

**NORMATIVE CONCEPT OF BEAUTY IN EFIK WORLD VIEW**

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**BENIN CITY.**

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**AN ORIGINAL ESSAY SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF  
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## **CERTIFICATION**

This is to certify that this project work was originally carried out by **JOY OTU ASUQWO**, with matriculation number **ART2101139**, and it meets the requirement for an award of Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy.

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**Date**

## **DEDICATION**

This project is dedicated to God Almighty ,the author and finisher of my faith. Also to my sweet mom, Mrs Osahon Mabel and my daddy, Mr Charles for their love, care, patience and guidance towards me. To my siblings, you guys are the best.

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## ABSTRACT

The concept of beauty has remained a central theme in philosophical and cultural discourses, shaping human aesthetics, identity, and social interaction. Within the Efik worldview, beauty is not merely understood as a matter of physical appearance but is deeply embedded in normative structures that guide moral conduct, communal life, and spiritual beliefs. This study examines the normative concept of beauty in the Efik worldview, exploring how it transcends surface-level attractiveness to embody values of harmony, balance, character, and cultural identity. Thus, beauty in this context serves as a cultural language that integrates aesthetics with morality and social order. The approach adopted in this study is descriptive and prescriptive method in unveiling western and the Africa (Efik) conceptions of beauty. Beauty in Efik thought is often measured against ideals of decency, discipline, hospitality, respect, and social responsibility. For instance, bodily beauty is celebrated through traditional adornment practices, while inner beauty is expressed through virtues such as humility, kindness, and truthfulness. Moreover, beauty is interwoven with spirituality, as the Efik recognize that true beauty resonates with divine order and ancestral values. This research concludes that beauty is not an isolated concept but one that sustains moral order and reinforces social cohesion.

## CHAPTER ONE

### GENERAL INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background of the Study

Beauty is studied as a part of aesthetics. To some extent, beauty is a cultivated social and even universal phenomenon, psychology, philosophy and sociology. An ideal beauty is an entity which is admired or processes features widely attributed to beauty in a particular culture for perfection. Beauty is traditionally being counted among the ultimate values with goodness, truth and justice. The experience of beauty often involve an interpretation of 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’.

Beauty may be peculiar to culture and tradition as there is no single description of beauty. The notion of beauty has been a point of discussion from the early Greek period up to contemporary times. For Lamb (1975), Plato’s symposium connects beauty to a

response of love and desire, but locates beauty itself in the realm of the forms<sup>1</sup> and beauty of particular object participate in the world of ideas and forms. Aristotle (1985) saw a relationship between the beautiful (*kalon*) and virtue; arguing that “virtue aims at the beautiful” He also stated that a good person acts virtuously for the sake of the “*kalon*”<sup>2</sup> a word that can mean beautiful. In Seife (2000) opinion, Pythagoras saw a strong connection between mathematics and beauty, they noted that objects proportioned according to the golden ration seemed more attractive.<sup>3</sup> Pythagoras professed that physical beauty consist in order, measure proportion and harmony. Hume (n.d.) asserted that “beauty is no quality in things themselves; it exist merely in the mind which contemplates them; and each mind perceived deformity, where another is sensible of beauty and every individual ought to acquiesce in his own sentiment without pretending to regulate those of others”.<sup>4</sup> Western idea of beauty deals with physical appearance, a trim figure, a light shade of the skin, and a great deal of height. The outside appearance of an object takes precedence over its value or purpose. Western conceive an individualistic concept of beauty and beauty is objective.

Africa conceptions of beauty can be understood both internally and externally, as emphasized in various traditions and cultures in Africa culture. This study focuses

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<sup>1</sup> Lamb, W. (1975). *Plato in 12 volumes III: Lybis symposium gorgias*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. p.16

<sup>2</sup> Aristotle. (1985). *Nichomchean ethics*. Indianapolis: Hackett. p.12

<sup>3</sup> Seife, C. (2000). *Zero: The biography of a dangerous idea*. New York: Viking. p.32

<sup>4</sup> Hume, D. (n.d.). Of standard of taste. In *Essay: Moral and political*. London: George Routldeges and Sons. p.41

essentially on Efik conceptions of beauty. Beauty is subject to the hegemonic standard of the ruling class. Because of this beauty is and elusive commodity and historical period. In order to understand the meaning of beauty as peculiar to various African cultures, it is important to note that there are two main sources of beauty since the African is very religious and seek the societal co-existence, it will be safe to conclude that the two sources of Africa beauty are religion and society, Ozumba (1995) explain the strong love for religion by the Africa when he claim that the Africans are known “to be highly religious in the sense that everything he does is guided by the hopes and fears of not only the living but the departed, the God of divinity and the Omnipotent being”<sup>5</sup>

A typical Efik person regards physical beauty as a gift of God and anyone with natural beauty is fortunate. It is also believed that God intentionally makes female species to be more beautiful than male, consequently, it is culturally expected that everyone especially female person should pay more personal attention to her body adornment and care. Beauty from African point of view entails functionalism, communalism, collectiveness and commitment. These three aspect of beauty encompass the beauty of Africa in every circle since from the western point of view, 'beauty is said to lie in the eye of the beholder'. From the African perspective the concept of beauty has a purpose in which it has to fulfill. The religious view of beauty implies that a supreme being created

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<sup>5</sup> Ozumba, G. O. (1995). Africa ethics. In A. F. Uduigwomen (Ed.), *Footnotes on Africa philosophy* (p. 8). Lagos: Obiorah and Ogbinaka. p.8

man and made him look beautiful, so it embodies physical and eternal form of beauty, whole the society emphasize on the internal beauty.

Beauty among the Efik is called *uyai* is the manifestation of the well-made or well done. To the Efik's beauty (*uyai*) has two aspect, the *mfon ikpa-idem*, which translates to "the beauty of the body." and the inner beauty *nsonga*. The outer beauty has to do with the surface quality of things or outward appearance in general, it has to do with the facial look and the physical body. Beauty seek at whatever is pleasurable in the eyes, the method of making this pleasurable is through the use of the body adornment. Body adornment takes many forms such as hairdos, use of cosmetics and outing accessories and this emphasize the feminism of female specie.

Beauty requires a well – developed body in the case of a woman means having rounded buttock (*mbombom*) and big breast (*eba*) suggesting fertility. This means that a big body of a woman in African context means that she will bear children in marriage and that is the functionality of beauty from the social point of view. A beautiful woman in the eyes of a typical Efik person cannot be trimmed and slender like that of the western world. Body part such as eyeballs (*enyin*), tooth, teeth (*edet*), breast (*eba*) and buttocks (*mbombom*) occurs frequently as central focus in traditional sayings about outer beauty. This kind of beauty is ephemeral and fleeting. It can change dramatically and significantly with situations. For instance a person with outer beautiful face can be permanently disfigured in an instance and become physically ugly.

Beauty does not end in the outer or physical features, there is a place for morality and responsibility which counts as beauty. In Efik land a beautiful person is admired but *uyai* is noting, without the inner beauty known as *nsonga* means character or essential nature, *uyai* can also be called as *uwem isin*," which means "life from the inside" or "inner life." It refers to the character and goodness of a person, which is considered the true source of beauty in Efik culture, that is the inner beauty. The notion of inner beauty becomes more than metaphorical and itself takes on the character of a moral attributes. The person who is outwardly beautiful but inwardly ugly may be admired first, but as soon as the inward ugliness resurfaces the person becomes repulsive. The ugliness or beauty of the inner person is attributed to the nature of one's character. The external physical beauty is presumed to mean moral beauty until it was recognized by other as immoral. This could also be in coherence with the western saying of not "judging a book by its cover".

Barry Hallen (n.d) explained that the possession of a good character is synonymous to beauty and is universally accepted. The possession of *uyai* is universally accepted as a sine qua non of beauty. Hence saying that (*uwem inam isin*) meaning character is beauty<sup>6</sup>. Most of Efik art forms proverbs, music, poems, films, storytelling and oratory are didactic in character as they represent beauty in their own forms. They are meant to inculcate in person, good behavior both at personal and institutional levels.

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<sup>6</sup> Hallen, B. (n.d.). *The good, the bad and the beautiful*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. p.45

The concept of beauty is relative; there is no universal acceptability of beauty. Some take beauty to be subjective, while some take it to be objective; is there any benefit the western beauty has given us? Is there any moral teaching in the western concept of beauty? Most people adopts, maintains or follows the western concept of beauty and it has been a problem to our society because all they care about is just their facial beauty. Do we have anything to gain from the Urhobo concept of beauty? Can the Efik's concept of beauty solve any societal hills? Due to lack of internal beauty, many homes have been broken and there are immoral act in our society.

The performance of beauty comes to us through a variety of mediated images that we are bombarded with daily. From the western point of view a slim, tall and light woman is considered to be a very beautiful lady and a model. Instead in Africa (Efik) sense, it is not like that, a huge woman with a big breast and big buttocks is considered to be an ideal beautiful Efik woman. The saying that "beauty lies in the eye of the beholder" may apply because the Efik's may be looking at beauty from the internal and external, but yet with the Westerners, the internal beauty does not matter. One can see the colour of teeth and straightness of your nose, physical appearance, without having a real and thorough idea of what kind of beauty is possessed internally. A person who is not physically beautiful has the probability of being given a second thought of he/she is of good character.

## 1.2 Statement of the Problem

For something to be ascribed with the concept of beauty it requires one's sense of judgment. On the other hand the concept of ugly is the opposite of the beautiful, it also means a sensation that is repulsive, unpleasant, unattractive etc. the beautiful and the ugly co-exist. Both concepts can also be misjudged and misrepresented and confused as a result of cultural, perceptual, valuational and subjective taste in the way they are being accessed.

