

An Exploration of Ivom Dance Festival of the Tiv People of Nigeria

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Received 3 November 2024; accepted 30 November 2024
Published online 26 December 2024

Abstract

In Tiv society like most societies in Africa and the world in general, the primary and most general function of a festival is to renounce and then to announce culture; to renew periodically the life stream of a community by creating new energy, and to give sanctions to its institutions. In sum, a festival presents a holistic range of behavioral modalities, each related to the modalities of normal daily life. At festival times, people do something they normally do not; they abstain from something they normally do; they carry extreme behaviors that are usually regulated by measure; they invert patterns of daily social life. This paper is thus, a synoptic appraisal of what constitutes the world of the Ivom dance festival and how it can be treated to become a reference African theatre tradition. To this end, the paper is a product of an anthropological survey of the Ivom dance festival of the Tiv people of central Nigeria with emphasis on performance aesthetics. The methodology employed in this paper was based on the writer's participatory-observation approach. The essentials of this paper are achieved by realizing some of the objectives of the Ivom dance festival by demonstrating the nuances of the dance performance as well as establishing the facts about its socio-cultural, and political aesthetic functions.

Key words: Dance; Festival; Tiv; Ritual; Aesthetics

Awuawuer, T. J. (2024). An Exploration of Ivom Dance Festival of the Tiv People of Nigeria. *Canadian Social Science*, 20(6), 62-71. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/css/article/view/13611>
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/13611>

INTRODUCTION

The Tiv people of central Nigeria have a worldview that every event has a cause and effect, which are supernatural as well as fabricated. They only appeal to Supreme Being when natural and human explanations or accounts to any event fail. For instance, when a disease fails to respond to treatment, the Tiv are convinced that certain persons, deities, or spirits have been offended and have sent the sickness or tribulation in revenge, thus the traditional healer through divination finds out which god or spirit is responsible for the illness and what must be performed to placate the offended spirit or deity.

Another thing to note is that, to the Tiv, unusual demonstration of individualism is viewed as dangerous and capable of destroying the serenity of *tar* (society). What remains is a potent collective and harmonious physical and spiritual co-existence. Therefore, to enhance communal life, emphasis is placed on arts that unite, and the period for these arts fall during dry seasons when granaries are filled up and there is no farm work. These events are so central to the Tiv that at these time (after harvest and during dry season), economic centres like markets are turned into performance arenas. Dance especially in Tiv society is so pervasive and significant, for example, to Tiv people, dance provides historical documentation as well as historical trends. For example, the *kuza* dance represents the forceful conscription of Tiv youth by colonial masters to provide cheap labour at Tin industry in Jos. *Ingyough* dance is a re-enactment of epidemics that swept across Tivland and left many with several bodily distortions and maimed limbs. *Dasenda* is a portrayal of the police brutality during the colonial era. Therefore, the Tiv concept of dance itself attracts and recognizes the function and boundary that separates the real and the imaginary. However, indigenous Tiv arts, especially dances are used by communities and cultural groups to embellish their domestic and public (social life)

gatherings. For the Tiv, arts, especially dance is a way of life and is evident in social, political and religious spheres of life.

IVOM DANCE

The source and history of *Ivom* dance festival is speculative, the same way as most festivals in Tivland. From many interviews conducted, the origin is not specific; others view it as married to a lady from upper Cross River in Nigeria popularly called by the Tiv people as Udam. Others see it as deriving its origin from the literal *Ivom*, the yam heap as a style of farming which explains their source of wealth. Most respondents commenting on the historical aspects of the Tiv people puts the date for the beginning of *Ivom* and other festivals around the ninth century. This date, although wanting in substantial evidence, can be partially accepted when we view the fact that it was about this time that the Tiv people finally settled at the plains, where they are found today, to a more viable social life (Atsalegh Dogo, oral interview).

Some elders and *Ivom* priests interviewed in Gwer in Benue state viewed *Ivom* as *Ijiir kyaa* (Festival) as was referred to in the beginning. This version of *Ijiir kyaa* seems to hold more grounds in terms of cohesion regarding the paraphernalia of *Ivom* performance. According to this version, Tiv people in the past had a way of exhibiting akombo, *Ikyav* (spiritual artifacts) through a forum known as *Ijiir kyaa*. This *ijiir* was normally hosted by *shagbaor* (man of honour) within a district. The essence of *Ijiir kyaa* (festival) was premised on the fact that the Tiv man sought to express his ritual cleansing (akombo) outstanding achievements in a festive mood. This version also considers *Ijiir kyaa* as an avenue for the exchange of special witch artifacts (*ikyav*) or a way of finding a better place for safe keeping of such items.

Based on oral interviews, it was gathered that the name *Ivom* which means 'heap' molded on farms for planting different crops is a representation of the fact that, farming is the chief occupation of the Tiv people for livelihood. Therefore, in *Ivom* festival, sacrifices are made to appease the gods to ensure fertility. But actually, what culminates into what is now referred to as *Ivom* is the idea that, it is a competitive celebration amongst age-mates, as such the construction of *Ivom* as a stage for the performance is an indication that an age-mate who climbs the *Ivom* outclasses his mates who have not attained such position by standing taller than them.

