

A REFLECTION ON THE VALUES OF ART AND AESTHETIC IN AN AFRICAN (YORUBA) THOUGHT SYSTEM

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a philosophical reflection on the values of African art and aesthetics. Using the Yoruba traditional society and artefacts as our springboard, the paper employs the descriptive and analytical method of philosophy to explicate the meaning and place of art and aesthetic among the Yoruba people. The paper underpins the idea that beyond the recreational and decorative values that may be placed on artefacts, there are socio cultural, economic, political, religious, and other values that do not only point to the world views of the Yoruba in particular and Africans in general but also to the ethical, epistemic and metaphysical beliefs of the traditional lives of the people. While the paper upholds the interconnection between ethics and aesthetics, it argued that aesthetical consideration of artefacts among the Yoruba does not rely on the objects of art on the surface value but with critical consideration of the real essence of the objects of art. Hence, the paper underscores the concept of *Ewa* 'beauty' to be very fundamental in aesthetical analysis of artefacts among the Yoruba people.

Keywords: Art, Artefacts, Aesthetics, Yoruba, Ewa

INTRODUCTION

The contention on whether there is or there can be African philosophy was for some time a subject of debate which attracted many philosophers' attention with various themes and discussion of what African philosophy is or how it can be explained. While this is not the focus of this paper, it is worth mentioning that the discussions have placed African philosophy and its study on the global footing. One of the discussions however, does not only affirm the existence of African philosophy but also proves that philosophy has been in existence before the introduction of Greek philosophy (Oguejiofor 41). The argument therefore, is that it is the African philosophy, through the Egyptian connection, that influenced

the emergence of philosophy in Greece. If we accept this view, it follows then, that there would not have been what is called Greek philosophy today if African philosophy did not exist. Greek philosophy, according to Oguejiofor is nothing but child of Egyptian philosophy, which is African. Thus, the historical Egyptian civilization came with true philosophical enterprise that provided the ground for the Greece.

The claim that Greek philosophy and civilisation originated from Africa and precisely Egypt, provides the ground for the originality of the African art. This claim is corroborated by Onyewuenyi (21) when he asserts:

Greece was a colony of the Egyptian Kingdom, that Greeks, the so called the fathers of philosophy, came to Egypt and studied under the Egyptian mystery priest-philosophers, and that the theories and doctrines of the Greeks were influenced by their study in Africa.

Perhaps, it should be maintained that the assiduosity of the originality of the African thoughts concerning its own world-view as well as the aesthetic and artistic conception is strengthened by the philosophical idea of "African Centeredness" otherwise known as Afrocentrism. The claim of this philosophical school is that:

...the true authors of Greek philosophy were not the Greeks, but the people of North Africa called Egyptians; that the praise and recognition given to Thales, Plato, Socrates, Aristotle and Pythagoras belong properly to Egyptians of North Africa, and by deduction to Ethiopians of Central Africa (Oyewuneyi 22).

Given the foregoing, it is an exercise in the right direction for Afrocentrism and African Scholars to make a conscious positive effort to re-establish, recover and rediscover, what has been destroyed and/or stolen from Africa and/ or even denied Africans be it cultural, artistic, economic, scientific or philosophic thought. Be that as it may, it is important to maintain that the originality or the authenticity of African art as well as the works of Africans in this respect with the aesthetic evaluation of them are peculiarly African. This paper therefore, seeks to espouse the idea of art and aesthetics as an integral part of the African (Yoruba) traditional cultural thought and belief system before the advent of western philosophy.

THE IDEA OF AESTHETICS AND ARTS

Aesthetics is a branch of philosophy that is concerned with the study of an important area of reality. According to Ade Ali (4),

It is a form of philosophical contemplation, which handles critical application of philosophy to the general and theoretical studies of art as well as the works of art and the experiences connected with such works.

