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THE TIV *INGYÔUGH* DANCE PERFORMANCE

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Abstract

Traditional dance is one of the oldest groups of art forms among the Tiv people. Despite its age, it is still enjoyed across the society, having a great audience appreciation and of course, participation. However, a pertinent challenge is that out of the dozens of dances performed in Tivland, only an insignificant number of them have literatures about them and worst of it all is that they are not documented in visual forms (photography and video). This research is based on data gathered through interactive focus group discussion (FGD) by the author. This was after a visual documentation exercise of the Tiv *Ingyôugh* dance put together as a documentary film. The paper is designed to provide some written literature on this traditional dance as one indigenous performance that has truly documented a traditional practice in Tiv society. The paper concludes that without the *Ingyôugh* dance performance, majority of present day Tiv people alive would not know that there was a kwashiorkor epidemic in Tivland in the past.

Key Words: *Ingyôugh*-Dance, performance, aesthetics, indigenous performance, culture

Introduction

Every culture of a people contains pockets of aesthetics of its life, experiences, history and worldview of such a society. These variations reflect peculiar attitudes, behaviours, norms, values and idiosyncrasies of that community. The realization of this reality has spurred this researcher to embark on series of documentary films to capture these values and idiosyncrasies that can still be found in Tiv culture.

Growing up as a young boy in Tivland, one saw that almost every major family had a group of dancers or a bard that was there to orally document, entertain, educate and comment on current happenings within the environment. At present however, these cultural practices are fast disappearing. If some of these practices are not documented now, our children will not have their cultural history to tell or build upon. It is towards this step that this work is designed to remedy the situation.

The plan for this series of project is simple. In my handling of courses like "Theatre and Home Video Production", "Indigenous Dramaturgy" and "Film Production", I employ the Theatre for Development (TFD) approach to enter a community where a traditional-dance still exist. After the preliminary entry steps of visiting the environment, talking to people, taking permission for the interaction etc, a day is fixed for inter-group rehearsals and another day fixed for performance. As the performance is going on, film students record it. During this same interaction, questions are asked and a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) is held.

This paper is therefore a product of such an outing. This took place in Awajir, Konshisha LGA of Benue State, in February 2015. This principle and practice is guided by theoretical postulations of famous scholars of the Arts discipline one of which is what Fodeba Keita (cited in Dories Green 13) says about African dance:

> African dance is not detached from the lives of the people but it is a spontaneous emanation of the people. African dance translates everyday experience into movement; these include happenings or events in their lives which they choose to remember. The event could be of great historical significance, such as war, and the independence of African nation of everyday significance such as birth, puberty or the pounding of maize to make meal. African tradition demonstrates that dance can be a significant psycho –social device able to penetrate many aspects of human existence. It is in this vein that Robert Nicholls notes that for the Africans, "dance is a mode of communication which utilizes gestures and movements to convey information and as such is a major educational vehicle" (47).

The above presentation has given us a background to appreciate the *Ingyôugh* dance, not only as a dance but as a Tiv theatre that truly appeals to the emotions of the audience with its rhythmic dance.

The Origin of *Ingyôugh* Dance in Tivland

Ingyôugh is one of the Tiv traditional dances that has gained international recognition. It was first performed

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by the Awajir group who featured at the Negro Festival in Darkar, Senegal, in 1964, as well as other national festivals. The dance is a satire of the kwashiorkor epidemic that engulfed Tivland in the 1920s.

The origin of the dance is traced to *Iharev* clan in present Guma Local Government Area of Benue State. During a Focus Group Discussion (FGD), Azege Gbamjir, who is the present leader of the troupe states that Jua Igbe in his sojourn brought back the dance in 1950 to Awajir community in Konshisha Local Government Area. While the original dance was called *Shav,* Jua Igbe called his version of the dance, *Ingyôugh* since *Ingyôugh* (Kwashiorkor) had lavished Tivland and there were still many people that were left deformed because of the disease. According to this source, Jua Igbe, on his return from Ihyarev started a troupe with some able-bodied young men that were interested in the new dance as well as some of the survivors of the epidemic that needed to be re-integrated into "normal" activities of the land. The young dancers would dance vigorously and at a given signal, suddenly start mimicking the different deformities that were common among the survivors of kwashiorkor. Even though this was humorous, the troupe had a rule that the audience must not laugh at the deformities displayed. Anyone who was caught laughing was said to have violated the rule, "*gba tia*", and had to appease (*wam*) the dancers, with some money. This sent the message to all members of the Tiv society that it is wrong to laugh at a deformed person, and it still an understanding practiced in Tiv society.

