

HEIDEGGER'S CONCEPT OF ART AND THE AFRICAN CONCEPT OF ART: AN INSIGHT INTO THE DISCOURSE OF BEING AND TRUTH

Ugwu, A. Kingsley & Ngwoke, H. Chimezie (University of Nigeria, Nsukka);
Ozoemena, L. Chigozie (University of Sussex, UK)

Abstract

In this paper, we set out to make a comparative study of the Heideggerian and the African conceptions of Art. Questions as to whether there is more to just aesthetics in Arts, have recently dominated philosophic discussions among philosophers. It is in response to this that we argue in this paper that Art is not just an expression of aesthetics to both conceptions, but also has been a vehicle carrying truth, history, ideals of identity and cultural values and means through which being is revealed. The expectation from the paper is to see how similar, though from different cultural backgrounds, the Heideggerian is related to the African conceptions of what Art could mean and imply. The paper applies a comparative design and critical analysis method.

Key words: Heidegger, Art, African conception, being, truth

Introduction

In this paper, we will on one hand, expose Martin Heidegger's conception of Art and how it explains Truth and History. For Heidegger, Art is nothing but a parameter through which Truth reveals itself, History is made, and reality in its entirety keeps unfolding. In his words: *art is the becoming and happening of truth*.¹ Going further, he maintains that Art "grounds history" by "allowing truth to spring forth."² By implication, Truth is explained in Art. Suffice it thus to say that with Art, 'that which is' clearly comes to revelation and preservation. In juxtaposition, we will on the other hand explore the African conception of Art, how it connotes History and explains some philosophic concepts and ideals. For the African, Art is an aspect of History, and by this,

¹ Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," *Basic Writings* (London: Routledge, 1978), 167; Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*. A. Hofstadter, trans. (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 71; Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe*, Vol. 5: *Holzwege*. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann, ed. (Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 1977), 59

² Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 77; Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe*, 65

reality and conceptual ideas are explained through Art. Art is never separated from culture and certain traditional phenomena and values. It speaks, directs, defines and revitalizes certain important philosophical ideas and core values. It depicts and bespeaks of Truth, History and equally goes a long way in the course to explain reality. Certain concepts like Truth, Justice and Equity are defined and expressed in Artistic phenomenon. Apparently, just as Heidegger maintains that Art as a concept is never explained without the concepts of Being, Truth and History; and that it is a means through which Truth ‘comes to ‘happen’ and ‘be’ in the ‘real’ world,’ Art in the African conception explains reality, brings into the physical realm, that which is ideal, conveys the facticity of History, and finally puts into representation, the reality behind the Art itself. However, the guiding questions are: How epistemologically factual are Truth, Being, History and certain philosophical concepts revealed and explained in the work of Art considering some hermeneutical influences and human influences? How are Truth and Being particularly, represented and explained in their exactitude, in an Artwork— are Truth and Being material or immaterial? Be that as it may, the thesis this work defends is that Arts explain truth and reality, and as obtainable in the environment of the Art. In attempt to address the research questions, we will employ analytic, comparative and evaluative methods so as to present a laudable analysis of, and comparison between the Heideggerian and the African concepts of Art, and critically evaluate them.

An Exposition of Heidegger’s Conception of Art

Martin Heidegger rejects the idea that Art is all about Aesthetics which is all about the imitation of the world, and centers on the question of beauty and artistic taste. For him, Aesthetics occludes the true historical significance of Art and reduces the concepts of Being and Truth to mere visual appearances and appreciation. As such, it incapacitates the inclinations of Art to form and inform our historical worlds. He reasons that with ‘Aestheticization’ of Art, other disciplines— politics, philosophy, and other history-shaping movements— would be easily disconnected from Art, and that is an unthinkable phenomenon let alone being actualized. If this could happen, reality is no more a process-one, it will cease to unfold. To this end, for him, Art and its ontological importance to Being and Truth therefore need to be saved from the ‘Aestheticization of Art’ which Heidegger referred to, as

anchoring on Aesthetics to explain Art and which reduces Art entirely to mere 'concept of beauty'.

With 'Aesthecization' of Art, Art Galleries, Museums, etc., are created, and with these, the Artworks in them become representational and are taken out of their real historical context. So, in Art, the question of the importance of 'Art's world' ought to be accompanied with the question of its 'thingly nature' hence for him, the eagerness to unravel the 'thinglyness' of Artworks subsequently leads us to "force the work into a pre-conceived framework."³ Heidegger is more concerned about the retaining of the 'world', and 'essence' of Art because when Arts are "torn out of their own native sphere," they lose their 'world' and 'relation' to the conceiving eye and proof of the 'truth' they represent hitherto.