Going by Ali's position, aesthetics can be described as a critical reflection on the techniques and skills which human beings bring to bear in the development of their intellectual and material lives. It can therefore, be ascribed to the study of all works of art. In this regard, we can simply define it as the critique and elucidation of all forms of works of art. By 'art', we mean an organised study or a field of study responsible for the creation of various forms of works of art. In the same vein, Nicolai Hartmann (8) sees it as a philosopher's reflection on the works of art. In this philosophical reflection and bringing to bear philosophical perspectives on a work of art, he brackets other perspectives other than the philosophical, and focuses on the sublime (Brandy 4).

Carlos Miranda, as cited in Abimbola and Falola (268) defined art as "an enduring and continually communicative record of man's emotional response to his environment." In other words, art is a specific form of consciousness and human activity that reflects reality in artistic images and it is one of the most important means of aesthetic comprehension and portrayal of the world (Ali, 101). According to the Oxford Dictionary,

Art is the expression or application of human creative skill and imagination, typically in a visual form ..., producing works to be appreciated primarily for their beauty or emotional power.

Generally, art is commonly used to refer to crafts and special works of art like building, sculpture, architecture, painting, music, dancing and the likes. In short, art refers to special skill, which is even applied as a system of rules to facilitate the performance of certain actions, be it as opposed to nature or science.

In philosophical consideration, art is an all embracing phenomenon. It is a kind of abstraction that is general or universal to all forms of art. It refers to the intellectual virtue for making things as well as "the right reason for making things (*recta ratio factibilun*)" (Nwoko 17). In this context, art is more than knowledge of the principles required in producing or making beautiful or useful objects, it entails the sense and a true course of reasoning concerned with making things.

It should be pointed out that art is essentially characterised by man-made-artefacts rather than something natural. It is a continuous communicative record of man's emotional response to his environment (Listowel 16). Such things, which are technically referred to as artefacts are works of art that emerges from a variety

of artistic manifestations such as painting, drawing, sculpture, music, poem, play, literature works and many more. Usually, artistic artefacts are classified in the following forms, visual arts, verbal or musical arts, theatre arts, poetic arts, literary arts and so on. The various forms of African art also fall within these classifications.

THE YORUBA PEOPLE

The Yoruba people are more than thirty-five million (Adegboyega 264), occupying the southwestern part of Nigeria along the Republic of Benin border and extends into Republic of Benin itself. According to Eades (17), the Portuguese explorers “discovered” the Yoruba cities and kingdoms in the fifteenth century, but cities such as Ife and Benin, among others, had been standing at their present sites for at least, five hundred years before the European arrival. As argued by Adegboyega (264), “archeological evidence indicates that Yoruba people are technologically and artistically advanced.” They were living somewhere north of the Niger in the first millennium B.C., and they were then already working with iron.

Ifa theology states that the creation of humankind arose in the sacred city of Ile Ife where Oduduwa created dry land from water (Adewale 60-71). In Yoruba history, Ife was the first Yoruba city, Oyo and Benin came later and grew and expanded as a consequence of their strategic locations at a time when trading became prosperous (Akogun 3). It is important to note that the old Yoruba cities typically were urban centers with surrounding farmlands that extended outward as much as a dozen miles or more. Both Benin and Oyo are said to have been founded by Ife rulers or descendants of Ife rulers. Benin was claimed to have derived its knowledge of brass casting directly from Ife (Babatunde 17), and the religious system of divining called *Ifa* spread from Ife to all the Yoruba nations of the world.

It suffices to say that the Yoruba cultural influence has spread across the Atlantic to Europe and Asia. Yoruba traditions thrive in Brazil, Cuba, Haiti, and Trinidad and Tobago. In Haiti the Yoruba's were generally called *Anagos*. Afro-Haitian religious activities give Yoruba rites and beliefs an honoured place, and the pantheon includes numerous deities of Yoruba origin. Also, more than one-third of Afro-Brazilians claim Yoruba ancestry (Fadipe 22-23). Yoruba culture is famously visible in Bahia, Brazil, manifesting in everything from its religion to its music; in Brazil, Yoruba religious activities are called *Anago* or *Shango*, and in Cuba they are designated *Lucumi* (Akintoye 72). Traditionally, the Yorubas organized themselves into networks of related villages, towns and kingdoms; with most of them headed by an *Oba* (King) or *Baale* (a nobleman or mayor).

