Political Communication and the Nigerian Democratic Experiment: Critical Insights from Yorùbá Philosophy

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Abstract

Nigeria's political sphere is fraught with violence, electoral frauds, unfulfilled promises and negligence on the part of the ruling class, hence political communication in Nigeria have been faced with hostility from electorates spurred by public distrust of the mass media. This essay philosophically argues for a culture-bound understanding of political communication in a way that enables a strategic decolonization of communication concepts and ideologies. This cultural understanding advocates the need for the domestication of information prior to their application in a way that enable us to properly reflect on and engage with the existential complexities of Africa's political landscapes. The central claim of the Yorùbá political communication is that local and national communicative principles in political discourses should be subsumed under epistemic, ontological, and ethical dimensions drawn from Yorùbá histories, cultures, and values. This essay therefore deploys Yorùbá philosophical insights underlying the creation, distribution, use and control of information as a political resource that could be adopted by governments, organizations, the media, and individuals in Nigeria.

Keywords: Political communication, Mass media, Democracy, Proverbs, Political symbols

Introduction: The Nigerian democratic experiment

Though defined and understood in myriad of ways, democracy has been widely described as the most attractive form of government. Democracy emphasizes equality of citizens and freedom of expression, such that legitimate power resides with the people while government gains legitimacy only by the consent of the governed. Although differing in characterization, democratic theories have revolved around processes and principles that will result in political freedom for all, supremacy of the rule of law and a commitment to the progress of the political entity (Dunn, 1994). Noting that "the people cannot decide until somebody decided who the people are", Rustow (1970, 11) suggests that constituting the rules of democracy must be preceded by national feeling or a sense of national unity which does not exclude any group regardless of gender, ethnicity or class. In recent past, Africa has been faced with the task of defining, re-defining, shaping and grooming her democracies, a process which has been filled with political adventures including decisions on what forms of democracy to adopt, how government should be structured and what dividends should be expected from democratic rule.

The return of democratic structures to Nigeria in 1999 marked an epoch in the political landscape of the multi-ethnic and heterogeneous state. It presented democracy as most synonymous with holistic development and aggregated growth and led to the pursuit of constitutionalism and good governance, measured in terms of an efficient and effective delivery of public goods. Sadly, Nigeria has since been faced with problems of concretizing the professed democracy. Leadership and followership problems exhibited by political opportunism (Hassan, 2010); elite fragmentation (Oseni, 2014); a decline in the functions of parliament (Achebe, 1984); lack of ideology on the part of political parties (Bello-Imam, 2010); problems of judicial freedom and neutrality (Owoeye and Kawonishe, 2011); security challenges (Sampson, 2014) and economic downturn (Nwoke, 2013) consequently calls for a re-assessment of specific frameworks being used by the Nigerian state (Omotoso and Akinpelu, 2014). Among other issues, problems of establishing and maintaining national order facing local and national democracies (Omotoso, 2016), are being assessed in multidisciplinary ways, especially through political philosophy, political economy, political science, political communication, among others. Of all these, political communication is central to this paper.

According to Salami, "Democracy recognizes the differences in human interests and put structures in place to provide the means for the genuine meeting of the minds, and considers 'politics' as the area of negotiation" (Salami 2006, 68). Such means are created, nurtured and sustained by political communication. Political communication has been variously defined: it is

the "pure discussion about the allocation of public resources (revenues), official authority (who is given the power to make legal, legislative and executive decision), and official sanctions (what the state rewards or punishes)" (Denton and Woodward 1990, 13); "that subset of communicatory activity considered political by virtue of the consequences, actual and potential, that it has for the functioning of the political system" (Rahman 1991, 21); "the creation, distribution, use and control of information as a political resource, whether it is done by governments, by organizations like pressure groups or the media, or by individuals" (Manheim 1991, 7); it consists of "not only verbal or written statements, but also visual means of signification such as dress, make-up, hairstyle, and logo design, that is all those elements of communication which might be said to constitute a political 'image' or 'identity'" (McNair 1995, 4); it is a process "entailing the issues, ideas, policies, personnel, structures, organs/channels, problems, people, messages, and even feedback involved in political activities" (Nnadi 2008, 250). These definitions present a wide terrain including such aspects as political agenda setting and agenda building, the uses and effects of political advertising, the relationship between journalists and politicians, the framing of political news by reporters, gatekeeping processes, and more recently, the uses and influence of the new social media in election coverage and public opinion management (Okigbo and Onoja 2017). In line with this, Lin, identifies five traditions within the study of political communication.