But Art cannot, for Heidegger, be conceived without the concept of the 'Great Art' that existed in the past especially in the 'Greek Temple' at Paestum. It is noteworthy to point out that the "Great Art is not representational but that of work being and a dynamic artistic process."⁴ However, in the above described era of the existence of Art was the era he refers to as the era when the "happening of truth" prevailed in Arts.⁵ The implication of this term means, for Heidegger, the time "a work of art would open up its own world which in turn permitted its existence."⁶ In fact, Heidegger describes this era and process as "truth at work." Nevertheless, in *Being and Time*, Heidegger shifted from the way he conceives Art as existed in Greece to a new fashion of conception which could be likened to the Platonic 'Allegory of the Cave' where 'Truth relies on a double concealment'⁷ and light is flashed on it to bring about its clear conception and concealment on the obstacles surrounding it, though there must be carefulness to ensure that on the process, truth remains tied to untruth, or the surrounding or covering darkness or obstacles or concealments. This is so important

³ Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," *Basic Writings* (London: Routledge, 1978), 167

⁴ Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," 167

⁵ Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," 168

⁶ Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," 168

⁷ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson, transl. (Blackwell, Oxford, 1962), 31-57, 251-67. See also, Jani Koskela, "Truth as Unconcealment in Heidegger's *Being and Time*" *Minerva - An Internet Journal of Philosophy* 16 (2012): 116-128

because if on the process truth is untied to untruth, truth would not remain itself and would consequently “go through a process of concealment/unconcealment in its limited form”⁸ which is worse even. This is only but a reference to the Heideggerian lamentation about the ‘concealment of truth’ by most of his predecessors, hence the necessity for the deconstruction process to unconceal the concealed— to uncover the covered truth in which *Dasein* stands in.

Art as a concept is never explained without the concepts of Being and Truth. It is a means through which Truth ‘comes to “happen” and “be” in the “real” world’. With Art, “that which is” clearly comes to revelation and preservation. In the work of Art, Heidegger contends, the creating individual (creator) unconceals “the truth-of-all-being” within an area of discourse. It brings light to unfamiliar or forgotten world. He sees Art as an indispensable aspect of reality through which history emerges, and or is kept in continuity and for posterity. Art is nothing but a parameter through which Truth reveals itself and History is made and all keep unfolding. Heidegger perceives the essence of art in terms of the concepts of being and truth. He argues that art is not only a way of expressing the element of truth in a culture, but the means of creating it and providing a springboard from which “that which is” can be revealed. It “grounds history” by “allowing truth to spring forth” and by this, Truth is explained in Art. It enhances the emergence of implicit ontology and ethics through which historical communities and individuals comprehensively align to each other and their world of histories. Cardinal, Art bestows on things their real “outlooks” and human beings their “outlooks on themselves.” The unfolding of reality is in Art, through revelation in Artistic works (“*a-lêtheiac*”) which denotes the struggle to “dis-close” or “un-conceal.” Art is thus an “essential strife” between two interconnected dimensions of intelligibility (revealing and concealing) which Heidegger calls “world” and “earth.” Art so ontologically functions between two dimensional: for *revealing* as against *concealing*. In sum, Art works in three paradigms: (1) Micro-Paradigm, (2) Paradigmatic Artworks and (3) Macro-Paradigm.

Basically, Art, and by extension, Truth, for Heidegger, are never, by the way of conception, complete without these two concepts: ‘earth’ and ‘world’. He saw the concept ‘world’ as the “openness of the broad paths of the

