

Akombo in Tiv Traditional Worldview: A Theological Discourse

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Abstract: Many Foreign and some indigenous scholars have in the past undertaken several investigations on the concept of *akombo* with varying degrees of negative ideas. The false impression created and subsequent practical misrepresentation of this concept by scholars and adherents has changed the true meaning and essence of *akombo* over time. This work aimed at setting a theological basis for a correct understanding and practice of *akombo*. This was accomplished by investigating the religious role of *akombo* as healing and protective rituals and as divinities in Tiv belief system. Descriptive phenomenology was adopted and used to investigate and describe the conscious experience of *akombo* as a way of attaining a healthy, prosperous and long lasting life through interaction with the Supreme Being. When compared, significant difference in characteristics of *akombo* as rituals to that of divinities was noticed. While some divinities (primordial) were deified to become ancestors no *akombo* had such quality. *Akombo* were therefore, viewed to be means through which interaction with the Supreme Being was made feasible. The work recommended that practicing *akombo* in hygienic condition, an integration of modern socio-religious ideas into *akombo* belief and practice with frequent and intensive research on the concept by scholars will help redeem the faulty perception that *akombo* are divinities worshipped by the Tiv.

Keywords: Akombo, Traditional Worldview, Theological Discourse, Tiv

I. BACKGROUND

The picture of a particular object one draws depends largely on his or her position where he or she stands or sits. The religion or belief system practiced by an individual or group depends on his or her experience of the divine defined by the environment from where he or she comes from. The variety in experience produces the differences in religious practices by different ethnic groups all over the world. This clearly shows that people's claim of their encounter with the divine as seen in their practices should not be dismissed out rightly but be investigated for a better understanding of such belief system.

The Tiv of Central Nigeria as a religio-cultural group has had their experience of the divine. This group is situated in the Benue valley of the middle-belt region and is said to have come from Bantu race in Central Africa (East 14, Gbor in Torkula 8-9). This is accepted based on similarities in language, physique and belief system as expressed by the groups (Baka qtd in Ushe 6). Population explosion which forced the Bantu out of their Sheba abode in Central Africa to

different parts of the World brought the Tiv down to the Benue valley where they have settled as the fourth largest homogenous group in Nigeria. They have fourteen (14) out of the twenty three (23) local government areas of the present Benue State. Their population is well over five (5) million people.

Akombo as a central element in Tiv traditional religion upon which all other elements in the religion revolves is believed to be creation of the Supreme Being. They (*akombo*) have rules and regulations governing the practice of the rituals and the general conduct of societal members in all ramifications of life. Violation of the codes attracts punishment from the divine. But obedience brings fertility to women, land, good health and prosperity to the people. Through this means (by propitiation of the *akombo*), the Tiv people access the Supreme Being for the provision of security to both people and properties, ensure peaceful co-existence of individuals, promote unity and development among others. This is the generally accepted view of the Tiv about *akombo*. This show to a large extent what the Tiv believe and understand about God and how they relate with their God. It debunks the erroneous idea by early scholars that the Tiv worship *akombo* and therefore, have many gods. The work stresses that *akombo* are simply a means of getting closer to *Aondo* (Supreme Being) for maintaining a harmonious relationship with the divine in order to attract blessings from God.

II. THE DYNAMICS OF TIV TRADITIONAL WORLDVIEW

Aondo (God):

The Tiv believe that the world consists of two realms-the physical and the spiritual. Spiritually, Tiv worldview is an expression of their robust belief in one Supreme Being as the creator of the universe with other beings and forces of nature that are meant to preserve the close relationship between humanity and the creator. All the Land, water bodies, trees, animals, birds, sky with all the heavenly bodies, human beings and other living and non-living things according to their kinds form the physical world. Though the Supreme Being is invisible and cannot be seen with the physical eyes, his works transcends to the physical world and are actually perceived by all humans. According to Denga man as a creature of the Supreme Being who is centrally placed was "released from

the firmament down to the earth naked -*Wankwase hungwa dyelegh* by the Supreme Being (qtd in Torkula 7, 8).

