculptures; *Colour Schemes*: Colour combinations produce certain significant meaning for certain societies; *Music*: Which include songs of praise, or criticize; *Extra-mundane communication*: This involves rituals, prayers, chants, trance, libation, hysterics through which the living communicate with the dead; *Symbolic displays*: These they be culture-specific or universal media. They are smiling, sticking out of tongue, expression of fear etc.

These classifications and definitions of indigenous communication, whatever their limitations, remain valuable to African people even in the face of modernity and scientific discoveries (Onwubiko, 1991:28). It is important to note that some of the communication systems are peculiar to specific societies because they are borne out of the people's culture, religious conviction, and experiences. Thus, their interpretation may vary from one society to the other. In any case, they do reveal the ethics of each society.

Relation of ethics to communication

Some often ask how does ethics relate to communication? Such a question is fallout from the opinion held by some scholars that ethics and communication do not mix. It is important to briefly unravel the question in order to appreciate the ethical dimension of communication. Firstly communication is imperative to society because without it human ideas, thought, beliefs, conviction, principles, opinions, cannot be known. This is because through communication, men share knowledge, information and experience. All these involve action which is a subject of moral study. Also associated with this argument is the fact that communication involves an interactional process, because in the process of communication there is participation. According to Onigu Otite, the ability to communicate effectively depends upon how well the individuals share a common integrated bundle of cultural norms and values (Otite and Ogionwu 1979:277). Given this information, we can rightly argue that an act of communication is first of all an interaction. Even where media of mass communication, such as radio, are used, there must be some form of interaction between the communicator and his absent audience before the degree of communication can be assessed.

Thus, communication is not something separate from the society or imposed upon it. It is an integral part of society. Us activities mostly consist of rules of human behaviour and specify that certain thoughts, beliefs, opinions, etc being communicated through any means are wrong or immoral while others are right or immoral. Hence, we talk of media ethics, or immoral dance, drama, picture, signs, music, words, written symbols, gestures etc. (Bakstanousky, 1989:103).

Our range of communication is as varied as our means. It stretches from simple commands such as 'Do\ 'Don't', Stop!', ' Go!', (which may be conveyed by expression or gesture, pictorial signs or flashing light of agreed meaning, or by words). It is important to note that the commands mentioned above have ethical background because they are expression of the 'dos' and 'don't's' of society which refer to positive and negative ethical principles respectively. For example, the word 'do' refers to an approved conduct, which society cherishes while the word 'don't' refers to those conducts which members of society must not perform or do. In other words, the terms 'do' and 'don't' are both moral terms and expressions. In the words of Hare, the two words are both evaluative and descriptive. (Hare: 1952:143). In their evaluative function, they are used to commend or condemn. Thus, if I say that "he has done what he is obliged to do," I am indirectly commending the action. Conversely, if I say, "he has done, what he is not supposed to have done", it means, I am indirectly condemning his action. Evaluative terms are therefore used to guide choice. In fact, as Hare has put it, moral statements have direct relation to our conduct, for to make a moral statement is to commit one to what one says (Hare 1952:143).

From the foregoing, we can understand that communication systems are subjects of moral rules. And because communication is a human activity, it can be evaluated from the moral point of view just as any other human activity can be. Communication, like other social activities, presupposes a background of morality and would be impossible without it.

Therefore, communication, whichever form we have in mind has ethical impetus because it expresses human thought and feeling: the great work of literature and drama, painting and sculpture, music, religion, philosophy and science (Barry 1965:16).

Ethical issues in indigenous communication systems

Given the volume of what constitutes African Indigenous Systems, we have selected a few for thorough examination of their ethical content. The selection arises out of a need to avoid over-generalization and a desire for thorough work. Hence, there is room for other scholars to explore those left undiscussed. Those selected for discussion are: facial expression, gesture, preserving symbol colours, and oral traditions.