⁸ Gerald L. Bruns, *Heidegger's Estrangement* (London: Yale University Press, 1989), 30, 33

simple and essential decisions in the destiny of any historical people.”⁹ Put in another way, it is all about the daily ‘existence, the rules and morals’ of the existence. “The world is grounded, just as the illuminated clearing is surrounded by darkness, on the earth.”¹⁰ So, in opposition to this effect is the concept, ‘earth’ which could be seen as “the spontaneous forthcoming of that which is continually self-secluding... and concealing.”¹¹ The ‘earth’ in this way obstructs and opposes the clearing of the ‘world’ but both for a mutual agreement, a ‘binding difference and boundary’ (Der Riss or rift) and the proof of their nature. In his words: “The opposition of world and earth is striving. But... the opponents raise each other into self-assertion of their natures.”¹² At this point, the effect or influence from the thought of Heraclitus and his concept of ‘opposite’ and that of Plato and his epistemology vis-à-vis the ‘Cave Allegory’ is quite clear.¹³ Heidegger is more concerned on how to make being to emerge through the works of Art. For him, Art should not be representational, but subjectively involved and emerged. Aesthetics and its movements, he contends, have succeeded to conceal or hide the real understanding or illumination of being so as to let being be approached and known clearly and comprehensively. Just as he fights for the exhumation of Being and its real understanding from its tomb where it has been buried by misleading conceptions, he equally fights for the ‘de-objectification’ or ‘subjectification’ of being instead of its being ‘objectified’ or ‘de-subjectified’.

An Exposition of the African Conception of Art

Art is one aspect of life that is mysterious considering its creativeness. It essentially transcends mere physical representation of a person or phenomenon. It insightfully goes beyond the Artwork to picture reality and history. Bewaji is of similar view when he writes: “African art encompasses

⁹ Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 172

¹⁰ Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 172

¹¹ Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 172

¹² Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 172

¹³ Cf. Heidegger, Martin. *Off the Beaten Track* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). Translation of *Holzwege* (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 1950), volume 5 in Heidegger's *Gesamtausgabe*. See also, Heidegger, Martin. *Basic Writings*, "On the Origin of the Work of Art." 1st Harper Perennial Modern Thought Edition, (ed.) David Farrell Krell (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), 143-212

the visual and non-visual, the tangible and non-tangible elements of artistic representation and presentation, such that virtually every aspect of living constitutes a veritable domain for the preservation and application of art.”¹⁴ It also transcends Aesthetics and the whole idea of beauty. For instance, man as a creature (an Artwork) fashioned by God according to the Bible, is a statue or image that does not end in expressing his physiology and physical existence as an entity or being, but also goes beyond to express the idea and beauty of creativity, and equally the ‘beingness’ or existence of his Maker. He conveys, in himself and by his existence, the facticity of History of such an existent or being in a particular era. Put in another way, he is a truism or replica of History and fact-in-representation. He depicts the Intelligence of his Maker, his Maker’s Mind, Wish and existential mode, and finally an existential picturesque of his Maker. On the same line of thought, Bewaji further contends that

art is the expression of the compulsive, innate human tendency toward creativity. It is one of the main engagements and accomplishments of human beings, which arguably distinguishes humans from other beings, as the means by which humans are capable of focusing at the same time their intellectual consciousness and physiological dexterity to achieve and express their perception, comprehension, apprehension, annotation, expression, demarcation, appreciation and documentation of their peculiar lived realities¹⁵

Through art, man expresses his inner being and capability towards creativity and expression of the being behind such creativeness. In the African perspective, importance and essential implications of Artwork cannot be overemphasized as arts touch every aspect of the African life. For the African, Art carries in itself, History, and stands for reality of a phenomenon, an event, etc. The African metaphysics and worldview cannot be entirely explained without Artworks expressing the spirit or gods they convey and the aspects of Divine Reality they operationally are attached with. For instance, according to Abanuka, the Artwork of *Chi* “corresponds to One or Oneness. It emphasizes

¹⁴ John A. I. Bewaji, “Philosophy, Education, and Art in Africa” in Adeshina Afolayan and Toyin Falola (eds), *The Handbook of African Philosophy* (Palgrave Publications, 2016), 735

¹⁵ Bewaji, “Philosophy, Education, and Art in Africa”, 735

the characteristic of the Supreme Being as unique.”¹⁶ He further enlightens us that in the Igbo conception of gods and their aspects of Divine Reality, *Anyanwu* (Sun god) corresponds to ‘Goodness’ which conveys “the positive quality of light in so far as it affirms that the Supreme Being contains in itself all positive characteristics,” *Igwe* (Sky) “extends beyond what the eyes can see and points ‘Infinity’ of God as the Ultimate Reality,” *Amadioha* stands as ‘Knowledge’ which “reveals the power of the Supreme Being, God as infinite,” *Ala* stands as ‘Identity’ “of the Supreme Being and the whole reality,” *Ahiajoku* stands as ‘Creativity and Productivity’ of the Supreme Being in both Itself and particular things, *Agwu* stands as ‘Mercy’ which is “the healing and reconciliatory aspect of the opposites involved in Creativity,” *Ofo* stands as ‘Truth, Equity and Justice’ which ensure “that Mercy is not blind, but guided by the demands of a certain inbuilt mechanism or laws of nature or of reality as a whole,” *Agu* stands as ‘Dyad and Other’ which “closely related to Goodness” and is the “characteristic of that which is good to multiply,” *Ikenga* stands as ‘Eternity’ which expresses “the continuation or persistence in existence of individual things.”¹⁷

