

The Hegemony of Western Civilization and its Corrosive Influence on Oral Tradition among the Tiv of Central Nigeria

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Abstract

The main thrust of this paper stems from the submission that slave trade, colonialism and missionary activities are the platforms upon which the hegemony of Western civilization was ushered in Tivland. It has drawn evidences from these three aspects of Western activities that gave validity to this paper's preoccupation. The consequence is the continual erosion of the rich oral tradition of the Tiv of central Nigeria. The Western activities that swept through Tivland in quick succession wreaked havoc on the collective psyche of the Tiv thought, values and advancement. While insisting that the hegemony of Western civilization has precariously contaminated and brought to a standstill the growth of the linguistic facility, traditional values and orature of the Tiv; the paper contends that Tiv had well established pattern of linguistic structures, traditional values and viable orature before the incursion of Western hegemony. It further submits that urgent steps must be taken to rescue Tiv linguistic facility and oral tradition from extinction. The study adopted descriptive analytic model to drive home its points and predicates its discourse on Post-colonial theory to prove the corrosive effects of the hegemony of Western civilization on Tiv oral tradition. It concludes by putting forth viable options as a panacea for Tiv to come out of the imperial logjam. There are also recommendations that will help curb the hegemony at its present state among the Tiv people of Central Nigeria. If this is done it will restore the dignity and wealth of Tiv orature, language and traditions.

Key words: Colonialism, Hegemony, Missionary, Oral Tradition, Western Civilization

Introduction

Hegemony from a traditional Marxist view is a political concept which means expression of control of one state over another and by extension means rule or dominion. However, it was Antonio Francesco Gramsci, the Italian Marxist philosopher who extended the scope of hegemony to cover the totality of social process. Gramsci in his work *Selections from Prison Notebooks* (1971) took hegemony beyond political contours. He viewed hegemony as a situation in which the dominated or the subordinate groups consent to their conditions of domination without restraint. Recognizing this fact, Abubakar Aliyu Liman avers that "Hegemonic process is ... achieved when dominant forms, practices, values and ideology are accepted as natural or inevitable reality that must be accepted by all (64). Traditions and practices are among the most active but subtle components of a hegemony process. The following elaborate analysis of the concepts of traditions, institutions and formations as

important ingredients of a hegemony process by Williams Raymond is agreeable for the ensuing discourse:

Hegemony is always an active process, but this does not mean that it is simply a complex of dominant features and elements. On the contrary, it is always a more or less adequate organization and interconnection of otherwise separated and even disparate meanings, values, and practices, which it specifically incorporates in a significant culture and an effective social order. These are themselves living resolutions of specific economic realities. This process of incorporation is of major cultural importance. To understand it, but also to understand the material on which it must work, we need to distinguish three aspects of any cultural process, which we can call traditions, institutions and formations. (114)

After the collapse of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade in the 19th century, the surging tides of colonialism that swept across Africa are responsible for the erosion of the foundations of oral traditions among the Tiv of Benue State in central Nigeria. This depravity was later consolidated by the corrosive wave of continual Western civilization. By oral tradition, as it is referred to here is the indigenous verbal and vernacular aspects of culture of a people found in the matrix of daily living, which are intrinsically capable of being transmitted from one generation to another. These vernacular aspects subsume speech, proverbs, chants, folktales, songs, etc. The different gamut of oral traditions among the Tiv are woven in measured cadence of appeal and expressed aspects of customs, norms and observances of the people. These Western imperial forces slave trade, colonialism and missionary activities were unmindful in preserving the existing ethnic, linguistic and oral traditional realities of the Tiv. Instead of developing these oral traditions to universal standard; the imperialists' activities distorted and retarded the pace and tempo of cultural growth of one of the most populace nations in Nigeria, the Tiv nation. This situation did not only distort cultural growth of the people, but it plagued the chances of enriching the people's tradition and its appreciation. The Western activities that swept through Tivland in quick succession wrecked havoc on the collective psyche of the Tiv thought and advancement. This outing is consistent with Abba Aliyu Sani's view which avers that "Subsequent to the colonialization of Nigeria, virtually all facets of the...society became subordinated to those of the conquering imperialist". Sani's submission is agreeable for the ensuing discourse, because the prehensile tentacles of the imperialists' activities projected into every aspect of daily life in Tivland left it culturally and traditionally bankrupt. The aftermath of the imperialists' activities has proven this diagnosis to be true. This is both a difficult issue demanding a critical attention and an illogical social impasse calling for a pragmatic resolution.