> The first is the tradition of rhetorical analysis of public political discourse.... The second,... how different governments use propaganda/persuasive messages to influence public opinion... the third, the tradition of voting studies... the fourth is the study of mass media effects... and fifth is the tradition of institution study of the press and government in their relation to public opinion (Lin 2004, 70).

The peculiarity of political communication (hereafter policom) cannot be underestimated, as the intents of government and the governed rides on the wings of how adequately policom has been channelled to achieve pre-defined democratic objectives. Hence, this paper attempts to use policom to develop paradigms that will take into cognizance the communicative components of Africa's, and particularly Nigeria's, democratic realities. This work connects with the idea of Afro-constructivism, which raises the need to reconstruct the society from the realities of the history of such society, based on the perception that African thought does not apprehend an independent metaphysico-social reality, but construct a system of principles or norms governing clear understanding of social order (Chukwuokolo 2014). In the same vein,

the paper's methodology aligns with Fayemi's Hermeneutico-reconstructionism entailing

> the creation/formulation of a contemporary African philosophy that recognizes, identifies and explains the intellectual foundation of ancient African philosophies upon which specific ideas, beliefs and principles in oral tradition can be demonstrated (and interpreted) as critical and rational, while at the same time trying to explore the potential of some humanistic aspects of the techno-scientific and philosophic resources of other cultural traditions to contribute towards the creation of a contemporary decolonized African system (Fayemi 2012, 200-201).

Here, I shall be utilizing the strengths in the methods of cultural reconstructionism and hermeneutics respectively to interpret the African intellectual heritage so as to deploy such interpretation for solving current problems. This work recognizes the need for an African political communication constructed upon a solid philosophy; one that is not alien to African histories, cultures, and values; a philosophy which scrutinizes the epistemic, ontological, and ethical dimensions of the subject matter (Omotoso 2017). Accordingly, this work is significant in its offering of a fresh perspective to the policom discourse, aiming to show by its restatement of beliefs, ideas and theories which have been suppressed or denied,[1] but which are necessary for the completeness of the discipline, that there are deep-seated ideas which could be garnered from Africa, to address Africa's problems. Following the introduction, section II discusses political communication in Nigeria; section III articulates the understanding of political communication arising from Yorùbá history and philosophy, and section IV presents critical insights from Yorùbá cultural understanding of political communication when applied to contemporary Nigerian democratic situation.

Political Communication in Nigeria

Noting that good communication is tantamount to informative democracy for societal transformation, Omotoso (2015, 327) remarks that "the message, that is, what is to be communicated, and the media, that is, how the message is transmitted" constitute the two contexts within which one can argue that "the power to influence (political power) is embedded in the power to communicate." Given this crucial insight, policom becomes fundamental to democratic theory. Despite this, policom is unfortunately a latecomer within the study of Africa's democratic discourses, hence, justifying Popoola's (2017, 15)

1 This is drawn from the words of Onyewuenyi (1993, 39-40).

argument that the late evolution of political communication reflects state hostility to political science in Africa and Nigeria in particular.

According to Osagioduwa, Omotoso and Olukotun, "political communication cannot be unequivocal in that it diversifies as dictated by situational contexts in relation to era, societal traits, geography, culture, race, system of government, behaviour of leaders and the led, and opinion of communication scholars...." (Osagioduwa, et al 2017, 1) By implication, the history of political communications in Nigeria is interwoven with the history of colonialism, Christian missionary society, political development, socio-economic structure, ownership of newspapers and other mass media of communications (Rahman, 1991). Policom in Nigeria has taken different forms. From dissemination of political views in terms of governments' positions on issues; soliciting for support in political activities, to presentation of masses' grievances and so on, policom has transited through periods including what could be called *authoritarian policom*, which pervaded Nigeria's early post-independence era where media ownership and control rested solely on government and so was characterized by one-way-communication of government policies and programmes to the masses for compliance. There was also the *Soviet-Communist Policom* which pervaded the later part of military rule in Nigeria. It was characterized by party press ownership; media as teacher of the masses; emphasis on the positive harnessing of media outlets for the goals of national development and social change; placing value on unity (Rahman 1991).