In the African, particularly Igbo religion, Artworks go a long way to explain religious realities just as they stand as symbols of moral and normative principles or guides. Artworks placed in the African Shrines or worship centers are as symbolical and significant as the worshipping words or prayers themselves. They convey the facticity of existence of those spiritual entities they physically represent and portray, they equally tell a factual story about the particular process, manner and system of relating (in the way of religion) with such entities in that time. For instance, the existence of *Ikenga* as a god is expressed in an Artwork that pictures *Ikenga*, and it is so personal to men exclusively as the principles behind family lineage. In time course, it goes beyond ‘men-*Ikenga* relation’ to *Onu Chukwu Oke* family worship where women and children would be involved. *Onu Chukwu Oke*, literary means ‘the mouth of God of Creation’ or ‘God of my own share’, (in this sense, ‘share’, stands for *Akara Aka* (predestination)). So, because it is tied to an activity of relationship (religion) between men and their *Ikenga* which has something to

¹⁶ Bartholomew Abanuka, *Further Critical Studies on the Igbo World* (Onitsha: Spiritan Publications, 2009), 46

¹⁷ Abanuka, *Further Critical Studies*, 46-8

do with destiny, makes it ‘personal’ and invariably portrays the fact of individuation. However, today, this *Ikenga* Artwork of worship has become so family-affair that it has metamorphosed into the institution of *Onu Anyanwu* literary meaning ‘the mouth of the Sun’— the Sun god which represents the ‘Eye of the Creator’ as the Eye that oversees everything happening on the earth. In this light therefore, ‘nothing is hidden under the Sun’ as a saying is an embedded religious practice of the Igbo Religious Conception. That presupposes that the sun is the eye of the Supreme Being through which He sees all that is happening. It is in this ontological conceptual scheme of realities that prompts the African to accord certain religious phenomena and symbolical religious Artworks, sacredness and god-hood. The reason for this is that objects and Artworks are either natural-object or portray natural being beyond their physical representation, and through that virtue, can attract other natural beings, God (the Creator) inclusive, and as such can be instrumental in the hands of the Great Creator to punish or bless man for his evils or good deeds respectively. The African person is portrayed as the man who is so inclined to nature and who uses religion to reconcile himself with nature and has an access to exploring it. This attachment of the African to Nature even has enough to say about the African identity and worldview. It makes him nature-incline-being. In the African’s communal life, he comes into contact with everything that is, even nature itself. Just as Okolo puts it, “‘being-with’ as characteristic of the African mode-of-being-in-the-world means also openness to nature in positive and sacred relationship.”¹⁸ For the African, “nature is sacred and mystifying. The African seeks harmony with it by sharing in its life, its spiritual and material blessings... the task of man is however to exploit nature and to the full, too.”¹⁹ Thus, in this manner, any deviation from the moral principles demanded by nature amounts to deviation from the cosmic harmony and order which goes without no consequences from both the visible and invisible realities; but when venerated, good fortune and blessings are assured.²⁰ Expatiating this view, Mbiti insists that the African sees the universe in terms of himself, and endeavours to live in harmony with it. Even where there is no biological life in an object,

¹⁸ C. B. Okolo, *What Is To Be African? Essay on African Identity* (Enugu: Cecta [Nig] Ltd, 1993), 21

¹⁹ Okolo, *What Is To Be African?*, 21

²⁰ Okolo, *What Is To Be African?*, 22

African people attribute (religious cum mystical) life to it, in order to establish a more direct relationship with the world around them, in this way, the visible and invisible parts of the universe are at man's disposal through physical, mystical and religious means²¹

Maquet further puts the same idea thus: "Nature, which man (the African) can never ignore is vast and indifferent. It hurts as much as it protects and the good man as often as the bad is in turn victim and beneficiary."²² Artwork is an intrinsic part of nature expressed here, and for the African, the wonder, beauty and order that follow nature connote the idea of religious reverence, and at once remind the African of a Higher Being who should be behind them. Man is an artwork, and existence itself expresses nothing than artistic nature of the Highest Being who is behind every existent (existence). Art for the African is everything, for it expresses everything.

