

NORMATIVE VALUES OF TIVTAKERA AND GBASELA TRADITIONAL DANCES

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Abstract

This paper examines the normative values of Takeru and Gbasela dances of the Tiv people. Personal interviews were conducted with participants of the moribund and stakeholders in traditional performances among communities in Shangev-Tiev, Konshisha Local Government Area of Benue State, where the dances were being performed until lately. Parson's, theory of social action and pattern variables are adopted to explain the normative values of Tiv traditional dances. It is the arguments of this paper that dance projects and transmit the prescribed canons of a people and the functional roles of traditional dances are found in the form, manifest in the functionality in relation to the participants with whom dance is bound in cultural transaction. The paper submits that Takeru and Gbasela dances are functionally relevant in the development of modern Tiv society and Nigeria as the dances provide food for thought for social re-engineering, apart from their entertainment value. The paper recommends among other things that traditional dances should be properly choreographed as viable means of socialization needed to instil, safeguard and promote peaceful co-existence among global communities.

Key Words: Socio-Anthropology, Values Tradition, Traditional Dances

Introduction

In every human society, there exist some forms of artistic expressions that assert and or establish the cosmology – manifest in the values and norms akin to the society in question.

These performances are part of the cultures and traditions of the society, which affirm its religious, socio-cultural and political life. One of the most expressive and artistic means through which the cosmic and transcendental reality of the human species of most global societies is expressed is dance. To this reality, dance occupies an essential place in the cultures of every society throughout the world, particularly in African societies; personifying energy and a graceful beauty flowing with rhythm.

In generic terms, dance is a colouration of life experiences which could be in the form of mollification, celebrating a harvest, honouring kings and queens, celebrating weddings, marking birth rites and of passage, expressing disgust and other ceremonial occasions, particularly in African communities and may be marked by dancing in gatherings, festivals or ceremonies. Okafor (2005) describes dance as:

a ubiquitous medium of communication or expression in African cultures. By its nature, a Nigerian dance or music engages all the senses in performer and spectator/listener alike. It is the patterning of the human body in time and space in order to give expression to ideas and emotions.

For instance, ritual dance as well as many other dances utilizing masks is a way of achieving communication with the gods. The point is that dances are transformations from mythic raw materials that are elements of the world view of a people.

Moreover, dances, particularly in African communities often have strong narrative roles, which may have evolved from the practice of hunters relating stories of the day's hunting to the rest of the community, relating creation myths, telling morality tales, or simply entertaining and amusing. It is like traditional attires worn differently by people in various societies in all ramifications. From birth through death, dance serves as a navigator of man's way of life and the directional signs towards a better, peaceful and purposeful human existence. Bakare (1997) views dance as:

...a controlled emotional outlet whose form reflects cosmology; as a creative experience that draws an extension of speech and gesture that add further levels of meaning to formal occasions; as a strategy for orchestrating the climax of a successful exchange; as a challenge to the power of authorities that generates an alternative reality; as a communal response to acrisis that recreates order out of confusion; and as a sequence of transformations that periodically resolves an inherent social dilemma.

This position underscores dance as an expressive medium that goes beyond words and letters, but a poetic manner of emotional expression through body movements.

In all African cultures, dance accompanied by music and song help circumscribe the task of the individual and the group within and to the community. While it could be accepted that every society has its own characteristic dancing culture, the physical and psychological effects of dance, in general, enables it to serve many functions. Each culture has its dance language, and the language is rooted in spiritual connections, unspoken and transcending. In addition, Charles and Justin discuss several functionalities of dance to four theories – philosophical aesthetic theory, choreologists aesthetics theory, sociological aesthetic theory and medical therapeutic dance theory – thus highlighting the implications of each theory to dance study and with regards to the choreography, dancers, students as well as teachers. However, the messages enshrined in the gestures used in African dances have not been given adequate attention.

Indeed, dance plays an important role in helping communities maintain a connection with their past and keep their cultural traditions alive. From To this perspective, dance helps people affirm life and the possibility of a better future and this possibility is manifest in its meaning and functionality to the participants with whom it is bound in a cultural transaction. It is against the backdrop of this that this paper sets to examine the normative merits of Tiv traditional dances; beaming the searchlight on *Takera* and *Gbasela* dances.