Basically, *Ivom* as a festival is categorized into two types; "the *Ivom i Udam* and the *Ivom i Tiv*" (Ankume Nyebe: oral interview). *Ivom i Udam*; Udam by the Tiv meaning refers to "the upper Cross River - Obudu, Ogoja, Gakem" (Doki 98). This kind of *Ivom* does not involve ritual complexities, but one thing of note in this context is that an Udam wife cannot be the host's first wife – it

is meant for matured, strong and aged people. This study is not intended to cover this type of *Ivom*, therefore, the subsequent discussion will not cover it.

To Ankume Nyebe in an oral interview, "the land on which *Ivom* is built becomes a sacred piece of land which should not be trespassed. However, if it happens, the offender is prone to cleansing rite or could suffer from severe headache" (oral interview). Nyebe's perception about the site of *Ivom* is not clear because, he did not come out clearly with the type of *Ivom* he was referring. This is to say that, "there are basically two kinds of *Ivom*; the *Ivom i kwaav*, which is rather simple" (Atsalegh Dogo: oral interview) and meant by the host to show his agility and places his shoulders high above his peers/ age mates and the *Ivom i tyo*, which is consented, and approved by the host's kinsmen and involves a lot of ritual rites and other observances.

According to oral interviews with some elders in Gwer and Konshisha Local Governments in Benue State, the *Ivom i tyo* is on the other hand grouped under two categories: the *Ivom i sorun tar* which the community encourages an individual to host so as to bring back the lost glories of the land through rituals and feasting. The *Ivom Ibiamegh*, a subsidiary of the *Ivom Ityo* is the hall mark and the highest attainment of *AKombo* and *shagba* in Tiv. This kind of *Ivom* brings distinction to the chief celebrant in the sense that it marks his towering status in the community. According to Ordugh Gbe "Ivom *Ibiamegh* is superior to all other categories of *Ivom*, it is communal in all ramifications, and is the highest and the last stage of *Ibiamegh*, the highest *akombo* that one would ever attain in Tivland" (oral interview).

For better understanding, it will be nice to explain briefly what *Ibiamegh* is, and its link to *Ivom*. *Ibiamegh* as a ritual performance encompasses all the rudiments of medicine, *akombo* and witchcraft in Tiv land. It has to be explained here that the witchcraft is positive in the Tiv context since a master had to know all the good and bad aspects of witchcraft to be *orbiam*. The knowledge of negative witchcraft is to ensure complete protection from evil as it would be attempted by evil persons.

Sometimes, the final ritual process of becoming *orbiam* (*ibiamegh* priest) status, according to several interviews conducted is celebrated, thus, becoming a festival that a period is set aside to celebrate events of achievements through *Ivom* festival that gave pride to priest and his people. That is to say, the festival, *ibiamegh ki been* (getting all the initiation rites of *Ibiamegh*) has organizational levels and it has policies and principles that define its structure as a solemn rite which subsume the entirety of *Ivom* ritual festival. Sometimes the *Ivom unden* (climbing the *ivom*) is part of the *akombo*-medicine rite and it is of great elements that constitute the final *Ibiamegh* festival rites. (Iorfa Gbabe: oral interview).



Figure 1
Initiation process of Ivom ritual carnival

The *Ivom Ityo* ritual festival in discourse is the sum total of all the traditional Tiv elements of *shagba*. *Ivom* literary means, an earth mound as would be found in a yam farm. The contextual use of *Ivom* here is meant to be a big heap built on an open space where some of the festive activities take place. Other people call it *Amar* literary translated to be ‘dances’ which represents the whole essence of *Ivom* because on the actual day of the festival, dances are presented by group of persons who come to take part in the festival. Kano Swende defines the concept of *Ivom* as:

A colossal earth mound raised by the host where the guests are required to climb on top while dancing gracefully to the scintillating beat of the *genga* and of course, when the performer climbs down after the performance it marks the signal of merry making as he would have thrown a feast (oral interview).

This definition is simple and clear, however, the musical instruments used on top of the *Ivom* during the performance range from *genga* (talking drum) to *agbande* (drums).

HOSTING OF IVOM DANCE FESTIVAL

As earlier stated, *Ivom* signifies the highest rating in *shagba* (status or fame) amongst the Tiv people. To Ordugh Gbe:

Ivom is almost the last and the highest traditional *shagba* one can attain in Tiv society. As one is matured, he first finds a simple marriage (*ikyar*) within his community. He must marry and *kuha kwase* (traditional marriage rite); he again will *wa genga* (a dance that dancers drum themselves) for his age mate; he must also buy *nyinya* (horse); he will *gber idyer* (a mysterious musical instrument made of wood); *unde Ivom*; (climb *Ivom*); and lastly *miir amar – wa ivom* – hosting of *Ivom* festival (oral interview).