The return to civil rule which began with the failed third republic in 1993 heralded the arrival of the *social responsibility policom*. This is contrary to Rahman's claim that not much relevance can be derived from a social responsibility theory of the press for Nigeria, as social responsibility policom directs critical attention at media commitment to both the government and the masses. *Libertarian policom* began to grow in Nigeria as democracy was taking root. Thus, since 1999, the press has been in the struggle for freedom of information. On this, the proliferation of new media in the 2000s brought unprecedented but questionable level of liberty, reflected in uncensored news reporting, internet journalism and unrestricted mass participation in information gathering and dissemination, through social media. These theories provide a viable starting point for the discussion of political communication; particularly the transitions and frequent meandering of the Nigerian state between authoritarian, soviet-communist, libertarian and social responsibility since colonial period characterized by a teeming population of non-literate masses; the post-independence media of the 60s and 70s; the military incursions of the 80s and 90s, and the democratic regimes since 1999. Although, these theories of communication have been used to explain policom in Africa, none has successfully and completely captured the African situation,

since most are alien to Africa's indigenous structures. The following section therefore presents elements of cultural framework indigenous to the Yorùbá people of Southwest Nigeria as a critical dimension for understanding policom which foreign theories and models have failed to capture in the African policom discourse.

Yorùbá and the Idea of Political Communication

Indigenous/traditional communication recognizes the existence of traditional structures and channels of communication used as verbal and symbolic aspects of interpersonal and group communication.[2] Beginning with communication in pre-colonial Nigeria, Omu, (1978) identified oral communication (informal transference media) and organized communication (formal transference media) as the two agencies of communication. The oral communication media on one hand explored informal contacts and spontaneous gatherings such as family gatherings, village festivals, marriage, circumcision feasts, public meetings and traditional court sessions, moonlight gatherings and so on, to exchange and disseminate information. On the other hand, the formal transference media was a more organized mean used by the traditional administrative organ to disseminate information and communicate with their subjects. Other forms of indigenous media include oral literature, trade, festivals, gunshots, drawing on the cave walls, thick cloud smoke, talking drum and gong-men/town criers which could each fit into earlier categorization as either formal or informal media.[3] Indigenous communication was not only vertical/formal (from rulers to the subjects), but also horizontal/informal (individuals to other persons and groups). For instance,

> Individuals communicate with society through physical and metaphysical means. A farm owner, for example, may mount a charm conspicuously on his farm in order to stress private ownership and to scare off human intruders…. Rainmakers communicate their power to disrupt events through various psychological means. The distant bull-roar of the Oro cult (Yoruba, Western Nigeria) in the night warns women to stay-off the streets at the approach of the cult men. Special drum beats communicate various messages. The gbedu rhythm, for instance, signifies a royal occasion: coronation, funeral, the traditional dance of a king (Oduko 1987, 3)

Notably, the indigenous communications systems use local languages; they are interactive in the form of several chains of face-to-face activities from the source or sources to the receivers; they are exclusively integrated into local

2 See Folarin (1987) and Ebeze (2002).

3 See Ebeze, 2002.

cultures; they do not depend on Western technology and they are dissimilar from the Western model of communication consequent upon which colonial governments found them inadequate.Through colonial to contemporary times, these means of communication have managed to survive although some have been tagged out-dated.

Yorùbá, noted for their urban lifestyle, rich artistic culture, and sacred kingship, had unique manner of leadership and administration before colonial incursion; in actual fact, they are well known for their sophisticated centralized governments (Atanda 1980) and a political system which is analogous to what Oduko (1987, 4) describes as "constitutional monarchy". With such high urbanization index, politics among Yoruba is held to begin from the home, into the towns in the form of kinship which help to produce monarchical systems so that mini-states provide political frameworks for mega-states. These political structures according to Adekunle indicates how "the political philosophy of the Yoruba, their political institutions, and strong organization were indigenous to them" (Adekunle 2006, 275), and how these have played out over the years; hence, Fayemi and Omotoso (2010) note that in Yorùbá traditional societies, the distinction between *ìjọba* and *òṣèlú* encouraged the culture of community service. Here statesmen's and stateswomen's concern for improving lives aided development in traditional settings.[4] Traditional Yorùbá political and governance structure begins with an administrative and political head, usually the *ọba* and the cabinet made up of chiefs who assist in the running of their domain and the maintenance of law and order. Decisions are consensually made alongside council of chiefs who make laws and set punitive measures. Although the *ọba* among Yoruba are supreme leaders, the political system is structured with checks and balances to check tyrannical rule. The Ọ̀yọ́ Empire provides a vivid example with the Aláàfin as the administrative head (with the *baálẹ̀* of smaller towns being answerable to the Aláàfin), the Ọ̀yọ́ Mèsì (the council of kingmakers), the age grade, and Ògbóni cult acting as a check on the powers of the chiefs and the Aláàfin who can be impeached if found tyrannical. Yorùbá belief in good governance is founded on a sense of responsibility from all actors, that is, the recognition and willingness to collectively do what the society requires. Take this proverb for instance:

Ọkọ kú, ọmọ ọba mẹ́ta a pète; Ọbẹ mú epo, Lálá mú iyọ̀, Àjùwọ̀n mú ata.