God is variously called by different ethnic groups on different names that depict his attributes as the Supreme Being. Among the Tiv, He is known by the name *Aondo* (God) who is said to be omniscient (have knowledge of all things). *Aondo fa hanma kwagh* is a phrase which shows that God knows everything. It indicates that God knows everything that is happening everywhere in the world at the same time. He is omnipotent (have absolute powers) hence the name *Aondohemba* – God surpasses all which clearly attests to his almightiness that is always felt throughout the earth. *Aondo* is also omnipresent – *Aondo ngu hanma ijiir hen shighe mom* (God is present everywhere at the same time). These qualifications place him high above all other beings in the universe, hence his supreme nature qualifying him to be called the Supreme Being.

Everything that happens in the sky which has something to do with the human race is attributed to *Aondo* because of His all-powerful nature and importance to humanity. To the Tiv, *Aondo's* abode is far away in the sky but he is believed to be in control of everything (in the sky and the earth). Here are some few expressions as examples: *Aondo ta oo* (God has thrown sun rays); *Aondongu noon ura* (God is pouring down rain); *Aondo ngu van a ahumbe a ura* (God is bringing rainstorm); *Aondo ngu tan uwer* (literary, God is throwing down moonlight). All the above and other wonderful activities in the sky like thunder, lightning, lunar eclipse that affect mankind are attributed to him. This depicts that God is not only supreme in authority and active in the world but a caring father to his creature's welfare. His transcendent and immanent natures are also seen in these attributes and activities in human endeavours. Though he is far away in the sky out of the reach of man, his presence is always felt through his activities. His existence is thus accepted by all the Tiv race as a Supreme Being (God). He is without form or shape which makes it impossible for him to be fully described by anyone. His size is shown by the size of the universe. Though the Tiv are known for their artistic works as can be seen in their *kwaghir* masquerade, none of their designed works is found to represent *Aondo*.

Human being who inhabits the earth is believed by the Tiv to be surrounded by natural and supernatural forces. Imasoggie attests that humankind has the physical and spiritual natures, psycho-physical (qtd in Ushe 50). In the psyche (soul, spirit, being), human being is open to *Aondo*, spirits and other important forces of the universe. The physical refers to the corporeal (bodily) nature that can be seen and touched. Human being is descended to the earth from *Aondo* and therefore, goes back to *Aondo* upon death. The Tiv believe that human condition after death however, depends on how he or she lived, died and is buried. The body (physical) and the soul (spirit) are indivisibly linked to each other (as long as he or she is alive) and consequently united to God who causes

the existence of the soul in the body in order that the body could exist (Igboaka 87).

Dzurgba narrating a Tiv myth to explain the association of *Aondo* with the sky which reflects *Aondo's* transcendent and imminent nature says that *Aondo* once lived close to human beings and used to interact with them freely; until when a woman was pounding yam in a mortar and struck her pestle against *Aondo*; *Aondo* became annoyed and withdrew to dwell in the heavens (*Minor Divinities* 14-15, Tiv of Central Nigeria 176). Makar concludes that God's abode is therefore, the sky where he is far away out of the reach of humanity as the chief factor in the cluster (65). Rubingh adds that the firmament or the sky becomes his cover (*kwav-Aondo*) and the clouds his spots, "*abeen*" (72). The above myth expresses that mankind is supposed to be in close link with *Aondo* if not the disobedience of man that led to disharmony in the world because of *Aondo's* displeasure. This resulted to the separation of *Aondo* from humanity. Thus, human power of perceiving and responding to *Aondo* in a harmonious relationship was broken. It also debunks the erroneous idea of a sky God by some authors who tried to show God's nonparticipation in the world after creation by clearly attesting that at a time in history, *Aondo* lived very close to man and communed with him. It is clear then that the God worshipped by the Tiv is not located in one particular place as alluded. *Aondo* now dwells in distant majesty and is sometimes approached directly by the Tiv in times of wars, epidemics and drought (East 254). He is however; most frequently addressed indirectly through the sacred *akombo* rites. This is a means by which he is accessed for help that also serves as a proof to his intrinsic transcendent and imminent qualities (Rubingh 72; Gbenda 38).

