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UNIVERSITY OF GHANA, LEGON
INSTITUTE OF AFRICAN STUDIES

PHILOSOPHY OF ART IN EWE VODU RELIGION

By

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THIS THESIS IS SUBMITTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF GHANA, LEGON IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE AWARD OF PHD AFRICAN STUDIES DEGREE.

JULY, 2019

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work towards the award of Doctor of Philosophy in African Studies and that, to the best of my knowledge, it contains neither material previously published by another person nor material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree of the University, except where due acknowledgement has been made in the text.

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DEDICATION

For my father, Dr. Mawuli Adjei.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMNTS

I owe my deepest appreciation to my father, Dr. Mawuli Adjei, for giving me his blessing and full support to embark on this challenging intellectual and spiritual journey. Words cannot express how supportive he was in encouraging me to pursue higher education throughout these difficult years. This research was mainly funded by my dad and partially self-funded with the funds I generated from several curatorial projects and art exhibitions I staged in order to support myself through higher education. Again, all this couldn't have been possible without the initial support from my dad. I am profoundly indebted to Prof. Avorgbedor for supplying me with all the research leads, thoughtful clues and an endless reading list that I fully enjoyed! Prof. Esi Sutherland-Addy and Dr. Stephen Acheampong also deserve my profound gratitude for their diligence, prudence and intellectual contributions in making this research a valuable contribution to the study and appreciation of indigenous African Religions and the arts. Together, their collective intellectual guidance, constructive criticism and unrelenting efforts inspired me to successfully complete my research.

Special thanks go to Prof. Kofi Anyidoho, Tɔgbui Addo VIII, Fiaga of Klikor Traditional Area, Tɔgbui Klu Agudzeamegah II, Chief of Dagbamete, Mama Adzorhlor III, Christopher Voncujovi, Prof. Dzodzi Tsikata, Prof. Kwasi Dunyo, Prof. Ablade Glover and Dr. Obadele Kambon for all the invaluable assistance, motivation and warm reception they offered me during the course of my research. Most importantly, I greatly appreciate the contributions of all my research assistants and collaborators, Godwin Azameti, Hutɔ Adzimashie Bali, Tɔgbui Dzokpoto, Dumega Koku Nyonator, Anthonio, Wisdom Akli, Tsoene Humali, Tɔgbui Agagli Asipodi, Fianugɔ Womegbeamewo, Tɔgbui Afadi Nuwordu, Tɔgbui Humali, Tɔgbui Dawubo Gbadagba, Tɔgbui Kofitsey Humali, Rose Aʊadada, Sofo Anani Humali, Afanyehu Nuwordu, Oliver Torgboh, Adzo Humali, Noble Kunyegbe, Puduo Nana Baffour-Awuah (Nana Sufi), Curtis Andrews, Meera Venkatachalam, Worlanyo Ahaddo, Julius Akoto Brown and all those who assisted me in my research in various ways. I also thank Dr. Ramatu Dadzie for her patience and understanding.

I also wish to extend special thanks to esteemed African elders like Opanyin Kwabena Kusi Appouh, Prof. Nana Afia Opoku-Asare, Dr. Steve Kquofi, Dr. Opamshen Osei-Agyemang, Dr Samuel Nortey, Ato DeGraft Johnson, and Dr Rahman Adam for laying the groundworks to forge

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the warrior spirit within me during my KNUST days. Throughout my research, certain colleagues, loved ones and relatives supported me in various other ways. I'm most thankful to everyone, especially Rebecca Tandoh, Wiz Kudowor, Sami Bentil, Kofi Boachie-Ansah and anyone who supported me throughout this research with moral support. My final, but not least, appreciation goes to my mother Rosemary Adjei, even though we disagreed in many ways on my research interests, we all have different journeys in life and destiny keeps calling.

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PREFACE

Over the last six years, I have been researching into the arts of Anlo-Ewe Vodu religion in order to attain a full grasp of its rudimentary philosophies. But the actual spiritual journey began over a decade ago. My research, my subjects and the research topic were nothing new to me. In fact, the areas where I conducted my research were very familiar terrains for me because they constitute my ancestral home. Some of the sites where I conducted my field interviews and participant observations were actually just a few minutes motor ride or within a walking range from our family house in Atiteti. I attended senior high school (between 2001-2004) in Keta, Volta Region. I also made frequent trips to my village even after high school. My first encounter with Vodu art occurred while I was studying visual art in high school. I remember during my high school days, while negotiating shortcuts and "secret" routes through town at night, my colleagues[1] and I would cringe in "fear" and "horror" at the mere sight of Legba or other Vodu sculptures in front of people's houses and shrines. What actually struck fear into us was not the "intimidating" presence of the Vodu sculptures per se, the truth is, we were mostly breaking the law and school regulations by sneaking out of boarding house through unapproved routes and without permission! In most indigenous Anlo-Ewe societies, Vodu still actively remains the "keepers of the law and order". To make matters even difficult, superstitions, mysterious tales and unsavoury rumours were constantly being peddled around in school about the "ghoulish" and "dangerous" tendencies of Vodu deities (particularly Anlo-Ewe Vodu) and how the "mere sight" of some Vodu sculptures may even "zap your soul" into "non-existence". Countless tales also abound of Vodu deities "shape-shifting" into "lizards", "goats", "crows" and other "domestic animals" to "initiate

[1] Especially those brought up as Christians in Accra and other cities. Those who did not grow up in the villages or get the opportunity to live and share the spiritual experiences of village life.

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conversations" with students who "study too much" just to "enquire" if "they weren't tired of learning"! Keta being a coastal town, was awash with *mami wata* superstitions just too overwhelming for one to fathom. The fabricated tales that surrounded mystical aspects of Vodu and sacred arts were unimaginable. Some of these "accounts" have been distorted and reproduced in publications by some Western researchers as though they are concrete facts:

> Imagine a place where the dead can speak to the living through mediums, dreams, and prophesy and where malicious individuals who seek to harm have the power to kill by merely staring someone in the eye. […] Imagine a place where your brother can be your mortal enemy and where witches brew curses into the night, meeting undetected as owls in ominously tall baobab trees interspersed throughout most villages. Imagine a place where hairy dwarves with backwards feet can kidnap and drag you from the forest, bruising your body with their powerful little kicks while training you to be spiritually powerful and adept. Imagine a place where spiritual pregnancies can have ghosts lay with their widows and vampirous spirits sneak into a person's bedroom under the guise of a frog. […] Imagine a place where animals can be people in disguise, listening in on your secrets.[2](Dietrich, 2012:6)

Strangely enough, despite all the fear and mystery that surrounded Vodu, I mustered courage and began to develop a rare kind of appreciation and raw passion towards Vodu art—a mystical connection. I gradually became entranced by these sublime sculptures any time I encountered them. Their mere apparent 'lifelessness' enthralled my young curious imagination to an extent that on certain occasions I pleasantly became transfixed by simply gazing at them. The spiritual aura they triggered was uplifting. As a young naïve child, I recall spending extended periods "observing" (at a 'semi-safe' distance) if the 'Vodus' would actually 'come and eat' the sacred meals served before them in earthenware bowls. My colleagues saw me as an oddball who needed to be "excommunicated" from the 'clique'. To them, I was a 'forbidden non-conformist child,' a bit too 'morbid' in my aesthetic pleasures for a mere teenager. They tried every strategy in their

[2] See Christina M. Dietrich. Spirit Messengers, Divine Encounters: Practitioner Inhabitants of the Anlo-Ewe Spirit World. Unpublished PhD Thesis. University of California, 2012, p.6.

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hopes of "dissuading" me from engaging in what they deemed "ungodly" ventures. This fear-mongering was intensified with groundless claims that I would "swiftly die" if I get close or tried to understand "these things". It has been over 15 years on, some of my colleagues have passed on, I am still here! (at least "for now"). I have even drawn extra close to the Vodu sculptures than before.

Researcher posing with a cluster of Vodu sculptures in front of Tɔgbui Dzokpoto's Brékété Shrine Woe, Keta, Volta Region (2016). Photography by Researcher.