In analysing the above therefore, it follows that, *ikyar* was considered the first thing as one gets matured, this kind of marriage enabled the couple to be proud and brag before their age mates as a sign of beauty and handsomeness. The *kwase kuhan* (marriage feast) is a process where one marries from a far distant clan and holding a feast demonstrating his braveness and handsomeness, as he has not married a sister. An interview

with Nemba Akwaya, a ninety-five-year-old man from Mbakyaan Council Ward in Gwer East local Government of Benue State reveals that: “Another name for *kwase huhan* is known as *tsa utu* which means an occasion to welcome the bride in the family. This is the actual *kwase u kuhan*, and it is done all night with special marriage rites”. Songs are usually sung, while the women dance gracefully to their rendition. This feast also costs lavish spending as cow or goat, food and drinks are provided depending how well to do, the bridegroom is. One special thing from this feast is that, the fowl that is slaughtered for the marriage rite (*ikyegh a wule*), is only consumed by those who have passed through the same marriage rite, otherwise only bad luck and misfortunes will follow you, and even could render the afflicted to remain unmarried (Iorfa Gbabe, oral interview).



Figure 2
A horse ridden aspect of the carnival

Nyinya (horse) is also considered as a process in the *shagba u* (pride of) Tiv. *Nyinya* is the Tiv word for a horse. The horse surely found its way into Tivland in the wake of contact with the Fulani/Hausa people. Among the Fulani the horse was firstly used in warfare, and secondly, as a beast of burden during peaceful time. To a Tiv man, the horse was neither of these. According to oral interview with Kano Swende, a man over ninety years old from mbalom council ward in Gwer East local government of Benue State:

A Tiv man used to buy a horse as a proof that he was rich. And because it cost him a fortune, he had to show it round to his age-mates, and the whole world that he has arrived. There was a celebration and essentially, on that day, the horse dance was performed by the women-folk.

Thus, as part of the carnival, the horse owner mounts his horse, rides round the arena displaying his adroitness, singing songs in praise of himself and his great ancestors. At the end of it all, money and livestock are presented to him, and the festival ends with general merriments in the evening.



Figure 3
Idyer players during the eve of the carnival

The *indyer* is a big wooden hollowed instrument that is meant to summon a whole community to an emergency meeting. It is made from trunk of hard trees, and right to have it was awesome. Human sacrifices were required to have those rights. The *indyer* was used to announce special events like the first rain for planting of millets, death of significant figures, wars etc. The process of acquiring this is in two dimensions: One could be issued the *indyer* from his maternal kinsmen (*igba*) which is of less human sacrifice; while that from his kinsmen (*tyo*) is of higher human sacrifice. For someone to get this as a property, it becomes a thing of pride as many hurdles are crossed. However, “*indyer* is not a requirement for *Ivom*, though it is counted as part of *shagba*. It is understood that, in those days, the ownership of *indyer* was exclusive for the eldest and aged in the community” (Iornenge Wende, oral interview).

Genga u wan for an age mate was simply inviting ones age mate to *genga* dance. This kind of dance could be danced by every young man around the Tiv society, so for one to host an age mate for the dance was a thing of pride because, it involved merry making and fun fare that were of material and financial risk to the host.

As earlier stated, there are several kinds of *Ivom* dance festivals, however, concisely, two main types are identified; “the *Ivom i tyo*, and the *Ivom i kwaav*” (Iornenge Wende: oral interview). The *Ivom i tyo* is that which its performance is guaranteed by ones *ityo* having its roots from the grandfathers. While the *ivom i kwaav* is that which is meant by the host to showcase his prowess and dignity to his age mates. The organization, principles and policies governing both of them remain the same.



Figure 4
Part of the Ivom dance carnival

What is the same concerning all these kinds of *Ivom* dance is that, before one nurses the ambition to host any *Ivom* dance festival, he first indicates his intention to his kinsmen who would grant him go-ahead or otherwise, haven known the type of *Ivom* dance; be it *i kwaav* or *i tyo* (for the age group or for the kinsmen). One important point to note here is that; the hosting right is not just for any person; It is an exclusive right for those who have distinguished themselves in terms of traditional achievements (*shagba*) and their ‘chest dark’, which means that they are vested in the art of witchcraft. According to Atsalegh Dogo, a host in March, 2008; “the intending host will have to seek the approval from *ityo* (kinsmen) a year to the hosting date so as to enable the clan prepare for the proper hosting for visitors by cultivating crops in that respect” (oral interview). This in essence is because; people will have to enter into intensive farming towards a successful hosting of the *Ivom*. For example, if one intends to host March next year as is always the case, he will have to receive an approval of the right of hosting in March of this year to enable people prepare. Having sought and obtained the approval, the next point of contact is the maternal relatives who will in their usual duty consent following the position of their brother’s (*anigba*) relatives.

To a Tiv man, one must *yor amar* (spiritual entertainment of *tyo*) *amar* before it is approved for hosting. In this process, one could invite his relatives and slaughter a pig for their consumption signifying his intention; “nonetheless, the darker side of it is that, some one’s life must be sacrificed for hosting” (Ankume Nyebe). In short, at every bit of the process, the intending host must be careful otherwise somebody’s life will be taken, if not the host’s life will be at stake. This becomes a special case of linkages from one’s maternal kinsmen (*igba*) and his kinsmen (*tyo*). If the host wants to be free from an entanglement from his *ityo*, the *igba* (maternal relatives) are invited to witness every point in the process so that no individual would have the chance of harming their *igyoor* (sister’s son) spiritually.