Theoretical Assumption

Living organisms including humans are **social** when they live collectively in interacting populations, whether they are aware of it, and whether the interaction is voluntary or involuntary. This is because orientations, or behaviours which take the interests, intentions, or needs of other people into account (in contrast to anti-socialbehaviour) have played some role in defining normative values and human solidarity. One way in which these expectations become apparent is the manifestation of the roles that people play as members of society. With each social role you adopt, your behaviour changes to fit the expectations both you and others have of that role. Akunno, G. quotes William Shakespeare, who summed up human life in the following word:

All the world a stage,
And all the men and women merely players:
They have their exits, and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts.

These lines capture the essence of the rights, duties, expectations, norms and behaviours that a person has to face and fulfil his society. What is crucial for an appreciation of the social roles manifest in human action are the conditions under which, and means by which they are undertaken and the norms in terms of which choices between such actions are guided.

Various theoretical models have been advanced to explain human interaction and the accompanying consequences. This paper adopts the philosophical assumptions of Parsons, in his theory of social action and pattern variables to explain the normative values of Tiv traditional dances. The theory provides a way of categorizing the types of choices and forms of orientation for individual social actors, both in contemporary society and historically. The variables provide for the value patterns of culture and the normative requirements in social systems which Adams and Sydie (2002) opine that; “they are means of guiding individuals toward one or other of a set of dichotomous choices. Parsons' theory of social action and pattern variables provides a means of describing and classifying social relationships, diverse societies, and the values and norms of these. All of the norms, values, roles, subsystems and even the society as a whole can be classified and examined based on these patterned variables. Parsons propounded five pattern variables of role definition, although he says that there are many more possibilities. The first is the gratification-discipline dilemma of *affectivity versus affective neutrality*. The dilemma here is in deciding whether one expresses their orientation in terms of immediate gratification (affectivity) or whether they renounce immediate gratification in favor of moral interests (affective-neutrality). According to Parsons, "no actor can subsist without gratifications, while at the same time no action system can be organized or integrated without the renunciation of some gratifications which are available in the given situation".

The second set of pattern variables of role definition is the private versus collective interest dilemma, which he termed '*self-orientation versus collectivity orientation*'. In this case, one's role orientation is either in terms of private interests or the interests of collectivity. Parsons explains that, “a role may define certain areas of pursuit of private interests as legitimate, and in other areas obligate the actor to pursue the common interests of the collectivity”. The third pair of pattern variables is the choice between types of value-orientation standard, which Parsons christened “*universalism versus particularism*". In the former case, the standard is derived from the validity of a set of existential ideas, or the generality of a normative rule, in the latter from the particularity of an object or the status of the object in a relational system.

The fourth pair of pattern variables is *achievement versus ascriptive role behaviour*. The choice here is between modalities of the social object. Achievement-orientation roles are those which emphasis on the performances of the people, whereas ascribed roles, the qualities or attributes of people are emphasized independently of specific expected performances. The fifth pair of pattern variables are *specificity versus diffuseness*. If one adopts an orientation of specificity towards an object, it means that the definition of the role is oriented to the social object in specific terms. In contrast, in a diffuse orientation, the mode of orientation is outside the range of obligations defined by role expectation. The major assumption of Parsons' theory of social action and pattern variables highlights how

people incorporate normative principles into their reasoning, self-understanding and social interaction; hence relevant in the determination of normative values of traditional dances.

Dance Orientation in Tiv Society

In Tiv culture, the closest word to dance defined in English as “rhythmic or patterned movement performance as an end in itself” is *Ishol* or *Amar*. This concept of dance in Tiv, according to Hagher (1976) “relates the phenomenon of dancing as a game hence *Ishol* means game” (61). Thus, the art of dancing in Tiv society is used altogether to describe specific dance styles employed by the dancers as a game. This idea is linked to the mimetic zeal of hunters re-enacting the movement of animals from their hunting expeditions; perhaps to strategise better for superior expertise in this endeavour. In consonance with the foregoing, Hagher again defines dance in Tiv society as:

the rhythmic and patterned movements performed in accompaniment of ityoulov (music) in different styles and manners for different socio-economic or political events and occasions; expressing in mimetic or symbolic manner the cosmology and ideals of the Tiv society. (62)