In retrospect, I came to a realization that perhaps I was utterly fearless of the Vodu sculptures not because I was necessarily a 'foolhardy' child but rather due to the fact that I merely perceived them as interesting artworks. I vividly recall going on unaccompanied trips to graveyards in Ɲɔlivimɛ and Whuti just to appreciate funerary sculptures, sometimes pleasantly lost in thought while in the process of admiring these remarkable artworks. In my young fanciful mind, I kept imagining how my image would be immortalized into one of these fine sculptures someday in the near future when I die. Even in my childhood "fantasies", I kept comforting and reminding myself:

> *…this is authentic art, this is my culture, these are my people, this is where I come from, I'm a child of the Land, this is where I shall be buried when I join the ranks of the noble Ancestors, it would only be wise for me to begin my spiritual journey now…*

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This thesis presents an account of my academic and intellectual immersion in Vodu art which was sparked from my childhood days. In this thesis, I have documented the mystical experience of engaging with Ewe Vodu aesthetics at close quarters and with the custodian and practitioners of the various artforms.

"If Africans don't tell their own stories,
Africa will soon disappear"
- Ousmane Sembene

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ABSTRACT

This study examines Anlo-Ewe indigenous knowledge systems and the extent to which they inform and explain the scope and significance of the visual arts as employed in Vodu religion and spirituality. The thesis further explores the particular ways in which artistic expression and local aesthetic norms are articulated in everyday modes of being-in-the world in order to sustain arguments on the significant place of the visual arts in Anlo-Ewe Vodu religion and spirituality. One of the major premises and conclusions of this thesis is that religious and ritual contexts often constitute significant sites for discoursing and exhibiting artistic-aesthetic preferences—these sites have been largely underrepresented in studies on Ewe society, history and culture. A growing number of contemporary art historians recognize and attempt to explain the integration of indigenous worldview and spirituality as part of the larger sociocultural universe in which artistic-aesthetic expressions are encountered; this study builds significantly on this trend of scholarship in African art history. The thesis demonstrates and at the same time argues for a deeper understanding of not only the ways in which religious and artistic-aesthetic expressions are closely interrelated, but also the specific ways in which they are dialogically connected to and rooted in indigenous ontologies and knowledge systems. Analytical perspectives draw on several disciplinary sites, including methods of art history, oral history and debates in cultural anthropology, linguistics, religious studies, critical theory and postcolonial studies. Field methods and techniques of research emphasize qualitative approaches with visual ethnography, ethnographic interviews, oral history, direct observation, practice-based research and autoethnography as the primary modes of data collection and analysis. The theory and practice of the autoethnographic research encouraged constructive but critical engagement of personal biographical, experiential and deeply reflective moments as integral parts of the total interpretive framework. Drawing additionally on techniques of purposive, simple random sampling techniques and stratified further (e.g., along gender, age, type of shrine or religious house, etc.) the investigation identifies and underscores the relevance of indigenous philosophical outlook, knowledge systems, and everyday lived experiences in understanding the aesthetic dimensions of the visual arts in Anlo-Ewe Vodu religion and spirituality. Key findings and conclusions build on emergent perspectives and methodologies of African religious traditions and expressive art forms that privilege contextual-functional and "art-for-life's sake" understanding, including spheres of

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religion and spirituality. Additionally, the thesis provides major correctives based on a set of indigenous perspectives and practices (in the areas of aesthetics, philosophy, visual arts and religious traditions) and which caution former and lingering usages and misguided perceptions rooted in notions of the "fetish," "primitive," etc. Since the religious contexts of Anlo-Ewe Vodu represent a complex of rituals that integrate the various art forms, the analysis argues that the Vodu tradition is best understood as a synesthetic whole involving the visual, corporeal, motional, sonic-aural (music dance, costume, gesture), and related affective domains of creativity; Anlo-Ewe examples sustain and elaborate on those of other African contexts. In sum, this work represents a major contribution to the identification and interpretation of the visual arts in African religious contexts, with emphasis on local aesthetic constructs and philosophical traditions and in relation to visuality as embodied tradition.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Content **Page**

TITLE PAGE i
DECLARATION.....ii
DEDICATION.....iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....iv
PREFACE….....vi
ABSTRACT.....x
TABLE OF CONTENTS….....xii

1.0 CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND…….....1

1.1 Background to the Study.....1
1.2 Research Questions….....5
1.3 Statement of the Problem.....6
1.4 Theoretical Framework.....11
1.5 Objectives 23
1.6 Scope of Research 23
1.7 Significance of the Study.....24

2.0 CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE.....25

2.1 Introduction.....25
2.2 A Historical Overview of Primary European Accounts of African Art……..…….25
2.3 The Philosophical Foundations of European Accounts of African Art and Culture.....35

2.4 Summary of Discussion.....55

2.5 Critical Perspectives of Primary European Accounts of African Art: A Case Against African "Primitivism" and "Fetishism".....57

2.6 Summary of Discussion.....67

3.0 CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY.....68

3.1Introduction.....68

3.2 Data Collection and Data Instruments….....69

3.3 Population and Sampling Method.....…….....78

3.4 Evaluating the Pros and Cons of Conducting an Auto-ethnographic Research.....
.....…….…..79

University of Ghana http://ugspace.ug.edu.gh

3.5 Experiential Learning and Active Research Participation……..……..……...84

3.5.1 Concrete Experience.....……....85

3.5.2 Brief Description of my Learning Experience (Practical Evidence of Field Research). What did I do? ….....……..…...85

3.5.3 Where did I work, how many days, what was my Position as a Researcher? 87

3.5.3.1 Activity Outline/Work Plan Timeline Employed for Research and Field Studies…….....……87

3.5.4 Reflective Observation.....89

3.5.4.1 Challenges and Brief Analysis of the Effects of how what I did Filtered through my own Concepts.....89

3.5.5 Abstract Conceptualization.....90

3.5.6 Action Experimentation.....90

3.5.7 Presentation of Findings.....91

3.5.8 Major Challenges Faced During Research.....94

3.5.9 Concluding Remarks.....97

4.0 CHAPTER FOUR: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS: PART 1 98

4.1 Is there an African Aesthetic?: Towards Defining African Aesthetics.....98

4.2 Concluding Remarks.....116

5.0 CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS: PART 2 118

5.1 Towards Redefining Ewe Vodu Aesthetics: A Primer to the Discourse on "Fetishism" 118

5.2 Introduction.....118

5.3 Intercultural Roots of "Fetishism": A Theological Overview 121

5.4 Intellectual Roots of "Fetishism"……..…….....126

5.5 On Aesthetics, Art Criticism and Genuine Appreciation of Vodu Arts (Part 1) ……..136

University of Ghana http://ugspace.ug.edu.gh

5.6 On Aesthetics, Art Criticism and Genuine Appreciation of Vodu Arts (Part 2) – Towards Conceptualizing Visual Identity in Vodu Aesthetics 142

5.7 Concluding Remarks.....147

6.0 CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS: PART 3 …….....140

6.1 Colour Symbolism and Psychological Properties of Blue in Ewe Vodu Aesthetics 151

6.2 Photographic Documentation of the Aesthetics of Blue in Kli-Adizma, Mama Vena and other Vodu Religious Rites and Worship. 162

6.3 Ewe Vodu Tri-Colour Aesthetics in the Context of African Spirituality.....177

6.4 Vodu as Combat Science: Healing, Psychic Warfare and the Psycho-Spiritual Dimensions of the Arts. 185

6.5 Concluding Remarks.....195

7.0 CHAPTER SEVEN: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS: PART 4 196

Towards Redefining Ewe Vodu Aesthetics..... 196

7.1Introduction..... 196

7.2 On Western Aesthetic "Standards" and Critical Perspectives of Ewe Vodu Aesthetics..... 196

7.3 Concluding Remarks.....223

8.0 CHAPTER EIGHT: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS: PART 5 …….....225

8.1Introduction..... 225

8.2 'Tradition' versus 'Modernity' in Art: Myth, Reality or Mirage?.....226

8.3 Modern Art and Sacred Vodu Aesthetics: Neglected Symmetries 228

University of Ghana http://ugspace.ug.edu.gh

8.4 Modernism, Abstraction, and the Sublime in Art: A case for Ewe Vodu Aesthetics.....247

8.5 Concluding Remarks.....296

9.0 CHAPTER NINE: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....299

9.1 Conclusion.....299

9.2 The Need for Further Investigations and Research into African Art: With Special Reference to the Performing Arts.....301

