

MOM KOHOL MOM IN TIV SOCIO-POLITICAL THOUGHT SYSTEM

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Abstract

The initiative of living and realizing one's potential, enjoying peace, resources and tranquility in the society was heralded by Africans from time immemorial. Living in unity and cohesion not only ensured protection of lives and property but also provided the needed atmosphere for Africans to showcase their hidden potentials for the development of their various communities. Among the Tiv people of Benue State, Nigeria the ideology of 'mom kohol mom' was devised to uphold the above value. The study employed qualitative research tools where data were derived from books, journal articles, dictionaries and the Internet etc. The historical, expository, descriptive and evaluative methods were adopted for the study. The historical method presented the views of various Western and African philosophers cum scholars on the concept of communalism. The expository and descriptive methods presented the nature of traditional socio-political thought of Tiv people while the evaluative method focused on 'mom kohol mom' as potent principle for national unity among the Tiv people of Nigeria. The study found out that, lack of unity has bedeviled the Tiv nation due to non-adherence to the communal life style as encapsulated in 'mom kohol mom'. This has led to evident exhibitions and portrayals of jealousy, envy, religious fanaticism, land disputes, poverty, politics of bitterness, decline in value orientation, individualism, sectionalism etc. These indices have thwarted development in Tiv land, retarded growth and bred suspicion among the people. The study therefore concluded that, Tiv people need to revive their traditional value system as encapsulated in 'mom kohol mom' in order to accomplish cohesion, integration, unity and development.

Keywords: African, Tiv, Mom, Kohol, Communal, Cohesion and Unity.

Introduction

From time immemorial, African societies devised a means of maximizing and enhancing the potentials that nature provides. In Nigeria and Tiv society to be precise, ways were strategized of living and enjoying life. One of these ways is the principle, *mom kohol mom*. This cohesive philosophy ensured that lives and properties are protected with the welfare of members of the community taken care of. Africans long ago, underscored the relevance of living in communion with other members of the society and that is why they abhorred or jettisoned individualism. But that is not to say that they disapproved individual effort or feat but that they felt living in communion breeds unity, solidarity, oneness, harmony, and cohesion. For them, that was the surest way to ensuring the attainment of development and progress.

Mom means one. *Kohol* means plus. *Mom kohol mom* literally means one plus one. This implies the coming together of brothers and sisters to promote the interest and good of the Tiv society. Furthermore, *mom kohol mom* entails living in mutual relationship,

togetherness and oneness to promote the common good of all the members of the Tiv society. This is the socio-political thought system of the Tiv people which ensured that every member or segment of the community benefit from the resources that accrue from it.

On this note, the paper examines the concept of *mom kohol mom* in Tiv socio-political thought as communalistic system for national unity and cohesion. This begins with a clarification of concepts, a review of the concept of communalism as captured by some African philosophers and scholars; *mom kohol mom* in Tiv socio-political thought as communalistic system would be examined; challenges of realizing or adhering the communal thought of *mom kohol mom* in the contemporary era shall also be identified as well as an evaluation and conclusion would be drawn.

Clarification of Key Concepts

For one to have a firm understanding of this study, it is ideal to explain the following concepts: *Mom Kohol Mom*,

Communalism, National Unity and Cohesion.

Mom Kohol Mom: *Mom kohol mom* is an altruistic and inclusive worldview that transcends zoning and power rotation to a realization of the holistic development of the Tiv society. It is a Tiv philosophical ideology that emphasizes the communalism of members of the society. It entails solidarity, togetherness, oneness, unity and a sense of belonging and brotherhood. It abhors all manner of selfishness, greed and individualism.

Communalism: Communalism is a political philosophy and economic system that integrates communal ownership and confederations of highly localized independent communities. Murray Bookchin, a prominent libertarian socialist, defined the communalism he developed as “a theory of government or a system of government in which independent communes participate in a federation” as well as “the principles and practice of communal ownership”. (The term government does not imply acceptance of a state or top-down hierarchy).¹

For Kwame Gyekye, communalism is the doctrine that the communality (or group) is the focus of activities of the individual member of the society.² What that entails is that in communal setting, individuals that constitute the socio-political environment and working relationships are involved. In support of that view, Africa Economic Development Institute (AEDI) in one of its special articles defines communalism as a

¹. M. Bookchin in dwardmac.pitzer.edu.

². K. Gyekye, *Tradition and Modernity: Philosophical Reflections on the African Experience*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 36

strong allegiance limited to one's own ethnic group, commonly based on sharing history and cultures, characterized by collective cooperation and ownership by members of a community.³ It is the strong identity with and devotion to the interest of one's own minority or ethnic group rather than those of society as a whole. It is a form of nationalism at the sub-national level. Communalism, in a broad sense, means a strong attachment to one's own community.

National Unity: Unity is the state of different areas or groups being joined together to form a single country or organization. It means to unite. Its synonyms are: agreement, accord, consensus, harmony, solidarity, unison, assent, unanimity, concord and concurrence. Others are: unification, coalition, federation, integration and amalgamation.⁴ The concept of unity is often associated with terms like mutual relationship and togetherness or oneness.