Facial Expression

People often express their feeling and thought by the use of their eyes. For example, when a person who is about to perform a bad action is looked at possibly by elders with contrived, annoyed or aggrieved face, the person will immediately know that he is not expected to act in a way he had wanted to. Or if he had started performing an action, (e.g. talking about an issue) and he notices annoyance in the face of another person beside him, he should know that he has to drop the action. In Yoruba society, parents are fond of using their face to warn their children not to act in certain ways. This often takes place when visitors are around in their house or when they are in another people's house where it is difficult to communicate with spoken words to command the child not act in a particular way. A child who harkens to facial expression of his parent is called a disciplined child (Olabimtan et al, 1986:71). Such a child is called *Omo to mo oju* a child who understands facial expression or sign). If such a child, (having recognized the facial sign), ignored the message of the sign, he will be punished later in the day. He is either beaten or the parent may stop allowing him to go out with him in the future.

Conversely, when a person is looked at favourably, it may mean that he is expected to go on performing a given action but if it is otherwise, it may mean that he is expected to desist from performing the action. It is important to note that facial expression could only work where people who are involved understand the rules on which the signal is based. This code has found a crucial place in African Culture (Amadi 1982:83). Right from infancy, a child is trained to understand facial signs. For example, when a breastfeeding baby intentionally or accidentally bites its mummy's breast, the mother looks on it angrily. That is a sign of warning, annoyance, and condemnation of the baby's action. Mostly, immediately the baby realizes this, he may smile and consequently desist from biting the mother any further. In short, the face is an agent of articulating the ethics of the society. This, however, varies from one community to another.

Gestures

Gesture involves movement of the hand or head to indicate or illustrate an idea, feeling etc. In other words, bowing of the head, a handshake, a hand wave, clapping of hands, hand fisting, hand knitting, prostrating, kneeling, sitting, standing etc constitute components of gestures. In African society, gesture which involves the elements listed above has ethical connotation. Each element constitutes a means of conveying ethical principles of the African Society. (Nabofa, 1994:83).

For example, it is a tradition of many African peoples for a young person to kneel or prostrate while greeting elders. (Olabimtan, 1986:89-94). Not only this, everybody without exception bows their heads and may even prostrate or kneel to great Oba (King). All these forms of gestures are used to demonstrate adherence to the ethical principles of a society, such as respect for elders and loyalty to divine authority. The act of a young person prostrating or kneeling to greet elders is a sign of respect to elders. (Mbiti, 1980:183-185). For the purpose of emphasis, Africans place a high premium on old age because it is a sign of maturity. According to Abogunrin, respect for elders and authority is one of the most important aspects of Yoruba ethics (Abogunrin, 1989:273). In fact, respect for parents which is manifested in kneeling or prostrating, to greet them, carrying a load for them, among others, are regarded as sacred duties. The belief is that those who neglect these duties will lose not only the respect of their immediate society, but will bring curses upon themselves. (Bascom, 1942:50). Therefore, African ethics teaches respect for elders, regardless of blood relationship, Elders are valued as indispensable because they are always the source of wisdom, strength and guidance. (Fadipe; 1990:310). Regarding the respect for the Kings, African people believe that their Oba (Kings) possess divine authority; hence, they are called earthly vice-regents. In the words of Mbiti, they are referred to as *pontifex maximum* or earthly viceroy (Mbiti 1980:182-183), the power-wielder (the vice-gerent of the Deity).

Because of this, African Society enjoins respect, obedience and loyalty to rulers who represent the authority of the divinities and the ancestors. Therefore, every subject of an Oba should bow down to greet him. It is a sign of loyalty. Disrespect for the rulers and elders are therefore regarded as one of the most heinous crimes in Africa (Abogunrin; 1989:261). In the same vein, African wives have an obligation to respect their husbands. Hence African women are accustomed to bowing down, allowing the heads to touch the ground before their husbands. Such is usually accompanied with giving of clapped or cupped hands to the husband. This is called "Osuba" in Yoruba society. This involves knitting or clapping of fingers together as a sign of

demonstrating loyalty to their husbands. Handshake is also another form of gesture which express ethical message in African society. Though this is an imported idea in Africa, yet people are using it a great deal to express their thought and feelings towards other members of the society. For example, a handshake is a gesture of peace; -"See, I have no weapon in my hands"; or "I invite you, also without a weapon, to take hold of it". Since most people are right-handed, to disarm the right hand is to proclaim friendliness. Friendliness, in ethical perspective, implies cooperation, collegueship, co-partnership. This enhances growth of fraternity, solidarity, fellow-feeling, voluntary associations, coalitions, federations, united fronts, common fronts, mutual assistance, reciprocity etc (Ifemesia, 1985:223).

