

Dynamics of Song Composition, Authorship and Plagiarism among the Tiv Oral Poets of Central Nigeria

By

Terlumun KEREKAA PhD

Department of English, Benue State University, Makurdi

itkerekaa@gmail.com

07039249074, 07014086314

And

Prof. Mbaiver Leticia NYITSE,

Department of English, Benue State University, Makurdi

Leticianyitse1@gmail.com

07039249074, 07014086316

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Abstract

This study explores the intricate dynamics of song composition, individual authorship and plagiarism among the Tiv oral poets in Central Nigeria. It extols how the Tiv people, known for their rich oral traditions and vibrant musical culture, have a long history of song composition and performance that reflect their unique identity and sensibilities. The disturbing evidence of plagiarism which often leads to acrimony among Tiv oral poets is the main thrust of this research. It aims at examining the cultural context of song composition, the concept of individual authorship, the prevalence of plagiarism and the consequence on song performance in Tivland. Bronislaw Malinkowski's model of functionalism is employed as the analytical tool in this study. The findings reveal that there are evidences of plagiarism among Tiv oral poets which distorts originality in song composition. There are also no established copyright laws that specifically address song authorship, ownership, or plagiarism in Tivland. This absence of formal regulation complicates the resolution of disputes related to music rights. The study recommends that a legal framework that recognizes and protects the rights of individual Tiv oral poets, while respecting the collective and communal nature of music culture be put in place. The study hopes that the framework would help address disputes and provide guidance on issues of authorship and plagiarism.

Keywords: Song Composition, Individual Authorship, Tiv Oral Poet, Song Plagiarism and Song Performance

Introduction

Song composition and performance is one of the most enduring and a vital element of Tiv culture, used in various contexts such as festivals, rituals, storytelling, and social gatherings. Tiv songs often carry historical, moral, and social messages that entertain and shape social behaviour in the society. They also serve as a means of transmitting norms and cultural knowledge through generations. It is a significant activity in Tivland such that it attends to almost all other activities. It can be used to lull a baby to sleep, celebrate a newly married couple, mourn the dead, inspire men for

war or to perform a particular task, woo a love one or even trade insults. It is found with the traditional medicine men and diviner priests. It provides a rich lively context during festivals, hunting or fishing expeditions. Children playgrounds and evening stories at the fire side are all attended to by song performances. Keil, the American anthropologist points out boldly that “there are more expert songsters and dancers per capital in Tiv land than in any society known to me” (17). Keil is right in linking song performance to dance because practically, song renditions are capable of provoking dance steps among the members of this ethnic group. The fact is, apart from good song performances, Tiv people also create and appreciate good dance performances. Therefore, wherever songs are performed in Tivland; one is likely to find dance performances. This explains why some Tiv oral poets perform alongside a group of dancers that are part of their team. Poets like Ikyaater Uge of Mbayion, Tôndu Kumbur of Mbatierév and Ayôô Angwe of Mbara among others all perform alongside dance troops. Legendary oral poets like Bam Ginde of Mbatiaav and Iorrumun Ankyá of Mbayegh were also excellent dancers who always mesmerize their audiences with both song and striking dance performances.

Song composition, performance and authorship in Tivland are embedded in a rich cultural and historical context. Tiv oral poets have historically been revered for their ability to capture the essence of Tiv sensibilities through their songs compositions. Understanding the complexities of this issue requires an appreciation of Tiv oral traditions, which often differ from Western norms. While addressing plagiarism in Tivland, it is crucial to preserve the cultural essence of Tiv songs and find ways to adapt to the evolving music landscape. A balance between tradition and modernity, along with the development of an appropriate legal framework, can help safeguard the intellectual property of individual oral poets as well as preserve the cultural and creative expressions which are the collective property of the community.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts Bronislaw Malinowski’s model of functionalism as the analytical tool for examining the issues of song composition, authorship and plagiarism among Tiv oral poets. This is because Tiv traditional orature inherently aspires and does seek after service because it naturally reflects the Tiv existential society. Composition of songs too is primarily for the purpose of service to the society. This is because Tiv orature is generally vibrant and serves significant socio-cultural functions of education, entertainment, propaganda and preservation of ethno-cultural histories and genealogies. Even in the present age of computer and print media, the Tiv orature is purposeful and assist in propagating government programmes and leads in the fight for justice and social change which indices of good governance and development.