Akombo (Rituals)

The Tiv awareness of *Aondo* and His all-powerfulness heightens the Tiv person's surrender to the demand for obedience to the will of *Aondo* which takes place in rituals and the right observance of certain laws. Yuhe attests that The Tiv belief in an unseen order that is established by *Aondo* which *Aondo* uses as a standard for measuring human obedience (35, 36). Total adherence to the laws, taboos and prohibitions means complete obedience to *Aondo* which produces the desired establishment of a harmonious relationship with the divine. In essence, this belief echoes good health, fertility of land and women, bumper harvest, long life and prosperity for humanity.

A violation of the code means impending danger to humanity in the form of disasters, untimely deaths, epidemics and infertility to mention a few. This explains why these Special Forces called *akombo* are made by *Aondo* and given to humanity to control the activities of individuals in order that the desired harmony would be restored or achieved for a more meaningful life to be lived. The various *akombo* are the embodiment of the codes with their various penalties attached to them. The Tiv are given the special knowledge by God to

discover how the various *akombo* can be disturbed which produces calamities and the way they can be propitiated in order to restore the lost harmony. Through propitiation of certain *akombo*, particular misfortunes and social ills are corrected through which obedience to *Aôndo* is measured and success in life is subsequently realized.

Akombo have emblems by which they are identified. These emblems are made up of material objects which the Tiv use in their everyday life. They are derived from sticks, soil, animal parts, shells, stones and feathers. However, the emblems as believed by the Tiv are not objects of worship but a means through which the invisible Being is accessed for help, thus making the universe a better and happier place to live. *Akombo* in Tiv understanding become a means being is accessed for worship or help. They are symbols of the Supreme Being's authority and protection over his creation. The knowledge availed for the Tiv by *Aondo* to discover these forces makes the number of the forces run to hundreds. *Akombo* keep disappearing because of irrelevance while new ones keep emerging as they prove to be efficient. The way these forces operate may include: initiation, propitiation and acquisition, all attached to specific laws, taboos and prohibitions that subsequently qualifies an individual to attain a particular height in the practice of *akombo*. These determine the way *Akombo* are disturbed and how they are set right for the well-being of humanity. There are also other forces that exert a lot of influence on Tiv belief system and way of life. These spiritual forces with extra-dimensional existence, whose activities control human behaviour in society and show that they are not complete spirits, are known as *azov* in Tiv.

Azôv (Fairies)

Azôv which can be said to be spirits or fairies hover around actively though not with identifiable bodies. *Azôv* (plural) or *ijôv* (singular) can appear to anybody in any form at any time and place. They are not deities nor angels nor spirits of the dead, but spirits of nature. Their habitat is in the rock, water, woods, hills and mountains. *Azôv* are supernatural beings or spirits but some of their activities among men are contrary to the nature of spirits because they are seen and felt. In the investigation of *azôv*'s physical involvement in human activities, Torkula stresses that when offended, *azôv* punish by beating their offender with noticed visible whirls that are physically felt, and by hauling stones at the family or sometimes by visiting them with sickness (17). They are not seen with the naked eyes but sometimes appear to some selected people of their choice in human form. It could be on the farm, at home, at the stream or in the bush, to demand for a favour in form of cloth, food, money or any other help.

