



Symbol in African Religion and Philosophy: the Tiv Experience

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Abstract

Tiv religion is a traditional religion of the people of Benue State, located in the middle belt of the North Central region of Nigeria. This religion is a unique religion because the religion and the people of this region are exclusively peculiar only to the region. Symbols are basic phenomena in the Tiv religion. Tiv people religion, culture and symbols are synonymous and characteristically outstanding in the Nigerian culture. Symbolism is thus a special feature of its religion for it put them on the world map of culture, religion and tradition. Therefore, symbols play a pivotal role in the transmission, interaction, information dissemination and the interplay between the Tiv people and culture, and it culminates in physical and the spiritual world interaction. In other words, it is the thought process of communication between the physical and metaphysical realms. It creates a link between the finite and the infinite. It serves as a character molding agent, and is an agent of supernatural policing and enforcement of punishment. It also guarantees moral conduct and ethos in the society in which it operates. Its various symbolic arts and expressions symbolizes the present and offer some evidence of divine agencies. It therefore connotes an intertwining of both the spirit and physical realms. It is the evidence of the expression of divine injunctions, codes and ethics, and a mode to reprimand actions as well as serving as an agent of deterrence in the society. The role of the Tiv religion and philosophy cannot be over emphasized. The paper employed a literary descriptive method since the research is qualitative in nature.

Keywords: (Symbol, Tiv religion, expression of divinity, symbolism, religion)



Introduction

It is a known fact that intuition is the common impulse of human interaction and relationships, and that communal solidarity and cohesiveness begins from collective and mutual fears, sorrows and indeed joys that abound in African social and cultural milieu. In other words, the collective sensibility of Africanness is accentuated in the metaphysical and transcendental forum, social equilibrium, and the heterogenic inclusivity which allow all and sundry to suffice as one entity. Like any other culture in the world, the Tiv culture also shares these experiences as a way of promoting a communal life. Prior to Christian expeditions in Africa, indigenous religion was advocated, and promoted by the traditional elders and leaders of the Tiv people and was made a model for individual and social life style. Symbols served as the means of communication among the people and were also used as aids to achieving the religious objectives of the Tiv people. Discussion on the symbols and Tiv religion would not make any reasonable impact without a proper grasp of the people in the focus of the research, the religion and its symbols.

Symbols succinctly enhance communication and also serve as the motive for expression and practicability of cultural diversity, its display and interpretation. Symbols represent the physical and spiritual realms, they are fondly found during events such as coronations, foundation building, funerals, and initiation rites, and also in marriage ceremonies in, around and within the community under discussion. Symbols are representations of ancestors/ancestry spirit, they also represent deities of the community and are displayed during ceremonial event, veneration and worship of one's ancestors, spirit and deities. (Duruaku, in Waapela 2014). Man lives among a number of creatures however, certain superior qualities make him a superior being. The power to create artificial symbols is one such quality. Among all creatures, humanity holds a sub-consciousness to utilize one's sensitivity in the interpretations of physical and metaphysical reality through symbolic expressions. Hence, symbol is predicated on the existence of Superhuman/Divine evidence in the human hemisphere. The existence of divine consciousness in man, distinguishes him from all other creatures. Value judgment, inventory, retentive and imaginative reality are the symbolizing roles of human mental qualities. Ebireri's (2001) assertion affirms the above aptly when, he maintains that art, myths, dreams, science, and rituals are all manifestation of symbols and that these aid in the communication process.

Among the Tiv people, symbols takes the form of natural phenomena like vegetation and artificial images presented in the form of carvings, embossments, engravings, pottery, painting and sculpture. These symbols mirror the objects of belief, knowledge and social reality of the people. They also reveal the manner in which phenomena are physically signified, aiding meditation, promoting spiritual development, providing a means of social control and preserving the knowledge transmitted or communicated from generation to generation. Social interaction, dissemination and internalizing of ideas, facts and innovations encompass the direct expression and indirect expression of ideas and communication (Ebireri, 2001). Communication can also be seen as a fundamental social process through which ideas are exchanged. Waapela (2014) assert that there are two types of communication. These are linguistic and non-linguistic communication. The linguistic communication uses oral (spoken) words to convey messages while the non-linguistic communication uses symbolic code to fully express the intended message(s). Alechi and Doki in Waapela (2014) attempted an identification of what constitute symbolic codes of communication as body touching, nearness, tendency, visibility, condition, head sways, facial expressions and remarks. The non-linguistic form of dissemination employs objects in the transmission of information (Waapela, 2014b). According to White cited in Ebireri (2001), every human conduct, attitude and characters are predicated upon the use of symbols. Hence human conduct is characterized as symbol-is. The desire of Tiv to choose for themselves



a communal life style, has led to introduction of symbols to ensure not just communication but also an effective dissemination of information strictly to members of the ethnic group as such.