There are salient structures that constitute the Yoruba plethora of cultures and traditions. The most prominent are the Yoruba political structure, the social

fabric, religion, art and artefacts and many more. All these are some of the cultural tenets that define the Yoruba people before, during and after colonialism.

YORUBA (AFRICAN) WORKS OF ART

From our classifications and explanations of the meaning of art, Yoruba works of art in particular and African works of arts in general include ceramic and sculpture, painting and design, crafts and drawing, metallurgy and craft-industry, mineralogy and manufacturing as well as music, dance, drama, literature and theatre. All these can only be best understood within the artistic and aesthetic point of view of the Africans. It is in this regard that the Yoruba works of art can be explained, understood and valued.

Thus, in Africa, and particularly in Nigeria, the Mejiro cave near old Oyo and the one at Afikpo, the Sango stones among the Yoruba, the Ughavan stones of the Edos, the Swafini stones at Oruokolo in the Eastern Niger Delta, which are understood as micro lithic stone tools: the famous terra-cotta figurines of the Northern Nigeria used for iron-smelting since fifth century BC; the bronze casting artefacts found in Ile-Ife and Benin, the pottery and sculpture works of art in the East and Western regions especially as in Ife, Idofe, and Nok culture domestic pottery in the northern part ; as well as the naturalistic paintings and carvings in the area of architectural technology are all indigenous artefacts symbolic of African art. Not only that, the agricultural resources such as cocoa, cotton, coffee, millet, sorghum, and rice; as well as mineral resources like crude oil, coal, natural gas, columbite and tin do in another sense constitute the natural products in the area of natural art which also determine, in the modern day Nigeria, the advancement of food and textile technology on the one hand and mineralogy and metallurgy on the other hand.

Perhaps, we should state that like the totality of African cultural realities, Yoruba art is based on intuitive awareness of the mental to forge the artefacts of positive aesthetic value that stand to promote the goal of the society. Thus, to possess the knowledge of Yoruba art, one needs to understand the psychology of the people in terms of their beliefs, ideas, fears and hopes; their social organisations and values; their language and dialects; their literary expressions and oral traditions; their religious, social political and economic life as well as their music, arts and crafts. In short, to speak of Yoruba art is to talk about the complete way of life of the Yoruba people and the symbols, (empirical and the non-empirical) that promote that value. All these are connected with aesthetics because "the matter which an artist works with is seen by him as having intrinsic aesthetic qualities" (Koestenbaum 91). In this regard, aesthetics in Yoruba artistic and cultural sense refers to life in general, and also to the totality of vital experience, because it is that ultimate intuition the Yoruba artist expresses in his creation. The same idea goes for what can be known as African aesthetics.

From the foregoing, and our understanding of the various classifications of art among the Yoruba people made earlier in this paper, the following submissions can be made about Yoruba art:

- (1) It is a distinct approach to Yoruba and by extension African value system and artefacts from traditional mind –set, that is, from the point of view of the epistemological attitude of Yoruba and African mode of knowing.
- (2) It is an expressive embodiment as in music, sculpture, literature and so on.
- (3) It expresses an attitudinal and a behaviouristic approach to the Yoruba way of life and the complete art of living.
- (4) It is a body of value and culture (material and non-material) that is supported by the sociology, psychology, history, religion and mythology.
- (5) Yoruba art is a relative phenomenon to the Yoruba world-view as well as the cultural view and the mode of knowing and appreciation adopted by them.

