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A PHILOSOPHICAL APPRAISAL OF IBIBIO CONCEPT OF BEAUTY

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Abstract:

The concept of beauty in Ibibio belief system had severally been under rated by some people who belong to a different belief system as an unattractive culture. To this end, the concept of beauty remained subjected to various misrepresentation, misinterpretation and distortion. However, beauty they say is in the eye of the beholder. The concept of beauty in Traditional African philosophy is relational and functional. However, the philosophy of beauty or philosophy of the beautiful is a developing discourse in contemporary African philosophy. African philosophers are now beginning to earnestly have more than a passing and non-technical interest in the reality of the beautiful. In the context of African cultures, the concept of beauty or beautiful is indeed uniquely aesthetical as it is functional. Since time immemorial, *Nwommo* served as traditional museum preserving traditional paraphernalia of Ibibio society. These traditional paraphernalia includes all kinds of objects ranging from carved wooden objects and figurines to cast iron and bronze objects. These objects gave identity to the people of Ibibio land. The beauty of these objects formed an astonishing and envious attraction to the Ibibio nation. *Uyai* means beauty in the Nigerian language of Ibibio, and it's a fitting title for this beautiful record. Awash in exultation and infused with melody, *Uyai* is a gorgeous vision of international pop. The work employed the 8th edition of the MLA style of documentation and as well used conceptual analysis as its method. The position of this work is that, the works of art" in Ibibio is rich and could be expressed using an aesthetic property such as beautiful, graceful, gorgeous, charming, handsome, spectacular", dull, unattractive." Ibibio concept of *uyai* (beauty) could also be appraised geometrically, emotionally, attitudinally, psychologically, ethically and expressionally.

Keywords: *Uyai*, gorgeous, conceptual analysis, art, Ibibio, aesthetic, properties, beautiful, graceful, gorgeous, charming, handsome, spectacular, dull, unattractive., geometrically, emotionally, attitudinally, psychologically, ethically and expressionally.

INTRODUCTION

The Ibibio thought system is a component of the African Worldview on reality. Historically, Eyo Mensah say that the Ibibio people validly occupy a geo-political entity called Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria located in the south-east corner of Nigeria. The history of the origin of the Ibibio people is controversial in many historical records. Some historians have postulated a Cameroon origin (7). He further says that others are of the opinion that the Ibibio people originated from Central Benue Valley, the central dispersal area of all Bantus (8). They have a plausible culture, full of natural beauty. The various analyses that portray the aesthetic image of the Ibibio would be explored in detail in the body of the work (41).

Moreover, the Ibibio concept of beauty is subsuming in her cultural heritage. According to Okon, Culture is the knowledge that someone has by virtue of his/her being a member of a particular society” (47). Culture is a summary of a man including his belief system. To this end, Eskamp & Swart, established thus:

In essence, there is no society without a culture and language as a vehicle for cultural transmission. Culture is defined in the anthropological sense as the way of life, the complex whole that consists of everything we think (idea and ideologies), everything we do (norms and patterns of behaviour), and everything we have (artifacts) as members of society” (91).

Certainly, people have learned that culture must be understood in order to communicate. The link that ties the trio together is that they complement each other as well as allow for the continuity of societies and the experiences of the people (Okon, 43).

The interface among language, culture and communication is succinctly summarized by Soola thus: language is one of the, if not, the most enduring artifacts of culture... a people can always have their history traced through their language” (Soola 26). It is interesting to note that language is used to transmit the culture and learning experiences of the people through oral media like songs, folktale, oral literature, myths and legends, and through non-oral media. Like drums, plants, town criers, in informing, educating, entertaining and mobilizing the people” (Okon 53).

Consequently, the Ibibio culture has an interesting view of what beauty is all about. According to Isiramen in talking about beauty from African (Ibibio) concept, he says we can do such an appraisal on aesthetic properties such as beautiful, graceful, gorgeous, charming, handsome, spectacular, dull, unattractive, etc. The aesthetic judgement of a people (Ibibio) is based on some influences. For example, the influence of societal sophistication and the ability to comprehend the dynamism of life as portrayed in the work of art (12). In addition, the Ibibio word *ntuen-akpo* is used metaphorically to refer to a woman who only has physical attractiveness, adorned with facial beauty but lack good manners. These and more will be discussed in the main work.

