A FUNCTIONALIST DISCOURSE OF THE INDIGENOUS DANCE THEATRE TRADITION IN AFRICA

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Abstract

This paper from participatory and critical perspectives, attempts a functionalist discourse investigation of the home-grown African dance tradition from a philosophical and sociological praxis. From an experiential vantage position, the thesis of the paper holds strongly that, as art forms, dances in Africa serve various functions; as catalysts for socio-political and economic transformation. Using Swange dance of the Tiv people from Central Nigeria as a paradigm, and from a functionalist point of view, the article sees African dances as contributing a greater part in uncountable ways in a positive transformation of the society. It also sees dance as a domain within the humankind that should be harnessed for greater and positive socio-political dividends. In conclusion, the article holds strongly that the efficacies of these indigenous African dances cannot be over emphasized considering the numerous functions these dances perform towards the socio-political and economic development of the African societies, because most of these dances have often acted as sites for staging various cultural histories as well as formulating ideology.

Key Words: Africa, dance, performances, functionalist, ideology

Introduction

It is on the strength of the efficacies of the African dance that the focus of this article is able to perform a critical evaluation of African folk dances within the praxis of a functionalist critical discourse analysis. To this end, this article carries out a cursory analysis of dance in Africa in totality with the aim of unveiling its functional values at the social, political, religious and economic levels. For example, in Nigerian multi-cultural settings, dance plays various functional roles in almost all the major manifestations of human experience and exposure. Thus, as one of the folk media in Africa, dance has a popular language that sometime people understand and respond quickly to when there is clamor for an orientation. This is because all the genres of dance are identified with particular cultures that engender in the audience a sense of identification and empathy as well as a feeling of ownership. Hence, members of the audience are socially influenced positively when they watch a folk dance performance belonging to their cultural origin.
According to Blacking as cited in Impey and Nussbaum (1996):

Dance is part of the basic infrastructure of life in Africa. It is inherent to the essence of being human and is integral to the experience of birth, death, rites of passage, religious ritual and work: African societies treat `dance as a foundation of social life, which enables individuals to discover and develop their human potential, to reaffirm their relationships with each other, to sharpen their sensitivities and educate their emotions. In such societies, music and dance help people to remain politically conscious, intellectually alive and creative, constantly adapting to the changes that are required as people relate to their environment and make decisions about their future(3).

Indeed, the above explains why dance in Africa is also regarded as a potent tool for shaping and re-shaping the history of different cultures all over the world. Thus, it is regarded as a universal phenomenon, just like the spoken word, or language. As one of the potent tools for communication and nation building, dance in most instances is used as a symbol of oneness thereby culminating into aiding societal and behavioral changes. Significantly, dance reminds people of their history, heroism, adversaries, shortcomings and other unfolding issues in the society, making it an important instrument in the mainstream of any developmental agenda.

Viewing dance within a cultural context, Marsh and Gould (2003) state clearly that

Culture as ‘context’ is concerned with the underlying values, beliefs, and traditions of a community. The understanding of such concepts opens possibilities to integrate people’s potential and power in the project design. The ‘content’ of culture is related to the local cultural resources or the concrete translation of the cultural context in life.
with its symbols and practices as ways of working, social organisation and traditional heritage. The tangible expression of culture is its ‘method’ and refers to the use of any cultural form including song, drama, dance, music etc (13-15).

Therefore, the focus on the human person in the development process, and the need for him/her to participate in shaping his/her own reality sometimes lies at the base of the ethics and aesthetics of dance. There are aspects of dance that are functional and human oriented for example, many a times, dances are put at the service of the disadvantaged people (rural dwellers who are not close to modern mass media) for the reason of discussing and working out strategies for dealing with socio-economic and political issues.

This folk medium becomes functional because the folk dance communicates with the people in their own language and idioms, and deals with issues that possess direct relevance to their own lives. It is a practice that integrates the people’s artistic modes of expression into the process of discussion. This liberal approach enables the people to tackle issues that relate to all the faculties of human endeavors. For example, Ahura argues on this premise that Nigerian theatre be moved from its elitist physical buildings to wherever the ‘people’ are (1985). Kidd (1983), in the same vein, explains that

This move has been effective in areas of rural India and Bangladesh where labourers have found theatre to be an effective tool in reducing exploitation and victimisation. When these tenant farmers prepare scenarios for presentation to other landless villagers, they make room towards the end of the performance for ‘actors and audience [to] discuss real plans, to be carried out the following day, to pressure government to deepen their well…. Each drama not only shows the problems but gets the audience talking about them (131).