It is also important to note that Yoruba art is secular, religious and mythical in some cases. There is no doubt that various myths like myths about ancestors, gods, Yoruba cosmogony exert some influences on some Yoruba artefacts. This position is corroborated by K.C. Anyanwu (100) when he writes on African art,

There are innumerable myths in Africa, which have inspired great works of art, music, oral literature, religious practices, social and political organizations, and ethical and moral norms. These include myths about gods, goddesses, ancestors and the creation of man and the world; the founding of societies and the establishment of technology; and stories about animals and their relations to man, the origin of death, and the nature of earth and water spirits.

In a nutshell, Yoruba art is not a superfluous emotional reaction to the environmental factors and nature but rather an illuminating experience offering direct insight into the nature of life. Rather than being a subjective study, it is an objective study of the activities of the craftsmen, their works of art, the motives behind their works, the aesthetic connection between the artists and their works on the one hand as well as an appraisal of the relationship between them and the society on the other hand.

TYPES OF YORUBA ART AND THEIR VALUES

Within the cultural traditions of the Africans with specific reference to the people of Yoruba South West, particularly Ogun State in Nigeria and others in general, the following kinds of art are significant: Visual Art, Verbal/oral Art, Musical Art, Literary Art, and Theatre Art.

VISUAL ART

This is a form of art that involves painting, drawing, cloth-dyeing, weaving, masking, wood-carving, pottery and all forms of architectural and

industrial designs. Each of these aspects of visual art constitutes an industry on its own and the products arising from them all constitute the works of art (artefacts) of aesthetic value. For example, dyeing, an integral part of textile industry illustrates a developed use of materials found in the environment. It epitomizes the adornment of clothing, which is still highly cherished by the people. The art of cloth-dyeing characteristically known as *Adire* symbolizes the traditional designs and various aesthetics patterns given to various favourite cloths of the Yoruba which are used during special occasions like coronation of Oba, installation of traditional chiefs, naming ceremony or house-warming ceremony, etc. The art of cloth-dyeing is an industry constituted mostly by women and few men from the ages. In the history of cloth-weaving, Abeokuta in Ogun state appears to be the centre of *Adire*-cloth industry. Other places like Oje-market in Ibadan and Oshogbo in Osun State, Onitsha in the East and Kaduna and Gusau in the North are some of the places where the art of dyeing is not only popular but also where cloth-dyeing products of aesthetic value and colouration can be found in Nigeria.

Hitherto, the craft of weaving which follows the dyeing of the reads and the art of weaving with strands of the cylindrical stem of the phrynum plants are important sectors within the Visual art. The aesthetic importance of the art of weaving in general is to promote the decorative patterns and contrasting colours of the indigenous traits of the people. These are often seen in the finished products like *Aso-Ofi* commonly found in Iseyin, Saki and some other towns in Oyo state. *Aso-Ofi*, such as *Sanyan*, *Etu*, *Alaari*, etc. has remained one of the most famous traditional dress that are usually worn during important occasion like the coronation of a new king, chieftaincy installation, wedding, naming ceremony and many more. There is also, bead making known as *Ileke*. *Ileke* is a form of jewellery designed to be worn like the modern day jewellery, which comes in different finished products like, diamond, gold, silver and so on. Aside using beads as jewellery, it is also used to decorate kings and chiefs and community leaders. A chief or community leader can be identified by the type of his or her beads. *Eni-ore* is another craft of weaving, this is usually done by the mat-weavers. Mat weaving is commonly found among the people of Omu-Eleni in Ijebu area of Ogun State. In point of fact, the community is named after the art of mat-weaving Omu-Eleni, meaning, *Omu the owner of mat weaving*. Apart from Ogun State; Oyo, Osun and some of the Northern states in Nigeria are places where the art of mat-weaving is artistically popular.

Similarly the art of pottery which is significant among the traditional Yoruba industries as it is expressed in its finished products as in water-pots, cooking-pots, domestic utensils as well as in the emblematic plaques and various other artefacts is of artistic significance. The beauty of pottery as an industry lies in the fact that it does not only serve as provider of domestic artefacts but also as a provider of decorative works of art at various tourist centres and public places.