Be that as it may, *Ikenga* as an Artwork portrays also the man-hood, man-status and power or strength of a man. It is so sacred and religiously special that no one neither toils with it nor defiles where it is kept with play. Attempting with it implies daring the man's manhood which he is ever ready to protect with the last drop of his blood. Significantly, the arm-muscle of a man represents it and that explains why children do not play with the arm-muscle of their father or any man. For the man to prove his manhood or strength to his woman even in the public, he dignifiedly places it out for his woman to kiss which she must do respectfully and happily. To give a man a beat on his arm-muscle is an insult to his manhood in highest order, but on the other hand, for him to defend his being-a-man with his fellow man, they both punch themselves on their *Ikenga* so to prove their strength-level and supremacy as any who starts dodging or giving a sign of pain is automatically inferior to the other. From this explanation, we can see how conceptual scheme of thing represented in Artwork defines the mode of existence of man in the Igbo worldview and in a very practical way. By this, *Ikenga* artwork represents culture and Igbo identity as it is conceptually peculiar to the Igbo in this way, dignity, supremacy and man-value.

²¹ J. S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc. 1970), 19-21.

²² J. Maquet, *Africanity, the Cultural Unity of Black Africa*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), 64.

Further, the role of Artworks in religious practices in the African conception cannot be underestimated. In fact, according to Afolabi Olabintan, artworks expressed in symbols and incantations used in these religious sacrifices and rituals play a lot of physiological balance and moral consciousness in the people, for through them, the invisible is called upon and ontologically interacted with. In his own words:

In a community where most of their problems are rooted in anxiety and in the fear of the invisible and the unknown, the use of well known symbols and incantations could be of great help in working on the minds of the people to allay their fears and relieve them of their disturbances.”²³

Through arts and in representation of the invisible, the reality of the represented-invisible is manifested. Artworks therefore stand as the media for contact between the visible and the invisible. Thus, practical representation of the gods in Artworks puts into realism and empiricism the ideal and abstract which has ever been conceptually far and unapproachable. They draw the presence of the invisible nearer to the visible for ontological effects. This view goes in no demur with Nze’s position that *Ala* as a deity (mother earth or earth goddess) as a Creature or when put in the way of Art-representation brings that fear of being punished by *Ala* in the people thereby arousing their moral consciousness and conscience. But unfortunately, this conception is one of the damages which the European religion and its conceptual scheme of realities have caused Africans. Africans have been disoriented and brainwashed to believe that the earth is impotent to punish anybody who commits *Nso-Ala* (abominations) on it; that it is only God who can punish. As a consequence of this, the people now go on to do as wished which has purported evil in the society.²⁴ Even religious priests now commit evil in disregard of the earth they stand on forgetting that even the earth where Cain was standing on was against him and nature itself was unfavourable to him. However, emphasizing on the African conception of Artwork, Nze is of the view that the “Gods may be full of awe, but in the African universe, they are not unapproachable. During life as well as during death, the Igbos strive to have contact with gods. This contact

²³ Afolabi Olabintan, “Symbolism in Yoruba Traditional Incantatory Poetry”, *Nigeria Magazine*, no. 114 (Dec. 1994), 36-42.

²⁴ G. O. Abah and A. K. Ugwu “A Discourse on the Meaning and Cultural Implications of *Ala* to the Igbo,” *International Journal of Integrative Humanism*, 13(1), 2021, 183-207

enables them to obtain better bargains. It is an occasion, a vehicle through which they acquire wisdom.”²⁵ Through the application of Artworks in the African religion, reality becomes real, concretized and the ideal empirically beheld. They bring the idea of God and Divine down to human existential sphere.

The idea of Artworks presupposes the idea of history. Artworks give identical history of a people. In a people's religious perspective, Artworks show the transition in their religious activities from time to time just as we have indicated above. It is a material archive that tells a lot about a people. This is one of the reasons the disaster witnessed in the recent Notre Dame Cathedral will remain one of the worst that the French State may have experienced. The damage on the Artworks in there was damage to the identity, especially as it concerns their religious transition and development.