This approach is thus, seen as the capacity of members of the theatre group to keep a constant critical vigilance over their ideological products, and be prepared to test these not only through discussion but also through performance against known and experienced realities. This is what Brook refers to as the “immediate theatre” (1996) that looks at a way of treating pragmatic issues that are pertinent to people within a given society.

Based on the above positions, this article takes a holistic chat on the indigenous dance tradition in Africa with specific attention to its functionalist underpinnings. The core of this interrogation is therefore based on a careful selection of swange dance, one of the dance cultures of Africa.
To realize this aim and the objectives of the paper therefore, the study employed the primary source for this paper that comprised the use of participatory and observation methods as the research instruments in order to obtain the required facts. In addition, the study conducted oral interviews. The respondents for this included: Udoo Mbalagh, Mike Mbatyelovde, Solomon Doki and Richard Tsevende who are the living progenitors of the dance troupe of Benue State Council for Arts and Culture in Nigeria. Others that were interviewed are the various Swange bandleaders in Tiv land; the Director for Benue State Council for Arts and Culture; and the Head of Dance, Benue State Council for Arts and Culture; and selected Swange patrons and members of the audience. The facts collected were analysed using the functionalist theory as formulated by Auguste Comte.

Conceptualizing African Dance and the Functionalist Discourse

The functionalist theory as projected in this article is considered to be one of the sociological outlooks that are concerned with the interpretation of large-scale societal structures and the society. Functionalists attempt to explain why certain conditions exist in society by trying to ascertain their purpose - their function, examining how things work to meet people's needs and to promote social consensus. This presupposes that for something to be existent, it must possess a justification within the social organism.

In his position, Ritzer (1992) says:

Given this focus, the major functional issue is how a society motivates and places people in their “proper” positions in the stratification system….Proper social placement in society is a problem for three basic reasons. First, some positions are more pleasant to occupy than others. Second, some positions are more important to the survival of society than others. Third, different social positions require different abilities and talents (235).

Considering the above therefore, there is no possibility for any society to develop without recognizing all the components of the society. This could be at the macro or micro levels of such components. Thus, this theory as formulated by Auguste Comte, advanced a basic analogy that was extended and popularized by the British sociologist, Herbert Spencer, who drew parallels to the theories of the Naturalist, Charles Darwin’s theory that biological species adapt and change to survive as environmental conditions change. Thus, for the theory, all the parts of the social system, like the parts of the human body have a function and connect to the whole. Some elements of the functionalist way of thinking can also be traced.
to the works of the French sociologist, Emile Durkheim, and British-based anthropologists, Bronislaw Malinowski, and Alfred Radcliffe-Brown.

Above all, the functionalists believe that for a society to survive, it requires both a sufficient degree of role differentiation to provide workers for all the things that need to be done in a modern industrial society. It also requires a sufficient level of social solidarity and harmony among human endeavors and faculties within the domains of societal structure. It is against this backdrop that this article is critiquing dance in general, and in particular, African dance beyond the purview of mere entertainment. Like any art form, this paper holds that, dance is a representation of human emotion, conflict, representation itself, and overall life. And like the rest of the art world, it is accessible to almost all humanity in Africa.

Thus, conceptualizing African dance in this paper from the functionalist purview, arguments from some African dance scholars are not to be undermined. This argument is gaining much attention especially in recent conferences Organized by Association of Dance Scholars and Practitioners of Nigeria (ADSPON). In this line of argument, some are of the view that there is nothing like ‘African dance’. To this school of thought, there are many cultures in Africa with various kinds of cultural and folk dances, and as such it will make no meaning conceptualizing dances from Africa as ‘African dance’ as if they exist as a singular dance. Another school of thought holds ‘African Dance’ as a concept which is generically used to represent all forms of dances originating from Africa south of the Sahara. This, therefore, establishes a foundation in contextualizing African dance in this paper, which refers mainly to the dance of Sub-Saharan Africa, and more appropriately African dances because of the many cultural differences, musical and movement styles, their dances must be viewed in close connection with ethno musicological persuasion and philosophical strongholds. In many cases, these dances teach social patterns and values and help people work, mature, praise or criticize members of the community while celebrating festivals and funerals, competing, reciting history, proverbs and poetry; and to encounter gods.

