

THE CRITICAL EVALUATION OF BEAUTY AND CHARACTER IN IGBO CULTURE

**BY
JULIET FAVOUR GABRIEL
ART1901717**

**DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY,
FACULTY OF ARTS,
UNIVERSITY OF BENIN,
BENIN CITY.**

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**AN ORIGINAL ESSAY SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY,
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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this project *The Critical Evaluation of Beauty and Character in Igbo Culture* was carried out by **JULIET FAVOUR GABRIEL** with Matriculation Number: **ART1901717** of the Department of philosophy, University of Benin, Benin City, Edo State.

Dr. Sylvester Odia.
(Project Supervisor.)

Dr Wesley T. Osemwegie
(A.G Head of Department)

DATE: _____

DATE: _____

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my father, Mr. Gabriel Ajakiaye for laying the solid foundation for my life to be built upon.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am most grateful to God Almighty and I return all the glory to Him, the Father of light and giver of all wisdoms for His impartation of knowledge throughout this program.

I am acutely aware of the pivotal role played by my esteemed supervisor Dr. Sylvester Odia, whose exceptional guidance, mentorship, and paternal influence have been indispensable throughout the entirety of this project. Your profound expertise, remarkable patience, and steadfast support have not only shaped the trajectory of this research but have also molded my academic journey in its entirety. I am eternally grateful for the wealth of knowledge and wisdom you have imparted to me, and I am humbled by the privilege of having worked under your esteemed tutelage.

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ABSTRACT

This project holds significant importance in Igbo culture, a vibrant ethnic group in Nigeria with a rich heritage and deep_ rooted traditions. This abstract explores the intricate relationship between beauty both physical and moral, and character within the Igbo cultural context. It highlights the multifaceted dimensions of beauty, encompassing not only external appearance but also inner qualities, virtues, and conduct. This project reveals that beauty and character are intricately intertwined in Igbo culture, where the cultivation of virtuous character traits is highly valued and regarded as the true essence of beauty.it sheds lights on the timeless wisdom embedded in Igbo traditions and offers insights into the multifaceted nature of beauty and character in the context of a vibrant African culture.

CHAPTER ONE

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Beauty is traditionally being counted among the ultimate values with goodness, truth and justice. The word “beauty”, like any other philosophical concept is better described than defined. This is because beauty is characterized by different paradigms within a culture. This implies that the concept of beauty differs as per culture. Hence "there can be no uniform definition of beauty. However, Crowther defined beauty as “a combination of qualities that gives pleasure to the senses (especially to the eye or ear) or to the mind; a pleasing or attractive feature.”¹ The experience of beauty often involves an interpretation of an entity as being in balance and harmony with nature which may lead to feeling of attraction on emotional wellbeing. A concept of beauty is built into all of us and involves a balance between objective criteria and subjective impressions and a capacity to perceive order, symmetry, and harmony.

Beauty involves equilibrium between the whole object and its parts, as well as the various parts in relation to each other. The absence of this balance translates into the “unaesthetic. The word beauty is gotten from the Greek word *kallos* meaning “good” or “of fine quality”. Stace, in his book, *The Philosophy of Hegel. A Systematic Exposition* defines beauty as “the idea seen in a sensuous form, apprehended in art or nature by the senses.”² The implication of this definition is

¹ Crowther, J. (Ed.). *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press.1995)p.92

² Stace, W. T. *The Philosophy of Hegel: A Systematic Exposition*, (London: Dove Publications.1955), p.444

that beauty does not have its independent existence apart from existing idea in one's mind. This assertion makes beauty to be an accidental concept, depending on one's senses for its existence. What is meant here is that it is the senses that extract the idea of beauty from the possessing object. Supporting this fact, Santayana, in his book, *The Sense of Beauty* (as quoted by Van Meter Ames) posits that “beauty appears when the pleasure of sense is objectified: focused on the formal relations which constitute an object for contemplation.”³

The question about the existence of beauty is simply the question of whether or not beauty exists in existent things themselves as their object quality rather than merely in the mind. Is beauty an abstract or a concrete quality? Is beauty in the eye of the beholder or in the object that is beheld? Is beauty a constant or ephemeral? How do we account for change and permanence in so called beautiful objects? Do we have eternal unchanging standard of measure of the beautiful or not. Is the standard personal, conventional or common or it professionally ascertained? There are the differing questions that can be asked in respect to the reality or otherwise of beauty. What is of interest to us in this long essay, and which is at the center of contemporary philosophical debate, is the raging controversy over which is, the most relevant, between the cognitive analysis of the meaning of beauty and it's normative or utilitarian function. The emerging issues from this debate have now revitalized the dichotomy between the aesthetic and the normative conceptions of beauty.

³ Van Meter, A. “Recent Schools of Aesthetics”. Vergilius Ferm(ed.) *A History of Philosophical Systems*. (New Jersey: Littlefield, Adams, 1961) p.554.

It is possible to formulate the aesthetic conception of beauty in many ways, but the basic idea is that this conception of beauty describes the attempt to analyze the concept of beauty in terms of the aesthetic notions such as subjective and objective. Aesthetic conceptions are those tying beauty to feeling or rationality and to some function of its warrant for belief. According to Dogbert Runes, this conception sees “beauty or the beautiful especially in art and with taste and standards of value in judging art”⁴ it therefore focuses on the value dimension of certain kind of human experience. This conception is grounded in the intuition that when we ascribe beauty to feeling or rationality, one is primarily signaling that the view ought to be believed. What therefore supplies the substance for this conception of beauty is the aesthetic role of beauty, rather than it’s utility. The aesthetic conception of beauty can be broadly classified into three, subjective, objective, and subjective-objective theories.⁵

On the other hand, the term 'normative' can be used in more than one sense. It could be used to describe a standard or to affirm how things should be or ought to be. Understood in this sense then is the traditional Western theories of beauty, although aesthetic, are basically normative, since they also set standard (albeit aesthetic) on how the concept of beauty should be construed. However, there are other usages of the term 'normative' one of which includes using the term to describe which things are good or bad and which actions are right or wrong.

Again, the term 'normative' may also be used when talking about the role of cultural norms, shared values or institutions that is constitutive of the social structure and social cohesion. These

⁴ Runes, D, *Dictionary of Philosophy* (Totowa, NJ: Littlefield, Adams,1966) p.6

⁵ *Ibid.*,

norms and values act to encourage or enforce social activities and outcomes or enforce social activities and outcomes that ought to promote human welfare, while discouraging or preventing those that will not. That is, they promote social activities that are socially valued, while at the same time discourage activities that are socially undesirable. In this sense, the term 'normative' that we appeal to in our explanation of the normative conception of beauty - it is a common knowledge that the ways in which individuals or societies define that which they consider to be appropriate, that is, to be in accordance with their (normative or moral) standard varies greatly between peoples and cultures.

However, values and norms, as well as their meanings, are an integral part of human life in district societies and they are fundamental for prioritizing goals and organizing thoughts, beliefs and actions. In the Igbo conception, which is our primary concern in this work, Beauty is taken to be related to a family of norms and values that are fundamental in organizing the thoughts and actions of the people and entrenching the type of order that can engender development.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

In the African aesthetic mindset, many reasons undergird the African view of beauty whether visual, musical, kinetic, poetic, contemplative, spiritual or other non-visual arts. There is always a sense of purpose in whatever the African does. His paintings are informed by traditions, superstition, religion, folklores, conquests, history, etc. Works of art whether as in building, dress, dance, carving, horticulture, tattooing, theatre, war, etc., are informed by concepts like peace, love, friendship, courage, toughness, strangeness, hospitality, vision, religiosity, harmony, unity,

moderation, etc. On the negative side, it may be to inspire fear, hate, rebellion, hostility, wickedness, blood thirsty-ness, aggressiveness, invincibility, etc.

Beauty is a combination of qualities that gives pleasure to the senses or to the mind. It is a pleasing or attractive feature about an object or somebody. Beauty is seen not only in works of art but also in the physical characteristics or qualities of the human being. It can be internal or external. The expression of aesthetics among the Igbo people covers many artistic forms also. These include expressions that come in sculpture, paintings, carving, metal works, and architecture, etc. The Igbo conception of beauty can be understood both internally and externally, beauty has two realities, the outer /extrinsic beauty (*ahuoma*) and the inner /intrinsic beauty (*agwaoma*) Outer beauty has to do with the surface quality of things or outward appearance in general. Inner beauty (*mma n'ime*) refers to the intrinsic worth of things. In man, *ahuoma* is frequently implied in the word “*agwa*” meaning character, while in the object is implied in the word *ihe bara uru* meaning functional utility.