While surveying approaches to the study of orature, Leticia Mbaiver Nyitse avers that “Among these various approaches to the study of orature in Africa, the functionalist is the one most favoured by scholars of Tiv orature” (3). The critic’s argument is based on the purview that, Tiv orature generally is committed to the service of the society whether it is sacred or secular. This functional commitment of Tiv orature is prominent and it covers a broad spectrum of thematic preoccupations in the society. Iyorwuese Hagher attests to this fact concerning early governance in Tivland that “The popular arts [in Tivland] ...were organized in bringing people together to counter the destructive methods of the colonial administration” (189). Therefore, it is only natural for scholars of Tiv orature to incline their scholarship to the functionalist approach in their study of Tiv orature.

Charles Keil, an American anthropologist applied the functionalist approach in his earliest research work, *Tiv Song*. Linking Tiv orature with the social functional roles it plays in the society, Keil asserts that:

...song, tale-telling, and especially the dance represent the most positive, life-affirming forces and values in Tivland, a powerful collective antidote to the negative or individualistic aspect of *tsav*. Tiv composers and their helpers offer a constant corrective for whatever is going wrong and loud praises for those who do right. (21)

Keil’s assertion also places a high premium on the utilitarian task that the Tiv oral artistic materials undertake in the society. This task could be dissemination of cultural values, moral attitudes, and beliefs or warn against breaking of societal norms as it is evident in social criticism. Therefore, the Functionalist approach is sociological in nature and it insists on the utilitarian gains of oral materials of oral literature. It is more concerned with the functions that oral literary materials play in the society. This makes the oral artist in Africa one who does not strives after mere abstract beauty but a player of functional roles in his community. Chinweizu, Madubuike and Onwuchekwa Jemie observe insightfully that:

The artist in the traditional African milieu spoke for and to his community. His imagery, themes, symbolism, and forms were drawn from a community accessible pool. He was heard. He made sense, and again: For the function of the artist in Africa, in keeping with our traditions and needs, demands that the writer, as a public voice, assume a responsibility to reflect public concerns in his writings.... Because in Africa we recognize that art is in the public domain, a sense of social commitment is mandatory for the artist. (74)

The above exposition brings to the fore certain important issues such as the nature of oral art and the place of the oral artist in the society. Every art form in the traditional setting is put to the service of the society in aspects such as social, political, economic or religious purpose and such functions

cannot be denied. In fact, the relevance of the artist to his community is determined by the kind of art he produces. That is the functional value of his art form to his society.

The Art of Song Composition in Tivland

A song is called *imyo* or *icam* and song composition is referred to as *imyo dughun* in Tiv language. Therefore, a composer is called *or dughun* amo. The art of song composition is the creation of organized verbal formulation expressing thoughts, experiences and feelings. The art of song composition in Tiv oral poetry requires much dexterity as its performance and the experience differs from one poet to another. The process of song composition is achieved considerably at least through several ways. The first and most common way is through hereditary acquisition when a talented child finds himself in a home where there is a practicing professional poet; such gifted child naturally picks interest in the art of composing songs. Social interactions like that naturally prompt and whet creative lore of many children. Nyitse submits relevantly in this regard that “[a] child whose father is a composer automatically picks the art of composing. In spite of this, the would-be poet needs to join a group to receive formal training and experience” (22). Nyitse’s submission accounts for the reason why many sons of oral poets in Tivland pick the profession after their fathers’ demise. Younger generation oral poets like John Golozo of Mbativ, Fred Anyiman of Gaav and Terungwa Kumbur of Mbatierev are all performing after their fathers’ death. Even Chia Diôgô who performs Christian nuptial solo poems with *ikenge i mbayiase* (elderly voice style) admits to have picked his voice style he employs from one Kundamiyol Utsenga Nyamkyume. In an oral interview with Diôgô, he explains that Nyamkyume was his neighbour whose performance caught his attention during his childhood days at Ipav district of Gboko Local Government Area of Benue State.

