



The Efficacy of Iconographic Communication in the Cessation of Activities in the Disputed Land Case in Yakurr Local Government of Cross River State - Nigeria

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Abstract

Both verbal and written communication constitutes the basis upon which human societies establish relationships among themselves and proceed to define things in their environment to the level of their understanding. In the process of interaction and communication, conflicts often ensue. The question hence becomes: how are human conflicts, especially when they involve land disputes and related cases, to be resolved? Given the number of taxonomies of traditional communication modes available in the Africa and other societies, and despite the veracities of conflict resolution modes, how potent are these modes when it comes to disputed land cases? These are questions which the current study sets out to answers and has situated its investigation within the iconographic mode of communication. To achieve this objective, the study uses a survey method to gather data from 493 respondents within the study area. The findings of the paper show that iconographic communication modes, particularly the flora, called "Katele kole" in Lokaa, has significance serving advantage as an injunction of positive results on any disputed land case. The flora is a restraining power, which wherever in use, has drastically reduced tensions in land cases, in police stations and in customary courts within the affected communities. The study therefore recommends such a traditional 'iconographic communication' method despite the marauding effects of Western influences on Yakurr Culture in Central Senatorial District of Cross River State in Nigeria.

Keyword: Efficacy, Iconographic Communication modes, Conflicts, Yakurr

Introduction

Yakurr people are mostly found around the Central Senatorial District of Cross River State, Nigeria. Yakurr is geographically bound to the North by Obubra Local Government Area; to the South by Biase Local Government Area; to the West by Abi Local Government Area; and East by Akamkpa Local Government Area. Within the Yakurr formation, Ugep is its Administrative Headquarters. In other words, Ugep is the Administrative Headquarters of Yakurr Local Government Area. Yakurr people speak Lokaa and are over 196,450 (NPC, 2006 Census). They are mostly rural dwellers who are predominantly farmers. The need for farming and erection of residential buildings are two principal factors which explain the great importance attached to land. Land in Yakurr is divided along the lines of paternal families, hence no one member of the family can lay claim or monopoly to any parcel of land. Inheritance to paternal family lands is strictly masculine gender based. No member reserves the right to appropriate or sell any parcel of the paternal family land without the consent of the "Obol kapon", (Paternal family head). Deviants are always sanctioned.

Conflict

The term conflict is interdependently related to dispute and crisis. The major element of human conflict are incompatibility of goals, opposition in human relations, interdependence and interaction (Hocker and Wilmot, 1985), UMOFHO Development, 2000, Ikpe (2012; p. 71) writes that a dispute is a tangible expression of conflict, while an unresolved dispute manifests in a conflict as a disagreement or disharmony caused by a negative perception of the other's action. Crisis is simply an escalated conflict.

J. A. Cory quoted in Ukpong (2007), has well noted that the history of human society is one of conflict as well as voluntary co-operation; unruly elements seem deeply rooted in human nature and so there must be an organization to maintain order and suppress violence through the possession, and use, where necessary, of coercive, restraining power. This organization, in the context of this paper, is both the institutional and iconographic modes of communication. In support

of J. A. Cory, T. O. Elias also quoted in Ukpong (2007), has stated that within the elan or community, there are tensions, personal jealousies and individual self-assertions. Disputes take place in all manner of situations.

Conflicts are manifold that could exist in a nuclear family, extended family and the society at large. Among the Yakurr people, there are numberless cases of brothers being at daggers drawn with a fellow brother. There is a good deal of conflict within the extended family. Very often, the ~ conflict is a result of land dispute. Most members of the extended family occupy contiguous portions of land in several "asem", (section of cultivable land) within the village and "Lise", (land for residential purposes). A very greedy and wicked member, as reported Ukpong, (2007, p. 183) of the extended family, may be dissatisfied with the land he has and decides to trespass on the land of his kinsman for no just cause. Like Ukpong also noted, during each farming season, there is a good amount of land disputes, which may occasion physical assaults or fights.

Inter-family land dispute in Yakurr

As stated above, land for cultivation of crops and erection of residential houses are two principal factors that could cause infractions between brothers of the same extended family. Land dispute in Yakurr between brothers do degenerate to damaging and poisoning of established relationships by the persons and families involved in the conflict. In extreme cases, brothers in conflict resort to voodoo practices in the disputed land. These disputes, in the case of villages sometimes result in wars featuring the loss of lives, burning down of houses, markets and even entire villages. The question is, "Was there an organization or taxonomy to maintain order and suppress violence through the possession, and use, where necessary a restraining power?"

Institutional Mode of Land Dispute Resolution in Yakurr (Obol kapon)

Kur (2009) lends credence to the use of traditional communication systems when he states that strengthening the institutional and extra-mundane forms of communication could go a long way towards effectively addressing the nagging problem of land conflicts. This

institutional mode is very effective in Yakurr community, as the "Obol kapon" (paternal family head) is the custodian of all the paternal family lands. He has deep knowledge of all the locations of the family lands and he only authorizes appropriation of any parcel of land to deserving members of the family. Every born male child of the family and by extension, male children by adoption, are entitled to a given parcel of land for agricultural or residential purposes.