Thus, this paper romances with the second school of thought because ‘African dance’ as applied herein will be considered generic with apologies to Andre Grau, Francesca Castaldi, Georgiana Gorre, S. KwashieKuwor and a host of other scholars who have warned that using the term, ‘African dance’ without qualification is an over generalization that does not show recourse to the many ethnic groups that constitute the continent of Africa.

Considering the above within the context of this paper therefore, African dance, from whatever region, is unique of Africa and germane processes of putting means of critical evaluation of issues and situations in the hands of the African people. It is aimed at teaching them how to control their own affairs. In most African societies or communities, meaningful social change usually begins with individuals in the community identifying the need for and, indeed, accepting
to embrace change for social transformation to take place. Ezenwanebe (2014) writing on African dance holds that:

Dance as a deliberate, organized movement of the body in space and time is part of African culture,….dance, like songs, music, movement, chants, etc, is part of multi-sign language of African theatre, and its meaning, entrenched in the shared life of the people, can only be understood by those who are versed in the culture (167-168).

Thus, African dances are in most cases designed to reshape the rural institutions and persons thereby turning them into viable tools for positive change. This is because as people become engrossed in the entertainment engendered through these performances they are subconsciously encouraged to think critically on issues bothering their society. It is the desire to achieve the above as well as educate the people on how to harness their resources for self-development and self-awareness that propelled Augusto Boal and other theatre animators into making theatre more functional in human society. This approach is perceived as popular because it uses cultural indices and idioms that are acceptable and known to almost the entire population.

Therefore, considering the above and the stated intents this article is significant because of its focus on the need to strengthen the African folk dance tradition in order to increase its value and make it more socially, politically and economically relevant as well as a stimulating aspect of developmental theatre. It is thus apt to say that nations are like apples; they grow from their roots. The foundation for the growth of any nation lies in the cultural heritage of its people. Development, regardless of how it is defined, ultimately entails an attempt to build a better society. Thus, to address issues that touch the whole community, diverse engaging methods are used; songs and dances put the people in the right mood, so that they can listen to the prayers and admonitions of priests, leaders and their subjects. To ensure that the messages are understood and internalized by the members of the community, their priests and/or leaders use music, dance and drama (Enekwe 2014). This means that during festivals, in pre-modern societies, deities and ancestors of a community are appeased through masking, dances and other forms of impersonation, and full-scale dramatic performances are usually presented for the delight and edification of the people. As human societies evolved through time, religion and theatre also evolved.

This is why dance, in the classical and contemporary forms, embraces, reflects and mediates values of discipline, individual empowerment and group solidarity. Thus, dance can both foster and mirror the processes of social
transformation. Especially in African culture, dances are important mechanisms to reaffirm relationships that enhance community mobilization and development (Angela Impey and Barbara Nussbaum 1996, 4).

This is apt in the sense that every community has its own culture and an obligation to maintain it, thus, dance is one of the surest ways of communicating and espousing messages/ideas of stability and peace.

For example, in African societies, performances serve a complex diversity and socio-political purpose, of which within an indigenous Folk media tradition, each performance usually has a principal as well as a number of subsidiary purposes, which may express or reflect the communal values and social relationships of the people…. To this end, dance in Africa is appreciated as a social occasion but is simultaneously enjoyed as an activity in its own right, entertaining, giving pleasure and as an expression of communal life (http://www.enacademic.com/ & John Picton in www.britannica.com/art/African-dance, ).

Significantly, African traditional cultural dance performances have entered a dynamic new phase as a result of the influence of globalization which brings the fear that the future patronage of most secular dances will diminish because there is a likelihood for this generation to eventually abandon traditional dances in future in favor of the Western ones. Nigeria is not an exception. This situation leaves some troubling questions that need answers:

Are African dance arts heading for extinction in the near future? Considering the fact that culture is a dynamic phenomenon, what strategies can be put in place to preserve the diverse indigenous expressive cultures such as traditional dance and development? What are the identifiable indigenous culture-specific characteristics that can be adapted and yet retain identities and styles akin to the prototype traditional dances? What are the key issues that should be considered by dance critics, analysts and choreographers in Africa today? (Wanyama and Shitubi 2012, 433)
With the questions above in mind, and other contextual ones that may come up, the article will subsequently evaluate the nature and structure of ‘African traditional dance’ in modern times. Hence, a critical analysis of these questions above would be able to reveal that traditional African dances have themes, and these themes are the very embodiment of materials marshaled from the surrounding environment. It naturally follows that these materials combine with the themes to define the limits of the ideas of the themes that interest people.

