The Relevance of Death Inquisition and Its Implications on Socio-Cultural Development of Tiv Society of Nigeria

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ABSTRACT: *This study is an investigation of the relevance of death inquisition and its implications on socio-cultural development of Tiv people of central Nigeria. In the traditional Tiv society, when a man or woman dies, no matter the circumstances of the death, an inquest is carried out to find out the possible cause(s). This is of course based on the general belief that one does not just die; one has to be killed by some evil forces. Functionalist theory was employed in analyzing the study. The study showed that death inquisition enabled the elders to punish those responsible for causing death in Tiv society. Death inquisition enabled the elders to propitiate certain magic to protect the general well being of people against evil forces, inquest information is useful in the instruction and guidance of youths in fulfilling longer lives. However, death inquisition consequently results to violence between accusers and the accused person which result to conflict. This conflict affects socio-cultural and economic activities. Led to protest, multiplicity of compound and massive migration of family members to other areas. The study concludes that Tiv people should view death as a natural occurrence (phenomenon). A conscious recognition of this fact will help them to have a more mature understanding of death and this will turn to diminish the implications (complexities) which death inquisition has on socio-cultural development.*

KEYWORDS*: Death inquisition, implications, Relevance, Tiv society, functionalism, socio-cultural development.*

I. INTRODUCTION

One important phenomenon, which preceded the interment in Tiv society, is *Ku oron* (death inquisition). According to Wegh (2009:7) "death inquisition is the process by which the Tiv investigate into the case of death of their family members". Tiv people do not bury their death without first determining who the killer was. Despeldel and Strickland (1998:45) explain:

Traditional societies typically embrace an ecological orientation in seeking causes of diseases and death. They look to the supernatural and investigate the possible role of such phenomenon as the wind or moon, heredity and behavioural excess like not getting enough sleep. Many socio-economic and psychological factors may be explored. Perhaps the cause of death is related to the person's social interactions. Was anger, anxiety, fright or envy somehow involved? Did the person offend the ancestors or neglect to carry out proper rites for the death?

In the traditional Tiv society, death inquisition is carried out based on the fact that one does not just die; one has to be killed by some evil forces. Thus, Wegh (2012:42) contends:

The malevolent aspect of Tsav can be used to "tambe" (bewitched) people, send them bad omens, inflict material losses on them, and even death. The Tiv believes that "ormba-tsav" (a witch) can inflict harm on someone without having physical contact with the victim. This is done by attacking the "jigingi" (spirit) which is the life force of the person. Tiv say that the mbatsav (witches) do not physically attack a person in order to kill him, but they kuma (stab) the jigingi of the person and he dies.

Charles (2011: 131) confirms this fear thus:
Witches are endowed with supernatural powers and are usually associated with evil. They are believed to have the power to transform themselves into various creatures of choice and can mysteriously appear in more than one place at a time doing evil on its targeted victims. Witches are organized, they hold meetings and court sessions to decide cases and pass judgment against their victims. Such meetings and court sessions are believed to be done in the dark or at night. Their operation and social importance depend on social environment in which they function. They are often associated with extreme secrecy, hatred, filth, dark places and nefariousness.

Generally, the two types of death in Tiv society *Swende* (violent death) and *anange* (death resulting from illness) are proceeded by an open inquest not only to find out those behind it, but to give the elders the opportunity to warn (*tachin*) and take steps to prevent similar deaths in their domain. Again, Despelder and Strickland (1998:45) observed:

Sudden death, whether due to violence or accidental injury threatens the community's welfare. Survivors must go beyond the obvious cause to uncover what lies behind it. Elaborate precautions may be set into motion and sacrifices and medicine may be employed to purify the land and protect the community from further calamity.

Death inquisition plays a relevant role in maintaining stability and consensus in Tiv society. Although, it has some implications, sometimes violence ensued among family members, especially when an inquest result (findings) exposed those behind the death. Charles et al (2011:138) observes, "Witchcraft accusation brings violent quarrels, assaults and blood revenge".

