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THEATRE AND NATIONAL IDENTITY: THE CASE OF *KWAG-HIR* OF TIVLAND

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Abstract

A number of studies in national theatrical discourse have focused on the elements and forms of theatre and its performance as well as comparative discussion of differences in similar and dissimilar theatrical traditions across cultures and nations. Several of these investigations centre on other national and theatrical concerns without addressing the roles these forms play in reinforcing national identity and without necessarily focusing on the substantial potentials inherent in the forms in identifying a people's identity and promoting and preserving the same. There were four objectives that necessitated the inquisition into this study. The first was to bring to the fore the exemplary manner in which the Tiv nation of Nigeria sustained its identity as an ethnic group among several other colonially created states. The second was to establish that the Tiv were able to achieve this through the celebration, sustenance and preservation of *Kwag-hir*, one of the surviving and indigenous theatrical puppetry traditions in Nigeria. The third was to establish that fostering a strong national identity enhances a nation, not only in the political sense but culturally, validating the value systems which are inherent in the traditions of peoples, promoting relations; cross-national, cross-cultural and international which will enhance the unity of Nigeria irrespective of the number of ethnic groups it is made up of. The fourth was to examine how *Kwag-hir* binds together Tiv

identity; the structure and organisation which encapsulate Tiv cosmology, driving belief, behaviour, to the upholding of Tiv ideals. The study engaged concepts on identity in a descriptive and explicative analysis of the Tiv theatre, centring on puppetry (*Kwag-hir*), a principal and a core cultural theme which in several ways reveal the underlying driving belief, behaviour and consistent political and cultural posture of the Tiv. Findings reveal that the informed consciousness that enhanced the resistance of the Tiv to political and religious manouvings remains the underlying tenets of *Kwag-hir* theatre. This impenetrable posture that signifies Tiv identity marks them out among several other ethnic groups.

Keywords: National Identity, Kwag-hir Theatre, Puppetry, Sculpture, Archetypal symbols

1. Introduction

Ethnographical data reveal that most ethnic groups in Nigeria and in most parts of Africa have continued to undergo identity crises. This state of psychological confusion is engendered by inability of individuals and ethnic groups to mentally reconcile conflicting aspects of their individuality and the challenges of nationhood in the 21st Century. The Tiv of Nigeria, are a part of the 'nations' that were forcefully brought together to make up the Nigerian nation. Nigeria has since its creation made frantic efforts at becoming a nation or a state. According to Mazrui *et al* (1993), Nigeria is one of the several colonially created states struggling to attain coherent nationhood (435). Most ex-colonial African states were amalgamated by imperialists because of colonial interests and even in contemporary times only a few of the peoples in the resultant nation-states share cultural commonality or a shared sense of identity.

Post colonial Nigeria continues to struggle with identity crises, and for decades struggles for political emancipation have clashed with, and overwhelmed the cultural rebirth and search and realization of a much desired national identity. Evolving a national identity is a vital tool for fostering peace, political maturity, financial stability, and ethnic tolerance in a nation, particularly a multi-ethnic and multicultural nation. This has been hard to attain in Nigeria, a nation famed to be

Africa's most populous nation with outstanding human resources and potentials (Aguoru, 2011:28).

Various studies have revealed that Nigeria is a conglomeration of between 250 and 400 ethnic groups (Benson 2001, Bulhaya 2007). As a result of this ethnic configuration, there have been unavoidable ethnic tensions arising from power sharing tussles. Some of these have broken up in civil wars, insurgencies and insurrection amongst the ethnic groups. This creates further diversities and distrust among the ethnicities which are consistently wary of each other's intentions: be it political, linguistic, cultural and so forth. Nigeria can best be described as a nation of nations because each of the ethnic groups meets the criteria and definition of nations. Ogundele's (1995) description of a 'natio' is germane to this study. In his perception, a 'natio' is a local community and a domiciled family that is both cultural and political in its formation and which questions the rationale behind arbitrariness in chunking together amorphous entities in the creation of state (115). Nigeria may parsimoniously be described as a nation of natioes or nations.

2. Ideologies on Identity; Self Identity, Group Identity and National Identity

Identity salience has become preponderant in discourses inquiring into peculiarities based on nations, nationalities and national identity. Identity is popularly perceived as a general theory that defines the self, therefore national identity can be described as an omnibus theory, perception and perspectives that are engaged in defining the self, a group, groups, ethnicities and other social and even professional elements that may bind people and peoples together.