**Contextual Functional Discourse of African Dance**

In African societies, folk dances or performances in general are so central to their worldview; such that the festivals that feature such performances draw indigenes back from the urban areas to the villages to share the communal experience. This can be seen in the case of *Eyo* festival in Lagos state and the *Osun Osogbo* Festival in Osun State, which earned the *Osun Grove* its designation as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2005. Some other festivals like *Igbe*, *Ivom* and *Jer* exist within the Tiv cultural milieu. In the Tiv society for instance, if a particular hamlet wants to cleanse all her sons and daughters of the dreaded *akombo* (a spiritual curse), it behooves all the concerned subjects to be present at the venue so that the rite of cleansing will be properly carried out. These rites of cleansing are also credited with the preservation of special traditional culture and values of which dance is an important element. Therefore, dance as a cultural material plays a key role in these kinds of celebrations that subsist within African societies, which stresses society’s unity and love, cultural satisfaction, responsibility, purpose, creativity, development and faith. According to Kariamu (2004):

The kinds of dances vary but generally fall under the following categories: stilt dances; mask dances; military, war, and martial arts dances; rites-of-passage dances; harvest dances; story and myth dances; social and ceremonial dances; funeral dances; ancient court dances; work dances; healing dances; religious and spiritual dances; and, national- and ethnic-identity dances. Some of these categories overlap and are not mutually exclusive (14)

The above establishes the roles of dance as folk media in the growth of the African societies. The aesthetic content and form of these dances if examined critically will unveil the salient roles they play in the socio-political development of these African societies as messages are conveyed through expressive dance movements and songs.

As a study on the African indigenous dances, the content herein is based on the early erroneous opinions about Africans, who were regarded as untutored,
uncivilized, without arts, history, religion, philosophy or literature Mahood (1966), Beier (1967), Finnegan (1970) de Graft (1976). This paper thus advanced on the position of African scholars who have proved the foregoing outrageous claims to be false by researching into and writing about different aspects of African culture, civilization and knowledge such as Traore (1972), Ogunba (1978), Adedeji (2014), and a host of others like Mawere Opoku, Kwabena Nketia, Ofotsu Adinku, etc, who have demonstrated clearly that it is in the pre-colonial festivals, dances and other related performances that we find the roots of African functional indigenous theatre practice, long before the much touted westernization. Therefore, it is in light of the above that the study attempts a systematic critique regarding the potency of the indigenous African traditional dances, using many indigenous African dances as archetypes.

Thus, with regard to Nigerian dances for example, one might say that form is an aspect of content, form is also meaning, and this meaning is functional in relation to the participants with whom form is bound in cultural transaction. Ugolo (2007) writing on the functional values of dance affirms that, since time immemorial, man has used dance for his spiritual, physical, social, economic and political development serving his needs, especially in his attempt to reach equilibrium in survival strategy. This by implication holds on the utilitarian aspect of African dance. Hence, African traditions demonstrate that dance can be a significant psychosocial device able to penetrate many aspects of human existence. By commemorating such events as the passage of seasons and life cycles, transitions through life experiences are dramatized and made more meaningful.

Dance to the African is a way of life, a true representation of a people's existence expressed through rhythm and movement. In the African cultural paradigm the relationship between rhythm and movement is one that is inseparable; one cannot exist without the other. As the dancer is given breath through the drummers’ rhythm so does the drummer feed the dancers breath of expression as movement articulates rhythm; a perfect marriage where two become one in a synchronization of rhythm and movement that creates dance. Dance in Africa and in most parts of the world is used as a tool of expression and, is used for a variety of reasons. Dance is sometimes used for ritualistic purposes, as a secular activity performed for recreation or entertainment, embracing such factors as physical exercise, performance of skill, aesthetic enjoyment, courtship, personal communication and cultural continuity. In general, dance is used to commemorate important events in African life and society and since every second is an important event in the life of an African, dance becomes a way of life. This can be found in the Yoruba people of Nigeria as they value Bata dance at every occasion, be it sacred or secular.