The study of beauty as it is conceived in Igbo worldview can be explained easily when linked to the cultural experiences and worldview of the people. It is impossible and a futile effort for anyone to focus on a specific point when it comes to Igbo cultural experience because of the vital relations among things. For anyone to understand Igbo aesthetic experience one must understand properly and deeply Igbo mythology, religion, ontology, language, social and political doctrines as well as the Igbo theory of knowledge, hence to understand the concept of beauty among Benin people, one must have background knowledge of their culture. The Igbo people do not see the

world as something separate and detached; rather they see the world as a whole, a coherent unit where the spirits, the ancestors, the living and the dead interact.

The universe according to Momoh “is permeated with both the visible and the invisible beings such as God, man, ancestors, reincarnation, life after death, beliefs, institutions, practices and so forth.”⁶ Similarly, Dukor argued that the Igbo believe that everything that exist is a force and that none of them can exists in isolation.⁷ For them there is a life- force that tends to link everything together, there is no way one can talk of any issue in particular as distinct from another issue, the Igbo mode of cognition is said to be holistic. The ontological order is according to Mbiti, anthropocentric, it is a complete unity in an ontological holism.⁸This is what we intend to project as we discuss in the course of this long essay the conception of beauty in Igbo worldview.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

1. To investigate the different context of the meaning of beauty in Western and African philosophies.
2. To show that the concept of beauty in Igbo worldview is relational and functional.
3. To make us know that beauty in Igbo conception is intelligible when considered in the context of Igbo ontology

⁶ Momoh, C.S ‘African Philosophy :Nature ,Schools and Substance’ in Unah,J.I (ed.) *Philosophy for All Disciplines*,(Lagos; Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Arts, University of Lagos,1998) p.30

⁷ Dukor, M, *Theistic Humanism: Philosophy of Scientific Africanism*, (Lagos: Chimah and Sons Productions,1994)p.20

⁸ Mbiti, J.S, *African Religions and Philosophy*,(London : Heinemann,1969) p.15

4. To contribute to the ongoing discussion on African aesthetics by presenting the concept of beauty as it evolved from cultural conception.

1.4 Significance of Study

1. It will enhance our understanding of beauty that it is not universally inclined but culturally inclined.
2. It will help us to know the uniqueness of Igbo conception of beauty.
3. To expose us to the functionality of beauty in terms of social character and communality.
4. It will enable us to know the subjective–objective notion of beauty in Igbo perspective.

1.5 Scope and Limitation of the Study

This study essentially deals with Igbo concept of beauty. It is an attempt to examine beauty and its relationship to the notion of character. The analysis of the work is completely fixed in Igbo concept of beauty in relation to the Igbo worldview. However, this work is opened to works on Africa by both Africans and non- Africans writers.

1.6 Methodology

Using a method of critical analysis, this work would first examine beauty and then critically examine Africans view on beauty in relation to character; we intend to look at the western perception of beauty as the basis for justifying the normative perception of beauty in Igbo worldview.

1.7 Definition of Terms

Aesthetics: Aesthetics refers to the branch of philosophy that deals with issues of beauty and artistic taste. It also deals with the creation and appreciation of the nature of beauty to which art is intimately related. Aesthetic is also concerned with the question of whether those ideals that constitute beauty inhere in objects themselves or whether they exist in the mind of those that perceive them.⁹

African aesthetics: According to Njiofor, “African aesthetics is the normative science of beauty in nature and art, in other objects, and in living experience in line with African culture and tradition and ideals of the community for the well-being of all.”¹⁰

Beauty: Beauty is usually defined as “a combination of qualities that give pleasure to the senses (especially to the eye or ear) or to the mind; a pleasing or attractive feature”¹¹

Character: This is the intention to carry out one’s moral rule duty, the decision to obey moral rules, the way to achieve happiness. It is essentially concerned with right and wrong conduct. The quality of the individual character lies at the heart of the moral life he or she will lead.

⁹ Agulana,C ‘Personal Moral Values and Economic Development’ in Irele,D and Ekanola,A.B (Eds.)*The Development Philosophy of Emmanuel Onyechere Osigwe Anyiam-Osigwe, Volume 3,Economic Existence Awareness and Responsibility*, (Ibadan: Hope Publications Limited,2010) pp.9-10

¹⁰ Titus H.H and Smith, M.S, *Living Issues in Philosophy*, (New York: D. Van Nostrand Company, 1974) P.537

¹¹ Njiofor, J.C. “The Concept of Beauty :A Study in African Aesthetics, *Asian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* 7(3) 2018,p.31

1.8 Literature Review

Aesthetics refers to the branch of philosophy that deals with issues of beauty and artistic taste. It also deals with the creation and appreciation of the nature of beauty to which art is intimately related. According to Ome, aesthetic is also concerned with the question of whether those ideals that constitute beauty inhere in objects themselves or whether they exist in the mind of those that perceive them.¹² Ome, further defines aesthetics as a philosophical branch that deals with the “historically determined essence of human values, their creation, perception, appreciation and assimilation.”¹³

For Titus and Smith, aesthetics is “that branch of Philosophy concerned with art and the nature of the aesthetic object, experience and values.”¹⁴ Isiramengives an elucidatory description of aesthetics when she says that “Aesthetics is a branch of axiology basically concerned with the nature of art – expression and appreciation.¹⁵ The word “art” refers to action that can be appreciated. We can do such an appraisal on aesthetic properties such as “beautiful”, “graceful”, “gorgeous”, “charming”, “handsome”, “spectacular”, “dull”, “unattractive”, etc.¹⁶ The aesthetic judgment of a people is based on some influences. For example, the influence of societal sophistication and the ability to comprehend the dynamism of life as portrayed in the work of art.

¹² Ome, E.M, *Aesthetics: Critical Reflections on the Philosophy of Art*, (Enugu: Folmech Printing and Publishing, 2012)p.1

¹³ *Ibid.*,

¹⁴ Titus H.H and Smith, M.S, *Living Issues in Philosophy*, (New York: D. Van Nostrand Company, 1974) P.537

¹⁵ *Ibid.*,

¹⁶ Isiramen, C.O. “The Nature of Philosophy” in Oroka, O and Isiramen, C.O, (eds.) *Invitation to Logic*. (Warri: Bonaventure Publishers, 1993)p.12

Kalusi also presents a comprehensive analysis of nature of aesthetics when she opines that “Aesthetics deals with the principles of beauty, arts and music. It enables us to understand the orderliness of an action, the beauty or ugliness of anything or to appreciate a graceful performance. In the school, for example, aesthetics enables us to appreciate personal and environmental hygiene”.¹⁷ Blackburn defined aesthetics as “The study of the feelings, concepts, and judgments arising from our appreciation of the arts or of the wider class of objects considered moving, or beautiful, or sublime”.¹⁸

In his regarding aesthetics as the problem of appreciation of excellence, Ekarika postulated that “Allied with our mental appreciation of truth in the perception of reality is our sensible appreciation of the excellent in things – beauty in nature, beauty in art, beauty in literature, etc. The branch of philosophy which deals with all this is called Aesthetics, and lays down principles and rules for determining excellence and good taste with regard to right order and the artistic in things as also the appreciation of the beautiful”.¹⁹

For Enuwosa in Oroka “Aesthetics is the area that studies beauty, order, and harmony. This is the domain of fine and applied arts, music and theatres arts”.²⁰ Nyong defines aesthetics as “the study of standard of beauty. He went further to explain that aesthetics “...deals with the goodness

¹⁷ *Ibid.*,

¹⁸ *Ibid.*,

¹⁹ *Ibid.*,

²⁰ Kalusi, J. I. *An Introduction to Philosophy of Education*. (Warri: Coewa Publishers, 1996)
P.16

in things, and it probes into the role beauty plays in human life.”²¹ The rules that should determine what is beautiful in life, the status of beauty in terms of whether it can be objectively assessed or whether it may only be subjectively apprehended.

Aesthetics demands two basic questions: What is beauty? And what is art? These two questions are distinct and confusing. For some beauty is beauty of nature, not of art, and for some art is ugly, not beautiful. For these two questions demand an answer. A work of art may be beautiful to one, ugly to another. Where then is beauty in the eye of the beholder? Another important question for aestheticians is, what are the essential characteristics of beauty? We have beauty in sculpture, painting, drama, poetry, etc. They all have something in common”.²² This is why Nyong further opines that “Aesthetics is also called the philosophy of art” This is therefore an attempt to provide a distinguishing definition for works of arts, thereby assessing the essential, formal, geometrical, emotional, attitudinal, psychological, ethical, expressional, etc. properties or elements a work of art , or otherwise, for its evaluation.”²³

²¹ Kalusi, J. I. *An Introduction to Philosophy of Education*. (Warri: Coewa Publishers, 1996)
P.16

²² *Ibid.*,

²³ Blackburn, S. *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996)
P.8

CHAPTER TWO

A CONCEPTUAL APPROACH TO BEAUTY AND CHARACTER

In the vast expanse of philosophical inquiry, the conceptualization of beauty extends far beyond the superficial realm of mere physical aesthetics. Within this intellectual landscape, the interplay between beauty and character becomes a focal point of exploration. By engaging in a thoughtful examination of virtues such as kindness, resilience, and authenticity, one embarks on a journey to unveil the profound essence of an individual. Kindness, as a virtue, transcends the confines of mere benevolence; it becomes a fundamental aspect of one's character. From a philosophical standpoint, the beauty associated with kindness emanates not solely from external gestures but from the authentic, intrinsic quality of compassion that underlies such acts²⁴. This acknowledgment propels us beyond the surface, urging a deeper understanding of beauty that resonates with the very core of human existence.