9.3 The Need for Further Philosophical Inquiry and Multicultural Research in African Studies.....304

9.4 Vodu and Community Development…….....311

BIBLIOGRAPHY.....298

Bibliography….....298

Internet Sources…….....314

Online Sources of Images…….....314

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure **Page**

Figure 2.1 British soldiers of the infamous Punitive Expedition of 1897 "proudly" posing with the looted Benin artefacts…….....…….....40

Figure 2.2 Withdrawal notice of Gilley (2017) article on Taylor and Francis webpage …….....44

Figure 2.3 Resignation notice from editorial team of *Third World Quarterly*.....…….....44

Figure 2.4 A shot of Sape Agbo's protective Du-Legba, Denu-Hedzranawo…….54

University of Ghana http://ugspace.ug.edu.gh

Figure 2.5 Left: Josef Herman, the polish-British artist, at his home in London. Right: Helena Rubenstein poses by her curio cabinet……..…….63

Figure 3.0 Researcher participating in the communal drinking of sacred Aliha at the sacred grove of Tɔgbui Adzima Shrine in Klikor, Volta Region (2016).…….…….…….....70

Figure 3.1 Focus group discussion with Tɔgbui Hutɔ Adzimashie Bali and important members of Tɔgbui Adzima Shrine Torgodo, Volta Region (2017). ……....70

Figure 3.2 Researcher interacting with Dumegawo (community elders) in Dzogadze, Volta Region (2017) ……..……..72

Figure 3.3 Researcher in a meditative mood (while participating as a performer) during a Brékété worship ceremony. Woe, Keta, Volta Region (2017).…….…….……73

Figure 3.4 Researcher in a shot with the High Priest of Mama Vena Shrine, Tɔgbui Nuwordu.....….....76

Figure 3.5 One of the rare surviving pictures of my great-grandfather Tɔgbui Akakpo Adjei I, Dufia of Atiteti……...……...…...…….....77

Figure 3.6 I learnt how to think, talk, ask questions and behave in new ways…….....86

Figure 3.7 Tɔgbui Dzokpoto pouring libation and asking for the blessings of the Vodu dieties in his shrine before I commenced my research. Woe, Keta, Volta Region (2016) …….....95

Figure 4.0 Left: "Immersion – P---Christ", Right: Nkisi nail sculpture……..…..114

Figure 4.1 Drs. Clark's "Doll Test".....…….....115

Figure 4.2 Racist illustrations positioning the Caucasian race as "superior" to the African race through fabricated religious doctrines…….....…….....116

University of Ghana http://ugspace.ug.edu.gh

Figure 5.1 Legba stationed around the vicinity of Kli-Adzima Shrine in Klikor, Volta Region…….....…131

Figure 5.2 Du-Legba on the way to Atiteti, Volta Region…….....…133

Figure 5.3 Observing the creative process of sculpting a Legba Torgodo, Volta Region, (2017) …….……..…135

Figure 5.4 Hunɔ Amegashie Abinga, praying to the deities and the ancestors to seek their approval. Torgodo, Volta Region (2017) …….……..……..... 145

Figure 5.5 Researcher painting the walls of Tɔgbui Adzima's Shrine. Torgodo, Volta Region (2017)……..……..…..……...…146

Figure 5.6 Researcher painting a Vodu sculpture in front of Adzima's Shrine. Torgodo, Volta Region…….…..…146

Figure 5.7 Putting finishing touches to the painted Vodu sculpture. Torgodo, Volta Region (2017)……...…..…..147

Figure 5.8 A back shot of the entrance to Hutɔ Adzimashie's Shrine Torgodo, Volta Region (2017) …….……...……..…149

Figure 5.9.2 Vodu sculptures representing Tɔgbui Salɛkɔ and Ðɛɖɛ. Woe, Keta, Volta Region……..……..……149

Figure 6.1 Variations of Egyptian Blue Lapis Lazuli pebbles and stone ……....152

Figure 6.2 Samples of the pulverized pigment Pile of Egyptian blue frit and pebbles. ……..…….…...153

Figure 6.3 From left, 1. Pinedjem I Worker 1 Faience, 13.6 cm 21st Dynasty, 1026 Circa Dutch private collection 2. Henuttawy A Worker 1 Like worker 2 Faience, 11.7 cm 21st Dynasty, 1040 Circa. Dutch private collection 3. Ushebti figure (servant of the defunct Pharaoh Seti I) 1301-1290 BCE, 19th dynasty. (Photo credit – VB)..... 153

University of Ghana http://ugspace.ug.edu.gh

Figure 6.4 From Left, 1. Egyptian cobalt blue glaze vessel, Louvre, 2. The sovereign's sphinx Amenothep III bidder to the gods, 3. Egyptian blue mummy …….……..….154

Figure 6.5 From left, 1. Egyptian Faience Beads, 2. Ancient & Medieval History - Egyptian Faience Collar Necklace, Late Period, C. 664-332 circa, 3. New Classic Egyptian Lapis Lazuli Stone Chain Beads Necklace ……..……... 154

Figure 6.6 Left: Remains of the Knossos palace in Heraklion of Crete right: The-Throne-room-at-Knossos palace in heraklion of crete ……..…….……..……..155

Figure 6.7 Ancient human sacrificial rituals by the ancient Mayans and other Meso-American regions involved smearing of blue pigments on the people condemned to death (as "offerings" to the gods)……..……...……..156

Figure 6.8 Left: Lord Ram, as Rama is called in India, surrounded by worshipers Right: A boy with his face painted blue like the Hindu god Shiva, stands near a sculpture of Ganesh before immersing it in the River Ganges ……..……..…….. 156

Figure 6.9 Left: A Vodu Sculpture on top of Mama Vena Shrine, Klikor Volta Region. Right: A Vodu Sculpture atop of Mama Vena Shrine.…….……...162

Figure 6.9.1 Ɛhɔmɛfoa *klo* emblem. Afiadenyigba, Volta Region…….…….162

Figure 6.9.2 Left: *Ɛhɔmɛfoa klo* emblem represented on the sign board of Tɔgbui Afetɔku's Shrine. Dagbamete, Volta Region (2015). Right: In the 2018 American superhero film titled *Black Panther*, costume designer, Ruth Carter incorporated the *Ɛhɔmɛfoa klo* emblem into the costume design of the 'River Tribe Elder', Isaach de Bankolé…….…….163

Figure 6.9.3 Mama Vena Shrine in Ablotsivia, Klikor, Volta Region……..…...164

Figure 6.9.4 Ritual Procession of Fiasidiwo. Klikor, Volta Region……....165

University of Ghana http://ugspace.ug.edu.gh

Figure 6.9.5 Left: Tɔgbui Naza Kudese two weeks before he joined the ranks of the Ancestors Alakple. Right: A Minawo in a demure pose during the Kli-Adzima spiritual festivities. Klikor, Volta Region……..……..…….…….…..165

Figure 6.9.6 An Amegashie fully clad in her spiritual regalia. Klikor, Volta Region……..…166

Figure 6.9.7 A group of Hunuaw of in a procession exiting the sacred grove where prayers are offered through libation and animal sacrifices made to Kli-Adzima for spiritual renewal Klikor, Volta Region (2016). ….…….167

Figure 6.9.8 Tɔgbui Humali saying prayers and interceding on behalf Kli-Adzima and Mama Vena devotees at Mama Vena Shrine in Ablɔgame, Klikor, Volta Region…….…....168

Figure 6.9.9 Left: Fianugɔ Womegbeamewo pouring libation to the ancestors and community deities. Right: Ritual procession after the *Tagbayiyi* spiritual prayers, libation and sacrificial ritual at the sacred grove during the Kli-Adzima Festival. Klikor, Volta Region (2016)……....169

Figure 6.10 Fianugɔ Womegbeamewo pouring libation to the ancestors and community deities, during Tagbayiyi spiritual prayers, libation and sacrificial ritual session at the sacred grove of the Kli-Adzima cluster of Shrines.……... 170