National Cohesion. This is a process and an outcome of instilling and enabling all citizens in the country to have a sense as well as a feeling that they are members of the same country, engaged in a common enterprise and facing shared challenges. Indeed, National Cohesion goes beyond peace-keeping and conflict management. National cohesion is based on the fact that societies and individuals can only achieve their potential when living and working together. This is realized through the regulation and reconciliation of differences, competing interests and demands. National unity is strong when everyone in the country has the opportunity, resources and motivation to participate in society as fully as they wish and on an equal basis with others.⁵

Brief History of Tiv

Before the idea of *mom kohol mom* is examined, it is ideal to present a brief history and geographical location of the Tiv as a people. The term Tiv, according to Shagba J. Moti, refers to the identity and language of a people.⁶ The Tiv people are located in Benue State, Middle Belt region in Central Nigeria. Tiv land extends on both sides of River Benue in Central Nigeria and occupies an area of about 9,861 square miles and stretches from about 60 30 to 80 north latitude and 80 to 10 east3 longitude. Based on the last official Nigerian census of 2006, the Tiv people numbered 4.6 million. That makes them the most populous ethnic group in Benue State and the fourth largest ethnic group in Nigeria after Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo with over 14 million individuals throughout Nigeria and Cameroon. The Tiv language is spoken by about 15 million people in Nigeria and close to a million in Cameroon. Most of the language's Nigerian speakers

³. www.africaecon.org

⁴. <https://www.collinsdictionary.com>

⁵. <https://www.must.ac.ke/nationalcohesion>

⁶. **Shagba J. Moti.** *An Encounter Between Tiv Religion and Christianity.* (Enugu: SNAAP Press Ltd, 2001), 9

are found in Benue, Cross River, Taraba, Nasarawa, Plateau and Ekiti States and FCT Abuja. The language is a branch of Benue-Congo and ultimately of the Niger-Congo phylum.⁷

According to Akpenpuun Dzurgba, *Swem* is the place where Tiv people migrated from to where they are today in Benue State.⁸ The Tiv migrated from *Swem* in Akwaya sub-division of Cameroon and finally settled in the Benue Valley of Central Nigeria. Tiv is the fourth largest ethnic group in Nigeria. Tiv is an ethno-linguistic group in West Africa with its language spoken in Benue, Taraba, Nasarawa, Plateau, Ekiti, Cross River, as well as FCT Abuja.

The Tiv are predominantly subsistent farmers whose main crops are rice, cassava, yams, millet, soya beans and sorghum etc. The people also rear livestock such as ram, goats, pigs and chickens as well as cattle. Owing to the influence of westernization, a good number of Tiv people have converted from traditional religion to Christianity, and a lesser number have adopted Islam; but their traditional religion, based on the manipulation of forces and cultic emblems, *akombo*, entrusted to humans by a creator god, remains strong.

The *akombo* are manifested in certain symbols or emblems and in diseases that they create. An organization of wise elders, called *ityo*, with the ability to manipulate these forces meet at night to repair those manifestations of *akombo* (e.g., epidemics) that affect the people. The Tiv people are the largest producers of yam in the whole world hence, the appellation, "Food Basket of the Nation". It is said that the typical Tiv person does not hold back when it comes to food. Due to its popularity, it is assumed that pounded yam, *ruam*, and soup is a staple in any Tiv home. Nevertheless, there are three major types of *ruam* that are eaten by Tiv people. There is *ruam kumen*, *ruam nahaan*, and *akpu*. On another note, the Tiv people are well known for being hospitable and accommodative of strangers. Today, Tiv people occupy fourteen Local Government Areas in Benue State, namely: Makurdi, Katsina-Ala, Kwande, Ushongo, Gboko, Tarka, Buruku, Vandeikya, Ukum, Logo, Guma, Gwer, Gwer West and Konshisha.

Tiv Political Setting and Thought

The Tiv had no administrative divisions and no chiefs nor councils. Leadership was based on age, influence and affluence. The leaders' functions were to furnish safe conduct, arbitrate disputes within their lineages, sit on moots and lead their people in all external and internal affairs.⁹ Among the Tiv, the basic unit of socio-political

⁷ E. Duggan, "Notes on the Munshi ('Tivi') Tribe of Northern Nigeria: Some Historical Outlines". (*Journal of the Royal African Society*. 31 (123): 1932), 173-182

⁸ A. Dzurgba, *Fundamentals of Traditionalism*. (Nsukka: Progress Printing Press, 1977), 28

⁹ Okechie-Offoha *et al*, Marcellina Ulunma; Sadiku, Matthew N. O. *Ethnic and Cultural Diversity in Nigeria*. (Africa World Press, 1996), 105