According to scholars, theoretical constructs emanating from discourses of national identity have been erected around the concept that certain distinct elements mark out a culture and make the same adaptable to other cultures and that the totality of these elements constitute its national identity (Clark, 1990; Huntington, 1997; Keillor and Hult, 1999). The idea of this framework already predisposes a set of distinct elements that distinguish as well as set apart its culture and behaviour which is applicable to all peoples and enables it to exist and also defines its identity as a nation. Keillor and Hult's (1999) essay on a five-country study of national identity implications for international marketing research and practice centres on the implications of an

“extremely strong” national identity or “extremely weak” national identity in a global economy.

Keillor and Hult (1999) define identity in terms of its subcomponents, the function it serves, societal indices which define the unique characteristics of an identity of a given culture’s identity and the usefulness of all the concepts to the operations of the international market. In all, we understand that national identity is ‘the extent to which a given culture recognizes and identifies with its unique characteristics’ or its ‘... sense of culture’. Keillor and Hult (1999) conclude that countries with extremely strong national identity invariably control the global economy.

The Tiv of Nigeria engage the self and social identity in empowering the Tiv identity. The population of the Tiv folk is about five million and they dominate central Nigeria spreading across Taraba, Nassarawa, Plateau and Benue states of Nigeria. The nation’s distinct national and theatrical identity is captured succinctly in Aguoru’s words:

The inhabitants of Tiv land claim to have a separate cultural identity irrespective of being geographically located in the Northern region of the country. These people fiercely refused the ploy of the Hausa/Fulani *nations* to subjugate them culturally, politically and to forcefully indoctrinate them into the Islamic religion that had become the religion of the North (2011:54).

This view is further reinforced by statements on the posture of the Tiv nation on the crises in Nigeria made by Paul Iyorpuu Unongo President-General, Tiv Progressive Movement, National President, Middle-Belt Association and Former Minister of Mines, Power and Steel Development. The posture of the Tiv is germane to this study because it lends to the discourse various perspectives about the way the Tiv nation perceives itself within the nation Nigeria and the Tiv intervention in the conflicts that led to crises time and again in Nigeria. In the year 2013, Unongo categorically spoke on the Tiv perception and posture to the prevailing circumstances in Nigeria in a prearranged press briefing. He said:

I address you today on behalf of the Tiv people of Nigeria, after successfully holding an emergency meeting of the Tiv-Nation, under the auspices of the TIV PROGRESSIVE MOVEMENT, on Tuesday, 18th April, 2000, in Gboko, the traditional capital of the over 8 million Tiv people spread across all over the states of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Far-reaching decisions were taken at the meeting concerning topical issues of interest to the nation-state of Nigeria. The meeting empowered the leadership of the Tiv Progressive Movement to make the position of the Tiv-Nation public, canvas for its stand and generally inform all Tiv leaders of commerce, politics and all other endeavours, to rally support for the principled stance of the Tiv-Nation, wishing never to be pushed aside, or be misrepresented ever again in this country (Paul Iyorpuu Unongo, November 5, 2013).

One observes in this press conference that the Tiv leader consistently refer to his people as a nation - Tiv-Nation- and suggests that just like in times past when they had to resist political and religious subjugation, that they had inklings and can ‘...discern thick clouds of uncertainty, suspicion, fears and anxieties...’ There were suspicions that ‘... dangerous, disturbing consequential posturing, by all significant ethnic groups of this country...’ may take over (Unongo 2013). The concern thus made it imperative for the Tiv Progressive Movement to clearly state the position of the Tiv people on the crises in the Nigerian nation state. Here we see the distinct individualism of a nation within a nation whose identity is threatened by many factors defining and redefining its posture and stand in a place where it should be marginalized.

From the Tiv migratory legend, the Tiv’s population had exploded and this necessitated migration from Central Africa, a place of bliss that is regarded as ‘Tiv nirvana’ to the middle belt area of Nigeria (Aguoru 2011). At this point, Swem Karagbe, as their homeland in Central Africa is called, is a mountainous terrain that is still venerated by the Tiv community. The Tivs are traditionally farmers and the peoples and terrain they inhabit are known as the food basket of

Nigeria because of the volume of food and fruits produced by the Tiv people (Bohannan, P & L 1953, Enem 1981 & Hagher, 2003:24).