4 Fayemi and Omotoso (2010) identify conceptual conflation wherein *ìjọba* (act of rulership) is erroneously described as government and *òṣèlú* is erroneously termed politician. These errors downplay elements of statecraft without necessarily being a politician which is being emphasized in contemporary politics.

(The husband died, and three princesses made their contribution [to the feast];
Ọbe brought palm oil, Lálá brought salt, and Àjùwọ̀n brought pepper).

Communication in Yorùbá culture is pre-historic, but then, for Hachten, the "lack of mass media, which implies technology, does not mean that no media have been used" prior to colonial incursion (1971, 11). The following proverb further establishes the importance of communication among Yorùbá:

À-jókòó-ài-dìde, àsọ̀rọ̀-ài-gbèsì, ká sinni títí ká má padà sílé: ài-sunwọ̀n ní ń gbẹ̀hìn-in rẹ̀.

(Sitting-without-getting-up, speaking-without-waiting-for-responses, escorting people on their way and not turning back: unpleasantness is what they breed.)

Yorùbá communication strategies maintain high regard for the private and public spheres. The following proverbs exemplify Yorùbá's regard for the public sphere:

Moní: Àjọwò; Wọ́n ní: 'Àjọwò; Ohun tí a bá jọ wò gígún níí gún.
(I said, "Let us mind it together;" and they responded, "Let us mind it together"; whatever has everyone's attention and care comes out straight.)

Pípé là ń pé gbọ́n, A kì í pé gọ̀
(Assembling is what we do in order to be wise, we do not assemble to become foolish)

Ọ̀rọ̀ tí ó yẹ k'á sọ ní fìtí la, a kì í sọ ọ́ l'ókùnkùn
(What should be discussed in public ought not be discussed in private).

Àdáṣe níí hunni; àjọṣe kì í hunni
(Going it alone is what gets one in trouble; collaborating with others does not get one in trouble).

On the other hand, the following proverbs exemplify Yorùbá's regard for the private sphere:

A kì í bọ òrìṣà lójú ọ̀fọ́n-ọ̀n; b'ó bá da'lẹ́ a máa tú pẹpẹ.
(One does not sacrifice to a god in the presence of a house rat; otherwise, when night falls it invades the rafter shelves).

Bí iṣu ẹni bá ta, a máa d'ọwọ́ bò ó jẹ ni
(Success is better managed on a low key)

It is however worthy to note that operations in both spheres, the personal and the political, have been mutually inclusive. For instance, while politics and administrative issues in pre-colonial Yorùbá communities were regarded as public issues, several factors at the private spheres contributed immensely to decisions and events at the public sphere.

Instances existed in old Òyó Empire where personal misunderstanding turned out to create strains in political relations, and where domestic/marital issues culminated into political rivalry among communities. Proverbial examples include:

Bí a bá pé bí rí kóto, a máa ń pé bí rí kóto
(General meetings must necessarily be followed by inner caucus meetings).

Àìkọ́wọ̀ọ́rìn ejò níí ṣekú pa wọ́n lọ́kọ̀ọ̀kan
(Snakes are easily killed one by one because of their failure to operate as a group).

An example to ascertains how policom among Yorùbá operates on mutual inclusiveness of both public and private spheres is the historical account of Ẹfúnṣetán Aníwúrà, an Ìyálóde of Ibadan whose family background and internal dynamics including procreation challenges made her strict on her slaves and was thereby misinterpreted as being wicked, particularly in her relations with her community.

Political actors in Yorùbá policom span persons and groups who operate in both public and private spheres including constituted authority (the paramount ruler, chiefs, family heads, youth leaders, religious leaders and so on), citizens (members of the communities under the administration of the paramount ruler), and the media (basically constitutive of tools for indigenous means and forms of communication as well as their custodians including town criers and coded message bearers). Citizens in traditional Yoruba society were largely described as subjects. Although they are free born having full rights as members of their communities, they are normatively described as "subjects",[5] due largely to the fact that citizens owe allegiance to the constituted authority; however, they enjoy rights of citizenship and often proceed to convey their grievances in order to check perceived despotism of constituted

5 But not within Mamdani's (1996) context of "decentralized despotism."

authorities. It is also pertinent to note that colonial invasion has drastically altered this traditional idea of "subject" and "citizen," with grave consequences for policom as would be seen below. In the light of the transitions, it will not be out of place to regard the masses in traditional Yorùbá societies as "subjects," while referring to the masses in modern times as "citizens."