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organization was the *Ya* (compound).¹⁰ After *Ya* is the lineage, clan and ultimately the kindred levels. These designations are not used in the sense of a hierarchy of administrative units. With regards to the Tiv, the *Ya* consisted in its simplest form a man, his wife or wives, their children and various other categories of dependents. It was the duty of the *Orya*, (head of the compound), to protect his wives, children and other dependents. The dependents were largely made up of strangers, adventurers and refugees. However, impoverished dependents in the compound of really wealthy men could be exploited through active participation in farm activities in return for the protection and food they enjoyed. Similarly, immigrant families or persons grateful for protection of the men of substance within the community could be exploited as well.¹¹

The all-important source of power was seniority based on age. Age conferred superior knowledge of the environment, control over women and therefore control over young men. The ideology of lineage descent was the primary factor that differentiated full citizens with prior entitlement to local resources from client/dependent outsiders. It is pertinent to note that the compound, *Ya*, being an independent unit was linked with other units through kinship connections and ties of marriage alliance. A group of compounds tracing their descent to a common ancestor made up the clan. To the average Tiv, his centre of allegiance lay in the first instance with the *Ya*, followed by the kindred, then clan. This pattern of allegiance precluded any attempt at evolving some sort of centralized monarchy that could command the respect and obedience of all Tiv people.¹²

Mom Kohol Mom in Tiv Socio-Political Thought as Communalistic System for National Unity

Communalism in Tiv Traditional World View

In times past, the Tiv practised a policy of “communalism” or “collectivism”. By this policy, all activities, like tilling the land, building living quarters, food security etc. were approached collectively. Even children belonged to the collective society. Tiv communal value also reflected in “*ihyumbe*” whereby farming activities were carried out communally and in which all members of a particular age grade participated. Land in Tiv society was also owned by the family and only allotted by the eldest family member – no single individual possessed land. Everything was communally owned. This egalitarian attitude ensured fair and equitable distribution of resources. Torkula captures this communal spirit which he calls kinship in his book, *The Concept, Practice*

¹⁰. M. Tesemchi, *The History of Political Change Among the Tiv in the 19th and 20th Centuries*. (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishing Co. Ltd., 1994), 24

¹¹. Y. Rose and W. I. Akputu, “Conflict Managers and the Strategies for Managing Conflict in African Traditional Religion and Culture: The Tiv Experience” in (*Journal of University Scholars in Religions (JUSREL)*), Issue 8. Vol. 2., April, 2020), 201

¹². Rose and Akputu, 201

and Colonial Influence on Kinship System Among the Tiv People of Central Nigeria. He states thus:

It is worthy of note that the concept of kinship among the Tiv people applied to hunting and the dividends derived there from. Animals killed in a hunt were shared equitably so that no person returned home empty handed...any opportunity that comes to the kinship group is shared among members. Everything belongs to the group and not individuals. Even wives belong to the group except sexual intercourse (*kwase wase*)...hunting among the kinship group was greatly influenced by this socialistic tendency.¹³

This communal attitude of the Tiv is a sound basis for forging a communal relationship between human beings and the environment. The African sees another as a brother and sister, they see themselves as belonging to one family, that is why they shared most things in common like land, eating together, sitting together in moonlight to tell tales, going to farm together (*ihyumbe* in Tiv), fishing together (*wa tange*). Thus, Gbenda specifically tries to capture aspects of the Tiv conceptualization of environment by stating they have a sense of communality – “*Ka se Tiv*” (We are Tiv); he states also that among the Tiv resources are set aside for conservation in hunting and fishing expedition – ‘*Wa Tange*,’ and ‘*Kohol Suwa*’. To him, these religio-cultural beliefs and practices are responsible for the protection of particular ecosystems or habitats, as well as the protection and conservation of particular animals or plant species through the use of taboos and regulation regarding the exploitation of particular natural resources.¹⁴

This communal attitude of the Tiv is a sound basis for forging a communal relationship between human beings and the environment. This was why any typical Tiv man or woman would punish or discipline an erring child even if the child does not belong to him or her and the parents would applaud such stranger. That is done because Africans believed that as soon as a child comes to this world, he or she belongs to the whole community and not just to the parents alone. Collaborating the same point Waghid, Van Wyk, Adams and November maintained that the slogan “your child is mine (and) my child is yours” has a particularly African flavour to it and in many ways epitomises the sense of community so prevalent in African society.¹⁵ In this sense, the child is held to be the property of the community and it is the community members who are expected to see to it that the individual child becomes a significant member of that particular community, an asset to all.

¹³. A. Torkula, *The Concept, Practice and Colonial Influence on Kinship System among the Tiv People of Central Nigeria*. (Jos: Midland, 2004), 59

¹⁴. J.S. Gbenda, *Religion and Ecology: A Comparative Study*. (Makurdi: Obeta Printing and Publishing, 2010), 1

¹⁵. Y. Waghid, B. Van Wyk, Adams, F. and November, L. (eds.). *African Philosophy of Education. Reconstructions and Deconstructions*. (Matieland: Stellenbosch University Printers. Department of Education Policy Studies (DEPS), 2005), 108

Africans also believe that the kith and kin is an unbroken cord such that anyone found wanting was frowned at. As such the Tiv would say, we are not fond of doing this “*Se mba eren nahan ga*”. Instead of *mo* (me) they would say *se* (we). They also believe that an injury to one is an injury to all, and a victory for one is a victory to the whole community. That is why they accord respect and honour to an individual who has excelled or attained a certain feat in life with a chieftaincy title.

