

The Girinya Dance Theatre of the Tiv People of Nigeria: an Aesthetic Evaluation

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ABSTRACT

'Residual theatre' is used to refer to mean ritual performances that are still enacted but which have lost their original purpose. Such performances can still be enjoyed and can still play a role in promoting social cohesion and a sense of identity, so long as the performers, and the audience, recognise and accept the way they have changed. The *Girinya* dance of the *Tiv* people of Nigeria, which was originally a war dance, is a case in point. In the *Tiv* dance aesthetic, men's dances should be vigorous and energetic, as the *Girinya* dance is, but whereas in the past the dance was about the way warriors should behave in battle, it is now about continuity and renewal. I have tried to describe and evaluate this aesthetic and the way it has been adapted to have a new meaning within the changing culture of the *Tiv* people.

Introduction

Recently, issues about the continued relevance of traditional theatre in the 21st century have dominated discourse within academia¹. The rationale behind this discourse might be inferred from the imbalance, which exists between the west and the developing world. This imbalance can be seen in the highly technological hegemony of the west and the fledgling under-development of the developing countries. The technological revolution in the west has gradually reduced communication to a 'one-

touch-button' system in which people prefer to stay at home and watch television or movies than go out to a theatre to watch a live performance. This is adversely affecting the theatre performance as an immediate, dialogic process.

Against this background, how can the *Tiv* theatre, as a residual event, remain relevant and compete with the ever-changing society of computers, Internet, website and democratic governance? A residual theatre is not a 'dead' theatre but a theatre that has lost its original values and is adopting new ones as the social

environment undergoes change. The residual theatre might not be able to compete favourably in the western scientific sense, but will still have relevance and can continue to contribute to social harmony. This social harmony can be achieved on the level of the aesthetic.

Aesthetics does not simply imply beauty or ugliness. It captures the totality of a people's world-view; religious, social and even political relationships. These develop the aesthetic temperament. This temperament in turn develops the perception and receptivity to change; including technological change. How change is perceived and received will affect and determine the uses to which that change is put.

The *Girinya* performance, as it is practiced today, has undergone a great deal of change. The change has been on the level of religion (the advent of colonialism and Christianity), representative governance and social

perception of success (now material and monetary recognition rather than strength and prowess). This has affected the use of emblems such as *imborivungu*, human head and other paraphernalia associated with warriorhood and the social construct of success. This has greatly reduced the use of *Girinya* for the sharpening of skills and religious renewal and fortification for war. Today it is little more than a dance. Thus, it has acquired a new dance aesthetic that stresses strength, vitality, style and order.

Hagher submits that: In *Tiv* dance aesthetic, men's dance should be full of energy Nimbleness of feet, endurance and speed.²

The aesthetic idiom of the *Girinya* dance is expressed in the above. In addition, the dance is seen to be enhanced and made meaningful to the *Tse-mker-Tiv* people and is appreciated:

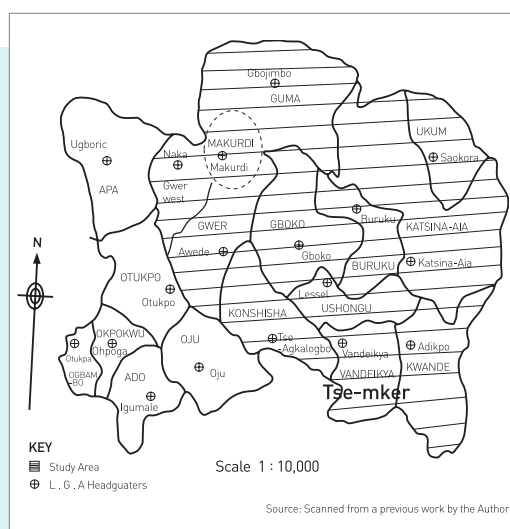


Figure 1
Map of Benue State showing the areas studied



Figure 2
Niger-Congo language speaking areas

If he dances Sha Agee with a lot of force, and with harmony, vough vough. The man should hold up his head tall and proudly, sha iceen failure to observe these consideration results in bad dancing, without harmony, speed or pride, described by Tiv as dang dang³.

This forms the philosophical assumption underlying the aesthetic evaluation of the *Girinya* performance, as residual theatre and will form the basis of the evaluation later in the work. For now, who are the Tiv people?