Of these three actors (constituted authority, citizens and media), the media stands as mediator (Omotoso 2013). Although town criers/gong men were not accorded so much regard by the ruling class, citizens respected town criers and viewed them as the face of leadership. Remarkably, town criers had the moral capital to not only organize and re-organize messages, but also a moral duty not to distort or misinform citizens. Also, unlike coded message bearers who often await and report responses of coded messages, town criers' roles in policom was characterized by a one-way communication in which they are not permitted to bring back publics' views to leaders.

The Yoruba understanding of political communication in this study is connected with three different forms or dynamics of communication—*àrokò*, *òwe* and *ẹsẹ Ifá*. *Àrokò* (coded messages) combines symbolography, objectifics and signs to offer profound meanings in the process of interaction between the sender and the recipient. Symbolography present symbolic writing or representation using graphic descriptive representational device to convey a message which is understood within the context of a known social event and an accompanying verbal message. Objectifics are media presented in concrete forms which may have significance for a specific society only or may be universal through their traditional association with specific contextual meanings. For example, kolanut, charcoal, white pigeon or fowl, white egg, feather, cowries and so on are objects which are meaningful because they connotatively represent something.[6] The political import of *àrokò* is established, as they could be sent by a traditional ruler, chief, Ifá priest, Ògbóni cult member, hunter, artisan, warrior or individual citizens to a counterpart or any other person, group or body (Falola and Adebayo 2000). It involves sending an item or a combination of items to a person from which the decoder (or receiver) is expected to infer a piece of information which could be of a warning, admonition, punishment, conflict, announcement/marketing strategy, indicator/directive, expression of affection and pleading (Abudullahi-Idiagbon 2010). Examples of political communication via *àrokò* include:

1. Presentation of an empty calabash to a king or a traditional ruler as a mark of no confidence meaning he/she is expected to leave the throne or commit suicide.

6 For details on this, see Wilson (1987).

2. When a ruler of a village sends a knife, sword or red cloth to another village, it signifies disagreement and war. Feedback would be determined by the receiver's decision to seek peace or to start preparing for war.
3. A comb for parting the hair signified the irreconcilable end of a relationship between individuals or communities

Òwe (proverb) is "a saying in a more or less fixed form marked by popular acceptance of truth tersely expressed in it" (Finnegan 1970, 393). It is a speech form that likens, or compares, one thing or situation to another, highlighting the essential similarities that the two share (Owomoyela 2005, 3). Proverbs often provide connective platforms to generate and retain interest in issues and events by summarizing expectedly long narratives with unequivocal accuracy. Policom-related examples include:

Àsọ̀rọ̀ àìlàdí rẹ̀ ló pa Elémpe àkọ́kọ́ tó ní igbá wúwo ju àwo

(Speaking without elaborating is what killed Elempe the First who said calabash is heavier than china) (Owomoyela 2005, 19).

Here, communication is deficient as the Elempe failed to explain the context within which a calabash could be heavier than a china. It connects with the parody of a politician in the following conversation on the campaign ground:

Electorates: "We want free education"
Politician: "Forget it"
Electorate: "We want good roads and free healthcare"
Politician: "Forget it"

When such a politician is accused of failing to fulfil the desires of the electorates after winning election, he/she says; "I did not promise those things, I only said 'forget it!'" In this case, "forget it" serves an ambiguous purpose since it could either mean "it is impossible" or "consider it done."

Competence in leadership:
A kì í fi'ni joyè àwòdì k'á má lè gb'ádìẹ.
(One cannot be given the title "eagle" and yet be incapable of snatching chickens. (One should be able to live up to expectations.) (Owomoyela 2005, 42)

Àì-kúkú-joyè, ó sàn ju, "Ẹnuù mi ò ká ìlú" lọ.
(Not-assuming-the-position-of-ruler-at-all is far better than, "My word is not heeded by the people.) (Ibid, 52)

Decorum in leadership:
Àgbà kì í ṣerée kí-ló-bá-yìí-wá?
(An elderly person does not engage in the kind of play that provokes the comment, "What brought all this about?) (Ibid, 49)

Àgbà kì í ṣorò bí èwe.
(An elderly person does not perform rituals like a youth) (Ibid, 49)

Proverbs are widely used on the political scene—at political rallies, for election campaigns, political advertisements, political public relations and public communications. They have also been used to establish superiority, higher capacity/experience of a political party above others, to gain trust, to build electorates' confidence and to assure citizens of a better future.