Tiv Ontology as Background to the Practice of Mom Kohol Mom

God is the Supreme Being and creator of the universe. Addressed as *Aondo* in Tiv metaphysics, God is the creator of everything including man. He is the creator of the spirits, man, plants and animals as well as other things. In Tiv ontology, God is considered as residing above, in heaven; he is in all and holds all in being. In fact, everything in the world has its beginning and end in *Aondo*. All that God has made, the Tiv refer to as *gbaaondo*. *Gbaaondo* explains the nature and order of things and being. Even though different, the universe is ordered in such a way that there is perfect harmony in the inter-relation between the various beings in being. All the activities of *takuruku*, *adzov*, *akombo* and *mbatsav* are submerged at the end in *Aondo*. This implies that all the spirits and forces, though endowed with power, must have their blessings from God, for it is God, *Aondo*, who represents the supreme essence of all created beings.

In Tiv ontology, God created the spirits to serve man as the mediator between Him and mankind. Though invisible, spirits were endowed with the capacity to reveal themselves to man. Man as the summit of all created beings, has innate potential to communicate with spirits. In his overwhelming goodness, God created animals and plants as raw materials for appeasing spirits and to serve man's needs. *Mom kohol mom*, as a principle, has drawn its power and philosophy from the unity of all forces in nature with God, *Aondo*, to emphasis the need for mankind to work together in harmony, drawing strength from God, to promote common good above all things and ensure the attainment of the existential end of all.

In Tiv metaphysics, *tsav*, witchcraft is featured prominently. It is a mystical force, tangible and intangible mystery. For the common man, it is something that grows in the human heart or chest. It is not exclusive to humans, animals too. It is either transmitted biologically or acquired through initiation. *Tsav* is neutral and it either used to perpetrate good or evil, depending on the witch or wizard. If the witch or wizard is good by nature, he uses it for good, and if he or she is bad, he uses it for evil. According to Wegh and Moti, “...one can have a good heart or an evil heart. When *tsav* is linked with the heart, the implication is that the heart determines the nature of *tsav*. A good heart means a benevolent *tsav*, while an evil heart translates into a malevolent *tsav*”¹⁶.

¹⁶ J. Moti and F. Wegh. *An Encounter Between Tiv Religion and Christianity*. (Enugu: SNAAP Press Ltd, 2001), 57

The good *tsav* brings a great manifestation of success, wealth and development while the bad *tsav* causes retrogression, stagnation, infertility and wretchedness as well as poverty. Through this witchcraft practice, the Tiv elders commune with the spirits. This communion enables them to know the mind of the spirits and order the society as such to enhance community harmony, peace, progress and development. The elders have a lot of respect in Tiv tradition, such that once one becomes an elder; there is need for him to start seeing spiritually. This makes the elder to know why there is bad omen in the land and how order will be restored. Whenever there is problem, the entire community makes recourse to the elders to know why such has befallen them. The elders too ensure that the people keep to the custom and tradition handed down to them by God through the spirits. They emphasize the right thing and discourage the bad through reward and punishment in accordance with the unity of purpose emphasized by the principle, *mom kohol mom*.

Mom Kohol Mom as Tiv Political Thought for National Unity

The Tiv understanding of the physical and spiritual components of the human person has made them to have respect for human dignity. This respect is demonstrated in their hospitality and philosophy of solidarity, *ya na angbian*. They believe this philosophy can only be strong if they are generous and care for others. Everybody within Tiv world is a brother or sister. Hence, *Ayatutu ka uno, ka se!*, who are the people? We are! This solidarity is demonstrated when a Tiv man join his brother to combat a non-Tiv without knowing the cause of the fight. They respect all humans but care more for a fellow Tiv brother or sister. They are peaceful, loving and kind but when hurt they do not keep quiet. Also notable in Tiv hospitality is the Tiv gesture of kindness and receptibility towards visitors. According to Ushe, "...the Tiv hold in high esteem the virtue of: welcoming strangers, protecting visitors, (*u eren a mba van nya dedoo*), feeding the hungry (*u nan mba ijen I ker ve kwaghyan*), housing the homeless (*u taren ior ikyar ki yaven*), amongst others. All these form the package for Tiv hospitality, which is grounded on the Tiv maxim, *Er-doo hembra inyaregh* (charity is better than money)".¹⁷ This belief system makes them to insist on a visitor eating in their house and any visitor that refuses to eat is not accepted. For them, such a visitor has an ulterior motive for doing so and even when accommodated, they keep an eye on him. Their generosity to visitors does not extend to giving one's wife to a visitor. The man can leave his family bed for a visitor to sleep but cannot give him his wife to sleep with, because by tradition, Tiv people do not share their wives. Hence the Tiv saying, *u yav or a kwase yo, u ngu nan ken ikev-we*, (i.e. if you sleep with a man's wife, you are in his palm). It also means the man with whose wife another has had sexual intercourse, has the power to kill the latter, and whatever he says against such will manifest. What he says works because the community is already connected spiritually and the gods do not entertain sexual promiscuity, hence they only

¹⁷ M. U. Ushe, *Kpor of Tiv Culture*. (Enugu: SNAAP Press Ltd, 2007), 122

wait for the words of the man whose wife has been defied. What follows is punishment with death or impotence to serve as deterrent to others who have the same tendency.