While the imperialists projected civilization as the height of their aspirations, they must be judged by the depth of corrosive effects on the indigenous societies they invaded. Western civilization is at best a false proposition; smoke-screened for the passage of Western hegemony. Modernity which is the precursor of civilization is in its roots deadly corrosive to Tiv oral traditions. At a hasty glance, modernity is admired for its heights and aspirations; but at a careful consideration, there is a profound depth of decadence and corrosion that have eroded away the wealthy traditions and cultural artistry of the Tiv people. This was a form of tyranny considered necessary for savaging Tivland among other African nations. This was simply the old facile argument that the imperialists armed themselves with as they leeches on the vast nations in Africa. C.S. Lewis has earlier drawn the world's attention to this kind of tyranny that, "A tyranny sincerely exercised for the good of its victims may be the most oppressive of all". This observation provides a broader perspective on the phenomenon of Westernization in Tivland and Africa in general. Far more disheartening is the decline of

traditional norms woven in Tiv orature and their humanizing values in the daily lives of the people. This intractable situation is further accentuated by the unmitigated obsession for civilization. The consequence is false identity, which leads to sterility of the Tiv oral tradition.

It must be noted here that, this paper's outing is not to discredit Western education and the Christian Missionary which have achieved much in bringing literacy and the message of salvation through Christ. But it is to point out sincerely that the credulous and wholesome acceptance of Western language and civilization as an inevitable means and standard of civilization for the Tiv nation is erroneous and deadly corrosive to the existence of Tiv language and oral tradition. There is no doubt that the Tiv language and oral tradition will inevitably face extinction, if hardheaded possibilities are not immediately advanced to savage the situation. Urgent and more decisive steps need to be taken in order to reorder and reverse this evanescent trend of traditional and cultural emptiness, without which the Tiv nation may experience seasons of linguistic, cultural extinction and a drought of traditional values.

Brief Ethic Profile of the Tiv People

The Tiv people are the most populous ethnic group in Benue State geographically located at the Savannah region of central Nigeria, popularly called the Middle Belt. With reference to the 1992 Nigerian Population Census, Yina has submitted that "The Tiv people occupy, by the 1992 census figures, a total landmass of about 22'004sq km" (35). Considering the numerical strength of the ethnic group, Atoato David Igirgi maintains that the Tiv people "are the fourth largest ethnic group in Nigeria, after the Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo" (qtd in "Artistic Ornateness..." 43). This view about the numerical strength of the Tiv people is concurred by Dzurgba that "The Tiv ethnic nation has a large population that has placed it in the fourth position in Nigeria" (126). These assertions by Igirgi and Dzurgba are convincing because, Benue State is one of the biggest states in Nigeria and members of this ethnic group account for more than half of the composition of the people in Benue State. Though the general demographic data reveals a high population density of Tiv people in Benue State, members of this ethnic group are also found in large numbers in the neighbouring states. For instance, Tiv are found in their numbers in Nasarawa, Plateau, Cross River, Taraba, Adamawa and Abuja.

In Benue State, the Tiv people are found on both banks of the River Benue such that, Tsenongu rightly maintains that they share geographical borders with:

[T]he Chamba of Taraba State surrounds them to the Northeast; the Igede (Benue), Iyala, Gakem and the Bette of Cross River State surround them to the South-east; and the Idoma of Benue State to the South. There is also an international boundary between the Tiv and the Republic of Cameroon at a Southeastern angle of the ethnic group's location. ("Artistic Ornateness..." 49)

The frequent ethnic crises and the high level of inter-marriages between the Tiv people and members of these neighbouring tribes are enough evidences that these tribes mentioned by Tsenongu share borders with the Tiv people.

The Tiv people are predominately agrarian farmers. They practice production of food and cash crops with keen devotion. They are well known for their cultivation of yams, cassava, sweet potatoes, other tuber crops, grains and fruits in very large quantities. In fact, the Tiv people supply food to almost all the states in Nigeria. Corroborating this fact, Dzurgba rightly avers elaborately that "The people have abundant foodstuffs that are carried daily to Lagos, Port Harcourt, Enugu, Onitsha, Aba, Calabar and other towns in Nigeria.... It is from the abundant production of foodstuffs that Benue state derived its name "Food Basket of the Nation" (166).