Hagher's definition as captured above implies that the Tiv *Amar* is a non-verbal form of deep emotional expression which cannot be adequately expressed verbally; which characteristically is accompanied by music which combines to become a dynamic phenomenon in Tiv culture. This is true because music functions to bring out dance (by triggering emotions) in which there can be no dance without music in Tiv culture. This culture of dancing in Tiv philosophy is in line with what Adesina (2010) describes as:

To jump, to hop, to prance, to sway, to tread, to hip-toe and to move the feet, hands and body in certain rhythms, measures and movements consisting of jumps, bending of the body, straddling, limping, bending of the knees, rise on hip-toes, throwing forward of the feet, changes and other movements.

This underscores dance as an expression of the physical, psychological and spiritual states of being that enables people to give meaning and context to their greatest joys, hopes, frustrations, fears and sorrows. The expression contributes to a sense of wholeness.

Thus, as an art form, dance has been playing various roles that are functional in all the major manifestations of human endeavours, particularly in Tiv society and culture. Tiv dances just like other African traditional dances occur in certain historical periods and serve as landmarks for certain historical events in the society. This is true as Doki (2006) notes:

What makes Tiv [sic] dance performance all the more interesting and encapsulating is the fact that such dances or performances are usually

accompanied by songs, which are always rich in entertainment, institutional and philosophical values. (95)

The implication of this is that the dancers' rhythmic body movement, complimented by the accompanying songs and music communicates the worldview and logical values of the Tiv society.

Indeed, there has been a transformation of the dance activity not only in Tiv society but others in Nigeria and elsewhere from the traditional performing modes to modern modes to conform to the demands of the times. This makes dance assume many roles and is used on different occasions as means of expression. Indeed, dance has also helped in shaping and reshaping the history of not only Tiv culture but also others around the world. Thus, it is easily regarded as a universal phenomenon, just like spoken word, or language; and as one of the potent instruments for communication and social development, dance has been used as a symbol of oneness which thereby culminates into aiding societal and behavioural changes.

Imperatively, dance is one of the earliest forms of communication, particularly in Tiv society. Akpede (2010) while reminiscing on the evolution of dance, particularly in Tiv society posits that:

Our forefathers over the years evolved this unique form of storytelling with children as their target audience. They used spirits and animals as their characters to depict good and evil as means of showing the young ones the direction that would be most beneficial to society by being good, obedient, hard-working and honest.

Akpede's position as captured above views a dance in Tiv culture as a conscious creation of man to deal with the challenges of his existence. The understanding that dance in Tiv culture implies a consciously composed, choreographed and complete bodily expression that is aimed at mirroring with the intent of correcting societal ills finds suitable expression in this paper.

Different brands of dance exist in Tiv culture. Akpede in his taxonomy identifies the following forms in which Tiv dances exist. These include; the historical forms (*Dasenda, Ichough* and *Ingyough*); ritualistic forms (*Ivom, Biamegh* and *Agashi*); Warlike forms (*Girinya*); mimetic forms (*Ihinga, Gbasela, Ifiam*) and the purely creative forms (*Swange, Gberchur, Ingyough, Vanger-gbilin/Takera*). This taxonomy is similar to that promulgated by Sebastian Bakare, whose classification identifies three major categories of dance forms: ritual dance, ceremonial dances and griotic dances (dances expressing local history) (6). The ritual dances represent the broadest and most ancient African dance, usually religious in nature and are designated for specific occasions that expedite and

facilitate the most powerful expression of the communities from where they are rooted. The *Ivom*, *Agashi*, *Girinya*, *ibiamegh* and the like are exemplars of the ritual dances in Tiv culture. The ceremonials are culturally functional as they are commemorative and transient than rituals. This type includes dances that serve as rites of passage and initiation (coming of age), coronation, marriage, chieftaincy and festive dances and include *Swange*, *Gberchur*, *Ingyough*, *Vanger-gbilin Ihinga*, and *Takera*. The griotic dances are those that serve as historical records of the society. This is because, in African culture, the griot is the village historian who teaches everyone about their past and is the keeper of the cultural traditions and history of the people. These traditions and stories are kept in the form of music and dance, containing elements of history or metaphorical statements that carry and pass on the culture of the people through the generations. *Dasenda*, *Ichough* and *Ingyough* are examples of griotic dances in Tiv culture. The dances tell stories that are part of the oral history of the people or community.