However, how can we determine what is beautiful? This work however shall seek to clarify some of these problems. Though the problem of the nature of beauty is a difficult one, just as any philosophical problem and it will also solve so many problems bewildering our contemporary society. One without a good character will not be involved in immoral things like kidnapping, raping, stealing, corruption and so on. It is also believed that character depicts or tells the kind of person you are, for Bredin et al. (2000) your character as a good person will guide you against immoral acts and by doing this one will become a moral being in the society<sup>7</sup>

## 1.3 Purpose of the Study

1. To investigate the different contexts of the meaning of beauty in Western and African philosophies.

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<sup>7</sup> Bredin, H., & Santoro-Brienza, H. (2000). *Philosophies of art and beauty: Introducing aesthetic*. Edinburgh University Press. p.28

2. To show that the concept of beauty in African philosophy is relational and functional.
3. To make us know that beauty in African concept is intelligible when considered in the context of African ontology
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.
  1. It will help us to know the uniqueness of African(Efik) conception of beauty.
  2. To expose us to the functionality of beauty in terms of social character and communality.
  3. It will enable us to know the subjective–objective notion of beauty in African perspective.

#### **1.5 Scope of the study**

This Study essentially deals with Africans 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 Africans concept of aesthetics and in relation to the Efik worldview. However, this work is opened to works on Africa by both Africans and non- Africans writers

## 1.6 Methodology

This study adopts the descriptive and prescriptive method in unveiling western and the Africa (Efik) conceptions of beauty. The source of information in this research will entail both secondary and primary sources of books, articles, internet etc in order to have a successful research. We shall rely on the library, internet among others for Literature.

## 1.7 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 (2012), 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.<sup>8</sup> Ome, further defines aesthetics as a philosophical branch that deals with the “historically determined essence of human values, their creation, perception, appreciation and assimilation.”<sup>9</sup>

For Titus et al., (1974), aesthetics is “that branch of Philosophy concerned with art and the nature of the aesthetic object, experience and values.”<sup>10</sup> Isiramen (1993) gives an elucidatory description of aesthetics when she says that “Aesthetics is a branch of

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<sup>8</sup> Ome, E. M. (2012). *Aesthetics: Critical reflections on the philosophy of art*. Enugu: Folmech Printing and Publishing. p.1

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

<sup>10</sup> Titus, H. H., & Smith, M. S. (1974). *Living issues in philosophy*. New York: D. Van Nostrand Company. p.537

axiology basically concerned with the nature of art – expression and appreciation.<sup>11</sup> 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.<sup>12</sup> 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.

Kalusi (1996), 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”.<sup>13</sup> Blackburn (1996) 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”.<sup>14</sup>

In his regarding aesthetics as the problem of appreciation of excellence, Ekarika (1986) postulated that “Allied with our mental appreciation of truth in the perception of

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<sup>11</sup> Isiramen, C. O. (1993). The nature of philosophy. In O. Oroka & C. O. Isiramen (Eds.), *Invitation to logic* (p. 12). Warri: Bonaventure Publishers. p.12

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Kalusi, J. I. (1996). *An introduction to philosophy of education*. Warri: Coewa Publishers. p.116

<sup>14</sup> Blackburn, S. (1996). *Oxford dictionary of philosophy*. New York: Oxford University Press. p.8

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”.<sup>15</sup>

For Enuwosa (2000) 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”.<sup>16</sup> Nyong (1996) defines aesthetics as “the study of standard of beauty. He went further to explain that aesthetics “...deals with the goodness in things, and it probes into the role beauty plays in human life.”<sup>17</sup> 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

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<sup>15</sup> Ekarika, J. P. (1986). *Introduction to philosophy: Preliminary notions in logic; metaphysics and theory of knowledge* (Vol. 1, 2nd ed.). Italy: Stamplato Uniongrafica. p.16

<sup>16</sup> Enuwosa, J. (2000). The nature of philosophy. In O. Oroka (Ed.), *Readings in general studies- introduction to philosophy and logic* (p. 11). Warri: Foresight Research Publishers. p.11

<sup>17</sup> Nyong, D. (1996). *Rudiments of philosophy and logic*. Lagos: Obaroh & Ogbinaka Publishers Ltd. p.8

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”. This is why Nyong (1996) 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.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.,

## CHAPTER TWO.

### WESTERN CONCEPTION OF BEAUTY

#### 2.1. Meaning of Beauty.

The idea of Beauty is such that is being reflected upon by both professional philosophers and unprofessional minds. In fact, our sense of judgement in whatever we derive joy, happiness and pleasure is based on our idea about what Beauty is. Hence, Beauty has become so many things to so many people. Though the concept of Beauty seems to be relative and subjective yet, its underlying essence should be such that bring satisfaction to its beholder.

What then is the essence of Beauty? 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 from culture to culture. Hence there can be no uniform definition of beauty. Apart from the fact that 'Beauty' is a dynamic concept, what is Beautiful today may be ugly tomorrow, and as such, its definition may keep on changing. This, notwithstanding a few definitions has been advanced.

Stance (1955) 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"<sup>1</sup> This implication here is 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 this means is that it is the senses that extract the idea of beauty from the possessing object. Supporting this fact, Santayana (1972), in his book, *The sense of Beauty* as quoted by Van Meter Ames posits that beauty appears when the pressure of sense is objectified: focused on the formal relations which constitute an object for contemplation<sup>2</sup>. Based on the aim of this chapter, it is good to define Beauty as the degree of one's sensual and intellectual expression that shows one's pleasure, satisfaction and understanding about an issue or object. By this definition it means that before something is ascribed with the concept of Beauty, It requires one's sense of judgement. Again, such must as a matter of fact fulfil the satisfaction of the beholder. For Caird (1969) It is at such point when pleasure is derived that our sense of judgement goes out "that it should please anyone"<sup>3</sup>. When it does, that Beauty is perceived and expressed.

### **2.1.1. Diverse Theories of Beauty.**

When philosophers claim that philosophy began in wonder' what do they mean? It is all about the wonders of nature which is actually the beauty of nature that beats man's artistic imagination. This is the handwork of God who is the embodiment of all

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<sup>1</sup> Stace, W. T. (1955). *The philosophy of Hegel: Exposition*. London, UK: Dove Publications

<sup>2</sup> Santayana, G. (1972). Expression and art. In D. J. Bronstein et al. (Eds.), *Basic problems of philosophy* (4th ed., pp. 455–467). Englewood Cliffs, NJ, USA: Prentice Hall

<sup>3</sup> Caird, E. (1969). *The critical philosophy of Immanuel Kant*. Amsterdam, Netherlands: Rodopi.

Beauty. But beauty by its ontology is related to knowledge which makes every expression on Beauty to be challenged by the skeptics. Hence philosophers with aesthetics minds began to formulate theories to enable them explain this aspect of the laws of nature.

The first is the Realist Theory of Beauty. One of the major proponents of the theory is Plato. He was a dualist as well as an idealist. He believed that the physical world of particulars when things are imperfect and they do change. According to Plato (1966), the world of particulars is full of opposites. “Beauty and Ugliness are opposites, they are two things and consequently each of them is one”.<sup>4</sup> This implies that the same object that appears beautiful can appear ugly at another time or to another person. It is this expression that object possesses beauty that makes some philosophers to see Plato as a realist. The point is that Plato’s real beauty is found in the world of forms/ideas. Here beauty remains unchanging “in the same state forever” and this is the type of beauty “which will not appear ugly”. So the particular instances of beauty we perceive here are imitations of the real beauty in the world of forms beauty has existence but its perception here in this world is only when it manifests itself in particular things, and that is the imitation of the ultimate beauty. What then is the major duty or function of this Plato’s objective of beauty? Koggel (2004) gives an answer by observing that his beauty is laid

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<sup>4</sup> Plato. (1966). Phaedrus. In R. E. Allen (Ed.), *Greek philosophy: Thales to Aristotle* (F. M. Cornford, Trans.; p. 185). New York, USA: Free Press

up in the heavens and can motivate the philosopher to direct his passion towards the pursuit of philosopher.<sup>5</sup>

This connects beauty with truth. What this mean is that the original ultimate beauty in the world of forms serves as a compass or barometer of detecting falsehood and directing philosophers into truth. Secondly, Carriet (1962), Plato’s concept of beauty is a guide towards right conduct. This is because “the creation and appreciation of beauty are symptoms of highly developed morality”.<sup>6</sup> Plato did not rule out the fact that there are instances of beauty in this physical world. But that such as imperfect, impure and unreliable. And at the same time it contains ugliness. For him, if our sense of perception and judgment is limited to this level of beauty then our idea of knowledge and truth will be based on falsehood.

**Pleasure theory or Hedonism of Beauty:** According to Akpan & Etuk (1990) is yet another theory of beauty. This theory asserts that “the beautiful is that which gives us a distinctive sort of pleasure or satisfaction”.<sup>7</sup> That is, the pleasure we derived from an immediate perception of an object is what determines the value of the object. The question is that it is everything that satisfies? The hedonist theorists say no. For them, there is graduation of pleasure in that some degree of pleasure gave positive value while some others give pains, which is negative value. This theory of beauty perceives pleasure

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<sup>5</sup> Koggel, C. (2004, May). Concept of beauty: A feminist philosopher thinks about paradigms and consequences. *Beauty Symposium*.

<sup>6</sup> Carriet, E. F. (1962). *The theory of beauty*. London, UK: Methuen.

<sup>7</sup> Akpan, E., & Etuk, U. (1990). *Aesthetics philosophy and artistic dimensions*. Uyo, Nigeria: Uyo Modern Press.

in both immediate or intrinsic and instrumental or extrinsic and instrumental or extrinsic ways. Intrinsic value has inbuilt character development mechanism. But that of extrinsic value is derived from one's family background, achievement and connections. The important thing about this theory is the fact of deriving one's needed pleasure and satisfaction from beautiful things. What if the pleasure derived is from artificial or make up kind of beautiful objects and not from the natural objects whose beauty is not deceptive? This theory seems not to consider that aspect because "a thing of beauty is a joy forever".