As a form of communal experience, no matter the type, either that of *tyo* or *kwaav*, the host’s age mates are invited before time so as to identify with him (host)

in the *Ivom* festival, by preparing in other to fulfill the stringent requirements dealing with marriage and other achievements. To Shagbaor Organde, a host in March, 2009, the hosting of *Ivom* is not just done; “the hosting must be for someone related and dear to the host in one way or the other. This for example, a father could decide to host an *Ivom* festival for his son, or could decide to host for his age mate or his sister’s son” (oral interview). Whosoever the hosting is for, preparations are done in such a way those gifts and pleasantries are exchanged from the host and the hosted. The construction and hosting of *Ivom* dance vary in magnitude and spiritual conceptualization; this is because of the fact that, the hosting of *Ivom* dance is grouped into several qualities; an old *Ivom* dance and a new *Ivom* dance.

Sometimes, someone is said to *kende* (renew) an old *Ivom*, which means that, that *Ivom* is constructed at the exact place where *Ivom* was formerly erected, else the soil on the site of the old one would be picked and drop at the new site before commencing the construction of the *Ivom*. This kind of *Ivom* festival is less in terms of sacrificial involvement which is considered human. A fresh *Ivom* is that which is built on virgin site as an original, “the host of this *Ivom* is the initiator of the process, and this is done without using an old site. This type is seriously involving in terms of sacrifice” (Apenda Agbo: oral interview). Another brand of *Ivom* is that which one’s forefather had started the process without completion, he is therefore asked by the *tyo* to complete the process. “This, a Tiv man would simply say that; *ivande soron Ivom*, which means that, the process of such *Ivom* had been done ever since” (Kano swende: oral interview).

After the construction, other individuals are also expected to invite their nephews (sisters’ sons) to partake in the ritual of which they are to climb the arena with a wife far from their clan. The sisters’ sons in the end are expected to offer a handsome gift to their mothers’ brothers ranging from money to pig. In reciprocation, these mothers’ brothers are then expected to entertain lavishly the guests of the hosted brothers respectively. In addition, the host clan invites all in-laws who have married their daughters so as to bring tokens for them and for those whose daughters are married in the host clan come on the festival day to receive tokens as well, this process is known as *amar a yaren*.

The actual process starts from the construction of the *Ivom* arena. Since it is not a small construction, it demands a communal job by the host community; after certain rituals are performed to consecrate the site, youth of the land are thereon detailed to build the *Ivom*. The construction used to be done locally with mud and local blocks. However, in the recent festival, hosted by Shagbaor Organde in Njiriv-Taraku in March, 2009, cement and burnt bricks were used in constructing the *Ivom* which actually demonstrated a radical shift from the traditional mode to a modern style.



Figure 5
Front side view of *Ivom*. Picture by the writer during field work in Mbalim-Njiriv at the *Ivom* festival hosted by Atsalee Dogo on 22nd March, 2008.

These processes are dependent on the kind of *Ivom* ritual a person would like to venture and the person hosting for, and the reason for the hosting. Akaa Dogo says; “an age mate could throw such a feast for another, generally, a man from one’s *igba* (mother’s clan) can throw such a feast for his *anigba* (one who hails from the latter’s clan)” (oral interview). Nombagu in this arrangement pointed out that, “the celebrant can also take up to the *Ivom* for a son of his sister and this is giving an honour of the highest order to sister’s son” (oral interview). These two conditions are not farfetched, the fact remains that, one can host for the son of his sister, age mate, and also his son.

ORAL HISTORIC IN *IVOM* DANCE

Historic in this context entails performance and its structured conventions and other aesthetic values like space, movement, costume, dance, music, improvisation and secular ceremony with an attached audience. Thus, theatre atmosphere in *Ivom* festival begins after all the preliminary stages as discussed in the first segment of this chapter are actualized, when the host is allowed to pick a date for the actual festival. Traditionally, it takes the host ten days to prepare for the event beginning from the day of millet fermentation to the grand finale. Just like any other festival in Tivland, the beginning of the ritual festival is marked by the fermentation of the millet for *burukutu* or *tashi* (local beer), which will be consumed by guests during the *Ivom* festival. Thus, during the grand finale, the following indices of theatre are prominently found as can be subsequently discussed.

From the beginning, during this time of preparation for *Ivom* festival, a song composer who will prepare the songs for the celebrant is engaged. His songs revolve proudly around the name of the host and his great grandfathers, together with the wife with whom the host finds favour in to perform *Ivom*. These songs are rehearsed as it is done in most theatre traditions.