It can therefore be affirmed that there is no art for art’s sake in African dance culture, thereby emphasizing the extreme functionality of African dance. This is to say that the organization of traditional African dances is motivated not only by the theatrical, but also by sociological, historical, political and religious
considerations. This identification is crucial to the understanding of African dance forms, these being the most important factors that differentiate it from other dance forms such as Ballet and Contemporary Modern dance of the West that are performed primarily for the entertainment of others. In modern times, African dance retains its characteristics with the added focus of the practice of African dance as a contemporary form of expression within the context of theatrical presentation for entertainment. Aihevba (2015 stressing on this says that

Dance…as demonstrated in traditional theatre plays a focal point in our lives. The seasons, the circles, phases of life, our interaction with men and spirits, our expression of grief, joy, every phase and nuance of our lives are marked and vividly inscribed in dance (9)

African dance is thus holistic in nature; the interaction of multiple elements that can exist within an African dance performance gives it the view of the all-embracing art of expression. Unlike the western structure of training, where an artist focuses on the mastering of one discipline, the African performing artist is trained and encouraged to be proficient in as many art forms as possible. A sense of pluralism exists since it is customary to integrate dance with other arts such as music, drama, oratory as well as with various forms of visual arts. This structure as stated earlier has a direct relationship to the culture, since religious ceremonies, festivals and other occasion of celebration involve the exercising of all the art forms in one performance. Within this structure therefore, the nature of pluralism introduces a further element of the African dance genre, which is improvisation within the dance. Improvisation occurs and is encouraged and can be seen as a form of appreciation, self-expression or a visual announcement of skill. In the situation where the onlooker becomes part of the performance, improvisation in this instance can be interpreted as acknowledgement that he has transcended to the level of performer.

It is therefore surprising that even with the above positions concerning the functionality of African dance; little is scholarly documented to propagate the serviceable attributes of African dance. This follows that most scholarly works that take the centre stage of dance in intellectual discourse are western dances without much recourse to African dances. Some of these African dances that sometimes fall within the score of dance scholarship are most African dances that were developed in the Western Hemisphere as a result of the slave trade. This is because many African slaves relied on dancing and singing to relieve the stress from the horrible experiences they were enduring. This paper therefore aims at filling this scholarly hollow on the efficacies of African dance.
A Functionalist paradigm of Swange Dance as a Tool for National Identity, Mobilization and Therapy

The state of psychological confusion is engendered by inability of individuals and ethnic groups to mentally reconcile conflicting aspects of their individuality and the challenges of nationhood in the contemporary era. The Tiv of Nigeria that is at the centre of this paper is one of the ‘nations’ that make up the Nigerian nation where components of the performing arts and culture triumph. These include; music, drama, dance and poetry as vehicles of social recreation, reformation, entertainment, enlightenment and information on one hand, and a custodian of the cultures, customs, values and beliefs of the people on the other. All of these values however, border more on socio-cultural relevance in view of their intrinsic components vis-à-vis the economic and commercial as it were.

Swange dance is a dance performed by the Tiv people of Central Nigeria that promotes identity and fosters patriotism. It is therefore, a dance which commands a high sense of identity and patriotism, identity is considered as ‘self’ that emerges in social interaction within the context of a complex, organized, differentiated society, and it has been argued that the self must be complex, organized and differentiated as well, reflecting the dictum that the self reflects society. It is when the identity is well articulated that patriotism will find its root to accommodate development. This is premised on a notion that there are as many different selves as there are different positions that one holds in society and thus different groups who respond to the self. This is where identity enters into the overall self. The overall self is organized into multiple parts (identities), each of which is tied to aspects of the social structure. One has an identity, an “internalized positional designation” (Stryker, 2000: 60), for each of the different positions or role relationships the person holds in society. Various styles of interaction are appropriate in each situation for each identity.

In examining the nature of interaction between identities of different persons, we can take two different perspectives: agency and social structure. In terms of social structure, we can focus on the external and talk about dancers taking a role or playing a role. In Swange dance, the social structure in which the peoples’ identities are embedded is relatively fixed and people play out the roles that are given to them. Anthropologically, the social structure persists and develops according to its own principles; individuals are recruited into positions and individuals leave positions, but for the most part the positions remain. When individuals feel good about themselves they take on more identities which is also the case of Swange dancers and their audiences. In general, therefore, examining the nature of interaction between identities means addressing both social structure and agency.