Bassey (2012, p. 45) explains that "any case of land dispute in Yakurr is settled by the Obol kapon. He has the greatest control of the family land. Land is an exclusive source of unity among the members of the paternal family. It is centrally controlled and jointly owned by all the members of that family". It is umbilical cord that binds all members of the paternal family. Indeed, the entire lives of the paternal family members depend on the land, which is a means of their sustenance. It is important to note that apart from the institutional mode, there is another channel through which land disputes are resolved in Yakurr community.

Iconographic modes in Yakurr

In the iconographic modes, communication consists according to Wilson (1998) and Akpabio (2003), the use of objects (objectified communication) and flora media. In this paper, our concern is with the flora media. Floral communication involves the use of selected flora of the local vegetation for the purpose of communicating specific meanings or ideas to members of the community, (Ikpe, 2012). In Yakurr, the flora that is used to communicate messages on a disputed land is the young unopened palm frond, called "Katele Kole". The use of this flora must be authorized by the "Obol kapon" through any of the elders in the family, which will be pitched on the land in dispute and warring members are by the presence of the flora on the said land advised to keep off, cease activity on the disputed land. Women and female members of the family do not have a say but can only listen to the proceedings. However, they may be asked to provide oral evidence perhaps, as eyewitnesses to breach of peace.

Flora "Katele Kole" mode of communication

Ogwezzy, (2010, p. 35) writes that every group of people in Africa has iconographic communication devices that are peculiar to its setting and which perform different communication functions. Such devices may be totally different from those used by other people or may have specific meanings as used by people in other cultures. So, iconographic communication devices, according to Ogwezzy, are items that transmit messages to the target audience. According to Ibagere (1994, p 88). "Marks on trees or grasses and leaves tied in certain ways are also used to send messages. For instance, among the Isoko of Delta State of Nigeria, cutting plantain stems and planting them upside down signifies the declaration of war by one community on another," (Akpabio, 2003).

In Yakurr, the young unopened palm fronds transmits messages of 'cessation' of activities on a land in dispute. It signifies a declaration of a temporary buffer zone, until the contending parties are brought to a round table for adjudication and resolution. No member, no matter how highly placed in the society is expected to flout the "Katele Kole injunction" on the said land.

Deviants are always sanctioned. The Obol Kapon is constantly firm on matters like this, with the flora serving as his unspoken but revered non-verbal communication on the issue.

Methodology

The researcher adopted the survey in the investigation. The population of the study was male members of paternal families across Yakurr local government area. It comprises the following communities: Ugep, Ekori, Nko, Mkpani, Idomi, Assiga, Agoi and Inyima. Their ages range between 30-60 years. The questionnaire was used to gather the data. It was administered on 493 educated respondents, to find out the efficacy of iconographic mode of communication among these people. Of the 500 copies of the questionnaire administered, 493 were fully completed and returned, 17 were either poorly completed or not returned. The random sampling technique proved quite helpful in the selection of the sample size. Data were collated and presented in tables, yielding related percentages.

Table 1: distribution of respondents according to communities.

Villages	No. of respondents	Percentage
Ugep	150	30.4
Ekori	100	20.3
Nko	60	12.1
Mkpani	40	8.1
Idomi	50	10.1
Assiga	40	8.1
Agoi	25	5.0
Inyima	28	5.7
Total	493	100

Table 1. shows the distribution of respondents, across the farming communities of Yakurr. Apart from showing the strength of respective farming population in the communities, the uneven distribution equally indicates those present at the paternal family meetings as at the time of conducting this survey.

Table 2: Distribution of Responding by Age

Age	No. of respondents	Percentage
30-40	290	59.0
40-50	110	22.3
50-60	93	19.7
Total	493	100

Researcher's fieldwork, 2019.

The table above shows distribution of respondents by Age. 290 respondents, representing 59.0% were between the age of 30-40; respondents between the age of 40-50 were 110, representing 22.3% and those between 50-60 years were 93, representing 19.7%. The use of age in the study was to find out the respondents who are actively involved in paternal family meetings.

Table 3: Distribution of Respondents' Educational Level

Educational	No. of respondents	Percentage
FSLC	207	42.0
WASSC	193	39.1
OND/HND/Degree	93	18.9
Total	493	100

Researcher's fieldwork, 2017.

[Table 3 indicates that respondents with the “First School Leaving Certificate”. (FLSC) are 207, representing 42.0%, those with the 'West African Senior School Certificate, (WASSC) were 193, representing 39.1% and others like OND, and Degree Certificates were 93, representing 18.9%. The use of educational level of respondents was to get the actual response without bias-due to interpretation.

Table 4: “land central to the people of Yakurr?”

Variable	No. of respondents	Percentage
Yes	493	100
No	-	-
Total	493	100

Researcher's fieldwork, 2019.

Table 4, indicates that the number of respondents who said 'yes' are 493, representing 100%; there was no respondent with a contrary view.