The second way of acquiring the art of professional song composition and performance is through the gift of song profession by the *Ityo* paternal clan. In the Tiv traditional world view, it is believed that poets who perform with profound perceptible creativity are those initiated into song profession by kinsmen or elders of their clans. Za-ayem Agye submits strongly in this regard that:

The religious underpinning of the ritual of initiation underscores the significance of the art of giving; for it is your kinsmen, who “give” you the powers to sing, “ka ityo you ka ve na u imo ye”... The aesthetic aura of cultural songs depend[s] on the semantic content, perceptual relevance and applicability to the mundane life situation. The songs aim at communicating not just to the sublime spirit but to the physical self on topical issues of life and its happening by chance. (42)

Agye’s critical comment points relevantly to the fact that song composition can actually be giving to a person as a gift by kinsmen who are representatives of his clan. However, unlike the artist who creates for Mbari in Ibo land, such an oral poet whose clan places the gift of composition in does not

put distance between himself and his composition. In the case of Mbari art, Chinua Achebe elucidates that:

Once made, art emerges from privacy into the public domain. There are no private collections among the Igbo beyond personal ritual objects like the *ikenga*. Indeed the very concept of collections would be antithetical to the Igbo artistic intention. Collections by their very nature will impose rigid, artistic attitudes and conventions on creativity which the Igbo sensibility goes out of its way to avoid. (43)

The above assertion is actually different from the experience and expectations in Tivland. In the Tiv socio-cultural world, the oral poet takes all credit and of course, reward for his talent and skills. He does not deny personal ownership but actually claims authorship of his compositions and performance. The issue of authorship to which this study shall return shortly is equally an important aspect of song performance in Tivland.

An oral poet upon who the clan bestows the art of composition is said to be performing *imyo ityôô*, a clan song. In such cases, such an oral poet shares the rewards from *imyo-mirin* song hosting parties and other high status outings with elders and kinsmen from his clan. In fact, on some very big occasions, some of the elders are selected to accompany the oral poet to such big outings. In such cases, rewards like a live cow will usually be taken back home to be shared among elders of the clan. Another reason for the presence of his elders at such serious occasions is also to protect him from the host. Moses Terhembra Tsenôngu throws more light on this issue when he explains that sometimes the reward could include mystical items and this is where the elders come in. According to him:

Apart from the members of his troupe, he also comes along with key elders from his clan. These elders are in attendance to add credence to the occasion as well as to protect the oral poet, should the host reward him with spiritual materials that are beyond his capability. ("Much Ado about ..." 259)

Tsenôngu's words further accentuate the fact that the clan which bestows the art of composition on the oral poet also has the duty to protect him as he brings honour and material wealth to them. To a very large extent, he is not a professional poet merely for himself, but for his clan. In that case, even if there are many songsters in that clan, he becomes the most prominent. The legendary Tôndu Kumur of Mbatierév from Gboko Local Government Area is one of such oral poets. He was a highly prized poet that not many people could afford to host him. His career as a professional oral poet earned him both local and international repute. In 1981, the administration of the Government of Benue State in collaboration with the Federal Government of Nigeria headed by Late President Shehu Shagari sponsored Kumbur to represent Nigeria at one of the International Festival of Arts and Culture in London. The oral poet distinguished himself and did his country Nigeria proud by winning several awards including the World Best Soloist Award with the title "**De Golden Voice**".

According to an informant, when his son Terungwa Kumur started performing shortly after his death, the elders were not happy with his act and his performance was short-lived. The reason is that, it is an exclusive preserve of the clan to again bestow the gift on any son of their choice. Therefore, the Tiv traditional mantra of *ya na angbian* was applied and the clan's gift of song composition was given to another person.

Yet, another way of venturing into the song profession of composition and performance is through formal apprenticeship. Here a person desiring to go into composing and performing songs as a professional poet, will approach a practicing oral poet of his choice whose style of performance he admires and get himself enlisted in a formal apprenticeship. Nyitse elucidates further about this process that "After training, the apprentice-poet has to be initiated by a master poet of his choice. This is crucial because failure to be properly initiated would lead to faulty composition manifested in hurried songs, which lack substance" (22). The initiation that Nyitse mentions is the *Jiagba* initiation ceremony. It is an initiation ritual into the profession of song composing and performance. This ritual involves administering a pounded concoction of the bark of *Jiagba* tree with some admixture to the would-be composer at midnight. It is believed that the *Jiagba* ritual intoxicates and brings to the fore the creative muse of anyone that undergoes it. In agreement to this traditional phenomenon, Iyortange Igoil insightfully explains the mystic powers of *jiagba* initiation that "Such an individual could be given some kind of insignia that was supposed to possess mystic powers capable of endowing him with the ability to compose songs of whatever length and retain them for subsequent performances" (200). The *jiagba* initiation is so potent that many people believe that it is impossible to perform without undergoing it first. Different critics of Tiv oral poetry such as Tsenôngu, Yina, Nyitse and Amase corroborate the view that several oral poets in Tivland attest to the efficacy of *jiagba* initiation. Some say it helps clear the voice as well as heightens the creative muse of the oral poet. The descriptive and mystic essence of the *jiagba* initiation ceremony is elaborately described by Tsenôngu who states that:

Besides the initiation by *ityo*, anyone who wants to compose can take a specified fee to a practicing poet whose songs he admires. The practicing poet now gives the would-be poet the *jiagba* concoction. *Jiagba* is composition medicine made up of the roots of a *jiagba* tree (*pericopsis laxiflora*), a weaverbird's tongue and assorted other ingredients. These are all ground and given to the prospective singer. Once he takes it, he is said to begin composing. It is believed that the *jiagba* medicine has the spiritual power to inspire composition, to retain the song in the composer's memory, and to win favour for the composer from his patrons and members of his audience. ("Artistic Ornateness..." 65)

Tsenôngu's description above agrees with the Tiv oral tradition where it is believed that, without the initiation with the *jiagba* concoction, an oral poet cannot acquire the creative muse and prowess for

performance. Therefore, it is generally believed that every oral poet acquires the art of song composition through informal training, formal apprenticeship, a gift from one's *ityô* clan or through the *jiagba* ritual ceremony.

Intimately connected to the art of acquiring song composition, performance and song publication is the process of song composition itself. These aspects necessarily need separate treatment because they are too complex to be lumped into monolithic feature of the song art. Finnegan recognises this fact earlier when she faults Albert Lord's handling of these various aspects as one in his definition. According to her:

The process of composition, memorisation and performance in oral poetry turn to be more complex than was once supposed. We can no longer accept Lord's definitive generalisation about composition in oral poetry – that 'with oral poetry we are dealing with a particular and distinctive process in which oral learning, oral composition, and oral transmission almost merge; they seem to be different facets of the same process'.... The reality is more interesting than any monolithic theory. (*Oral Poetry, Its Nature...* 86)

Finnegan is right because the process of composition, performance and publication are all different aspects. It is the combination of these different aspects with deliberate occurrence and progressive relationships that culminate into the poetic art. The realization of oral poetry as an art is dependent on the relationship between these different facets. If a composition is not performed it will lose its existence and its essence will not be realized; and if the performance is done in private, it will remain with the oral poet alone. It is the transmission through public performance that it reaches the audience.

The structure of songs may relatively be the same except in matters of length and content. Oral poets who are not literate enough to commit their compositions to writing keep composing and committing to memory without reliance on writing. This accounts for the reason why most oral poets particularly those that do not necessarily rely on writing do prefer isolated places in order to avoid distractions. Keil earlier corroborates this fact among Tiv oral poets that "One of the few things that all [Tiv] composers agreed upon is the need for isolation when composing, getting away from it all" (159). This need for isolation is also reported by one of the informants for this study Terhile Nicholas Kumbur, who knew one of the oral poets, Tôndo Kumbur in person as a father. According to Terhile:

My father used to compose his songs mostly in the night when everyone in the compound might have gone in to sleep or when he went to supervise his farms in the evening. There alone at the farm, he would either be composing or rehearsing the songs he already composed. He would usually spend sometimes singing to himself mostly in low tunes. (Interview with Terhile Kumbur 2022)

This information from the informant reveals the deliberate issue of privacy during composition where the songs are worked and re-worked to an acceptable version that is ready for public performance.