**Contextual Theory of Beauty:** According to this theory, things do not happen in isolation, it happens within the context of event. So, as beauty does not have its independent physical existence but depends on other things to exist, it means, therefore that its existence is contextual. Though contextualism is more of aesthetic theory that emphasizes "vividness and fusion" according to Akpan, yet everything in nature, within a context that is good and meaningful in life is beautiful. The vividness of aesthetic object is an experience that adds value to things. Beauty is all about value that makes life worth living.

**Subjectivist and Objectivist Theory of Beauty:** Is that of subjectivist and objectivist theories. All the theories of beauty have root from these two objectivist theory of beauty asserts that beauty is in the object while the subjectivist theory holds that beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Ozumba (1994) tends to pitch tent with the subjective in that "if

beauty is really an objective quality in things, there will be no room for disagreement". That argument is not valued in the sense that even among the subjective there are disagreements".<sup>8</sup> That argument is not valid in the senses even among the subjectivism. And such disagreement presupposes objectivist view is a step in a ladder of knowledge aiming at arriving that which is objective so there is objective beauty. But our problem lies in our perception of reality. Hence our opinion to what we perceive remains subjective.

### **2.1.2. Debased forms of Beauty.**

According to Ozumba et al. (n.d), there is a paradigm shift from the concept of beauty that gives pleasure and satisfaction, values and character challenges to man, to a debased form of beauty that does not promote the above mentioned qualities<sup>9</sup>. The modern day contextual theorists of beauty tend to view beauty in what Ozumba state managed concept of beauty. This is where beauty is captured from the pageant points of view. The proponents of this beauty system are the feminists. According to Koggel (2004) "the system includes woman's countless everyday rituals of the body improvement such as makeup and dieting as well as cosmetics and fashion industry medical technologies, such as cosmetic surgery".<sup>10</sup> What makes this version of beauty to be a debased form is because

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<sup>8</sup> Ozumba, G. O. (1994). *Aesthetic lecture notes*. [Unpublished manuscript].

<sup>9</sup> Ozumba, G. O., & Salami, Y. A. (n.d.). *Landmarks in aesthetic studies* (A book of reading). Makurdi, Nigeria: Microteacher and Associates Publishers.

<sup>10</sup> Koggel Op. Cit.,

1. It has a targeted audience - the male. That is why they have what they call the "male gaze". Though it is assumed that the "male gaze" needs not to be a male perceiver yet, men are the targeted audience.
2. It makes the natural aspect of the womanhood to be abused. Immediately a woman's nature is abused, there can be no remedy, takes for instance bleaching it burns the body. And today many women are suffering for that. No wonder the bible says "...burning instead of beauty"<sup>11</sup> [Isaiah 3:24].
3. It promote racism, the white see their race as more superior to the blacks race. So to draw the blacks closer to themselves the blacks must change their kinky hair to permed hair, their black skins to white skins. This process according to Alozie in Peyton (1978) invites "skin cancer into their system through the use of chemicals ..."<sup>12</sup>. What is the beauty here when chemicals and heat applied to the body are infecting the body with cancer and damaging the brains cells? Such beauty is a debased form of beauty. Beauty is supposed to fade with time but not to cause damage to the individual.
4. Apart from that, beauty derived from nudity is debased. This is why beauty pageants have been highly criticized in different quarters. Some religions do not encourage this because it promotes immoral and waywardness among youths. In fact, the honour and respect the shamefacedness of the womanhood have been

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<sup>11</sup> Aquinas, T. (1966). On beauty. In J. A. Mann & G. F. Kreyche (Eds.), *Perspective on reality* (p. 146). New York, USA: Harcourt Brace and World.

<sup>12</sup> Peyton, R. (1978). *Perspectives in aesthetics*. Indianapolis, IN, USA: Bobbs-Merrill.

thrown to the dogs .The sanctity of the woman privacy is now the thing of the past. Indecent dressings that exude sex appeal are what is promoting “beauty” now. No wonder rape is on the increase. Our advertisers today are capitalizing on this to advertise up to eighty percent of their products with nude women as if women are most intelligent human beings. The reason for those adverts is to purposely capture men’s attention. The summary of it all is that beauty is now becoming more of women centred than being the embroilment of the entire nature.

### **2.1.3. Definite Essence of Beauty**

The concept of beauty is not to be seen in the same perspective like some of the philosophical concepts that are abstract, but as that which has relevance to man and to society at large. As earlier stated, beauty does not have concrete existence that would have warranted us to extract its concrete composite elements in order to arrive at its substance (essence). Beauty is metaphysical being that depends on a physical or concrete being for its existence. According to Cooper (1995), Thomas Aquinas rightly observed “beauty is the participation of the just cause which makes all things beautiful indeed, the beauty of a creature is nothing but a likeness of divine beauty participated in things”.<sup>13</sup> What this means is that individual things are created by God with ability of possessing a degree of beauty based on the nature of the tree, while that of animal, man, etc depend on their respective natures .In this respect, Aquinas sees God as super substantially

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<sup>13</sup> Cooper, D. (Ed.). (1995). *A companion in aesthetics*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers.

beautiful ,and he is beauty himself “who gives beauty to all created things in accord with the limitation of each”.

Every creature has its limitation, and this limitation forms part of what makes that thing peculiar. So the proportion or degree of beauty of a thing will remain largely on the size, members and position of that thing. This implies that beauty is that metaphysical being that God inheres on things in order to make those things capture people’s attention, imagination, and pleasure. In this connection we can now say that there may be no uniformity in what constitutes beauty. But on a general note, beauty is made up of those qualities like morals, pleasurable, satisfying elements, goodness, brilliance, harmony etc. None of these qualities should be perceived in a relative term. Whatever qualities constitute the beauty of any objects, it should be such that harmonizes with the divine plan of its creation. So our perception of those qualities. When all these qualities disappear, the 'beautiness' which is the unifying factors or principle of those qualities fails to exist. At that point one can express his subjective view that such a thing is ugly or not beautiful.

## **2.2. Plato’s Conception of Beauty**

Plato probably inherited philosophical discourse of beauty from Socrates, who was described as a very ugly fellow. Plato equated beauty with truth, goodness, and excellence. To him, they were inseparable. He formulated an aesthetic theory in which art and beauty were identified with a supreme form or the ideal. Plato suggests that there are

particular instances of beauty and justice that aspire to a universal ideal, truth or form, which are based on the intelligible, rather than emotion or material presence. Actual objects, particularly artworks are imitative and inferior to nature. Art is at best, mimetic because it is a mere representation of the true form at the same time, within the delight of physical beauty, we are able to contemplate the eternal essence of beauty. According to The Routledge Companion of Aesthetics (2001), Plato, a student of Socrates, believed that the most sublime experience a person can have is ‘direct confrontation with the idea of the Good, the perfect beauty, symmetry, and truth.’<sup>14</sup>

Plato held that beauty was one of the ideal forms in the metaphysical realm which was apprehended by the mind and not the sense. Furthermore, For Aristotle (2001) Plato regarded the human realm of the senses to be inferior to reason in accessing truth. He believed that as the beauty of art and music appealed to the sense, they were seen ‘as an obstacle to insight into the ideal realm.’<sup>15</sup>

The beautiful itself as Plato calls the eternal, unchanging and divine form of beauty, accessible not to the sense but only to the intellect .... Instances of beauty in the sensible world exhibit variability or relativity. Something is beautiful at one time, not at another; in one respect or relation not in another, to one observer, not to another. The beautiful itself lacks all such variability, it is always is and neither comes to be nor passes away, neither waxes nor wanes”. His passage may be taken to imply that the Form of

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<sup>14</sup> The Routledge Companion of Aesthetics. (2001). London, UK: Routledge.

<sup>15</sup> Aristotle. (2001). *Metaphysics* (T. Taylor, Trans.). London, UK: Davis, Wilks and Layor

beauty is itself beautiful. That readily seems to make best sense of Beauty's being an object of love on a continuum with other such objects, for Marshall (1953) whether Plato thinks Beauty as being beautiful in the same way as a boy or girl is beautiful is matter of debate.<sup>16</sup>

For Plato, Beauty is one of the highest ideas. It does have a connection to simple physical appearance, since "all other forms or beauty derive from it" but goes far beyond that. It incorporates knowledge in all its forms, including as we saw in the *Philabus*, Mathematical objects and comes very close to Plato's highest ideal, the form of the good

### **2.3. Aristotle's conception of Beauty**

Another major philosopher who philosophized about the beautiful was Aristotle. He agreed with Plato that beauty is objective rather than subjective to individual experience. However he disagreed with Plato on what beauty is basically because he rejected Plato's theory of form of which Plato's theory of beauty is embedded. Contrary to the analysis and interpretation of many scholars, Aristotle's concept of beauty is in the metaphysics rather than in the poetics. In metaphysics according to Kant (1987), Aristotle juxtaposed the concepts of the good and the beautiful wherefore he states that the good and the beautiful are the beginning both of knowledge and the movement of things.<sup>17</sup> This

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<sup>16</sup> Marshall, J. S. (1953). Art and aesthetic in Aristotle. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 12, 229.

<sup>17</sup> Kant, I. (1987). *Critique of judgment* (W. S. Pluhar, Trans.). Indianapolis, IN, USA: Hackett Publishing Company.

is to say that the good and the beautiful mean the same thing alternatively but that they have a common root.