Included in the content of the improvised praise songs are prominent personalities in the society and those within

the host's *kwaav* (age-group) who are also alerted of their orkwaav's high achievements. These songs are to be accompanied by *Indyer* musical instrument that will also be used during *nyinya* (horse) dance that will help in creating a festive mood all night from the eve to the grand finale. Just like any conventional theatre production, rehearsals are done daily for a proper production of the various performances that constitute *Ivom* festival as dancer-choreographers or expert dancers are involved in choreographing some desirable dance steps for both the *indyer* and *nyinya* dances with communal criticism as in the case of traditional African theatre. Of specific to note is the fact that, the songs to be improvised and composed in this context will recount the hilarious activities and track of achievements of the host down to his ancestral line.

The real activities of the *Ivom* festival start on the eve of the festival; the consecration of the *Ivom* is normally done on the eve of the *Ivom* dance festival or early in the morning on the festival day. During the consecration, people are allowed to stay and watch the ritual, though sacred but open to the public. On the night before the festival, lots of merry making take place, people travel far and wide to keep vigil at the host's compound, during this time other performances are being done; men and women alike are seen dancing to the *Indyer* music as been played by experts all night long. There are horses (a *nyinya*) dances variously from different people trooping to age mates, maternal relatives and other well-wishers.

One thing to note here is the fact that, *Ivom*, also called *amar* (dances) is a combination of various dance groups who have come to cheer up their beloved ones as they climb the *Ivom* stage. Most times, people are even confused of what to watch as all the performative actions are done simultaneously. In a more significant way, *Ivom* is synonymous to *Amar*, which means 'dances. The *Ivom* as a name has only gained more recognition and in use because of its construction as a stage for performances. Therefore, the essence of *Ivom* is actualized through various dances from individual participants who are all out to win and carry the day.



Figure 6
Ivom dance performance in view with costume display.
Picture by the writer during field work at Ivom festival in Taraku, hosted by Shagbaor Organde on 28th March, 2009.

With all other dance groups in performance, the climax and the final performance of *Ivom* that thrills the audience is the dance during grand finale of *Ivom unden*. The *Ivom unden* begins with the host who is heralded to the arena on a horse ridden in a standing ovation as women and men alike are poised to dance gracefully to the scintillating beat of the genga – drum. It is at this point that the host is expected to climb the *Ivom* stage and introduce the hosted; it could be his son, brother, or an age mate. After this, he addresses the audience and his age mates enumerating his traditional prowess as:

Er yange m wa ikondo yo,
M er wan kwase shi m due ier ana,
M er kwase ken tar uchar shi m kuha,
M yam nyinya wam, kua u kwase wam,
Shi m yam u anigbian wam kpa,
M er kwa Dam,
Mkuha kwase u aingbian wam,
M gber indyer; m bee swende, iwa man igbe.
Shi nyaane mkaha ivom.

This address is interpreted as:

In my prime, I had a marriage within my kindred,
walked with her in the *Ier* arena.

I also married from a far clan,

I bought a horse for myself, wife, and brother.

Married a lady from Upper Cross River.

I also hosted my brother's wife to celebration.

I had a big hollowed wooden musical instrument.

I have graduated from *swende* and *igbe*,

Today, I host you for the *Ivom* festival.

After all these, the couples are allowed to climb the *Ivom* in pair for a dance performed stylistically. Here, the expert drummers of this occasion play the music while the couple dances rhythmically to the beat to a climax and later climb down from the back stage. This process depending on the number of participants involved, could last for hours. In addition to the above, the Tiv people also believe that the *Ivom* ritual dance performance is a source of fertility, good luck and social order. In a general understanding of *Ivom* ritual, a Tiv man believes that, the relevance of *Ivom* festival is purely to crave for a successful outcome or human labour or nature, for good, weather and animal hunting. Through various oral interviews, the researcher gathered that, the *Ivom* festival promotes human, animal and crop productions for a better living. Last but not the least, *Ivom* ritual plays a didactic role in shaping the attitude of the people. It instills the spirit of Tiv communalism. It is also linked with the people's philosophy of life. In its celebrations, the whole communities are brought together and as a result, interact with one another. In respect of this singular objective, one spirit is achieved.

AESTHETICS IN IVOM RITUAL DANCE

Within the context of this study, aesthetics is viewed as a branch of philosophy that is concerned with the essence and perception of beauty and ugliness. Aesthetics also deals with the question of whether such qualities are objectively present in the things they appear to qualify, or whether they exist only in the mind of the individual; hence, whether objects are perceived by a particular mode, the aesthetic mode, or whether instead the objects have, in themselves, special qualities—aesthetic qualities.

Therefore, aesthetic primarily concerns the experience or a best idea which explains objectively the appreciation and measurement of beauty that is inherent in an object. Traditionally, aesthetics is assumed that art objects are useful as well as beautiful. Art like dance, music, and other expressions might commemorate historical events or encourage morality. It might also inspire piety or patriotism. In any case, there must be aesthetic means to an end for achieving contextual message of the performance.

Aesthetics as a field of inquiry is therefore an investigation into everything that makes these experiential affordances possible and gives them whatever meaning they have for us. Consequently, we can explore how meaning emerges for us by examining the images, action schemas, radially structured concepts, conceptual metaphors, metonymies, feelings, and emotions that are afforded us by our world. These meaningful affordances will depend equally, and interdependently, on both the nature of our bodies and on the structure of the environments (both physical and cultural) that we inhabit. I will call this inquiry into the visceral sources of meaning “the aesthetics of human meaning and understanding.” (Johnson Mark, 15).