Theoretical Framework

Theories are set of ideas and propositions which have been proven to explain or analyse phenomenon. According to Asan Andrew Ate, "…Theories describe the relationship between the media and the society. Theories are dynamic and are subject to change depending on certain variables" (2). This then accounts to the postulations of different theories by experts at different times. Consequently, this paper utilizes two theories: the social responsibility theory and the social realism theory.

The social responsible theory falls under the normative theory of mass media. It buttresses discourses on folkmedia which adequately covers Ingyôugh dance under consideration in this paper. The normative theory ties the operation of the mass media to the political environment in which the media operates. According to Daramola in Asan, "the basic assumption of normative theories is that the mass media reflect and are conditioned by the nature of society in which they operate". Social responsibility in particular then stipulates that emphasis should be placed on social and moral responsibility of the people. The theory places emphasis on the moral and social responsibilities of people and institutions which operate the mass media. Scholars like Siebert et al (1954), Kunzick (1988), McQuail (1987) cited by Folarin outlines the basic tenets of social responsibility theory as follows:

1. To serve the political system by making information of public affairs generally accessible.
2. To protect the rights of the individual by acting as watch dog over the government.
3. To serve the economic system.
4. To provide good entertainment (7)

It is in the light of the Ingyôugh dance making information of kwashiorkor public and accessible, protecting the rights of the individual (by preventing stigma) and providing good entertainment that this paper adopts the social responsibility theory as one of the theoretical framework for this paper.

The second theory of interest in our work is the social realism theory. According to Adeyemi Oluwadamilare Oresanya, social realism is the exposition of the sociocultural, sociopolitical and socioeconomic challenges in the society which are reflected in a work of art. In Ingyôugh, the exposition of the kwashiorkor epidemic is adequately exposed in all its ramifications which include the disease, its effects of the body as well as the stigmatization it had on the survivors of the disease. This qualifies the artists of the Ingyôugh dance as realists. Oresanya cites Brockett and Ball (2011) as saying realists are people that are grounded in scientific outlook; they express the need to understand human behavior in terms of natural cause and effect (p. 147). According to Oresanya, social realism can also be described as:

> a cerebral and a rational mode of probing into the nature and function of society, its various institutions and traditions, and their functioning. Social realism therefore is an unusual effort of discernment and apprehension of social life and scholars perceive it as an intellectual penetration of social process (269).

In social realism, one cannot underestimate the values of the individual, social and cultural changes in all the spheres of life with their intricacies, and nuances: such as facts relating to family, class, marriage, politics, economy, morality, religion and educational standards. Apart from looking at social realism in the work of the creators of Ingyôugh, the documentation and the presentation of the Ingyôugh dance as a documentary film could be viewed from this theoretical perspective as well.

Picture 1 *Ingyôugh* Drummers using their drums as seats. Source: *Ingyôugh* Dance: A documentary Film by Don S. Iorngurum.

The Performance of *Ingyôugh* Dance

The *Ingyôugh* dance is usually performed in a typical arena form, i.e. in a circle with the drummers in the middle or beside the circle. A typical performance of *Ingyôugh* begins when the drummers take their position in the arena. The drummers carry two drums each and use the drums as their seats throughout the performance period.

The *Ingyôugh* dance is performed basically by males; with the strike of the drum, the dancers enter in a single file forming a circle. Once in a circle the lead dancer ushers in a song and the dancers respond. This is a signal 'to dance the dance'.

The dancers come with the entry song as they stamp their feet vigorously shaking their bodies and as the music transcends and the song changes, they begin to move their bodies in different postures as if they are disabled until the song changes to the next one.

At the climax of the dance, the dancers transform into kwashiorkor-like postures commemorating the kwashiorkor epidemic that infested Tivland during the colonial days.

Basically there are two major movements in *Ingyôugh* dance which include the vigorous shaking of the body, and then the distortion, which are all repeated until the group dances out.

Ingyôugh dance has therefore remained one of the most popular indigenous dances of the Tiv people. The dance is essentially metaphorical hence it is both abstract and mimetic. Iyorwuese Hagher describes it as:

> A vigorous men's dance that entails several body distortions as dancers dance while keeping beat to music, suddenly seem to throw all their limps in disarray, the face is distorted with eyes sunk, nose dilated and tongue limply hanging from the mouth, hands and held out of stiff angles to body, the stomach is swollen and made to the extent of unusual angles to the body; the effect of these dances is as if they were walking corpses. (37)

As indicated above, there are communicative sign systems that involve the actor's use of his body as a tool to express meaning. It involves the creative use of his facial

Picture 2 The Entry Step of *Ingyôugh* Dance. Source: *Ingyôugh* Dance: A documentary Film by Don S. Iorngurum.