The concept of beauty in Ibibio belief system had severally been under rated by some people who belong to a different belief system as an unattractive culture. To this end, the concept of beauty subjected to various misrepresentation, misinterpretation and distortion. This ugly trend had eaten deep in the thinking pattern of the people such that this rich culture is now facing a ridiculous moment. However, this work will expose the aesthetic nature to beauty in Ibibio belief system. This will remove doubt and enrich the masses.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

When a word is not clearly given a meaning by definition such word will be surrounded by ambiguity, vagueness and misconception as well as misinterpretation. It is based on this proposition that some basic terms that would be used in this research will be given a simple and operational clarification. This exercise would help to give precision, clarity and obvious picture to the concept of beauty under discourse. Below are the terminologies to be defined:

Aesthetic: This branch of philosophy that concerns itself with beauty or the appreciation of beauty. Put differently, aesthetic is a set of principles underlying the work of a particular artist or artistic movement. Generally speaking, aesthetic relates to art or beauty.

Beauty: Beauty is a property, quality or state of being that which pleases merely by perceived. To Aquinas, beauty is that which is attractive, pleasing, fine or good looking; comeliness. By extension, beauty is egregious, exceptional, conspicuous and outstanding.

A REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

This review used both primary and secondary sources. Extant literature revealed that the study of the concept of beauty contributes towards the development of African Philosophy. Review in this work is done on the following themes:

BEAUTY AS AN AESTHETIC CATEGORY

In antiquity, God in the course of creation consistently recognized the value of beauty as recorded in the first Pentateuch: the Holy Bible says And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good (Genesis 1:31). By implication, God declared the whole of creation aesthetically beautiful because the word good is synonymous with the word beautiful. A careful observation of reality demonstrates that the goodness in God's creation is essentially ontological rather than accidental; it is transcendental rather than superficial, or exterior appearance. It is not or what appeals to man's sensory faculties of hearing, seeing, feeling, tasting, or smelling. This is true because not every creature appears good or beautiful to us. For instance, creatures like snakes, monkeys, millipedes, mosquitoes, worms, lizards, etc are externally ugly but substantially beautiful.

Furthermore, aesthetics has also been seen as the study of the feelings, concepts, and judgements arising from our appreciation of the arts or of the wider class of objects considered moving, or beautiful, or sublime" (Blackburn, 8). Aesthetics has severally been regard as the problem of appreciation of excellence. To this end, Ekarika postulated that:

Allied with our mental appreciation of truth in the perception of reality is our sensible appreciation of the excellent in things—beauty in nature, beauty in art, beauty in literature, etc. The branch of philosophy which deals with all this is called Aesthetics, and lays down principles and rules for determining excellence and good taste with regard to right order and the artistic in things as also the appreciation of the beautiful (Ekarika, 16).

The piece above opens our eye to the fact that aesthetic is not only about physical phenomenon but mental objects inclusive. The appreciation of the work of art is tied to human perception which included taste, smell, touch, sight and hearing respectively. Beauty, order and harmony are key to aesthetics. In effect, aesthetics is the area that studies beauty, order, and harmony. This is the domain of fine and applied arts, music and theatres arts" (Enuwosa, 11). Butler also referred to aesthetics as the theory of beauty" (29).

Essentially, beauty remains one of the concepts that African scholars always want to x-ray. In essence, Nyong saw esthetics as the study of standard of beauty. To him,

aesthetics deals with the goodness in things, and it probes into the role beauty plays in human life. 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? (8). 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. These two questions demand an answer. A work of art may be beautiful to one, ugly to another. Where then is beauty in the eye of the beholder? Another important question for aestheticians is, what are the essential characteristics of beauty? We have beauty in sculpture, painting, drama, poetry, etc. They all have something in common. However, Ogbinaka cited by Nyonghe opines thus:

Aesthetics is also called the „philosophy of art“. It therefore attempts to provide a distinguishing definition for works of arts, thereby trying to assess the essential formal, geometrical, emotional, attitudinal, psychological, ethical, expressional, etc properties or elements a work of art ought to have, or otherwise, for its evaluation. Aesthetics comprises the double task of understanding beauty, enjoyment of intrinsic value appearing as if in an object, and art, instruments made for the purpose of originality, assisting in achieving, or maintaining experiences of beauty” (8).

The understanding of aesthetics as one of the essential component of axiology is root structured towards a quality appreciation of the works of art. It provides originality and competent factors the aid the authentic appreciation of all that has to do with aesthetics. Oroka on his part also says that aesthetics deals with the principles of beauty, and harmony as in the creative arts, including music...” (6). Judging from the human perspective, it is believed that everybody seems to be interested in the concept of beauty. To this end, Greer is of the view that the subject of beauty is critical to many people despite racial, cultural and gender boundaries” (Greer, 1999). The truth about beauty is that, it does not select, it is not share in prejudices. Beauty is central to human feeling. A man can go a long way to appreciate the beauty in his enemies knowingly or unknowingly. Hence, beauty has no boundary.