The population explosion which necessitated the migration of the Tiv from Central Africa, in the first instance, remains in their favour because they consider themselves and are regarded as the 'Leader nation' in the Middle-Belt region of Nigeria by their sheer number. The Tiv nation through their leader express their non-conformist posture and assertiveness as a people. He declares the audacity, on their part, to insist on the Tiv identity, to make declarations on the posture of other nationalities particularly on their insistence on the indissolubility of the Nigerian nation state and its nationalities on the basis of the numerous lives sacrificed by all the nationalities on the platform of the Nigerian Civil War. He expresses their objections to the injustice of Sharia, to shun the arrogance and bias of the North and commend the fairness of the Olusegun Obasanjo-led regime in appointing Middle-Beltans into political positions usually reserved for the northerners, and the predictably sharp reaction of the North are pointers to the resoluteness of the Tiv nation.

Unongo (2013) harps on these points in the press conference and categorically states:

The Tiv-Nation notes, that right from the inception of the Government of President Obasanjo, the President showed, through his disposition and policy posture, that he was disposed to making the people of Tiv and their brothers of the Middle-Belt, forget the incomprehensible marginalization of the past ...This singular act, created a favourable impression, and boosted the morale, the hopes, the aspirations and expectations of the Tiv people and the people of the Middle-Belt. We were really excited and openly wondered if indeed, we were truly on the verge of entering a new era, an era where our people and our land, would no longer be sidelined, neglected and humiliated (2013).

In his words, it was apparent that 'Nigeria and all lovers of Nigeria applauded this "bold, dangerous" move as absolutely essential for

Nigeria's survival as a democracy' (Unongo, 2013). The Middle-Belt and its peoples rejoiced while '...brimstone, hailstones, fire, and earthquakes thundered from our brothers of the Hausa-Fulani North against Obasanjo and the appointments (2013). It appeared that for the first time the North was willing to agree that the Middle-Belt nationalities were not descendants of the Hausa-Fulani but were offspring of '...the sons of the natives of the Middle-Beltan States...' (2013). Unongo notes that the fury of the North was directed at the President whom they had supported in winning the election for '...daring to appoint Middle-Belters, to the positions, for which they were eminently better qualified, better suited... (2013)'. The role of the Tiv theatre in defining and maintaining this staunch Tiv identity is the kennel of this paper, its overwhelming strategic success is the point this article articulates.

3. Theatre and National Identity in Tivland

It is not needless to reiterate that the Tiv of Nigeria is a nation with a strong and dominant ethnic identity and that its disposition as a nation within the Nigerian nation distinguishes it amongst several ethnic groups. The theatre of the Tiv people, as evident in the example of *Kwagh-hir*, is an aspect of their identity which reflects their core ethnic values. This theatrical form emerges, time and again, as a tool of ethnicity and nationhood in Tivland. It serves as a theatre of mobilization, self-realization, and preservation of traditional arts; specifically sculpture, carving, masquerading. It also serves as a medium of unification, wealth creation and technological and religious conscientization. A dominant factor that controls the world view and ideology of the Tiv people is their religion (Akpagher, 1994). So distinct is the Tiv religious ideology and understanding that it has been a valuable tool of resistance against the religious incursion of the Hausa/Fulanis. The Tiv religious ideology is captured succinctly in Hager's words:

It is no exaggerations to say the Tiv people have no festivals...where the sacred and the profane meet together...the Tiv have a different concept of the 'supernatural'. To the Tiv, the supernatural is not in the presence of the *Adov* spirits...but...the

circumference of his commonly held views about the composition of his world (1987:3).

Like other art forms, it is clear that the Tiv religion has expression in its arts: performing arts, dance, music, puppetry and masquerading and creative arts: sculpture, carving and painting. Bamidele (2000) asserts that ethnographic findings attest to the fact that literature, particularly drama, is invaluable in gathering information about peoples or understanding their cultural ideologies.