This is a common phenomenon among Tiv oral poets that the song art form emerges from contemplative privacy into the public domain. Arthur Francis Grimble, a British Colonial Service Administrator and writer describes approximately a similar scenario about how oral poems were composed in Kiribati. Grimble captures the process of oral composition in the following words:

...when a Gilbertese poet ‘feels the divine spark of inspiration once more stirring within him’, he leaves the village and goes off to some lonely place where he can do the initial work on his composition alone: ‘This is his “house of song”. Wherein he will sit in travail with the poem that is yet, unborn. All the next night he squats there, bolt upright, facing east, while the song quickens within him’. Next morning he returns to the village to collect a group of friends to him. (205)

It is evident that both Gilbertese and Tiv oral poets acknowledge and appreciate the need for contemplative solitude during composition which removes them from the public domain. But the difference is that Tiv oral poets do not always wait for some kind of divine or special inspiration to compose songs like their Gilbertese counterparts. The fact is, professional songsters in Tivland are commissioned to compose for different special occasions such as *kwase-kuhan*, *imyo-mirin*, *imyôngu teman* and political campaigns among others.

The reason for composing in seclusion is not farfetched. First, it is a way of protecting the verbal content from plagiarism. Songs can actually be stolen from original composers or plagiarised by other oral poets before authorship (ownership) is affirmed through public performance. This is discussed elaborately under the sub heading of authorship and plagiarism. The second reason for ensuring privacy in song composition is to avoid the songs from becoming too common before the day of presentation. When songs are composed publicly, many people become acquainted with them before such songs are presented to the public. This caution is necessary especially in instances where the oral poet is commissioned to perform at special ceremonies such as *imyo-mirin*, *imyôngu teman* or *kwase-kuhan*. This accounts for the Tiv proverb that *amar due akera yer icam ga* which means the dance festival is here, there is no need to hide the song.

Some professional oral poets who acquire an appreciable amount of formal education such as Oryina Anyiman, Chia Diongo and John Golozo among others attest to the fact that they write out the composed song texts. The oral poet explains that sometimes he composes his songs in segments such that he takes a day or two to compose a song particularly if it is a lengthy song. He said most often he creates the major components on a particular topic, and then he brings the various segments to form a song coherently. One common process every Tiv oral poet adopts is usually to rehearse their composition several times before arriving at an acceptable version.

Structurally, the Tiv song poetry is presented in verse or stanza form and very often with a lead or main segments of the song and the chorus. The verses are usually created through the pauses

made during performances. Normally the verses or stanzas are repeated twice before a next one is performed. Nyitse accentuates earlier that “shorter pauses indicate lines while longer ones indicate verses or stanzas, which contain a cluster of similar ideas” (10). It is the cluster of ideas in the stanzas that usually form the theme of each song. Among the Tiv people, the songs are usually not given specific titles but are referred to thematically.

Techniques and Structures in Song Composition in Tivland

Song composition in Tivland is a sophisticated art form that employs various techniques and structures to create meaningful and memorable performances. Tiv oral poets utilize a range of stylistic devices and organizational patterns to craft songs that are both engaging and culturally resonant. This section delves into the specific techniques and structures that characterize Tiv song composition.

Repetitive Patterns

One of the most prominent features of Tiv song composition is the use of repetitive patterns. Repetition is a cornerstone technique in Tiv song composition, serving multiple functions that enhance both the aesthetic and practical aspects of the songs. This technique involves the deliberate reuse of lines, phrases, stanzas, or musical motifs, creating a structured and rhythmic flow that is integral to the performance. These patterns serve multiple purposes: they make the songs easier to remember, create a rhythmic flow, and reemphasize the content besides the musical effect that is created. Repetition of phrases, lines, or stanzas allows the audience to anticipate and join in the performance, fostering a sense of communal involvement.

One of the primary functions of repetitive patterns is to aid in memorization. In a predominantly oral culture, where songs are transmitted without written records, repetition helps both the performer and the audience remember the lyrics and melody. By embedding repetitive elements within the song, poets ensure that their compositions can be easily learned, recalled, and passed down through generations. For example, a Tiv poet might repeat a key phrase or chorus throughout a song. This repetition not only makes the song easier to remember but also reinforces the central theme or message of the composition. Repetitive patterns are used to emphasize and reinforce key themes and messages within the song. By repeating significant lines or phrases, poets draw attention to important ideas or emotions, ensuring that these elements resonate with the audience. For example, in a song about bravery and heroism, a poet might repeatedly invoke the name of a revered ancestor or hero. This repetition serves to honor the individual and instill a sense of pride and continuity within the community.