Pictorial Examples of Visual Artworks

Picture 1



Weaved cloth popularly called *Aso-ofi*

Picture 2



Beads known as *Ileke*. This is usually worn by women on their necks, wrists, ear ring and waist. There are other special ones that are also being used as symbols by Kings and Chiefs in the community.

Picture 3



Cloth-dyeing known as *Adire* in Abeokuta

Picture 4



Wood carving used by the Yoruba to represent the goddess of wealth and prosperity – *Olokun*

Picture 5



A wooden carving that symbolises twins in Yoruba society. It is known as *Ere Ibeji*.

VERBAL/ORAL ART

The verbal art in the traditional Yoruba Culture in Nigeria consists of *Ijala* (Ogun poem), *Isipa-ode* (Hunters poem), *Ekun-iyawo* (a new brides poem), *Esa* (egungun or masquerade poem), *ofo* (incantations), *Ifa* incantations, riddles, poems, *ewi*, *oriki*, *Ege*, *Arofo* and music of all aesthetically rhythmic, poetic and dialectic styles such as *Sakara*, *Fuji*, *Apala*, *Juju*, *Seli*, *Senwele*, *Were*, etc. The products of verbal art, in most cases, belong to the realm of the deified ancestors, which exist in the form of divinities. The value of verbal art in general depends on the potency of the individual kind. For instance, while the efficacy of *ofo*- incantation is to bring into effect an occurrence or prevent a danger on the one hand. *Ijala* a poetic song of the hunters is chanted by hunters in the cause of their hunting expedition. It is usually to ginger their spirit and encourage one another while in the hunting spree. *Isipa-Ode* is also a poetic song of the hunters that is chanted in most cases to orchestrate the spirit of a departed hunter or used as a farewell to a departed colleague. *Ekun-iyawo* is a poetic song that is usually chanted during marriage

ceremony by house wives. It is meant to eulogise the parent and background of the new bride's parents and also to remind her of her background and the values that she has been taught, advise her not to deviate from the good virtues of her family is known for and also to encourage her as she embarks on another journey in life. In the same manner, *orin-ifa* (*Ifa* poems) is orchestrated either to illustrate an experience, explicate a prediction or to support the efficacy of sacrifice within the *Ifa* liturgy. It is in the same connection that *Asan*, *Ogede* or *Ofo* which are words of power or "mantras" are used evocatively to handle and evoke psychic forces of tremendous potencies.

MUSIC ART

Music art is an integral and important part of verbal art. Three different kinds of music of aesthetic flavour are discernible among the Yoruba. These are

1. Social music
2. Vocational music and
3. Religious music.

In this respect, social music are played for the embellishment and ornamentation of social occasions like child-naming, marriage, or funeral ceremonies or those linked with rites or rituals. While religious music are mandatorily ritualistic for the enhancement of the spirits of the dead or serve as appetite at religious festivals, vocational music on the other hand are both recreational, professional and it is usually for relaxation. In all, music as a work of art, is of aesthetic value because they all serve as instrument of organized sound of highly imaginative poetry and heavy interpretative percussion, which give overall pulsating and highly blended melody.

Be it in the traditional or modern society, music as a product of art by all standards is emotionally expressive and communicative. Indeed, music constitutes one of the media of expressions through which artists who are musicians not only express their feelings but also reflect on the nature and development in the society. Not only that, the educative importance of music is aesthetically significant. Most of the traditional music in this regard like religious music which enhance proceedings at festivals; vocational music like *Ijala* which is sung to boost the moral and courage of hunters going on hunting expeditions or warriors going to war; or social music like traditional *Apala* music of late Alhaji HarunaI shola and Ayinla Omowura as well as the *Sakara* music of Yusuf Olatunji and Saka Laigbaje are aesthetically educative. In the same vein, the *Juju* music of I.K Dairo, Ebenezer Fabiyi Obey, Prince Adekunle, Sunday Adeniyi (Sunny Ade) extol moral beliefs of the Yoruba and also relate to social current affairs in the society. Thus, music in this context is a work of art that promotes the cultural,

moral, religious and traditional values of the traditional Yoruba society in particular and the nation in general.