That there is profound orature among the Tiv of Benue State is a common knowledge, at least for those within the confines of Africa. The Tiv orature is a corpus of creative

expression that is oral in composition and structure; often delivered through performance. It is a form of performed literature that is lively and through which the tribe's material world and thought patterns are aesthetically expressed. It forms core part of traditional communication system which contains aspects of tradition, culture and customs of the Tiv. This orature derives its significance from the Tiv language and traditions which are available within the ambience of a speech community. Therefore, the Tiv orature is a worthy traditional edifice upon which the Tiv material world is realized.

Western Hegemony and its Corrosive Influence on Tiv Oral Tradition

According to Godwin Yina, "The first Tiv encounter with [Western] missionaries was in 1875 at Abinsi, but it was not until in 1911 that the South African missionaries came in Tivland at Sai" (53). With the settlement of missionaries at Sai, a village in Katsina Ala local government area of Benue State, Western civilisation and culture began to exercise its influence on Tiv socio-cultural milieu. The gospel work undertaken by the Dutch Reformed Church Mission (DRCM) from South Africa was so strong that the wave of conversion among members of the tribe swept away most unhealthy socio-cultural practices in the land.

Yina further submits pointedly that concerning the gospel work of the missionaries in Tivland that "The efforts of the DRCM were targeted towards the destruction of pristine Tiv values including harmless practices like folk songs, cultural music and dances, etc" (53). This assertion is convincing because many Tiv cultural practices were eroded away with the advent of Christianity. For instance, one of the cultural practices that, "received a blow" to use East words (*Akiga's Story* 418) was the *Yamshe* exchange marriage which had strong affiliation with *Ibiamegh* ceremonial poetry. Subsequently, *Ibiamegh* poetry, one of the most prominent poetic genres was knocked off when *Yamshe* exchange marriage was marriage abolished. Tsenôngu insightfully explicated that "The religious ritual that birthed that poetry [*Ibiamegh* poetry] began to die with the abolition of *Yamshe* exchange because it was essential for *ibiamegh* initiates to be children of only this kind of marriage" (Artistic Ornateness 4). In corroboration, Yina confirms this Tiv traditional phenomenon about *Yamshe* exchange marriage and *Ibiamegh* ritual that "...no man could perform the great *Akombo* [*Ibiamegh* ritual] unless he was the child of an "Iyam Ishe", exchange marriage union" (42). One therefore agrees with Romanus Egudu that "One of the worst effects of colonialism and colonial evangelization in West Africa is the suppression of the indigenous West African culture in general..."(14). Not only was the culture suppressed and subjugated, but the robust aesthetic and creative art forms that attended the Tiv cultural heritage in the land were stamped out. With Africa subjugated and dominated, the Western culture and European mode of civilisation began to thrive and outgrow Tiv cultural heritage. With the introduction of formal education, Western culture became frontline civilization and almost all aspect Tiv oral tradition are being viewed through the prism of Western civilization as primitive, archaic and regrettably unacceptable in public domain. As sense of pride in them is completely lost or destroyed beyond reasonable recovery. This unfortunate socio-cultural development is especially located among the younger generation. In collaboration, Ngessimo M. Mutaka avers that "the young generation in Africa that has grown under the western school system somehow feels estranged with respect to this oral literature" (1).

For instance, the missionaries considered the *Yamshe* exchange marriage as incompatible with Christian principles and as a result proposed to change the marriage customs in Tivland entirely. According to Tarbo, "It is not surprising that the proposal to change Tiv marriage customs was first made by the Dutch Reformed Church Mission on grounds that these were not in accordance with Christian principles" (34). Afraid Akawe Torkula also avers that the *Yamshe* exchange marriage was abolished with the support of the church. In his words "The

traditional custom of Yamshe in Tiv marriage institution was abolished by the British colonial administration with active support of the Christian Church...” (4). So in place of marriage customs that were abolished by the British Administration in 1927, *Kem* marriage by payment of bride price was legalized. The three imperial activities were all corrosive to the Tiv oral tradition and every other attachment to it.