Resilience, another virtue within the contemplative spectrum, bears philosophical significance in shaping the conceptualization of beauty. The capacity to endure challenges and setbacks reveals an inner strength that contributes to the allure of an individual. In this context, beauty emerges not as a fleeting facade but as a manifestation of fortitude, intertwining with the character's enduring spirit. Authenticity, often heralded in philosophical discourse, serves as a linchpin in the nexus between beauty and character. Genuine expression and sincerity in one's actions and demeanor elevate beauty to a higher plane, where it becomes a reflection of moral integrity. The

²⁴ Abraham, W. *The Mind of Africa*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1982).pg 46

harmonious synthesis of authentic selfhood and external manifestations engenders a profound connection between aesthetic appeal and the ethical underpinnings of an individual.

In this nuanced perspective, the philosophical exploration of beauty becomes a holistic endeavor, embracing both the intrinsic and extrinsic dimensions of human existence²⁵. The synthesis of virtues and external manifestations transcends a reductionist view of beauty, offering a more comprehensive understanding rooted in the complexities of character. As such, beauty becomes a philosophical construct that resonates with the intricacies of morality, urging individuals to reflect not only on their outward appearance but on the virtues that shape the very essence of their being.

The conceptualization of beauty finds its depth in the contemplation of virtues such as kindness, resilience, and authenticity. The interplay between intrinsic qualities and external manifestations forms the basis of a nuanced perspective that forges a profound connection between aesthetic appeal and moral integrity. Through this philosophical lens, beauty becomes a rich and multifaceted construct, inviting individuals to explore the intricate tapestry of character that underlies their existence.

2.1 Conceptualizing Beauty in Western Perspective

The concept of beauty has been a central theme in Western philosophy, with various perspectives on its nature. Until the 18th century, most philosophical accounts of beauty treated it as an

²⁵ Achebe, C. *Morning yet on Creation Day*. (London: Heinemann.1975)

objective quality, located in the beautiful object itself or in the qualities of that object.²⁶ For ancient philosophers like Plato and Aristotle, beauty was considered a quality of an object, and they asserted that there were objective criteria for explaining what is beautiful. In contrast, Enlightenment philosophers argued that beauty is a subjective judgment, a statement about what a person feels rather than a quality of an object. This subjective perspective was further developed in the 20th century, particularly within feminist philosophy, leading to a revived interest in beauty and a critique of the concept. The nature of beauty is a multifaceted and enduring theme in Western philosophy, encompassing various perspectives, from objective to subjective accounts, and it has been influenced by cultural, social, and historical factors.

The philosophical perspectives on beauty in the Western tradition have evolved over time, ranging from the classical conception of beauty as a supreme value, basic to the whole cosmos, to more subjective interpretations that emphasize the role of the observing subject in judgments of beauty. These diverse perspectives reflect the complex and multifaceted nature of beauty in Western philosophy. The relationship between beauty and morality in philosophy has been a central theme, with various perspectives and historical influences. In the Western tradition, philosophers like Plato, Aristotle, and Kant have associated beauty with morality. Plato, in his work "Symposium," argued that beauty inspires love, which is connected to ethics. Similarly, Kant claimed that beauty is the symbol of morality, strengthening our moral feeling and

²⁶ Anyanwu, K. C. "Philosophical Significance of Myth and Symbol in Dogon World-view". In C. S. Momoh (Ed.), *(The Substance of African Philosophy. Auchi: APP Publications 2012).pg17*

assuming an indeterminate purpose underlying nature²⁷. These perspectives suggest a deep-seated association between beauty and morality, rooted in ancient Greek philosophy and further developed in the Enlightenment era.

The moral-beauty view posits that morality and beauty are intrinsically linked, with moral virtues being considered beautiful traits in a person, and moral vices being seen as ugly. This view challenges the notion that human beauty is solely based on physical appearance, emphasizing the beauty of one's character and moral virtues. While some philosophers have historically connected beauty to morality, the relationship between the two has also been a subject of debate. The Enlightenment era saw a shift towards more subjective interpretations of beauty, leading to the idea that beauty is morally neutral. This perspective suggests that beauty exists in its own unique space, separate from moral considerations.

Western philosophy considers beauty to be one of the most enduring and controversial themes, with aesthetics being the philosophical study of beauty and taste. Art, as a form of expression, has been influenced by various philosophical ideas, such as the classical conception of beauty, which consists of an arrangement of integral parts into a coherent whole according to proportion, harmony, symmetry, and similar notions. This conception of beauty has been embodied in classical and neo-classical architecture, sculpture, literature, and music.

²⁷ Makumba, M. M. *An Introduction to African Philosophy: Past and Present.* (Oxford university press 1998)pg 25

In modern art, the concept of beauty has evolved to include various aspects of reality, such as emotions and feelings. Art now follows the voice of feelings, striving to find a beautiful form for content that is not necessarily beautiful in itself. This shift in perspective has led to a more subjective understanding of beauty in art, where individual experiences and emotions play a significant role in determining what is considered beautiful.

The perception of beauty in nature is closely related to the philosophical concept of natural beauty. According to Adorno, natural beauty is the origin of myth, as it is something for which everyone longs, and it reveals the "Functionalism Today"²⁸. The feeling of beauty in nature is universal, as everyone can appreciate the joy of being in a healthy, clean, and natural environment that is thriving and blooming. However, the concept of beauty in nature has been influenced by human intervention and environmental degradation. The idea of beauty in nature is now intertwined with the need for environmental protection and the preservation of natural resources. This has led to a more complex understanding of beauty in nature, where the aesthetics of the environment are closely linked to the ecological health of the planet.

The human body has been a subject of beauty in Western culture, with various philosophical and cultural influences shaping our perception of beauty. The classical conception of beauty, for example, has traditionally considered the human body as a work of art, with its proportions and symmetry being closely examined and admired. This perspective has been challenged by modern and contemporary art, which has explored the beauty of the human body in various ways, such as

²⁸ Gyeke, K. *An Essay in African Philosophical Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.) pg 78

through the use of unconventional materials, performance art, and body art. In addition to art, the concept of beauty in the human body has been influenced by cultural and social factors, such as the media and advertising. These factors have contributed to the development of specific beauty ideals, which have changed over time and across different cultures. The idea of beauty in the human body has also been shaped by philosophical debates on the nature of beauty and the role of the body in art.

In conclusion, the concept of beauty in the Western perspective is multifaceted, encompassing art, nature, and the human body. The perception of beauty in these aspects has been influenced by various philosophical, cultural, and social factors, leading to a complex and evolving understanding of beauty in the Western world.

2.2 Theories of Beauty

We shall consider four theories of beauty for the purpose of this study.

Aesthetics is the philosophical notion of beauty, which often includes the idea that an object is beautiful if perceiving it is accompanied by aesthetic pleasure²⁹. Aesthetic pleasure is the quality of a thing, and it can be found in various objects, such as landscapes, sunsets, and works of art. Aesthetics, as a theory, places emphasis on the pleasurable experience derived from beauty. Rooted in sensory appreciation, this perspective suggests that beauty is inherently linked to the sensations and emotions it evokes. The aesthetic theory contends that the experience of beauty is

²⁹ Makumba, M. M *Op Cit*

subjective, varying from individual to individual, as each person's sensory perceptions contribute to their unique understanding of what is beautiful³⁰. This theory propels us into an appreciation of beauty as a personal, sensory encounter that transcends objective standards.