We must go back and forth and understand how social structure is the accomplishment of artistic performers but also how performers always act within the social structure they create. As Stryker points out, there are multiple views of identity within sociology. Some have a cultural or collective view of identity in
which the concept represents the ideas, belief, and practices of a group or collective. This view of identity is often seen in work on ethnic identity, although identity is often not defined, thus obscuring what is gained by using the concept. This view lacks the ability to examine individual variability in behavior, motivation, and interaction.

Considering Swange within the realm of social identity, one has to accept a view, growing out of the work of Victor Turner on social identity theory, which sees identity as embedded in a social group or category. This view often collapses the group/category distinction and misses the importance within group behavior such as role relationships among group members. A third view of identities grows out of the symbolic interactionist tradition, especially its structural variant. This view takes into account individual role relationships and identity variability, motivation, and differentiation.

Thus, locating Swange dance within a perfect audience identity, the current Executive Director, Benue State Council for Arts and Culture in an interview with the researcher sees Swange dance as one of the dances that relates its numerous audiences to the identity of the Tiv, Benue State, and Nigeria at large. According to him:

If any august visitor visits Benue state and he or she is not entertained with Swange dance by the Benue State Council for Arts and Culture, the visitor does not feel satisfactorily welcomed. This is because Swange dance has become in recent times the icon of the Tiv in Benue state, Benue state identity in Nigeria and Nigerian identity globally.

This holds on the fact that Swange dance is considered as a reaffirmation of cultural identity. This is likely to lean on the claim that people have an inherent tendency to place increasing emphasis on traditional values and survival values as they age.

Moreover, in discussing Swange dance, it is worth accepting the claim since it is basically a reflection of what the cultural policy for Nigeria was meant to achieve in order to place Nigeria on the global stage of cultural peak, at the same time create a cultural identity for Nigeria. Once that identity is made, it will be aiding its people to push through their energies and resources for the improvement of the society. This is why it will not be out of place to state that when any group of human being establishes a possible cultural identity, they will be able to set a dynamic and positive direction for their collective existence in the universe.

The Tivanggee traditional wrapper was used to substitute the former skimpy and revealing costumes. The female dancers wear white blouses to conceal their chest regions to their waist levels and tie anggee wrapper from waist down to the knee levels. The male dancers on the other hand, tie this same
traditional wrapper around their waists and wear white singlet. These traditional
costumes give them easy identification as having come from a Tiv setting even
though, the singlet worn by the male performers are foreign made.

Also armed with the mandate to promote culture for identity, the Benue State Council for Arts and Culture Swange performance group deliberately retained some of its performance asp...
The above song is referring to HIV/AIDS as “Dan Zaria” basing their opinion on the fact that a greater population of the young men and women who were infected in Tiv land contracted this disease from the northern part of Nigeria. Moreover, that at this time most Tiv Ladies were prostituting around the axis of Zaria, and most of them were victims of the scourge. Even when people erroneously purport that Swange was full of immoral indices, this song is a vindication of the dance as setting some standards for morality and wellbeing of the people for national development.

This song of the 1980s coincided with the mid-1990s, which was well appreciated that individuals do not always control their own risk situation of HIV/AIDS. This led to the development of prevention programmes aimed at enabling particular groups or communities such as sex workers and men who have sex with men to adopt safer behaviour. At the same time, as individuals infected with HIV earlier in the epidemic gradually fell ill and died, challenging family and community structures alike, the need to provide health care and cushion the epidemic’s impact became increasingly obvious. Simultaneously, the importance of work on non-discrimination, protection and promotion of human rights, and against the stigmatization brought by HIV/AIDS, was more widely recognized. This also included the importance of involving different sectors of society. Swange dance as a humanistic art was very proactive in sensitizing people about the deepening pandemic in Nigeria given a growing realization that HIV/AIDS is also a development challenge. To the extent that people’s vulnerability to infection has social and economic roots, often including marginalization, poverty and women’s subordinate status, these conditions need to be tackled as a way of making society as a whole less vulnerable to HIV over the long term for national development.