Literature Review

A symbol is a terminology etymologically coined from the Greek semantic meaning 'token' or 'watchword'. It is a corollary of 'syn' meaning "unity". It also means throwing or casting. The science of sense evolved in a Greek world view, patterning to throwing things "together". It is also "compared" to a token used in comparisons to determine if something is genuine". According to Campbell (2002), a symbol however, small or great, either patterns to past or present functions simultaneously on three levels. He identified tripartite levels namely, the corporeal, walking consciousness, and the Spiritual realm which is the in-definability of the absolutely unknowable. He thus, saw the first two levels as being in the charge of science which he represented as signs. To him, art is not only an initial 'expression', but a pursuit of, and a process of, experience evoking, energy-waking of images; which can be termed a sensuous apprehension of being.

Pointing to the same direction as Campbell, Zimmer, (1969) comprehensively analyzed the concept symbol and its relevance to society. He avers that symbols are concepts and words, visions, ritual and images which are part and parcel of people customs and everyday life. In his words, the transcendental is made manifest in the processes of symbolism. To him, numerous metaphoric displays of representation and paradoxical interpretation of expressions underlie symbolic categories such as the ineffable, multiform, remain inscrutable. Zimmer however, concluded that symbols are a true representation or expression of the mind, spirit, and metaphysical. From Zimmer's view of symbol, it can therefore be conceived that symbol implies a visual image with an underlying idea relatively connected with universal truth..Campbell and Zimmer's views of symbol can also be said to mean a complex communication that often expresses a metaphysical or transcendental meaning.

In another perspective, Ebireri (2001), aptly define a symbol as a visible/visual expression of a transcendental experience. Symbols are expressions of a perceiver's covert experiences made overtly. It is a means through which a perceiver brings to the fore his/her inner sight, visions, mystical, or religious experiences. Other attributes that can also illustrates inner or covert imaginative ideas are words, myths, proverbs, parables, icons and masks and there are powerful and enduring symbols and signs for conveying either religious or traditional truth. In the same vein, Clifford (1973), delineated further that symbol is a very dynamic instrument of metaphysical order as it can function as a tool for interpreting and understanding the past, present and future. To him, symbols are produced within the cultural milieu of every culture, tradition, religion and society in different periods of history. Symbol is thus, a material aspect or item, representing an idea, concept or object. The item used as a symbol may not have, or may have relationship to that which it represents. Symbols in this context refer to objects, acts, relationship or linguistic formation that stands for multiple meanings. There are diverse forms of symbolic things, again, symbol has phenomenal and several interpretations. Symbols are generally perceived as agents impregnated with messages which are often decoded in their cultural and social contexts. Waapela (2014) gave a corollary of symbols as, objects, acts, which are linguistic and fundamental of language that are ambiguous with different meanings, which has a strong sense of awe to engender commitment from people. Symbols are presented in style and pattern such as rituals in various cultural heritages.



Symbolization is the ability to accentuate the very existence of myth, and the mystic, metaphysical, spiritual realm and the physical and reality. That is, from imagination to reality. To symbolize on the other hand, connotes the capacity to make the cosmos the physical, or to make a sacred, a mundane/earthly phenomena comprehensible (Waapela, 2014). In all human cultures symbols are used to express ideas, social structures and also to showcase specific cultures. Symbols therefore, carry hidden messages culturally construed and interpreted. In other words, symbol carry hidden ideology learned over time through cultural internalization. Put differently, symbols guarantee cultural heritage and serve as tool for knowledge enhancement. Symbols transmit information and help in the dissemination of information both in the physical and invisible world. A symbol can forestalls judgment, judiciary issues of deities, it reprimands evil, sanctions and even punishes offenders. On this premise, symbols give humans a sense of reality and a purpose/benefit of co-operative existence.

Viewed differently, Jung in Campbell (2002) opted for interpretation and meaning of symbols as distinct from signs. He emphasized that signs are a representation of things in reference. He therefore, maintains that symbolic expression is somewhat different from things which are metaphysical and mystical as such, and are things beyond the physical and are not known and precise. He asserted that any representation informed of by symbols are simply misrepresentations, and as such, are not true, and have a falsehood under-toning. Put simply, he summarizes that the whole human universe is composed of symbol usage, production, and application and misapplication. He then summarizes that arts and their signs are human creation and are subject to misuse, misinterpretation and misrepresentation. Jung further illustrated that languages are a component of variant symbols illustrated through words and every language portrays this attribute. However, he observes a very reasonable facet of symbol by enunciating that the relevance of symbols cannot be overemphasized, as they relate to dreams and are a visual expression of mystical world, this thus, adds impetus to this research in spite of his earlier stand. In line with above, Dalby (1992) connotes, human beings give the understanding of symbols as he/she perceive his/her reality. This Dalby refers to as “core images” of imagination. Dalby (1992) argues that a symbol personified in the form an of image can be deemed as a core image, relatively analyzed to represent a dream/vision which is enhanced through therapeutic and psycho analysis or counseling. William (2012) added impetus to the subject by asserting that symbols are observable through mythology, legends of history, and can thus contribute to psychological expressions of fantasy.