II. THEORETICAL EXPLANATION

Functionalism is considered appropriate to guide our investigation in this study. Functionalism is a theory that explains society by looking at it as a living organism. Haralambos and Holborn (2008:8) noted, "The key points of the functionalist perspective may be summarized by a comparison drawn from biology". In this way the functional view is that society is made up of various social institutions, such as the family, economy and the political system, of parts that are separate and yet interdependence or inter-locking. Functional theory of society according to Danrendorf (1959) characterizes every society as follows: First as a relatively persistent, stable structure of elements. Second as well-integrated structure of elements. This perspective emphasizes the way in which these parts of society are structured to maintain its stability. If there is any malfunction or disequilibrium in any parts, the society will be under threat. Talcott Parsons (1902-1979), American sociologists, was a key figure in the development of functionalist theory. Parsons was greatly influenced by the work of Emile Durkheim, Max Weber and other European sociologists (Abanyam, 2013).

The Tiv is born to two lineages: patrilineage (*Ityo*) and matrilineage (*Igba*). These lineages are responsible for his life and well-being. When he dies either of them must be held accountable. They must at least find an explanation for his death. Ordinarily, death causes a separation, which may never be reconciled. Death affects the living. By death, families are shattered, dreams of a better tomorrow are ended and hope is diminished. Therefore, death inquisition is a healing process, which aims to re-integrate broken families in communities, to heal wounds of acrimony and to re-enkindle hope in the people.

III. THE RELEVANCE OF DEATH INQUISITION AND ITS IMPLICATIONS ON SOCIO-CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT OF TIV SOCIETY OF NIGERIA

No matter where a man or woman dies, no matter the circumstance of death, the Tiv carry out an inquisition. This is particularly applicable to a young person. The setting of death inquisition is the home where the deceased is to be buried. Usually, the investigation takes place just before the burial, or at least on the day of the burial. Two main kin groups are involved in death inquisition. These are the *Ityo* (patrilineage) and *Igba* (matrilineage). In Tiv worldview, the two groups are the giver and taker of life. They also offer protection to an individual by ensuring that such an individual develop physically, spiritually and otherwise. Wegh (2007:7) claimed that, "a man's life is held in balance between his/her *Ityo* and *Igba*". With this reasoning, a man can only bewitched or killed by someone from either of the kin groups or through the combined accord of both kin groups. Every death inquisition begins with such an assumption. Thus, Torkula (2004:36) avers:

Tiv culture believes that when death occurs, somebody must have been responsible, usually Mbatsav or witchcraft practitioners. From the inquest or Ku-oron to divination or Ishor Kpehen several oracles could be consulted until the person responsible or group responsible for the death is identified. Amend could be sought, if a death is found unjustifiable. Ishor-Kor in Tiv means the identification of responsibility for an act by the oracle. This responsibility for death could therefore be attributed to Igba (matri-kins) or Ityo (Patri-kins) or the combined action of the two groups. A person who is dead could be adjudged as having killed himself if his behaviour is contrary to the norms of the society (Or-ne-wua-iyol-na).

Death inquisition in Tiv society opens with an elder on the patrilineal side charging the father of the deceased with the killing. In some instances, he accepts responsibility and death inquisition is brought to an end. If he does not plea guilty or accept responsibility for the charges, he is quite likely in his turn to accuse the matrilineage of the offence.

There are often accusations, counter-accusations, and the investigation drags on for a long time and in extreme cases, it is determined by divination (*Ishor-Kpehen*). Witchcraft accusation is also a common phenomenon among the Azande. Among the Azande of Sudan, any misfortune can be explained by witchcraft. For instance, if a bird discharges its waste on the head of a person who stood under a tree or worked on his farm. Explanation would be seek through the logic of witchcraft assumption that somebody must be responsible for his fate and he has to consult an oracle that will confirm his fear or authenticate his assumption. Charles (2010:28) revealed, "When this is confirmed, the Azenda will consult a witch doctor that will neutralize the witch with magic and also inflict the suspected witch with counter magic". Wegh (2009:8) pointed out that:There are times when the patrilineal group accepts responsibility for some one's death. Ityo may use the collective or constitutional tsav to eliminate a person adjudged to be notorious for perpetrating anti-community activities. People who have neither respect for the elders nor the traditions of the people are susceptible to attacks. When death inquisition cannot produce results in terms of finding a culprit, then the deceased is usually credited with causing his own death by embarking on self-destruction lifestyle.