Linguistic Imperialism and the Erosion of Tiv Oral Tradition

The Tiv people occupying the region of Benue, Nasarrawa, Taraba and Adamawa states in Nigeria were a people of heroic traditions and rich cultural repertory of linguistic idiophones, metaphors, proverbs, folktales, songs, ribaldry, verbal strictures and performing arts. They also had their language, unique customs, mode of dressing as well as communal values and norms. Tiv people were referred to the bastion of independence and a totem of identity for the minority tribes in Nigeria. History has it that, the Tiv people were known for their natural receptivity but vehement resistance of external domination. For instance, quest of the jihadists to capture the whole of the Nigerian territory in 1804 was halted by the Tiv nationality. The poisoned arrows of the Tiv people which were the death knell of the jihadists halted the Islamic hegemony led by Uthman Dan Fodio whose empire had already covered a vast territory from Sokoto to Illorin and from Yola to Kano. As a result of this remarkable resistance put forth by the Tiv nation; many other tribes in the Middle Belt and beyond which would have been subsumed by the Fulani hegemony were spared. The failure of the jihadists to covert the Tiv to Islam is explained by the toughness of their determined resistance to dominance.

Again, 1959 was not a creation of fiction, but a historical aesthetics of resistance by the Tiv nationality. The Tiv led the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC) which won all the seats in the then Benue Province in that year’s Federal election. This victory pitted the Tiv against the Northern People’s Congress (NPC) led by the great grandson of Uthman Dan Fodio, Sir Ahmadu Bello. The underlying battle was for the control of the Middle Belt. The victory of the UMBC at the polls was considered by majority of the northern elites as a betrayer of the north by the Tiv nation led by J.S. Tarka as the UMBC had aligned with Awolowo’s Action Group (AG). This resistance led to the famous Tiv Riots of 1960 *nande, nanade* and in 1964 *Atem itiough*. These riots were a conflagration sparked by supporters of NPC and UMBC in Tivland.

The Tiv nation was the last nation to succumb to the British authority. When an attempt was made by the then Northern House of Assembly to make Hausa language the official language of the region; the Tiv elites put forth a stiff resistance. However, once rich cultural heritage began to wane and this is attributed to many factors. Chiefly among them are colonial activities, Christianity and Western education.

A pivotal moment in the history of linguistic development of Tiv language came when other literatures and the Bible were presented to the natives in their own language. While there was a great sense of excitement that the Tiv people could read and write in their own native tongue; it was only presented to them as an inferior language to the English language from where the orthography was developed. The imperial language was imposed on the Tiv people making them believe that the imperial language and culture was superior to that of the natives. English language was like in the words of Ngugi “more than a language: it was *the* language, and all the others had to bow before it in deference (290).” It was presented as the standard and the measure of human intelligence. The potential beauty of providing a linguistic facility for the Tiv people to read in their native tongue was marred by the imperialistic ever-recurring superior mentality. That mentality found its way through the iron curtains of the gospel and had since had a firm grip on the people till date and has emerged in its extreme form where the whole structure of the native language is almost lost.

People are only able to think, perceive and understand in the linguistic facility that is available to them. It forms their thought patterns and worldview. Language forms a corpus of a people's imaginative expression and a repository of their arts, tradition and cultural edifice made manifest through beliefs, moral attitudes, customs, history, songs, proverbs and other verbal structures. The implication here is that the moment a people's language is tempered with or changed, their worldview is also distorted. Even the most celebrated author in African literature, Chinua Achebe was admittedly hesitant in receiving the unsolicited, imperial linguistic gift. In his words, "Is it right that a man should abandon his mother-tongue for someone else's? it looks like a dreadful betrayal and produces a guilty feeling (62)". Linguistic imperialism is more or less a mental slavery that affects the psyche of the colonized. According to Sule E. and Gboyega Kolawole, this explains why

Many leading African thinkers, notably Ayi Kwei Armah, have continued to echo the disturbing history of plunder in colonial Africa, insisting on proper psychic reconstruction in Africa as a way of creating a non-crooked narrative that will form the basis of an all inclusive, socially balanced world. (181)

This imperialistic mentality has encouraged over the years a gradual denial of the people's language. The natives were misguided; their minds were conditioned to look at the English language as a superior linguistic facility and a true marker of civilization. Recognizing this fact, Bem Ianna submits that "The implication of such shifts from native languages to English is that as people are abandoning their native languages, so are they abandoning their cultures. This explains why the American society is rapidly heading towards a monoculture (169)." This is one of the most inexpressible tragedies in history; that a people have lost their linguistic heritage with the attendant cultural erosion. The surging tides of Western civilisation will soon erode the whole foundation of linguistic structure of the Tiv people. Tor Iorapuu submits that:

...it must be loudly mentioned that slave trade and colonialism encouraged a denial of people's language and history as well as a rejection of their cultural heritage. Absorption of imperialist cultural practices under the guise of religion, trade or colonialism was considered civilization. (9)

The above assertion is sad but it is true as the modern Tiv man has all in his feet in midair in his obsession for civilization. His language is lost, his culture is completely eroded and his oral tradition eclipsed by the ever looming imperialist ideas popularly called civilization. In an effort to preserve the Tiv oral tradition, Akiga Sai is said to have submitted that:

It has been my constant prayer that God will help me to write this book in order that new generation of Tiv, which is beginning to learn this new knowledge, should know the things of the fathers as well as those of the present generation. For everything that belongs to the Tiv is passing away and the old people, who should tell us about these things will soon be dead... And do you however great your knowledge may be, remember that you are a Tiv, remain a Tiv, and know the things of Tiv, for therein lies your pride. (Akiga, cited in Iorapuu 13)

What Akiga meant in his submission is that civilisation should not remove a people's language from them. It should not remove the very traditions that have preserved the people's communality and collective consciousness. It should not truncate the enduring medium for passing down to posterity, the oral tradition of a people. For instance, the oral tradition of the Tiv is dynamic and expressive mostly realized through the instrumentality of language.

The embodiment of Tiv creativity, collective consciousness, values and aspirations is expressed through language and once that linguistic facility is lost, the people's art which subsumes beliefs and traditions is lost. Through language, the artist is able to maneuver a

communicative medium that is aesthetically rich and imaginative. This traditional communicative system comes about through a wide spectrum of oral tradition such as folk songs, legends, myths, proverbs, folktales, idioms, poetry in cadence of appeal, symbolisms and verbal confection. Yina brings out the significance of arts concerning a people that “The arts are iconic representations of nature and of society, real or imagery, visible or invisible or subjective (18).”

Another aspect of the imperialistic corrosive influence on Tiv oral tradition is the collapse of communal life and subsequent introduction of individualism in Tiv cosmology. The life of Tiv is essentially communal in nature and completely abhors individualism. This is central to the collective world view of the Tiv and was always exhibited in the matrix of daily human activities and social discourse. *Wagh sen tswen hule* – literally, ‘the stream flows alone and is not straight’ - is a common formulation of this world view. This Tiv proverb dramatizes a profoundly significant aspect of the Tiv world view that kept the Tiv united, without which the understanding of the present *civilized* generation of Tiv must seriously remain limited. But if they do not understand this world view, they will certainly have no sense of debt to those who went before them, who strived to keep the tribe as one indivisible unit through the traditional dimensions of communality. Describing a typical Tiv social feature, Tar Ahura avails that:

As an egalitarian group of people the inter-personal relationship that is cherished by the Tiv is the one based on co-operation rather than individualism.... Thus the individual must remain one with the society and the universe. Everybody must be seen to be working in co-operation with one another for the good of the community. Individualism is detested because of its tendency to break social harmony as well as the cosmic order. (120)

This egalitarian quality of the Tiv people where communality was highly valued has been disturbed by the colonial intervention and its place, individualism was planted. The negative consequence is that the imperialistic civilisation has bred a generation of Tiv sons and daughters with individualistic consciences. They are like feral children raised in the wilderness of Western civilization and the consequent result is a menace of hostility and wave of terror and chaos at a slightest provocation.

The stories by the fireside in the evening which instilled morals have been replaced with the Western hi-tech televisions that denied the children the opportunity of communal interaction. Ngugi wa Thiong’O earlier reminisced a similar nostalgic experience in Gikuyu that:

I can vividly recall those evenings of story-telling around the fireside. It was mostly the grown-ups telling the children but everybody was interested and involved. We children would re-tell the stories the following day to other children who worked in the fields.... We therefore, learnt to value words for their meaning nuances. Language was not a mere string of words. It had a suggestive power well beyond the immediate and lexical meaning. Our appreciation of the suggestive magical power of language was reinforced by the games we played with words through riddles, proverbs, transpositions of syllabus.