Picture 3 The semi-circular formation that eventually turns into a circle. Source: *Ingyôugh* Dance: A Documentary Film by Don S. Iorngurum.

Picture 4 Features-distortion at the climax of *Ingyôugh* Dance.
Source: *Ingyôugh* Dance: A documentary Film by Don S. Iorngurum.

expressions, movement in space, proxemics and gestures, body language and other forms of activities involving the dancer's relationship to his environment in order to pass across a message. Dance features prominently as a cultural signifier with a lot of social/religious messages seeking to interpret the world view and cosmological values of the Tiv people. Dance is a technical and essential aspect of theatre; through dance performers adapt intelligently their bodies to the rhythmic pattern. Through this serious concentration, meanings are conveyed to the audience. This is understood when the audience pay much attention to the dance expression, atmosphere or mood and movement on stage. Ogbonna asserts that;

> Dance as an aspect of human communication is more logical, technical and efficient when members of the chorus reduce their clients, songs and other verbal expressions or almost all the dialogue to mime. In mime, verbal expressions or all of the dialogue presented are reduced to conventions or symbols and body language with utilization of signs (Doki iii).

Most of the movements in this dance are scientifically relevant and capable of generating codes which are shared and understood between the performers, audience and the host community. The dance has peculiar steps which define it as a protest dance. The dance movements are vigorously symbolic of protest and insubordination, as the dancers stamp their feet, shaking their body and heads in disagreement to the sickness that befalls them. As they begin the distortion of the body iconizing the small pox epidemic as was the situation at that time, swelling their stomachs, shrinking their necks with tongues sticking out looking almost like walking corpses to resemble what the people were going through.

Aesthetics of *Ingyôugh* Dance

COSTUME: Costume in dance facilitates aesthetic beauty and communicates a message or meaning as well as interprets mood, situation and events. Though costumes do not speak verbally, they communicate non-verbally. Most costumes are culturally bound in such a way that when wrongly used, contradict perception and meaning. The costumes used in *Ingyôugh* are very simple and not elaborate as they are mostly very scanty. Dancers come in bare-chested as their tops. On their waists, they wear knickers. This scanty costume shows the level of poverty of the time. The caps of the dancers, *Idyer Agbum,* are adorned with snail shells.

PROPS**:** Props refers to all properties that are used during a performance or a production. These items include furniture, hand-held items, and other items that

are found within the vicinity of performance or on the body of the actor or performer. In *Ingyôugh* dance, the following props are noticed on the dancers: Armlet called *Akpagher*, Rattles called *Gbesa*, Cat Skin-Bag called *Ikpa-Mbusu* and the Horse-tail called *Tsa-Nyinya*. All these props have meanings attached to their use. The armlet, for instance is a symbol of spiritual involvement with certain rites. *Gbesa* provides extra musical notes according to the movements of the performer. The cat skin bag called *Ikpa Mbusu*, which is held in the hand signify the fact that despite our smartness in live, death is inevitable. Another prop that is very important is the horse tail; this adds beauty but shows the strength that comes from the horse as an animal.

Picture 5 Costume of *Ingyôugh* Dancers: Bare-Chest, Short-knickers, *Idyer-Agbum* Caps, decorated with Snail Shells.

Picture 6/7 - *Idyer Agbum*-Cap and a dancer in full costume and props

Picture 8 - Cat-Skin Bag (*Ikpa-Mbusu*) and Horse- tail (*Tsa-Nyinya*) used by *Ingyôugh* Dancers.
Source: *Ingyôugh* Dance (a documentary film) by Don S. Iorngurum.

MAKE-UP: Make-up is used in *Ingyôugh* dance as they paint their bare chest with wet ash and their whole body to be precise and cover themselves in dirt which makes the dancers look very black and dirty (see chalk patterns on dancers face, shoulders and tummies in picture 5). *Ingyôugh* dance have meaning and significance to the entire Tiv community, *Ingyôugh* exhibits imitation of human experience through an effective combination of music virtual, mime, makeup and costume.

Picture 9 - Rattles (*Gbesa).*

MUSIC: Music (*ityoulov)* is described by the Tiv as "the total combination of the various musical instruments and the rhythmic sounds they produce". According to Hagher, dance (*Amar)* in Tiv culture can be defined as:

> … Rhythmic and patterned movements performed in accompaniment of *ityoulov* (music) in different styles and manners for different social economic or political events and occasions, expressing in numeric or symbolic manner the cosmology and ideas of the Tiv society. (62)

It is implicit from the above perspective that to the Tiv, music and dance go hand in hand, an inseparable activity. Thus, the *Ingyôugh* dance cannot be said to exist independently of the Ingyôr music.