Several studies have also revealed that identities of peoples have been and can be preserved if their theatrical arts are held in high esteem, enjoy consistent patronage and are preserved. It has been observed that several nations like United States, Japan, Sweden, Hong Kong, and Mexico have consistently pursued a tradition of preservation of the theatrical arts as National arts and treasures. Notably, some of these countries have 'extremely strong' national Identities which strengthen the economy, culture and organisational structures of such countries. Nations with long history of preservation of theatrical arts and artefacts like Japan are worth emulating. Identity elements such as: the culture, history, politics and social/religious ideologies of Japan can be garnered from their performing arts and it remains a strong and binding factor in the Japanese national identity. Studies in the most dominant theatrical form of the Tiv, the *Kwagh-hir*, reveal that it is a composite art form made up of distinct performances and forms of creative art with socio-political significances. For instance, the *Nyambuan* performance – a form that predates *Kwagh-hir* – is a performance with intense social, political implications that sought to re-establish order through cathartic performances aimed at restoring the cultural disruptions created by the negatively intrusive colonial structures imposed on the Tiv folk. The performance took the form of a celebration, with music players and dancers forming the major aspect of the performance which was based on rituals. *Nyambuan* literally means 'The meat is gone bad' and it was a slogan and movement targeted at demystifying the *Mbatsav*¹.

The *Nyambuan* revolt was also partly targeted towards the abolition of the Tiv exchange marriages which made the youth dependent on the elders who provided the wards with whom the exchange marriages were contracted. The Tiv *Nyambuan* theatre was a

theatrical response that opposed and challenged the status quo. The imperialist response to the performances confirms the significance of the theatre to both the oppressor and the oppressed. Accounts of the massive arrests and unlawful detention of the players reinforces the sociological impact the theatre had. Suffice to say, it was a successful enterprise which satirised the prevailing political and religious imperialism on one hand and it re-established political and social harmony among the Tiv on the other. Tiv performing arts, as earlier stated, consists of storytelling, puppetry, music, dance, masquerading, dramatization and poetry. *Kwagh-hir*, the emergent representative theatrical identity of the Tivs, comprises these forms which are as old as the peoples. Puppetry is perhaps the most outstanding feature of *Kwagh-hir* and this study takes its bearing from the philosophy and significance of this art.

4. Sculpting and the Spiritual and Metaphorical Symbols of the Tiv

Amongst the Tiv, the sculptor *Or gban akaa*, is regarded as the director and playwright. The sculptor, based on his ingenuity, sense of complexity and knack for completion, is commissioned to either produce an entire range of puppets, masks and props for a new group or to add new puppets or concepts, animate or inanimate to the existing ones in the theatrical group. If the sculptor is to undertake creating an entire repertoire for a new *kwagh-hir* group, he would become resident in the community where he has been commissioned. Negotiation for payment for his services will include accommodation, a farm land, farm hands as well as financial remuneration. In one of the cases documented by Hagher (2003), a certain sculptor had resided in a community for three years and after the group that engaged his services was commissioned he stayed on for another 15 years (104). The importance Tivs attach to sculpting and the sculptor is metaphorical and symbolic of the Tiv world view. The sculptor practically roams through the forest identifying and cutting the best type of wood for the work. Tree spirits and other spirits that inhabit the forest and the trees are elements of universal and archetypal phenomenon. The Tiv presume that the *Adzor* inhabit the forests and the sculptor communes with them and receives illumination from the spirits for the benefit of mankind. This process of Tiv creativity is conceived in terms of travel in limitless inner space through the concentration of the mind. It is this

limitless galaxy of the imagination, which is the alternate world of human reality that the sculptor visits (105).

In essence, every new mask and every new puppet is celebrated as a successful representation of an encounter with the mystery of the *Adzov* world, therefore the sculptor is celebrated, considering the fact that only the sculptor can undertake such daring ventures and remain unhurt. The sculptor's process of creativity is highly rated as thorough and complete; such as one who is assumed to have the wherewithal to translate the intangible spiritual and imaginative world to concreteness. The audience suspends their disbelief to accept the illusionistic portrayal and personification of the *Ijov*, the head spring of Tiv creativity, which is translated in the sculptor's art. The sculptor is the agent of the semiotic transfer and transportation, performing this role as an artist. As a performer and craftsman, he excogitates technological manipulations through which he gives life to the puppets and masks. The hallmark of this craftsmanship is the actualization of the multisided communications that transpire between the creations, the society (the audience) and the spiritual metaphors yet unravelled.