The Tiv People

The Tiv social system did not rely on a centralised system of authority. That is, unlike the Hausa or the Yoruba who had Emirs and Obas, lording it over them, the Tiv never had a king over all Tivland. Rather, leadership starts from the family unit through the *Or ya* (head of the family) and his kinsmen and relates mostly on this level. The Tiv understanding of authority and power arises from a view of leadership that is amenable to the imposition of either elected or appointed chiefs. This explains why the Tiv had no chiefs who ruled over the whole land. It is the coming of the colonialists that brought with it the chieftaincy institution in Tivland.

In the Tiv notion of leadership therefore, authority resides only in the personality of the leader (family head). The family head gets his authority, not by appointment, but by his understanding, usage of *tsav* (witchcraft potential)⁴ and how much *Akombo* (medicine or charms) he possessed. This authority however, is valid only for those who are organically bound through their kinship to the possessor of the authority. Thus, a man could be a chief only over an area or a people he belongs to.⁵

In the Tiv social system also, kinship is designated in terms of *Tar* (land or world). The *tar* could also be patrilineal segments of origin known as *ipaven* (division or segment), made-up of compound units headed by the *Or ya*. The *tar* therefore is a place, but essentially a 'peopled' place⁶. This is why when a Tiv man is asked where his *tar* is, he replies in terms of the lineage segment occupying the area. From the perspective of kinship, *tar* Tiv would then connote the believed common lineage of all Tiv people as coming from one father, called Tiv.

The *tar* therefore is a place, but essentially it carries with it the designation of lineage. The designations and the importance attached to *tar* in the Tiv world-view shows the intimacy of the union of the earth and the

people. Observing this union of man and nature, Eugene Rubingh writes that, in Tiv society,

*Genealogy was definitive for man's location in the tar, for his understanding of authority, for marriage and family. It located him in the group where he could find security as he became part of the whole and submerged himself within it.*⁷

This relationship between man and nature (*tar*) is so strong that it is commonplace to hear a person being asked his *nongo* (group or lineage). Vambe Agaku⁸ insists that, it is necessary to know your *kpen tar* (part of land) and your *nongo* within the *tar*. According to him, this serves for identification anywhere. He maintained that, for proper placement within the *nongo*, an individual has to know the names of his ancestors (grand and great-grand parents). And being a patrilineal society, the individual, asked about his *nongo* or *tar*, answers in terms of ancestral cleavages; his *ityo*. The *ityo* designates the father's 'home' and the smaller segments that make up the *ityo*. The Tiv regard the *ityo* as a powerful entity, capable of protecting its sons and daughters. But it is also said that, when one is not at peace with his *ityo*, he could run to his *igba* (his mother's people) for protection.⁹ Thus, the *ityo* and *igba* are embodiments of much more than just lineage groupings, but carry with them spiritual significance and power. This relationship forms the thesis of this dissertation.

One other important aspect of the Tiv social system is the marriage by barter or exchange marriage, known as *yamshe*. The *yamshe* is a system of marriage in which the male of a family would give his sister to the brother of his intended wife and receive his desired wife in return. This exchange made it possible for the giving family and the receiving family not to feel the 'loss' of a daughter because it was as if faces merely changed.¹⁰

Again, Vambe Agaku observes that, the *yamshe* was very good and important to the Tiv people because family relationships were strengthened and it made the society closer to itself.¹¹ This system of marriage was also seen to discourage divorce and ensured that no married daughter was maltreated; because the other family might do the same to one's sister or daughter.

Within the Tiv social system also, it was permissible for a brother to take over his brother's wife in the event of death. According to Apine Agaku, this takeover was meant to ensure a family's continuity; that is, men to carry the family's name. Another reason was to avoid leaving a young woman to suffer a husband's death. In other words,

this served to give her a place and a sense of responsibility.

With the coming of the missionaries and colonial administrators to Tivland, the people were made to abandon the *yamshe* marriage system in favour of the *Kem* marriage system. This was achieved in 1927.¹² The *Kem* marriage system is a cumulative bride-wealth system, which begins with small gifts to the intended bride's parents and concludes with gifts from the bridegroom to his in-laws at the birth of each child. Vambe Agaku says that the *Kem* system was not practiced uniformly in Tivland. He says, for example that, amongst the Tse-Mker people,

*As I know, you start giving gifts to your in-laws and during such visits, you are expected to help out on the farm. When the in-laws are satisfied that you are worth their daughter, you then pay the dowry. It is not fixed and you don't pay anything at the birth of each child.*¹³

He goes further to say that; this system of marriage encouraged the pursuit of mere material wealth and the accumulation of wives out of greed. It also encouraged divorce. Since no daughter of a (monetarily) rich family would be held to ransom for a maltreated wife, husbands became unruly and insatiable. Consequently, the *tar* was said to have become spoilt (*tar vihi*) and the hitherto carefully maintained balance of the community's social structure collapsed.