Igbo arts as evidenced from Igbo-Ukwu Excavation, Mbari Centre, Uri Arts, among others historically give an epistemological foundation regarding the Igbo people. These phenomena of arts picture Igbo era of civilization and creativity. They also explain economic strategies and pattern of entrepreneurship the Igbo people engaged in, and through which they enhance their economic strength. The people speak and showcase their beauty through these arts. By this, they picture the reality of Igbo existence and experience.

Today, it is factual picturesque of the Nigerian-Biafran War which started lingering from the 1966 January 15th coup and later became a full blown war from 1967 till 1970, when we see artworks like the 'Ojukwu Aircraft' at the then Biafran Airport at Uli Town, Anambra State of Nigeria, 'Ojukwu Bunker' at Umuahia, Abia State of Nigeria, 'Abagana site' the place of the great bombing, and other significant sights pertaining the War. These are Artistic facts, and significantly memorable sites that tell the truism or reality of the War. The Nok Cultural Artifacts in Plateau State of Nigeria can never be forgotten in this regard. The 'Nri Hegemony' and Arts in Anambra State, the 'Igbo-ukwu Museum' and very many archeological discoveries of even the 'Great Bronze', the 'Akwete' cultural weaving of the Abians, the religious Artifacts of *Chi-ukwu* and *Ibinukpabi* in their respective Shrines in Abia State tell a lot about the reality of the Igbo people, their ancestral lineage,

²⁵ C. B. Nze, "Pragmatism and Traditionalism in the Concept of God in Africa" in *Uche*, Vol. 5 (1981), 26

their religious transition from one stage to another and to a large extent, the people's conceptual scheme of realities, states or positions of those realities and of their importance in the people's lives. All these among other archival and archeological documentations concerning the peoples of Nigeria, tell the date of Arts existence and practice, the historical habitation and occupancy of the people of particular places, in Nigeria. Some of these Artworks have archeologically been confirmed to date as far back as even the 5th century when some European countries never knew them. The Artwork of *Chi-ukwu* portrays even the nominal essence of the god as the 'big god' in a superlative manner. The Artwork brought the sense or idea of the Supreme Being (*Chi-ukwu*) to the physical and artistic representation to the people and situates as the intermediary between the 'ideal' *Chi-ukwu* and the people. All these are Artworks, and some of them attract tourists from different parts of the world and very significant centers and regarded as of great symbolism in the history of the people. They are not only of religious, economic and social significance, but also of historical necessities and truth-revealing. It has basically in this contemporary era, served as the people's identities, conscious-raising objects and pride for the people. Artworks inhere in themselves, the facticity of history, documentation and items for proof of reality of such Art, the Artist behind them and equally give a very big insight into the era they existed.

In the African community, the artistic staff of eldership which is prestigiously held by the *Okpara*, stands for the family level— be it nuclear, extended, kindred, clan, hamlet, village or even community— which it stands. Many a times, this staff stick is represented with *Òfó*, or made from *Òfó* tree. This is because of the cultural signification of *Òfó* in Igbo. *Òfó* transcends the perception of merely being a tree stick. Apart from its economic importance, its stick and Artwork culturally stands for the following ideologies: Truth, Justice, Purity/Uprightness and Equity. Its stick is not used as firewood or an object to be played with. It is seen as sacred tree through and with which the spirit speaks. When an elder speaks holding *Òfó*, it is believed to be nothing but the truth as it is. Speaking about *Òfó*, Edeh writes:

The greatest treasure that the *okpara* of the family guards is the *ofọ* of the family... I see a greater and deeper metaphysical significance in the *ofọ*. It brings out clearly the Igbo notion of being as a totality, as a unity... The *okpara* uses the *ofọ* to secure this assurance. When he holds the *ofọ*-staff, he is assured that he is no longer alone in his

decisions, judgment and benedictions. The entire community of being, embracing the living and the ancestors, is solidly behind him. He is beyond his individuality. By holding the ọfọ-staff in his hand when dealing with matters relating to the extended family, he is aligning himself with the visible as well as the unseen members of the family, the ancestors. Hence the ọfọ is used to maintain and perpetuate the spirit of tradition, the purpose of which is the assurance of the continuity of the community²⁶

