

The Idea of Iyuhe in Tiv Politics

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Abstract

In the literature on Tiv studies, so many postulations and counter-postulations have been made concerning the place of *Iyuhe* in the development of Tivland. These studies have been carried out from different disciplinary specialities. The main objective of this paper is to examine *Iyuhe* and its place in Tiv society and development from the point of view of political studies. Even though the pioneering work that trundled-up the idea of *Iyuhe* was carried out in the field of political studies there has remained an intellectual drought in engagements with the originating thesis that '*Iyuhe* is one of the motivating factors of Tiv political behaviour.' The paper argues that this thesis is farthest from the truth of Tiv politics; and not earthed in empirical and the lived politico-cultural reality of the Tiv people. The thesis is therefore merely conjectural, speculative, and specious. Contrarywise, the paper demonstrates that Tiv politics—partisan politics, that is—is not *sui generis*, it accords with known political antics and chicaneries that are associated with politics and politicians in modern political practice. Partisan politics essentially is about the pursuit of group and individual political interests and in such pursuits, there are bound to be machinations and intrigues for purposes of group or individual triumph and these machinations and intrigues cannot be ascribed to jealousy and envy. The paper demonstrates that Tiv political philosophy is entwined with a fertile tapestry of values and ideas that if mined and harnessed would be critically resourceful in addressing the challenges of political development and nation-building in Nigeria.

Key Words: Religious pluralism, governance, patronage, problems, and responsible religious pluralism.

Introduction

The credit for bringing the idea of *Iyuhe* into Tiv studies belongs to Mvendaga Jibo. He it was who in his book, *Tiv Politics Since 1959*, brought the idea to intellectual attention. Since then there have been a steady profusion of essays on *Iyuhe* and its place in Tiv society and culture. For the most part, the preponderance of literature on *Iyuhe* is in the field of sociological and cultural studies. This paper examines the idea from the point of view of political studies; it examines its social contingency and influencing propensities. In short, it interrogates the negative conceptualisation of *Iyuhe* and its place in Tiv politics.

This paper takes a counter-narrative position. It contends that envy or jealousy is an inherent human emotion. It is not peculiar to any race or ethnic group; but naturally and psychologically immanent in human constitution. *Iyuhe* is therefore by no means exceptional to the Tiv. The proponents of Tiv exceptionalism have not proved their thesis with any ounce of scientific and empirical evidence. To therefore, say, as the propagators of the *Iyuhe* thesis are wont to do, tantamount to imbuing a conjectural proposition with the force of tenability.

Available evidences, theoretically, culturally, and sociologically, all lend credence to the negation of *Iyuhe* as the bane of Tiv politics and development. If anything, the pores of Tiv cultural ecology are permeated with social practices and axioms that promotes the ethos and philosophy of communal brotherhood, love, and unity. There can be no doubt that jealousy and envy could arise in the mentation of gladiators in their pursuit of political power and glory, this in no way makes *Iyuhe* one of the major organising principle of Tiv politics and social life.

We argue that the tapestry of Tiv political practices are embedded with rich values and ideas that negates the thesis of *Iyuhe*. These values and ideas issues forth from the ore of Tiv intellectual thought and are aphoristically and folkloristically captured in their expressions. The Tivyanaangbian, which is at the centrum of Tiv social and political thought, for instance, propounds a social theory that is grafted on the fulcrum of, eat and give your brother, a theory of live and lets live, that is in the same philosophical and conceptual neighbourhood as the Yoruba, *Omoluabi*; Tswana, *Botho*; Igbo, *Ikenga*. A social vision premised on the spirit of communal brotherhood, equity, fairness, and justice cannot at the same time valorise the precepts of jealousy and envy; it is a case of approbation and reprobation in one breadth.