AFRICAN (IBIBIO) CONCEPT OF BEAUTY

The concept of beauty in Ibibio had gained wide contributions from different scholars. To this end, Isiramen opined thus:

This beauty in nature is absolute, objective, ontological, and transcendental, disseminating the inherent infinite attributes and perfections of the beauty of God. The ontological beauty in nature is the prototype, archetype, paradigm, or exemplar of beauties of all particular aesthetic objects. The people of Ibibio origin equally love, appreciate, and desire beauty, but many of them do not understand the intrinsic nature of aesthetic beauty. In an elucidatory description, aesthetics is a branch of axiology basically concerned with the nature of art-expression and appreciation. 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. The aesthetic judgement 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 (Isiramen, 12).

This goes to show that beauty remains an attractive element of man's life everywhere, and at all times. The Ibibio people hold beauty in high esteem in their dealings with nature. In a more comprehensive analysis of nature of 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" (Kalusi, 16). Beauty is one of the most precious gifts of nature to man which man himself is part of. It shows that the appreciation of beauty in the works of art and music is worthwhile.

However, the concept of beautiful in Africa tends to bespeak of external and internal qualities of a person or object. Moreover, the concept of beautiful in Africa bears some moral intonations beyond *teleos*. In the language of *Shona* in Zimbabwe; the word *kunaka*" (beauty) denotes well-groomed character and physical attractiveness" (Matiza, 2013). More importantly, Annang/Ibibio of Akwa Ibom origin, the word *ntuen-akpo*" is used metaphorically to refer to a woman who only has physical attractiveness, adorned with facial beauty but lack good manners. To this end Ibanga is of the view that:

Ntuen-akpo is a type of attractive pepper that can hurt the tongue when tasted or eaten. A woman described as ntuen-akpo is usually avoided, despised and not desired or valued despite her sparkling physical beauty. On the other hand, a woman who is rich in terms of good manners but lack in physical attractiveness is not often desired by the le crème of the society; and despite her good behaviours, if she attends a function she is given a relegated place away from public glare. (8)

However, in the African contexts there are two ways about it, there is the internal beauty which is usually seen through someone's deeds and the external beauty of which is seen by physical eyes. Beauty is not for the sake of being beautiful. Beauty, has social character; rather than being individualistic, it is communal. From African perspective, the concept of beauty has to have a purpose which it fulfils" (Matiza, 63-65).

Beauty without value is useless, meaningless and valueless. In effect, Baqie opines thus: beauty must serve to communicate values, norms, morals, and purpose. Beauty must edify the community. Beauty of a person or thing should be participatory and interconnectivity rather than individualistic; and should be meaningful only in the context of the acceptable standards of the community (Baqie, 14). It on this note that this research is interested in setting out to discuss the concept of beauty from the Ibibio perspective.

THE CONCEPT OF BEAUTY IN THE ANCIENT PERIOD

According to John Armstrong in *The Secret Power of Beauty*, beauty has been a focus of philosophical enquiry for centuries and the way beauty has been described has been subject to the conceptions of reality held at different times. This is because beauty is not eternal and constant but culturally dependent. Indeed, beauty has a beguiling capacity to be described in ways that are not true in all cases. For example, one can argue that beauty can be found in the ugly, but not all ugly things are beautiful" (24).

For classical Greek philosophers, the divine realm was privileged over human thought. In this metaphysical world-view the divine (or the ideal) realm was seen to be the source of wisdom, truth and beauty. (3) The structure of the soul was not regarded as being independent from the divine realm but rather as being aligned with it, an idea that differs markedly from our current understanding. (4) This classical conception of reality led Pythagoras, a mathematician of the sixth century BC, to apply a discovery he made in the field of music to a theory which he felt could explain the beauty of the world and human responses to beauty. (5)

Pythagoras discovered that a note plucked from one string would harmonise with a note plucked from another string that was exactly half the length of the original string. Pythagoras concluded that behind the apparent confusion of the observable world lies a mathematical order, and that the concept of beauty is a 'matter of mathematical proportion'. Pythagoras believed that the 'structure of the soul is essentially the same as the structure of the universe'. So, it was no surprise to him that when people are happy they are said to be in harmony with the world and, by contrast, when people are feeling discordant with the world, there is a problem. (Kuhns 6-9)

The idea that the essence of beauty is to be found in the mathematical structure and order was also held by the nineteenth century scholar, Eric Newton, thus: the basis of beauty in the observable world is 'the underlying mathematical behaviour of phenomena apprehended intuitively'. (55) Similarly, the conception of Beauty, Truth and Reason in the fifth century BC had the Greek philosopher Socrates believe that only philosophers 'can know true realities, perfect truth and beauty and goodness; and that it was their role to instruct and legislate 'on the kind of aesthetic environment which will nurture good men' (Beardsley 7).