5. Puppets and Puppeting as Ethno-Identity in Tivland

The significance of the puppets in Tiv land can be traced to its use in the earliest times in Tiv history. *Ab initio* the puppets were used for religious worship and rituals. For instance, the *Akombo* figures had the capability of regulating human activity and had the wherewithal to punish violators of social ethics (Hagher, 2003:108).

The *Imborivungu* emblem made of the human femur bone was carved to the form of a human head with all the features and these emblems were assured to have more potent powers than the *Akombo*, other puppets in this category include the *amboravungu*, *ibiamagh* and *atsuku* figurines. The *wuna akombo*, a place where all figurines are kept, is designed like a theatrical stage. The overall effect of the setting and the puppets create scenic atmospheres symbolic of the essence of the highest *Akombo* ritual (Hagher, 2003:108). There are other puppets apart from the inanimate and animal puppets in the *kwagh-hir* repertoire that reinforce Tiv nationalism.

6. Representation of Archetypal Symbols, Elements and Character-types in *Kwagh-hir*

The employment of distinct character-types is an enhancive element of the episodic and *staccatissimo* plot structure of *Kwagh-hir*. Portraits of ancestral characters who are the archetypal patriarchs of the Tiv ancestry are held in high esteem in the *Kwagh-hir* repertoire. The oldest of the patriarchs, Takurundu, is the father of Tiv who migrated from Swem Karagbe, Central Africa to the location the Tiv inhabit now. This migratory legend is a dominant play in the repertoire of most *Kwagh-hir* groups. The ancient puppets in this play portray the lifestyle, values and customs of the Tiv. Takurundu, the father of Tiv and Tiv are prominent characters in this play. The portrayal of Yion, the father of the Mbayion people is also a recurrent pattern in the ancestral archetype (Aguoru 2011). Recurrent symbols and elements that characterise the Tiv identity are portrayed in the play, for instance; the costume is typically Tiv, particularly the Tiv traditional outfit, *anger* - a stripped white and black attire woven and used by the Tiv peoples - the Tiv bag (*Ikpa abor atar*), and smoked pipes. The facial expressions of the characters which reflect approval or disapproval when actions are on-going are also crucial to delineating the Tiv identity (Aguoru 2011).

Other representative archetypal character-types include the supernatural characters portrayed in *Ber Awuna*² and *Bar Adzov* plays. The setting and characterization in the plays are archetypal portraits and imagery of mythical and supernatural characters, settings and occurrences particularly the mer-folk that dwell in the waters. Ber Awuna River in the non-illusionistic terms itself is a supernatural representation of the spiritual world underwater. The place and setting of the play is a portrayal of the supernatural space inhabited by the supernatural beings; the mer-maid, mer-men and the totality of the mer-folk and the unusual beings that dwell in the river. Other archetypal characters, portrayed include the satirical portraiture of members of other ethnic groups. This comparison is to celebrate the privilege of being a Tiv national as well as the Tiv identity (Hagher, 2003:209). Worthy of note is the character that smokes pipe and looks at his wife, who blends corn with loving adoration. The essence of this is to show and teach the commitment of the man to the Tiv marriage structure. The *Dasenda* women's unique dance music and dance steps derive from rigorous rehearsals and are all prideful exhibition of the

Tiv identity. *Swem Karagbe* can be interpreted as the most nationalistic statement in the *Kwagh-hir* repertoire.

This Tiv nirvana is the portrait of the setting of the ancestral Tivland prior to the movement to Benue valley. The abundance of resources and the resultant mood of the peoples are presented in fertility, in satiation, in peaceful cohabitation and in the manner Tivs expressed all these in *Swem* before migrating. These are the dominant themes portrayed to reinvigorate the belief in providence and the abundance of peace available in *Swem Karagbe*. *Swem Karagbe*, the play, is a trigger for the nostalgia deliberately transferred from generation to generation instilling some kind of national pride that is triggered from being offspring or descendants of persons with such rich and resourceful background.