Azôv give good things to people: They supply animals for hunting, riches, excellence in given areas and bountiful harvests among others. Hagher describes *azôv* to be the invisible counterparts of mankind that carry out human activities like trading, weaving of clothes and fishing stressing that these activities are not only outside the control of witches

and wizards but also in contrast with human actions (qtd in Torkula 18). *Azôv* work at night and sleep during the day while human beings work during the day time and rest at night. Just as humans tend domestic animals and stay in villages, towns and cities as their habitat, *azôv* are keepers of wild animals and occupy such places as forests, valleys, caves and water bodies; *azôv* should therefore, be considered to be the opposite of human beings. This conclusion is however not watertight hence the activities of *azov* are not said to be completely distinct from those of human beings.

Explaining why *azôv* are generous, Dzurgba avers that, "They have everything in abundance therefore, from their resources, they give generously to the people who are in need" (*Tiv of Central Nigeria* 179-180). This could also mean that they have communities with infrastructures, established institutions and relationships, associations, social facilities, economic and political organizations with which they run their government. The favours mentioned above are particularly directed to people who obey their laws, who are hospitable, generous and obedient to societal norms. Those who do not follow their laws and are not well disposed to other individuals are subjected to the wrath of the *azôv* in form of poor harvests, barrenness and blindness just to mention a few. *Azôv* as invisible beings with qualities that manifest physically eat and weep when hungry and afflicted respectively. *Azôv* maltreat individuals and families when offended. Their visible and invisible activities play vital roles in restoring sanity in society and developing the people's culture.

Azôv are believed to be haters of evil and malevolent behaviour while they cherish benevolent acts and kind gestures. Women and children are taught at a youthful age not to throw water out of the doorway anyhow at night since *azôv* move around houses, lest they pour the water on them and provoke their anger. Pregnant women are also not allowed to move about at night lest they come in contact with the *azôv* to destroy the good formation and fortunes of their unborn babies. These morals were taught to women and children to instill discipline and protect them against evil. The punishment meted on offenders by the *azôv* brings sanity and creates fear which make young people to be obedient to their elders.

Azôv are associated with the younger people whom Rubingh describes as wreaking vengeance on evil doers and thus using *azôv* as an instrument of revenge and correction (82-83). When the desirable qualities of Tiv religion seem to be eroding away, *azôv* are used as a corrective instrument. On the surface, *azôv* seems to be hostile to the entire activities of *tsav* but in actual fact, they are more hostile to the bad *tsav*. The practitioners of the good *tsav* are thus honoured and remembered among the Tiv for guarding and transmitting the sacred secrets of society to the next generation (Yuhe 54-55). Rubingh calls *azôv* the second anti *Mbatsav* movement after *budeli* because the *azôv* are said to have emerged when the destructive and vicious activities of the *mbatsav* were ravaging Tivland probably in the second decade of the

twentieth century AD (83). *Azôv* thus held a special position of not only opposing *tsav*, but also becoming “an instrument for redressing and correcting evil in the society” (Tseyô 61).

The acquisition of *azôv* by initiation does not only make the members immune to the malice of the *mbatsav* but fascinates the Tiv because *azôv* are believed to be haters of evil and therefore, viable instrument of dispensing justice to those who do not possess *tsav* (*mba vanger gbilin*) in the community. By so doing, long life is assured to members for choosing to be freedom fighters. People suspected to be responsible for some *tsav* activities particularly the bad *tsav* in the community are apprehended by the members and masters of *azôv* and are variously punished accordingly. The existence of *azôv* is acknowledged by both the Tiv religious and Christian religious adherents even today when some other aspects of the Tiv religion seem to be disappearing. A more active, supernatural and personalized force whose reality is also well recognized in Tiv cosmology is the *tsav*.

Tsav (Witchcraft)

Tsav as a Tiv religious idea is a complex factor that is originally a cosmic potency that is internalized in man to be part of his or her personality. According to Downes, *tsav* is a mysterious power force with life and energy necessary for the good generation of the ordinary functions of nature. It does not function by itself but exists in an active form in some individuals who use it for their personal benefits and can be maliciously used for reasons of vengeance (32).