The *Iyuhe* Thesis

The credit of introducing *Iyuhe* as an idea in Tiv political studies is attributable to Mvendaga Jibo. In his book, *Tiv Politics Since 1959* (1993), he states that (1993, p.x), 'This book is a departure from the holistic approach to

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the study of Nigerian politics. There are certain peculiar traits which have influenced Tiv politics which it has identified and analysed. One of these, *Iyuhe*, has not featured in the study of Tiv politics, though it is, as this work shows, *one of the major motivating factors in Tiv political behaviour* (emphasis mine).

Since Jibo's proposition of this idea as one of the major influencing factors in Tiv politics, many scholars writing on Tiv studies have factored *Iyuhe* in their analysis (Adega, 2009; Ipilakwagh, 2012; Viashima, 2010; Wendeh, 2012). The logical question that arises is, what is *Iyuhe*? Jibo (1993, p.196) provided the answer in these words: '*Iyuhe* is jealousy or envy. Even though it exists in all human societies, its prevalence in Tiv society seems to be unprecedented.' Let us lift and quote extracts of his conceptualisation of *Iyuhe* in extenso. Jibo (1993, p.196): 'Because of the *Iyuhe* on the average Tiv's mind, he or she does not wish to have another Tiv to excel. This *Iyuhe* is only applicable to fellow Tiv. Anything will be done to block a fellow Tiv from achieving fame, wealth, position, invention, prestige, etc.'

What is the source of *Iyuhe*? Again, Jibo (1993, p.200-201) provides the answer as follows:

Where does *Iyuhe* start? From the family. Most Tiv families are polygamous. Each mother and her children in a compound constitute a sub-segment of a family. What these mothers succeed in doing very early as they socialise their children is to inculcate *Iyuhe* in them as possible. Tiv children are brought up to see children of the other women who are also married to their fathers as opponents with whom they should seldom co-operate. They are brought up to thwart their brothers and to stop them from outdoing them in anything! This is why, by the time they grow up into adulthood, their minds are loaded with *Iyuhe*. This is why politicians tend to see politics from a mutually exclusive perspective. This explains why Tiv politician see the other as an opponent instead of seeing him as colleague.'

In the arena of politics, he contends as follows (Jibo 1993, p.200):

In politics, the Tiv culture discourages the building of a political career which could lead to pre-eminence in it. Under the *ya na angbian* (eat and give your brother to eat too) principle, once you get elected into the legislature for a term, you are expected to 'decline' it the next time around so that another person may also 'taste' the political experience or post, a few exceptions to this rule notwithstanding. Tarka who emphasised this principle used it selectively—it did not apply

to himself; he was in parliament from 1954 until the coup of 1966 and he was re-elected in the Second Republic, this time as a senator. On the face of value of it, the principle of *yanaangbian* looks so fair that one would be hard put to oppose it but in reality it may thwart Tiv aspirations in politics since it discourages the building of an enduring political career which might see one eventually at the apex of society or that of the Nigerian state.'

Adega (2009) and Ipilakwagh (2012) in their contribution to the Iyuhu thesis completely agrees with the position of Jibo. Both agree on the typological characterisations of Iyuhu—*Iyuhu boon* (naked jealousy and *bemIyuhu*—and that *Iyuhu* is the bane of development in Tivland. While Jibo is circumspective and cautious on the metaphysical propensity of Iyuhu, though he broaches it in restrained glee, Adega and Ipilakwagh, pontificates on the metaphysical-material reality of Iyuhu and its destructive manifestations and consequences on the development of Tivland. Ipilakwagh in what appears to be a major contribution to the *Iyuhu* thesis outlines the agents of Iyuhu. These agents are (Ipilakwagh 202, p.29-31): envy (*ishimanyian*), hatred, polygamy, poverty, greed, egalitarianism.

Adega (2009) and Ipilakwagh (2012) all concur that there is a connecting rod that joins Iyuhu and witchcraft. In short, that both are incestuously welded and pulsate dynamics that is the 'problem of development in Tivland.' According to Adega (2009, p.138) the effects of *Iyuhu* on the development of Tivland are to say the least catastrophic. Iyuhu has jeopardised the physical development of Tivland.' What is development? This fundamental question is left unanswered by these postulators.