Generally, Aristotle defines beauty in terms of appropriateness, symmetry, exactly and proportionality. In fact, in Aristotle's own words 'the greatest species of the beautiful are order, symmetry and the definite, in the Topics, he provides the definition thus, "beautiful is the appropriate". John Marshall notes that for Aristotle, beauty is cosmic ontological which in its highest form, it is fixed and external and the highest beauty is to be found in the heavens ... and for him, Aristotle the heavens do declare eternal glory and the earth is full of a resplendent beauty" that is to say, For Ginsborg (n.d) Aristotle identifies beauty with nature. And set nature as a standard of the beautiful.

As Marshall avers

Nature is characterized by the appropriate. In all nature, the details (are) work out in such a way as to produce symmetry and proportion and this is true not only of the heavens but of the sub-lunar worlds as well .... Nature which creates beauty per excellence ... because of the essential beauty of nature, we learn to create beautiful object by imitating the beauty of nature ... nature is the master of the appropriate; and we learn the appropriate by following the guiding hand of our master craftsman.<sup>18</sup>

Aristotle's beauty is real but equivocal its meaning derives from the nature of the beautiful thing in question. Aristotle sidesteps the stock problems of validating or defending aesthetic judgments, writing the poetics as though these assessments could be made orderly and definite" in Kant (1987) view, Aristotle also saw a relationship between

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<sup>18</sup> Ginsborg, H. (n.d.). *Kant's aesthetics and technology*. In *Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy*. Stanford, CA, USA: Stanford University. Retrieved November 20, 2022, from [www.Plato.stanford.edu/entries/kant\\_aesthetics/#2.1](http://www.Plato.stanford.edu/entries/kant_aesthetics/#2.1)

the beautiful (*kalon*) and virtue; arguing that “virtue aims at the beautiful. He also stated that a good person acts virtuously for the sake of the “*kalon*”<sup>19</sup>

#### **2.4. Kant’s Conception of Beauty**

Another major western philosopher who philosophized about the concept of beauty o the beautiful is Immanuel Kant. His philosophy of the beautiful is represented mainly in his critique of Aesthetic judgement. Kant defines beauty thus. “beautiful is what, without a concept, is liked universally.” This approach bears directly on Kant’s categorical imperative which implies universality for every judgment.

However the universability of the judgment of being is not objective as it is for any cognitive reasoning. In striving towards “universal communicability: in the judgment of beauty, there is no set of principles to subsume ones aesthetic judgement for universal validity. That is what he meant by the definition “beautiful is what without a concept, is liked universally. This implies that beauty has to be universally communicable. That is to say, what is judged as beautiful should be universalized; such that “in making a judgment of beauty about an object, one takes it that everyone else who perceives the subject ought also to judge it to be beautiful, and relatedly, to share ones pleasure in it”<sup>20</sup> one’s universalization of aesthetic judgment is purely subjective. Kant maintains that one does not need to justify his idea of beauty a backdrop of a concept or principle. “for beauty is not a concept of an object and a judgment of taste is not a cognitive judgment”. In other

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<sup>19</sup> Kant Op. Cit., p.232

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., pp.230-231

words, judgment of beauty is not scientific and artistic, you cannot determine the beautiful by applying predetermined scientific principles or its methods. In Alberro, (2004) Kant argues that

There can be no objective rule of taste, no rule of taste that determines by concepts what is beautiful.... If we search for a principle of taste that states the universal criterion of the beautiful by means of determinate concepts, then we engage in a fruitless endeavor, because we search for something that is impossible and intrinsically contradictory.”<sup>21</sup>

Kant distinguishes between different kinds of beauty or beautiful, namely: “free” or “vague” beauty and “accessory” or “fixed” beauty. Free beauty does not presuppose principles of valuation whereas accessory beauty does presuppose a concept by which it is determined. Hence, there are two kinds of beauty, free beauty (*pulchritudovaga*) and merely accessory beauty (*pulchritudoadhaerens*).

Kant also argues that the aesthetic judgment of objects with intrinsic teleos cannot be pure. He states that “a judgment of taste about an object that has a determinate intrinsic purpose would be pure only if the judging person either had no concept of this purpose, or it be abstracted from it in a making his judgment’.

Generally, Kant (1987) argues that judging beauty as good or otherwise does render such aesthetic judgment impure. Now just as a connection of beauty which properly concerns only form, with the agreeable (the sensation) prevented the judgment

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<sup>21</sup> Alberro, A. (2004). Beauty knows no pain. *Art Journal*, 63(2), 26–43.

of taste from being pure, so does a connection of beauty with good (i.e., as to how, in terms of the thing's purpose the manifold is good for the thing itself) impair the purity of a beauty of a judgment of taste.<sup>22</sup>

Another distinguishable Kantian characteristic is that he distinguishes the beautiful from the sublime. Kant (1987) describes beauty in terms/order such as harmony and proportion beauty is satisfied by taste. The sublime on the other hand, exceeds taste, rules reproduction and its experience requires imaginative freedom. The sublime takes precedence over beauty. Most prolific writers in modern day aesthetics subscribe to Kant's division of beauty and the sublime.<sup>23</sup>

Indeed, Kant, himself seems to intone his moral metaphysics with a language reminiscent of the duty, thus: "regard for universal communicability as something that everyone expects and demands from everyone else, on the basis, as it were contract of an original contract dictated by our very humanity" Kant's maintain that "to take a direct interest in the beauty of nature is always a mark of a good soul and that, if this interest is habitual, if it readily associates itself with contemplation of Nature, this indicated at least a mental attunement (*Gemuthsstimmung*) favourable to moral feeling". Therefore, Kant's notion of the beautiful, particularly as it relates to objects of accessory beauty, is a moral relevant category, even though its oral relevance is marginal and indirect. This point to this extent, links Kant to Plato in terms of their definite of the beautiful as moral outpost.

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<sup>22</sup> Kant Op. Cit.,

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.,

Beauty is thus a symbol of morality. In fact, Kant writes that it is the “the symbol” of morality.

## CHAPTER THREE

### NORMATIVE CONCEPTION OF BEAUTY IN EFIK WORLDVIEW

#### 3.1 Ethnography of the Efik People

The Efik people, predominantly located in Cross River State in southeastern Nigeria, represent one of the major ethnic groups in the Niger Delta region. Historically, they trace their origins to the Ibibio-Efik stock, having migrated from the hinterlands to the coastal areas, particularly settling in towns such as Calabar, Creek Town, and Duke Town. Over time, they developed a distinctive cultural identity that blends both inland and maritime traditions. The Efik are renowned not only for their strategic role in pre-colonial trade along the Cross River but also for their vibrant cultural heritage, which includes unique language, cuisine, clothing, traditional titles, and artistic expressions. Abasiattai (1990) notes that their advanced socio-political organization and elaborate rituals continue to mark them as a culturally rich and dynamic people, with many of their traditions reflecting deep aesthetic sensibilities and a normative conception of beauty that is both holistic and symbolic<sup>1</sup>.

Akak (1986) notes that, older Efik historical writing preserves multiple migration narratives. One strand traces movement down the Cross River and settlement at Creek Town and Duke Town, emphasizing ties with neighboring Ibibio and Ejagham peoples;

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<sup>1</sup> Abasiattai, M. B. (1990), *A History of the Cross River Region of Nigeria*, Enugu: Harris Publishers, p. 67

another, popular among 20th-century Efik authors, imagines an Oriental/Levantine point of origin, a claim used more to frame identity than to provide verifiable archaeology<sup>2</sup>. Ekong (2001) notes that regardless of which origin tale one favors, the Efik coalesced historically as a trading polity along the estuary, organizing themselves into compact towns whose quarters corresponded to major descent houses and trading lineages.<sup>3</sup>

Pre-colonial Efik towns were governed by councils of titled chiefs (*Etubom*) drawn from powerful houses, presided over by the *Obong* of Calabar. The *Ekpe* (*Egbo*) society graded, oath-bound, and performative functioned as the supreme regulatory institution: it promulgated laws, settled disputes, sanctioned trade, and staged the striking masquerades that embody civic power. For Forde (1956) *Ekpe* justice could levy fines, ostracize offenders, and even override chiefs; it also encoded commercial trust through ritualized debt enforcement vital to the riverine economy.<sup>4</sup> From at least the eighteenth century, Efik merchants acted as middlemen linking interior suppliers to European ships. Antera Duke's eighteenth-century diary, one of West Africa's most remarkable indigenous merchant records, shows how Efik houses negotiated prices, extended credit, and hosted ship captains with calculated hospitality. The same record and associated ethnographic notes illuminate the inner life of Efik compounds, ritual sanctions in trade, and the role of *Ekpe* in guaranteeing contracts. Forde (1956) further notes that, after the

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<sup>2</sup> Akak, E. O. (1986), *The Palestine Origin of the Efiks*, Calabar: Akak & Sons, p. 11.

<sup>3</sup> Ekong, E. E. (2001), *Sociology of the Ibibio: A Study of Social Organization in Traditional African Society*. (Uyo: Dove Educational Publishers, p. 12.

<sup>4</sup> Forde, C. D. (ed.). (1956), *Efik Traders of Old Calabar: Containing the Diary of Antera Duke, together with an Ethnographic Sketch and Notes*, London: International African Institute, p. 49

abolition of the Atlantic slave trade, Efik commerce pivoted to palm oil and kernels, canoe transport, and provisioning, with old mercantile networks repurposed for “legitimate commerce”.<sup>5</sup>

Efik social life is organized around the “house” (*ufok*), a corporate kin unit combining agnatic ties, clients, and dependents under a head (*Etubom* or senior man/woman). Houses controlled property, managed marriage alliances, and cultivated trading partnerships. Personhood was relational: prestige came from one's house achievements, ranks attained in *Ekpe*, and capacities to host, mediate, and give. According to Uya (2005), slaves and pawns (during the Atlantic era) were incorporated into houses, sometimes rising to influence; this layered composition explains both Efik social mobility and the harsh inequalities that fueled episodes like the "Blood Men" slave revolts in the nineteenth century.<sup>6</sup>

Traditional Efik religion centered on a supreme being (*Abasi*) and a dense world of spirits (*ndem*) tied to water, forest, and places of danger. Ancestor veneration and oaths before *Ekpe* shrines gave moral weight to contracts. Life-cycle rituals, naming, initiation, marriage, and funerary rites, wove together aesthetics, cuisine, and performance. The famed *Nkugho* (fattening-room) institution prepared young women for marriage through seclusion, instruction in domestic and sexual ethics, beautification, and

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p. 54.