The marriage institution in Tivland was that of the search for prestige rather than mere wealth. That is, it was a thing of pride to have a large family and be able to feed that family,¹⁴ also, it was a thing of pride to have many children (male) who would look after and defend the family's land and name. The *yamshe* then afforded a person with a large number of *angol* (marriageable sisters) to have great marriage potential and a large farm; an overflowing barn and people to tend it. But the *Kem* system forced a person to sell his farm produce to get money for the gifts and the dowry.

However, the Tiv social system is structured in harmony with the environment, as evidenced in the Tiv belief in the symbiosis of man, his society and the natural world around him. This attachment made the Tiv cautious about change. The motivation for cultural life amongst the Tiv came from the past rather than from the open challenge of the present.¹⁵ The Tiv like change; but only change that would fit into their general pattern of life. This cautious attitude made writers and other anthropologists characterise the Tiv as 'backward'.¹⁶

However, behind this seeming 'backwardness' lies a profound theory about the structure of the universe; a deep loyalty to, and respect for, the ancestral heritage, and a reverence for forces that guide the movement of the world. These forces form the religious consciousness of the Tiv people.

From the above, it is clear that the Tiv world-view rests on four cardinal points; viz, comprehensiveness, communality, egalitarianism and sacralism.

Comprehensiveness implies that social control was extensive; probably because of the common Tiv ancestry. It also enabled the individual to understand his obligations to society, his work and to his elders in terms of kinship. In this way, the individual got security. The social control and the individual's sense of responsibility regulated virtually all aspects of Tiv life. The comprehensiveness of the Tiv world-view was fundamentally a derivative of the traditional religion.

According to Rubingh:

*through the hundreds of akombo, each with its own area of human behaviour under its guardianship, all experience could be given cultural and religious value.*¹⁷

This is true because, with this control by *akombo*, influence on all aspects of human and societal behaviour was achieved. Thus, the Tiv world rests on the conviction of the *symbiosis of man and nature*.¹⁸

The communality of Tiv society shows that, despite the power, authority and wealth of an individual, that individual was not an island unto himself. This means that individuality was minimised in the interests of the whole society or clan. The fortunes or misfortunes of an individual were reflected in the lives of members of the community.

Closely linked to communality is the egalitarian nature of Tiv society. Within Tiv society, self-consciousness was discouraged by social controls so as to prevent the society from moving away from its tested and honoured patterns. Thus, any fundamental change was viewed with serious suspicion. This is because such innovation might be an embodiment of the seeds of retribution from the unseen forces (*adzov*). It was thus dangerous to venture into the unknown, as this might disturb the existing precious balance of the human and cosmic worlds. Though the Tiv might be seen as great imitators, their imitations are in the interests of retaining most of their basic way of life.

Thus the Tiv world-view gained much of its force from its Sacralism. Sacralism helped to unify experience and

thus homogenize Tiv cultural institutions.¹⁹ This is because, every area of life had its *akombo* and the bid to unify all aspects of life meant that it was almost impossible to divorce religion from jurisprudence or economic life or morality.²⁰

It can be concluded, therefore, that life and death matters exist in an environment that regards every action, behaviour or art as a communal act. Within the social, religious and political arenas of the Tiv world therefore, the *Girinya* exists to fill the vacuum that would have otherwise existed as a result of changing social and cultural patterns in a hitherto tightly knit kinship society.

The Origin of *Girinya*

The *Girinya* developed originally, as a warrior cult to defend the territorial integrity of the *Tiv* people as they migrated and acquired lands for settlement. Then, it was known as *Gber tyo* (beheaders). As the *Tiv* settled into their acquired lands, they observed the formation and sustenance of similar cults amongst their neighbours. These included the *Oju* (Igede), the Idoma, all of Benue State and the Gakem of the present day Cross-Rivers state.