Platonism, on the other hand, delves into the realm of abstract Forms and their connection to beauty. According to Plato, beauty is not confined to its manifestation in the physical world but is rather a reflection of an idealized Form³¹. In the context of art, this theory posits that true beauty exists in the imitation of these eternal Forms. Consequently, Platonism elevates beauty beyond the tangible and connects it to a metaphysical realm, influencing how art is perceived and valued. Plato's theory of beauty is rooted in the idea that beauty is a property of objects and can be understood through the concept of Forms. Plato believes that beautiful things remind souls of their mystery and that beauty has a unique place in Plato's philosophy, somewhere between the visible and the intelligible³². In Plato's view, beauty is closely connected to art, and the three features of beauty in the *Hippias Major* also apply in the *Symposium*

Kantianism introduces the concept of subjective beauty, intertwining it with morality. Immanuel Kant contends that beauty is not an inherent quality of an object but arises from the subjective response of the observer. Immanuel Kant's theory of beauty is based on the idea that beauty is subjective and universal, meaning that certain things are beautiful to everyone⁵. Kant claims that

³⁰ Oruka, H. O. (Ed.). *Sage Philosophy (Volume 4 in Philosophy of History and Culture 1991)*. E.J. Brill.pg89

³¹ Serequeberhan, T. (Ed.). *African Philosophy: The Essential Readings.*(Paragon House. 1998)pg57

³² Oruka, H. O. *Op Cit.*,

the beautiful has to be understood as purposive, but without any definite purpose. He also introduces the idea of the "free play" of the cognitive faculties, which is essential for understanding the experience of beauty. The aesthetic judgment, according to Kant, is influenced by both the form of the object and the harmonious play of the observer's cognitive faculties. Moreover, Kant connects beauty to morality, asserting that the experience of beauty is a disinterested pleasure, distinct from personal desires. This theory thus invites us to consider the ethical dimensions intertwined with aesthetic appreciation.

Subjectivism, the fourth theory, places a spotlight on feeling and sentiment as central to determining beauty³³. Rooted in individual perspectives and emotions, subjectivism asserts that beauty is a product of personal experience. This theory acknowledges the diversity of human sentiment and emphasizes the fluidity of aesthetic judgments. In the realm of subjectivism, beauty becomes a subjective interpretation, shaped by an individual's emotional response and cultural context. Subjectivist theories of beauty, such as those proposed by Hume and Schopenhauer, emphasize that feeling, not thought, informs us that an object is beautiful or ugly. Hume proposes that the feeling or sentiment is itself an aesthetic or moral discrimination, and that moral beauty partakes much of this latter species. Subjectivism does not lead to relativism, as not every sentiment is equally good.

In essence, these four theories Aesthetics, Platonism, Kantianism, and Subjectivism contribute unique lenses through which we perceive and understand beauty. Each theory invites us to

³³ Serequeberhan, T. *Op Cit.*,

contemplate beauty from diverse angles, whether as a pleasurable sensory encounter, an abstract Form, a subjective and moral judgment, or a product of individual feeling. The multifaceted nature of these perspectives enriches our comprehension of beauty, revealing its complexity and significance in shaping our artistic, moral, and human experiences. In conclusion, these four theories of beauty offer different perspectives on the nature of beauty and its relation to art, morality, and human experience. Aesthetics emphasizes the pleasurable experience of beauty, while Platonism focuses on the concept of Forms and the connection between beauty and art. Kantianism highlights the subjectivity of beauty and its connection to morality, and subjectivism emphasizes the role of feeling and sentiment in determining beauty.

2.3 The normative conception of beauty in African world view

The normative conception of beauty in African worldview is a holistic and multifaceted concept that encompasses aesthetics, cultural context, and spirituality. In African culture, beauty is not only associated with pleasing appearance but also with positive moral conduct and attitude, reflecting a communal and functional understanding of beauty³⁴. This relational concept of beauty is deeply rooted in African aesthetics, where certain standards of beauty and correctness in artistic expression and physical appearance are held in common among various African societies. Additionally, beauty in African philosophy is seen as serving a purpose and communicating values, norms, and morals, and it is closely linked with the development of moral awareness. Furthermore, the spiritual dimension of beauty is emphasized in African

³⁴ Wiredu, K. *Philosophy and an African*. Cambridge:(Cambridge University Press1980). Pg 23

tradition, where beauty is appreciated in realms of the spiritual, metaphysical, physical, and supernatural, and it is believed to lead to the orchestration of harmony and cosmic mind³⁵. Therefore, the normative conception of beauty in African worldview is a complex and interconnected notion that is deeply embedded in the cultural, moral, and spiritual fabric of African societies.

The African concept of beauty is deeply rooted in cultural, moral, and spiritual dimensions. It is characterized by a communal and functional understanding, where beauty is not only related to physical attractiveness but also to good conduct and moral awareness³⁶. This holistic view of beauty encompasses both inner and outer forms, emphasizing the harmony of physical attractiveness and positive character traits. Additionally, the spiritual dimension of beauty is significant in African tradition, as it is believed to lead to harmony and cosmic balance. Furthermore, African beauty standards are diverse and can vary across different regions and cultures, reflecting the rich tapestry of the continent. Overall, the African concept of beauty is relational, serving a purpose in the community, and is deeply intertwined with cultural and spiritual values, setting it apart from the Western individualistic and often purely physical conception of beauty. The African concept of beauty is deeply rooted in cultural, moral, and spiritual dimensions³⁷. It is characterized by a communal and functional understanding, where beauty is not only related to physical attractiveness but also to good conduct and moral awareness

³⁵ *Ibid.*,

³⁶ *Ibid.*,

³⁷ Eze, E. C. (Ed.). *African Philosophy: An Anthology*. (Oxford: Blackwell 1988) pg 5

This holistic view of beauty encompasses both inner and outer forms, emphasizing the harmony of physical attractiveness and positive character traits³⁸. Additionally, the spiritual dimension of beauty is significant in African tradition, as it is believed to lead to harmony and cosmic balance. Furthermore, African beauty standards are diverse and can vary across different regions and cultures, reflecting the rich tapestry of the continent. Overall, the African concept of beauty is relational, serving a purpose in the community, and is deeply intertwined with cultural and spiritual values, setting it apart from the Western individualistic and often purely physical conception of beauty

The Ubuntu philosophy emphasizes the importance of community and interconnectedness, promoting a communal view of beauty. Ubuntu is a humanistic philosophy that focuses on people's allegiance and relations with each other, putting the community at the center of everything. Ubuntu ethics prescribe individuals to identify and exhibit solidarity with one another, promoting behaviors that improve the quality of life of others. The communalism that the African Ubuntu approach preaches is essential to the spirit of the African Ubuntu philosophy, emphasizing the aspect of working with others as a team. Ubuntu recognizes the value of collaboration and the importance of mutual support in order to enhance the well-being of the community. The Ubuntu philosophy provides a powerful framework for community building, encouraging active listening, open communication, and inclusivity³⁹. By recognizing our shared

³⁸ Oruka, H. O. *Sage Philosophy (Volume 4 in Philosophy of History and Culture 1999)*. E.J. Brill. Pg 27

³⁹ Huntington, S. P., & Nelson, J. M. *"Philosophy of African tribes"*. Cambridge: (Harvard University Press 1976) pg. 34

humanity and interconnectedness, communities can foster a culture of collaboration and innovation, promoting communal beauty and well-being

2.3.1 Cultural Expressions of Beauty in African Traditions

Traditional Arts and Crafts

Traditional African arts and crafts play a significant role in expressing beauty within the continent's diverse cultures. These artistic expressions often reflect the community's values, spiritual beliefs, and aesthetic standards⁴⁰. For example, the intricate carvings, colorful textiles, and symbolic motifs found in African art not only serve as a form of creative expression but also convey the community's understanding of beauty and harmony. The use of natural materials and the portrayal of human forms in art often reflect the interconnectedness between the physical, spiritual, and natural worlds, contributing to the cultural expressions of beauty in African traditions⁴¹.

Adornments and Body Modification

Adornments and body modifications are integral to the expression of beauty in many African societies. Practices such as scarification, body painting, and the wearing of elaborate jewelry are not only aesthetic but also carry cultural and social significance⁴². Adornments are often used to symbolize status, cultural identity, and rites of passage. For instance, the Fulani women's

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*,

⁴¹ Tempels, P. *La philosophie bantoue (Bantu Philosophy 2000)*. Elisabethville. Pg 12

⁴² *Ibid.*,

elaborate facial tattoos and the Maasai beadwork are emblematic of beauty and cultural pride. Body modifications and adornments are deeply rooted in tradition and are a means of expressing individual and communal beauty ideals within African societies.

Rituals and Celebrations: Beauty in Festivities

Rituals and celebrations in African traditions are occasions where beauty is prominently displayed and celebrated. These events often feature traditional attire, body adornments, and artistic performances that embody the community's aesthetic values. For example, the use of vibrant fabrics, intricate hairstyles, and body paint during cultural ceremonies and festivals reflects the community's collective understanding of beauty and cultural identity. Beauty in African festivities is not only about physical appearance but also about the preservation of cultural heritage and the expression of communal pride and unity.

In conclusion, the cultural expressions of beauty in African traditions are diverse and deeply interconnected with the continent's rich and varied cultural tapestry. Traditional arts and crafts, adornments and body modifications, as well as rituals and celebrations, serve as vital avenues for expressing and preserving the multifaceted nature of beauty within African societies. These cultural expressions not only reflect aesthetic values but also convey the communal, spiritual, and social significance of beauty in African traditions.