Repetitive patterns also enhance the rhythmic and musical qualities of Tiv songs. The use of recurring phrases or stanzas creates a predictable and engaging rhythm that is pleasing to the ear. This rhythmic regularity is crucial in oral performances, where the musicality of the song plays a significant role in captivating the audience. Instruments such as drums, xylophones, and flutes often accompany Tiv songs, and the repetitive patterns in the lyrics are mirrored in the musical accompaniment. This synchronization of verbal and musical repetition amplifies the overall impact of the performance.

Repetition contributes to the structural cohesion of Tiv songs, providing a framework that unifies the various parts of the composition. By using repeated elements as anchors, poets can weave together different stanzas or sections of the song, creating a cohesive and harmonious whole. Repetitive patterns are a fundamental technique in Tiv song composition, serving to enhance memory, rhythm, audience participation, thematic emphasis, and structural cohesion. By weaving repetition into their songs, Tiv poets create compositions that are not only memorable and engaging but also deeply rooted in the communal and cultural fabric of their society.

Call-and-Response Format

The call-and-response format is a defining feature of Tiv song composition, integral to its structure and performance. This interactive technique involves a dynamic exchange between the lead singer (caller) and the *or yese imyo* (singing assistant) or the audience. The caller presents a line or verse, which is then answered by the *or yese imyo* (singing assistant) with a corresponding line or refrain. This format is deeply embedded in the social and cultural practices of the Tiv people, fostering communal participation and engagement. In its most basic form, the caller sings a line, and the responders echo the same line or provide a predetermined response. It creates a dynamic exchange between the poet and the audience, making the performance lively and participatory. By fostering a dynamic and interactive performance, the call-and-response format not only enriches the musical and poetic quality of Tiv songs but also reinforces the communal and participatory nature of Tiv cultural expression.

Improvisation

Improvisation is a key element in Tiv song composition. Poets often adapt their performances based on the audience's reactions, the context of the event, and spontaneous inspiration. This flexibility allows poets to keep their performances fresh and relevant, responding to current events and the immediate social environment. Improvisation also showcases the poet's creativity and skill, as they must be able to invent and adapt material on the spot. The audience has a strong influence on both the time of composition and during the actual performance. Improvisation or adaptation during

performance is also evident among Tiv oral poets. Tactful songsters are flexible enough to incorporate additional verbal content that may not have been part of the song when it was originally composed. It is in agreement to this fact that Nyitse asserts that:

Most Tiv songs are improvised even those already composed change during performance since the poet responds to the changing performance situation – for instance during the performance, a new arrival may be welcomed and becomes part of the song.... He [the oral poet] depends largely on inspiration and improvisation while composing. For the Tiv poet, the first step in composing is inspiration. (21)

This is a usual practice among Tiv oral poets especially at occasions where prominent personalities who were not considered are suddenly discovered to be part of the event. The reason for this practice is not improbable, because every song performance is largely audience centred. Without the audience there will be no need for performance because an oral poet performs neither for himself nor in emptiness. David Shim Orjime further corroborates that “...as far as oral poetry is concerned, the fate of the singer usually lies on the state of mind of the people he celebrates. The more pleased they are with the poet, the more reward he gets, and vice versa” (20). Orjime is right because, the oral poet needs the audience for his singing career to survive. This also accounts for the crave of oral poet for patrons with capacity to host them at wealthy occasions. Patrons are actually major supports for oral poets and the death of any patron is usually a great loss to an oral poet. Apart from monetary and material rewards that attend to song performance, the audience also most importantly serves as a viable source of inspiration for the poet.

Use of Imagery in Tiv Song Composition

These are potent devices that enrich the lyrical content of song rendition. Imagery makes the listeners’ engagement with songs profound and significant. The techniques of deploying imagery in songs give Tiv oral poets the latitude to convey complex ideas, emotions and cultural values succinctly and memorably. Some of these images are allusions to past events, ancestral figures or heroic deeds. Yina accentuates this fact that “The art performances are essentially communal and imbued with tinges of collective consciousness as the song-texts redound with allusions to the poet’s clan, peers, other clans, birth place, events of common exploit and epochs of communal significance” (5). By invoking vivid mental images and symbolic references, Tiv oral poets create songs that resonate on multiple levels, enhancing both their aesthetic appeal and cultural significance.