Figure 6.10.1 Fianugɔ Womegbeamewo pouring libation to the the ancestors and community deities in front of the Kli-Adzima Shrine. Klikor, Volta Region (2016)…….……...170

Figure 6.10.2 The aesthetics and symbolism of blue incorporated into an Amegashie's beads. Klikor, Volta Region…….……..……..…….…….……... 171

Figure 6.10.3 The aesthetics and symbolism of blue incorporated into an Amegashie's beads. Klikor, Volta Region. ……..……..……..……... 171

Figure 6.10.4 Komfo Bakai, formerly a Christian, now a Vodu Priestess. After futile attempts to resist Vodu spirituality, she finally relented and obeyed the demands of the deities who "chose" her to serve. Klikor, Volta Region (2016)……..…….……... 172

University of Ghana http://ugspace.ug.edu.gh

Figure 6.10.5 The aesthetics and symbolism of blue incorporated into coiffure. Klikor, Volta Region (2016)……..…….…….. 173

Figure 6.10.6 The aesthetics and symbolism of blue incorporated into bead necklace. Klikor, Volta Region (2016)….……..…….……..……... 173

Figure 6.10.7 Aesthetics of white and blue incorporated into body painting of Goʊu performers in Mama Vena Shrine. Ablotsivia, Klikor, Volta Region (2016)…….….……..….… 173

Figure 6.11Sacred aesthetics of blue evident in the body painting by members of Brékété Vodu. Woe and Dagbamete respectively, Volta Region (2016)……..…174

Figure 6.11.1 Aesthetics of white and blue incorporated into body painting of Goʊu performers in Mama Vena Shrine. Ablotsivia, Klikor, Volta Region (2016)…….….……..….… 174

Figure 6.11.2 Close-up shot of a young Goʊu performer during Kli-Adzima festivities in Mama Vena Shrine, Ablotsivia, Klikor, Volta Region (2016)….……..…….…... 175

Figure 6.11.3 Right: Entrance to Brékété Shrine in Ashaiman, Greater Accra Region. Left: Entrance to a Vodu cubicle. Klikor, Volta Region (2016)……... 178

Figure 6.11.4 Researcher (in red) with Tɔgbui Hutɔ Adzimashie Bali (in white cloth) and Tɔgbui Hunɔ Abinga (in navy blue cloth) saying prayers before pouring libation to seek approval from the Vodus and ancestors Torgodo, Volta Region (2016).…….…….……...…….. 178

Figure 6.11.5 White kaolin and the aesthetics of red, white and blue incorporated into the sacred costumes and physical make-up of Brékété adherents of Brékété Vodu in Tɔgbui Dzokpoto's Brékété Kponu. Woe, Keta, Volta Region (2016)…….……..…….…….. 179

Figure 6.11.6 Left: A common sight to behold on the walls of most Adzima shrines is an intersecting palette of red and white splashes on a large expanse of black or indigo colour fields. Right: Traditional drums, Dagbamete, Volta Region (2016)……...…….179

University of Ghana http://ugspace.ug.edu.gh

Figure 6.11.7 Left: Kli-Adzima devotee seeking spiritual assistance casually leans against a pillar supporting Tɔgbui Adzima Shrine in Klikor, Right: A group of traders (also Kli-Adzima devotees) sit in a pensive mood while awaiting the arrival of the Adzima priests from the *tagbayiyi* ceremony in the sacred grove, Klikor, Volta Region (2016)……182

Figure 6.11.8 Notice the colours of the beads that adorn the neck of the Kli-Adzima devotees during the 2016. Kli-Adzima religious Festival. Klikor, Volta Region (2016)……182

Figure 6.11.9 Tri-colour aesthetics and symbolism: red, white and black (and blue) incorporated into bead necklace. Klikor, Volta Region (2016)……183

Figure 6.12 Performers in a 'frozen' pose during a funerary procession at Tɔgbui Kporku's funeral (2017) ……184

Figure 6.12.1 From left: Vodu sculptures representing Tɔgbui Salɛkɔ, Đɛdẹ and Adzahɔlu. Woe, Keta, Volta Region (2016) ……192

Figure 6.12.2 Tɔgbui Agagli Asipodi (left) and Fianugɔ Womegbeamewo (Right), both Vodu Priests of Kli-Adzima Shrine. Klikor, Volta Region (2016)……192

Figure 7.1 Michelangelo's David Marble Statue juxtaposed by Andrew Loomis' illustration of Head Length Theory…… 198

Figure 7.2 Ɛtɔrmigbo (sculpture) juxtaposed by Loomis' illustration of head length theory. Woe, Keta, Volta Region (2016)……199

Figure 7.2.1Legba sculpture paired with Benin Bronze sculptures…… 204

Figure 7.3 Du-Legba Shrine, Alakple, Volta Region (2017)…… 210

University of Ghana http://ugspace.ug.edu.gh

Figure 7.4 Entrance to Tɔgbui Hutɔ Adzimashie's Adzima Shrine. Torgodo, Volta Region (2016) ……..211

Figure 7.5 Mama Vena Shrine, Klikor, Volta Region (2016)……..……..212

Figure 7.6 Shrine paintings on the wall of Tɔgbui Hutɔ Adzimashie's Adzima Shrine. Torgodo, Volta Region. Paintings by "Prof" 'Sampayo-Togo' (2017)……..……. 212

Figure 7.7 Sign post leading to Hunɔ Amegashie Abinga and Tɔgbui Hutɔ Adzimashie's Adzima Shrine Torgodo, Volta Region (2017)…....…….…….……..….212

Figure 7.8 The caption literally translates as, "shoes, clothes, caps/hats, and scarfs cannot enter the shrine. In the shot is the researcher posing with a modernist artist at Mama Vena Shrine in Klikor, Volta Region, Ghana……..…….……... 200

Figure 7.9 A sign-post to Tsabashi Dorkenu Shrine, Afiadenyigba Junction, Volta Region (2017) ……..213

Figure 7.9.1 A set of three rusty crucifixion nails……..…….…… 216

Figure 7.9.2 A Jesus sculpture juxtaposed by a Nkisi nail sculpture.…….…….……216

Figure 7.9.3 This image visually sums up Böhme's observation in a certain wry cynical manner……. 218

Figure 7.9.4 News clipping from *Daily Graphic* depicting derogatory terms used in describing African religions.…….…….…220

Figure 7.9.5 Adzevodu...……...…….…….….221

Figure 8.0 Dankoli Vodu Art Installation (Photo by Catherina Unger) ……. 229

University of Ghana http://ugspace.ug.edu.gh

Figure 8.1 Left: A Sacred Vodu (Legba) installation at the entrance to Tɔgbui Adzima's Shrine in Torgodo, Volta Region (2016). Right: Gustav Metzger collected a pile of rubbish, put it in a brown paper bag and declared it as "art" which was subsequently exhibited at the Tate Modern Gallery in London (2004)……..……..……....230

Figure 8.2 Left: Dankoli Vodu Installation. Right: Alexander Duncan's installation titled "Cove' (2007-2017) ……..……..……..231

Figure 8.3 Dankoli Vodu installations, Benin. Image Courtesy: Catherina Unger…….……231

Figure 8.4 Tracy Emin's "My bed", a messy installation, surrounded by used condoms and dirty knickers …….……. 232

Figure 8.5 Left: Pia Männikkö's *Still Live*, 2010. Unfired clay, 260 x 290cm. In the Glasgow School of Art Degree Show, the floor of the room, (Mackintosh building) was covered with 400 kilos of clay. ……232

Figure 8.6 Olafur Eliasson-Riverbed (2014). Olafur Eliasson's take on Louisiana is radical, fascinating and unique.……233

Figure 8.7 Vodu Shrine sculpture installation – Brékété Shrine, Dansoman, Accra (2017)…….235

Figure 8.8 *Dzawuwu* (as in thanksgiving or first-harvest offering to the ancestors and divinites). Atiteti, Volta Region (2017)…....……..……..…….……235