Igoil maintains that dance and music is a dynamic phenomenon in Tiv culture as the music functions to bring out dance; there is no dancing without music in Tivland (1). Dance to the Tiv is a noble art form and good dancers are accorded respect. For the Tiv man dance is used for a variety of purposes such as an outlet for physical and emotional release, historical documentation, an agent of political expression, as rite of passage and an avenue to let off steam or to resolve health or social challenges as in the genre of the *Ingyôugh* dance.

MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS: *Ingyôugh* performance is comprised of *Nom Gbande* (male drum or big drum), *Ngô Gbande* and *Ichôrogh Gbande* (female drum and small drum) and *Kwen* (gong). The whistle is also used as part of the musical instruments. The combination of these instruments gives sharp and fast rhythm.

This probably accounts for the vigorous and intensive body movement and distortion by the dancers. The musicians are controlled by the *Tor Ishor* (dance leader). The musicians in turn control the dancers.

The group leader blows his whistle on pre-arranged signals and the tempo of the music changes. He does the same thing when he wants a certain cadence to end.

INGYÔUGH SONGS: *Ingyôugh* dance songs are very short songs with very high tempo and fast rendition. It looks as if the song composers themselves are aware that spectators are normally more interested in action than songs they compose.

The *Ingyôugh* major songs are:

Tiv
Er yaaya er yaaya
Er on mba *Ingyôugh* ne va ve (2x)
Shoja va er ishol shin tembe
Ior a hembe ayem (2x)
Mor gbor, gbor gbing.

Literary translated as thus:
Let's celebrate

Let's celebrate
The *Ingyôugh* children are here(2x)
The soliders will dance in the market place
And the people will take to their heels.
Distend your stomach (2x)

The song shows how the Tiv people were suffering from the kwashiorkor disease that affected the Tiv people in 1920s, the song is short and to the point as the song dies down, the dancers then begin to take their various deformities to show the effect of the sickness when it manifest on people.

Tiv
Ayaa ya ooo Kpe hide ooo
Ooo Kpe
Ayaaya mimi ya Kpeke vihi or
Ooo Kpe
Ooo aye aye Kpeke
Kpeke va ve
Kpeke vihi gema zwa
Aye Kpeke er Kpeke va ve
Kpeke ooo aye
Aye Kpeke vihi gema zwa
Me Kpeke vihi gema zwa
Aye Kpeke, ooo Kpeke va ve.

Literally translated as thus:
There is excitement ooo kpe is back ooo
Ooooh kpe
There is excitement it is true that kpeke is so ugly
Oooh kpe
Oooh Aye, aye kpeke
Kpeke has come
Kpeke is so ugly with a twisted mouth
Aye Kpeke eee Kpeke has come
Kpeke ooo aye
Aye Kpeke ooo, Kpeke has come
Kpeke is so ugly with a twisted mouth
Aye Kpeke ooo Kpeke has come.

In *Ingyôugh* dance, this song is a dramatic song during the time of the performance when dancers emerge and entre the arena stage with various forms of deformities, dancing according to the rhythm of the music. In this song, the name Kpeke is the name of the dancer among them, who wears an ugly face with a deformed mouth which is captured in the song. The song explains the seriousness of how Kpeke is very ugly, which is being shown in the dance formation which makes it more dramatic, the deformities in this song depict deformities such as; swollen stomach, limply arms e.t.c.

Conclusion:

In the contemporary era, the *Ingyôugh* group studied here has performed in social gatherings and important festivals. Some of the aesthetic qualities of the dance may be seen by mainly watching the dance while others may be seen by critically studying the dance. One beauty of the dance is the flexibility and the distortion by the dancers. To the Tiv people, the ability to dance as though there are no bones in the body can qualify a good dancer and is highly appreciated thus the dancers of *Ingyôugh* dance must be flexible to really have an appreciated performance. The individual dancer's flexibility otherwise called individual free interpretation or ingenuity also allows for easy learning of free movements that are a necessary ingredient in dance performances in general. The agility of the dancers is another aesthetic which is a very important aspect of the dance.

The Tiv use music and dance to express various emotions. There are dances for funeral occasions, dances that record historical events, and there are dances and songs for marriage ceremonies. There are also dances that are choreographed for special ceremonial occasions like the society rite called *Ivom.* The attainment of nobility or *shagba* by buying a horse, building a house, acquiring a traditional title etc. Music and dance are not only a recreational activity in Tivland, but as fundamental phenomena since they permeate all aspect of Tiv life. Most importantly, *Ingyôugh* dance orchestrates a lot of values that are imperative in communication. It discusses in its songs, issues of great significance to the socio-political and economic development of Tiv society. *Ingyôugh* dance, like all Tiv dances employs numerous songs that are related in meaning are all used to communicate issues of concern.

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