<sup>6</sup> Uya, O. E. (2005), *The Efik and their Neighbours: Historical Perspectives*, Calabar: Cats Publishers & Clear Lines Publications, p. 60.

song. Mission Christianity, vigorously promoted from the mid-nineteenth century, reframed moral discourse, condemning twin-killing and certain ordeals while absorbing Efik music, eloquence, and hospitality into church life.<sup>7</sup> Efik cuisine celebrates the estuary: fresh fish, periwinkles, and smoked seafood enrich soups like *edikang-ikong* and *afia efere*; palm oil and local greens structure daily meals. Ceremonial hospitality, gin or palm wine, kola nut ritual, and elaborate banquets, builds alliances and marks status. Goldie (1890) notes that dress merges local textiles with imported cloths long favored by merchants: wrappers, embroidered shirts, coral beads, and, for *Ekpe* grades, distinctive insignia and masquerade regalia.<sup>8</sup>

Across the twentieth century, Efik identity has balanced continuity, *Ekpe* titles, house polities, ritual hospitality, with change: urbanization, migration, new professions, and shifting gender norms. Scholarship by Efik historians underscores how the people's strategic coastal position, institutional sophistication (especially *Ekpe*), and early literacy equipped them to mediate between worlds, hinterland and coast, tradition and modernity

### **3.2 Beauty in the African Perspective**

The concept of beauty transcends mere aesthetics to encompass moral values, social harmony, spiritual significance, and cultural symbolism. It is not restricted to the

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<sup>7</sup> Goldie, H. (1862), *Dictionary of the Efik Language* (abridged), Glasgow: Dunn & Wright, p. 35.

<sup>8</sup> Goldie, H. (1890), *Calabar and Its Mission*, Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, p. 22.

superficial or visual appeal of objects or individuals, but is deeply rooted in a worldview that integrates ethical conduct, communal responsibility, and spiritual awareness. In Oladipo (2006) opinion, African traditional societies often view beauty not as an abstract ideal or purely visual phenomenon, but as a quality deeply connected with goodness, communal belonging, and the reflection of moral character.<sup>9</sup> In this context, beauty is holistic, it includes not only what is seen with the eyes but also what is felt, practiced, and lived within the community.

Beauty is embedded in the way people live, interact, and understand their place in the cosmos. In many African cultures, beauty is integrated with the community's worldview and is expressed through the body, art, dress, language, and social behavior. A beautiful individual is one who embodies not only physical attractiveness but also dignity, wisdom, and the values of the collective. Beauty becomes a social language through which people articulate their values, aspirations, and spiritual commitments. It is not just about how something or someone appears, but about what it represents in the broader context of life, tradition, and purpose.

Among many African societies, beauty is functional and symbolic. It serves a purpose and communicates deeper meanings beyond aesthetics. For example, in sculpture and mask- making, beauty often lies in stylization and abstraction rather than naturalistic

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<sup>9</sup> Oladipo, O. (2006). *Thinking About African Ethics*. (New York: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, p. 34.

representation. This is because these artistic forms are not meant merely to depict physical likeness but to convey deeper metaphysical realities.

Beauty in the African perspective is often communal rather than individualistic. This communal orientation underscores the belief that individual beauty cannot be divorced from social responsibility. An individual is considered beautiful not only because of personal traits but also because of how well they uphold communal values and exhibit virtues such as respect, humility, and wisdom. Among the Akan people of Ghana, for example, beauty (*ahodwira*) is associated with cleanliness, moral decency, and societal usefulness. A beautiful person is one who contributes meaningfully to the welfare of others and honors their social obligations. For Gyekye (1996), physical beauty alone does not confer value unless it is coupled with character and dignity<sup>10</sup>. This conception stands in contrast to certain Western notions where beauty can often be seen as an individual and surface attribute.

In African societies, beauty is as much about *how one lives* as it is about *how one looks*. In African oral traditions, proverbs and folktales also reflect this ethical dimension of beauty. These oral forms serve as repositories of communal wisdom and are used to teach moral lessons. One common African proverb says, "Beauty is not in the face but in the heart," reinforcing the belief that physical appearance must be harmonized with inner virtue. Such sayings are not mere platitudes but are reflective of a deep philosophical

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<sup>10</sup> Gyekye, K. (1996), *African Cultural Values: An Introduction*, Accra: Sankofa Publishing Company, p. 97.

conviction that beauty must resonate with the soul's moral alignment. In this sense, beauty serves as a mirror of the societal ideals and ethical codes. A beautiful person is one who contributes positively to the well-being of the community, acts responsibly, and upholds the customs of the ancestors.

It is also important to note that African beauty embrace plurality. Rather than adhere to a single standard of beauty, African cultures celebrate variation, complexity, and uniqueness. Beauty can be found in diversity, asymmetry, and uniqueness. This pluralistic vision acknowledges the vast range of human experiences and expressions. According to Coombes (1994), the African appreciation of bodily forms, skin tones, and adornment varies widely across regions but consistently emphasizes the connection between external appearance and deeper cultural meanings<sup>11</sup>. This approach resists rigid categorizations and instead promotes an inclusive understanding of what it means to be beautiful. Beauty, therefore, is not monolithic but dynamic shaped by geography, ritual, and collective imagination. It embodies the cultural ethos of balance, integration, and harmony between the visible and the invisible, the material and the moral. Beauty is not simply something to be admired but something to be lived and demonstrated through action, behavior, and communal interaction.

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<sup>11</sup> Coombes, A. E. (1994). *Reinventing Africa: Museums, Material Culture and Popular Imagination in Late Victorian and Edwardian England*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, p. 45.

### 3.3 The Notion of Beauty among the Efik People

The Efik people, predominantly located in the southern region of Nigeria especially within Cross River State, possess a profound and elaborate cultural heritage that deeply influences their values, beliefs, and aesthetic ideals. The notion of beauty within Efik society is not narrowly limited to physical appearance or outward attractiveness; instead, it is understood as a complex and multidimensional concept. Beauty, in this cultural setting, encompasses a wide range of human attributes, including physical charm, moral excellence, proper social behavior, and adherence to communal traditions. As such, in the Efik worldview, beauty according to Ibanga (2017) is both a visible trait and a deeply internalized value that significantly impacts individual identity, social integration, and communal perception<sup>12</sup>.

A central feature of the Efik understanding of beauty is the cultural emphasis placed on feminine aesthetics. Among the Efik, a woman's beauty is not only a marker of personal appeal but also a determinant of her suitability for marriage and her status within the community. One of the most culturally significant institutions that reflects the Efik concept of beauty is the traditional "fattening room" practice, known locally as *Nkugho*. This institution is a rite of passage in which young girls, usually of marriageable age, are secluded and subjected to a period of physical, emotional, and moral grooming. The process includes a well-structured dietary program aimed at achieving physical fullness

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<sup>12</sup> Ibanga, D. (2017). "The Concept of Beauty in African Philosophy", *Africology: The Journal of Pan African Studies*, 10 (7), 249-260.

or plumpness, Offiong (1983) notes that it is a condition that is culturally interpreted as a sign of affluence, fertility, and attractiveness. Through this practice, the Efik people express the belief that a well-nourished body represents not only aesthetic beauty but also social and reproductive competence<sup>13</sup>.

The *Nkugho* experience is not limited to physical enhancement. It is an educational and moral process wherein young women are instructed on domestic virtues, proper etiquette, hygiene, and societal roles. These lessons aim to inculcate moral values such as modesty, respect, obedience, and industriousness, virtues that are essential in the Efik construction of a beautiful woman. Thus, beauty in the Efik tradition is a synthesis of the external and internal; for Offiong (1983), it reflects a harmonious balance between the body and character, between appearance and virtue.<sup>14</sup> In addition to these internal and physical attributes, adornment and material expression play a critical role in the aesthetic life of the Efik people. Efik women are known for their elaborate hairstyles, body decorations, and the use of traditional ornaments such as beads, cowries, and intricately designed fabrics. These aesthetic expressions are more than superficial embellishments, they serve as cultural symbols that convey messages about the wearer's social standing, age, marital status, and clan affiliation. Abasiattai (1990) notes that during festive events, weddings, and cultural ceremonies, the use of coral beads, luxurious wrappers, and distinctive hairstyles is not only a form of self-beautification but also an assertion of

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<sup>13</sup> Offiong, D. A. *Op. Cit.*, p. 145.

<sup>14</sup> Offiong, D. A. *Op. Cit.*, p. 159.

cultural pride and continuity<sup>15</sup>. Through such adornments, the Efik people express a collective identity and reinforce their shared values regarding beauty and decorum.

Though the emphasis on beauty is often directed at women, the male conception of beauty is not neglected in Efik culture. While not as overtly celebrated, male beauty is recognized through indicators such as physical strength, cleanliness, courage, wisdom, and rhetorical eloquence. Men who exhibit these traits are often regarded as honorable and attractive. This reflects the community's broader valuation of personal virtue and competence as central to the aesthetic ideal for both genders.