Cardinal to Tiv ethics is good behaviour. This must be done according to the principles and traditional belief system of the people. To ensure spiritual order, the elders emphasis purity in chaste living and virginity; sexual fidelity in marriage; love, kindness and benevolence towards others; respect for parents and elders, men and women; absolute respect and obedience to the customs and beliefs of the Tiv society; respect for life and the dignity of the human person; respect and unreserved pursuit of common good; sincerity and honesty in relationships; hard work and diligence in one's duties; and respect for places considered as sacred etc. These moral values are emphasized by the elders and kept by all to avoid the anger of the gods, spirits. Therefore, inability to keep these ethical principles is responsible for disunity, divorce, diseases, poverty, communal clashes, disorder and untimely death. In such a situation, the gods must be appeased before good health, peace and order will be restored.

The spirit of oneness and the sense of perpetual peace, order, unity, altruism and development propelled the Tiv to introduce the principle of fair sharing, *ya na angbian*, to regulate the sharing of food, wards and rotational system of farming, *ihyumbe* etc. This happened in the pre-colonial time, when the Tiv practiced communal mode of production. However, with the coming of the British colonialists and the imposition of Western ideology on the Tiv people, certain changes took place. For instance, exchange marriage practiced in pre-colonial Tiv society was replaced with bride price marriage. Immediately following the abolition of exchange marriage as a consequence was the system of kinship, which was tied to marriage and other social attitudes connected to it.

The Tiv socio-political philosophy, *ya na angbian*, survived the influence and changes brought by the British colonialist and was carried along to the colonial and post-colonial times. *Ya na angbian*, which was applied in the allocation of resources and the rotational system of farming, *ihyumbe*, has been adopted in the zoning and rotation of chieftaincy as well as political positions today.

Also worthy of note, is the fact that the principle of *ya na angbian* as applied in the pre-colonial Tiv society was both a spiritual and ethical principle, based on obedience to the spirits, sustaining unity and effective allocation of communal resources. Unity, *joozwa*, was necessary for peace and order. With the introduction of the principle, the sense of common good as contained in *mom kohol mom* was strengthened, for even men that had no biological sisters were given sisters to exchange for a wife, *yamshe*.

Mom kohol mom principle empasised that no individual can stand alone and do anything. Based on this no one was proud of his achievement in terms of his personal

abilities; since such achievements were dedicated to the people, for the people supported him both materially and spiritually to excellence. Hence, the saying, *tahav ka ityo*, power belongs to the kin and/or elders; for whatever blessing one has got is as a result of his back, *tahav ka jime*. So the Tiv belief system is tied to their communal value and all their actions are judged with special reference to the ontological balance of their society.

In the spirit of *mom kohol mom*, the Tiv believed that a tree cannot make a forest, *kon mom ngu luun ikyô ga* (a tree cannot make a forest). It was also believed that a river went along and was never straight (*wagh sen tswen hule*). The Tiv philosophy of *mom kohol mom* expresses this idea very well. Thus, from childhood to adulthood, the individualistic tendencies were curbed through social interactions and religious orientations. The Tiv for instance sang a song of solidarity as follows:

Tiv: *Iyange ne alu ikyurior a bam seoo*
hôn se kpe, hôn se kpe
iyange ne alu ikyurior a hii seoo !
hôn se kpe, hôn se kpe!

English: The day another people provokes us
Yes, we shall die; yes we shall die.
The day another people insults us!
Yes, we shall die, yes we shall die!

The message of the song is very clear and simple. It means the day other people provokes us, “we” shall fight to death. This expresses the individual's dedication and commitment to the cause of the community – “we”. It is this “we” as a people that was learnt in all things as an expression of *mom kohol mom*. This solidarity was a motivating factor in war. Anytime the Tiv engaged in war with another people, the spirit of communality and solidarity was a stimulating factor which helped them to defeat an enemy. For instance, the following song of solidarity was quite inspiring:

Tiv: *mnyam chiem er uke mire*
hoo uke mire
shima yam ngi awambe, awambe!
hôn ngi awambe awambe!

English: I dreamt that the non-Tiv have drowned
Yes they have drowned
My heart is bloody and bloody!
Yes it is bloody and bloody!