Tsav in the past was associated with the elders who were usually old people and probably some middle aged persons that distinguished themselves in the society. It was identified with people who were believed would better the lot of the community by safeguarding their interest, well-being and progress. If the *tsav* is used maliciously or viciously against the benefit of the society, it is said to be negatively used and is called bad *tsav*. But when used benevolently for the benefit of the society, it is said to be positively used and can be termed good *tsav* (Rubingh 73). *Tsav* is used in preserving the land and adding vitality to the people (this is benevolent use of *tsav*). It is a force that enables one to be successful in life endeavours and to impose his or her will on others in the community. Stressing the effect of the malicious *tsav* also known as the bad *tsav*, Rubingh attributes the sicknesses and deaths over the years in Tivland to the malicious activities of the possessors of *tsav* (73-74). This brought the Tiv anti-*tsav* movement which did away with many lives and thus instilled horror in the minds of many. This may be the reason why the good use of *tsav* among the Tiv is no more tenable. In the past, people who aspired to leadership positions in the society in various aspects of life were expected to have *tsav* as a prerequisite for the attainment of such positions.

To actualize the revitalization of people and the preservation of the land, *tsav* is joined with *akombo* for efficiency in Tiv religious practice. The *mbatsav* with their personal power combines with the impersonal to be better functionaries of

akombo practice in order to set right the *tar* (land) (Downes 27). People are assured through these rites that the susceptibility to which their life is endangered has been removed. Therefore, the land and women will once again be fertile and free from calamities (Yakubu 77).

Akombo and *tsav* work together in Tiv religious thought. While *akombo* upon violation of the taboos make one vulnerable to calamities and give the appropriate retribution, the *mbatsav* in addition offer their own punishment for the committed offence (Downes 74). The power that *akombo* represent may be controlled by an initiate into such *kombo*; and the authorities (*mbatsav*/elders) of the *tar* by becoming initiates can release the good and hold back the destructive forces for the good of the society (261-262). This implies that the *mbatsav* (witches and wizards) stand a better chance to interfere with the forces of nature in addition to punishment melted by *akombo*. The *mbatsav* are not evil in themselves however, the awe and dread they inspire are considered evil. Though, it is believed by the Tiv that in situations where an *ormbatsav* is supercharged, he may turn against the patrilineage (*ityô*) and identify with *mbatsav* by bypassing the approved methods of the society to carry out anti-social and dangerous acts (Downes 31)

Bi (Evil Signs)

The Tiv believe that actions in the physical world are largely determined by the forces in the spiritual world. This belief in the physical and the spiritual worlds is strengthened by the conviction that actions in the spiritual realm are made known to the physical sphere through secret codes that serve as a link between the two worlds. These codes are also known as signs or symbols. The perception of the signs in an area or family is viewed as a signal to an impending danger or success of the person or group in question depending on the kind of sign that is seen. This according to Waapera entails that there are good (meant for one's well being in health and prosperity) and bad (likely to bring calamities to persons) signs (117,118). For the purpose of this section, only evil signs will be explored as vehicles of religious insecurity in Tiv traditional way of life.

The presence or appearance of *ivungu* (or its plural form *avungu*), owl(s) in a place triggers the belief that someone may likely die or another calamity may befall the area. The symbols unfold the bad plan of the witches and other religious agents in the spiritual sphere intended for the individuals in the physical earth. It may be a request for a member of the witch society to pay back a flesh debt he has owed other members. This shows that he may have to give a human being for the piece of flesh he took. It also throws the community into panic as to which relations are caught up in the indebtedness thus posing menace and uncertainty in the environment. Continuous sitting and howling of the owl at a particular area, compound especially behind a person's house lessens the insecurity on others but intensify the fears of the intended family upon whom the action is wished-for. Its howling has a threatening sound, *Hu-huu, hu-huu, hu-huu*. A

sudden death at the time through a brief illness of a person or any other catastrophe in the area in question Dzurgba admits is consequently considered a justification of the dreaded secret language (Tiv of Cent Nigeria 183-184). Some nocturnal (night-time) birds like *kpile*, *mtsaan* and *gbev* belong to the category that shrieks or screams: *Kyarr,r kyarr,r,kyarr,r*. *Akiki* yells: *Vuku vuku vuku, Vuku vuku vuku, Vuku vuku vuku*. They are carriers of different threatening messages believed to be warnings from the spiritual world.