Ẹsẹ Ifá (Ifá verses) derives from Ifá, regarded as a living body of wisdom handed down by Olódùmarè (the Supreme Deity) to Òrúnmìlà (the first diviner priest) who used it to resolve human problems. The Ifá literary corpus, called the *odù*, consists of 256 parts subdivided into verses called *ẹsẹ Ifá* which exist in thousands and comprises all of the science, cosmology, metaphysics, medicine that embodies the wisdom of life, truth, the revealing of destiny and destination. Each of the 256 *odù* has its specific divination signature, which is determined by the Babaláwo using sacred palm-nuts and a divination chain. Considered the most important part of Ifá divination, *ẹsẹ Ifá* presents Yorùbá history, language, beliefs, cosmo-vision and contemporary social issues; and they are chanted by the priests in poetic language.[7] As a source of wisdom and intellectual development, the Ifá divination system has been preserved largely through the oral tradition of memorization and is applied whenever an important individual or collective decision must be made. Such collective decisions could be political, social, economic and familial, and they include election into leadership roles (Ajayi and Ojo 2008), resolving climate problems, diplomatic relations among communities, and so on.

One may connect the role of key actors (political actors, citizens and media)[8] with selected Ifá verses to tease out embedded Yorùbá policom elements. With regards to political actors, Ọ̀sá Ìwòrì says:

7 See Salami (2002), and Ajayi and Ojo (2008).
8 For details on actors in political communication, see Omotoso (2013, 54).

Ìmọ̀ràn l'à á kọ́kọ́ n dá kí a tó d'í fá. Ìmọ̀ràn ní s'ẹ̀gbọ́n Edu
(Reasoning with other humans should precede the search for supernatural assistance).

Here, emphasis is placed on the importance of deliberative democracy via communicative leadership. Similarly, the Èjì Ogbè speaks to the citizens:

Òrúnmìlà ló d'è jọ. Mo ló d'ẹ̀ jọ.
Asọ tó bá jọ'ni là á mú ró.
Ẹ̀ wù tó bá joni là á mú wọ̀,
Ohun tó bá jọ ra a wọn là á f ii wé ara wọn.
Ò kẹ́ rẹ́ lo j'ọkún, oyunkun si jo afè,

Túrùkú jọ Ẹlẹ́ dẹ̀-Ẹgàn, Èèpo ẹ̀pà jọ pósí ẹ̀lírí.
Èòpo awun jọ àhún ọ̀ pẹ,
Ọ̀ rẹ́ ẹ̀ mi jọ mí, mo jọ̀ rẹ́ ẹ̀ mi.
Kí iwájú ó jọ, kẹ́ hìn ó jọ.
Dífá fún àbíjọ tíí ṣọmọ wọn lóde-Ìgbájọ.

Òrúnmìlà said:
Consider '*ẹẹ́ jọ*', the number eight".
The word '*jọ*', the root means 'similar'
as when we say the dress should fit the wearer in colour and style.
As in dress, so other matters of comparison should be between similar things.
Ọ̀ kẹ́ rẹ́ and Ikún resemble each other as squirrels,
Even though the former is quick to hear while the other is deaf.
Oyunkun and Àfe are alike as rats.
The wild Boar resembles the pig
But one is vicious the other is domesticated.
The groundnut shell looks like the coffin of *ẹ̀lírí*.
My friend looks like me when viewed from the front
Because I look like him when viewed from behind.
This is however different from genetic resemblance between father and son,
Or the claim that the people of Ìgbájọ look alike.

Many people do not easily comprehend these important distinctions. The above reflects how naive and ignorant citizens could be about political issues, including their rights and obligations within supposed democratic dispensation. It also concretizes the need for political communication as a guide for citizens in these regards.

On the part of the politicians, Ọ̀wọ̀nrín Méjì says:

Ajù wọ́n, Ajù wọ́n, Òpó eran ò júkòó
Òun ló dífá fún Alákóléẹ́ jù tí ó kó wọn jẹ n'Ífẹ̀ Oòdáyé
Èyí tí wọn ní kí ó sọ́gbó ìta dòde,
Wọ́n ní kí ó má sọ igbó ìgbàlẹ̀ d'ọjà,
Wọ́n ní kí ó má fi igbo Ọ̀ṣun s'ede..
Ǹjẹ́ Alákóléẹ́ jù kò gbọ́, ǹjẹ́ Alákóléẹ́ jù ò gbà.
A ò fẹ́ ọ nílẹ̀ yí mọ́, máa lọ.

We are greater than them all.
We are more important than everybody else.
The tracks of bush animals are difficult to trace".
These were the principles adopted by greedy politicians
Who managed public affairs in pristine Yoruba society.
They were cautioned against playing politics,
As if hunting animals in the forest.
They were warned not to turn political parties to cheating organizations.
They were told not to convert public funds to personal use.
The greedy did not listen. They did not change.
In the end, the people said:
Go away! We do not want you in this society anymore.