The beauty and elegance of the Tiv woman is as much as an identity as any other discussed so far. The portrait of the Tiv woman in *Kwagh-hir* is intriguing and pleasing. The Tiv celebrate the beauty of their robust and voluptuous women who at one time or the other in their life time lead songs and perform in the dances that accompany *Kwagh-hir*. This is often replicated in the exquisite carvings of female puppets. In essence, beauty, in the Tiv sense, is the qualifier for a Tiv lady to be selected to perform in the *Kwagh-hir* chorus and dance ensemble. Pine's study of 'The Portrayal of Women in the Tiv *Kwagh-hir* Puppet Theatre' (2012) corroborates the earlier stated fact that womanhood is treasured and celebrated among the Tivs. Administratively, women are given huge responsibilities in the *Kwagh-hir* groups and are involved in the rehearsals. The coinage of new songs and dance steps are the sole responsibility of the Tiv woman who also ensures that the same skills are transferred to the coming generation (Hagher 2003). Pine furthers his arguments by observing that the involvements of women in *Kwagh-hir* are censored by the patriarchal values of the society. According to him, they are not allowed in certain sacred spaces during the performance; they are exempted from the manipulation of the puppets on stage and the women are assumed to be unfit for the agile role of the narrator.

The portrayals of the female character-types in the *Kwagh-hir* repertoire includes, the Wanalu, the woman blending food substances on the grinding stone, Nguveren, a heavily pregnant yet nursing mother, Ngo u Tiv, the Tiv matriarch with traditional Tiv body scarification, the

fisher woman Moji, and Waya, the happily married woman who flaunts her husband. In contrast to these character-types that celebrate Tiv womanhood are portraits of villainous women such as the prostitute *Kwase Ashawo*, the HIV puppet Anakande to mention a few (Pine 2012). Hagher's treaties and assertions on *Kwagh-hir* being a metaphor of resistance are realized in several other components of the *Kwagh-hir* performance. For instance, the Tiv dance is a form of social criticism, historical documentation, mass hypnotism and political expression. Dances and songs satirize the lazy, the evil, and the totality of all who represent values that are contrary to Tiv ideological beliefs. The hypnotic effect of dances amongst Tiv peoples cannot be contested. For the Tiv folk, the overwhelmingly hypnotic power of the dance becomes evident if the dances are engaged during crises, if care is not taken; such dances and songs induce unrestrained violence in a normally peaceful community. The drama of the hypnotic effect is narrated in a documented account of a response to *Mnyam cier mo*:

People jump out of their houses from bed, from eating, abandoning whatever they are doing and go out to first watch and join the procession which sings in unison keeping tune by stamping their feet and crossing their weapons with metallic clang (Hagher, 2003:81).

The content and form of the performances promote conscientization and political empowerment. A number of the lyrics of the songs portray happenings at the House of Assembly, gives the names of political figures in the country, as well as the political undercurrents at the local and at the national levels.

Several Nigerian theatrical scholars such as Adelugba (2007), Bamidele (2001), Ogunbiyi (1981), Dasyva (2007), have written extensively on the significance and relevance of theatre to nation-building. For Ogunbiyi (1981), it is an instrument in the hands of the masses in their pursuit of human rights, in its entirety. Such theatre, he continues, must build on the experiences of people; history, theatrical forms and elements which are veritable appliances in combating oppressions - be it economic, traditional or political. The Tiv *Kwagh-hir* has doubtlessly served this purpose, surviving where most (indigenous)

ethnic theatrical forms such as the Yoruba Alarinjo travelling theatre have fizzled out or have been stamped away by religious and cultural imperialism and particularly by, social, economic, political, and technological challenges and pop culture (Aguoru 2011). According to Adelugba (2007), *Kwagh-hir* has moved from being an ancient art into contemporary relevance, in his words, ‘... *Kwagh-hir* fits in my own overall view ... the role of the theatre’ (Dasyuva, 2007: 171). From Hagher’s perception, the basis for evolving a theatre of development and conscientization is to develop theatrical approaches that will translate the traditional theatrical styles into forms that promote cultural and scientific transformation which will translate into social change (Hagher, 2003:247). *Kwagh-hir*’s stance as a theatrical revolution represents these and much more in the Tiv history. The party politics of the 1950’s and 1960 rocked the core of Tiv ideology and unity. An average Tiv was loyal to kinship ties rather than to religious imperialist voices despite the latter’s popularity. There were several disruptions of the Tiv social harmony by the colonial structure and administration that had disarmed other ethnic groups in Nigeria with the same strategy. Whether it was the oppressive pre-colonial traditional authority or the high handed colonial administration or the collaborate effort of the Native Administration and British Government, as well as unjust tax collectors, the Tiv popular arts were campaigns targeted at disarming the oppressive groups and the Tiv almost, always recorded victory