The Efik appreciation for beauty also extends into the performative and expressive arts such as dance, music, oratory, and even the art of storytelling are regarded as aesthetic domains in which individuals can display refinement and cultural grace. A woman who dances rhythmically, a man who sings with a melodious voice, or a person who speaks eloquently in the Efik language, is often described as beautiful in the communal sense. These performative arts are not merely forms of entertainment but are deeply tied to moral education, cultural transmission, and social cohesion. Uya (1992) notes that beauty, in this regard, becomes a reflection of how well an individual embodies and performs the collective values of the Efik community.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Abasiattai, M. B. *Op. Cit.*, p. 91

<sup>16</sup> Uya, O. E. (1992). *The Efik People: Culture and History*, Ibadan: Spectrum Books, p. 94

The Efik notion of beauty is inherently holistic and normative. It goes beyond surface-level traits to encompass character, cultural participation, and moral standing. It sets forth expectations about how individuals should present themselves, interact with others, and contribute to the community, while also offering avenues for personal expression and cultural affirmation. Importantly, this ideal of beauty is shaped by historical traditions and communal values, making it both a deeply personal and socially regulated phenomenon. As such, beauty within the Efik worldview serves not only as a criterion of attraction but also as a moral and cultural standard of what it means to be a good and complete human being in society.

### **3.3.1 Intrinsic Beauty of the Efik People**

In the traditional worldview of the Efik people of southern Nigeria, beauty transcends the superficial and enters the moral, spiritual, and social realms of human existence. While outward appearance is acknowledged and celebrated, especially during communal ceremonies and rites of passage, the Efik place a far greater emphasis on what is known as intrinsic beauty, a deeply rooted conception of personal virtue, moral integrity, spiritual harmony, and cultural responsibility. This concept of beauty operates on a multidimensional plane, linking personal character with communal ideals, and external conduct with metaphysical values.

Intrinsic beauty is best understood as the manifestation of inner qualities that conform to the values upheld by Efik society. These include humility, wisdom, dignity,

generosity, self- control, and a harmonious disposition towards both the community and the spiritual world. According to Ekpenyong (2006), "the Efik consider these attributes not merely as traits of a good individual, but as essential criteria for true beauty"<sup>17</sup>. Beauty, therefore, is not measured by facial symmetry or bodily adornment alone, but by the nobility of one's character and one's alignment with communal ethics. In the Efik moral imagination, the truly beautiful person is the one whose actions foster peace, unity, and well-being within the society. Such beauty is active and performative, it must be demonstrated in one's conduct, speech, and relationship with both humans and the divine. This understanding of beauty is cultivated through a robust social and moral education system that begins in early childhood and matures through deliberate rites of passage. Young girls, for instance, undergo the *Nkugho* rite, an institution often misinterpreted as mere physical beautification through fattening.

In reality, it is a holistic process that prepares young women to be morally upright, emotionally mature, and socially responsible. The rite involves not just physical rest and pampering, but also a strict curriculum of cultural learning. They are taught the virtues of patience, domestic skills, respect for elders, and the sacred role of women in preserving community values. For Offiong (1983), these teachings are internalized through songs, storytelling, mentorship, and reflective silence<sup>18</sup>. *Nkugho* thus becomes a space of transformation where young girls transit into womanhood not only by changes to their

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<sup>17</sup> Ekpenyong, J. E. (2006), *Culture and Customs of the Efik People*. (Calabar: University of Calabar Press, p. 29.

<sup>18</sup> Offiong, D. A. *Op. Cit.*, p. 161.

body, but by deepening their sense of identity, responsibility, and virtue. The outward plumpness traditionally associated with *Nkugho* is thus symbolic of inner fullness of wisdom, readiness, and the cultivation of beauty as a moral and cultural achievement.

For men, similar virtues are instilled through communal upbringing and participation in cultural institutions such as the *Ekpe* society. This society, which serves as both a traditional governance and spiritual order, functions as a moral academy for male development. A truly beautiful man in Efik thought is one who displays courage, speaks with wisdom, upholds justice, and embodies the communal spirit. Public recognition, leadership roles, and ancestral honor are typically reserved for such individuals, who are regarded as both socially and spiritually adorned. The Efik proverb, "*Ifok ke iso ke idara ison*" (Character is the light that brightens one's path), reveals how character is seen as the inner light of beauty that guides life and commands respect. Ekpenyong (2006) notes that in everyday interactions, a man's reputation for fairness, restraint, and community service often speaks louder than his physical appearance.<sup>19</sup>

The spiritual dimension of intrinsic beauty is also of great significance. The Efik believe that physical beauty can fade, but spiritual and moral beauty have enduring value. Individuals who maintain harmony with the moral codes of the ancestors and show reverence to the divine order are believed to possess *ekpeme* (inner peace or favor). This

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<sup>19</sup> Ekpenyong, J. E. *Op. Cit.*, p. 37.

spiritual grace according to Essien (2011) radiates in their interactions and is thought to protect them from misfortune, attract blessings, and elevate their social standing<sup>20</sup>.

*Ekpeme* is not something that can be purchased or fabricated, it is earned through decent living, through fidelity to tradition, and through the consistent alignment of one's life with the cosmic and ancestral order. This belief system teaches that real beauty is not fleeting or skin- deep, but an existential quality rooted in one's soul and spiritual conduct. Beauty, therefore, is not only seen, it is felt, sensed, and lived out in harmony with the forces of the universe. Ekpenyong (2006) notes that the community, in turn, affirms and sustains this normative conception through oral traditions, rituals, and the social practice of praise.<sup>21</sup>

Elders often narrate folktales that highlight the triumph of virtue over mere appearance. These stories serve as moral lessons, demonstrating that physical allure without good character leads to downfall, whereas modest appearance combined with virtue brings glory. Songs sung at public gatherings extol individuals who have distinguished themselves not by how they look, but by how they live. These oral performances are not just entertainment; they are instruments of moral education, reinforcing the belief that beauty must first and foremost reflect ethical alignment. These stories and songs function as moral mirrors, reinforcing the ideal of beauty as that which aligns the soul with goodness, the body with grace, and the mind with truth. Through

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<sup>20</sup> Essien, E. D. *Op. Cit.*, 67–80.

<sup>21</sup> Ekpenyong, J. E. *Op. Cit.*, p. 69.

repeated performances, the community internalizes these ideals, making them central to Efik cultural consciousness. For Ekpenyong (2006), it is a comprehensive appreciation of the human person as a bearer of dignity, honor, and moral responsibility. In such a conception, beauty is not simply a physical trait, but a life well lived, shaped by culture, refined by virtue, and harmonized with the divine.<sup>22</sup> The Efik understanding thus challenges more materialistic or commercial definitions of beauty, presenting instead a spiritually rich, ethically grounded, and socially integrated vision of what it means to be truly beautiful.

### **3.3.2 Extrinsic Beauty of the Efik People**

Extrinsic beauty in the Efik worldview refers to the outward and socially appreciated expressions of aesthetic value as exhibited through bodily adornment, attire, body modification, and ceremonial appearances. This concept of beauty is visible and tangible, one that can be seen, adorned, and celebrated publicly. Unlike intrinsic beauty, which pertains to the moral or spiritual dimensions of a person such as good character, virtue, or internal grace, extrinsic beauty among the Efik is largely concerned with the physical manifestation of cultural ideals of attractiveness and elegance. These external expressions are not merely individualistic endeavors; for Ibanga (2017), they are deeply

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<sup>22</sup> Ekpenyong, J. E. *Op. Cit.*, p. 79

rooted in communal expectations, collective identities, and sociocultural norms that define what constitutes visual appeal and public admiration within the society.<sup>23</sup>

One of the most notable expressions of extrinsic beauty among the Efik is body decoration and adornment. This includes the traditional practice of body painting and tattooing, known as *nkuho*, and the application of natural cosmetics derived from indigenous herbs and clay to enhance the skin's appearance. These practices are not just decorative but are deeply symbolic, serving as important rites of passage and embodying meanings of transformation, maturity, and readiness for societal roles. For Offiong (1983), such practices are particularly significant among women, especially those preparing for public ceremonies or undergoing traditional rites of passage.<sup>24</sup> For example, the use of *ndom* (white chalk) to decorate the body during the fattening room ritual signifies purity, fertility, and readiness for marriage, a key marker of feminine beauty in Efik culture. This ritual embellishment of the body underscores how extrinsic beauty is intertwined with cultural identity and communal values. Clothing also plays a critical role in the presentation of extrinsic beauty.

The Efik people are renowned for their rich, vibrant, and often luxurious traditional attire that is both expressive and meaningful. Ekpo (2004) notes that, women often wear the *onyonyo*, an elegant long gown made of fine materials such as silk or lace,

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<sup>23</sup> Ibanga, D. (2017), "The Concept of Beauty in African Philosophy", *Africology: The Journal of Pan African Studies*, 10 (7), 249-260.

<sup>24</sup> Offiong, D. A. *Op. Cit.*, p. 190.

adorned with beads, gold jewelry, and head wraps that enhance not only their beauty but also their grace and poise<sup>25</sup>. The opulence of the attire reflects refinement and societal standing. Efik men also express extrinsic beauty through the donning of traditional wrappers, embroidered shirts, caps, and canes, all of which are indicators of status, age, and refinement. These clothing styles are not only visually pleasing but serve as visual narratives that communicate social roles, affiliations, and occasion-specific appropriateness. Thus, fashion and dress in Efik culture go beyond mere functionality, they are cultural codes that speak volumes about the person wearing them.