Socrates believed that artists were mere imitators of things, and that they were incapable of knowing their own best interests. Beauty, along with goodness and truth, were moral issues considered necessary in the promotion of public welfare. 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. Plato held that beauty was one of the ideal forms in the metaphysical realm which was apprehended by the mind and not the senses. (Beardsley 8)

Furthermore, Kuhns explained that 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 senses, they were seen as an obstacle to insight into the ideal realm." Others consider that sensual experience to be as much a mental activity as that of thought and reflection. Despite this counter argument a remnant of Plato's position, in which he posits that attention to the senses which beauty elicits is an obstacle to truth, is still evident. In the fourth century BC Aristotle, who was a student of Plato, wrote that the beauty of a living thing, or a work of art, displays a unity in variety and an integration of parts which would be spoiled if anything was added or subtracted. (17).

MEDIEVAL PHILOSOPHERS PERSPECTIVE OF BEAUTY

The medieval age is marked by the beginning of St. Augustine. Highly influenced by the Platonist and Neo-Platonist thought, his views are related to philosophy of art in his autobiographical work *The Confessions*. The study on art from the writings of St. Augustine is tedious since the ideas are strewn variedly, however, the crux of it is

presented here. By using the words *ex nihilo* and *ex material*. He distinguishes the creation of God and the human creation, that of the artists. He did not opine the imitation of nature of Forms as held by Plato.

Augustine held nature superior, as creation of God that forms the material for the artists. Unlike Plato, he found a kind of truth in the poetic compositions. He considered False as that which tends to be what it is not. In this connection, he divides falsehood into two, one as the deception brought about by nature and two, the deception carried by the living beings. The deception by the living beings he further classifies as practical and deliberate illusions and deceptions only to amuse. He distinguishes the poetic or the artistic falsity as the deceptions for amusement.

Hence, he does not favour the idea of Plato that poets are liars or flatterers. The intention of the artists, says Augustine is not to deceive. He mirrors the view of Plotinus when he says God's beauty emanates to nature in the act of creation. Initially, he says, matter was formless 'without any beauty' and describes a hierarchy of beautiful things. He recognizes the evil in the line of beauty. Thus, ugly finds a place in the description of art by Augustine. For him, that which is ugly serves as the medium to bring beauty prominently and contrasts thereby contributing to the effectiveness of beauty.

According to Armstrong, the next major revision to the way in which beauty was envisaged in Western thought occurred during the medieval period when the dominant religion in Europe was Christianity. At that time, the sun of human beauty was said to be obscured by the moon of divine beauty. Theologians believed that God was the first and ultimate artist and that there were 'two forms of beauty, one human, superficial, and relative, and one divine, real, and objective, which is its cause'. Clement of Alexandria described 'God as the true beauty' while Ficino wrote that 'Beauty is the attraction of the soul back to its origin in God; it is God as attraction'. Light was associated with beauty during the medieval period, 'light itself being held to be the most beautiful of things'. Aquinas identifies 'three conditions of beauty- integrity, harmony, and clarity' and he defined beauty as a 'certain proportion and lustre that meant not only bright colours... but also the showing forth of the essence of a thing" (Armstrong, 23). He arrives that beauty belongs to the nature of formal cause in the following manner:

1. Beauty and goodness in a thing are identical as they are based on the same Form
2. Goodness is praised as beauty
3. Goodness is logically different from Beauty
4. Goodness has the aspect of an end; Beauty relates to the cognitive faculty and the beautiful things are those which please when perceived.
5. Hence, beauty consists in due proportion; for the senses delight in things duly proportioned like every cognitive faculty
6. Since knowledge is assimilation and similarity relates to form,
7. Beauty appropriately belongs to the nature of a formal cause (23).

In dealing with the question 'whether god wills evils', he describes the view of St. Augustine according to whom out of all things is built up the admirable beauty of the universe wherein even that which is called evil, properly ordered and disposed,

commends the good. For him, God wills that appertains to the perfection and beauty of the universe. While Augustine positions evil in the line of beauty, Aquinas argues that it refers to the intermediary cause. Aquinas takes up the argument on 'whether god can do better than what he does'. He resorts to the position of Augustine that each thing that God has created is good, and taken all together they are very good, because in them all consists the wondrous beauty of the universe. Beauty is the key element to substantiate that the creation of God is good. (23-24)¹

BEAUTY IN THE EYES OF SOME CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHERS

In our day-to-day lives, it is often easy to describe things as beautiful. Some would say, is all around us if we look hard enough. As John Cage has observed, 'Beauty is now underfoot wherever we take the trouble to look.' (4) The word 'beautiful' can be applied to many things: days; people; buildings; images; sounds; flowers; landscapes; clothes; music – to the music of Vivaldi, Beethoven, Stravinsky or Schoenberg – the list goes on, but what is it that makes all of these things 'beautiful'?