The *Kwagh-hir* model is a paradigm for resistance, the strategy operated within its groups: costume, organization and songs became strategies adopted by the Tiv pressure groups in combating and resisting political, social, and religious oppression. According to Hagher,

... *Kwagh-hir* has continued to be (a) galvanizing factor of the monolithic Tiv culture along with other popular theatres... and other dance traditions (2003:261).

There are several dimensions to the relationship between Tiv theatre and the Tiv identity. The theatre is an integral part of the Tiv cosmology while the ability of this form to unify the people is through the consistent and deliberate effort to keep the theatrical forms alive and sustaining it as a fundamental part of the activities that celebrate rites of passage, competitions amongst groups, and festivals. Employing

the component forms of *Kwagh-hir* in competitive celebrations ensures that there are rigorous rehearsals which promote excellence in music, dance, puppetry and other theatrical innovations of the Tiv.

A strikingly remarkable aspect of the Tiv lifestyle is the sustenance of its art forms, sculpture, carving and creativity. Aguoru (2011) notes that the Tiv perception of beauty is observable in the carved puppets, unlike most puppets in other puppeting tradition in the world, *Kwagh-hir* have exposed limbs that are smooth, life-like and functional. Such puppet characters include puppets performing surgery, football teams playing in jersey among others. To Tivs, sustaining Tiv culture is as important as celebrating Tiv art.

Worthy of note is the fact that there is no stratification in the involvement and participation of the Tiv folk in the *Kwagh-hir* performances. This, more than any other factor, promotes the participation of all and the level patronage the form enjoys. There is hardly any Tiv national who has not at a time or another participated in *Kwagh-hir*, participation is seen as commitment and loyalty to the Tiv communal spirits. It is also able to serve as a platform for mobilization because there are no restrictions in participation; gender, religion or age. This Tiv sense of unity even in the performing arts is instructive. While other ethnic theatres, particularly, the *Alarinjo* theatre had a penchant for breaking up into splinter theatrical groups for contentions based on financial gains or unwillingness to be mentored, Several *Kwagh-hir* groups at some point came together under one umbrella, the *Anor Gyura Kwagh-hir* group, in honour of one of its leaders who had gone blind mysteriously after an evening performance. The cumulative effect of the cooperation and loyalty of the people to the theatrical form is enormous. *Kwagh-hir* has been preserved and promoted by scholarly writings of scholars like, Enem (1981), Hagher (2003) whose doctoral thesis remains the authority on the origin, form and structure of *Kwagh-hir* and the Tiv peoples.

Iyorwuese Hagher's appointment as an ambassador is not undeserved because he and his team have continued to promote *Kwagh-hir* extensively, nationally and internationally. *Kwagh-hir* has been celebrated in countries such as Russia, Bulgaria, Great Britain and France, in essence, promoting international scholarship of the form. Instead of the dominant recurring themes that portray cultural conflict and resistance to Western medicine and technology in most of African

literature, one finds that *Kwagh-hir* plays promote all round enlightenment and technological advancement; examples of such plays are a doctor conducting a caesarean section, the Benue Cement factory, flying airplanes and mobile motorbikes. Though *Kwagh-hir* has attained and sustained national and global success, consistent efforts are being made by the Tiv nation to develop, preserve and keep the form relevant in contemporary times. A proposal presented to the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safe Guarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, Seventh Session, Paris, in December, 2012 was stumbled upon in the course of writing this paper and the title reads: **Safeguarding the Intangible Traditions of *Kwagh-Hir* (Tiv Puppetry Theatre) in Nigeria through Comprehensive Documentation.** This document ought to be a template for all other nations within Nigeria and beyond. Such a posture to the preservation of the arts and cultures of peoples will promote an extremely and positively strong national identity which is the identity of most successful nations in the world.