Culturally, in extreme cases (especially in olden days) where the inquest is not conclusive, an elaborate post-mortem is carried out on the deceased to determine whether he had killed himself using the *Tsav* (witch) in his chest. The post-mortem involved putting a big pot-shered (*chenge)* on the deceased's chest (*Vanger)* to ascertain the spiritual might of the *tsav* or chest. The major traditional instrument used in diagnosing and assessing the deceased's chest is charcoal and a semi-circle is drawn on the chest of the deceased after which water is thrown on it. The charcoal marks are not washed away entirely, the chest is cut alone the charcoal marks and tongs (of the *ibohough* tree) used in opening up the chest. On opening, the *tsav* (witch) growing on the side of the chest "flies" out before settling back to enable a more thorough examination (Torkula, 2004).
The relevant or an insight into a particular death enable the elders to propitiate certain magic (*akombo)* in order to ensure better health for the general well being of the entire community and punish those behind, especially when the reason(s) are not justified. Inquest is also relevant because even when its result (findings) revealed that a man had killed himself such information became useful in the instruction and guidance of the youth's lives towards a more fulfilling and longer.

However, given the relevance of death inquisition in maintaining social stability, at times conflict occurred within the Tiv family, especially when an inquest result exposed those behind the killing of family loved ones. Similarly, Abanyam (2012:85) observed, "these conflict leads to unwanted destruction of lives and property" hence, there is always causalities in every conflict, victims of such conflict become incapacitated. This turn to affects family and society's development. In the traditional society, witchcraft can be hated communally. Charles (2011:142) acknowledged that "Community such as Oron in Akaw Ibon State of Nigeria accused and confirmed witches/wizards are communally slaughtered if discovered through oracle that they were actually responsible for the death of identified person(s) in the community".

The implications following the above is that when a community experiences frequent death there is a general sense of threat, insecurity and danger in the entire neighbourhood. The society gets an image of a wicked, evil, cruel, hostile and aggressive society in which the witches can operate without an intervention by the elders. Consequently, the elders of the community are viewed as a weak set of elders whose authority has been ineffective to such an extent that witches have to operate freely. There is also a general perception that the council of elders lost its authority, respect and legitimacy to the witches by either the weak-mindedness of the elders, the negligence of duty on the part of the council of elders, their collaboration in watchful activities or incompetence of the elders. This result to a general sense of dullness in the entire community. People especially young men and women are not inspired by the state of the society to engage in socio-cultural activities such as Music, dances and songs that brings individual and corporate vitality to the social life of the society. Such activities cease to occur in the community because of the general sense of insecurity and lack of peace and stability.

In most traditional African societies, elders or parents gather the young ones by fireside or moonlight, inside or outside the compound and tell them stories of happenings in the past. Stories of heroic deeds are recounted to the younger ones as well as stories of how a particular personality outsmarted another, stories of exploitation of a group by another group and how God liberated those exploited group are all recounted to the younger ones. Some of these stories drive most children into tears or strengthen their hearts to withstand any hardship in their potential social encounter. (Instill fear or confidence) songs are also composed in those stories to stare children into action and to control most socially unapproved behaviours. Lazy ones, deviants, terrorists and those who perpetrate injustice in the community are ridiculed. However, these literature which encourages work ethics and sanctioned disapproved behaviour among the people ceased (are equally handicapped) because of insecurity.