Another key element is the fattening room institution (*nkugho*), a deeply respected and time-honored cultural rite that accentuates extrinsic beauty while simultaneously preparing a woman for womanhood and marital responsibilities. During this period, young women are secluded in a private space and are nurtured with special diets, massages, and skincare treatments designed to enhance their physical form and well-being. The emphasis during this phase is on developing a rounded, fuller figure, which is traditionally seen as the epitome of beauty and desirability in Efik society. As noted by Essien (2011), the fattening process is a cultural embodiment of the aesthetic ideals of health, wealth, and femininity<sup>26</sup>. It is a public affirmation that beauty is not innate alone, but something to be cultivated and celebrated communally.

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<sup>25</sup> Ekpo, T. (2004), *Culture and Beauty in Efik Society*, Ibadan: Spectrum Books, p. 51.

<sup>26</sup> Essien, A. (2011), "The Aesthetics of Womanhood in the Efik Culture: Fattening Room and Cultural Identity." *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 23(2), 189–201

Hair grooming is also an essential part of extrinsic beauty among the Efik. Hair is treated as a canvas for artistic and cultural expression. Elaborate hairstyles are crafted to enhance the facial features and overall appearance of the individual, reflecting both creativity and adherence to cultural aesthetics. These hairstyles, often adorned with beads, threads, and metallic ornaments, carry deep symbolic meanings. As noted by Abasiattai (1990), they may indicate age, marital status, social class, or readiness for certain rituals<sup>27</sup>.

Hair grooming, typically carried out in groups or by professional stylists within the community, is also a social event that fosters bonding and reinforces communal ties. It signifies how beauty in the Efik tradition is not a solitary pursuit, but one embedded in collective life and cultural transmission. The use of ornaments and accessories, such as bangles, necklaces, and waist beads, and anklets, is deeply symbolic and visually expressive. These ornaments do not only serve to beautify the body but also carry layers of meaning tied to fertility, spiritual protection, wealth, and identity.

For the Efik, adorning the body with such items is both a personal and cultural statement. Waist beads, for instance, may denote femininity and sensuality, while gold necklaces could signify affluence and noble lineage. These aesthetic embellishments thus reflect a blend of individual taste and communal heritage. More importantly, they embody the pride of a people who value beauty as a collective ideal and a cultural inheritance. In sum, extrinsic beauty among the Efik people is a complex interplay of

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<sup>27</sup> Abasiattai, M. B. *Op. Cit.*, pp. 105-107.

body aesthetics, attire, ornamentation, grooming, and cultural performance. It represents not just individual attractiveness or outward elegance but is intricately linked to deeper cultural values, communal identities, social roles, and traditional symbols of respectability. Extrinsic beauty is carefully cultivated, celebrated, and even ritualized in various stages of life, making it an essential part of the Efik worldview. As such, beauty in Efik society is not a superficial or fleeting attribute but a deeply embedded cultural expression that defines personhood, femininity, social cohesion, and community participation.

### **3.4 Normative Conception of Beauty In Efik Worldview**

"Normative" simply means that something is guided by standards or rules about what ought to be, rather than just describing what is. In philosophy, it is used to talk about values and obligations: what people should do, what is right, and what is considered proper. When we talk about beauty in a normative sense, it means beauty is not only about individual taste or preference, but about cultural expectations and moral standards. As noted by Taylor (1989), a community does not just describe someone as

beautiful because of appearance alone; it also prescribes what a beautiful person should be like, both in character and conduct.<sup>28</sup>

Among the Efik of Old Calabar, this link between beauty and morality is very clear. Aye (1967) explains that for the Efik, beauty was never just skin-deep. Traditions such as the *mbopo*, the fattening room for young women, went beyond physical grooming and nourishment.<sup>29</sup> In these periods of seclusion, women were also taught proper manners, respect for elders, skills for keeping a household, and moral responsibility to the community. This shows that beauty was seen as a blend of the physical and the moral; a young woman could only be admired if her outward appearance matched her character.

Forde (1956), in his ethnographic account of the Efik, makes a similar observation. He notes that physical adornments, clothing, and rituals of elegance were always tied to social values.<sup>30</sup> Institutions like *Ekpe* did not just maintain political order, they also reinforced ideals about decency, modesty, and self-discipline. In the same way, Uya (2005) writes that Efik thought constantly warned against valuing outward charm without inner virtue.<sup>31</sup> In their wisdom, beauty without character was considered incomplete, even dangerous, because it could deceive or mislead others. This way of thinking makes the Efik conception of beauty deeply normative. It was never only about a fair face, but about

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<sup>28</sup> Taylor, C. (1989), *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, p. 24

<sup>29</sup> Aye, E. U. (1967), *Old Calabar through the Centuries*, Calabar: Hope Waddell Press, p. 78.

<sup>30</sup> Forde, C. D. *Op. Cit.*, p. 97.

<sup>31</sup> Uya, O. E. *Op. Cit.* p. 143.

what that face represented in terms of morality and responsibility. True beauty had to radiate from within, harmonizing physical grace with good character. This reflects a wider African view in which aesthetics and ethics go hand in hand where looking good means little unless it is grounded in virtue.

The normative conception of beauty in the Efik worldview is deeply rooted in the community's cultural, spiritual, and aesthetic values. Beauty, in this context, transcends superficial appearance and incorporates a rich tapestry of moral, spiritual, and social ideals. For the Efik people of southeastern Nigeria, beauty is not merely a physical attribute; it is an embodiment of cultural values, identity, and societal norms. Their understanding of beauty is both holistic and normative, prescribing what ought to be considered beautiful based on communal expectations, ethical comportment, and harmonious living. Within Efik society, beauty is traditionally linked to moral virtues and good behavior. A person is not considered beautiful based solely on physical features but also on how they comport themselves within society. As noted by Essien (2012), an Efik proverb "*Ufok ima ada idem mme enyin, ke obio, esie ke ifiok, ke ndoñ, ke ima, akak ibet, yak ndinum, ndinam akak ifiok.*" emphasizes that character and moral uprightness are integral to beauty.<sup>32</sup> Thus, beauty in the Efik cultural milieu involves an inner moral quality that complements the outward appearance.

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<sup>32</sup> Essien, E. (2012), "Beauty and Morality in Traditional Efik Society." *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 24, 2), 175-188.

The normative beauty ideal in the Efik tradition is embodied in specific cultural rites and practices. The most notable among these is the *fattening room* tradition, where young maidens are secluded and trained in domestic virtues, moral conduct, and cultural etiquette. For Umoetuk (2015), during this period, they are also physically nurtured to gain weight, a marker of beauty and fertility in Efik tradition<sup>33</sup>. The fattening process is not merely for aesthetic purposes; it symbolizes maturity, readiness for marriage, and adherence to communal norms. This practice underscores the idea that beauty is nurtured and regulated according to societal standards.

In the realm of adornment, the Efik place great importance on external appearance as a representation of inner harmony. Women traditionally adorned themselves with elaborate hairstyles, body markings (*nsibidi* tattoos), beads, and wrappers made from fine textiles such as George cloth. Ekpo (2006) notes that these embellishments were not just decorative but communicated a woman's status, morality, and family background<sup>34</sup>. The community's visual aesthetics function as normative codes, guiding what is socially acceptable and desirable in terms of beauty.

The Efik normative conception of beauty is an integrated value system that encompasses physical, moral, and social dimensions. Beauty is not an individualistic or subjective matter but a culturally constructed ideal that is shaped, taught, and maintained

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<sup>33</sup> Umoetuk, A. (2015), *The Fattening Room Tradition: Beauty, Culture, and Womanhood in Efik Society*, Lagos: Heritage Books, p. 89.

<sup>34</sup> Ekpo, E. (2006). *Cultural Aesthetics and the Efik Woman*, Calabar: University of Calabar Press, p. 109.

by societal norms and traditions. In Efik culture, the idea of beauty cannot be separated from the values that guide everyday life. Beauty is not just about how a person looks but about the kind of character they show to others. Aye (1967) explains that for the Efik, true attractiveness is found in the balance between outward elegance and inward virtue.<sup>35</sup> A person may have a pleasing face, but if they lack respect, humility, or good character, they are not considered beautiful in the deeper sense.

One of the strongest values shaping this outlook is respect for elders and harmony within the community. A young woman or man is admired not only for their physical appearance but also for their manners and the way they uphold family honor. This is especially clear in the *mbopo* tradition, the fattening room for women, where physical preparation for marriage went hand in hand with moral and social training. As Aye (1967) notes, young women were taught patience, humility, and responsibility, so that their beauty would reflect not just a well-prepared body but also a disciplined character ready for family life.<sup>36</sup> The Efik also value the close relationship between aesthetics and morality. Forde observed that dress, adornment, and personal presentation were always tied to behavior. A finely dressed person who lacked virtue was not admired because beauty was meant to mirror goodness. Institutions like *Ekpe* reinforced this by rewarding honesty and discipline, qualities that shaped how people judged attractiveness. In this sense, reputation was as much a part of beauty as physical appearance.

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<sup>35</sup> Aye, E. U. *Op. Cit.*, p. 89.

<sup>36</sup> Aye, E. U. *Op. Cit.*, p. 145.

Generosity and hospitality are also deeply valued among the Efik, and they too feed into the cultural notion of beauty. Uya (2005) points out that those who welcomed guests warmly, shared food, and showed kindness were considered more beautiful in the eyes of their community.<sup>37</sup> To the Efik, beauty was something you lived out through actions, not only what you wore or how your body looked. Altogether, the Efik see beauty as a reflection of their most cherished values: respect, humility, generosity, and moral uprightness. It is a way of saying that outer charm must always go hand in hand with inner virtue. This makes beauty, in their culture, not only an aesthetic quality but also an ethical one.