The imperialistic *self-contain* apartments have eliminated meeting points at the streams and wells which occasioned a beehive of communal activities. The Western civilization is deadly corrosive to moral foundations built by the Tiv oral tradition. Iorapuu bemoans the same facts

Also central to the Tiv world-view is the cultural dimension of communality. Individualism is abhorred thus the view that no 'Tiv person is an island'.... It is doubtful if these values are still upheld due to the influence of imperial arrangements such as colonialism and globalization. (12)

Therefore, the advent of the Western missionaries and the subsequent era of imperialist activities in African communities led to the relative stagnation and often precipitous decline of traditional cultural pursuits among the Tiv people of Benue State. Worst still, is the ugly manifestation of Western civilization which leaves the Tiv people morally bankrupt. For instance, Rupert East, one of the Colonial pioneers for the abolition of the *Yamshe* exchange marriage and the legalization of *Kem* system of marriage in Tivland decried that "Another regrettable result of the change[civilization], which seems inevitable in everything we touch, is that the Tiv marriage contract has now become much commercialized" (Akiga 173-74). The point being stressed here is that many people are making exorbitant demands from their prospective in-laws.

The fact is that Western civilization completely supplanted the social and traditional ambience of the Tiv people and its place a hybrid tradition evolved through the instrumentation of formal education and the church. The immediate result of the imperialistic adventure on Tiv land is seasons of distortion of traditional norms, cultural extinction and rape of Tiv socio-cultural values.

Contemporary Challenges and Implications

There are challenges and implications which the imperialistic hegemony has created for the Tiv nation. The Tiv nation is silently eclipsed by Western ideologies and one does not need to go far to see that the people have lost their identity and profoundly, a sense of pride in who they were. At the moment, the Tiv nation and of course, the rest of the contemporary African nations are beguiled by the utopian fantasy of Western civilization and liberal ideas. The evidence is mounting and they are undermining the foundations of African moral traditions. Tyohdzuah Akosu has earlier lamented that "The more the Western world disparages us and literally runs away from us like some leper, the more we hanker after its ways and values (122)." Paradoxically, the West itself has proven inadequate to handle such fantasies. Such fantasies have only produced fruits of chaos and tragedy. The fantasy of Western civilization has found fertile grounds in Tivland. The words of Chuck Colson as relevant for the this discourse, when he referred to Western civilization as "a new kind of cultural tyranny that finds minds, uninformed by traditions and standard easy to shape (17)" The situation is worse with the succeeding generations. They have bought a lie and are not ready to let go. They have squandered the rich heritage of their fathers and are celebrating the mental slavery when ideally they should be resisting it. In fact, the contemporary Tiv man is ashamed of speaking his language in public; it is a mark of civilization. At best, he speaks his language or call names in it more or less like a non native speaker. Dare Arowolo collaborates this view generally about Africa that:

With Africa subjugated and dominated, the Western culture and European mode of civilisation began to thrive and outgrow African cultural heritage. Traditional African cultural practices paved the way for foreign way of doing things as Africans became fully 'westernised'. Western culture now is regarded as frontline civilisation. African ways of doing things became primitive, archaic and regrettably unacceptable in public domain. Not only were certain aspects of the material culture in the colonies lost or destroyed, colonial societies also lost the power and sense of cultural continuity, such that it became practically

impossible to recover the ability to strive for cultural progress on their own terms. (13)

Western civilisation is in reality a concept of domination; neo-colonialism. It is an imposition of Western tradition over traditional and cultural values.

The contemporary Tiv man has missed the point, but the moral impulse to correct it is not there. He is from a crop of generation whose heroes are no longer stuff of the rich traditional Tiv heritage that placed high premium on character, duty, integrity, gratitude, ethics, and moral obligation. Their heroes are spectacular and insatiable consumers of utopian dreams. Trading their cultural identity for civilization, they blend into faceless conformity. They are enslaved by the ruthless Western ideologies and have lost a sense of direction and moral rectitude. The incessant riots on the streets and villages are ready examples to point at. It is already a symptom that the society cannot live with the consequences.