Imagery in Tiv song composition involves the use of descriptive language to create vivid sensory experiences for the audience. This technique engages the listeners’ imagination, allowing them to visualize scenes, emotions, and narratives as they listen to the song. Symbolism involves using symbols, objects, figures, or colours to represent larger ideas and concepts. In Tiv song composition, symbolism adds depth and layers of meaning, allowing poets to communicate complex

themes and cultural values succinctly. Symbols rooted in Tiv culture, such as traditional artefacts, historical references, and mythological figures, enrich the songs with cultural significance.

Tiv oral poets masterfully employ figures of speech and symbolism to create songs that are rich in meaning and cultural significance. Through metaphors, similes, personification, and hyperbole, they add depth and resonance to their compositions. Symbols drawn from nature, culture, and history allow poets to communicate complex themes succinctly and powerfully. By understanding these techniques, we gain deeper insights into the artistry and cultural significance of Tiv song composition, appreciating the skill with which Tiv poets preserve and transmit their rich oral traditions.

Song Authorship and Plagiarism among Tiv Oral Poets

Tivland traditionally relies on oral tradition for the preservation of knowledge, which extends to song composition, transmission and publication. Songs like any other aspects of oral tradition among the Tiv people are passed down through generations, often a written record. This particular practice makes it challenging to delineate the boundaries between individual song authorship and collective cultural expression. In Tivland, the concept of individual ownership of songs is not as pronounced as it is in Western societies. Many songs are considered the collective property of the community. The creation of some songs sometimes may involve multiple contributors, including lyricists, composers, and singers, blurring the lines of individual authorship. However, the emergence of individual authorship is not limited to written literature alone. It is also evident in song composition; especially songs composed by individual oral poets. Almost every song in the Tiv traditional community is traceable to an individual composer called *or dughun imyo* or *mbadughun amo* when rendered in plural form. However, songs like lullabies are usually not credited to any composer or author. There also general songs composed overtime and handed down to successive generations and their composers are not known again. In his research on the song genre of Tiv oral poetry, Keil earlier submits that “So far as I can determine, the only songs for which an individual creator is not necessarily assumed are lullabies and the songs that animal characters are likely to sing in the midst of a tale. Some Tiv would even insist that these simple song forms have their composers but that they are unknown” (97). Keil’s assertion is agreeable in the ensuing discourse because the authorship is as important as the songs themselves among the Tiv people. In as much as folk songs in Tivland have no physical form and solidity like books, individual oral poets have a way of laying claim on personal proprietorship of their compositions. This individual authorship in song profession is facilitated by the simple fact that, every oral poet in Tivland performs deliberately with a different and unique *ikenge* voice style. It is the voice style that becomes an individual identity for each oral poet. Therefore, all

oral poets in Tivland are identified by their *ikenge* voice which many of them try to protect. However, there is a disturbing evidence of plagiarism or *ikenge* voice theft among Tiv oral poets.

What might be perceived as plagiarism in song composition in Western contexts can be seen as a form of borrowing or a kind of intertextuality in Tivland. It is actually a common phenomenon for Tiv oral poets to incorporate elements of existing songs into their own creations. This practice is rooted in respect for tradition and does not always carry the same negative connotations as plagiarism in other cultures. Nevertheless, individual authorship is also an important aspect of song profession in Tivland without which the understanding about the primacy of song composition and performance remains seriously limited. For instance, prominent oral poets in Tivland such as Aginde Agena Leke, Bam Ginde, Tôndu Kumbur, Akile Bende, Yanmuel Yashi, Tarker Golozo, Ameer Yongu, Ajo Ugor, Geri Kwaghbo, Faga Adinge, Atayo Koko, Obadiah Orkor, Pevkyaa Zegi and Oryina Anyiman among others are all known by their individual *ikenge* voice styles.

The truth is, these voice styles have become trademarks and signature of their performances. The degree to which individual authorship is valued among Tiv oral poets is only dimly apprehended until one realizes that a voice style can be adopted, stolen or plagiarized all known as *ikenge i tôôn*. This takes place in two ways. Oral poets either adopt *ikenge* voice styles of older poets who have died or steal (plagiarize) *ikenge* voice of poets who are still performing. Tsenôngu earlier draws attention to this unfortunate phenomenon when he describes it that:

It is the situation where some oral poets have launched their career by adopting the voice shapes of some of the oral poets in the earlier generations. The Tiv refer to this as *ikenge i tôôn* which could be sympathetically translated as voice borrowing. (92)

Tsenôngu's translation of voice theft as "voice borrowing" in the above assertion is almost lopsided and can be misleading because borrowing as a term semantically suggests that it is actually done with the approval of the owner. However, this is not the situation surrounding voice plagiarism. No oral poet is happy that his *ikenge* voice style is plagiarized and of course, perpetrators of this unfortunate act do it without the authors' approval. This can be described as voice theft. It is one of the things that very often lead to vicious acrimony among Tiv oral poets.