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<sup>37</sup> Uya, O. E. *Op. Cit.*, p. 150.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION

#### 4.1 Evaluation

The normative concept of beauty in the Efik worldview extends beyond individual taste or subjective preference, reflecting instead a collective cultural standard deeply embedded in social norms and values. Beauty, for the Efik, is conceived not only as a physical quality but also as an ethical and symbolic category that defines personhood, social identity, and cultural belonging. As noted by Offiong (1983), this normative conception ensures that beauty is not arbitrary but is regulated by communal expectations of what constitutes physical attractiveness, moral uprightness, and social refinement.<sup>1</sup>

This normative framework aligns with broader African aesthetics, where beauty serves as a relational force, binding individuals to their community and cosmos. Offiong (1983) notes that it prescribes that true beauty manifests through a synthesis of physical form, moral virtue, and practical utility, ensuring that aesthetic value reinforces societal well-being rather than existing in isolation.<sup>2</sup> Central to the Efik normative ideal is the physical dimension of beauty, particularly embodied in the Nkuho seclusion practice, a rite of passage that prescribes seclusion and nourishment for young women to achieve a plump, curvaceous form symbolizing fertility, prosperity, and health. Philosophically,

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<sup>1</sup> Offiong, D. A. (1983). *Imperialism and Dependency: Obstacles to African Development*, Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers, p. 95.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105

this normativizes beauty as an outward reflection of inner abundance and communal wealth, where slenderness might signify poverty or misfortune, inverting Western ideals of thinness as aspirational. In this sense, beauty becomes a metaphysical marker of ontological completeness—plumpness is not arbitrary but a harmonious alignment with nature's bounty, echoing Platonic notions of proportion yet grounding them in lived, cultural reality. The Efik worldview thus prescribes beauty as a bodily ethic: one ought to cultivate a form that signals readiness for reproduction and social contribution, transforming aesthetics into a teleological pursuit aimed at perpetuating lineage and community stability. This normative stance critiques superficial beauty, insisting that physical allure must be earned through disciplined preparation, thereby integrating aesthetics with virtue ethics in a way reminiscent of Aristotelian eudaimonia, where beauty contributes to the good life.

Beyond the corporeal, the Efik normative concept of beauty intertwines with moral and behavioral imperatives, prescribing that aesthetic value is inseparable from ethical conduct and character. In the Nkuho ritual, seclusion is not solely for physical enhancement but for imparting wisdom in domestic skills, humility, and relational harmony, underscoring that beauty ought to encompass "good conduct" alongside attractiveness. For Akak (1986), this reflects an African aesthetic ontology where beauty is functional and relational, devoid of the Western "beauty for beauty's sake" as critiqued

by thinkers like Hegel, who viewed non-European aesthetics as underdeveloped.<sup>3</sup> Instead, Efik beauty norms mandate a holistic personhood: a beautiful woman is one who embodies virtues like obedience, nurturing, and cultural fidelity, aligning her with the communal worldview. This normative integration challenges dualistic philosophies, such as

Descartes' mind-body split, by positing beauty as a unified essence where the ethical informs the aesthetic, and vice versa. Beauty, in this light, becomes a prescriptive tool for social cohesion, warning against discord and promoting a metaphysics of unity where individual allure serves the greater good. The communal and relational essence of Efik beauty further elevates its normative status, prescribing that aesthetic ideals must enhance social bonds rather than isolate the individual. Unlike the subjective relativism in postmodern Western thought, where beauty is "in the eye of the beholder," Efik philosophy views it as inter-subjective, validated through community rituals and shared values. This normativizes beauty as a social contract: one ought to pursue it not for personal gratification but to affirm familial and societal roles, such as marriage and motherhood.

Contemporary shifts in the Efik normative concept of beauty reveal philosophical tensions between tradition and modernity, prescribing adaptation while preserving core values. Globalization and health campaigns linking obesity to illness have eroded the

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<sup>3</sup> Akak, E. O. (1986), *The Palestine Origin of the Efiks*, Calabar: Akak & Sons, p. 79.

fattening ideal in urban contexts, yet the Nkuho's essence persists as a symbol of cultural evolution, emphasizing skills and empowerment over mere physicality. Philosophically, this evolution invites a hermeneutic approach, interpreting beauty norms as dynamic responses to existential challenges, akin to Heidegger's notion of "being-in-the-world." The normative imperative remains: beauty ought to adapt without losing its functional role in fostering resilience and identity. This underscores an African philosophical resilience, where beauty norms resist colonial impositions of Western slenderness, reclaiming plumpness as a decolonized aesthetic of abundance and well-being.

In conclusion, the normative concept of beauty in the Efik worldview offers a profound philosophical critique of aesthetics as integrated with ethics, ontology, and community, prescribing a life-affirming ideal that transcends mere appearance. It challenges Western dichotomies by normativizing beauty as ephemeral yet purposeful, tied to morality and functionality, urging individuals to embody harmony for communal upliftment. This perspective not only enriches global aesthetics but invites reflection on how beauty, as a normative force, can guide human flourishing in an interconnected world.

Unlike Western notions that often valorize slimness, Efik ideals emphasize bodily fullness as both aesthetically desirable and socially meaningful. Beauty here is not simply visual charm; it is a sign of readiness for social roles, particularly motherhood and marital responsibilities. In addition to body shape, the Efik normative standard of beauty is

expressed through body adornment and cosmetic practices. Ekpo (2004) notes that women apply *ndom* (white chalk) during fattening rituals or ceremonies, symbolizing purity, fertility, and moral integrity<sup>4</sup>. Traditional body painting (*nkuho*) and the use of herbal cosmetics not only enhance outward attractiveness but also communicate social identity and ritual readiness. These practices underscore the idea that beauty is not an individual pursuit but a cultural performance regulated by established customs and collective recognition. Clothing and ornamentation also play a significant role in the normative beauty ideal. In Anasiattai (1990) opinion, the Efik traditional attire, such as the *onyonyo* for women, accompanied by gold jewelry, beads, and head wraps, projects elegance and status, while men's wrappers, shirts, and caps serve as markers of refinement and social standing<sup>5</sup>. Attire is not randomly chosen but carefully aligned with age, marital status, and ceremonial context. Through these standards, beauty becomes an expression of propriety, cultural pride, and societal cohesion. The Efik normative concept of beauty integrates moral character with physical elegance. For Essien (2011) beautiful woman is not judged solely by her outward features but also by her comportment, modesty, and respect for cultural traditions<sup>6</sup>. Physical adornment without moral virtue is considered incomplete, as the Efik emphasize that true beauty is both external and

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<sup>4</sup> Ekpo, A. H. (2004). *Culture and Identity in Efik Society*, Calabar: Glad Tidings Press, p. 59.

<sup>5</sup> Abasiattai, M. B. (1990). *The Efik and their Neighbours: Historical Perspectives*, Calabar: University of Calabar Press, p. 87.

<sup>6</sup> Essien, E. (2011). "The Fattening Room Tradition and the Ideal of Femininity in Efik Culture." *Journal of Nigerian Cultural Studies*, 5(2), 33–47.

internal. Thus, beauty functions as a holistic ideal that embodies virtue, dignity, and social responsibility.

For Offiong (1983), hair grooming further reinforces the normative conception of beauty. Hairstyles adorned with beads and threads are not merely decorative but symbolize age, marital status, and ritual functions<sup>7</sup>. Grooming is often communal, highlighting the social dimension of beauty and its role in integrating individuals into cultural life. Similarly, Ekpo (2004) notes that accessories such as waist beads, anklets, and necklaces are invested with symbolic meanings tied to fertility, protection, and cultural identity<sup>8</sup>. These embellishments illustrate how beauty is intertwined with social expectations and symbolic communication.

In essence, the normative concept of beauty in Efik culture operates as a regulative ideal. It prescribes how individuals, particularly women, should present themselves to embody communal aesthetics and moral expectations. Deviation from these standards often invites disapproval, underscoring the disciplinary function of beauty in sustaining cultural values. Thus, beauty in the Efik worldview is not merely a superficial attribute but a profound cultural expression that integrates aesthetics, morality, and social identity.

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<sup>7</sup> Offiong, D. A. *Op. Cit.*, p. 101.

<sup>8</sup> Ekpo, A. H. *Op. Cit.*, p. 112.

## 4.2 Conclusion

The normative concept of beauty in the Efik worldview demonstrates that beauty is not a shallow or superficial ideal, but a multidimensional value that unites the physical, moral, and spiritual dimensions of life. The Efik conception shows that aesthetics is inseparable from ethics and communal identity. While external adornments such as body decoration, attire, and the fattening room ritual serve as visible markers of cultural pride and social belonging, they are only meaningful when harmonized with inner qualities such as character, virtue, and wisdom. This holistic outlook emphasizes that true beauty is a reflection of both outward appearance and inward morality.

The Efik understanding of intrinsic and extrinsic beauty also highlights the importance of cultural education in shaping ideals of personhood. Through communal rites, oral traditions, and social practices, individuals are trained to appreciate beauty not merely as a matter of attraction, but as a symbol of responsibility, dignity, and social harmony. Beauty, therefore, becomes a moral compass and a cultural language through which values such as respect, humility, and communal solidarity are transmitted across generations.

However, this conception is not without its challenges. While the cultural ideals preserved through practices like the *Nkuho* have ensured the continuity of Efik traditions, they may also impose restrictive expectations, particularly on women, in a modern context where personal autonomy and global standards of beauty exert strong influence.

Yet, despite these tensions, the Efik normative view of beauty continues to offer a powerful framework for rethinking aesthetics in contemporary society, especially as it insists on the union of ethics and aesthetics.

Ultimately, the Efik worldview teaches that beauty is a way of life, not just a matter of appearance. It is a standard by which individuals are measured not only for their physical appeal but also for their contributions to communal well-being and their alignment with moral and spiritual values. In a world where beauty is increasingly commodified, the Efik normative conception provides a timeless reminder that true beauty radiates from character, culture, and the harmonious balance between the inner and outer self.

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