The language challenge in Tivland is another is a shameful reality. Both children and adult of Tiv descent have embraced English language as a mark of civilization. The immediate consequence is they are significantly losing proficiency in Tiv language. Both the colonial administration and the Christian missionaries introduced English language as the only language of instruction in formal education and administration. The Tiv language in which the Tiv people had proficiency, the language of instructions and teachings at home, the language with which they had sound compositions for expression and entertainment, the language which formed their thought patterns and world view, the language which was their identity was ruthlessly wrenched from them and its place a strange language was imposed on them. The immediate implication of this ruthless act was the removal of excitement and harmony which native speakers experience when using their language. Again, Ngugi shares the same sentiment in Kenya when he avers that “Then I went to school, a colonial school, and this harmony was broken. The language of my education was no longer the language of my culture (290).” The imperial education introduced in Tivland severed the Tiv people and take them further from their language and orature. It imperial hegemony appeared silent, but the consequences still reverberate through the ages. All the subjects and courses are taught in English language from the nursery, through secondary to higher institutions. The rhymes and literary books introduced to pupils and students are all written in the English language. Pupils and students who speak the Tiv language – their language within the school premises located in Tiv land are punished. Pupils sitting for Common Entrance Examinations into secondary schools must credit English language to be qualified; secondary school students must credit English to read any course in the University and students reading courses other than English must offer Communication in English as a GST. All these show a high premium placed on English as a language. What this means is that English language become a major means of communication and the culture of the Tiv people as well as other African nations. This is because language is the most portent instrument for expression of culture and literature. Ngugi agrees that “language, any language, has a dual character: it is both a means of communication and a carrier of culture (291).”

The unmitigated crave for individualism is a Western ideology that has now engulfed the contemporary Tiv nation. It has brought members of this tribe to a depressing state, a condition that has informed the enemy that the tribe is no longer on indivisible force that combated the Islamic invasion to a standstill. They have bought a lie – that the most important thing is getting ahead of everyone else; success, power and achievement. It is misplacement of priority and the best it can produce is chaos. The implication is that, the contemporary Tiv nation is at best like a heard of independent minds marching towards moral oblivion.

Traditional Tiv communal life style is breaking down very rapidly. The family which is an immediate unit of socialization is silently giving way to single parenting. The extended

family that was an important feature of Tiv tradition, where respect for age and elders was practiced has given way to nuclear family. The respect for values that were held sacrosanct in Tiv family relations is no more. Children and younger ones now find it very difficult to greet elders or vacate their seats for elders in social gatherings.

The democratic process, rudimentary though it was, but with great potential as accompanies every human institution, was brutally uprooted and replaced by the authoritarianism of colonialism. A new crop of elites was created, nurtured, and weaned on the altar of autonomy. The tribe cannot communicate as one again because the language of communality has been deconstructed by stripping away and perverting meaning. *Wagh sen tswen hure* literally “a river meanders because it wanders alone” is a cautionary proverb in the Tiv oral tradition that was often employed as a social formula against individualism. The depth of peril promulgated by this proverb will be lightly comprehended by present generation or a none native speaker until such realizes that the Tiv people attach great value to kinship in their social organization. Eugene Robingh insight proves helpful in the ensuing discourse:

Anyone who expressed unusual individualism, anyone who tended to move out from the time-honoured form of maintaining the serenity of the totality, was potentially dangerous to everyone. He was moving on untested pathways and might commit any number of unpropitious acts and upset the carefully structured balance of the world. (69)

It was for the sake of stability that fanned the embers of egalitarianism in Tivland. It is worth adding here that originally, the Tiv society was a classless one where happiness or sadness was experienced by all and all together. Therefore, anyone seeking for self-aggrandizement was automatically seen as a threat to the peace of the community where everybody was considered to be equal. Of course such a person would be resisted. Ahura explains further that:

This general portrait of the Tiv reveals the distinctive features of Tiv life in which everybody is assumed to be equal. This egalitarian ethos explains the violent resistance to the appointment of chiefs during the colonial era. The Tiv saw that such an appointment would automatically place one person in an undue advantage over others, thus making it possible for the person so elevated to use his position to exploit the other members of the community. Thus, even though the Tiv were reasonably large in number they never had a paramount political leader until 1946 when the first Tor Tiv (King) was crowned by the colonial administration. (120)

This egalitarian system of the Tiv community was ruthlessly destroyed by Western imperialism. In its place they armed the Tiv elites with the imperial structures which have whetted their avarice to continue to carry out the act of subjugation of the masses. Kasongo shares the same sentiments for the whole African states when he submits that “one could infer that when westernisation was imported to African countries, the hidden side of modernism was materialist interests. Civilisation was just another concept of domination: imposition of incoming new culture over traditional cultural values”.

. The loss of language denuded the Tiv people of pride, history and purpose. For generations spanning through centuries, Tiv sons and daughters spend half their lives learning and trying to master the Western language, culture, literature and traditions at the detriment of the indigenous traditions. It has created a false sense of belonging, a distorted sense of advancement and an ignorant determination to be seen more like a Westerner. The overall effect is a complete loss of identity. The contemporary Tiv man has both feet planted in the midair.