Figure 8.9 Apart from mainly focusing on the "tribal", "functional" and "exotic" aspects of African art, early Western writers also focused their attention on how colonialism and Christian missionary activities influenced African art……..…..…….. 238

Figure 8.9.1 Picasso in his studio in the Bateau-Lavoir, Paris. Photographed for Gelett Burgess (1908) …….…….240

University of Ghana http://ugspace.ug.edu.gh

Figure 8.9.2 A close-up of Les Demoiselles D'avignon juxtaposed by an Mbuya Mask, Pende peoples – The Mask can be found in Royal Museum for Central Africa or RMCA, Tervuren, Belgium. Pablo Picasso (1881-1973). - Les Demoiselles d'Avignon, 1907 – Painting can be found in The Museum of Modern Art or MOMA, New York……241

Figure 8.9.3 Left: Pablo Picasso (1881-1973).- Horse, "Parade" (Cocteau, Diaghilev, 1917) paired with a Baulé Mask on the right, Ivory Coast. Former Lévy Collection…….……...242

Figure 8.9.4 Left: Details from Picasso's "Guernica" (1937) compared with the head reminiscent of the Baule mask on the right …….…….……...242

Figure 8.9.5 Henri Matisse, Portrait of Madame Matisse (1913) and a Shira Punu Mask from Gabon placed side by side, in a "Primitivism" Catalog ……..……..…243

Figure 8.9.6 A "modern" painting by Paul Klee juxtaposed with an Akan Akuaba doll……..243

Figure 8.9.7 Vodu shrine sculpture installation – Brékété Shrine, Dansoman, Accra…….....244

Figure 8.9.8 Gloria O'keefe popularly regarded as the "mother of Modernism" standing by her work ……..…..……...…… 244

Figure 8.10 Vodu shrine Mural at Kli-Adzima Shrine in Klikor, Volta Region (2016)……..…245

Figure 8.10.1 Abstract painting by Cy Twombly…….……245

Figure 8.10.2 Researcher Painting on the wall of an Adzima Shrine in Torgodo, Volta Region (2017)..…..……..…… 246

Figure 8.10.3 Jackson Pollock Painting in his studio (1950). ……..……...246

Figure 8.10.4 Left: Mama Ablɔgame Vena Xanukplɔ. Right: Noble Kunyegbe, Two of the Principal artists in the Kli-Adzima cluster of shrines. Klikor, Volta Region (2016)

University of Ghana http://ugspace.ug.edu.gh

…….…… 254

Figure 8.10.5 Left: Afanyehu Nuwordu Right: Rose Aʊadada. Both body painters, Mama Vena Shrine. Klikor, Volta Region (2019).…….……. 255

Figure 8.10.6 Ngɔgbeda Sodolo Tekpe leading Mama Vena (Ablɔgame) fiasidiwo to trek in single file procession from the shrine to a sacred site to collect kaolin. Klikor, Volta Region (2016)……..……..…..…….….…… 257

Figure 8.10.7 Kli-Adzima devotees pulverizing sacred kaolin (mixed with sacred water) into a fine paste while waiting for their turns to plaster the shrine walls. Klikor, Volta Region (2016).....258

Figure 8.10.8 Kli-Adzima devotees in the process of *'balili'* (plastering the shrine walls with sacred Kaolin). Klikor, Volta Region (2016).……..… 259

Figure 8.10.9 Kli-Adzima devotees in the process of *'balili'* (plastering the shrine walls with sacred Kaolin) Klikor, Volta Region (2016).……..……..… 259

Figure 8.11 Mama Vena Shrine Xanupklor engaged in the dripping, splashing and sprinkling process of making abstract expressions on the plastered shrine wall. Klikor, Volta Region. ……..…….….…..…260

Figure 8.11.1 Ablɔgame Xanukplɔ engaged in the dripping, splashing and sprinkling process of making abstract expressions on the plastered shrine wall. Klikor, Volta Region……...…….….… 260

Figure 8.11.2 A finished modernist *'balili'* mural on Kli-Adzima Shrine wall, Klikor (2016)……..…….……...… 261

Figure 8.11.3 Kli-Adzima devotees pose in front of the freshly painted *'balili'* mural on Kli-Adzima shrine walls. Klikor, Volta Region (2016)……...……..…… 261

Figure 8.11.4 Vodu devotee in a contemplative pose making her final supplications on the finished

University of Ghana http://ugspace.ug.edu.gh

masterpiece mural. Klikor, Volta Region (2016)..……..……..…..…… 262

Figure 8.11.5 Close up shot of *'balili'* shrine mural on Mama Vena Shrine wall. Ablɔgame, Klikor, Volta Region (2016) …...……...…….……...… 262

Figure 8.11.6 Researcher posing by a variation of Modernist soak-stained mural on the mud walls of Tɔgbui Adzima Shrine in Torgodo, Volta Region (2016) ……..……...…...… 265

Figure 8.11.7 Young child poses in front of Tɔgbui Adzima Shrine wall. Klikor, Volta Region……..……..……..……... 267

Figure 8.11.8 A group of German academics appreciating my artwork during an art exhibition in Accra. Title of artwork – Shaka's Military Reforms (130cm x 175cm) (2017)……268

Figure 8.11.9 Incorporating symbols and aspects of modernist Vodu body art into the installation performance for my Purple Harmattan Exhibition opening at Alliance Francaise in Accra (2017) ……..….... 268

Figure 8.12 Vodu devotee being decorated by a modernist Vodu artist ahead of performances at Mama Vena Shrine, Klikor, Volta Region (2016)…….……..…269

Figure 8.12.1 Repetitive circles incorporated into body art of a Vodu performer Klikor, Volta Region
(2016)…….……...…...…..……269

Figure 8.12.2 Young Ewe performance artists in Alakple and Klikor Respectively (2017)…...270

Figure 8.12.3 Young Ewe performance artists in Avenɔƒeme, Volta Region (2018)….....…...270

Figure 8.12.4 Tɔgbui Afadi on his way to join Tɔgbui Agagli Asipodi and Fianugɔ Womegbeamewo for spiritual renewal ceremonies in honour of Kli-Adzima and Mama Vena Klikor, Volta Region (2016)……..…….…....271

University of Ghana http://ugspace.ug.edu.gh

Figure 8.12.5 Researcher and a Brékété adherent in a pose with a spot-painted sacred sculpture of Nana Adziwonor (a protective occupational deity) Woe, Keta, Volta Region (2016).....271

Figure 8.12.6 Amegashie sitting in front of her spot-painted shrine (Tsabashi Dorkenu Shrine), Afiadenyigba, Volta Region (2017).....272

Figure 8.12.8 The Qatar Museums Authority's Al Riwaq exhibition space in Doha is decorated as a giant Damien Hirst spot painting.....277

Figure 8.12.9 Damien Hirst's "Pharmaceutical Series" 277

Figure 8.13 Close up shot of an Amegashie sitting in front of her spot-painted shrine (Tsabashi Dorkenu Shrine), Afiadenyigba, Volta Region (2017).....278

Figure 8.13.1Damien Hirst's spot painting 278

Figure 8.13.2 Left: Ife Mask paired with "Golden heads (Female)" by Damien Hirst 279

Figure 8.13.3 Left: Damien Hirst's "Prodigal Son" paired with "*latsotso*" (Vodu sacrifice) during the Kli-Adzima Festival in Mama Vena Shrine, Klikor, Volta Region (2016).....280

Figure 8.13.4 Two Ndebele women sitting in front of their colourful house.....282

Figure 8.13.5 Shot of an Ndebele artist painting a modernist mural on her wall.....283

Figure 8.13.6 Esther Mahlangu.....283

Figure 8.13.7 A Photomontage of Piet Mondrian and three of his paintings.....284

Figure. 8.13.8 Rectangular fractal models and developed from an Aerial view of the city from a chief's palace in Longone-Birni, Cameroon 284

Figure 8.13.9 Aerial view of the city Logone-Birni, built by the Kotoko people of Cameroon. The buildings, made of clay, are examples of architecture by accretion 285

Figure 8.14 A Kli-Adzima devotee adorned with *yibotsi* hairstyle. Klikor, Volta Region (2016).....291