2.4 The Interface between Beauty and Character in African Worldview

In the African worldview, beauty is strongly linked to moral character and communal values. Aesthetics and morality are intertwined, and a person's beauty is not solely based on physical appearance but also on their moral strength and conduct⁴³. This perspective is rooted in the communalist functionality of service and upholding social virtues of brotherhood and togetherness. Therefore, a beautiful person in African aesthetics is expected to reflect both physical beauty and moral goodness. This interconnectedness of beauty and character is evident in African traditional, religious, social, and ethical systems, driving the dynamics of African aesthetic patterns in both rural and modern communities. The concept of beauty in the African worldview is not just about individual appearance but also about embodying social and moral virtues that contribute to the well-being of the community. In the African worldview, the interface between beauty and character is deeply intertwined, reflecting a holistic understanding of the human experience⁴⁴. Unlike Western perspectives that often compartmentalize these concepts, African cultures emphasize a symbiotic relationship, recognizing beauty as an outward expression of inner virtues.

In many African societies, physical beauty is seen as a reflection of one's inner harmony and moral character. Features like a warm smile or expressive eyes are considered manifestations of a person's soul, revealing qualities such as kindness, integrity, and wisdom. This holistic

⁴³ Rhodes, Gillian, et al. "Cross-cultural perception of female facial appearance: (A multi-ethnic and multi-centre study." *PLoS One*, vol. 16, no. 1, 2021, doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0245289.pg67)

⁴⁴ Tempels P. *Op Cit*

approach challenges the notion of beauty as merely skin deep, urging individuals to cultivate virtues that resonate beyond the surface. This perspective challenges the conventional Western notion of beauty and emphasizes the importance of moral positioning and communal values in defining beauty. It also raises questions about the societal standards of beauty and their impact on individuals, particularly in the context of race and cultural differences. The African view of beauty and character offers a unique philosophical lens through which to examine the interconnectedness of aesthetics, morality, and communal values⁴⁵.

The African worldview emphasizes the interconnectedness of beauty and character, where beauty is not solely based on physical appearance but also on moral strength and conduct, reflecting communal values and social virtues. This perspective challenges conventional Western notions of beauty and raises important questions about societal standards of beauty and their impact on individuals, particularly in the context of race and cultural differences.

Moreover, African cultures often value communal well-being over individual aesthetics. The concept of ubuntu, prevalent in many African societies, underscores the interconnectedness of humanity. Beauty, therefore, extends beyond the individual to encompass the collective, emphasizing the significance of one's character in contributing to the harmony of the community⁴⁶.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*,

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*,

Traditional African art further exemplifies the integration of beauty and character. Sculptures, masks, and adornments often serve as visual expressions of cultural values and spiritual beliefs. The aesthetic appeal of these artifacts is inseparable from the intended message, embodying the notion that true beauty lies in cultural authenticity and a deep connection to one's roots. Yet, it is crucial to acknowledge the diversity within the African continent, as different regions and ethnic groups may interpret these concepts variably. While common threads exist, individual cultural nuances contribute to a rich tapestry of perspectives on beauty and character⁴⁷.

In conclusion, the African worldview weaves a profound tapestry where beauty and character are intricately linked. It challenges the dichotomy between external appearances and internal qualities, emphasizing a holistic understanding of human existence. In embracing this perspective, individuals are encouraged to cultivate virtues that transcend the superficial, contributing to a collective beauty that resonates within the community and echoes across generations.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*,

CHAPTER THREE

BEAUTY AND CHARACTER IN IGBO CULTURE

3.1 A Brief Ethnography of Igbo people of Eastern Nigeria

The Igbo people are located in south-eastern Nigeria and found, mainly, in Abia, Anambra, Enugu, Ebonyi, Imo, and parts of Bayelsa, Delta and River states of Nigeria. The Igbo land shares boundary on the north with the Igala, Idoma and Ogoja peoples, on the east with the Ibibio, on the south with the Ijaw of the Delta region, and on the west with the Edo-speaking peoples of Edo State of Nigeria. Igbo group is one of the three major ethnic groups in the country. The River Niger divided the Igbo land into two unequal parts: The Eastern Igbo, which is the larger part, on the eastern bank of the River Niger and western Igbo, the smaller portion, on the western bank of the Niger. The two sections, nevertheless, share many cultural affinities.

Today, the word 'Igbo' is used in three senses, as Uchendu has rightly noted, namely, the Igbo territory, the native speakers of the language, and finally a language group.⁴⁸ The Igbo language belongs to the 'kwa' language group of the Niger-Congo language family.⁴⁹ Igbo land is not a homogeneous entity but characterized by different sub-cultures with significant differences

⁴⁸ Uchendu V.C. *The Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria*. (London: Holt Rinehalt and Winston. 1965), 13-15.

⁴⁹ Forde D. & Jones G.I. *The Ibo and Ibibio Speaking Peoples of Southeastern Nigeria* (London: International African Institute, 1950). 44-46.

among them. While Forde and Jones distinguished five cultural sub-groups of the Igbo culture area, Onwuejgwu identified six.⁵⁰ For instance, Forde and Jones division is as follows:

- (1) Northern or Onitsha Igbo which includes towns like Awka, Udi, Enugu, Enugu Ukwu, Nsukka, Aro Ndizeogu, Onitsha, Agukwu Nri, Igboukwu, Nanka, and Ihiala.
- (2) Southern or Owerri Igbo, which includes towns like Aba, Umuahia, Owerri, Ahoada, Okigwe, and Orlu;
- (3) Western Igbo, which is the part of Igboland in Delta State and includes towns like Asaba, Agbor, Kwalle, Ilah, and Aboh;
- (4) Eastern or Cross River Igbo, which includes towns like Abam, Ohafia, Afikpo, Arochukwu, and Abriba.
- (5) North-Eastern Igbo, which includes towns like Ezza, Uburu, Okposi, and Abakkaliki.⁵¹

The differences noticeable among the Igbos are as a result of various influences ranging from historical contacts with their neighbors to migration. The Cross River Igbo (Eastern Igbo), for instance, are assumed to have adopted their specialized age set system and double descent system from their Ibibio neighbors⁵². However, drawing attention to the great fact of differences is not to deny that there are overwhelming similarities uniting all the sub-groups. Such similarities are in the institutions and language. For instance, the basic cultural uniformity shared

⁵⁰ Onwuejgwu M.A. *An Igbo Civilization: Nri Kingdom & Hegemony*. (London: Ethiope Publishing Corporation, 1981), 8-11.

⁵¹ Chinyere U. Self-identity and chieftaincy titles among the Igbo's of Southeastern Nigeria. *LUMINA: Holy Name University*. Vol. 20, No.2. 1-23.

⁵² Osaghae, P. I., Igwebuiké: The Concept of Beauty in Igbo-African Philosophy, in *Igwebuiké: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities*, Vol. 5 No 7, September 2019.58-69

by the Igbo includes one Igbo language, kolanut and white. The differences noticeable among the Igbos are as a result of various influences ranging from historical contacts with their neighbors to migration. The Cross River Igbo (Eastern Igbo), for instance, are assumed to have adopted their specialized age set system and double descent system from their Ibibio neighbors⁵³.

However, drawing attention to the great fact of differences is not to deny that there are overwhelming similarities uniting all the sub-groups. Such similarities are in the institutions and language. For instance, the basic cultural uniformity shared by the Igbo includes one Igbo language, kolanut and white chalk customs, the vigor in Igbo music and dance movements, highly developed arts of wall decoration and delicate body paintings, pottery designs, and ‘*mmuo*’ (masquerade) institution. Socio-political institutions like the age grade system, and ‘*umunna*’ (patrilineage) groupings, are also common to all Igbo culture areas. Again, the honorary chieftaincy conferment is also a common practice among the Igbo people.

3.2 Conceptualizing Beauty in Igbo Culture

The philosophy of beauty or philosophy of the beautiful is a developing discourse in African philosophy; however, this does not imply that there was no African conception of beauty. Rather, African philosophers are now beginning to earnestly have more than a passing and non-technical

⁵³ *Ibid.*,

interest in the reality of the beautiful. In the context of African cultures, the concept of beauty or beautiful is indeed unique.⁵⁴

In Africa, beauty is generally associated with women and every woman feels inadequate if she is not beautiful, regardless of all her other achievements. In a sociological field study conducted by Arden Haselmann in Senegal, some of the male participants associated beauty with women. African conceptualizations of beauty are in feminine terms;⁵⁵ and perhaps every usage of the word “beauty” or “beautiful” is usually constructed to celebrate womanhood or feminine spirit. Beauty connotes celebration of worth, value, quality, essence, and desirability.

Hence, the concept of beauty in Africa is quite broad, and varies from one cultural community to another. However, as Vimbai Matiza rightly observes, the concept of beauty in Africa tends to indicate external and internal qualities of a person or object. Moreover, the concept of beautiful in Africa bears some moral underpinning beyond teleos. For instance, in the language of Shona in Zimbabwe; the word “kunaka” (beauty) denotes good manners and physical endowment.