The Panacea for Recovery

It is important to emphasize fundamentally here that, urgent and more decisive steps need to be taken in order to reorder and reverse this evanescent trend of emptiness about the Tiv culture and oral tradition. There is need to understand the road map of the ethnic and traditional profile of the Tiv people, then use it as a foundation to recover what is lost. Without this, the Tiv people of central Nigeria will continue to experience dearth of culture and tradition. Two hundred years or so of colonialism robbed the tribe of decades of opportunities-opportunities of self-development, opportunities of self-government and, indeed, opportunities of self-styled technological developmental pace. This social change that is destructive to the Tiv cultural heritage through which their philosophical and material reality were structured and expressed must be understood and challenged to a standstill. There is necessary need, therefore, for the flogging of the negative impact of Western civilisation and culture on the Tiv nation in all fora; so that policy makers can begin to see the need to reappraise their policies that contribute to the cultural dearth or the ones that negate the principles of cultural revival among the Tiv.

All Tiv elites must ensure that Tiv language would not end up as linguistic fossils for linguistic archeologists' laboratory to be tagged and stored away only for discussions and research purposes. Tiv language is a single language of the Tiv ethnic group with very little dialectical variations and no linguistic hindrances to mutual intelligibility among the numerous speakers of the language. Before the era literacy, the Tiv language was kept alive by daily speech and the rich store house of Tiv orature made manifest through songs, proverbs, folktales, tongue twisters, idioms, etc. This is the heritage of the Tiv nation and must not be allowed to end up in the circles of dead languages like Latin and Greek. But the vision to keep Tiv language alive and viable must be pursued with polemical vigour. Elites of Tiv descent must start writing language and publishing both creative and research works in Tiv language. This may seem abnormal, but it is a hardnosed path out of the imperial impasse – a revolutionary break with Western hegemony. Ngugi shares the same sentiments on a larger scale about Africa when he said;

We African writers are bound by our calling to do what Spencer, Milton, and Shakespeare did for English; what Pushkin and Tolstoy did for Russian; indeed what all writers in world history have done for their languages by meeting the challenge of creating a literature in them, which process later opens the languages for philosophy, science, technology and all the other areas of human creative endeavours. (303)

Ngugi's submission underscores the significance of writing in a particular language. Writing in a language opens it up for recognition, sustenance and preservation from linguistic impotence. Obiajunwa Wali's assertion that "Literature after all, is the exploitation of the possibilities of language (283)" is a good premise for both writers and critics of Tiv descent to stop playing the gallery of international fame with English, but devote energy and attention in enriching Tiv language and tradition by investigating its orature.

Tiv children must be taught first to speak, write and read in Tiv language before any other language without an air of shame about it. The educational curriculum must be restructured such that pupils and students will go through the school system without hatred for their language, culture and tradition. They should be taught the history of their people and should value it. They should be taught the kind of literature that reflects the values and struggles of the Tiv people. They should read in their selected texts about the Tiv heroes who fought the World Wars and the nation's civil war to keep the society in one piece. Western classic

literatures should be translated into Tiv language. This will not be an easy task; it entails a great quantum of hard work to adventure in this direction.

Conclusion

From the preceding discourse, this study has explored the erosion of the rich Tiv oral traditions and linguistic facility as the consequence of slave trade, colonialism and missionary activities which are the bastion of the hegemony of Western civilization in Tivland. Before the advent of Europeans, Tiv like other African nations were none literate nations; where orature was the sole literature of the people. One of the most profound consequences of imperial activities in Tivland is the rape of the people's orature. The era of imperial pillage led to the relative stagnation and often precipitous decline of the tribe's oral tradition. Consequently, this situation in Tivland has left the rich oral heritage of the Tiv in a precarious condition of imminent extinction. Western civilisation challenged traditional belief systems and promoted the diffusion of new ideas and modes of life. This imperial hegemony has eclipsed Tiv language, traditions and orature. There is a gross drought of proficient native speakers of Tiv language and practitioners of the tribe's traditions and orature. The implication of this unfortunate situation is a symptom of extinction; hence, the loss of a tradition is a loss of the society. To this extent, certain strategies are recommended that will stem the tide of atrophy of Tiv orature, language and traditions amidst the challenges of Western civilisation.

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