With this song, it was clear that the Tiv are now ready to fight to death with the non-Tiv

who have offended them. Thus, the person learnt to appreciate the survival value of a corporate existence, solidarity, consensus and cooperation, *mom kohol mom*. Whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual. Therefore, the only way of understanding the African communal sense is "I am because we are, and since we are therefore, I am".¹⁸

Challenges in the Effective Implementation of Mom Kohol Mom

The challenges of *mom kohol mom* in Tiv society today is generally known to have been borne out of the interest of the elite class whose interest is not for the sake of peace and development in Tiv society but to pave way for their exploitative political agenda. The politics of dominance has affected the Tiv democratic purpose for the adoption of *mom kohol mom* and has divided the Tiv into different sections such as MINDA, Jemgbagh, Sankera and Jechira, etc. In recent times, the Tiv nation is no longer divided according to the patrilineal cleavages like *Ityo-ishin*, *Kparev*, *Shitile*, *Ichongo* and *Ipusu*. The new double-edged sword that is cutting the Tiv nation apart is the emergence of political associations.¹⁹

At present, the situation has changed as individualism has taken over and decisions are not often taken by consensus in Tiv society. Consequently, power is now in the hands of the strongest in Tiv society including political and traditional powers. Thus, many Tiv politicians find ways of coming to power by all means in Nigeria. Consequently, Nigerian politics includes election rigging and even the use of hired thugs, resulting in the further diminishing of people's political voice leading to disunity among party members. So when some politicians fail to win a majority in Tiv land, they still insist on holding on to power by resorting to rigging.

Political leadership is supposed to rotate across families out of a sense of consensus and sharing. Where this is not followed, the people resist imposition of a political leader on them using spiritual or physical means. There are some challenges in the effective implementation of *mom kohol mom*. Among them are: jealousy (*iyuhe*), religious issues, politics of bitterness, decline in value orientation, sectionalism and Westernisation among others.

Jealousy

According to Tiv tradition, jealousy means *Iyuhe*. *Iyuhe* means jealousy. It is popularly known as 'Pull Him Down' (PHD) syndrome. It is a situation whereby one seeks to destroy the other in order to take his place. However, Ahile opines that much of what

¹⁸. J. S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*. (New York: Doubleday & Co. 1970), 108

¹⁹. Yawe qtd in S.D. Shishima, "Tiv Unity and National Development in Nigeria" A Paper Presented at the Cubanet Publishers and Tiv Professionals Initiative Annual Public Lecture Series and Induction of Tiv Professionals held at (Jovina Hotel, Gboko on 31st October, 2015), 6

goes on in Tiv society today can only be understood against the background of the social structures and relations initiated by those who colonised them. "Yes, the structures are so created to fashion the desired disparity amongst groups".²⁰ The trend has led to the decline of ethical principles in the land. For instance, the unity that existed in Tiv land was triggered by the respect the younger ones had for those who were elders in the land. Today, the situation has changed, the mentality of internal discrimination and jealousy is very strong. It is very common to hear one say that *via vea mo yô saa shin gema*, meaning "this person and I, unless we meet in the grave".²¹

Jibo notes that those who have this kind of orientation would want to thwart their brothers and sisters and to hinder them from advancing. According to him, this tends to make Tiv politicians to view politics as mutually and exclusively preserved. This *iyuhe* explains why Tiv politicians see the other as an opponent instead of seeing him/her as a colleague for peace, unity and development for the whole Tiv nation, a situation that is active in Tiv nation.

Religious Issues

Religious issues most a times lead to disunity in Tiv society due to the fact that, belief systems are viewed in different perspectives therefore, paving way for the lack of unity in Tiv society as a group of people. Even in the same congregation or denomination, the same thing happens when there is a disagreement over interpretation of scriptures, doctrines, sacraments or practice. Religious institutions split into factions and such factions organise themselves into new religious institutions, organisation or movement. Religious controversies and schism in Christianity originate from these sources.²²

Today, most Tiv people are Christians and a few are Muslims. However, some are adherents of Traditional African Religion. This is to say that the religious issues between the Tiv can also cause disagreement as they are religiously pluralistic. It is, therefore, appropriate to say that some of the ethnic squabbles involving them can be also traced to fusion created as a result of political participation and control over land, in pursuit of political power, the manipulation of religion may lead to religious problem between the people of other religious organisations.²³

Land Disputes

Land disputes may occur between two or more communities in Tiv society. This is often

^{20.} T. Ahile, *Culture, Democracy and the Rule of Law: Theory and Evidence from Nigeria*. (Zaria: Ahmadu Bello University Press Limited, 1977), 107

^{21.} M. Jibo, *Tiv Politics since 1959*. (Zaria: ABU Press, 1993), 200

^{22.} A. Dzurgba, *Fundamentals of Traditionalism*. (Nsukka: Progress Printing Press, 1977), 2

^{23.} S.D. Shishima, "Tiv Unity and National Development in Nigeria" A Paper Presented at the Cubanet Publishers and Tiv Professionals Initiative Annual Public Lecture Series and Induction of Tiv Professionals held at (Jovina Hotel, Gboko on 31st October, 2015), 91