Among the Igbo’s of Nigeria the word “*o chakomaka*” is used metaphorically to refer to a woman who is only endowed or physically attractive, but lack good manners. A woman described as such is usually avoided, despised and not desired or valued despite her sparkling

⁵⁴ Haselmann, A. “*All Women Talk*” – *A Study of Beauty and Female Identity in Senegalese Culture*. (Dakar: Wheaton College Peace and Conflict Studies Africa. 2014), 12.

⁵⁵ Matiza, V. M. African Social Concept of Beauty: Its Relevancy to Literary Criticism. *Asian Journal of Social Science & Humanities*. Vol. 2 No. 2, (2013)61-70.,

physical beauty.⁵⁶ Although, from a sociological field study conducted in Senegal, abstractions from the responses of the participants affirm that “inner and outer beauties are not mutually exclusive”.⁵⁷

Furthermore, a woman who has good manners (*agwaoma*) but is not physically endowed or attractive is not often desired by the le crème of the society; and despite her good behaviours, if she attends a function she is given a relegated place away from public glare. As a result, a woman who is bestowed with inner beauty (*eziagwa*) but not endowed with outer beauty (*mmaahu*) would usually pad up her body with oils and accessories in order to appear to have a complete beauty. Such act is described as “*akpukpo ahu*”, meaning beauty enhancement or make-over. By applying make-up or cosmetics on her body, she becomes attractive and it is believed that she will earn upward review of her value in terms of beauty judgment.

Thus, among the Igbos in Nigeria, beauty is defined as unison (or harmony) of physical attractiveness (*omara mma*) and good manners (*agwa oma*) – this is to the extent that it applies to people. Also, note that in the African contexts there are two ways about it, there is the internal beauty which is usually seen through someone’s deeds and the external beauty that is seen by physical eyes⁵⁸. A person can therefore be said to lack in beauty if they lack one of the halves that constitute the beautiful.

⁵⁶ Greer, G. *The Whole Woman*. (London: Transworld Publishers. 1999), 42

⁵⁷ Haselmann, A. *Op. Cit.*, p.65

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p.67

More so, functionality is another quality that characterizes beauty in African context. The concept of “beauty” is not for the sake of being beautiful; instead it has a social or communal inclination, rather than being individualistic. Also, from African perspective, the ‘concept of beauty’ has to have a purpose which it fulfills. Beauty must serve to communicate values, norms, morals, and purpose; in other words beauty must edify the community. In investigating the concept of beauty among the Sudanese, it was observed that beauty is found in “good behavior, skills, knowledge, and dress” as well as in “physical features”. There cannot be beauty for its own sake; beauty must be intended to serve the society or the cultural ambiance it stems from. This means that any kind of beauty that a person or thing intends to achieve as beauty; void of the sensitivities of others in the community is ‘un-African’. Thus, beauty in an African context implies working together.

In other words, beauty must reflect the communalistic nature of African societies. The general idea about beauty in Africa is that “a person or a thing is considered good, and thus, beautiful, if directed toward achieving or enhancing harmony and order in reality of which the community, people, and things are a part”.⁵⁹ The beauty of a person or thing should be participatory and depict interconnectivity rather than individualistic; and it should be meaningful only in the context of the acceptable standards of the community. Usually, if a person’s action is seen as “fostering or leading to disharmony in the community and in nature or reality at large, then it is considered as bad or ugly”. The Ubuntu dictum for example states that “I am because we are”; this can be construed as a person’s beauty communicates universality.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.61-68

To this extent, the concept of beauty in Africa is objective in that it communicates a communal standard such that I am beautiful because my community members affirm my beauty as such, but outside my community the affirmed beauty may be disavowed. What is considered beautiful is meaningful only to the people in that context. But then it is also subjective in that the standard of beauty is different from community to community.

3.3 Intrinsic and Extrinsic Concept of Beauty in Igbo Culture

The Igbo people are naturally rhythmic and they have various festivities and ritualistic traditions which expresses this. Their folktales and folklores like other African people are of great epistemic relevance as they serve as instruments of learning and entertainment (like the masquerade festivals. They have strong traditions and prominent traditional rulers who keep order and sanity in a complex society where beauty and manners which expresses morality, are intertwined.⁶⁰ The religious view of beauty implies that a supreme being created man and made him look “beautiful” as he/she pleases. So, it embodies the physical or external form of beauty.

Since beauty seeks at whatever is pleasurable to the eyes, a method of making this pleasurable is through the use of body beautification and enhancement of the natural beauty. A woman may have good moral character but won't be desired by the best people of the society because she's not physically attractive to the eyes. As a result, a woman who is bestowed with inner beauty (*agwa oma*) but is not endowed with the (*omara mma*)(external beauty) would usually cover up her body with oils and body beautification in order to appear to have a complete beauty. Body

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*,

beautification takes many forms such as hairdos, use of cosmetics, tattoos and use of accessories. Young girls learn the techniques of body adornment from their mothers or from female friends. Hair dressing is an art of hair adornment by styling the hair in order to enhance personal appearance and look appealing. By enhancing her beauty and body, she becomes attractive and it's believed that she will gain the desired attention and recognition. Although, the Igbo don't place much emphasis on the external beauty of a woman.

Another factor that can be appreciated generally is the fact that a woman who covers herself well can be regarded a good and attractive woman. Beauty isn't focused on the external factors only—like her facial features or body structure. Although, all these are important in beauty but they don't hold much significance as the internal factors—like her manners, character, values etc. The everyday Igbo man would appreciate the external beauty of a woman, but he will value even more the internal factors which holds the true beauty. They believe that the external features will fade over time, and the internal features will remain. A woman can be beautiful and not have a good character; such a woman can be termed bad. Although, a woman can be ugly and have good character, she can then be termed a good woman. Both internal and external features are important in beauty, but the internal features are being valued and appreciated more in the Igbo community.

On the other hand, The Igbo love for communalism reveals itself in the idea of inner beauty. For the Igbo, beauty does not end in physical attributes or features; there is a place for morality and responsibility which also counts as *Oma* “beauty”. Hence, among the Igbo, a woman is only

termed beautiful if she continues to fulfill the roles expected of her by society and her family. What has been said about the woman also applies to the man. A man who is handsome but does not perform his expected duties is described in all negative terms.

The physical beauty doesn't hold enough grounds to the Igbo people; you must fulfill your moral obligations to be termed *Oma* "beautiful". A girl also treasures marriage with a man whose cultural background can be established. This comes out clearly in many Igbo folktales in which young women are warned against getting married to handsome men whose cultural orientation is not known. In Igbo land, a beautiful person is admired but the physical beauty is nothing without the inner beauty known as "character".

In such cases, it would be appropriate to say that good moral character is the most important. It is the head of beauty for the person. Somebody whose complexion or physical features is good, but who has no character, he or she is not completely good. He or she can't be seen to be entirely beautiful; most times they are termed as unattractive or ugly. It is the behavior of the person that we look at before we say he or she has (good) moral character. Character is the head of beauty. The true beauty is *agwa* "character". If somebody has good character, then the person has beauty—that is how we explain the relationship. The person who is outwardly beautiful but inwardly ugly may be admired at first, but as soon as the inward ugliness is being exposed, the person becomes ugly. The ugliness or beauty of the "inner" person is attributed to the nature of one's *agwa* "character". The external physical beauty is presumed to mean moral beauty, until

recognized by others as immoral. This could also be in coherence with the Western saying of not “judging a book by its cover”.

It is believed in Igboland that the true beauty comes from inside. A lady who’s beautiful outwardly (*omara mma*) and she’s ugly on the inside (*agwa ojoo*) is considered to be repulsive. Such person can’t promote or preserve harmony and peace amongst her family or the community. A lady who is beautiful outwardly and inwardly (*omara mma*) is considered a true beauty.

In essence, Igbo aesthetics is a quest for happiness, prosperity and peace in life. A good character is pleasant to behold and experience, as it brings forth social harmony among men. In society, it awards almost every individual the opportunity for being admired once he has good character. Such person is being looked at with utmost respect and love. Most of Igbo artforms—proverbs, music, poems, films, story-telling are didactic in character, as they represent beauty in their own forms. They are meant to teach persons good behaviors. They do this by special appeal to the consciousness of the audience in order to bring about some certain ethical, social and political attitudes which are meant to promote peaceful relationships between individuals and the community. These art forms are not just expressed in ordinary language; rather they are created in fascinating methods that makes it intriguing to the audience. The beauty inherent in these artforms are meant to prompt some peculiar ethical, political, social behavior and this requires that the speaker or performer is well accustomed to the ways around him/her at a particular time in the history of the people.