Apart from hugging, embracing one another may be signs of gratitude, a person who has done well or who has behaved as expected by society may be handshake. This could be a sign of approval of his action or it could be a means of appreciating what one has done. By and large, bowing, kneeling and prostrating and other related forms of gesture are marks of submission, obedience, loyalty, respect etc. This is not peculiar to social affairs; it is also found among religious people who pray with palms pressed together in a gesture of supplication. Some Christians raise their hands to heaven in adoration. Likewise, a praying Muslim prostrates himself as a sign of submission of God. All these are means of religious communication which have ethical dimensions (Nabofa, 1994:18).

Preserving Symbols

Preserving symbols in African Society consist of carvings, footprints, writing masks, print, drawing and several arts works (Akpaide 1982:241-265). All these serve as a medium of expression of thought, feeling, emotion and idea, which mostly have moral undertones (Herskovists; 1961:451 -456). In traditional African Society, works of arts and culture and symbols are outlets and vehicles through which religious ideas are expressed. This view is seriously supported by Esi Kinni-Olusanyi who opines that they reflect every kind of emotion in the human mind and radiate religious pleasures {Esi Kinni-Olusanyi 1993:54}. Therefore, the artist is indeed the spokesman of his community since he expresses what is held by the corporate group (Nabofa; 1988:81).

For example, in an Oba's palace, there are works of arts and sculptures and drawings. Some of these are pictures of wild animals like lion, tiger and snake. They are drawn not to scare people, but to show the authority and power of kings, for the lion in the picture represents the King of animals. Their presence in the picture is to show that the King is powerful and should be respected. (Olaoba, 1995:1). Not only this, there are some arts works showing an Oba standing tall, while his subjects prostrate before him. This indicates an act of submission and loyalty to recognized authority. This is to invite others around the palace to respect the king.

There are also arts which show past heroes or heroines. Their presence in town is symbolic. It may serve the purpose of remembering heroic activities of a particular hero or a sign of gratitude for the life and services of the hero which should serve as a model to others, (Ezenya; 1986:28). It is important to note that that picture demonstrates the courageous attitude of such warriors. Courage is one of the important ethical values in African Society. Courage means bravery. It is a quality that enables a person to control fear in the face of danger, pain or misfortune. Norman Bremer has urged people to have:

The common courage to be heroes, the courage to resist temptation, the courage to speak the truth, the courage to be what we really are, and not to pretend to be what we are not, the courage to live honestly within our own means, and not dishonestly upon the means of others (Berner 1985:28).

Religious symbols such as votive figures, which adorn shrines, reliquary figures, and charms figures, stool, used in initiation to the cults, the apparatus for divination, dance, musical instruments and a variety of other ritual paraphernalia are examples of arts works, (Bascom; 1973:11). They are the overt expressions of the people's religious and ethical experience. The artist uses them to graphically communicate the community as the sum total of religious and ethical thoughts, feeling, experience, belief, opinion and attitude. (Nabofa, 1994:50).

Colour

Colour is the decomposition of white light, which is composed of the seven colours of the spectrum or rainbow: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet (ROYGBIV) (Nabofa, 1994:87). On the basis of our experience, colours are very effective tools and modes of communication in African social setting because they impinge fast on people's mind and thereby transmit a lot of information and ideas to them. The opinion of Wangboye is apposite when he states that "colour plays such an important role in your daily lives that some of the most important decisions we take are important role in our daily lives that some of the most important decisions we take are influenced by the colour around us (Wangboye 1985:13). On this note the colour of an object communicates and registers more readily in our mind than its shape (Nabofa; 1994).