The Iyuhu Thesis: An Anti-thesis

There is no better place to start this critique by asking the question, is Iyuhu (jealousy/envy) peculiar to the Tiv people? The answer is, no. And all the proponents of the Iyuhu thesis also agree to this answer but with a caveat. Jibo (1993, p.196) enters the caveat thusly, 'Even though it exists in all human societies, its prevalence in Tiv society seems to be unprecedented.' In other words, the difference of *Iyuhu* in Tiv society and other societies is not a difference of kind of degree. What is this degree, say, on a scale of 100%? How did he arrive at the conclusion that the prevalent rate of *Iyuhu* in Tiv society is unprecedented? Nowhere in the work is this gargantuan claim validated.

Given the intended manifesto of the work to demonstrate how Iyuhu is 'one of the major motivating factors in Tiv political behaviour' the expectation was that the chapters and pages of the book would be painted

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with the influencing propensities and manifestations of *Iyuhe* on Tiv politics. There is no analytical interminglement of *Iyuhe* and Tiv politics in the first, second and third republics, for instance; *Iyuhe* is explicated in the last chapter in the form of futuristic projection. This non-explication of the negative contingencies of *Iyuhe* runs throughout the disquisition of all the claimants of the *Iyuhe* thesis. In the face of all this it can be adjudged that the ascription of exceptionality and highest prevalence rate of jealousy and envy in Tiv society and politics is lacking in empirical and theoretical habituation.

Now to the origin of *Iyuhe*. According to Jibo (1993) *Iyuhe* starts in the Tiv family, especially polygamous families. The question that arises is is it true that *Iyuhe* starts in the Tiv polygamous family? No. Are all polygamous homes breeding ground of jealousy and envy? No. Is Tiv polygamous family an exceptional polygamous system? No. Let us take the issues one after the other. The claim that the curriculum of socialisation in the Tiv polygamous home is built on the foundations of *Iyuhe* lacks empirical substantiation. It is not grounded in any known sociological and anthropological. To the contrary, Shagbaor Wegh, the notable Reverend Father and renowned Tiv anthropologist, in his work, *Marriage, Family and the Church in Tiv*, demonstrated the positive value and use of *Iyuhe* in the Tiv family. *Iyuhkepelanis* marital rivalry—a rivalrous practice that is associated with polygamy in anywhere it exists—is practiced in the Tiv contest to upstage other women by displaying qualities of gentleness, obedience and responsiveness in order to demonstrate that she loves her husband and cares more about him.' (Viashima, 2010, p.12). Therefore, *Iyuhe* in the polygamous Tiv family is not meant to load the impressionable mind of the young Tiv person with jealousy and envy.

What of the monogamous home? Can theoretical evidences be depone to support the claim that in monogamous Tiv homes the curriculum of socialisation is inherently anti-*Iyuhe*, given its social structure and close-knit nature? No body of evidences validates this claim. Whether one is from a monogamous, polygamous, polyandrous, polygynous, cenogamous family system is not tangential and determinative in the veining of the jealous and envious emotions. Now and again, the point bears restating that there is no Tiv exceptionalism.

It is apposite at this juncture to look at Tiv anthropology especially the nature of its cultural organising principles and their philosophical systems to find out whether it is permissive of jealousy and envy. We would look at few aphoristic and proverbial expressions of the Tiv people to back up our argumentation.