The *Oju* (Igede) form of the *Girinya* is known as *Oglinya*²¹ and incorporates an active masquerade form. The Idoma form of *Girinya*, known as *Oglinya* or *Ogalanya* (practiced mostly by the Edumoga people of Benue State), also incorporates masquerade forms to the warrior cult. The primary motif of all the cults encountered by the *Tiv* people was to protect them from attacks by other groups. The cults were organised in such a way that dance was used as a means of exercising and sharpening skills and techniques needed in warfare or battle in the period from the late 18th century to the early 19th century. As a 'military' formation then, the *Girinya* had a hierarchy, akin to the army. The *Tor Girinya* was seen as the Commander-in-Chief. He was followed by the *Tor Tough* (Chief of Staff), the *Atem* ('Breaker' or what is known in modern terms as Provost); the *Shuwa* (Spokesman) and the rest of the warriors according to the number of human heads they possessed.

Due to the relationships that later developed (marriage and commercial farming), the *Tiv* people are said to have gradually borrowed the dance aspect of the *Girinya* cult activity. And as the colonialism of the early 19th century introduced Christianity and the police state, the dance became the main focus of the cult activity. This was mellowed because the display of skulls and other

paraphernalia was considered offensive to the Christian missions and the colonial government.

However, the *Girinya* still maintains a warrior hierarchy today and is performed at important occasions; as will be seen in the description of the performance .

The *Girinya* Performance

In its present form, the *Girinya* is performed on occasions of significance to the *Tiv* people; occasions such as the visit to the locality of a Governor, a distinguished son of the land, the coronation of a chief or the death of a prominent son of the land and its members. Thus, the *Girinya* is performed as a dance to entertain and as a rite of passage.

As a dance for entertainment and show of ability, the dancers come to the dancing arena dressed in singlets (vests), a loin cloth around the waist and trousers or short pants underneath; brandishing machetes.

When called upon, the dancers take their turn in the dancing arena, the *Tor Girinya* (Chief of *Girinya* or leader of the troupe) is always the first. He comes over to perform a solo dance of cleansing. Greeted by cheers from the *ilu* (wooden gong), the *or miar* (flute man) and the spectators, the *Tor Girinya* dances in slow, but regal shuffles round the dancing arena. He dances round making 'clearing' or weeding gestures with his machete. He does this movement round the dancing arena and back to the entrance point, where the dancers are waiting. The dancers then file out in a single formation and scatter around the dancing arena; with the *Tor Girinya* and the musicians in the middle. Thus scattered, the music changes beat. This serves the dance movements and the display of technique and ability as in war; that is, the stalking, leaping on prey and beheading movements.

During this dance display, the dancers watch each other carefully to catch whoever is not being attentive to his immediate environment. And to show that a dancer is attentive, when another dancer takes a leap, the other responds by leaping backwards and raising his machete high above his head. But when a dancer is caught off-guard, the blunt side of the machete is placed on the back of his neck. He then falls to the ground, signifying that he has been beheaded. The 'victor' is then carried shoulder high by his colleagues who dance round the arena in mock celebration of victory. After this celebration of victory, the dance continues, but without

the 'beheaded' colleague. This goes on until only one dancer is left in the dancing arena, with the *Tor-Girinya* and the musicians. The remaining dancer is then lifted high by his 'beheaded' colleagues and the *or miar* sings his praises.

When the remaining dancer is finally dropped to the ground, all the dancers engage in another dance movement known as *amar a kuur* (the dance of death). A *mar a kuur* requires a vigorous dance step. In a semi-crouching position, with knees slightly bent forward, the dancers keep a steady one-two hop until they fall to the ground exhausted; signifying that they have danced the evil spirits around to death. The dancers then pick themselves up and dance out of the arena.

Girinya is also performed in honour of the dead, especially dead members of the troupe, as a rite of passage. When death is the reason for performance, the *Shuwa* (the canary: spokesman) invites the members of the troupe to a meeting. When all the members of the troupe are gathered in the *Tor Girinya's* house, they file out to the dead member's house. As they leave for the dead member's house, the *Tor Girinya* holds a young chick in his left hand and his machete in his right. As they reach the deceased's house, the dancers scatter round the compound, as if taking positions against potential attack. Then slowly as if stalking, the dancers move into the room prepared for their use. After some time in the room, the *Tor Girinya* emerges, with the young chick in his left hand and dances round the compound of the house. As he dances round, he makes mock chops at the chick's head and jabs outwards, towards the fringes of the compound; as if cutting and pushing away obstacles. Where the deceased has more than one son of the same age from different wives, they follow the *Tor Girinya* as he dances round. When the *Tor Girinya* reaches the door of the room in which the deceased is lying in state, he chops off the chick's head and allows the blood to spill on the doorposts and inside the room. At this point, the contesting sons rush for the chopped head. The one that picks up the head inherits his father's *imborivungu* (emblem of spiritual power) and also joins the *Girinya* rank.