It is important to note that in the African Society, colours are symbolical and hence, subject to several interpretations from one time to another and from one culture to another. They do convey ethical messages to people whenever they are used in certain circumstances. The colour red has a strong association with blood and fire. It is therefore a colour that is coupled with emergency and with danger. We see it as a warning of danger when it is placed on an object, article, property etc. For example, in traditional African setting, farm owners are fond of placing a red colour, object on their farmland indicating "Don't enter or Don't steal" to prospective thieves (Webster, 1948:29). Whoever sees such objects will not enter the farmland or tamper with objects with red colour or any objects; placed on them. Failure to do so is to either die instantaneously or experience other untold danger which may involve shedding of blood of the *victim*. This colour does not only create psychological fear to a potential thief, but also inculcates the principle of discipline and responsibility in African Society. (Webster, 1948:29). The warning that one should not enter to steal made stealing (which is a moral vice) less common in traditional African Society.

While colour 'red' is associated with danger in traditional African Society, colour white symbolizes purity, love, joy, glory (However, the Kinga people of Tanzania regard white as evil) (Nabofa 1994:24). With this exception, others regard colour white as a symbol of love and purity. Both words are essential moral values in African society (Ansah 1989:248). In fact, it is a

general belief of Africans that love is the core moral value which others surround. It is in this sense that Normal Bremer says:

Love is the -, great instrument of nature, the bond and cement of society, the spirit and spring of the universe, we can serve only so long as we can love (Bremer; 1985:218).

Because the colour white symbolizes purity, many people both within and outside religious circles use white clothing and objects to indicate righteousness, purity, cleanliness, open-heart etc. In traditional religions, some divinities, especially *Obatala* are associated with colour white. *Obatala*'s religious object of worship is white. Therefore, he likes seeing his adherent wearing white and using white-coloured objects in their daily life. With this, he expects his adherents to be pure in heart and character. Thus, for *Obatala*, purity is the highest of all ethical principles which his adherents must practice on daily basis (Awolalu and Dopamu; 1979:21). The commonest colour in nature is green. This is the colour of leaves and growing things and thus of life, safety, and normality. Green is, therefore, the natural colour for indicating a situation that is normal. Colour green specifically stands for peace. Thus, whenever green leaves are carried by a group of people, or by an individual at a public rally or it is placed on a vehicle, it symbolizes peace. Peace is also an important moral value in the African society because; it means freedom from quarrel, strife, conflict, rioting, disorder, hostility, violence or war. It is also freedom from fear, anxiety, uncertainty, disturbance, or tension. Precisely, it is an atmosphere of calmness, security and safety. The African belief is that where peace reigns supreme, all other moral values such as honesty, love dedication etc. will have their places.

In the same vein, colour blue symbolizes peace, love, charity and truth (Wanikado, 1994:86). Truthfulness means being in a state of reality or factualness. It is important to note that truthfulness is an important virtue in African Society. In the words of Abogunrin, truthfulness is the most important moral value which all others revolve around. (Abogunrin; 1989:273). We agree with Abogunrin's position because life is impossible without trust. Hence, the saying: "Honesty is the best policy". For honesty or truthfulness is whatever makes man a good citizen. Thus in any society, truthfulness is an obligation for everybody. With the above brief analysis and meanings ascribed to different colours, we can submit that colour in African Society conveys African social values which are strongly embedded in African Culture.

Oral Traditions

What constitutes oral traditions for African people are as follows: myths, folktale, proverb, music, song, Ifa corpus etc. (Finegan, R. 1970:28). These traditions are called oral ethics by Dzurgba bearing in mind that they convey ethical messages for people in African society Dzurgba (1999:83-91). One of the features of the traditions is that some of them are still in oral form and they are transmitted from one generation to another. It is of recent that few scholars begin to document them for preservation sake. A brief look at a few of them will justify their being labelled as oral ethics as Dzurgba did and this will equally show how they articulate the ethics of the African society. For example, myths are stories ranging from the simple explanations of common occurrence related to the fact of human existence, to serious riddles like

those involved in the phenomena of birth, human life in all its phases and death (question with), reference to the Deity, the whence and whereof of the unseen world in which man feels himself enveloped with rules which guides or molest him (Idowu, 1999:6). With reference to rules, emphasis is always placed on character. In view of this, mythological stories are told about what constitutes good or bad character or good or bad conduct in society. (Bayard, 1993:1 -17). In such stories, animals like tortoise and snails always feature, the tortoise representing a bad person engaging in several immoral practices like deception, selfishness, greed, hatred, uncooperative attitude etc. Conversely, the snail features as a patient, humble, gentle, disciplined, honest person. The story is usually concluded with consequences of both types of behaviour. For good behaviour, there is public honour, public commendation, public applause, public appreciation, while bad behaviour fetches bad people public condemnation, ostracization, beating, punishment, disgrace etc. These stories like fables and others related to it are told to teach and articulate positive ethical principles in society (Bayard 1953:1 -17).