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due to the growth in population and the desire to own, control and acquire enough land for farming, residential buildings, investment and sale to those in need. The people may as well need a particular piece of land for social, economic, political and technological development; as a result groups may no longer meet to discuss certain issues that ordinarily would have been for the unity of the said community thereby causing disunity among the people. This is very common in Tiv society.²⁴

Belief and the Practice of Witchcraft

Belief in witchcraft often caused disunity among the Tiv. Sometimes, a person is accused of bewitching another and this creates a lot of disunity among family members. Again, the fight over witchcraft charms and emblems (*ambor a ivungu man akombo*) may create a lot of squabbles and fight among even close kins in Tiv society.²⁵

Politics of Bitterness

In recent times, party politics and the aggressive quest for power and wealth seems to have eroded the value of honesty and good family name that was associated with the Tiv. Some Tiv youths engage in snatching of ballot boxes during elections. Political opponents are maimed, killed, thrown into hand dug wells to die without befitting burial. Young girls and boys are intimidated, harassed, raped so as to impose unpopular candidates on the masses. The worst of it all is the involvement of traditional and religious rulers into political affairs of the people.²⁶

Decline in Value Orientation

When a Tiv man gives birth to a child, he does not actually think that the man and woman have the right to bring up the child morally, there is a conception that the child that is born into the world is no longer the child of the parents alone. True as that may be, experience has shown that this egalitarian quality has been abused in recent time and in most cases misunderstood and misinterpreted by many people.²⁷ Children were taught how to respect parents; respect for elders does not begin with physical gesture. It is proper to inculcate values into the young members of the society through the use of words. The sacredness of a name announces to the child that such a person deserves respect and honour. This is one thing that is lacking in Tiv society at present. Children simply greet their parents by calling their names. There is no sign that the parent or parents are special in their lives. This attitude continues as the child grows up. In most cases, this brings about an immediate result, an insistence by those in authority to win the respect due to them normally will lead the young man to ask some nasty questions like; "*msteu sha akuu ashee?*" (do I sleep on your eye brow?). Also worthy of note is the

²⁴ Shishima, 12

²⁵ S. D. Shishima, 12

²⁶ S. D. Shishima, 12-13

²⁷ S. D. Shishima, 13

fact that what counts now in the Tiv society is money. In fact, there is a common adage that has come with the derogatory epoch which says, *or u mimi yo saa naira*. This is interpreted to mean, “a man of honour, is one with a lot of money”. The reality on ground is that such mentality is built by the uprising of capitalism in our society, and this practice has over the years gradually pushed the philosophy of communalism to the background.

Sectionalism

Sectionalism or factionalism in Tiv has manifested itself in many respects: giving of political appointments, distributing or allocating/erecting developmental structures and worst of it all, it has manifested in xenophobic dimension. 'Ka Kparev' or 'ka Mbavia a Mbavia gaa', 'ka Ihyarev', 'ka Masev', 'ka Isherev', or 'ka Ityoshin gaa' or generally *ka MINDA* (*Masev, Ihyarev, and Nongov* Development Association). These stereotypes, prejudices, name calling and all kinds of pejorative, derogatory and apprehensive xenophobic feelings and attitudes have only fanned the ember of disunity and divide in Tiv land. This had made clans in Tiv to build barriers against their fellow Tiv brothers to such an extent that even land is preferred to be sold to a non-Tiv by the seller than to his Tiv fellow.²⁸ The settler-indigene phenomenon in Tiv land has made other clans to refer to others as '*mbavan-a-va*' (strangers or foreigners) as such any sensitive decision, or, development is greeted by exclusion, discrimination, acrimony, marginalisation and deprivation. These and other forms of are devoid of communalism and have greatly thwarted the much cherished development in Tiv land to such an extent that Tiv land is branded a Less Developed State (LDS) as it faces crises of underdevelopment.²⁹

Westernization

Westernization of Tiv society by the British colonialists entrenched liberalism in human behaviour, particularly the Christian message that no one should judge and punish except God. This has given room to looming social vices and crime like sexual promiscuity, armed robbery and theft as well as loss of respect for elders etc. The Tiv tradition of altruistic pursuit of common good has been sacrificed on the altar of individualism, as everyone thinks of himself and his family. Today, what is meant for many is hijacked by a few. This system instituted by westernization has stagnated true development in Tiv society.