Thus, Aesthetics in the works of traditional theatre practice seem to range from the pragmatic and rational in the secular realm to the violently emotional in the religious. Thus, at a fairly simple level, aesthetic appreciation is expressed as approval of the manner in which a work has been accomplished, of its compliance with possibly unformulated but nevertheless well-understood standards through aesthetic principles. These principles include; harmony, rhythm, variety, grace, unity, emphasis, balance, and proportion. Doki Gowon observes that: “what therefore this principle insists upon is that each theme should be appropriately realized by proper fusion of the parts in whatever medium of expression used” (92).

Thus, in Tiv society where religion depends more on ritual performances involving dances or oratory than on objects, expression of the arts may be channeled into an exquisite refinement of craftsmanship, often in the making of utilitarian objects. In these circumstances, the quality of an object used in the expression often becomes a symbolic reference to social status like the costumes and props used by people during traditional religious festivals. In the case of *Ivom* ritual festival, all the aesthetic principles are actualized in the *Ivom* dance which according to Uji “is a concrete expression of the *joie de vivre* that is the

product of a successful matrimonial home. The festival and the dance, therefore, draw attention to the importance of a happy home which functions as a vital cog in the wheel of a harmonious society” (51-53). Aesthetically, the *Ivom* dance festival therefore, is expressed through rhythmic impulses in a harmonious form, balance and unity. Moreover, the proper use of costumes in this festival has been therefore, suggested to be a material means by which Tiv values are transmitted nonverbally to those qualified to understand the messages involved, thus becoming a mode of communication that reinforces and is vital especially on variety and emphasis. For instance, *gbevwar*, *ivavtyo*, *anger*, *agbendeakuruu*, *muleutiv*, *dwem*, *akpamkir*, *derem*, *ashira*, *apu*, *takpa* and a host of others are mostly the costumes used for the grace of the *Ivom* festival. But the beauty of it all is that the use is selective depending on the role and status of the performer. If one is using *akpa mkir*, that establishes a contrast between him and the other people as he stands taller in status than them. In particular, *Ivom* performance seems to have the power both to express reality and to express emotion. The most popular approach to this concept of understanding is through a concept of Tiv ritual theatre as a form of symbolic expression of the aesthetic experience which stands in a fundamental proximity to values, ethics and moral judgment that is an integral to nature as moral indices of Tiv worldview characterized with decorum and code of conduct in performance.

The concept of expression in *Ivom* performance thus, could be variously seen as a principal function in modern aesthetics, however, is to describe those aspects and dimensions of artistic meaning that seem not to fall within the bounds of representation which is not the case of African performance. This however, is either because the aesthetics in *Ivom* involve no clear reference to an independent subject matter or because the connection between the subject and the artistic form is too close and inextricable to admit description in the terms appropriate to representation. The distinction between representation and expression is one of the most important conceptual devices in which one reasons in the contemporary study of the traditional arts theatre. With *Ivom*, a traditional African theatre practice, representation as a concept seems aesthetically irrelevant and to elevate expression into the single, true aesthetic function. The first argument is descriptive, or conceptual concerning with classifying objects according to their common properties, and so done to satisfy the human curiosity through the ritual observation. The second, by contrast, is intuitive, which *Ivom* is concerned with by presenting its subject matter (an “intuition”) in its immediate concrete reality, so that one is able to watch it as it is in itself. In understanding expression in *Ivom* performance, the audience’s attitude passes from mere curiosity to that immediate awareness of the concrete particular performances that is the core of the theatre aesthetic experience.

Systems of symbols and artifacts in *Ivom* are constituted in a certain ordered and determined relationship to the form, content, and intention of presentation are believed to be among the most important means of knowing and expressing Tiv religious facts. Such systems also contribute to the maintenance and strengthening of the relationships between the Tiv man and the realm of the sacred or holy (the transcendent, spiritual dimension). The symbol is, in effect, the mediator, presence, and real (or intelligible) representation of the gods in certain conventional and standardized forms. For instance, during the last consecration before the commencement of climbing *Ivom* for performance by the performers, the *Ivom* priest uses certain amulets and strange artifacts expressing the symbolic potency of the items. Before feeding the performers, the priest first drops a portion on the ground by way of first feeding the unseen guests, the ancestors. This expression is symbolic among the cultured Tiv society, because a Tiv man believes that his ancestors are always around him watching over him just like the Christians believe in personal Angels, as such when he gets food to eat, he first feeds the ancestors before taking his portion. Again, one symbolic thing of note during *Ivom* festival is the issue of *avambe* and *akinde* which are planted at front and back of the *Ivom* which by interpretation are representation of the human beings who are bid to be offered or offered as sacrifice for the festival.

THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL AESTHETICS OF IVOM DANCE

Generally, aesthetic experience, at its highest and best, is considered to be an experience of great value. So, what makes an experience aesthetic as opposed to an ordinary everyday experience? Accounts of aesthetic experience seem unable to yield a characteristic or group of characteristics that can serve as the basis of a definition of aesthetic experience. It seems to have a variety and complexity that defy attempts to state its essential conditions (Adele Tomlin, 5). Thus, this experience could be in form or content which again places us in a critical aesthetic judgement of performance. It could be the judgments of labor, time, and value encoded in the gimmick suggest that this aesthetic category reflects nothing less than the basic laws of capitalist production and its abstractions as these saturate everyday life (Ngai Sianne, 4). Thus, a critical study of the *Ivom* performance has helped to unveil a crossing point between the socio-economic and political aesthetics of the festival to the Tiv society. *Ivom* festival serves to meet specific social and psychological needs and provide cohesiveness to Tiv socio-political and economic institutions. Significantly, the obvious domains of festivals are; oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of

the intangible cultural heritage; performing arts; social practices, rituals and festive events; knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; traditional craftsmanship (Edited by Ullrich Kockel, et. al, 40). In this wise, there are obvious and inherent symbolic actions and objects in the display, and the actions that assist one to interrogate the Tiv worldview in identifying the nexus amid kinship bond, ritual, economic, legal, political structures, aesthetics and other socio-cultural structures. Therefore, the art of *Ivom* ritual festival is linked to certain sociological consequences and connotations. The fact remains that only an accepted person within his society is allowed to host *Ivom*. If you are not a man of the people, a person with a questionable character, you are not allowed to play host.

In the spiritual realm, the effect of *Ivom* in connection to the Tiv world view cannot be over emphasized. Religion is the main supporting element of most African societies; it regulates the life of the African societies because they are religious and are bond by it in every day's life including theatre. This is why African theatre like the Greek's could be said to have its root from religion. Therefore, during the *Ivom* festival, the rituals performed are of great significance which according to Akaa Dogo; "the *Ivom* festival is bid to bring good harvest and riches to the host community because the gods are appeased, and participants are purged and freed from certain evil forces" (Oral interview).

Politically, the festival plays an important role in the political base of the Tiv society. The host and the participants are all enveloped in *shagba* (fame), a prestige that actually places one above another which again offers him a political opportunity in his immediate society. Moreover, the hosting of *Ivom* takes a political order and decorum as permission to host *Ivom* is granted by *ityo* (kinsmen) and the *igba* (maternal kinsmen) which demonstrates the political order and hierarchy in the Tiv society. The host of *Ivom* before given the mandate to host the *Ivom* follows some political process; first, he consults the council of elders in his community who must give him a go ahead. Despite that, the elders in his clan also advise him to meet with elders from his mother's clan who finally give the approval. This hierarchy of approach by the host inculcates to the youth to follow due process in whatever they want to do. Therefore, the *Ivom* festival can enhance a proper administration in Tiv society.

More significantly, as earlier mentioned some of the Akombo that are associated with *ivom* ritual performance; *Akombo a swende tyo*, *Akombo imande tyo*, *Akombo a azoo tyo*, *Akombo a kwambe tyo*, *Asete* and *gatarabi*. Thus, the socio-cultural relevance of *Ivom* ritual theatre is firstly seen as a cleansing avenue. This is to say that, the essence of this ritual is to purge the participants of such *akombo* that are associated with ill luck, body pains and boils. It is an avenue for the participants to tap and acquire

the supernatural resources/forces for a better living devoid of *akombo* complications or uncertainties that may be-fall of them.

Apart from cleansing rite, this ritual is also aimed at protecting or fortifying and individual participant or the entire community from the caprice of nature and the evil of other people or the wrath of the Akombo such as *Akombo a swende tyo*, *Akombo imande tyo*, *Akombo a azoo tyo*, *Akombo a kwambe tyo*, *Asete* and *gatarabi*.

Most of the entertainment genres in Tiv society are actually going extinct; however, with *Ivom* festival still in vogue, it is an avenue for entertainment. Because life at present is vested with tension, fear and despair, the *Ivom* festival will definitely serve as a weapon used to reduce the persistent tensions and anxieties. Some of the people who come to witness the *Ivom* festival do not consider the religious undertone, but only glue to the entertainment aspect of the performance. More importantly, *Ivom* is considered by the Tiv people as *akombo a shagba* (a prestigious ritual) which gives incentive for intensive and effective communication with distant influential friends and relatives. Despite the laudable benefits of this festival, the festival is steadily dying out especially in areas which have fully embraced western ways of culture.

IVOM DANCE FESTIVAL AND THE MODERN TIV SOCIETY

Whenever mankind has been deemed to need divine aid for salvation, there has been an emphasis on a personal relationship with the saviour-god concerned. Such relationship usually connotes faith in and loving devotion and service toward the deity, and such service may involve moral and social obligations. Thus, based on the functional approach, ritual behaviour is explained in terms of individual needs and social equilibrium. Ritual is thus viewed as an adaptive response to the social and physical environment. The functional explanation of ritual attempts to explain this behaviour in relation to the needs and maintenance of a society. The strength of this approach is dependent upon a claim that it is both logical and empirical. This follows that ritual is the belief system of a society, which is constituted by a classification of everything into the two realms of the sacred and the profane. The sacred is that aspect of a community's beliefs, myths, and sacred objects that is set apart and forbidden. Therefore, the function of ritual in the Tiv community is that of providing the proper rules for action in the realm of the sacred as well as supplying a bridge for passing into the realm of the profane.