Dance, as one of the most fundamentals of the arts, involving a direct expression and experience of oneself through body language, is a basic form of authentic communication, and as such it is an especially effective medium for therapy, based on the belief that the body, the mind and the spirit are interconnected. Swange dance is such a dance that is continually playing therapeutic functions in the society. These values of the dance range from social to the psychotherapeutic worthiness. This worthiness of the dance can be understood from the general objective fact concerning dance, which is known to be an artistic genre that touches on the humans stress as it affects the body and mind. On individual dancers of Swange, just like any form of dance, using breathing techniques, movement exercises specific to muscle group areas, and the use of dance and authentic movement techniques, they will explore ways to relieve themselves of carrying unnecessary burdens in their bodies.

Abakapa wan
Tondoveoo
Ikpan
Kwasekaabakpaoo
Tondoamo
Hen gbendaveoo
Ikpan!

Translation

My slippers
Has cut
Ikpan
A woman is slippers
She has cut
On the road
Ikpan!

The above song from Swange dance establishes the importance of feminist social critique of gendered social practices and relations aimed ultimately at effecting social transformation. This is in line with the social status quo as always contested in favour of a feminist humanist vision of a just society, in which gender does not predetermine or mediate our relationships with others, or our sense of who we are or might become. This is all the more pertinent in present times, when issues of gender, power, and ideology have become increasingly more complex and subtle. This song was composed in the late 1980s that by coincidence aligned with the feminist theories of the late 1980s, which proved that speaking of ‘women’ and ‘men’ in universal, totalizing terms had become deeply problematic. Woman here is considered as a pair of slippers by men in the song establishing Gender as a social category intersects with other categories of social identity, including sexuality, ethnicity, age, (dis)ability, social class and position, and geographical location. This notion is a social problem in the sense that patriarchy as an ideological system also interacts in complex ways with, for instance, corporatist and consumerist ideologies that are akin to the feminist thinking that has succeeded in drawing public attention to inequality between women and men and to the structures within society that belittle and work against women.

Such issues are problematic and need serious attention. Such a song that has metaphorically likened women to a pair of slippers needs a critical reappraisal as it falls within the parameters of the feminist discourse leading to a reconsideration of gender issues like economic and material exploitation of women, the sexual division of labor, especially in domestic work and childcare, and women’s inequality within the workplace. This is also part of the canons of the New World Order. It is also the interface of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of which in the United States, materialist feminists take up a similar position. The argument is that material conditions and social relations resulting in
policies that promote equal pay and equal opportunities for socio-political and economic development oppress women as a class.

The context of the song is in a way blaming women for their inconsistency when it comes to the issue of relationships, be it matrimonial or casual friendship. From the content of the song, we can see that women are regarded as expendable items. They can be summarily divorced if in a marriage and they can be dispensed with if it is a friendship. This song in its analysis is patriarchic in context because it only faults the women without really looking at the wrong aspects and ways of men, as they can be reckless and heartless when it comes to the issue of men-women relationships. This *Swange* song is therefore capable of generating a critical discourse concerning women emancipation, which is part of the doctrines of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) with the aim of achieving gender parity at all levels. Dance can also be used to develop a healthy citizenry and it is this healthy citizenry that are needed to catalyze the socio-economic and political advancement of a nation. This was one of the aims of Adolf Hitler when he took over power in Germany in 1933. He decided to use dance through gymnastics to develop a culture of political consciousness and healthy people who would be able to defend their motherland. Dance is thus a good means of developing physical and mental fitness. This of course is an offshoot of the therapeutic functionality of dances and *Swange* dance is most appropriate. Its virtuosity and rigorous detail as well as the appeal of its songs and music come from both the soothing mellifluous run of its rhythms and the emotion studded lyrics, many of which have great philosophical depths of insight all making the dance most suitable for this purpose.

Just like many cultures of the world, song and dance pervade the life and the world of the Tiv people. When they are sad, they sing; when they are happy, they sing; when a child is born, they sing and dance and when one dies, they also sing and dance. So strong is the singing and dancing tradition in the Tiv society that it can be described as a lubricating oil that they use on their wheel of life as they transact different facets of their living. This view of life and death leads to an approach to funerals and burial that stresses the idea of a journey to *Alugbem* (*everlasting*), which essentially means that death is a rite of passage. The funeral and burial are regarded as a process of seeing off the dead to their next abode. See an example of the popular *Swange* dirges below:

*Or la tsorunyo*
*NengekpamorJato Aka*
*Man shikpamorAkaahanAgboKpile*
*Kamba yam veTsorlaa*
*Yam Jato man tsorkpa*
*Or tsergaoo*
*Or tsergaoo*
*Or tsergayo*
*A yemkende se ve*
Translation

If someone is to live forever
See man of honour Jato Aka
And man of honour Akaahan AgboKpile
Those ones would have lived forever
Jato Aka would have lived forever
But no one can live forever
No one can live forever
No one can live forever
He has gone and left us

This *Swange* song is as central to the worldview of the Tiv people as they always see death as man-made, which brings to mind that some Tiv people have strong belief that a person does not just die unless he or she is spiritually killed by someone for a sacrifice, ritual obligation or fulfilment.