The above, highlights political rights of citizens, as well as their use of the media as a viable information resource and a virile platform for activism. This could also apply to media organizations as they engage in the rat-race reporting of political activities.

The above discussion has shown, with examples, how Yorùbá traditional political systems harness proverbs and other cultural elements in their political communications. Since the creation of Nigeria, Yorùbá politics have always deployed party symbols and campaign songs, speeches and manifestos from these cultural elements. There are several examples in the use of palm tree, horse, eagle, and broom among others since the First Republic.

Of the three media forms selected for this work, proverb has retained prominence. This corroborates Tatira's assertion that the ability of proverbs to "comment on widespread human experiences enables them to remain relevant; they fit any place, time, and function in spite of the technological advancement of a particular community" (2001, 239). However, this does not render the other two irrelevant. It must be noted that *àrokò*, *òwe* and *ẹsẹ Ifá* share an attribute which could be called "codedness":

Òwe ni Ifá ń pa, ọ̀mọ̀ràn níí mọ̀ ọ́'
(Ifá always speaks in parables; and only the wise understands).

Òwe lẹ́sin ọ̀rọ̀, bí ọ̀rọ̀ bá sọnù, òwe la fi ń wá a
(The proverb is the horse of speech. When speech is lost, the proverb is the means we use to hunt for it)

Likewise, it takes deep insight and communal belongingness to utilize and interpret the *àrokò* and the *ẹsẹ Ifá*. Their coded nature in policom generates several critical insights for accountability, mutual respect, separation of powers, check and balance mechanisms, conflict resolution and so on, with each playing critical roles in ensuring responsive governance and good citizenship.

Policom in Yorùbá politics has been characterized with political messages embedded in family history, dress patterns/styles, mastery of language, politics-based entertainment, political advertising among others. Certain family names resonate veteran political experience such that there are high expectations from people associated by blood or mentorship with such families. In his work on "Branded Political Communication," Albert (2017) expounds on how political communication is framed in an iconic manner that easily attracts attention to the brand through (1) branded political titles, (2) branded dressing patterns or (3) mixed method. For instance, Chief Obafemi Awolowo left behind two iconic elements in dressing (a famous fez cap now known as "Awolowo cap" and a special kind of pair of spectacles) by the time he died in 1987 (Albert 2017, 173). Similarly, the late Chief Bola Ige retains a high reputation for his linguistic dexterity and oratory prowess, and the late Adegoke Adelabu was reputed for his deft political rhetoric. It is within the context of political rhetoric, for instance, that it is possible for Yorùbá political actors to undermine political coinages as a potent means of desecrating the political messages of their opponents. For instance, a "thumbs up" image of a political party could be interpreted as the sign of whitlow. Also, a party acronym like PDP (People's Democratic Party) could be recreated as "*pindipi*" (meaning a stuttering or faltering team).

What insights could then be drawn from the foregoing for contemporary Nigerian democratic dynamics? This is the focus of the following section.

4. Critical Insights from Yorùbá Political Communication

In Africa, the lack of balance in reporting, fuelled by the misconception of roles and obligations in media and government relations, has both internal and external implications that do not augur well for the sustenance of

democracy, as well as social and economic development" (Isike and Omotoso 2017, 217).

The crux of the argument here is that traditional political communication tools are still very relevant in Nigeria's political landscape. Development connects with a scrutiny of what is being politically communicated, by who and for what purpose. In fact, most of the elements highlighted and discussed in the body of this paper are engaged on daily basis by all actors to communicate politically, yet, scantly have they been discussed in scholarly engagements on Nigerian politics. Likewise, many actors misuse these elements unconsciously and consequently lose out in their judicious applications.

Modern democratic Nigeria is fast losing track on carefully harnessing traditional and modern values. Of utmost importance at this point is the place of the encoder, decoder and message. The moral character of the encoder 'who' and the decoder 'who' is also important in the determination of message viability.[9] According to Omotoso (2013, 61):

> In Yoruba communities the initiator in a communication process is important as this person also determines what reaction will be elicited from respondents. When a person initiates communication, the Yoruba respondent will usually weigh the worth of that person against the power he or she holds. How this is done can be typified with the conversation below:
>
> *Son: My father has promised to punish your community if you fail to pay taxes*
> *An elder in the community: Who on earth is your father?*
> *Son: My father is the newly installed King.*