University of Ghana http://ugspace.ug.edu.gh

Figure 8.14.1Beads trader spotted posing with Ewe beads during the Kli-Adzima festivities. Klikor, Volta Region (2016)……294

Figure 8.14.2 Kli-Adzima muralist, posing before a finished sacred mural in Mama Vena Shrine. Klikor, Volta Region (2016)……294

Figure 8.14.3 Notice the different expressions and aesthetic responses to shrine art, Kli-Adzima creative ritual processes and general social experience within the sacred space. Klikor, Volta Region (2016)……295

Figure 8.14.4 Notice the facial expression and tactile aesthetic response of the Vodu devotee being decorated by a modernist Vodu artist ahead of performances at Mama Vena Shrine. Klikor, Volta Region (2016)……295

Figure 8.14.5 "Vomit Artist" Millie Brown creating one of her infamous "Vomit Paintings"……297

Figure 9.0 Left: Hutɔ Adzimashie Bali in a performance with a Kokushi.. Right: : Powder being sprinkled on a Vodu Performer. Dagbamete and Dzogadze respectively, Volta Region (2016)……304

Figure 9.1 Left: Lorry park under construction in Dagbamete Community Right: Accommodation for shrine members during festivals……313

Figure 9.2 Left: View of the clinic that will serve Dagbamate Community Right: Patients accommodation in Dagbamete community ……313

Figure 9.3Left: A shot of the new community hostel in Dagbamete. Right: Tɔgbui Sri poses with his entourage, the Chief of Dagbamete and high-ranking members of Tɔgbui Afetɔku Shrine and the Dumagawo of Dagbamete community. ……314

Figure 9.4 Tɔgbui Sri III in a sodcutting pose flanked by his entourage, the Chief of Dagbamete and high-ranking members of Tɔgbui Afetɔku Shrine and the Dumagawo of Dagbamete community ……314

University of Ghana http://ugspace.ug.edu.gh

LIST OF DIAGRAMS, ILLUSTRATIONS AND TABLES.

LIST OF DIAGRAMS **Page**

Diagram 2.0 Diagram explaining Graham's Hierarchy of Disagreement…….…….. 28

Diagram 2.4 Illustrations of "Creatures" of "Guinea," or West Africa……..47

Diagram 3.3.1 Diagram showing the three stages of participant observation…….……..….74

Diagram 3.5.1 Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle.……..….…...84

Diagram 3.9.5 Dale's Cone of Experience.…….…….....….. 91

Diagram 5.0 A diagram of Brékété pantheon in Tɔgbui Dzokpoto's Shrine in Woe, Keta …....119

Diagram 5.3.1 Kieran's (2006) Aesthetic triad ……...….…136

Diagram 8.12.6.1 Left: Sim'bi Right: Sim'bi Africain. Circles incorporated into Veve symbols in sacred Vodu symbolism among people of African descent in Haiti..……...……...…..…272

Diagram 8.12.7 Visual representation of the Fon creation myth ……...….…274

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 7.1 Michelangelo's David marble statue juxtaposed by Andrew Loomis' illustration of the head length theory…….....…….....186

Figure 7.2 ɛtɔrmigbo Sculpture juxtaposed by Loomis' illustration of head length theory……187

Figure 8.13.6 Hypothetical Cycle of the Sacred Vodu Aesthetic Experience. …….……...……..…….……...……275

University of Ghana http://ugspace.ug.edu.gh

LIST OF TABLES

Figure 3.1.2 Gender distribution of key respondents (they primarily included Vodu Priests, Priestesses, Spirit Mediums, Psychic Healers, Mystics, Chiefs, Queen Mothers, Community Elders, Academics and Artists). ……..……..71

Figure 3.6.1 Activity Outline/Work Plan Timeline Employed for Research and Field Studies…87

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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Background to the Study

The definition of art has been fraught with so many controversies, from ancient to our modern times. Thus, any attempt at a comprehensive definition will remain futile, or partial at best. This has been one of the primary concerns of art critics, or philosophers of art, who might concentrate on specific artforms—art, dance, music, film, drama, and so forth. Various scholars have made some attempts to register useful and working definitions of art. Today's definition of art incorporates the idea, philosophy and the purpose of the artwork; it also relies greatly on the reaction and appreciation of the artwork by the public and humanity at large. As such, it has become an essential part of research methodologies and orientations to focus on audience, including their immediate and bio-historical and socio-cultural contexts that inform their sensibilities in the context of African art. As cited by Haase,

> […] the answer to the question What is art, is not the same for all cultures. The idea of special objects made as "fine art" is not common to all cultures. In some cultures, what Westerners have traditionally called art, represent principles that guide every thought and action. Esthetic traditions are visible in everything such a culture produces, including functional objects.[3]

With this developing trend of reassessing and defining art, African art may be considered as a universal ideal in redefining art. According to Chanda (1994:53),

> African art is a contextual art, it is a manifestation to be understood only in the light of its cultural origins. It may be admired for its formal qualities, but the

[3]See Fee-Alexandra Haase. Beauty and Esthetics Meanings of an Idea and Concept of the Senses: An Introduction to an Esthetic Communication Concept Facing the Perspectives of its Theory, History, and Cultural Traditions of the Beautiful.https://publikationen.unituebingen.de/xmlui/bitstream/handle/10900/44052/pdf/EstheticsLatestversionNEW.pdf?sequence=1 See also Africa, Zaire. Arts Connected. Retrieved from: http://www.artsconnected.org/artsnetmn/whatsart/kongo.html (published online, June 12, 2007)

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> formal qualities tell us nothing about the artist who carved it, the culture he or she worked in, or its efficacy as useful, powerful object.

Gyekye (1996:126) posits that "in contrasting the conception of African art with that of the European, most writers in the past asserted that, while the European held a conception of "art for art's sake," that is, a purely aesthetic conception of art, the African held a functional and symbolic conception of art". Francoise Gilot is also reported to have stated in an interview that:

> [...] a Negro mask was an ethnographic object [...] Men had made those masks and other objects for a sacred purpose. A magic purpose. A kind of mediation between themselves and the unknown hostile forces that surround them in order to overcome their fear and horror by giving it form and image. (Philips, 1995:29)[4]

African art and artefacts such as masks, clothes, body painting, architecture and sculptures, like African music, have often emerged in the function of religion, rites and rituals, and are undoubtedly expressions of African emotions and identity. These expressions of art have reached high levels of aesthetics and can be divided into different styles and techniques.[5] However, a controversial debate about African art that has surfaced in the past few years concerns its role as a mirror of Western colonial history. Two questions are central to this debate: who creates meaning for African art? Who or what determines its cultural authenticity?[6] Another raging debate among Western and African art scholars is the question of whether African art is "pure" art or not?[7] Two interesting

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[4] Philips (1995) and Gilot cited in Jennifer Wilkinson. Using and Abusing Art. In Coetzee, P.H and Roux A.P.J (Eds.), *The African Philosophy Reader,* London: Routledge Publishers, 2000, p.388.

[5] See Miller et al. (Ed.). African Knowledge and Sciences: Understanding and Supporting the Ways of Knowing in Sub-Saharan Africa. In *Papers and Proceedings of an International Conference on African Knowledge and Sciences*, October 23 to 29 2005, Bolgatanga U/R Region Ghana, 2006, p.26.

[6] See Sidney Kasfir. African Art and Authenticity: A Text with a Shadow. In *African Arts 25(2):40-97.* 1992, p.2.

[7] Refer to Jennifer Wilkinson. Using and Abusing Art. In Coetzee, P.H and Roux A.P.J (Eds.), *The African Philosophy Reader,* London: Routledge Publishers, 2000, p.386.

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questions are hereby applicable to this particular debate. The first being, "who defines art"? Secondly, "who has the sole monopoly to determine what is art and what is not 'pure art"?