Dance not only of the Tiv traditional society but also any of its kind elsewhere assembles the communication elements in a manner that more often resembles poetry with its ambiguity and multiple, symbolic and elusive meanings. The point is that to understand the non-verbal communication nature of dance of any type, the form in which it is composed and the content most often expressed through the accompanying songs and music becomes central. What this portends is that dances of not only the Tiv society but others in Africa are performed but not without music and songs; and as one of the potent instruments/tools for communication and maintenance of social harmony inter-relations, dance has been used as a symbol of oneness which thereby culminates into aiding societal and behavioural changes in Tiv society, just like others around the globe.

Tiv traditional dances are usually of folkloric dimensions with congeries of iconic-cultural markers of identity, learning and wisdom, socialization and transmission of values and mores which are important to the centripetal Tiv mind. As such, like any other traditional society in Africa, the Tiv society has engaged itself in the culture of dancing from time immemorial, though it is regrettable that most of these dances are now on the verge of becoming extinct.

Nature and origin of *Takera* and *Gbasela* dances

Two notions exist on the origin of *takera* dance in Tiv culture, which is interlinked. The first is etymological and relates the origin of the dance to the Tiv expression *ta kera*, which means 'to throw away'. This notion is linked to the Tiv man's desire to display wealth and affluence; exhibiting one's splendour (*shagba*) and boasting among age mates. To do this, a man would marry many wives, buy a horse, and throw an extravagant party – say a dance party, a song party and so on where people would come from all walks of life; eat, drink and enjoy themselves to the fullest. The second is not too far from the first as it shares some common elements-which are related to the desire to exhibit one's splendour.

According to Tyodoo (2009) “In the old society, to exhibit one's splendour (*shagba*), and boast when in company of age mates, the Tiv man buys a horse. *Takera* dance is associated with the dance movement of a horse”. Horse buying in the Tiv society of the old was a highly valued achievement one could attain; and once a person buys a horse, he will throw a party to celebrate this noble achievement or move around the domains of his age mates in the community to acquaint them of his achievement. From the two notions, the extent to which the celebrant provides ample food and drinks during such an event would determine the enormity of *shagba* of the person in question. To this end, a man would ensure that he provides more than the guests in such a party could eat and drink to justify his display of splendour - *kume Shagba*.

The origin of *Gbasela* dance is contestable as claims are made to several sources, attributing the dance as having been invented by some individuals around Tivland. However, as the dance taxonomy earlier highlighted reveals, *Gbasela* dance is a purely creative dance modelled after the life of *gbasela* (wolf) a carnivorous, wicked, hostile, clever and greedy animal of the dog family. Its characteristic hostility and wickedness make *gbasela* to be feared by other wild and domestic animals and even humans. This is because of its excessive love for meat such that it employs every means to catch its prey as well as known to eat each other at any slightest opportunity. Iorhen Gabo links the origin of the dance to the artistic invention of Ikyungwa Mee, who invented the dance during the *atem ityou* (head crushing) that left Tivland in chaos as brothers rose against brothers, families against families and clans against clans. Although such authorship may be contestable, it is characteristic of the communal nature and eclectic nature of traditional dances in Tivland.

The Normative Values of *Takera* and *Gbasela* dances

To determine the normative values of *Takera* and *Gbasela* dances, personal interviews (using Semi-Structured Interviews, SSIs) were conducted with erstwhile performers of the dances in Shangev-Tiev community of Konshisha Local Government Area of Benue State. The respondents in the interviews were selected based on their wealth of knowledge in the subject matter – having been long time participants in the said dances. The views of the respondents represent the veracity of the values of these dances in Tiv society in particular and African society in general.

It was Harper who once remarked that; “the first step in studying dance in traditional society is to identify the functions it performs”(148). This position underscores the fact that Tiv traditional dances are valuable only by virtue of their sociocultural worthiness. As such, the values of dance in Tiv society cannot be overemphasised. Many have valued dance as entertainment, *but entertainment is not the most important function in Tiv traditional dances. This is because* dances, especially in Tiv society are performed for socio-cultural, historical, political, economic and religious purposes.