What is it that links them in this way? There appears to me to be no quality that could be common to each of these things – other than perhaps their ability to affect the way we feel in one way or another – yet they can all be described using the same word, so, what does it mean to be beautiful? If beauty was to be located within an object it makes sense to expect all beautiful objects to share some common attribute, however as this is not the case, beauty must be located outside the object itself, and so the question now is what is beauty and what does the word 'beauty' actually mean?

However, Glenn Parsons expresses this question in his essay on beauty and public policy thus: 'When we say 'this is beautiful', what are we saying? One simple and intuitive answer is that we are simply expressing a liking or preference for the thing in question. So saying 'that dress is beautiful' equates to 'I like that dress'. This answer to our question gains plausibility from the great diversity of things that people call beautiful: dresses, faces, sunsets, cars, paintings, songs, scientific theories, chess moves, and so on. What could all of these very different things have in common, except the fact that in each case, the speaker likes that thing? The beautiful dress has a striking colour, but the chess move has no colour at all; the beautiful song has a catchy melody, but the beautiful sunset is silent; and so forth. Thus, we seem to be left with only the positive feeling of the speaker – a liking – as the only common element that makes them all beautiful.' (5)

Parsons' problem with this answer is that it is too simple. Equating beauty with liking is not a satisfactory explanation because 'if we can explain our liking for something in terms of its beauty, then its beauty cannot be the reason for that liking. If it was, then our explanation would be no explanation at all: in response to 'why do you like it?' we would say 'because I like it'. If beauty can be a reason for our likings, as it clearly can, then beauty cannot be equated with those likings.' (6)

According to Steiner to be beautiful is to be valued," suggesting that beautiful objects, such as beautiful artworks or musical works, need have no merit or purpose other than simply being, in order for them to be valuable. (7) Furthermore, in saying this, Steiner implies that something is automatically of value because it is beautiful, which means that the concepts of beauty and value are inextricably linked. Steiner states that 'Value is thus always central to the meaning of beauty.'

CONCEPT OF BEAUTY IN THE IBIBIO TRADITIONAL THOUGHT SYSTEM

Historically, the Ibibio people validly occupy a geo-political entity called Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria located in the south-east corner of Nigeria. The history of the origin of the Ibibio people is controversial in many historical records. Some historians have postulated a Cameroon origin. Others are of the opinion that the Ibibio people originated from Central Benue Valley, the central dispersal area of all Bantus.

Thus, Talbot cited in Noah states that the region occupied by the Ibibio with its forest abounding in wild fruits, its waters teeming with fish, and salt to be obtained from the mangroves and sea water, may have been inhabited from very early times. The Ibibio are the most ancient descendants of the Semi-Bantu people in Nigeria (9).

Furthermore, recent scholarship has increasingly tended to reinforce the belief that Southern Nigeria has been peopled for a very long time. Persuasive speculations have been made both by Armstrong and Posnasky that based on antiquity and continuity of the major linguistic groups of Southern Nigeria, population movements and migrations into the area might have involved small groups of people trickling through the forest belt over a longer period of time ever before the expansion of the bantu-speaking peoples. In effect, Noah cites Talbot as arguing that by 7000 B.C., firm formations of some of the ethnic groupings in the area had begun. In another work, Talbot records that in origin the Ibibio language is probably the most ancient of all the semi-Bantu languages indeed, according to certain traditions it is older than the Ijaw” (10).

According to Uwem, the Ibibio live in South Eastern part of Nigeria. They are the fourth largest ethnic group in Nigeria and the oldest ethnic group in the country. The present-day Akwa Ibom area occupied by the Ibibio was described by colonial authorities as the six Ibibio districts of Calabar Province consisting of Abak, Eket, Ikot Ekpene, Itu, Opobo (now Ikot Abasi) and Uyo. The ancestors of the Ibibio people are believed to have occupied the Central Benue valley along with other population upon their arrival from further North”. While in the region, they evolved the proto-Bantu language and other religious and social institutions, including the conception of God” (129).