After performing this 'cleansing' and appeasing rite, the *Tor Girinya* dances back to meet his colleagues. After a short dance, the dancers then dance in a single file towards the room in which the deceased is lying in state. As each dancer crosses the door of the room, he bends down and places his machete on the back of his neck as

a final mark of respect. This stage of *Girinya*, as a rite of passage, is called *Lyaku-ji* (away flies)

The above is a descriptive presentation of the two types of the *Girinya* dance as performed today. This dance, as presented by these two types, will provide the material for an aesthetic evaluation.

Philosophical Assumptions

This evaluation is predicated on the philosophical assumption that, every work of art has a significant form²², that is, whatever is being constructed has an aesthetic form. An aesthetic form deals with the way an object or pictorial display is put together. In such a display the objects must be considered in relation to one another compositionally. The relationships here would refer to the elements that make the performance functional for the practicing society. These include the mode of dancing, dressing (costuming), rhythm, movement, pace, tempo, etc or mimetic acts within the performance. These make up the aesthetic character of the performance. How this feeling is expressed differs from one society to another.

Different views exist as to the concept of aesthetics, though its general structure may seem basically the same. It recognises the existence, in a work of art, of beauty, form and order. But on the second level, aesthetics could be interpreted around the intrinsic value of the object experienced. As the aesthetic concept developed and gained currency, the metaphysical interpretation of experiences became of utmost significance. This metaphysical interpretation was found in Plato's fascination with the arts. He interpreted this as inspiration or heavenly madness.²³ Responding to this interpretation, Hegel became the first to apply aesthetics to the philosophy of fine art (including the performing arts).²⁴ He identified aesthetics and the philosophy of fine art as being the most important because of the perceptual and inspirational qualities they embodied.

These two concepts have also found firm expression in the Kantian theory of aesthetics.²⁵ The Kantian aesthetic theory is dominated by the concept of metaphysical determinism. Metaphysical determinism was expressed in its application of the Kantian aesthetic theory to the issue of perception and value judgement in the arts. This means that every experience of a work of art tasks the individual to intrinsically experience it and pass judgement as to what is experienced. The intrinsic

evaluation lends insight into the structure of the performance, while the value judgement raises the contextual aesthetic implications. The contextual implications may include moral value, economic value, political value, religious value and social value (norms).²⁶

It is from this that the aesthetic attitude comes.

According to Harold, the aesthetic attitude:

*is the attitude of complete occupation with perceptual data, considered in their own nature, not as signifying or resulting in anything else. It is only an interest in perceptual data for their own sake.*²⁷

This explains the fact that every artistic creation and performance has laws, conventions and regulations governing structure, style²⁸ and presentation. This is constitutively deterministic. The aesthetic experience is not intellectual but perceptual. The perception is steeped in the attendant cultural iconography. This also means that, *culture influences the perception and attitude of an individual.*²⁹

Aesthetics is therefore not a concept that can be copied or transferred easily from one people to another; though similarities in structure may exist. This explains the necessity of studying and applying aesthetic concepts and theories from a cultural (society) perspective, that is *on the basis of their cultural relativity and cross-cultural comparability.*³⁰

This, however, makes the study of performance aesthetic subjective. Subjective because it is inseparable from morality, and morality is inseparable from a people's culture and general world view. Thus, the study of performance aesthetic is localised, diverse and difficult. It is so localised that a general or universal approach to the study of aesthetics renders it vague. Perhaps this explains the assertion that, *the basis for one's response to beauty exists in the structure of one's mind*³¹ or that *beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder*³¹ and the reason for beholding. This means that the construction or perception of beauty depends on the value acquired by the individual within a cultural environment.

Baumgarten's first qualification of aesthetics as a *philosophy concerned with the concept of beauty especially as it relates to arts*³² therefore sets the stage for consistent efforts to analyse and discover the aesthetic experience of a work of art. Significantly, he submits that every work of art must have *a significant*

*form.*³³ 'Significant form' refers to the way an object or a display is constructed and performed. The construction would be in the arrangement of the various segments or components that make the entire performance - the presentation style, the mode of dancing, dressing or mimetic arts.