Òfó as an artistic work embedded with cultural value thus, symbolically represent a community-mouth whose custodian is the Okpara, and when it is used at the *Onu Anyanwu*, the family worship centre, the whole family comprising of both visible and invisible membership is represented. In regard to the value of Òfó as it concerns justice and uprightness, the African would always say: *Ome ihe jide Òfó* (he who acts should ensure to have Òfó). And to prove a person's guiltlessness, and that nature has vindicated the righteous, there comes a saying thus: *Oji Òfó ga ana* (he who has Òfó must scale through). These sayings, among many, point to the sacredness and symbolical representation of Truth, Justice and Equity by the Òfó Art item. It is equally used in the shrines and worshipping centers to indicate the purity and sacredness of the shrines, and it portrays them as the meeting place where the invisible speak to the visible, that is why shrines are called *Onu Mmuo* literary meaning the 'Mouth of the Spirit'. It makes any place it is used as an article of cultural recognition, sacred and dignified. Òfó Art is more than the perception of its treeness and ordinary stick. It is used to suspend people from approaching an item or a plot of land, by this, whatever it is fastened over, the item or piece becomes a secluded and sacred that it is not for public outreach or consumption depending on the item. It is an Art item that commands so much respect among the Igbo Africans.

Another item which stands in measure to socio-cultural value among Igbo is the *Omu nkwu*— the newest, or better still, youngest part that grows in the inner most circle of the palm fronds of a palm tree. This particular item is of great cultural significances in the Igbo African perspective. However, this is not originally an artwork, but it can artistically be applied to culture. For instance, it is used to make, designate and aesthetically decorate the *Ódò*

²⁶ E. M. P. Edeh, *Towards an Igbo Metaphysics* (Enugu: Our Saviour Press, 1999), 62-3.

version of masquerade and its affairs as expressions of culture and traditional values. The culture of masquerade in Igbo is an inseparable phenomenon from artworks as they not only picture the reality and aesthetics of masquerades, but also give masquerades identities and portray the reality of ancestry as inherited in masquerade culture. This position is central in some scholars' works.²⁷ When *Omu nkwu* is artistically situated in some Igbo cultures, it stands for 'season' counting. Further, anywhere it is fastened across, it means 'restriction of movement'. More so, it is used to give a signal as it stands for a restrictive sign to women that this is masquerade's domain, and that their movement should be restricted towards there. It is also used as a sign of festive period, and most importantly, as a sign of defense mechanism against diabolism and charms. It is used as a sacred object with which a corpse is approached at the first site. It spoils or incapacitates charms especially that of Ojukwu specie of palm tree. At this point, the Art of this very item portrays more meaning and essence than the mere conception of palm frond-status.

At this point, it could be said that artworks stand for a people's identity. All the aforementioned artistic items used among Igbo ethnic nationality of Nigeria could be regarded as elements or tools of identity to the people of the ethnic nationality. They describe the people and portray their culture and scheme of value and reality. They are what a people are known with and for. Artistic items, of course, depict ancestry, in that, they tell where and how they emerge and equally tell historical reality about a people. Some artworks are ancestral portrait, and by that, stand with every sense of dignity and integrity to the people whose ancestry they picture. By this, artworks inhere a huge cultural and conceptual value. It is from this perspective that they are said to be objects of attraction and invocation to the invisible reality among the visible reality. With artworks in representation of the invisible, the represented-invisible could be easily invoked upon and attracted to the visible for ontological influences.

²⁷ T. U. Nwala, *Igbo Philosophy* (Abuja: Niger Books and Publishing Company Ltd., 2010), 265-80, 285-96. See also, N. A. Omeje, "Poetry as a Potent Factor in Omabe Festival of Nsukka in Igbo Land" *Ikoru Journal of Institute of African Studies* 10(1&2) (2014), 317-31
Nwala, T. U. *Igbo Philosophy*. Abuja: Niger Books and Publishing Company Ltd. 2010 3rd ed.

Evaluation and Conclusion

We have been able to explore the Heideggerian and the Igbo conceptions of Art. The observable synergy is the fact that both see Art as an epitome of History. That is to say that Art is history itself because it carries or conveys it.

On this ground, the conception of the being behind Art comes into play for the African. In this, the African appears Aristotelian to enquire on the Cause of that very Art in regard to its Efficiency— the maker of the Art. In Artworks, the Efficient Cause is revealed and that equally has to do with history. By this view, the possible implication could be that Art appears 'subjectified' rather, while being appears 'representational'. On the contrary, Heidegger would rather argue that Artworks make being to be representational, that is 'objectified' instead of being 'subjectified'. It may sound right to say that for Heidegger, the Efficient Cause should rather be representational in Art thereby making Art to be subjective and an object through which being emerges.