According to him, from the Central Benue valley, they dispersed to Usak Edet region on the Nigerian side of the Cameroon Mountain from where they accessed present-day Ibibio area via the sea. From this point, a section of them migrated and settled at Ibom in present-day Abia State, established a functional socio-political organisation including the much revered Ibritam Inokon (the Long Juju of Arochukwu). After many generations, scarcity of land triggered conflict between the Ibibio and the Aro Igbo. The Aro Igbo sought an alliance with a group of mercenaries known as Akpa. The alliance resulted in the defeat and expulsion of the Ibibio from Ibom. The arrival of the new wave of migrants triggered massive dispersal within Ibibio land. It should be noted that as is common in race formation, every group in Ibibio has mixed up with some other groups. Indeed, strictly speaking, there is no homogenous population anywhere in the world. The Ibibio themselves were a part of some other group or groups before they broke off to establish, over many centuries, a distinctive identity of their own today” (129-130). Similarly, Edet Akpan Udo writes thus:

The Ibibio-speaking people belong to the semi-Bantu stock whose cradle land has been located in the Central Benue valley...to this group belong Boki, Gayi, Yakoro. Akunakuna, Abine, Yakur, Asinga, Ekuri, Ukelle, Opoto, Mteze, Olulomo...from their cradle land to the Cameroon area south west wards through the equatorial rainforest to the Savannah grassland...using as they did the Cross River and its tributaries, they reached Ibom, now in Arochukwu, and later Itu in modern Ibibio land... (14).

Explaining further, Abasiattai states that:

In the course of moving from the Central Benue woodlands into the forest region, the ancestors of the Ibibio further developed their methods of procuring food, their language, religion and social organisation, and microlithic technology. They consolidated their hunting and gathering and possibly vegecultural techniques into agriculture during the first century A.D. when similar agricultural developments are known through archaeology to have occurred among the Bantu people, who dispersed into Central Africa. Their technology also advanced to include the use of iron (16).

This suggests that the history of the Ibibio origin remains like a matter without a specific record and certainty. The history seems to be more of speculation than an assured fact. Many scholarly works are silent on this matter. However, this work can only build upon the testimonies that are available.

AESTHETICS VALUES IN IBIBIO CULTURE

Expanding the meaning and place of values, Idang is of the view that, the value of a thing, be it an object or a belief, is normally defined as its worth. Just as an object is seen to be of a high value that is treasured, our beliefs about what is right or wrong that are worth being held are equally treasured. A value can be seen as some point of view or conviction which we can live with, live by and can even die for. This is why it seems that values actually permeate every aspect of human life. For instance, we can rightly speak of religious, political, social, aesthetic, moral, cultural and even personal values. We have observed elsewhere that there are many types and classifications of values. As people differ in their conception of reality, then the values of one individual may be different from those of another. Life seems to force people to make choices, or to rate things as better or worse as well as formulate some scale or standard of values. Depending on the way we perceive things we can praise and blame, declare actions right or wrong or even declare the scene or objects before us as either beautiful or ugly. Each person, as we could see, has some sense of values and there is no society without some value system (4).

The aesthetic values, of Ibibio culture lie in her language, culture, mode of communication and religious practices; and other aesthetic motivated practices such as *mbopo* (the *fattened* maidens) amongst others. Language consists of the spoken form (speech) and the written form (writing) as well as signs. It is the primary means of human communication. Language as a means of communication which allows us to discuss the past and the future, to share our experiences with others, and to benefit from their experiences" (Kottack, 159).

Based on the foregoing, it can be argued that the use of language is crucial in the socio-cultural existence of 'man'. Through this multi-dimensional existence of man, it is

possible to discover the varied world-views and patterns of thought and ways of performing activities in every society. Since language is the carrier of culture, its role in socio-cultural continuity is found in the indigenous means of communication in different societies. Language is what people in a community acquire and the oral aspect is the spoken heritage of a people like Ibibio language (Okon, et al. 25).

Communication is the process by which one person, through the use of available and visual symbols, engenders meaning in one or more listeners” (Anderson et al, 407). Communication involves all acts of transmitting messages to channels which link people to the languages and symbolic codes which are used to transmit messages, the means by which messages are received and stored, and the rules customs and conventions which define and regulate human relationships and event (James et al. 20). In addition, Okon notes that the transfer of information through the use of symbols can be verbal or nonverbal, or both. These means of communication are seen in the use of plants and town criers, among others, by the Ibibio (26).

The aesthetic values of Ibibio culture is also found in her concept of religion and sacrifices. According to Aniekan, the Ibibio Concept of religion goes synonymously with her concept of sacrifice. As a matter of fact, sacrifice constitutes the essential element in Ibibio traditional religion. The Ibibio, like every other people easily perceive their imperfection, and consequently attain the idea of a perfect being, which is solely responsible for the wonders of creation and the cosmic order, and natural disasters (earthquake, flood, lightning and thunder), rain and sunshine are all enigmatic to the average Ibibio man as he has no specific explanation for them. This then induces him to go in search for more security, long life, wealth and children. Thus, he presupposes the existence of a creator, an eternal order, anuncaused causer”, in whom all the explanations of the mysteries of creation subsist. It is this being, who is called *Abasi* (God) that created the world, sustains it, provide the order in it, and also accounts for its mysteries nature (121).