African songs which consist of various forms such as songs, lyrics, ballads and minstrelsy (Bowra 1962:82 and Jones 1959:70) constitute an important medium of communicating the ethics of society. For example, the nuptial chant (Ekun Iyawo) articulates sexual morality. The bride (chanter) sings it on the eve of her marriage to prove to the public that she is a virgin. This is a pride to the African family or home. (Faniyi 1975:677-699). In the same vein, Igbo song among Igbomina of Osun State constitutes means of condemning some vices in society such as theft, adultery, laziness, idleness, religious intolerance, family instability etc. (Agboola 1987:18). It is important to note that a good number of songs are ancient and fixed in character. They are all informative and meaningful for one purpose or the other because their contents are replete with ethical teaching that borders on honesty, dedication to duty, humility, selflessness, tolerance, justice etc. (Beier (1956:26 and Awe 1974:29).

Apart from songs, proverb is another significant medium of indigenous communication in African society. It occurs informally in day to day verbal communication or conversation (Olatunji; 1983). In fact, according to Ikenga-Metuh,

Proverbs spring spontaneously from the people. They are voxpopuli... in profound sense and consequently, should be accepted as a true index of what a people regard as true and are interpretative of the principles of life and conduct. Proverbs are therefore, trustworthy witness of the social, political, ethical and religious ideals of the people among whom they originate. (Ikenga-Metuh 1992:20).

Proverbs are highly rated among the Yoruba for they are considered to be the wisdom lore of the race. They communicate ethical values of society enjoining people to apply them to daily social relations (Boverd 1977:188). In the words of Olatunji, proverbs serve as social characters to praise what the society considers to be virtues such as tolerance, responsibility, dedication, love, discipline, justice etc. (Olatunji 1985:170). In the same way, proverbs are used to condemn what the society considered injustice, intolerance, destruction, jealousy, envy, hatred, sexual immorality among others (Ajibola 1947). For example, hard work is praised and

laziness condemned in the samples of Yoruba proverbs shown below: *Atelewo eni kii tannije*. meaning *One's own palm does not deceive one*. That is, every man must work for his material success for if neighbours are not ready to help one hand does through hard work. This proverb extols the virtue of industry or hard work. On laziness, a Yoruba proverb says: *Iponri ole kii ni laari Ojoojumo lakitiyan nba* *The lazy man s destiny does not prosper It is daily that trouble besets it*.

This indicates that a lazy man always gets into trouble. From this point, we can argue that while proverb communicates ethical values of society, a person who speaks it becomes an agent of articulating ethical values of society in an informal manner. The same could be said about Babalawo who are adherents of Ifa. The Ifa literary corpus among the Yoruba is a storehouse of information on moral matters. (Adewale 1986:60-61). It is against this background that Abimbola argues that Ifa is a repository of Yoruba traditional body of knowledge embracing ethics, philosophy, medicine and folktale. (Abimbola 1976:1 -11). As a matter of fact, much of Ifa corpus borders on character or action of men specifying out what constitute good and bad behaviour. It reveals rewards accrued to a person who behaves rightly and also punishment that awaits people of bad character. (Bascom, 1969:8). From the foregoing, it is obvious that facial appearance, gestures, symbols, colours and oral traditions have ethical undertone because their contents are rich on ethical issues. Hence, they communicate ethical thought, feelings, and judgement of society. As a matter of fact, they are important to African people, and hence, they constitute important media of communicating African Cultural beliefs and practices.