In all, music in Yoruba traditional cultural society and in African cultural context is a global verbal art and a phenomenon that embraces such important characteristic features. In the words of Ade Ali (111) music “could be socio-psychological, historical, structural, symbolic and aesthetic”. Aside, it could also be functional, cultural, moral, and sociological given the impact it has on the people and society at large. It is apt to mention some artists such as I.K Dairo, Chief Ebenezer Olasupo Fabiyi, (a.k.a. as Ebenezer Obey), Sunday Adeniyi (a.k.a. King Sunny Ade), Prince Adekunle, Idowu Animashaun (a.k.a. Apola king);, Sir Sina Peters- all of these are juju music exponents; late Haruna Ishola, Kasumu Adio, Ayinla Omowura, Saka Laigbaje who were formidable-popular *apala* music exponents; Mrs Batuli Alake, Alhaja Kuburat Alaragbo and Alhaja Salawa Abeni who were popular waka music exponent; Sikiru Ayinde (Barrister), Kolawole Ayinla (a.k.a. Kollington), Wasiu Ayinde (Marshal), Adewale Ayuba – each on his own right a popular fuji musician; Olanrewaju Adepoju and Tunbosun Oladapo who were also known for their *ewi* exponents; Fela Anikulapo-Kuti and his “Afro beat; -(a great musician of international standard), the Lijadu sisters – the soul- moving singers and many others as among those who have contributed immensely in time past and in recent times to the phenomenal growth of music industry not only in Nigeria but also in Africa.

It suffices to say here that the stimulation and the aesthetic feelings arising from the music industry would not have its full existential import without the value added to it by various musical components of indigenous importance. In this category are assorted Drums of membraphones type, sting of chordophones type and percussion of idiophones type. Each of these musical components has its own social, cultural and aesthetic value. For instance, the “talking drum” *Gangan or Dundun, Sakara* and *Bata* (a product of art as it goes with music) a product of art, does not only promote the activation of social activity but also provides the drummer the ability to utilize the final qualities of the drum in praising dancers and appraising the value cherished by the individual society. Other types of drums are *Omele, Akuba, Sekere* and so on.

By and large, the value of musical art cannot be overemphasized because it serves a medium for producing variety of music (characteristically known as works of art) which do not just provide avenue for socialization, entertainment, acculturation, unification, moralization but also serve as a medium for promoting happiness, pleasure and relaxation *cum* economic value. Not only this, some of the traditional music are known for their thematic styles. For instance, *Sakara* music which is a popular Egba traditional social music among the Youba people and as popularized by such artistes like S. Aka and Yusuf Olatunji is significant for its “lots of repetitive sentences, apostrophes, allusions, hyperboles, parallelism, word-plays” and like other music mentioned above, proverbs, moral

stories and folktales are embedded in them, which actually promotes the tradition of the Yoruba. It is in the same manner that *Gelede* organization which is connected with *efe* social music has its aesthetic value in the production of Yoruba excellence in wood-carving, painting, metal work, costume design, satire, poetry and music. The fact is that, music is part and parcel of the way of life of the Yoruba peoples.

Pictorial Examples of Musical Instruments

Picture 6



Gangan /Dundun or Talking drum

Pictures 7 and 8





Sekere Sakara. (It sometimes also serve as talking drum)

Picture 9



ABURUKUWA

Ako-omele (African percussion)

Picture 10



Omele

Picture 11

Bata (It is also used as a talking drum)

All the above labelled drums are musical instruments. They also represent Yoruba visual arts.