Animals like *Icongo* (Fox), *Hwa* (Wild-cat), *Hum-gaga* (Chameleon), *Ishoho* (toad) when met on the high-way or seen publically communicate messages ranging from illness to death threats to victims. In the same vein some insects are associated with the activities of Witches (*mbatsav mba kasev*) and Wizards (*mbatsav mba nomso*). For instance, in swampy and marshy areas where there are fireflies that fly about at night, their movement from one place to another is considered to have religious connotation in Tiv traditional religious thought and practice. Dzurgba states that it is believed among the Tiv to be night light used for the activities of Witches and Wizards in their recreational centres during their festivities or meetings that are meant for planning to attack their victims (Tiv of Cent Nigeria 184). Coming across such bunch of fireflies endears one to have a mystical experience that makes him unable to walk and speak out. The borer of fear created makes him/her feels been blown to extra ordinary size and height. Upon recovery one is said to have had an encounter with the *Mbatsav* (Witchcraft practitioners).

The frequent visit of the above signs is viewed as an indication of weakness on the part of the leadership of the society (elders) who are supposed to intercede on behalf of the community. No encouragement, motivation and inspiration of the youth to compete for excellence neither are there individual and group liveliness in boosting the social and economic well being of the society. Horror and lifelessness characterize the performance of members in socio-political and religio-economic activities of such community.

III. AKOMBO IN TIV TRADITIONAL WORLDVIEW

Akombo in Tiv have no correct English equivalent. But they can generally be described as supernatural impersonal forces that have been given to humanity by God through which people and properties are protected from theft and destruction, human beings are prevented from going to extremes and a means through which human dignity is restored by offer of solutions to human predicaments upon propitiation of the *akombo*. *Akombo* as a means through which the aspirations, blessings, authority and power of the Supreme Being is felt and accessed by the Tiv, is actualized by the provision of a harmonious relationship with God through initiation, propitiation and acquisition of the *akombo*. This is achieved through propitiations of the various *akombo* and observance of the *akombo* codes.

Akombo are symbolized by materials used in everyday life like animal, soil and plant products. Specifically, broken

earthenware (*icenge*), sticks (*atoon a ikon*), bones (*akuhe*) and skins of animals (*akov a inyam*) that are often fashioned and used as symbols (Dzurgba *Tiv of Central Nigeria* 77). These are mere signs that do not cease to be ordinary objects when invoked, but they are believed to convey a special spiritual message to the minds of the adherents that empower them to transcend to another world other than the physical. Lifeless as the objects symbolizing the forces appear to be, they are not believed to have indwelling spirits in them but that they act on instincts as naturally designed by the Supreme Being. In this sense *akombo* emblems may not be likened to fetish objects but rather viewed as symbols. *Akombo* are used for the protection of both individuals and properties against being stolen or defied by other persons. They regulate human behaviour by punishing their offenders in the form of illnesses or calamities. They also regulate the transfer of *akombo* from generation to generation through strict adherence to the set procedures.