Though the above analysis varies in content and context, it is clear from the review that, a symbol can be interpreted as the act of throwing two or more different things together for the purpose of contrasting, comparing something which stands for something else. Symbol is thus a language that does not convey meaning plainly. It is a language that represents something else and therefore has to be interpreted. Symbols have to be penetrated and understood. Sometimes one need more than logic and rationality to be able to penetrate a symbol. More deeply, there may be need for deep spiritual insight. These notions are required more in sacred symbols. Symbols are important for they illustrate the need to approach reality from the sacred to the profane, in things involving real-life situations or event with the abstract.

Symbols are basically classified into two major types. These are vocal and non vocal symbols. Vocal symbols are the sound symbols which among others include parables, proverbs and songs. Non vocal symbols on the other hand, are devoid of any speech. Examples of these include among others bells, drums, gongs and rattles. There is also a further distinction which classifies symbols into presentational and representational symbols. A presentational symbol is that which tries to create an illusion of reality or simply shows the meaning behind an object. Representational symbols or sign point or stand for something else without necessarily



participating in the realities for which they stand. Presentational symbols are necessarily connected to that which they symbolize (Waapela, 2014).

A symbol has a number of features indicated by Waapela (2014) as follows, a symbol possesses some qualities by association over a period of time, which may be factual or ideal in nature. The connecting link between the symbol and the symbolized is thus, constituted by functional relationship that exists between them. A symbol has a condensation or variety of meanings representing many activities, objects and relationships and it speaks to humans in many ways and opens a door to reality from different angles. This is the most easily acknowledged property and attribute of a symbol which an icon or index does not convey. A symbol is evolving. It has the ability to summon and speak to each person that comes into contact with it. Hence it operates at a level of subject and not at the level of object as a sign does. In its evocative quality, a symbol is in its entire aspects, dynamic and calls for a response from man and demands him to enter into communication with the reality which manifests itself in the symbol. Dalby (1992) however, concluded that a symbol has an admirable capacity and degree of flexibility.

Considering these characteristics, some symbols have a tendency to be fixed in meaning when there is a high level of satisfaction with their nature and function by the persons who use such symbols. Yet, some symbols emerge and disappear while some are discarded, replaced or change in value and meaning, over time. This supports the claim that culture is dynamic since no culture, simple or complex, escapes the dynamics of change overtime, whether, rapid or slow. However, no matter the intense or pressure for change of symbols, threads of continuity are often discernible. Symbols whether vocal or non vocal, presentational or representational possess some distinct qualities from signs. A sign is a non-verbal action or gesture that encodes a message. As opposed to sign a symbol has the capacity to encapsulate various meanings representing a multiplicity of activities, objective and relationships. However, the Tiv people whose symbols are at the centre of this study, have no distinction between a sign and a symbol. The Tiv man or woman simply refers to either of the two as *ikyav* (for singular) and *akav* (for plural).

Tiv People of Benue State, Nigeria

The terminology Tiv has a tripartite under-toning. First, it is a nomenclature that depicts the entire ethnic group. Second, it refers to the language. Third, it refers to their genealogy, to which all Tiv people trace their common ancestry/dynasty (Amokaha, 2014). Out of all ethnic group in Benue State, the Tiv surpass other ethnic groups by a two third majority of the population. This is manifested on the premise of occupying fourteen local Government areas of the state out of twenty three: namely; Buruku, Gboko, Gwer-East, Gwer-West, Katsina-Ala, Konshisha, Kwande Logo, Makiurdi, Tarka, Ukum, Ushongo and Vandeikya (Waapela, 2014). Benue State where the Tiv are mostly prevalent, is located in the middle Belt region of Nigeria and their areas of abode according to Bohannan and Bohannan (1967) and also Rubing, (1969), falls roughly between 6'30' North latitude and 8'10' east longitudes. The Tiv are bordered to the East by the Juktun and Chamba of Taraba State; to the West by the Idoma and the Igala of Benue State and Kogi State respectively. The Tiv also shares a border with the Angwe, Alago and Koro of Nasarawa State. And to the south, the Tiv are bordered by a group of ethnic groups which the Tiv refers to as Udam of Cross River State.