Till this day, the study of African art remains largely a Western discipline, the product of Western sensibility and an expression of Western aesthetic responses to African visual culture. This partially explains the disparity between African art as it is presented in written texts and African art in reality. As argued by Jan Vansina, 'African art' is usually the label given to the visual arts of people south of the Sahara, and, in particular, those of Western and Central Africa. Perceived to be authentically less 'African', northern Africa - almost half of the continent including Egypt - has been excluded from the discourse of traditional African art history.[8] Moreover, students of African art have focused primarily on the sculpted form and its aesthetic appeal, neglecting other forms. Even when students turned to the study of style and the cultural and social contexts of African art forms, they have focused primarily on the description of the function and uses of objects in an ethnographic context. Hence, their written texts, often presented in the mode of the 'ethnographic present', have expressed no concern for history, time-scale or change in African art. This approach to African art and creativity has evolved into what Sidney Kasfir has called the 'one tribe[9] one style' paradigm, a model of the theory that has dominated African art studies to date. It is due to this approach that African art, mostly presented as traditional masks and wooden sculpted figures,

[8]Olu Oguibe, & Okwui Enwezor, (Ed.). *Reading the Contemporary: African Art from Theory to the Marketplace*, MIT Press: Cambridge, Mass, 1999, p.214.

[9] Apart from Kasfir, Fried, Chinweizu, Lewellen and several other scholars have discouraged the use of 'tribe' in modern anthropological scholarship. Refer to Fried (1967: 154) cited in Ted C. Lewellen. *Political Anthropology: An Introduction*. Westport: Praeger Publishers. 2003, p.26, p.49) See also Chinweizu. (1975) *The West and the Rest of us White Predators, Black Slavers and the African Elite.* Lagos: Pero Press. p.387.

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has been perceived as a product of a universal, unchanging 'tribal' essence and communal sensibility within which the creative individual remains largely anonymous and unimportant.[10]

African art has always been a historical curiosity among art history scholars for its unique aesthetic appeal and philosophical dimensions. The combination of imagination, creativity and spiritual dexterity exhibited in African artworks goes a long way to demonstrate the extraordinary creative minds ancient African artists possessed. The link between African art and spirituality exemplifies how art is inseparable from religion—which is in essence an African way of life; a wholeness in living life. In this philosophical discourse, I explore art and the sacred, humanity and the divine, creativity and spirituality, art being a vehicle through which Africans express a sense of the sacred and spiritual experiences. Art is at the centre of how we conceive the world. Creativity and other ways of knowing (epistemology), ways of being (ontology) and ways of making meaning out of life itself (existentialism).

In this study, I argue from revised academic perspectives, about the relationship between philosophy of art, artistic modes of expression in Anlo-Ewe Vodu religion and concrete ethnographic paradigms of religious aesthetic experience within the sacred Vodu space. The discourses outlined in the research essentially reinforce the intellectual foundations laid by researchers to explore the mystical link[11] between humanity, art and the spiritual forces in Anlo-Ewe Vodu religion. Aesthetics forms a vital component in practicing and appreciating Anlo-Ewe Vodu religion, as such, it requires a thorough investigation. The concepts propounded in this

[10]Ibid. p.214.

[11] Blier (1990:91), in her studies on African art, has hinted on the links between art and African religions, political systems, philosophies, social structures, cosmologies, mythologies, geomancy systems, histories, languages, and dramaturgical forms [...] This explains how art generally plays a pivotal role in understanding, appreciating and practicing Anlo-Ewe Vodu religion like any other West African religion.

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research are based on my personal experiences[12] as an artist, curator and participant-observer in the field.

1.2 Research Questions

1. What are the key features of Anlo-Ewe Vodu traditions and how do they support or illuminate the definitions of African religion (or indigenous religion in African contexts)?

2. What is the significance of Vodu in the total Anlo-Ewe philosophy and cosmogony?

3. What are some of the specific features, practices, and local ideas that explain or distinguish Anlo-Ewe aesthetics?

4. In which specific ways do Anlo-Ewe aesthetic traditions support the notion of Art for Life's Sake?

5. What role does aesthetics play in the arts of Anlo-Ewe Vodu religion?

6. What constitutes African Aesthetics?

7. How has sacred Vodu aesthetics shaped and influenced modern art?

8. What specific insights derive from the fields of Anlo-Ewe music, dance, everyday gesture and bodily practices, for example?

9. In which specific ways are the traditions of the aesthetic exemplified in Vodu and why?

10. How does Vodu art and the general area of aesthetic explain the interrelationship of indigenous philosophy, mysticism, metaphysics, and ontology?

11. What are some of the basic problems and misconceptions in African art history?

---

[12] Some of these personal experiences have been addressed and discussed at length in Chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6. For instance, in Chapter 3, I discuss the pros and cons of autoethnographic research to address some of the prevailing academic debates that question its "validity" as a "scientific" research methodology. I also discuss how my personal experience and role as an "insider researcher" facilitated a rigorous and reliable "scientific" theoretical-methodological procedure and ways in which it contributed to the overall integrity of the thesis. All these have been elaborated in the Chapters mentioned.

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12. What are the main challenges facing the research of Vodu and how are these reasonably and impressionably mediated?

13. What specific contributions does the Anlo-Ewe Vodu tradition bring to recent studies and debates on spiritual phenomena in relation to artistic traditions?

1.3 Statement of the Problem

This research began as a personal intellectual journey to investigate (by adopting a philosophical approach) and appreciate art in Anlo-Ewe Vodu religion. Early on, I realized that much scholarly studies and research have already been conducted into Anlo-Ewe Vodu religion and philosophical thought. However, detailed attention is rarely paid to the philosophy of art and its crucial role in preserving various philosophical aspects of Anlo-Ewe Vodu religion. A few scholars have done some significant studies on Anlo-Ewe Vodu religious art and funerary sculptures such as Cudjoe (1969, 1971), Dogbe (1989) and Gilbert (1982) respectively. Other scholars include Dennis (2004), Aronson (2007), Ross (1998) Farris-Thompson (1983), and Meyer (2012). Most of these publications apparently do not provide all the in-depth information for art critics, art historians, aestheticians and philosophers of art. Hackett has also cited Blier's observation concerning this issue:

> In her review of Sieber's and Walker's *African Art in the Cycle of Life* (1987), she notes that the section on religion relies on scholars of religion (such as Mbiti) rather than African-art scholars 'probably because this is an issue few, other than Leon Siroto (1979), have really dealt with critically, *even though religion is an important secondary topic of nearly all African-art scholarship'* [13]

[13] Rosalind I. J Hackett. Art And Religion in Africa: Some Observations And Reflections. In *Journal of Religion, Africa,* 24(4), Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1994, p.295.

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As a result, the need to fill this epistemic gap has produced quite a number of important works. Some of these critical publications discuss philosophy of African art at length.[14] Faced with methodological problems and often prescriptive Western paradigms in African art scholarship, Abiodun (1990, 1994, 2014) has emphasized the crucial responsibility of harmonizing anthropological approaches and art historical perspectives to African art with African philosophy being the core of such studies or what he refers to as the element of 'soul'. [15] Houtman and Meyer (2012) have also stressed the need for a materialist approach in religious studies. Other scholars, such as Gyekye (1996, 2013), Blocker (2003), Avorgbedor (2015), and Venkatachalam (2015), have charged African art scholars to conduct more research into African philosophical notions of art and African religious aesthetics.

Another key challenge emerging researchers encounter in ethnographic studies and visual anthropology is confronting the issue of looking through research materials and archival records for information on indigenous Anlo-Ewe artists (especially women). The scarcity of comprehensive art-related documentation on Anlo-Ewe women or by Anlo-Ewe women is, in my view, a major lacuna in the scholarship related to Anlo-Ewe art and sacred aesthetics. Addressing a similar concern, Sandra Morgen (1989: 10) has also noted:

> Dominant anthropological understandings of gender are revealed not only by where anthropology textbooks and theory do discuss women and/or gender, but also by where those discussions are significantly absent.[16]

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[14]Ogbechie (2008, 2005), Okediji (1992, 1997, 2002), Onyewuenyi (1984), Okafor (2000), Avernorgbo (2008), Abiodun (1983, 1987, 1989, 1990, 1991, 1994, 2014), Gyekye (1996), Anyanwu (1981), Okpewho (1977), are among some noteworthy scholars. Key texts such as Principles of traditional African art,Onyewuenyi's (1984) *Traditional African aesthetics: A Philosophical Perspective"* and Diagne's (2011) *African Art as Philosophy* also deserve mention.