LITERARY ART

Literary art is another important integral part of African art. Literary production in Africa is the art of writing, documenting and formalizing the beauty of African ideas, the culture, value and the way of life of the people. The African literary artistes in this respect exist in the form of novelists, poets, playwrights etc. In Nigeria for instance, written literatures especially in Yoruba language is dated back to 1848 when late Bishop Ajayi Crowther from Western Europe translated English Bible to Yoruba language. This was due to the alphabetization of Yoruba language by the visiting Europeans who were majorly missionaries. Since that period, literary works have been produced and published in so many Nigerian principal languages: namely Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa as well as in English language which serves as the lingua franca in Nigeria.

Some notable Yoruba literary artistes of credible and proven credentials who have contributed to the growth of Yoruba literary works are late J.F. Odunjo a poet and novelist, late Chief Olu Owolabi, Wole Soyinka – the first African Nobel prize winner in Literature; Olarotimi Williams, Prof. Femi Osofisan – a playwright and theatre director; Prof. Ebun Clark, Tunde Awoleye – a playwright, dramatist and Ewi exponent; Prof. Niyi Osundare – a novelist and a poet; Prof. Ogundipe Leslie, a novelist etc. We must however, state that there are other notable Nigerians like Chinua Achebe and Ngugi Wa Thiongo whose literary works have also attracted international recognition. They constitute a host of literary contributors to the growth of African cultural dynamism and value system both at the local and international levels.

THEATRE ART

Theatre art, which exists in the form of travelling theatre, film art, and cultural displays both at local and international levels, is equally a formidable aspect of African art. Theatrical displays are important for so many reasons. The beauty of it does not lie alone in the promotion of entertainment it offers. Also, theatrical show serves as an instrument for social and cultural integration. It is one of the means of projecting the cultural image, identity and the value system of a people. In Nigeria, and most importantly in the West, a good number of theatre artistes, and dramatists had indeed contributed to the vast development of theatre art. For instance, late Chief Hubert Ogunde Moses Adejumo (a.k.a. Babasala), Duro Ladipo; Akin Sofoluwe, Chief Akin Ogungbe all these artistes were engaged in travelling theatre art both in Nigeria and outside, Jimi Solanke – a singer and an actor, as well as Chief Segun Olusola and his Television programme “Village Headmaster” are known to be worthy promoters of theatre art in Yoruba society and Nigeria.

In all, theatre art is peculiarly of value for the fact that it does not only give an insight into the people’s way of life but also project the culture of the people, the vitality of the cultural artefacts as well as enlightens and forms the means of integrating the value system. It also serves as a symbol of education, inculcation of moral standards and by extension it serves as a means of generating income for the practitioners and the society. Besides, if we are to talk of an instrument that readily promotes the unifying, homogenous, corporate, social and attitudinal nature of the people within the same cultural bound, particularly among the Yoruba, in Nigeria and in Africa, the art and culture of the people comes to the fore.

In the Western world, and to an extent, sensuous satisfaction is derived from science and technology rather than aesthetics and art. All forms of developmental drives and economic growth hooves around science and technology without none or little consideration of the ethical or moral implications on man and the possible negative effects on the society. In the West, science and technology remained the pivot of their philosophical world view with utmost dependency practically on science and technology to answer fundamental questions on issues of human existence, economic, politics, socialization and many other deepest questions. On the other hand, the Yoruba sees art and aesthetics as part of their world view, a cultural thing and although, they also derives sensuous satisfaction from aesthetics in general and art in particular, but, they look beyond this to consider many functions art could perform in the society. It is their belief that in the societies, art has a role in ethical training and the administration of justice, as well as the joy of aesthetic pleasure. It attempts a description of their belief system, be it political, religious, economic, and so on. It also answers some salient questions that borders on existence generally. Our

understanding of the Yoruba conception of the value of aesthetics and art could be corroborated by the traditional Yoruba saying, *eni to ba ri ewa ti ko woo, konipe di akuse* "anyone who meets beauty and does not look at it will soon be poor" (as quoted in Vogel1986:xvii). The Yoruba traditional art has always reflected the traditional beliefs, values, lifestyle, and realities of the people. The reality that the artefacts entails among the people as reflected in their ways of life is what makes art a vital force in the community.