The Tiv are known to be people whose cosmos is intertwined with their religion and culture. The people's moral, religious and metaphysical beliefs constitute an inseparable religious worldview (Torkula, 2006). Torkula (2006) and Waapela (2011), conclude that the Tiv believe that God (Aondo) is responsible for the creation of rituals (Akombo) to regulate the cosmos and ensure its proper functioning. Keil (1979), wrote that the Tiv are well known for their cultural activities



crowned with storytelling (kwagh-hir/Wagh Alom). He further stressed that Tiv people are the best storytellers in Africa. In support of Keil's assertion, Laura and Behanna (1957) added that storytelling is a binding force in the community. The Tiv are largely farmers. According to Edward, (2003) they have a rich culture which is richly loaded with symbols. This study examines its impacts on the people's religion and philosophy.

Scholar's opinions differ when it comes to a definition of religion, and some people define religion according to a discipline and field in which they find themselves, however, the concept can be said to be a basic belief system accepted by group member and upheld by adherence as a guiding principle for everyday existence as well as a belief relating to origin of natural objects, events which attract devotion and rituals from members. Defining religion also constitutes moral codes concerning human actions and inactions. According to Shishima in Agber (2022), cosmic order and religion are intertwined, it is this intertwined nature that perpetuates religiosity. Also, Gbadamosi (2022) emphasize that humanity consist of physical and non-physical nature of human being. According to him, the Yoruba like many other peoples of the world are of the belief that the human nature is both material and immaterial. The Yoruba belief is that human beings have the material body which is used to live and interact in the physical world. They also hold the notion that there is also non-physical material body which interacts in the metaphysical sense. From this view, it can be deduced that religion encompasses cultural patterns that direct and inform social behavior, world views, text, sanctified/sacred places, ethics or cooperate/organizational/collective cohesion and relationships with the supersensible, supernatural or transcendental. Religions of the world share unique features that predicates what constitute religion, some of these elements includes: divine, sacred, faith, a supersensible being, supernatural beings and transcendence which forms the norms and ethos for human reality.

In spite of modernity and globalization, religion continues to exert its grip on humanity. Science in spite of its impact has failed to extinguish religion (Hugh, 2010). Agber (2022) corroborating the above asserted religion forms the crucial major identity of the Tiv society, thus, its historical milieu can be learned through the inculcation and internalization of its religious, cultural and festivals diversities. This is why Odunola et al (2022) maintains Festival is an important social phenomon that exist in all human cultures. Odoitie (2022) in Odunola (2022) also asserted festival provides opportunities for projecting the community into the natural scene. It will be difficult for one to see a society where one form of festival or the other is not being celebrated. The popular most pronouns used in religion among the Tiv is Jov (Ijov), involving a collation of many rituals, festival and cultural practices by the citizens. Shishima in Agber (2022) indentified the Ajoy (plural for Jov) sects as: Ijoy Aondo, Ijoy Ageraiber (Agerabyer), Ijoy II, Ijoy Ihura Vanger, Ijoy Mnger, Ku ngu Uma Ijoy Ayaba, Wanlisa and Kumendur. As a corollary, Waapela (2014) averred Tiv religion and culture cannot be separated from its cosmic order. Thus, Tiv beliefs system, the physical, metaphysical realm are made up of the entirety of the cosmology . Tiv world view is founded on the existence of Aondo (God), akombo (rituals), tsav (witchcraft), azov and ujjingi (spiritual) all conceived as supernatural while a umache (man and human), tar (land, district, locality) and gbaaondo (nature) are similarly conceived as natural.

Statement of the problem

Tiv religion and culture is substantially and equivocally opulent and is a compelling part of the peoples way of life and their religiosity is conceptualized through the synergies and the synonymous nature of the symbolic ritualistic and spiritualistic nature of the Tiv religion. Therefore, to properly contextualize and conceptualize the dynamics of the people and its religion, symbol, symbolism in the Tiv religion and culture suffice as a trade mark for proper comprehension of one of the pluralistic, multi-diversified cultures, ethnics and religious group in Nigerian society. This



paper uses documentary sources and field observations in its attempts to create awareness on the vital role of symbol in the Tiv religion which may contribute to exposition of the traditional culture and religion of Africa in general as well as expose the multi-cultural nature of Nigerian society.

Methodology

The method applied in this research was phenomenological and a descriptive method was employed. It involved a qualitative approach which involved the use of preliminary and post preliminary sources of data collection. The preliminary sources of data collection was the use of oral interviews and focus group discussions while the post preliminary source involved the use of library materials, academic journals, the internet, and relevance text books etcetera. This was supplemented with interviews with traditional leaders and elders of Tiv land as well as information from bulletins, and program booklets of the traditional rulers and traditional chiefs and chief priest and priestesses of the religion in question.