Writing on the Tiv moral and cultural cosmos as it pertains to *Iyuhe*, Viashima (2012) contends that *Iyuhe* is frowned at in Tiv society. He says that they Tiv on the contrary are always excited about an individual's

achievement. According to him, (Viashima 2010, p.9-10):

... considering that communal clashes are a common phenomenon in Nigeria, and that political confrontation also exists between individual of other ethnic groups, it is difficult to see how Jibo arrives at the kind of *Iyuhe* that is the preserve of the Tiv. The problem seems to be that Jibo and the likes of him adopt a political analysis of Tiv society that is limited in scope. *Iyuhe* is not an essential aspect of Tiv personality. Tiv say that *Iyuhe ka mtwem* (jealousy is ashes) and when you throw ashes to the ground they rise up and settle on you. That is to say who perpetrate *Iyuhe* will meet their nemesis. The idea that Tiv always work for the downfall of one another is often contradicted in the show of pride and adulation that the Tiv display when a member of the society has had an accomplishment. Tiv like success, and imagine it to be an essential attribute of Tiv personality. One is believed to be able to record an achievement because one is *mar u Tiv* (of Tiv extraction). Tiv also say that *angbian ka una zermuufu u nyianshigh* (one is positively affected by the glamour of his kin). This is definitely an expression of solidarity, an interest in the success of ones's kin, and the realisation that a brother's success is in a way one's success, and so one should take pride in one's brothers' success, achievements and advancements in life.

Another Tiv proverbial saying that rails and flails jealousy is, *angbian ka nan alu sha ipyungwa uyaieren* (when your brother is on the saddle/throne you eat the best portions of meals). The Tiv are universally known with their social philosophy of *ya na angbian* (eat and give your brother). At the core of the philosophy is the imperative of social justice, equity, equality, promotion of communal brotherhood, love, and the communal sharing of public goods, values and resources (Pine, 2013). All these sayings and expressions are culturally sedimented in Tiv philosophy and run concomitantly in contrasting direction to *Iyuhe*. The strange bedfellowship of *Iyuhe* and these noble values can hardly be gainsaid. The *Tivyanaangbian*, stands at a coeval status with other similar communal philosophies in Africa such as the Tswana, *Botho*; the Yoruba, *Omoluabi*, and Igbo, *Ikenga*. Writing on the place, importance and relevance of these communal philosophies Sudarska (1996, p146-148) cited in Babatubde (2019, p. 31) contends that, '...the Tswana *Botho*, Yoruba *Omoluabi*, Igbo *Ikenga* are all spiritual concepts that reiterate the importance of hard work, intense humanity demonstrated in caring and sharing—respect, responsibility, restraint, reciprocity, reverence,

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responsibility, reason and reconciliation.'

Now let's look at Jibo's postulations on *yanaangbian* and Tiv politics. Premise 1.) 'In politics, the Tiv culture discourages the building of a political career which could lead to pre-eminence in it.' 2.) 'Under the *yanaangbian* (eat and give your brother to eat too) principle, once you get elected into the legislature for a term, you are expected to 'decline' it the next time around so that another person may also 'taste' the political experience or post, a few exceptions to this rule notwithstanding.' 3) 'On the face of value of it, the principle of *ya n aangbian* looks so fair that one would be hard put to oppose it but in reality it may thwart Tiv aspirations in politics since it discourages the building of an enduring political career which might see one eventually at the apex of society or that of the Nigerian state.'

The contention that Tiv culture discourages the building of a political career which could lead to pre-eminence is counterfactual. What are the facts? As Jibo himself stated, J.S. Tarka was in the parliament from 1954 to 1966 a period of thirteen years. In 1979, he won election into the Senate and was there till his demise in 1980. George Akume served as Governor of Benue State from 1999 to 2007, eight years; he served in the Senate for 2007 to 2019, twelve years; a total of twenty uninterrupted years. He is presently serving as Minister of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Suswam spent eight years in the House of Representatives, 1999 to 2007, eight years as Governor of Benue State, total of sixteen years and was recently elected into the Senate for a term of four years. At the end of his present tenureship in the Senate, Suswam would have spent twenty years in power. The incumbent Governor of Benue State, Samuel Ortom, was Chairman of Guma Local Government, Minister, set to complete his eight uninterrupted years as Governor. Terngu Tsegba spent twelve years in the Federal House of Representatives and rose to become Speaker Pro-tempore; Senator Orkev Jev is set to complete his twelve years in the National Assembly, first as member of House of Representatives for eight years, and now Senator. So many of these examples abound.