Globalisation

Globalization has turned the world into a global community with the advent of

²⁸. I. W. Akputu and T. Mhon, “Tiv Concepts of *Tsav* and *Iyuhwe* as Key Factors in the Underdevelopment of Tiv and Tiv Land”. Tarnongo Adejir and Terver Udu (eds). *Tiv Language, Culture and Political Economy: Issues, Challenges and Prospects*. (Katsina-Ala, Benue State: Gold Ink Company, 2017), 430

²⁹. P. Unongo, *The Intelligentsia and the Politics of Development*. Ed. Shija, Terhemba, et al. (Makurdi: Aboki Publishers, 2010), xiv

technological innovations and gadgets commonly referred to as Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). It is a diverse set of technological tools and resources used to communicate and to create, disseminate, store and manage information. This includes technologies as radio, television, video, DVD, telephone, satellite systems, computer and network hardware and software; as well as the equipment and services associated with these technologies, such as video conferencing and electronic mail. These gadgets especially cell phones are sometimes used negatively by youths. The technological gadgets often tend to isolate the individual from the public or crowd. The individual may be in the public but is so engrossed or married to his/her cell phone to such an extent that he/she is completely out of the public. What is captured above is that globalization has somewhat negatively affected the spirit of communalism in the present time as people give or spend more time with technological gadgets than they should in physical contact. But that is not to say that these gadgets do not foster communalism. They do because individuals evolve communicating through social media platforms like WhatsApp, Zoom, 2go, Video Conferencing, etc.

Strategies for Effective Implementation of *Mom Kohol Mom* in Contemporary Tiv Society for National Unity

It is believed that, no society can build a solid foundation of national development and cohesion without visiting its past cultural heritage. It is the review of the past legacies that enables a society to improve its existing circumstances and experiences, and, therefore, preserve some aspects of its rich values to attain its aspirations. Recognizing the fundamental and inevitable place of the traditional systems of governance within the framework of national development, traditional moral values could be infused into the minds of contemporary Tiv sons and daughters.

Thus, Government should accord recognition to traditional institutions and values with the modern-socio-political system. There is also the need for Government to reintroduce moral instruction in all levels of our institutions of learning, allowing moral instruction draw its content from philosophical teachings. This will enhance the understanding and value of *mom kohol mom* amongst the people and promote discipline which will greatly minimize their tendency for corruption.

Other areas to be looked into and reshaped include the following:

- (a) Review of inherent structural defects in the composition of the entire Tiv socio-political system.
- (b) There is need for leaders who can turn setbacks into comebacks. Leaders that can add value to the people, use their influence at the right times for the right reasons. Such leaders are needed today to overcome the overwhelming insecurity orchestrated by Fulani herdsmen.

- (c) The entrenchment of justice, unity, equity, (*ya na anginaism*) and fair-play in the political administrative system.(d) Tiv value system needs to be strengthened and reconstructed. Stakeholders in Tiv need to come together and identify the negative, destructive and harmful elements in Tiv culture today and jettison them to advance the society socially, culturally, politically and economically.
- (e) Similarly, entrepreneurship attitude should be encouraged and promoted among the youth. Tiv youths should be empowered with skills to be useful to themselves, families and the society. Therefore, government should open the Food Basket of the Nation for business to thrive like establishment of factories to cater for the abundant agricultural produce that the state possesses; a lot more of the vibrant youth could be encouraged to engage in these productive ventures and in this manner it will prevent them from sitting and brooding over '*tsav*' and '*mbatsav*', for their predicament. After all, the Tiv say that even the '*imborivungu*' is not given to lazy or idle people.
- (f) To bridge the gap of animosity, sentimentality, acrimony and disharmony between Tiv clans and eschew '*iyuhwe*' (the destructive element) because it is often said '*iyuhe ka mtwem*', jealousy can boomerang like ashes.
- (g) Furthermore, efforts of spiritual leaders aimed at riding Tiv land of the activities of the destructive *tsav* should be encouraged, and supported by the government for greater and healthier development of the society. Efforts of successful sons and daughters should be appreciated, supported and imitated instead of blackmailing, backbiting, slandering and engaging in politics of acrimony in order to bring them down. Similarly, those who have made it to the top should equally aid the younger generation to also attain the same height.
- (h) Musicians, poets, academicians, the media, the entertainment industry, spiritual leaders and traditional institutions should intensify campaign promoting the Tiv traditional value of *mom kohol mom* towards ensuring progress, cohesion and development.

Conclusion

The paper examined *mom kohol mom* in Tiv socio-political thought as communalistic system for national unity in the contemporary era. *Mom kohol mom* is an altruistic and cohesive philosophy that transcends zoning and power rotation to a realization of the holistic development of the Tiv society. With the erosion of *mom kohol mom* in traditional Tiv society by the forces of westernization, there is lack of respect for elders–custodians of Tiv culture and tradition, and this has affected greatly the strict adherence to this principle as seen in its challenges. Today, an understanding of '*mom kohol mom*' as redefined in this work is necessary to inculcate in our leaders the tenets of altruism and absolute fairness which are indispensable for good governance and quality leadership. Hence a leader who knows and hearkens to the problems and aspirations of the masses realizes the essence of leadership which is unity, stability, equity, progress and

development. The tenets of the principle as demonstrated in the work clearly shows that the principle is crucial to the attainment of unity, stability, peace and development in Nigeria. It should therefore be incorporated into the constitution of institutions, nations, unions and organizations in furtherance of the culture of common good and peaceful co-existence.

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