The socio-cultural exigencies of *Takera* and *Gbasela* dances make both a combination of several symbolic and intricate movement patterns, combined with music and songs to project and uphold normative values while condemning those that are inimical to social cohesion and development. For instance, Ugber during a personal interview explained that:

takera dance projects the spirit of communal sharing that characterize the social philosophy of Tiv culture in which people particularly, the well-to-do have to extend their wealth to those who have less as reflected in the philosophy of ya na angbian. The sense is that those who have should use the wealth to make the less privilege to joyfully part-take in the enjoyment of their riches. The idea was that wealthy people were identified by how much and often they could throw parties to cheerfully provide merriment to those who could not afford it.

These changes in the socio-economic and political life of the Tiv which culminated in the emergence of capitalist relations of production have affected the practice of Tiv communalism in which fair play and justice were guaranteed.

Collaborating with the above, Iho explained that:

Tiv people in the period preceding colonialism were said to be largely a communal people. It therefore meant that their cosmology will be shaped by communalism. This communal nature of Tiv society emphasized values such as collectivism, egalitarianism and equal access to the means of production as well as the sharing of wealth. The implication is that whatever anyone had was believed to have been given to him for the common good of all. Thus, one's wealth in Tiv is perceived to be communal and should be made to be enjoyed by members of the community and not just by the owner of the wealth.

In other words, communalism provided an atmosphere for social co-existence and control of factors of production. Precisely, this formed the foundation for social interaction and integration in Tiv, though a stateless society, as many researchers have described it. Deeply rooted in this normative ideals, *Takera* and *Gbasela* dances function to integrate Tiv society by expressing social organization, validating instruction, perpetuating values and promoting ethnic solidarity. Such unique and intrinsic values manifest in the idea that unlike many Western forms of dance, in which the musicians providing the accompanying music and the audience both maintain a distance from the dance performance, *Takera* and *gbasela* dances incorporate a reciprocal, call-and-response or give-and-take relationship that creates an interaction between those dancing and those surrounding them. This fluidity is the quality that makes the two dances, like other dances of its kind in Tiv society

to be secular and participatory, with spectators being part of the performance as there are traditionally no barriers between dancers and onlookers. In this regard, people or the community must exist to a large extent based on equality and fraternity where the sense of brotherhood, kinship ties and the extended family system play very key and crucial functions in a communal relationship.

In an interview with Aku Periwa (a sixty-nine-year-old herbalist in Mbaje), he decried the declining nature of cultural practices such as dances and the accompanying values. He stated emphatically that:

Today, the Tiv hardly share filial resources. Food is still symbolically shared as most Tiv men invite their brothers to share in whatever they are eating but the practice where one could give out food in large quantity, such as a bundle of millet or guinea corn is no longer obtainable. That kind of gesture is now only extended to in-laws, and not to any brother on relation in need. Most of the excess or surplus food that was used for such purposes is now sold for cash earnings. Greed and selfishness are fast becoming the order of the day in contemporary Tiv society and this has conspired to breach the hitherto existing communal life of the Tiv man.

The above explains how the extinction of some traditional performances and events which hitherto served as avenues of socialization and mobilisation as well transmission of cultural values across generations has a boomeranging effect of diminishing cultural values among communities in Nigeria.

Gbasela dance movement patterns represent a relevant attribute of the wolf (*Gbasela*) which the dancers x-ray and mirror in anticipation of a change of behaviour; thus serving as a platform for corrective human behaviour among the Tiv while at the same time instilling morals. The philosophical underpinning *Gbasela* dance is what Atsua Ihyo (during a personal interview) explains:

Gbasela dance is meant to correct behaviours that go against the communal life, norms and values that unite the Tiv people. It is meant to educate the people not to live and behave like the wild Gbasela (wolf) which has no sense of filial co-existence.

This remains an extrinsic value of *Gbasela* dance which remains a metaphor for human behaviour, portraying man's inhumanity to man; thereby educating the people to live cordially with one another. Indeed, *Gbasela* dance is the throbbing pulse of the Tiv people in social education and rehabilitation which constitutes the themes of wisdom, conceived in the mind of its audience and community members in general.