Symbols and Tiv Indigenous Religion and Philosophy

Religion is an agreed chain of ethics and worship by a group of people. Religion inculcates ethics and serves as an instrument for social control and enhances collective behavioral norms as well as societal well being. Maintaining human society is dependent on deep internalization of religious norms and principle. Religion involves the personification of a divine entity in human form. Notably, incantations, recitations, moral conduct and worship forms part of the liturgy and practical aspect of a religion (Lugira, 2009). Philosophy on the other hand is described according to Omoregbe (1993) as a critical analysis and quest into the nature and meaning of reality. Oshitelu (2002) believes that philosophy implies the investigation of simple and crude experience which it presupposes. Philosophy is also empirical and a rational inquiry into common experience. More so, Fatalaiye (1998) sees philosophy as being a comprehensive analysis of ideas. In line the with above, the concern of this research is the critical analysis of natural events which is why the research understudies the Tiv religion and philosophy. Tiv indigenous religion and philosophy therefore has to do with beliefs and practices involving a dialogue between man and the supernatural, as well as a quest into reality which is expressed through symbols.

Symbols vehemently portray the philosophical and rational sense of the Tiv people, it is a cardinal key in interpretation of the invisible, it is a link that mediate between the living and the dead. Symbols such as masks and statues play the role of representing ancestor through whom a number of requests, applications prayers are religiously made by the Tiv people. The statues of ajov for instance are made, consulted and prayer to for some favours. These favours may include but are not limited to rain, fertility of the worm, fertility of the soil, good harvests and is clear when we see a sacrifice been offered in the presence of these carved statues representing deities.

Politically, the Tiv indigenous religion has employed symbols to ensure justice and fairness among the people. This is seen both in the effective leadership and followership of the Tiv people. Symbols are employed in objects such as tsa, gbough (staff of office), in the administration of their various jurisdiction. Tsa (tail) is used mainly for blessing from either elders or leaders. The same tsa is used on the other hand to reprimand, warn and even punish an offender. Indigenous religion has taught the Tiv people the various ways of evoking their ancestors using these symbolic items. It is also indigenous religion that has taught the followers the values and power of the ancestors. Tiv ancestors in themselves are symbols of the almighty God (which they refer to as Aondo u a gbe sha man tar). Among the Tiv it is believed that imo I mbavesen ka imo I ivongu (words of elders are word wisdom). They are words of ancestors. It is in line with what Alk



(2002) wrote that in that when we live it is because our ancestors consider us worth of living. When people excel in life, they are simply exhibiting the radiant and splendor exhalation from the ancestors, deities and god. Tiv indigenous religion teaches that each leader not minding the level is a symbol (presentation) of ancestors. This is the belief on which the Tiv people are tied to what is termed swem ritual pot. It is believed that the swem ritual pot contains ashes of the late Takuluku who led the Tiv fairly and judiciously. The belief is that his ashes are present in the swem ritual pot and are an indication that he is present and would still (even long after death) exercise his fairness truthfulness and justice over whatever transpires in Tiv land or among Tiv people.

It is this strong belief that up till today the Tiv indigenous religion leads the people to swear by the swem ritual pot. The pot is believed to make the offender's legs and stomach swell up. And if confession is not made of the offence committed, the offender finally dies. This belief shows that the practice of indigenous religion is strengthened by the involvement of symbols (swem ritual pot). This apart from enforcing quality leadership also ensures loyalty, obedience, justice and fairness among the followers. Economically, the Tiv have a series of economic activities apart from farming. The people practice hunting, blacksmithing, cloth weaving and other items of daily need. Ate iwya from where blacksmithing is done is also a ritual. Tiv indigenous religion has it that ate iwya is a place for safety for whoever is fraying in fear of destruction of any kind. Ate iwya is also believed to be a place where theft is never carried out. All that is left in Ate iwya is never carried away by anybody unlawfully or without any permission. Symbolically, ate iwya is a sacred place based on the teachings of Tiv indigenous religion.