The two characters mentioned in the song above were prominent Tiv people who had lived as if they were going to live forever in the context that they were referred to as great mbatsav (wizards) who were the custodians of tsav, akombo and other related artefacts (ikyav) in Tivland. The song therefore tries to console the bereaved families of the fact that because of the inevitability of death, these great men who lived as though they would not die had died. And that such family should be consoled by the fact of inevitability of death without any recourse to accusing anyone.

*Swange* dance is one of the night performances held on any burial. Although sponsored by prominent people, such as government functionaries, wealthy business people, chiefs and other leading figures in the area, such *Swange* performance may take place for the entire period during which the body lies in state and *Swange* dirges are sung for consoling as stated above.

Conclusion

This paper reveals that the developmental functionalism of *Swange* as African dance shows that the dominant ideology of ‘development’ has found its paradigmatic expression in Tiv land. The philosophy of dance development aid is therefore a comprehensive attempt to write *Swange* dance into the change of society in general. The theory used in the paper is found to be connected with a practice of economic and administrative support, which has postulated these central “functions” of *Swange* dance for Nigerian national development. It is a popular dance and an instrument of integration and nation building. It is also a tool for social development. In addition, it is a tool for national identity. Again, the study finds out the Semiotics in Swange dance with its ideological orientations. Above all, it is a tool for economic development and empowerment, as well as a tool for social consciousness, mobilization and therapy.
The discussion of Swange dance within the praxis of development communication is not exclusively about behavior change. The areas of intervention and the applications of Swange as development communication extend beyond the traditional notion of behavior change to include, among other things, probing socioeconomic and political factors, identifying priorities, assessing risks and opportunities, empowering people, strengthening institutions, and promoting social change within complex cultural and political environments. The development communication of Swange in this study is associated with behaviour change ascribing to a number of factors, such as its application in health programs or its use in mass culture to persuade people to adopt certain practices. These kinds of interventions are among the most visible, relying heavily on Swange as a folk media communication campaign to change people’s behaviors and to eliminate or reduce often fatal risks. The reality of development, though, is complex and often requires broader changes than specific individual behaviors. Swange dance could effectively serve as an approach in communication for behavior change, using method and medium to persuade individuals to adopt specific practices or behaviors. This approach could be used even in health initiatives with aims to fostering positive behavior; promote and sustain individual, community, and societal behavior change; and maintain appropriate behavior considering the popularity of the songs in the dance as pointed out in the body of this work.

Thus, Swange dance as communication for social change is a strand closer to the newly emerging paradigm in development that emphasizes the importance of two-way communication and the need to facilitate people’s participation and empowerment. Change is now expected to be defined with the people and not for the people, making communication for social change closely aligned with the participatory communication perspective. Swange as a tool for advocacy communication involves the use of communication to influence specific audiences, policies, and programs on key development issues. In conclusion therefore, it is obvious and pertinent to note that, there is need to locate the social and cultural phenomena of the African dance within an analysis of the conditions of existence of those who make it, watch it, experience it, and talk about it within a particular historically and anthropological constituted structures of powers and representations that influence those activities. In fact African dance is a continental treasure which is seen as a generator of foreign exchange and as an integrated part of these dances which are important contributors to tourism. It is still a cultural attraction to potential investors and an assertion of identity, cultural creativity and genius of the grassroots in defiance of oppressive postcolonial, and other dominant regimes, middle-class propriety.

Most African dances have often acted as sites for staging various cultural histories and for formulating ideology. With their rhetorical and semiotic features, these dances have offered particularly effective means of conveying notions of what is African. Furthermore, because African dance as an artistic genre to express African values can be performed in the actual presence of these
communities which can serve not only to make claims for an African identity, but it can also gain immediate communal support or rejection for that assertion just like any performative genre.

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Oral interviews

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Swange Dance, Music and Songs

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