Here, viability and validity of a message is premised on the personality and moral status of the "who". This has retained its place despite media and communicative transformations. Regrettably, many political office holders in Nigeria have lost their foothold in this regard; their reputation has been so battered that they have lost the credibility to endorse electoral candidates or political parties. Anyone whose words must be taken serious in today's

9 Actor(s) are key players in any communication process. The actor can be referred to as the 'who,' comprising of both the encoder and the decoder; the person who is disseminating the information and expecting a response from his or her audience in return, and the receiver of the disseminated information, respectively. Therefore, both the leader encoding information and the led receiving and interpreting the information, are "who" in their varying capacities. They are moral beings who can be held responsible for their actions or inactions. See Omotoso (2013).

political arena must work hard on their personalities and moral standing. These principles are largely embedded in Yoruba Philosophies of governance, of which Yoruba political communication is a sub-set.

If there has been corresponding recognition and understanding of political symbols (Palm tree, Umbrella, Broom, Thumb etc.) by members of other ethnic groups constituting the Nigerian State despite relative social dispositions, it follows that indigenous communication could be re-visited, reconstructed and harnessed for policom purposes in present day Nigeria. Whatever enhanced the universality and usage of smileys in the new media, such that they are also employed in political communication, could also be employed in the use of *àrokò* in physical, mediated and virtual forms. Nigerians must begin research and re-invigoration of indigenous values into current systems both to re-define and preserve these values. Currently, political communication in Nigeria has been thrown off balance; the old are not catching up and the young are gradually losing touch. Political campaigns are fast losing educative contextual and critical content. The media is getting distracted with imitations of foreign patterns of coverage and reportage of political news; the rural masses are getting excluded due to media illiteracy and politicians are fast embracing manifestos and campaign that lack substance. Prominent among traditional policom ideas brought into modern Nigeria's politics are ideas of: costuming political aspirants for national acceptability; *aṣọ-ebí* syndrome for political campaigns; competitive songs and slangs for political campaigns; use of indigenous languages on campaign grounds; creation of rhetorical political advertisements and so on. These have failed to foster the united aim of nation-building; rather they have been instruments for looting of public treasury. It is therefore not a question of whether the traditional policom tools are relevant or useful in modern day politics, but a question of how to bring them into the realities of contemporary times in the purest form.

Conclusion

Today, indigenous media of communication seem to be waning in popularity in Africa largely arising from the advent of modern communication media; dearth of skilled personnel; the drastic reduction of the power and influence of traditional rulers; availability of globally acceptable signs; domination of the global economy and culture by powerful advertisers; and the negative influences of globalisation on indigenous cultures and languages (Olatunji and Thanny 2011).

Nigeria is not just fragmented, it is also polarized. Under the best of circumstances, it is hard for people to reach compromises about the use of culture-based tools for policom across the country without alienating some

cultures. However, if policom in Nigeria continues to follow foreign cultures, the country's real social and economic shortcomings will not be addressed[10], and in a matter of time more problems will break out spontaneously among an increasingly embittered public. Having established the symbolic, linguistic, metaphysical and moral values of *òwe*, *àrokò* and *ẹsẹ Ifá* for political communication in the Nigerian democratic sphere, embedded moral, spiritual and patriotic constituents provide viable platforms for their re-enactment into current political settings.

Compared with the traditional application of policom tools, the contemporary Nigerian electorate is better informed and better equipped, but to what end? Just as politicians must begin to consider their speeches, dress sense, physical gestures and communication skills, the media must arise with renewed interest in educating the masses and constructively presenting political issues, likewise, the masses must awaken a sense of commitment to judicious interpretation and use of communicative gestures from political actors.

There is no harm in projecting Yorùbá philosophy of policom to be equally studied, mastered and imbibed by Nigeria, Africa and the world; groups who find equally worthy values within their cultural systems could present them to afford a pluriversal global community. There is hope that issues raised here will trigger a recovery of philosophical discourses embedded within African cultures, systems and values to facilitate their application to burning issues on the continent. Specifically, if Nigeria is facing difficulties in achieving the imagined democracy at a national level, perhaps building viable democratic structures could begin at regional levels whereby ethnic nationalities consciously revisit their indigenous value systems, re-organize from within, before considering a national approach. This would fall in line with the sayings of our elders that "*Ilé l'a ti ń kọ́ ẹ̀ṣọ́ r'ò de*" (charity begins at home)!

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10 See Mudhai (2017:242) who argues that "With large populations remaining poor due to corruption and resource mismanagement and with clouds of violence and electoral malpractices hanging over polls in some African countries, it is difficult to tell whether involvement of Western communication strategists adds value to African politics through their well-funded munitions of the mind."

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