Socially, the concept of ya na angbian (chop give brother) is symbolically represented in the communal life of the Tiv people. The communal life of the Tiv is taught and brought into practice by the people's indigenous religion. The religion is made effective and efficient by the use of symbols. The Tiv people have a 'leaf' borrowed from the acts of ants. These little creatures believe in togetherness. Thus, together they can (kpelanor) pull home an elephant. There is also the context of zwa u or ngu wuese nan ga (ones mouth dose not praise him). These symbolic contexts have made the people to religiously believe in togetherness. Kwaghir/Kwagh alom (Tiv puppet theatre), Ange, Shie, Tembe, and a host of other dance types of the Tiv people are further evidence of a communal life exhibited in social activities. Of all these numerous dance types, none is performed by a single individual. This clearly demonstrates the role of indigenous religion in propagating togetherness amongst the people. The various costumes are all symbolic and effectively play major roles in exhibiting the religion of the people, and the spirit of togetherness. These bring into clarity the role of symbols in: (a) Respect for the teachings of Tiv traditional beliefs and practices. (b) Bringing into practice the teachings of the Tiv indigenous belief system. (c) Showing the makers (Artists) of the physical objects of representation (symbols) are the source of the indigenous religion of the Tiv tribe in Benue State, Nigeria. Thus, portraying the people as practitioners of what their religion teaches with symbols as a tool for a practical approach to religion. Tiv culture is the culture of creativity, innovation and adaptation. It is based on this identity that this study has gone down memory lane to dissect some Tiv indigenous religious activities so as to expose the position of symbols. It is worthy of note that Tiv culture and religion is a sum total of spirituality, music, aesthetic, family, marriage rites, etcetera, and as such, symbol is an important aspect of the physical exhibition of the spiritual sphere.

The cultural milieu of the Tiv is dynamic and evolving; it adapts and assimilates new and innovative ideas after time. But its value formation flows from the ethics and dictates of forefathers from generation to generation. This why Ushe (2011) avers African religion and culture is continuously ritualized. Many of the everyday objects beautifully created by African craftsmen are symbolic hence they are representational records of honored legends that can be read almost



like texts, and these are in various forms which include but are not limited to animals, plants birds reptiles that represent deities and spirits. The Tiv traditional arts mostly bears the semblance of natural objects, like roots, animal, trees, river, hills, mountain etcetera. These serve the purpose of spiritual and physical representation of what they stand for. The objects used for symbolic expression are the means through which deities, ancestors and those in the metaphysical realm reveal themselves and are objectified in the present. Symbols, particularly the non verbal symbols according to Ushe (2011) play the role of symbolizing authority and also serve a significant part in enhancing communal solidarity and cohesion. Symbols among the Tiv are common phenomena, it has always been a case, and is a phenomenon that has been transmitted from generation to generation, as such it is the sum-total of Tiv culture and religion. It however, ultimately reserves a strong spiritual, philosophical and rational connotation to the Tiv people.

Religious rituals are incomplete without the symbolization of the spiritual and the supernatural realm through symbols, and it is that this process marks the actual presence of the metaphysical in the activities of living beings. The presence of the supernatural in Tiv peoples' daily life ensures the social bond experience in society through a communal belief system and social participation in ceremonial life. Symbolic items used for religious rites and rituals are not venerated but rather are a physical representation of the divine manifestation among the living. In this vein, Mokhutso (2022) strongly antagonize the idea that ancestors and symbol are demonic by averring that ancestral and symbolic veneration are not demonic; instead, demonology is a foreign concept in traditional African religion. According to him, the words 'demon' or demonic' do not exist in Africa languages and world view. The presence of supernatural entities in human affairs greatly promotes mystical ties in symbolic objects, which in turns holds the Tiv people together in religious commitment and continuous adherence to the dictates of the codes and ethics of the community, as such; those symbols are use for social control and solidarity. In view of the above, Ushe (2011) asserted, symbols and masks that are spirit objectified and are pertinent for ceremonial purpose, for instance, if absent during initiation rites, such rites would be considered incomplete. Marks and masquerades at initiation ceremonies are potential elements and physical manifestation of spirits. Thus, the presence of spiritual representation guarantees obedience by initiates to the observation of traditional rites. As a corollary to this practice, Edward (2003) asserts that this practice often led the initiates into the "bush schools" where initiation takes place and they obey without complaint as a result of the objectified presence of the divinity through symbols. Symbols in the Tiv philosophy are very important; this is understood from the perspective of giving smooth passage into the spirit realm or land of the dead during funeral rites. Apart from natural objects used as symbols, sculptures, artifacts of culture are objects of representation as symbols used to orchestrate royal authority and are also the arbiters of the law, rules and codes of conduct of the community.

Another philosophical and rational underpinning of the Tiv culture is the use of figurative staff for elders and traditional rulers as a symbol of authority. The staff usually manifests a superior power from beyond, as such, the staff can only be handled by designated chiefs and kings strictly appointed by the gods, contrary to this spiritual call, whoever handles the staff die instantly. It is important to note, only those appointed by the divinities are qualified to bear the mark of the spirit. As such, they represent the gods through verbal or oral folktales as having the transcendental call thus bearing such ferocious animal traits and strength. Elemi (1981) narrated further, that symbolic figures tend to engage in communal settlement of disputes, and conflict beyond human understanding. William (2013), expounded further that spirits exhibit themselves through masquerades, and are revealed through masquerades and are approved as potential supernatural 'crowns'. Symbols are then an emblem of communal solidarity. A mark is used as local teaching and technical aids, supplementing the headship of the mentor by simulating the asset of value which the community desires of its members. Similarly, a masquerade may be



viewed from a negative angle, however negative it may be, it still exists for the purpose of teaching the importance of doing good, whereas perpetuating evil against others certainly returns evil.