Tsenôngu cites sufficient examples of oral poets who plagiarized the *ikenge* voice style of other poets. One example from his long list is Augustine Shima who stole from Emmanuel Wade. In Tsenôngu's words "Augustine Shima ...was a great artist but his voice shape was stolen from Emmanuel Wade right from the time that Wade was still alive and anytime the two met, there was a lot of quarrelling about Shima's action" (93). It is evident that Tsenôngu finally comes out clearly and rightly refers to the activity as voice theft as he points out poignantly in the case of Shima and Wade. The critic's elucidation about voice plagiarism is a reality about contemporary oral

performances. Tsenôngu further points to more instances of voice theft where he avers that “Philip Iwar, for instance, uses the *ikenge* voice shape of Faga Adinge while Simon Tsav, in some poems, gravitates between Tarker Golozo’s voice in one release and Oliver Ayeh’s in another” (95). Another instance of voice theft is the case of Gabriel Oryina Anyiman whose *ikenge* voice style was stolen by his *oryese imyo* singing assistant in the early days of his career as a poet. Anyiman was so pained that he performed all his song without a singing assistant till his death,

Apart Tsenôngu’s examples with regards to voice theft, Gabriel Oryina Anyiman’s *ikenge* voice style was also stolen by his *oryese imyo* singing assistant who broke away and started his singing career. Anyiman was so pained that he performed all his songs without an *oryese imyo* till his death. This explains that voice plagiarism among Tiv oral poets is quite a common phenomenon. Beyond plagiarizing voice styles of other poets, some oral poet even plagiarize parts or the whole verbal content of songs composed by previous poets. Terungwa Kumbur, John Golozo and Fred Anyiman are all performing verbal contents of their parents’ composition with the same voice styles. Apart from the vicious acrimonies among oral poets, voice plagiarism also leads to the dearth of originality in song profession. The fact is, even the audiences do not have regards for oral poets who plagiarized voice styles of other poets. Tsenôngu earlier corroborates this fact that “...very few Tiv [audiences] will take a composer who has not designed his own voice shape seriously. It deserves repeating that Tiv audiences do not regard poets who have borrowed other composers’ voices” (95). This observable fact about authorship and plagiarism also explains why Tiv oral poets compose their poems privately, rehearse and commit it to memory before performing publicly. However, it is important to state here that there are actually a category of songs in Tivland which authorship is difficult to establish. Lullabies, children play songs and many other songs that are performed merely for entertainment purposes fall in this category. These songs are therefore, owned by the community and they can be performed by any individual or group of people. Songs performed during Ajigber or mummy water dance performances are examples of such songs whose authors are not known.

Conclusion

From the preceding discourse, song composition and performance is discovered to be a significant aspect of the socio-cultural life of the Tiv people. The study contends that it is actually challenging to delineate the boundaries between individual authorship and collective cultural expression in song composition. However, the findings reveal that there still exist the issues of authorship and plagiarism where a composer’s *ikenge* voice style is stolen or even the whole verbal content. This act of plagiarism very often leads to different degrees of acrimony among oral poets and death of originality as demonstrated earlier in the study. What makes the issue of plagiarism

among Tiv oral poets difficult to handle is because traditional music culture in Tivland operates within a largely informal legal framework. There are no established copyright laws that specifically address song authorship, ownership, or plagiarism. This absence of formal regulation complicates the resolution of disputes related to music rights generally. Tivland primarily relies on customary laws and community-based dispute resolution mechanisms. When disputes regarding song authorship and plagiarism arise, they are often addressed within the community, with the involvement of respected elders and traditional authorities. But establishing a framework that respects tradition while acknowledging the need for innovation is essential. Tivland should consider developing a legal framework that recognizes and protects the rights of song composers, while respecting the collective and communal nature of music culture. This framework would help address disputes and provide guidance on issues of authorship and plagiarism.

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