Table 5; "which organizations or taxonomy is deployed to suppress violence or act as a restraining power, in the event of land dispute in Yakurr?"

Table 5

Variable	No. of respondents	Percentage
Obol Kapon/flora	480	97.3
Police	8	20
Customary courts	5	7
Total	493	100

Researcher's fieldwork, 2019.

Table 5 shows that 480 respondents, representing 97.3% agree that there were organizations and taxonomy like Obol Kapon and flora that were helping to suppress violence or acted as restraining power in the case of land dispute, while 13 respondents, representing 2.7% identify the police and the customary courts performing this role.

Table 6: How potent is the flora in resolving land disputes in Yakurr?

Variable	No. of respondents	Percentage
Very potent	493	100
Not very potent	-	-
Total	493	100

Researcher's fieldwork, 2019.

Table 6, indicates that 493 respondents, representing 100% agree that the flora as a of communication used by the people of Yakurr in the settlement of land dispute is very potent. There was no respondent with a negative answer.

Table 7: Are there prescribed penalties for violating the presence of the flora in a disputed land?

Variable	No. of respondents	Percentage
Yes	493	100
No	-	-
Total	493	100

Researcher's fieldwork, 2019.

Table 7, clearly show that there are prescribed penalties for members of paternal families who flout the flora injunction. This is seen in the number of respondents, representing 100%. There was no negative response.

Discussion of findings

The data gathered from the respondents generated the following discussions and results. Research Question 3, Restated:

“Is land central to the people of Yakurr?”

The data gathered from this table shows that 100% of the respondents agreed that land is central to the people of Yakurr. They mentioned two major factors that land is being acquired: for agricultural and residential purposes. Their position is very much in line with William and Udo (2012); Bassey (2012) and Ukpung (2007). So, in Yakurr, the need for farming and erecting of residential buildings are two factors that explains the great importance of land to these people.

Research Question 4, Restated:

“Which organization or taxonomy are deployed to suppress violence or act as a restraining power in the event of any land dispute in Yakurr?”

Table 4 answers this question, as 97.3% of the respondents mentioned the institutional mode (Obol kapon) and an iconographic mode (flora, called Katele Kole) as instruments deployed by the people in the event of any land dispute. Their submission is in tandem with Bassey, (2012) who said that the Obol Kapon (paternal family head) exercises authority over the family members and land. According to Bassey, the greatest control of the Obol kapon is family land, often regarded as exclusive source of unity in the lives of the people. It is centrally controlled by the paternal family head and members, and in the event of any infractions between kinsmen, the Obol kapon with his Council of elders authorizes the hoisting of the katele kolo (flora) on the disputed land as an injunction. This function of the flora acting as a restraining power is also noted by Ukpong, (2007) among the Ibibios.

The remaining 2.7% respondents, according to the table feel that the Police Force and Customary Courts, as organizations help to suppress violence or act as restraining power in the event of any land dispute in the area. This scenario, according to all the respondents is rare and happens when the dispute has degenerated to crisis point or conflict. When matters comes to a halt, one of the contenders may run to the police or court for arbitration. Anyway, such cases are always referred back to the Obol Kapon.

Research Question 5, Restated:

“How potent is the flora in resolving land dispute in Yakurr?”

The data gathered from table 5 indicates that 100% of the respondents agree that the flora is very potent in the settlement of land dispute. According to the respondents, the reduction of land cases in the police stations and customary courts in Yakurr is as a result of the efficacy of the flora, which act as an injunction, pending the determination of the matter by the presiding Obol kapon and his Council of elders. Functionally, the respondents confirm that the flora acts as a restraining power to 'stop' further activities on a disputed land.

Research Questions 6, Restated:

“Are there prescribed penalties for violating the presence of the flora in disputed land?”

According to table 6, 100% of the respondents agreed that deviants risk forfeiting that parcel of land and appeasing family members with jars of palm wine, as may be directed by the Obol Kapon. It must be stated here that the person of the Obol kapon is sacred. Part of his sacredness is a result of the fact that he is seen as a representative of family solidarity and unity and he is an embodiment of the family and an epitome of social order.

Conclusion

Wilson (1998) and Akpabio (2003) classify iconographic communication devices mainly into two groups objectified and flora. In this paper, we considered the flora, called "Katele Kole" in Yakurr, whose function is to stop any activities on any land in dispute. Among the taxonomy presented by Wilson (1997), this work finds both the instrumental and iconographic modes as useful in settling land disputes in Yakurr. As the views of the respondents suggest, the efficacy of these modes of communication are not in doubt in this cultural community, as deviants risk forfeiting such parcels of land and other prescribed penalties. Kur (2009) lends credence to the use of traditional communication systems when he states that strengthening the institutional and extra-mundane forms of communication could go a long way towards effectively addressing the nagging problem of land disputes. From the above, it can be concluded that the reduction of land cases in police stations and customary courts in this cultural location was as a result of the efficacy of iconographic device, called 'Katele kole'

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