In cases where the physical beauty does not match with the moral beauty, then the Igbos do not regard it as beauty. Igbo concept of beauty goes two ways; it is both physical and moral. They have to be both inherent, for one to be regarded “beautiful”. Although, in a situation whereby the person may lack the physical beauty but has more of the inner beauty, he or she is termed “beautiful” either way, but it doesn’t work that way for one that has physical beauty but don’t have the inner beauty. One who is physically appealing is not really considered to be beautiful if she lacks *Agwa* “character”. Character can be seen as the yardstick for one to be called “beautiful” in every sense. To them, physical beauty withers away with time but moral beauty can thrive till eternity.⁶¹

At one point, one can infer that even though beauty is inner but it can still be revealed outwardly. As Hallen stated, “there are many actions that can aid the description of beauty; although the performers of these actions have the inner conviction to act, we can only have a clear view of their actions after it has been done.”⁶² It is in this case that an Igbo had the right to judge or ascertain the beauty of a person which just means that inner beauty can be descriptive in itself, meaning one can easily grasp the aesthetic nature of a thing, whether it is internal or external.⁶³

According to Kwame Gyekye, good character is the essence of the African moral system, the lip chin of the moral wheel, the justification for a character-based ethics is not far to seek. For, all

⁶¹ Wiredu, K , A Philosophical Perspective On The Concept Of Human Communication, in *International Social Sciences Journal*, Vol. xxvii, no.2,(1980), 199-206

⁶² Hallen, B. *Africa Philosophy: The Analytic Approach*. (Ibadan: African World Press, 2006)p.42

⁶³ *Ibid.*,

that a society can do, regarding moral conduct, is to impart moral knowledge to its members, making them aware of the moral values and principles of that society.⁶⁴ In general, society satisfactorily fulfills this duty of imparting moral knowledge to its members through moral education of various forms, including, as in African societies, telling morally-fringed proverbs and folktales to its younger members. The Igbo makes good character a large and essential part of beauty. This means that one is only seen as someone beautiful if he or she acts accordingly to norms and rules which the society terms as “good” or they act in ways that are morally acceptable to the society.⁶⁵

The everyday Igbo man values the intrinsic beauty in a woman. They value the character and her good attributes. Women with such beauty are termed “good” and they are good enough to marry. To an Igbo man, he will prefer an obedient woman who is submissive to her husband. A woman, who values family, socializes well and brings all extended family together. He will also prefer a caring woman. A woman who shows love and loyalty to her husband, A woman who is contented with what she has. All these are internal factors or attributes which the Igbo community can consider “beauty” in a woman. A woman who can bring and preserve peace in her home is considered beautiful. The Igbo isn’t focused much on the outside beauty, but they’re after the true beauty “*Agwa*” character—which is within.

⁶⁴ Gyekye K. *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995)p.32

⁶⁵

The concept of beauty and character go together in accessing a woman, especially a would-be wife, a woman of substance is one who has combination of *omara mma agwa oma* (beauty and character). If a woman is good looking but her innermost self is bad, she will still be called an immoral woman. A woman going to her husband's house is often advised to go with character and not beauty. This just shows that beauty is all about a woman who promotes peace and harmonious relationship around her and her community, which further shows that true beauty to the Igbo is one who promotes happiness, peace and love amongst others around her. A woman who is able to keep a home and the extended family through patience, happiness and love that is regarded beauty. For men is not really about material things or even the physical beauty; it is rather, the amount of work she can do that is regarded beauty.

Beauty for men is to be hardworking and also powerful. Men's standard for beauty is of that way because the man is the head of the home and also the provider for the family. It is attractive and appealing to the women when a man plays his roles well as the head of the home. It is also considered true *Oma*(beauty). A man who is lazy but physically appealing can be seen repulsive or ugly. A man who can build his home and take care of his home is considered *Agwa* (beauty). This just shows that a thing is only beautiful if only it's useful to the individual and if it contributes to the overall well-being and growth of the community.

Looking at an Igbo phrase, "mma n' uche" meaning beauty is in the mind of the beholder". When this statement is being made, it is in reference to the character, disposition, speech and others. It's focused on the inner beauty which can't be seen—virtues like empathy, honesty,

hospitality, humility, courage, honesty etc. That's where the true beauty lies. Beauty doesn't end in the physical features, there's a place for the inner beauty which is moral and seen as good. This is the purest form of beauty in Igbo aesthetics. A person is morally evaluated according to his or her *agwa* (character) whether it being good or bad. This particular phrase, "*mma n' uche*" focuses on the importance of one having a good and pure mind to then be considered *oma* (beauty).

The belief that man is the creation of a pure and perfect *Chineke*(God) whose expectation is the expression of beauty in such a way that it affects his neighbors and environment in a positive way. One who has a good and pure mind is believed to have a tested character and he/she is seems as a good example of *Chineke* (God) creation and he/she can be trusted in many ways, he/she gets to be put in high regard by anyone they do come across. A good mind is reflective of a humble, respectful, loving, kind, thoughtful and peaceful personality. It is these qualities that a man looks for in a bride. There is no greater beauty better than a good and pure mind. One with good mind will be relevant to the society and to those around them. The clean mind of a woman is said to be able to protect her husband from evil.

Barry Hallen explained that the possession of a good character is synonymous to beauty and is universally accepted the idea of beauty is morally embedded in a community, social environment, cultural beliefs or traditions, which shows the normative standards, social obligations, interpersonal relationships.⁶⁶ It is on this basis that one is being defined as a "morally beautiful

⁶⁶ Hallen, B. *Africa Philosophy Op. Cit.*,p.34

person” .The connection between the goodness and beauty of a person that character is a necessary condition for a person to be truly considered beautiful. An individual’s character is his “artistic creation” that is responsible to the community and its values. This process of “character creation” is being imbedded in an individual, either by the family, friends or even the neighbors in the community.

Furthermore, Barry Hallen stated that, there’s a difference between the physical and inner beauty. Physical beauty is an “outer beauty” which is considered not too important. This kind of beauty is fleeting—it may fade away with ease. It can change instantly.⁶⁷ For instance, a person with an “outer” beautiful face can be permanently disfigured and then become ugly. The more important kind of beauty is the inner beauty that reflects one’s character and this kind of beauty stays forever. The inner beauty is harder to cultivate but once it’s been cultivated, it’s very hard to destroy and stays within someone for long. The most important observation people make about a particular person is about his/her moral character-and not all about the physical beauty. It is one’s character that gets easily judged to be either good or bad, it is one’s character that determines what one does. This is summarized by Hallen’s maxim, “Handsome is as handsome does”⁶⁸

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*,

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*,

3.4 Character as Beauty in Igbo Culture

Female beauty in Igbo cosmology in particular is inscribed in traditional cultural codes in relation to body parts, complexion, overall physiology and aesthetic appearance, though as we shall clarify below, often subject to a corresponding moral evaluation. This idea of personhood is morally constituted by, and embedded in, a community, social environment, cultural beliefs or traditions, which indicate the normative standards, value commitments, social obligations, interpersonal relationships, and mutual dependencies.

It is on the basis of these that one is identified and defined as a ‘morally beautiful’ person. These values include: rationality, morality, regard, honor, dependence. Such values coupled with the ontological value of the person who is at the centre of the hierarchy of beings in the vital force, are accorded to all persons irrespective of nationality, race, color, religious affiliations, or socio-cultural and environmental contingency.⁶⁹ An important character trait that is being considered as inner beauty in Igbo worldview is *ndidi* “patience”. This means the ability to accept or tolerate delay, problems or suffering without becoming annoyed or anxious. It also involves the ability to stay cool and calm under pressure.

According to Robert Thompson in the aspect of being “cool”, the concept of “cool” has an important aesthetic connotation in the Igbo community which also highlights the logical

⁶⁹ Robert, T., A Discourse on the Fundamental Principles of Character in an African Moral Philosophy; *African Journal of Human and Culture*, Vo.10, 2018) vol.10. 40-52.

connection between moral goodness and beauty,⁷⁰ the concept of “coolness” is a significant virtue that speaks of one’s strength of moral character. Hallen argues that good moral character tends to be related with persons who always appear self-controlled and also at alert.⁷¹

However, one might critically respond to this idea by saying it’s not clear on how being patient can be considered *oma* (beauty). As Thompson said, one who is embedded with coolness and good character is someone that’s extremely beautiful and like unto a god.⁷² One may say that *ndidi*(patience) can be seen as *oma*(beauty) because it’s an attractive trait whereby a woman who is willing to wait and stay cool under pressure, troubles and pains she may face just to get her desired goals later is exactly what an Igbo man will desire in his bride. A woman who understands that everyday can’t be rosy, a woman that’s relaxed-even in troubles. Such a woman can be considered beautiful because patience is a hard trait to cultivate and meeting one with such trait is considered attractive.