Therefore, the symbiotic relationship between theatre and society is for theatre to attempt re-creation of the social world of man's relation with his family, politics, and with the state in its economic and religious construct. Theatre is thus, multi-dimensional, touching generally all

the aspects of human existence such that in Tiv society, ritual enactments or festival theatres are not done in a vacuum, they are backed up with some deep rooted socio-political functional responsibility of flourishing the human existence in all its forms and as a whole. Therefore, every society, large or small, has regular major ritual festivals and observances that celebrate and display its fundamental commitments and that intensify and renew the spiritual memory of its followers.

Obviously, there are reasons that motivate the hosting of *Ivom*. To Shagbaor Ugande, "it is to give the community known as *tyo food*" (oral interview). To Iorfa Gbabe, the main purpose of this festival is to display wealth and to score a point against one's age-mate (oral interview). Others see it as an avenue for the return of lost antiquities of the land. The Tiv people believe in *Ikyav mbi mba tugh* like *imbyiu iviungu*, *ityoor ki ayu* and the host of others which are sources of wealth of an individual or a community as a whole that are usually kept in other neighbouring communities. Sometimes to retrieve such items normally results to communal crises which is an attestation to the fact of constant communal crises in Tivland. Festivals such as *Ivom* remain the only way where such items are returned in peace. When such "items" are returned to the right ownership, there is *mndorom* (peace), fair riches, and good harvest among other desirable wishes. Normally, in the process of bringing back such artefacts, they are accompanied with rain as a mark of the optimum supply of food and life.

Kano Swende rightly maintains in an oral interview that, "the maternal kinsmen of the host, during the grand finale blesses him with prestige known as *m urum* by given him a metaphorical calabash' (oral interview). The calabash is metaphorical in the sense that it is not an ordinary calabash; its content is mystical and spiritually loaded so as to lead the *aingba*, from grass to grace. This implies, that to a Tiv man, prosperity of a man lies to fact that either the person is covered spiritually by his *ityo* who must have given him *ikyav* - prosperity akombo, or the *igba* has given him *anjondo* (calabash), this calabash can only be brought from one's *igba*, and is not permanent, it has a time frame of which it will be revoked for another person's usage. The process is said to involve human sacrifice.

However, based on several oral interviews conducted, it is gathered that, the dwindling nature of *Ivom* festival is based on the over ridden consequences of Christianity and modern education. According to the Christian and the educated position, the requirement for hosting *ivom* festival is always involves human sacrifices and therefore, considered satanic and out dated. Thus, it is concluded that the worst of it are Christianity (kwagh u Aondo) and western education (makeranta) that have actually contributed to the dwindling of *Ivom* ritual festival. This is to say, the rise of Christianity, western

education, modernization, the impact of politics, growing urbanization, the steady breaking of down of family ties and the challenges of modern times, etc, all have (negative) impact on people (Bur 21).

Nevertheless, *Ivom*, just like any ritual theatre has to do with making specific moments of importance in the life of the Tiv sociology and as a traditional institution which artistically unites the society through appeasement, continence training, cleansing, fortification and, edification via performances that are enveloped in the popular mannerisms of the secular and the sacred practice. Thus, the issue of bracing or rejuvenating *Ivom* festival is a wonderful development that pledges and guarantees an artistic resurgence that would open the people's experiences to nurture on the complex socio-political disputes affecting them. It is the legacy of physical artifacts and intangible attributes of the Tiv society that are inherited from past generations, maintained in the present and bestowed for the benefit of posterity generations

CONCLUSION

One of the pillars of theatre; educational functionality of *Ivom* dance in this case cannot be ruled out. Traditional theatre is a fountain of knowledge; through it, the totality of ideas and information in reference to a set of people's histories, religious practice, social and political organizations travelled through theatre. The *Ivom* dance festival is actually that form of popular traditional theatre, which explores and projects for cultural prosperity.

In this era of decolonization, the Tiv Traditional Council should as matter of urgency make a policy for the regular hosting of these festivals within Local Government Areas in Tiv land, with the aim of preserving the cherished Tiv culture and theatre tradition. Cultural Officers in the Tiv speaking Local Government Areas in Benue State should make a point of duty to liaise with the State Ministry of Sport, Youth and Culture, and the Nigerian government to encourage, support or sponsor this dance festival because it is still usefully important to the socio-political development of the society as it is potent communicative weapons for moral stability and the development of Tiv body polity.

It should also be a target of the Benue State Council for Arts and Culture to mobilize rural dwellers towards hosting these kinds of dance festivals by going round

these communities reminding and pricking their conscience regarding the importance of these aspects of Tiv dance cultural heritage that is fast fading away which could be used for vital aspect of education, mobilization and re-orientation of the Benue people and Nigeria at large, and may hitherto bring a sense of togetherness and collectiveness.

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