For the African as well as it could be said of Heidegger, Art expresses the facticity of an era and the happenings in that very era. It is an archive itself. It keeps record. It inheres history and stands as a proof of Truth or facticity of a being or phenomenon.

Having known that Hermeneutics is an obstacle in the process of epistemological enquiries on a particular discourse, it becomes a problem in the assessment of works of Art especially in regard to how the African sees and interprets Art. This epistemic challenge may not be exclusive to the African conceptual scheme on Art alone. This is because no matter how and what we see or take Art to be, Art is art, not a man. Art remains a work by man expressed with and in nature. Hence, Art cannot, in every exactitude, be subjectified or assume humanity. Again for the African, there are sometimes he cannot explain the incongruities in the historical documentations of Arts, hence hermeneutical challenges involved in history. When this happens, the truth we propose that they express may be false— falsifiable or deterred. Some Artworks that are built on falsehood or bias which, by this nature, contradict the reality of truth, may render the concept of truth and history meaningless.

Heidegger has tried to separate the concept of Aesthetics from his concept of Art even though he did not maintain a thorough parallel relationship between the two. At the fundamental level of Art finds Aesthetics. Even the

very conception of Art inheres the concept of Aesthetics. From Christian religious background, the whole activity of Arts started in creation and it has very many reasons to be identified with the whole genesis of Aesthetics as a concept. Thus, the concept of Art is indeed an interesting discourse in philosophy especially as it regards the Heideggerian view. In this project and as it relates to the African view of Art, it has also been an interesting discourse as we have attempted pinpointing the similarities and dissimilarities between the two views.

Bibliography

- Abah, G. O. and Ugwu, A. K. "A Discourse on the Meaning and Cultural Implications of *Ala* to the Igbo," *International Journal of Integrative Humanism*, 13(1), (2021), 183-207
- Abanuka, B. *Further Critical Studies on the Igbo World* (Onitsha: Spiritan Publications, 2009)
- Bruns, G. L. *Heidegger's Estrangement* (London: Yale University Press, 1989)
- Bewaji, J. A. I. "Philosophy, Education, and Art in Africa" (eds), Afolayan, A. and Falola, T. *The Handbook of African Philosophy* (Palgrave Publications, 2016)
- Edeh, E. M. P. *Towards an Igbo Metaphysics* (Enugu: Our Saviour Press, 1999)
- Heidegger, M. *Being and Time*, (trans.) Macquarrie, J. and Robinson, E. (Blackwell, Oxford, 1962)
- Heidegger, M. *Poetry, Language, Thought*. (trans.) A. Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971)
- Heidegger, M. *Gesamtausgabe*, Vol. 5: *Holzwege*. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann, (ed.) (Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 1977)
- Heidegger, M. "The Origin of the Work of Art," *Basic Writings* (London: Routledge, 1978)
- Heidegger, M. *Off the Beaten Track* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). Translation of *Holzwege* (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 1950), vol.5 in *Heidegger's Gesamtausgabe*.
- Heidegger, M. *Basic Writings*, "On the Origin of the Work of Art." 1st Harper Perennial Modern Thought Edition, (ed.) David Farrell Krell (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), 143-212
- Koskela, J. "Truth as Unconcealment in Heidegger's *Being and Time*" *Minerva - An Internet Journal of Philosophy* 16 (2012): 116-128
- Mbiti, J. S. *African Religions and Philosophy* (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc. 1970)

- Maquet, J. *Africanity, the Cultural Unity of Black Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959).
- Nwala, T. U. *Igbo Philosophy* (Abuja: Niger Books and Publishing Company Ltd., 2010)
- Nze, C. B. "Pragmatism and Traditionalism in the Concept of God in Africa" *Uche*, 5 (1981)
- Okolo, C. B. *What Is To Be African? Essay on African Identity* (Enugu: Cecta [Nig] Ltd, 1993)
- Olabintan, A. "Symbolism in Yoruba Traditional Incantatory Poetry", *Nigeria Magazine*, no. 114 (1994), 36-42.
- Omeje, N. A. "Poetry as a Potent Factor in Omabe Festival of Nsukka in Igbo Land" *Ikoro Journal of Institute of African Studies* 10(1&2) (2014), 317-31