All these positions we have reeled out, their various occupants got in through the instrumentality of *Tiv ya na angbian*. A political career that spans for twenty years, and in some cases largely uninterrupted can scarcely be said to be not 'an enduring political career.' This fact therefore runs contrary to the postulation that dismantles 'Tiv culture discourages the building of political career which could lead to pre-eminence.' If anything, Tiv political behaviour have demonstrated a penchant for encouraging longevity in political career without recourse to *Iyuhe*—whether of the *boon* or *bem* variety.

A related issue that needs to be addressed is Jibo's (1993, p. 196) claim that 'Because of the *Iyuhe* on the average Tiv's mind, he or she does not wish to have another Tiv to excel. This *Iyuhe* is only applicable to fellow Tiv.

Anything will be done to block a fellow Tiv man from achieving fame, wealth, position, invention, prestige, etc.' The Tiv are renowned for assisting fellow Tiv to attain prestigious positions, to achieve fame and glory, and to acquire wealth. The exploits of Paul Unongo in his brief stint as Minister of Power and Steel, Professor Daniel Saor as Vice Chancellor of Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), General Stephen Ikya at the Federal Urban Mass Transit Programme (FUMTA) and many others contradict this claim. Fellow Tiv have facilitated the appointment of Tiv sons and daughters into positions of prominence such as Military Governors, civilian Governors, Ministers, Ambassadors, heads of parastatals and agencies, Vice Chancellors, Chancellors and Pro-chancellors of universities, chairmen and members of numerous federal boards and agencies; the list is endless. It is therefore counterfactual to say the Tiv on account of *Iyuhu* do not help themselves to attain positions of respectability, fame, wealth and prominence; and should one defy the odds and break the ceiling, fellow Tiv would do all they can to pull such a risen Tiv person down.

Finally, we have deliberately left untreated issues that are extraneous to Tiv politics such as non-patronage of Tiv business men and women, Tiv elites' patronage of non-Tiv business as against Tiv businesses; inter- and intra-personal and so on. The reason is simple, they are not immediately relevant to the scope of this paper which focuses mainly on the interface of *Iyuhu* and politics. These issues would be discussed in a more expansive discourse on Tiv society. To draw the curtain on this discourse, it is pertinent to state that the reigning cultural ideology in Tiv society is not *Iyuhu*; there is no Tiv exceptionalism to this human emotion, therefore, to say so would be overly deterministic.

Conclusion

This paper has presented the arguments of the proponents of the *Iyuhu* thesis and its impact on Tiv society and development. Specifically, it examined the place of *Iyuhu* in Tiv politics. It argued *Iyuhu* is not one of the major organising principles and cultural ideology of the Tiv. Furthermore, that contrary to the postulations of the *Iyuhu* proponents the body of available evidences from the empirical, conceptual, and cultural ecologies of the Tiv points to the fact that *Iyuhu* is not a factor in Tiv politics. There is no Tiv exceptionalism to jealousy and envy and polygamous practice. Indeed, from the repertoire of their moral and cultural cosmos, the Tiv are notable for being their brother's keeper based on their communal philosophy of *ya na angbian* and their ever-insatiable desire to celebrate individual excellence and achievements.

The Tiv are renowned for assisting themselves to attain positions of prominence and eminence. This assistance is emblematised in their occupation of top elective and appointive positions in Nigeria. There is

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nothing in the Tiv culture, contrary to the *Iyuheists'* position, that thwart the political careers of Tiv sons and daughters and their rise to enduring political careers. From available evidences, Tiv people have facilitated, sustained and consolidated the political careers of Tiv sons and daughters in most instances electing them for uninterrupted periods of twenty years and ever willing to do more should the need arise. The Tiv *yanaangbian* like other communal philosophies across the globe is a is promotes the ethos of good governance, equity, justice, fair distribution of communal public goods and resources. Given the weight of these evidences, it is concludable *Iyuhe* has no impact on Tiv politics.

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