Moreover, for the Ibibio, this being is not alone in His abode. There are other supernatural being which help pilot the affairs of the world and of man in particular. They also believe in the existence of evil or malignant spirit who is continually in hunt for human life in the world. These are called *mfummfumekpo* (The wandering spirit). The Ibibio concept of sacrifice therefore comes as a result of their continuous search for security in life, and this they believe can be found in only God (*Abasi*). And as a good child, who is always seeing to please the father, when asking for favors, the Ibibio resort to sacrifice to God who is capable of providing their needs. They prefer to lose what is most dear to them in order to please God, so as to receive favours and protection from Him. They believe that by accepting their sacrifice, God is obliged to react to their petitions and thanksgiving. For them, *Abasi* (God) who is far off cannot be approached directly. Thus, they use the intermediaries of other spirits, deities and divinities, who they believe are nearer to God (Aniekan, 121).

Similarly, they also offer sacrifices to malignant spirit to abate their malicious intervention in human affairs, or to help punish, torment or kill their enemies. The Ibibio understand sacrifice as, 'A material offering made to God through the intermediaries of spirits, deities and ancestors, with the hope of pleasing them and thereby achieving the desired goal, which can be either positive or negative. Thus, animals are slaughtered, and food and drinks are offered for this purpose. The Ibibio

religious culture is therefore all about ritual sacrifice, as families, villages, clans and communities have their different times to offer sacrifice to their gods, God and ancestors, this is done for protection of their kids and kin, families, villages and clans (Aniekan, 122).

The concept of aesthetic values, is clearly presented by Idang as follow:the African concept of aesthetics is predicated on the fundamental traditional belief system which gave vent to the production of the art. Now art is usually seen as human enterprise concerned with the production of aesthetic objects. Thus, when a people in their leisure time try to produce or create objects that they consider admirable, their sense of aesthetic value is brought to bear. If we see art as being concerned with the production of aesthetic objects, then we can truly say of African aesthetic value that it is immensely rich. Let us have an example: the sense of beauty of the Ibibio people is epitomized in their fattened maidens whom they call *mbopo*. These fattened maidens are confined to a room where they are fed with traditional cuisines. The idea behind it is to prepare the maiden and make her look as good, healthy and beautiful as possible for her husband. This is usually done before marriage and after child birth. Apart from this, they are taught how to live moral life and show respect in marriage, etc. The Western model of beauty is not like this. It is often pictured as slim-looking young ladies who move in staggered steps. This shows that the African aesthetic value and sense of what is beautiful is markedly different. Aesthetic value is what informs a people's arts and crafts as it affects their sense of what is beautiful as opposed to that which is ugly. The aesthetic value of a society influences the artist in his endeavour to produce aesthetic objects that are acceptable to the society in which he lives (105).

These and more are the areas where the aesthetic values of Ibibio culture are found. These values are very essential in Ibibio history.

WHO IS A BEAUTIFUL PERSON IN IBIBIO ORIGIN?

It is a truism that beauty is a universal phenomenon, because beauty is generally appreciated, loved, desired, liked, accepted and even pursued. Philosophically, beauty is essentially ontological, objective, and absolute because it is the revelation and indication of the infinite perfection of God, the creator of all things. However, this meaning of beauty has been misinterpreted, and distorted by many... the aesthetician tries to understand that his aesthetic object is his thought over a speech or an action (Enomah, 109). Inferentially, the aestheticians believe that one of the authentic sources of achieving personal beauty is attitude and behavior.

According to Ibanga...beauty-in-person progresses directly proportional to a person's age in a positive direction until middle age, and progresses inversely proportional to a person's age as he/she gets older. In other words, a person gets more beautiful as he/she grows older from birth. However, beauty-in-person declines or deteriorates when the individual get to the peak of the prime of his/her age; and declines further as he/she gets older. The peak of the prime of a person age is middle age which range from 50 to 55 years in male and 45 to 50 years in female. Once a person passed the middle age, beauty-in-person starts to diminish. ...beauty-in-object progresses directly proportional to an object's age in a negative direction. That is to say, that an art object gets uglier as it gets older in age; except perhaps when care and attention is continually given upon such object. An art object attains the peak of beauty at the point of complete creation. But the beauty-in-object starts to decline from that point it is

fully crafted, all things being equal, until the beauty wears itself out in the object. It is noteworthy that beauty-in-person and beauty-in-art can be amended in upward direction. However, beauty-in-art cannot be amended to attain the prime stage which it was when the moment it was definitely created; and beauty-in-person, once it passed its prime, cannot be amended to be like the state it were before its prime” (256).

There is no direct specification as to who can be said to be beautiful in Ibibio aesthetic concept. To this end, Ibibio saying goes *uyai* (beauty) *ikwerebe ke okpo iso.*” This means beauty does not end in or determined on the face. However, it can be inferred that anyone who is capable of promoting, sustaining, directing and restructuring Ibibio values can be held as a beautiful man. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder they say.