Arts and craftsmanship are the most industrial aspect of the Tiv indigenous beliefs and philosophy. They project the symbolic manifestation of the supernatural prowess expressed through arts. The process of crafting indicates the spiritual ideology is translated to humans. It also shows how the supernatural creature embellishes man with creative ideas and innovation as such the Tiv hold such activities in very high esteem. In each case the particular cultural symbols and artistic styles are used in creating items of worship. Hence, one is able to reinforce the traditional religious beliefs and values and philosophy of the people. The patrons of the arts and craft are mostly indigenous. This is because Tiv masks and symbols are carved to be worn and used in the performance of certain religious and cultural obligations. Also, most figurative sculptures are designed for ritual purposes alone.

The artistry of symbolic emblems and crafts are often created with strong feminine evidence which indicate fertility. These also aim at showcasing the boldness powerful figures, for instance, animal horns symbolize strength, fright, awe, and inspire one to enforce both religious and social solidarity. In the same vein, an artist may decide to give a false or misleading concept in his/her artistry to stress the spiritual component embedded in the arts as well as establish a significant message within its artistry. The majority of Tiv sculptures, are created to visualize the structure of traditional leadership authority, mostly presented as seats of wisdom and personality. The implication is that creative arts and sculptural craftsmanship are geared towards encapsulating the human structure rather than nature. On the other hand, some creativity in the Tiv craftsmanship seemingly projects natural objects which are sculpted or crafted to have an accurate imaginative sense of the deities, divinities, ancestors and the gods of the Tiv land.

Alik (2002) toeing the above line, asserted that African symbols may be in dress, arts, food or body adornments and these are the ingredients that show the Africaness in Africans. This is in conformity with Mbiti's (1985) view who purportedly averred that Africans are notoriously religious, and that religiosity and philosophy saturate every aspect of the African livelihood. Hitherto, it is justifiable to say that the Tiv symbols, marks, sculpture, arts and crafts are intertwined with the Tiv traditional religion and philosophy. One cannot exist without the other (Mbiti, 1971). To say the least, it is imperative to the actual manifestation of religion and philosophy of the Tiv people. Suffice to say, these are the actual elements of uniqueness of the Tiv religion and philosophy. In a similar narrative, William (2013) interpolated that, through symbols, arts and sculptures people can understand African religion and creativity as an integral part of the Tiv religion and philosophy. Waapela (2014) investigating symbolism, noted that there are several typologies of symbols including the following: symbols in rituals, symbols in religion, symbols in clothes, symbols in hunting, symbols in agriculture, decorative art symbols, symbols in music, symbols in musical instrument, symbols in Tiv ritual paraphernalia. According to him, these types of symbols aid in the identification of several deities, divinities and small gods abounding among the Tiv heterogeneity as well as projecting their responsibility in different departments in life's programme, as such, they exist to guide people to function according to the norms and codes stipulated by the supernatural being.

The Tiv people are richly endowed with a diverse cultural heritage, fondly expressed through colorful cloths (notably black and white fabric with locally made embroidery) and this forms parts of the Tiv arts and craftsmanship. Stressing the important of color in the symbolic processes, Kudrya-Marais, et al (2022) added impetus to this research by asserting color is used to convey the beliefs and value of the world's major religions. He emphasized colors are used to create specific meanings. He further stressed symbolic colors assents to religious ideology and is closely



connected to cultural practice. Masquerades, puppetry and marionettes add momentum to the Tiv cultural heritage with monumental meaning to their existence which adds impetus to the Tiv religion and philosophy per se. The figurative and ironic image of the being behind the masquerade usually carries strong messages. This is why Ayakoroma (2016) postulated that, the idea of every cultural display is to express opinions, beliefs, customs and traditions to on-lookers, especially the youth, as well as proffering visual metaphors from the spirit world, for understanding and resolving communal crises. His assertion therefore, aligns with Awolalu;s (2003) observation that the cultural activities have the potential for community's development, general economic rejuvenation, and political aggrandizement of the host community and neighboring states.