An analysis of a performance like the *Girinya*, therefore, would depend on the style and mode. The style and mode are the core of the *Girinya* form; that is, the ability to 'hang' together the different aspects of the dance to make a coherent whole for a person or group of people from both within and outside the social environment. This is the unity of the *Girinya* form of dance. But to create that unity and coherence, the artist separates the form from the matter of some object of experience; such as the human body or spiritual illusions or a tree, and imposes that form on another matter (like dance, mime or ritual presentation or a carving). By virtue of the re-creation of some object of experience, such a re-creation forms part of the nature or universe of those practicing it. From this perspective, the *Girinya* can be said to be an aesthetic experience re-created outside the original context but hanging together coherently to re-create the desired feeling of fulfillment and achievement.

The study of Tiv aesthetic experience, therefore, cannot be isolated from the Tiv approach to everyday life and experience. This informs Tiv society's perception and acceptance of a set of values considered right. This is because the experience, understanding and appreciation of works of art (*Girinya* dance in this case) depends upon the acceptance of an aesthetic set.³⁴ An aesthetic set is a particular sub-class of a perpetual set; the function of which is to disseminate, organise and interpret the ideas and information which constantly invade our perception.³⁵ This perpetual set can be found in the Tiv world-view, experience and everyday words that help in describing, ascribing and emphasising the aesthetic experience - for example, *Mdoom* (beauty).

According to Hagher,³⁶ the basic Tiv concept of beauty lies in 'lightness' and 'darkness'. He submits that:

*Lightness is physical beauty, attractiveness loveliness and appealing --- Darkness (wa ime) as in a performance, on the other hand, means achieving distinction in artistic harmony.*³⁷

This implies that the Tiv aesthetic concept and philosophy in performance is based more on the structuring and objectification of artistic creativity. This is

shown in the philosophy that all male performative arts *should be full of energy, nimbleness of feet, endurance and speed*.³⁸

This forms the philosophical assumption underlying this evaluation. In addition, the Tiv adjectives that enhance the understanding of the above philosophy will be used. These include *iwanger* (brilliance), *wanger* (glowing, clear), *mdoom* (physical beauty), *lengem* (clear, clean or brightness), *vough vough* (exactly, in accordance), *Tegh Tegh* (slowly), and *Lugh Lugh* (smoothly).

Girinya: an Evaluation

In application, *Iwanger* or *Wanger* in a dance form like *Girinya*, would refer to the execution of what is difficult and complex, smartly and with vigour to bring out its beauty. And for a dance to be considered 'brilliant' it must be guided by certain principles and techniques unique to the dance form and which enhances its uniformity and subsequently the appearance of the special skills embedded in the dance execution. The spectator finds the brilliant, not necessarily in the music or dance as a whole, but in the dancers' energy, vitality and gracefulness. This may be because, the Tiv believe that the human body is the vehicle for the transmission of vitality, energy and life through the medium of music found in the performance.

Writing about the concept of the brilliant, or *Iwanger* amongst the Tiv people, Faris says:

--- that which is clear is also brilliant. The Tiv have the strangely beautiful concept of a good dancer 'shooting darkness', i.e reducing the power of darkness and social heat by means of his shining aesthetic grace.³⁹

This concept of the dancer 'shooting darkness' is what Hagher referred to as *Wa ime*.⁴⁰ When a person is said to *vine amar* (do a dance), he is simply said to be involved in the creation of brilliance. The aesthetic grace could be seen at the beginning of the dance, when the *Tor Girinya* in regal shuffles, leads the dancers into the performance arena. Thus, when a dancer is said to *chagh ishool*, *shav ishool*, or *Kpiligh ishool* (dancing seriously and stylishly), it indicates the individual appeal of the dance entity and the degree of liveliness of the performance as displayed by that individual dancer. This liveliness in performance is one of the brilliance factors.

These are vitality, energy, power, and grace.⁴¹ These factors generally form the basis of Tiv dance aesthetics.

This shows that the aesthetic finds expression in art and the art, especially drama and theatre, finds expression in the human being through the medium of the body. That is, the body is an expressive embodiment of the emotive forces that find appeal in the human psyche.⁴² The expression of *Girinya* is found in the execution of the dance steps by the dancers and the various segments that make up the entire performance. The entrance of the *Girinya* dancers into the performance arena shows the *iwanger* (brilliance) of the *Girinya* dance form. With the *Girinya* dance, a single line or the serpentine formation is used for entrance before the dancers scatter round the performing arena, maintaining a loose circle formation so as to give every dancer enough space to move and dance '*sha agee*' or vigorously. It is this loose formation that allows the individual's skills to be appreciated and enables the spectators to see if the individual dancers are dancing *vough vough* (accordingly).