Indigenous communications and modernity

It is no exaggeration that the average African man today is, to some extent, a deculturalised person living in a no-man's land and imbibing cultural values that are not African. This development is brought about by several factors such as colonization, introduction of foreign religions - Christianity and Islam, social change, political ideology, urbanization etc. (Lloyd 1975:65-66). Arising from this situation, many of African indigenous communication systems were condemned by Westerners and were looked upon with disdainful eyes to the extent that African people became discouraged in using them. Africans were deculturalised to the point that most means of communication were regarded as archaic, traditional and rudimentary. Because most of them have a religious background, they were all condemned with traditional religion. (Dzurgba, 1992:30). This condemnation arose from Western belief that Africa could have no idea of God and a well-developed religion. Indeed, Sir Samuel Baker, the explorer, believed that the Northern Nilotes of Sudan had no religion at all. He said: that Africans without any exception, are without a belief in a Supreme Being neither have they any form of worship idolatry... (Baker, 1841:423-424). 'It is no wonder, then, that, when Christianity was introduced to Africa, the missionaries banned the use of African drum, and African dresses by a few convertees in their churches. (Ayandele 1966:29). Thenceforth Africans began to lose interest in African drum which constitutes an important communication system. Not only this, African people have all but lost their heritage in form of songs and proverbs with which the efforts of the society is communicated. (Wilson 1987:24). Today, African songs are substituted with Western songs in which much of European musical instruments are widely used at the expense of African musical instruments. Hardly can we see any youth who is competent enough to sing African songs especially those that are in form of lyrics and ballads which are used to communicate societal ethical values. (Lloyd 1979:83). For example, among Igbomina people in Osun State,

Igbo song which is used to praise and condemn good and bad behaviours among the people as the case may be is no longer rendered. (Agboola 1987:29). It is also a pity that as a result of modernity; African youth do not only find it difficult to speak in proverbs but could not even understand it because they are less concerned about it. Sad enough, when a proverb is said, the youth have their artificial and superficial meanings and interpretation to it. This development is doing havoc to African Culture. For example, a Yoruba proverb says: "Maalu ti o ni ru, Oluwa lo n ba le esinsin ", meaning: Cow without a tail, it is God who chases away tse-tsefly that may bite. This proverb alludes that normally cow uses its tail to chase away flies from its body, but a cow without a tail can only be helped by God to chase away flies. When one suggests this proverb to an African youth that "Cow without a tail..... the response is usually "many of them are at the abattoir". This answer is a wrong way to complete the proverb. This example demonstrates to us the extent and degree to which African proverbs are treated with contempt. Besides, little emphasis is placed on African symbols which serve as a medium of communication in indigenous society. Today, artists are no longer interested in local artifact; rather, their works of arts are being influenced by European culture. Today, they design what is suitable to European taste. In the same vein, the pithy sayings, folktales and mythology are no longer rendered by the elders for the benefit of the youth as it was in the past. Today, the moon-light stories of indigenous society have been replaced with television and video shows. The advent of Satellite Dish and greater development in internet technology has shifted the bases of African communication from indigenous communication to modern oriented mass media (Wilson 1987 - .24).

CONCLUSION

In spite of the deculturalization of the African man regarding the use of African indigenous communication systems, the African has not totally lost the moral values inherent in them. In fact, the indigenous communication system is more readily used in villages than in cities. Today, scholars both Western and Africans are currently doing research on quite a number of them. For example, scholars like Wande Abimbola, Oludare Olajubu, Olatunji, (Abimbola 1975) among others have done sufficient scholarly work in African indigenous communication, such as Ifa, Oriki, Ijala etc. This is to affirm the usefulness and relevance of them even in the contemporary society. This development to our mind calls for cultural renewal in which "Africans will do things according to their culture. Not only this, the need for cultural renewal regarding indigenous communication systems becomes imperative if an ethical re-orientation of African society is to be achieved. From the perspective of the Nigerian Political scene the war against corruption initiated and invigorated Nigerian governments at different times may not yield adequate dividends unless means of articulating ethical values such as indigenous communication systems are renewed, reactivated and re-promoted. This is necessary for ethical re-orientation programmes initiated by several peoples of African Society to be meaningful. The time for the renewal is now and should not be postponed.

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