Hallen argues, “a mind distinguished by patience, especially in a difficult or problematic situations informs a consciousness that maintains self-control and optimal communication with itself and its environment”.⁷³ It is the coolness of the mind and character that allows a person to maintain a patient and calm appearance. Such a person can work peacefully and positively with the community. The idea of coolness also derives from balance in action, behavior, character and

⁷⁰ Hallen, B. *The Good The Bad and The Beautiful: Discourse About values In Yoruba Culture.* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 2000)p.11

⁷¹ Robert, T. p.242

⁷² Hallen, B. *Op. Cit.*, p.20

⁷³ *Ibid.*,

their ability to enhance balance and harmony in a community. For Hallen, “it is in this way that the aesthetic of the cool underlies and structures the morality or the cool, the beautiful and the good”⁷⁴

The Igbo aesthetic surpasses the physical appearance but reaches into moral good character. Morality is linked with the aesthetic in everyday Igbo community. The Igbo believe that the purest form of beauty is good moral character. Thus in Igbo culture, *agwa* (character) is synonymous with *oma*(beauty).

In the traditional Igbo communities, people learn the moral values through every day's activities and through education provided. The education provided is a lifelong process. It starts at birth and continues through to death. Such value system bind people together which makes them strong and united. It makes people learn tolerance and understand brotherhood which paves the path for social harmony and physical well-being of the community and others as well. Polycarp Ikuenobe avers that in Africa “a person or a thing is considered good, and thus, beautiful, if directed toward achieving or enhancing harmony and order in reality of which the community, people, and things are a part”⁷⁵. Beauty of a person or thing should be participatory and interconnective rather than individualistic; and should be meaningful only in the context of the acceptable standards of the community.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*,

⁷⁵ Ikuenobe, P. Good and Beautiful: A Moral-Aesthetic View of Personhood in African Communal Traditions in *Essays in Philosophy*, 17(1),(2016), 125-163.

Ikuenobe further noted that if a person's action is seen as "fostering or leading to disharmony in nature, community, and reality, then it is considered bad or ugly"⁷⁶. The Ubuntu dictum states: I am because we are. What this means is that a person's beauty should communicate universability. To this extent, the concept of beauty in Africa is objective in that it communicates a communal standard, but it is also subjective in that the standard of beauty is different from community to community. In Igbo culture, I am beautiful because my community members affirm my beauty as such, but outside my community the affirmed beauty may be disavowed. What is considered beautiful is meaningful only to the people in that context.

As a way of rounding up this section of the research one is only regarded as being beautiful in Igbo cultural belief if there's a true exhibition of virtue imbedded in their character. Outward appearance is seen as fleeting and a mere attraction when compared to the depth of a person's character.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*,

CHAPTER FOUR

EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION

4.1 EVALUATION

African aesthetics and especially that of the Igbo is valued – charged; it acknowledges the reality of beauty and particularly investigates its manifestation in nature and in art in a critical evaluative manner. Aesthetic judgment – the sensory contemplation or appreciation of persons, things or work of art or objects – has an important place in African culture.

In practical reasoning in the conduct of everyday affairs of the community, Just like other African aesthetics compare historical developments with theoretical approaches to the arts of many periods they study the varieties of art in relation to their physical, social, and cultural environments. They use psychology as a tool to understand how people see, hear, imagine, think, learn, and acting reaction to the materials and problems of art, its creative process and the aesthetic experience.

For many years scholars regarded the study of beauty as the whole or main problem of aesthetics. Now the subject has broadened to include many other aspects of art in relation to the life around it. One main pronounced task is to collect organize and interpreted accurate information about the arts and aesthetic experience; and help people judge the aims and values of art more intelligent especially in relation to nature and human life in the world. The African people are not left out in this endeavour. We agreed and affirm with Ozumba that

The African aesthetic has his reasons for dealing on aesthetic object as beautiful or ugly. It may be amusement content strangeness ability to communicate a message – the value may lie in the formal material and final causes or the imagery that is conjured (presented) by the work of art. The African carries on his artwork for varying reasons, only those aesthetics, who understand the telos (purpose or end) behind the work can better appreciate them be they African or non-African.⁷⁷

We have endeavoured in this study to unravel real constituents of beauty, the meaning it holds from its conception from the African as well as and Igbo aesthetic cultural perspectival community background, we discovered that beauty is a conglomerate fluid concept. Its *esse* (being) lies in an object's appearance perceptible pleasing qualities. from the foregoing discussion, it is evident that beauty of natural things and aesthetic objects in African and Igbo aesthetics is something that does qualify structure: it is not imposed on matter as form is as that of the western aesthetics but rather qualifies form itself bringing about symmetrical equilibrium and harmony.

In so far as it thus inheres in natural and artistic objects and being distinguishable, it does provide an objective criterion, yet (just like other linguistic concepts, beauty and its interpretation depend on the human mind, since it is what eventually renders knowledge relations actual, what then do the findings of our research imply? It is this: African as well as Igbo cultural approach to the concept of beauty is holistic: it encompasses both the external⁷⁸ (pleasing appearance) and the internal (good character aspect that is, positive moral conduct and attitude) 'agwa' constituent

⁷⁷ Ozumba G.O. 'Outlines of African Aesthetics', *Sophia: An African Journal of Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 9 (2), 2007) 153 – 158.

⁷⁸ Gbadebo. M.D, 'The Western and Yoruba Concept of Beauty', *LWATI: A Journal of Contemporary Research*, 8(1), 286 – 296.

aspects, which is the linchpin wheel of the African ethical system, is placed over and above the external constituent aspect because this gradually fades with the passing of years. Also we discover that in African as well as the Igbo aesthetics, there is a close relationship between the beautiful and the good and this is at the base of the unquestionable ethical dimension of beauty in the African as well as the Igbo aesthetics discourse.

Moreover, in this research, we still discovered that the credibility between the Igbo conception of beauty and that of the western is that, what is primary to the Igbos is secondary to the modern aesthetics. The African as well as the Igbos cherished the inner beauty (*ime aru*) character more than the outward beauty. To the Igbos, without the inner character or beauty (*agwa*), the outer beauty will not be recognized. But, for the western or modern conception of beauty, what is primary is the outward or physical beauty. Although, they also cherished the inner beauty, but to them it is secondary. In the Western culture the primary objective of aesthetics appreciation is removed from everyday life and is being persevered in museums as object of contemplation. They also conceived an individualistic concept of beauty⁷⁹.

4.2. Conclusion

In conclusion, we need to define beauty as the degree of our individual sensuous expression showing our pleasure satisfaction and understanding on an issue, object or person. This definition is the functional definition of beauty, which point out some things to us. Beauty on individual entity has to be recognized and appreciated.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

In our appreciation of beauty, the senses are at work .if our senses are infected our sense of Judgment will be affected. That is why no group of people can give equal judgment about beauty because of the way reality appears to them. Beauty has being expressed. Here the problem of language affects our expression of beauty. This is because most of what we think in our minds cannot be written down and even if it is written down, it is either most of the words are ambiguous or not enough to express ourselves. Again the degree of pleasure and satisfaction we derived from beautiful things depends on our different understanding and taste that is why it is commonly said “one man’s” need is another man’s poison. What may meet the condition of your satisfaction today may not meet together. It differs also as per person. What is in the eyes of the beholder?.

Beauty can be found in issue like truth, in objects like trees, and in a person. These are the major things we can perceive with our five senses. At this point, it becomes necessary that man as a rational being should put his intelligence into action by employing all these different qualities of beauty and its functions into use in order to make a harmonious living in a given society. Beauty is what God endows in nature, making man to appreciate the entire creation and creator God himself.

The concept of beauty in Africa and especially in Igbo aesthetics is analogous with the concept of good. An understanding of beauty as a good concept in aesthetics is impossible without the appreciation of good. The physical appearance is considered less important than the mental or emotional status of any man. Beauty is both inborn and attainable, and good is the channel of

making beauty both tangible and attainable. As earlier observed, beauty is good, and good is beautiful. To the Igbo, beauty therefore is the revelation of good.

This study is by no means exhaustive, the variations and applications of beauty in Igbo aesthetics are vast and doubtful if all the facts and dimensions of beauty can be exhaustively treated. This is because; the concept of beauty is the concept of man, his purpose culture, sentiments etc. In conclusion, we need to define beauty as the degree of our individual sensuous. Beauty in philosophical discourse is not based on the physical features alone but also internal features. Beauty therefore is expected to be internalized in the sense of character and usefulness. The conception of beauty by the Igbos has to do with the functions of the objects and the usefulness. This has great influence of the practical life of the people in so many ways. In the first place, the emphasis on the internal beauty has helped to promote good behavior. Having known that beauty alone does not make everything, those who are naturally beautiful will not be proud and think they are all in all. And also, those who are not beautiful as such will not think that they are not fit, into the system of the society with good behavior, they can still win people to their side.

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