As a male dance, the *Girinya* requires a lot of energy, vitality, nimbleness and physical fitness. This is because the dance is carefully structured to convey the desired representational display of situations as in war, though the dance is now for mainly entertainment.

In *Girinya*, music dictates the dance phrases and the changes in action or pattern. For example, when the 'stalker' succeeds in 'beheading' his prey, the music changes tempo to reflect the celebrations that accompany victory. The music becomes lighter and faster.

Thus in this dance performance the dance and music complement each other. The music stimulates the emotions which are expressed in the movements of the dance.⁴³ The musical instruments, at any given time, dictate the pace, vitality and the energy the *Girinya* dance requires.

Mdoom (beauty) as an aesthetic quality means physical beauty or the appeal of a dance form as distinct from *iwanger*. *Mdoom* requires that the dancer *telegh ishool* (bend slowly and smoothly) *sha iceen* (with grace and pride) and be seen to excel in the execution of the dance. When the *Girinya* dancers engage in the dance of victory or of death (*amar a Kuur*), the individual's creativity and understanding are put to the test. The spectators are interested in seeing the *mdoom* of the dance, when the *Girinya* dancers *telegh ishool vough vough* (Dance accordingly) and seem to be involved and enjoying what they are doing. In this way, it is possible to

see the *iengem* (brightness or clarity) of the dance movements; whether it is performed *tegh tegh* (slowly, a common feature of feminine dances) or *sha agee* (with a lot of energy).

The *iengem* (brilliance or clear qualities) of *Girinya* therefore, would be found in the costuming and the execution of the dance. Dressed in vest, loincloth and holding sharp and dangerous looking machetes, the dancers try to re-create the image of a warrior. This adds to the beauty of the mimetic re-creations of war, skill and prowess. This is so, partly because *iengem* can be applied to

*...any singer, story-teller, dancer, orator or any person who carried the day by sheer presence or force of personality, irrespective of his or her skill and actual appearance.*⁴⁴

This goes to show that individual skills are appreciated in the *Girinya* dance form. The more creative the *Girinya* dancers are (to add styles not common to other dancers), the more they are seen to *engem* or *wa ime* (shoot darkness).

It is to be noted that, the *Girinya* is regarded as *amar a tswam* (dance of cruelty or viciousness) because of what inspired the dance form (war) and certain aspects (beheading) or requirements for the cult membership. This masculine quality (beheading) gives the *Girinya* dance its dynamics and the energy, vigour and vitality to enable the dancer dance *sha agee* and *vough vough*. Dynamics here refers to the ability or skills of the individual or group in executing a dance movement. And in achieving any dance's dynamics, the body becomes the main vehicle of execution.²⁹ The dynamics of *Girinya* dance thus show that an unhealthy person cannot participate. This is because *Girinya* dance, like war, requires flexibility, physical, spiritual and mental fitness and the stamina to endure. The *Girinya* dance is therefore dependent on its dynamics as a major value of expression.

Aesthetically, the dynamics and the general appeal of *Girinya* would be found in its purpose (the original concept of the dance), composition and dimension.

The composition of the *Girinya* dance is also very important. The composition is manifested in different forms; the entry, the positioning round the performance arena, dance movements, stalking, the celebrations and the overall pictorial feel of the performance. With the entry, it is only the *Tor Girinya* that can lead the performance. Behind the *Tor Girinya* comes the *Tor*

Tough (Chief of Staff) and they are followed by the other dancers. On entry, the dancers form a circle, with the *Tor Girinya* in the middle.

Dimension, on the other hand, carries with it elements of the human skills that help in the execution *vough vough* of a dance. It also helps the individual's display of skills and styles as he perceives it or as the music stirs his emotions.

Thus the composition and dimension of the *Girinya* dance are geared towards a singular purpose; to entertain while re-creating moments of glory and achievement. With this, the dancers achieve a collective purpose. The understanding of this collective purpose helps achieve the quality of *iengem*. The aesthetic quality of *iengem* adds colour and uniformity to the collective effort of re-creation; manifested in the dance proper. Though this collectivity is very important, the dimension and individual skills and ability add greatly to the aesthetic perception of the *Girinya* dance form. This can be seen when the individual is said to *Kpiligh ischool* or *chagh ischool* (skilful exhibition of a dance mode) *vough vough*. At this point, the dancer can be said to be displaying his aesthetic experience or understanding of the creation. The dance is then seen from the point of view of individual creativity and ability. Creativity and ability play great roles in the application of a dance form like *Girinya*. This is because no two warriors can possess the same skill, ability and stamina. Though the ultimate goal would be victory and to bring back heads, the approach would differ among individuals. For example, while some warriors might hop from tree to tree stalking their prey, others might walk straight into enemy view, then take a good run, then quickly hide and takes the closest pursuer. In other words, the *Girinya* dance gives room for individuality within a collective creativity.