Akombo have different classifications that are premised on different criteria by different people. To Yakubu *akombo* are divided into six groups based on their functions thus: *akombo a sorun tar* (*akombo* for repairing the land), *akombo a mar* (*akombo* for birth), *akombo a uange* (*akombo* for illness), *akombo a ikyor* (*akombo* for hunting or luck), *akombo a yangen* (*akombo* for protection) and *akombo a bumun - akombo* for oath taking (87-89). Casaleggio has five divisions based on processes, they are: *akombo* for birth, hunting, harvest, diseases and those for warding off the *mbatsav* (witchcraft practitioners). According to East, *akombo* are divided into two groups based on their places of origin thus: *Akombo* of birth and of hunt or arrows (76). The birth *akombo* (*Twel*, *Ilyum* and *Ihambe-icigh*) are said to be the indigenous *akombo* while the second group (*mku*, *akombo-adam*) and the others are borrowed *akombo* from the neighbouring tribes. Downes however, generally classifies *akombo* into two major groups based on their importance and area of coverage to the society thus: the small *akombo* (*akombo a kiriki*) and the great *akombo* as *akombo a tamen* (177). Small *akombo* are concerned with the wellbeing of specific individuals and families while the great *akombo* cares for the entire community. This classification today receives more recognition among the Tiv and is widely used by Tiv and non-Tiv scholars globally.

Akombo occupy an important position which is very central and plays crucial role in all aspects of Tiv person's life experience. They regulate the behaviour of the entire Tiv race through the offer of reward and punishment to those who are obedient to and offenders of *akombo* codes respectively in addition to ensuring peace, unity and enforcement of decisions for the well-being of the Tiv. Through correct propitiations and observance of the *akombo* code, protection and good health, fertility of land and women, provision of wealth to the people and stability of the Tiv society is guaranteed which in turn promotes long life and prosperity.

Upon violation of the *akombo* code (*pev akombo*) either through touching of the emblem by a non-initiate or destroying the protected property, *akombo* seize the culprit who manifests symptoms of particular illnesses or abnormalities in other areas of life in the community. When critically examined and discovered that they are not ordinary signs, diviners are consulted who open up by explaining which *kombo* is violated and how such *kombo* could be appeased to restore the lost harmonious relationship with the supernatural. Once this is carried out things get back to normal, but when neglected more misfortunes and even deaths are incurred. By protecting farm produce, virgin girls and other properties from theft, wrongdoings are greatly reduced to foster a stable crime free society.

Special functionaries of *akombo* in the different areas of life are employed to achieve these objectives through manipulation of the forces. For one to be a successful functionary in the propitiation of *akombo*, he must have to be initiated into that particular *kombo* by a qualified master of that *kombo* which allows him to participate in the activities of the *kombo*. He cannot at this stage propitiate the *kombo* for any person until he acquires the mastery of that *kombo* from a qualified master. However, in some particular *akombo*, he is allowed to offer simple medication to affected persons. Upon acquiring the mastery, he is then taught the right technical practices – incantations, motioning and offer of sacrifices. The type of objects designed as emblems, where they are derived from and how they are used are all introduced to him.

The incantation for example, ‘*Ibo sen isho kondo, Ibo sen isho kondo*’ (guilt descend innocent ascend; guilt descend innocent ascend) is common and central to most *akombo* during propitiations especially cleansing rituals and actual appeasement in the *kombo* concerned. This incantation is often said twice during propitiations. *Kombo* of *swende* is a good example whose rites are carried out at a flowing river where water is used to symbolically wash away the evil and send same to the unknown land as the water flows to strange destinations. In the absence of a river or stream, a small canal replicating a running stream is marked on the ground and the water cleansing the body drops and flows away. It is through this act that the power that heals is released chasing out the evil that has befallen the *swende* victim.

The Tiv traditional worldview attributes much respect to *akombo*. This is demonstrated in the respect given to *akombo* functionaries at occasions and homes and the insistence of the observance of *akombo* laws by community leaders as a way to greatness. To the Tiv, no meaningful fit is achieved in life devoid of *akombo*. Therefore, all aspects of Tiv life are attached to one *kombo* or the other. There is *kombo* of marriage, disease, hunt, protection and numerous other *akombo*. *Timbe mku* is one of the hunting *akombo* that provides not only game in hunting expeditions but also protect and guide a hunter back home. It generally gives good luck to initiates. Most of the Tiv practices can be found in many other African ethnic groups. The European merchants,