Dzuergba (2012:106) mentioned that such wise sayings inculcated ideas such as the evil of jealousy, selfishness, wickedness, hypocrisy and greed while inculcating virtues such as love, kindness, gentleness, impartiality, fairness or justice and humility. Another implication is that the condition of insecurity affects the socio-economic situation such as clearing of farmlands, cultivating the lands; planting and harvesting of crops are usually done more effectively through labour cooperative troupes of men, women and children. These work cooperatives facilitates a greater production of food and cash crops. Nevertheless, when a society gets into anomie (social disorganization), all these activities cease because of massive isolation of individuals and families. Food and cash crop production reduce drastically. The persistence of the situation can lead to widespread famine and malnutrition. Again, Dzurgba (2011:177-178) observed that: The society with the image of insecurity, instability, famine and unhappiness does not have good external relations. Its members are not invited to dance festivals and competitions by other societies. Other communities refuse to let their daughters marry men of that society and are not interested in their son's marrying daughters from it. The reasons are that the security of life and property cannot be guaranteed to both their daughters and wives. Thus, the society suffers from inter-community sanctions. The wives who had been married many years ago and have children, but feel very much insecure in that community in which there is an apparent collapse of authority may decide to divorce their husbands purely on religious grounds. They feel that security of their life and property has not been guaranteed by council of elders, that they want to marry elsewhere for that purpose. Thus, the rate of divorce increases generally in that society. Their daughters who have been married to other community refuse to visit their parents frequently for fear of using them to pay flesh debts. When a daughter is on a visit to her parents, according to the tradition of the Tiv people, an indebted father, mother or a relative may use her to clear him. The daughter may be offered to the witches as a payment. For this reason, the daughters who are married to other community lose interest in their traditional duty of visiting their parents occasionally. Sometimes, a daughter is adviced by the father, mother or a relative not to make frequent visits to her home because a witch could take advantage of her home visits and kill her.

Moreso, there is also massive migration of family members to urban areas. This equally affected most rural communities because the abled body youths that would have been an access in organizing the rural economy flee mass to urban centres. Thus, Dzurgba (2011:179) vividly explained: This has often led to tension, conflict, and crisis in the family and results have often been disintegration, a split of a compound of a migration of individuals or families to other parts of Tivland or the neighbouring ethnic groups and to settle their permanently. In a few cases, such families may return to their home community after the notorious witches have died.

The phenomenon of multiplicity of small compounds all over Tivland have, in part, arisen from queries among families members. Some may be accused of being responsible for either the sickness or the death of a son, daughter, brother, sister, aunty, cousin, nephew or parent.Moreover, there may be a massive protest by the young people and women who call for a restoration of security in the community. The age grades of young people may hold meetings of their respective age grades to make resolutions, which they communicate, to the council of elders. If their demands are not met and the society continues to experience, widespread diseases and frequent occurrence of death the young may collectively take laws into their own hands. Abanyam (2012:85) noted that: The elderly are usually accosted to give account of the deceased's death in most cases. Some are physically manhandled. All sorts of degrading languages are used against them. Children run-away from them for fear of being bewitched. The youths are always against the elderly people as they see them as possible barriers of progress. They attribute some, if not all the ills in the society to the elderly and in all see the elderly as "devil incarnates in men". That is why the elderly are being manhandled to deter them from repeating the same act (evil)

IV.   CONCLUSION

It is obvious that in the traditional Tiv society, when someone dies, an inquest is carried out to determine the cause and find those behind the death, whether such death is justifiable or not. This investigation is based on assumption that something most has caused the death. This study exposed both the relevance of death inquisition and implication on socio-cultural development in Tiv society. Death inquisition enables the elders to punish those suspected of causing death. It is useful in the instruction and guidance of the youths towards a more fulfilling and longer life and it has a reputation (implication) of causing conflict and hatred in Tiv society. This conflict affects socio-cultural activities, economic activities, led to multiplicity of small compounds, massive migration of some family members to other areas and protest against the elders by youths who call for a restoration of security in the society. There is urgent need to discourage black magic that is capable of causing harm in the society.

However, Tiv people should view death as a natural phenomenon. A conscious recognition of this fact will enhance a more mature understanding of death and it will turn to diminish the implications or complexities which death inquisition has on the socio-cultural development of Tiv society.

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