However, it is music that enhances the *iengem* of *Girinya*. It does not only highlight the presence of 'formal' beauty, but helps in the understanding of certain aspects of the human experience and reality as it transports a person's mood and action to a higher plane of experience and feeling. Thus, music enhances the qualities of composition and dimension through the expressive vehicle (human being). This means that music does not exist in isolation from dance; and it is true that *music in Tiv does not exist solely for itself*⁴⁵. It has to contribute to a greater purpose - and every aspect of Tiv life⁴⁶ incorporates dance. This is why a warrior cult could also dance out its activities. This could also be explained in the light that,

*Dance affirms life, negates death and evil aspects of Tsav, demonstrates the enduring solidarity of lineages and strength, the discipline, the power of its young men and women who in marriage across lineage and clan lines will procreate and perpetuate the Tiv people*⁴⁷.

This is probably why dancing forms the greater part of *Lyaku-ji* (away flies). Dancing during such an occasion as death re-affirms life.

Every activity has a significant form,⁴⁸ that is, the activity is created out of the necessity of the time, its expressive purpose. In *Girinya* dance, the expressive purpose was to create a state of alertness and physical preparedness in the warriors. This is why *Girinya*, in its present form, tries to re-create or re-enact battle situations. This helps to establish, emphasise and constantly remind members of the society of their selfless duty to their fatherland. On the second level of the performance of *Girinya*, the purpose would be seen as a rite of passage, a mark of respect for a distinguished citizen. When this becomes the purpose, all dance movements and displays are geared towards the preparation of the deceased for a better life and a smooth transition to the world beyond (*mbakuv*).

Conclusion

The *Girinya* can best be appreciated and seen to carry with it the moral view of its environment. For example, the motif of clearing before the commencement of the *Girinya* performances shows the Tse-mker-Tiv people's acceptance of the existence of supernatural powers (*Tsav* and *akombo* in particular), good and bad. This is why the *Tor Girinya*, on behalf of all the dancers, seeks the protection of the good *adzov* (spirits) or *mbatarev* (owners of the land) to drive away evil spirits. Also, the whole stage of *lyaku-ji* is a purification rite. This serves to create harmony between the physical and the spiritual worlds and clear the passage for the deceased on his journey to the land of *mbakuv*.

In this way, the *Girinya* performance demonstrates a view of morality and social lore. In spite of being a dance, the *Girinya* conforms to the Tse-mker-Tiv people's sense of the decent, good and beautiful. Decency is seen in the composition of the *Girinya* dance. Though a war dance, when it is performed in public not all the examples of the actual occurrences in battle are displayed. But the dancer

has to convince the watching public that he is capable, thereby showing the good of his efforts. When this 'good' (individual creativity) is effectively displayed, the beauty of the dance manifests itself.

The *Girinya* dance is an effective and objectified⁴⁹ dance. That is, by watching, the spectators get involved in the dance and are its judges and critics. There are no restriction as to the age of the audience. However, care is taken not to influence the young into practicing 'beheading' one another! In watching the performance, the young are expected to appreciate only the beauty of the *Girinya* dance and the tricks the dancers use in out-doing one another.

Therefore, *Girinya* fulfills the aesthetic criteria of the Tiv people. The costumes and the dance itself are aesthetically effective. A people watching a haphazard dance cannot talk of appeal or the physical beauty of it. The Tiv refer to such disorder as *dang dang* and would not associate any moral, religious or aesthetic quality or value to it. To qualify as an aesthetic experience, the sum total of such an event must possess value and be seen to be *vough vough* or *Doo* (good). *Mdoom* therefore highlights co-ordination, order and appeal. The overall effect would thus convey the *iengem*, *iwanger* and *mdoom* of the *Girinya* dance.

The residual theatre, whose values keep changing as the social environment undergoes cultural and technological interaction and consequent changes, continues to be relevant. This relevance is found in the new role the theatre is assuming worldwide. This role is that of a motivator towards change in all aspects of social, economic, political and religious life. 🏠

NOTES

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