anthropologists and missionaries were surprised when they came into contact with these African concepts. Instead of carefully studying and appreciating the African belief and practice, they had wrong impression of Africans and falsely accuse all the people of being Hottentots and pagans. This is rightly captured in Ifesieh’s remarks on how the Portuguese at the inception of their exploratory activities visited South Africa and falsely reported that “the people are all Hottentots and they have no religion” (111). The Whiteman’s orientation in science and technology at the time blinded him from appreciating the mysterious nature of African tradition and culture. It deals with unseen things. The Whiteman wrongly believed that the African belief system is not empirical therefore, inferior and cannot be matched with the Western worldview.

The Tiv belief in *Aondo* (God) sees him as *Jijingi u tamen u hemban cii* (Supreme Spirit) among other *ujijingi mba kiriki* (lesser spirits). This is a special feature in Tiv belief and practice. The unfriendliness towards aboriginal concept and practice wherever it occurred sought empirical approach to all facets of life against the African mysterious approach, because to them, it was believed to have challenged their worldview.

If the *akombo* were to be carefully examined in their positive socio-religious values by the Whiteman, they would have been integrated with their religious concepts in order to morally build the Tiv life. The absence of this has now drawn the Tiv person’s concern to how the will of *akombo*, *azov* and *tsav* could be expressed in relation to *Aondo* who is the origin of all things, living and non-living, human and material and is worshipped universally. The Tiv approach generally indicates a dependence on the Supreme Being by all beings including humans that seek his face for help in times of trouble.

The unending challenges of the Tiv which they could no longer handle led to the search for greater powers beyond humanity for help. As people understood their weak areas, they look unto the supernatural for assistance in order to overcome the manifold challenges before them. It may perhaps be by fighting against an enemy in physical war, spiritual attacks in form of sickness and accidents among others. Others still propitiate *akombo* to have good luck in everything they do like hunting; marriage and prosperity in one’s own business and favour at places of work. The supernatural or spiritual realm is believed to have the power to provide the above human needs and even more in form of gifts as reward and misfortunes as punishment. Those who need protection and assistance to life’s endeavours in form of blessings, authority and power placate the *akombo* correctly and acquire them in order to be successful in life and be influential in their various societies. The *akombo* also provide good luck, healing to ailments, fertility of land and women, living a wealthy and life of affluence just to mention a few. All these and much more are received by propitiating *akombo* through prayers, libations and sacrifices. Thus, the lifestyle of a traditional Tiv person (in its socio-political and religio-economic spheres) is generally seen to be controlled by

akombo through initiation, propitiation and acquisition processes that are believed to render a healthy, peaceful, moral and fulfilled life to humankind.

IV. SUMMARAY AND CONCLUSION

The Tiv consider *akombo* in their different designations as a recognized instrument that is used for accessing the Supreme Being and for the control of human behaviour in order to maintain the time-honoured rapport with the divine. Obedience to their regulations results to blessings while noncompliance ensue retribution to the victims. Success and failure in the various ramifications of life is believed and attributed to this relationship. Propitiation of the *akombo* restores the impaired relationship to the divine thus producing long life and opulence to human race. This attained success is only sustained through the maintenance of the *akombo* code which to the Tiv is a standard measurement for obedience to the Supreme Being.

The Tiv believe that *Akombo* are not worshipped as idols but are used as a way through which God is accessed for help to humanity. They bring about peace and tranquility through the people's obedience of the code thereby fostering unity and development to the society. These *akombo* are Tiv identity as a monotheistic religious group with distinct traditional worship system that acknowledges the existence of a Supreme Being who is also the creator and sustainer of all living and non-living beings. *Akombo* are therefore, viewed by the Tiv to be the key to living a healthy, peaceful, moral and religio-economically fulfilled life to humanity. They can conclusively

be said to be the basis upon which the socio-political and religio-economic life of the Tiv revolves.

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