A CRITIQUE OF THE CONCEPT OF BEAUTY

The concept of beauty has been an interesting issue in history and even today. Aestheticians who admire it often struggle to present it in a more palatable manner. In this connection, Susan avers that: beauty can illustrate an ideal; perfection. Or, because of its identification with women (more accurately, with Woman), it can trigger the usual ambivalence that stems from the age-old denigration of the feminine. Much of the discrediting of beauty needs to be understood as a result of the gender inequality. Misogyny, too, might underlie the urge to metaphorize beauty, thereby promoting it out of the realm of the 'merely' feminine, the unserious, and the specious. For if women are worshiped because they are beautiful, they are condescended to for their preoccupation with making or keeping themselves beautiful. Beauty is theatrical, it is for being looked at and admired; and the word is as likely to suggest the beauty industry (beauty magazines, beauty parlors, beauty products) the theatre of feminine frivolity as the beauties of art and of nature. How else to explain the association of beauty i.e., women with mindlessness? To be concerned with one's own beauty is to risk the charge of narcissism and frivolity. Consider all the beauty synonyms, starting with the 'lovely,' the merely 'pretty,' which cry out for a virile transposition (211).

Since beauty has social implication the Ibibio concept beauty is an exception as it is interrelated to the concept of beauty in African worldview. The Ibibio belief system is enshrined in her rich cultural heritage. The appreciation of the rich cultural heritage of Ibibio is a direct definition/expression of the beauty she is bequeathed with naturally.

The Judeo Christian Bible opined thus: “And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good” (Genesis 1:31). By this, God declared the whole of creation aesthetically beautiful. However, through a careful observation of reality demonstrated in Ibibio concept of beauty, we can say that it appeals to man's sensory faculties of hearing, seeing, feeling, tasting, or smelling in different ways. This is true because not every phenomenon appears good or beautiful to all at the same time. It is based on this instance that creatures such as snakes, monkeys, millipedes, mosquitoes, worms, lizards, etc are both ugly and beautiful at the same time to different people. Therefore, the works of art in Ibibio could be expressed using an aesthetic property such as beautiful, graceful, gorgeous, charming, handsome, spectacular, dull, unattractive, etc. *via* any form of influence. Finally, Ibibio concept of *uyai* (beauty) could also be appreciated geometrically, emotionally, attitudinally, psychologically, ethically and expressionally. To this end, the enjoyment of the intrinsic value of Ibibio concept of beauty appears plausible as it concerns itself with African worldview.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This research has it that the Ibibio of Nigeria are one of the oldest Benue-Bantu tribes of Sub-Saharan Africa. It further observed that written accounts are generally silent when it comes to the subjects of where the people of Ibibio originated from. Apart from the vague testimonies of their antiquity in the present location where they occupy, information on the origin of the Ibibio people is scanty and very speculative. It can also be observed that the word Ibibio” is both an ethnic and a linguistic term; that the people formerly had no name to which they referred to themselves as a whole. The Ibibio society was a highly structured one, with its hierarchies and social classes, whether political, social, religious or military organizations. The Ibibio speaking people occupy the extreme southern corner of Nigeria.

Furthermore, *Uyai*, means beauty in the Nigerian language of Ibibio, and it's a fitting title for this beautiful record. Awash in exultation and infused with melody, *Uyai* is a gorgeous vision of international pop. This work also established that the aesthetic values, of Ibibio culture lie in her language, culture, a mode of communication and religious practices and other aesthetic motivated practices such as *mbopo* (the *fattened* maidens) amongst others. In addition, the Ibibio word *ntuen-akpo*” is used metaphorically to refer to a woman who only has physical attractiveness, adorned with facial beauty but lack good manners. This makes the concept of beauty in Ibibio (African history) to remain an inexhaustible phenomenon.

In conclusion, it is objective to say beauty is in the eye of the beholder. This is true because when many people think about beauty as concept in Africa, many people will think only of nature lover. While we could spend the entire time talking about the natural beauty of Africa, there is nothing more beautiful about a place than its people. It is on that note that the aesthetic judgement of a people (Ibibio) 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.

There are numerous shrines used by various ethnic group in Nigeria and one of such used by Ibibio ethnic group in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria is *Nwommo*. Since time immemorial, *Nwommo* served as traditional museum preserving traditional paraphernalia of Ibibio society. These traditional paraphernalia includes all kinds of objects ranging from carved wooden objects and figurines to cast iron and bronze objects. These objects gave identity to the people of Ibibio land. The beauty of these objects formed an astonishing and envious attraction to the Ibibio nation.

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