In another interview with a cultural enthusiast, Saa Azege affirmed that:

Traditional dances such as takera and gbasela to a large extent mirror society by exposing and condemning the evil habits of individual members of the society while encouraging and praising some normative principles of the society exhibited by some individuals. Matching the philosophical underpinnings of these dances depicting the life and behaviour of people in social interaction in which selfishness, unfriendliness and greed have reigned supreme with individuals exhibiting loss of the sense of filial piety, calls for the urgent need to change that is all deserving and immediate.

Visibly, not only does *Takera* dance offer young men and women the opportunity to show off themselves, thus encouraging courtship, it provides training for work and combat. This implies that traditional dance is not a luxury, but part of each person's physical, emotional, intellectual and cultural growth. It is a language (a universal language) through which people can share each other's pain and accomplishments. *Takera* and *Gbasela* dances in Tiv society are the transmission of historical values. These dances perform the functions of social control, social integration, signalling, dissemination of information, inspiring, entertainment, and encouragement while inculcating good morals underlining the necessity of virtuous living and denouncing wrong deeds. Laced with the rich array of cultural materials that serve as costumes and props that give *takera* and *gbasela* dances their aesthetic worthiness, both dances are therefore a rich cultural value or heritage and through that Tiv people anywhere on the globe are easily identified.

Politically, dance has been used extensively in traditional African society to create peace and maintain order. The potential of dance is carefully harnessed to govern any given society. It is therefore not an overstatement to say that dance is one of the many ways by which African society is organized and governed. It plays a vital role in reaching out to the various classes of society for any communal activity or ceremony. Both *takera* and *gbasela* dances have been used extensively in the traditional Tiv society to create peace and maintain order. The potentials of these dances are carefully harnessed to govern Tiv society societies as generally found in other societies in Nigeria and Africa at large. These dances are heavily tied to the institutions of society and extol the very basis of survival of the social system in that it contributes significantly to the fulfilment of all society's needs.

Indeed, various nuances between the dance genres and styles represent their social settings and culture. As dance is a ubiquitous element of culture, *takera* and *gbasela* dances remain viable tools for sociocultural, historical, economic and political rejuvenation.

Conclusion

Dance is a psychological form of human behaviour that helps in conditioning the emotional state of individual members (of given societies), by recreating their personal or self-worth, the cathartic and therapeutic function of dance is linked to this behaviour since certain experiences of dance performance can help to purge negative feelings and emotion embedded in performers as well as spectators. Dance provides opportunities for the propagation of normative behaviour as it remains man's most potent means of expression.

Like other Tiv traditional dances, *takera* and *gbasela* have a strong narrative role, which may have evolved creation myths, morality tales, or purely creative patterns; all aimed at informing, and educating while amusing. These dances represent controlled emotional outlets whose form reflects cosmology and generate an alternative reality; as a communal response to acrisis that recreates order out of confusion; and as a sequence of transformations that periodically resolves an inherent social dilemma. *Takera* and *gbasela* dances, like many others in Tiv culture, remain relevant and potent tools of knowledge impartation in both traditional and modern setups; capable of checkmating, conscientizing and sensitizing societies against incessant vices that result in social and moral decay.

It is however, observed that unless careful attention is attached to the normative values of dances in Nigerian societies like the Tiv, such dances may not be able to make any impact on the populace. It becomes incumbent on government at all levels, policymakers, stakeholders, traditional institutions and all men of goodwill to make policies to safeguard and promote the rich cultural heritage of traditional dances through the re-introduction of dance in the school curriculum at all levels, a revival of traditional festivals and other cultural ceremonies providing avenues to provide for the display of dances for social education.

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Oral Interviews

S/No	Name	Age	Occupation	Location	Date
1	Iorhen Gabo	62	Traditional Dancer	Mbayem, Shangev - Tiev	5 th June, 2022
2	Timothy Ugber	56	Traditional Dancer	Mbayem, Shangev - Tiev	5 th June, 2022
3	Atusa Iho	77	Traditional Dancer	Mbashengen, Shangev - Tiev	5 th June, 2022
4	Aku Periwa	68	Herbalist/ Traditional Dancer	Mbaje, Shangev-Tiev	5 th June, 2022
5	Saa Azege	59	Teacher/ member, Takera dance group	Mbaikyo, Shangev - Tiev	6 th June, 2022