Corroborating the aforesaid, Hagher (2003) illuminated on the Kwagh-hir theatre (Tiv traditional theatre) further by stating that the Tiv history has shown how greatly cultural assertiveness has promoted the Tiv communal development. On this premise, he insisted, that in order to understand the effects of cultural heritage on communal development of the Tiv, it is important to study the Tiv people in two phases; first enshrined in the storytelling tradition of the people and secondly in folktales and folklore embedded in symbols. In a different light, Enem (1981) opines that Kwagh-hir (Tiv local theatre) dramatic displays are often performed nocturnally as a service and theatrical amusement for the people; and spectators and audiences are drawn to the iconic and ironic messages within the show which are often religious, spiritual and philosophical in nature. The numerous theatrical instruments are representations of spirit and they often send supernatural messages to their audiences, it is usually a show of the prowess of culture, history, arts and symbolic culture of the Tiv people which in the long run embellishes the Tiv culture, religion and philosophy. Again, Enem, denotes that symbol and culture is transitional transmitting from one generation to another, and this is why the Tiv symbol has stood the test of time and has continued to survive until today even in the face of modernization, It's longevity could also be attributed to the fact that the Tiv people love dance and entertainment.

Recommendations

One remarkable recommendation this study proffers is the conceptualization of African culture through contemporary and modern concepts with global acceptance. This involves the reinventing of some, if not all African/Tiv symbols for global consumption, for instance, the use of artificial intelligence in its production and presentations, technological gadgets etcetera.

Ability to pass down ideas and innovations from symbolic items, expressions and ritual/spiritual aspect of the arts and symbols to future generation is also paramount to the sustainability of the culture and religion as such.

Symbolic items, arts and artifacts should be properly guarded at museums and archives, and monumental items should be protected and reserved for tourist consumption and tourist delight and attraction.

The government should be more engaged in funding art works, monumental projects, artistry, and symbolic arts and expressions of the religion

Quizzes and competitions on arts and symbols should be a sole interest of schools and agencies in order to promote and maintain traditional arts and symbols.

Art exhibitions should be made popular by governmental agencies, private organizations and schools in order to further foster the promotion of African culture and exhibitions. Parents and



families should see arts and symbolic studies as being just as important as they see science, medicine and technology.

Conclusion

It can be deduced from the above study that symbols are a medium for communication among the Tiv people. As a medium of effective communication, symbols serve as a tool for information dissemination and they are:- a bridge between spirits, ancestors and the living; they warn against misfortune, and are tool for dispensing justice, they also reward the just and punish the offenders. They are instruments for promoting the communal and economic life of the Tiv people. The core experiential and daily life of the Tiv people is collectively arranged. This is because individualism is seen as a taboo, and as such, the Ubuntu proverb 'I am because you are' suffices. According to Mokhutso (2022) and Kroeze (2022), African traditional philosophy of community or ubuntu has a sagacity from which the world can learn lessons to combat individualism, segregation and harm against other human. This care for others is critical in life and is echoed by Nicolaides who states that one's rights and duties in society are based upon a multifaceted philosophy because of the moral aspects which are a blend of heritage and tradition. Ubuntu asserts that society, and not any transcendent being, provides human beings with their basic humanity (Nicolaides, 2014; 2015; 2022). Thus communalism is vital. Collective socialism forms the common heritage of the Tiv people, particularly because they are farmers, and so communal living aids in the subsistence and commercial existence, and this cuts across all fabrics of life and intertwines the religious and philosophical world views.

It is worthy of note that although symbol is important and is an integral part of Tiv religious, it is however, not the only aspect of Tiv religion, but is rather an important part of it. As Mbiti (1971), states, it is important to note all aspects of the traditional religion to ensure its wholeness. This is why this research is imperative for providing a comprehensive and accurate display of the Tiv religion and philosophy. The discussion on symbolic rituals, languages and aesthetics, virtues, hospitality, empathy courtesy and respect among others truly portrays Tiv religion and philosophy. Dance, music, poetry, symbols and arts are the basic element of the Tiv culture and all these elements are orchestrated through religious rituals. Customary laws are rich and driven through consultation with the supernatural agencies, and therefore protect with awe and fear the people who are expected to obey or face sanctions or be reprimanded or punished by deities, ancestors and divinities of the Tiv land. This fundamental understanding contributes to the promotion of morality in the community. The Tiv people are vigorously concerned with the protection of their farm lands and community boundaries and as such symbols play a greater role in serving as a warning sign to intending encroachment. Legislations, laws and nationhood begin and end with traditional sanctions. From the above discussion, it can be concluded that symbols play various roles in Tiv land. Among these roles we noted that, they serve as a medium for communication among the Tiv people. As a medium of effective communication, symbols tend to serve as a tool for information dissemination and are a bridge between spirits, ancestors and the living. They warn against misfortune and are also a tool for dispensing justice and reward the just and punish the offender. They also serve the purpose of being instruments for promoting the communal and economic life of the Tiv people.

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