7. Conclusion

This paper is an examination of the interface between theatre and national identity. It is a purposive descriptive, analytical and explicative approach to examining the Tiv *Kwagh-hir* theatre and the distinctive Tiv identity. These have been juxtaposed with focus on puppetry, a principal core cultural theme which clearly delineates the fundamental belief pattern and structure of the consistent and individualist nation among other Nigerian nations. An examination of the sacred role the puppet maker and the puppeteer plays within the Tiv physical and psychical structure in reinforcing the worldview of the Tiv is linked with the significance of 'his' creations, lifelike presences of individual puppets that are archetypically symbolic. The combination of these offer with it a perception of the driving force underlying the Tiv politics, engagement and posture, an enabling force that empowers the nation to resist unequivocally the political subjugation of the North since Nigeria got its independence as well as the Sword of Islam in the earlier centuries.

This explication highlights that which is special, and particular to an ethnic group with the universal themes of culture, religion, belief and behaviour which is applicable to all nations and all groups of people to foreground the age-long apparent but abandoned fact that identities of

peoples are the innate and intangible elements peculiar to them. Identities can be reinforced by activities of groups that promote them. Identities of peoples are not necessarily established by learning or conditioning because it already exists. The Tiv nation and its forms have brought to the fore the issues that are being grappled with by nations in defining and redefining identity. *Kwagh-hir* authenticates Wole Ogundele's postulate, that national identity in Nigeria can only be achieved when there are successful ethnic specific identities. The Tiv therefore, are not trying to evolve an identity, they acknowledge their ethnic specific individualism and have continued to reinforce and sustain the Tiv identity especially through their traditional arts, particularly *Kwagh-hir*. Ethnicities in Nigeria must take a cue from the Tiv of Nigeria who continue to evolve within their ethnic identity and have attained cultural and nationalistic success despite the challenges of identity crises faced by African nations in the 20th and 21st Centuries.

There is urgent need to strategise on how to preserve and promote indigenous theatrical traditions, this should encapsulate the transition of these forms and the cultural value system they showcase to the coming generations. Institutionalising them as it is being done in other countries with strong national identities which derive from their art and culture must be an immediate national goal. The Tiv *Kwagh-hir* preservation template is once again germane and can be adopted by other nations. The objectives of the project include:

- reviving the ancient and traditional craftsmanship and intellectual iconography of Tiv Culture.
- highlighting and propagate the use of traditional theatre and its technical expertise in contemporary Tiv Society.
- exposing this unique Tiv Traditional community theatre and its didactic pedagogy in mass education for social relevance
- showcasing the dynamism of contemporary social concerns of Tiv communities in theatrical interpretation of Kwagh-Hir Community popular Theatre
- propagating this vibrant community popular theatre form as a heritage for younger generation of Tiv communities.
- sharing with the world theatre the intangible traditions of traditional Tiv communities.

The expected results include:

- promoting the intellectual traditions of the Tiv

- preserving and promoting the lexicon and grammar of Tiv indigenous language
- reinforcing and propagating the cultural identity of Tiv people.
- passing on to younger generation the culture of continuity in the folk arts of Tiv people.

These points need not be overstated, however, further studies and investigations should be carried out in these and other respects. Studies of ethnic theatres and comparative studies in theatre within Nigeria, as well as inter and intra continental theatrical studies, which will bring enormous value to theatrical scholarship as well as promote international relations, should be core in our efforts towards nation building. Nevertheless, evolving a Nigerian identity will demand resoluteness on the part of individual 'nations' within the Nigerian nation state and the determination of the same to promote national consciousness by assigning great importance to their specific ethnic identities.

¹ The *Mbatsav* representative of the Tiv worldview is a reflection of the religious and magical, as well as psycho-religious, ideological and philosophical representation of the Tiv world. The *Mbatsav* society possesses occult power which is assumed to have elements of witchcraft, talent, power and ability (Bohannan 1958). The *Tsav* in Tivland has the dual nature of good and evil.

² The artistic directors, puppeteers, critics, and other members of cast contend the claim to the theatre process and performance. For often a puppetry may conceive a new invention that a sculptor brings to life and yet takes glory for it. It is also clear that sculptors are not responsible for conceiving the establishment of *kwagh-hir* groups.

³ *Ijov* is a concept that describes the supernatural and unseen that nonetheless has control on human activities.

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