It suffices to say therefore, that Yoruba art in particular and African art in general clearly depict the philosophy of the people. It could be described as the product of the interaction between the sentient human organism, that is, the Yoruba people and their natural environment. It is a way by which they interpret their world view, create an enabling environment for unity, peace, social order, economic development, religious tolerance and political relationship.

FURTHER REFLECTION ON EWA (BEAUTY) IN YORUBA ART AND AESTHETICS

Ewa is the Yoruba word for 'beauty'. *Ewa* is very fundamental in the consideration of aesthetics in Yoruba thought. It also remains an integral part of assessing any artefacts in the society. This is because the value of any object is the beauty it has. Aesthetics as pointed out earlier is the science of value and it is also the science that engages the study of artefacts and the motive behind them. The idea of beauty is essentially connected to the study. Thus, the conceptual explanation of beauty in aesthetics within experiential and contextual scheme of the Yoruba implies that the beauty of artefacts and man himself is not about the colour attached to them. In fact, the Yoruba conception of beauty is deeply ethical, metaphysical and aesthetical.

It is in these senses that beauty can be recognized in relation to the characters and the characteristics of any artefact in Yoruba traditional society. It is the quality that makes such an artefact value laden. To some people, especially in the West, beauty is either determined by or refers to the physical characteristics or posture of artefacts. To some others, as in the Yoruba and Africa in general, beauty refers to the characteristics beyond perception. The meaning of beauty lies in the essence of artefacts. The essence of an artefact therefore determines the value of life of the people in every society.

Given this, a person who has beauty in Yoruba context refers to someone who is purposeful and contributes meaningfully to the cultural, economic, political development of his environment. This is what gives a person aesthetic value. The Yoruba belief is that the essence of man lies in his beauty in character and character formation. This is why it is said in Yoruba and Igbo parlance that *Iwa lewa omo eniyan*, (character is the beauty of a person), and *mma nwayi bu agwaya* (a woman's beauty lies in her character). Therefore, beauty from an African perspective must have a moral and pedagogical content and must be relational

and socially valuable; otherwise, it leaves much to be desired. This is because a work of art does not command value in itself and by itself. Its value is, among other things, socially and normatively dependent.

They also mostly warn men not to marry a woman because of beauty- *emator iwa f'aya sile, iwa ni ewo*. There is also another saying *Iwa ni ti 'wa, Bi a ba se huu nii gbeni si* (reward is contingent upon one's character). More so, beauty as a reflective character and as applied to man in Yoruba contextual scheme is also supported by the proverb that says: *Obinrin so 'wa nu O l'ounkolorioko* (a woman lost her character and claimed that she did not have a good choice of husband)

Overall, from an African (Yoruba) perspective, a work of art is not just valuable and valued because of its entertaining, recreational and decorative content; it must also have socio-ethical content. In fact, while its recreational and decorative content may be overlooked, its socio-moral content cannot. A literary, visual, musical work etc, that has the potential to corrupt the youth, the society or its target audience, will be adjudged bad and unacceptable, its economic, decorative, and recreational content notwithstanding.

CONCLUSION

What all these claims stand to connote within Yoruba aesthetics is that beauty is not about colouration but just about essence of oneself as well as the artefact in question. Characteristically and aesthetically, the beauty of man's life is for one to have a life of purpose as well as life of fulfilment. The question in Yoruba thought that: *Ki lo wa fun?* That 'What is your essence'? is a challenging question. It is a question that presupposes that the person addressed has failed in certain respect to do what is worthy and required of him. In Yoruba aesthetics and moral life, for one to have an aesthetic value such person is expected to be his brother's keeper and be useful not just to himself but also to others. A life, which fails to satisfy such requirement, is regarded to have lost its value. Hence, aesthetic life is the basis of human existence among Yoruba people.

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