[15] See Rowland Abiodun. Understanding Yoruba Art and Aesthetics: The Concept of Ase. In *African Arts Journal, 27(3)*, 1994. See also Rowland Abiodun. *Yoruba Art and Language: Seeking the African in African Art*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014, p.1.

[16]As cited by Ted. C. Lewellen (2003). See "Gender and Anthropology: Introductory Essay." In Sandra Morgen,

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These omissions have created academic lapses in the study and appreciation of Anlo-Ewe religion and necessitates the need for critical documentation. Consequently, the growing need to fill such epistemic gaps has been an area of concern for critical scholars over the last few decades.

The basic problems of the philosopher concern facts about the nature and plan of the universe, questions and answers to which are intermingled with deep and far-reaching consequences of people's daily activities. The fundamental task of philosophy, therefore, is to seek and unravel the deepest and basic meanings underlying human life, thought and daily activities.[17] Reflecting on some problems and observations on art and religion in Africa, Hackett (1994) was spot-on when she drew the conclusion that:

> Africa's artistic and religious traditions offer primary evidence of the expressive and intellectual vitality of a vast and fascinating continent (cf. McNaughton 1988:50). Art objects, whether sculpted figures, textiles, paintings or pots, are generally enjoyed, critiqued and used by communities or groups, rather than being the prerogative of individuals alone. Hence, they provide important points of entry into people's conceptual worlds. African art is held to be successful at evoking and abstracting the powers which are central to human life because artists are not bound to produce forms that resemble or portray individual humans. Yet, despite this and the obvious ritual significance of many artistic objects, the interactive relationship between art and religion in the African context remains remarkably understudied and misunderstood. [18]

Art is the quintessential core of religion universally. Granted the significance of art in the "great" religions of the world, it can be surmised that Anlo-Ewe Vodu religion is equally impractical if it

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Ed., *Gender and Anthropology: Critical Reviews for Research and Teaching.* Washington, D.C.: American Anthropological Association, 1989, p.10.

[17] Kwame Nkrumah. Mind and Thought in Primitive Society: A Study in Ethnophilosophy: With Special Reference to The Akan Peoples of The Gold Coast, West Africa. (Unpublished doctoral thesis), Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1944, p. iv.

[18] Rosalind I. J Hackett. Art and Religion. In Africa: Some Observations and Reflections. In *Journal of Religion, Africa,* 24(4), Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1994, p.294.

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lacks the various art forms such as the visual, oral and performing arts. From an African religious perspective, a sculpture piece devoid of what Placid Tempels terms the "vital force", is just a plank of wood or art for art's sake. Tempels writes about how this "vital force"[19] (which is a life-giving energy prevalent in the universe) permeates Bantu existentialist thought. Tempels states that:

> This supreme value is life, force, to live strongly, or vital force. The Bantu say, in […] their purpose is to acquire life, strength or vital force, to live strongly, that they are to make life stronger, or to assure that force shall remain perpetually in one's posterity [...] Force, the potent life, vital energy are the object of prayers and invocations to God, to the spirits and to the dead, as well as of all that is usually called magic, sorcery or magical remedies [...] These various aspects of Bantu Behaviour already enable us to see that the key to Bantu thought is the idea of vital force, of which the source is God. Vital force is the reality, which though invisible, is supreme in man. (1959:20-23)

What Tempels refers to as "vital force" is what the Anlo-Ewes refer to as "Gbɔgbɔ" (breath of life, cosmic energy), or Ŋusɛ (Power).[20] Inferences are being drawn from the spiritual philosophies of the Bantu people in the Congo region because Vodu art, religious practices and spiritual beliefs are not confined to West Africa but they are also a shared religious experience in other parts of Africa and the Diaspora. Sub-Saharan Africa has a lot in common, as its peoples have known a

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[19] An important yet basic view about nature held by the African is that life forces permeate the whole universe and that matter and spirits are inseparable from religion. See Millar et al. (Eds.), (2006), African Knowledge and Sciences: Understanding and Supporting the Ways of Knowing in Sub-Saharan Africa in *Papers and Proceedings of an International Conference on African Knowledge and Sciences*, October 23 to 29 2005, Bolgatanga U/R Region Ghana, p.12.

All beings, whether living or spiritual, posses vital energy, or ase (power). Wise individuals such as priests, initiates, and fortune tellers are known as *alase* or *alawo.* See Klaus E. Müller and Ute Ritz Müller, *Soul of Africa: Magical Rites and Traditions*.Maveville: Imprimerie Jean Lamour, 1999, p.263.

[20]Also, this universal "vital force"or "life force" is what Tzu, the Taoist philosopher, similarly refers to as (Tao or "the way") in his philosophical treatise *Tao te Ching* which forms the religious foundations of the Taoist faith. In his research on *Vodun and the Bocio Tradition*, Springer advances compelling theories and parallels between vodu life or energy and the Wei wu Wei concept is deeply embedded in Lao Tzu's Taoist Philosophy. See Lao Tzu. *Tao te Ching.* Translated by Stephen Mitchell.1994, p.1. See also Odette Springer, Drawing Water, Drawing Breath: *Vodun and the Bocio Tradition* (Publication details unavailable).

Henri Bergson also projects the theory in his work *Creative Evolution* that human life depends on a similar force he describes as *élan vital.* See Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution.* New York: Dover Publications,1998.

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great number of migrations across the continent. Although there are more than a thousand ethnic groups, many of them have similar origins or historic relationships.[21] Riguad (1969:9) provides a rough ethnic/geographic distribution of where Vodu religion is prevalent on the African continent:

> The Voodoo[*sic*] pantheon of gods is composed of *loas* (gods) that come from all parts of Africa. Tradition has it that the term *vo-du* is drawn from the language of the Fons. Other tribes[*sic*] that contributed to Voodoo[*sic*] gods were the Nago people, the Ibos, Congos, Dahomeans, Senegalese, Haoussars, Caplaous, Madinges, Mondongues, Angolese [*sic*], Libyans, Ethiopians, and the Malgaches. Moreover, the names of these tribes [*sic*] generally serve to designate separate Voodoo [*sic*] rites themselves.

Fascinating studies exist on Vodu, Candomblé and Santeria, providing important parallels for studies on culture and religion among recent, but also politically weak or disenfranchised, African immigrants in the West.[22] In this regard, it becomes imperative to adopt an all-inclusive approach when conducting comprehensive African-centred research. As such, I endeavor as much as possible to include what Pinn (2009:1) describes as the "Black Labyrinth" (people of African descent on the African continent and in the Diaspora regions) in order to present a very broad body of knowledge regarding philosophy of art not only in Anlo-Ewe Vodu religion but also other related philosophical issues among other African people in different geographic regions. A quote from Pinn provides a clearer understanding of what he describes as the "Black Labyrinth". He infers that:

> […]—the Black labyrinth—as it relates to the process of enslavement and colonization […] African diaspora or what I call the Black labyrinth is not unidirectional, but rather overlapping, complex, multidirectional—assuming the significance of porous boundaries. Stemming from these qualifications there is a

[21] See Miller et al. (eds.), African Knowledge and Sciences: Understanding and Supporting the Ways of Knowing in Sub-Saharan Africa. In *Papers and Proceedings of an International Conference on African Knowledge and Sciences*, October 23 to 29 2005, Bolgatanga U/R Region Ghana. 2006, p.13.

[22] See Emmanuel Akyeampong, Africans in the Diaspora: The Diaspora and Africa. In *African Affairs,* 104/416, 429-447. 2005, p.193.

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> somewhat obvious caveat: The nature and meaning of the Black labyrinth extends beyond the confines of any particular location while also needing to be represented in relationship to particular locals.[23]

Stressing on particularistic studies in continental African philosophy, Wiredu (1998) argues that, different forms of inquiries must be taken into consideration or topical issues must be discussed from diverse ethnic backgrounds. For instance, "The Akan doctrine of God," "The Anlo-Ewe notion of Metaphysics," "The Yoruba concept of afterlife and so on."[24] It is in view of these discussions, issues and attitudes pertaining to the relationship between African art and religion that this study proposes to focus primarily on the philosophy of art in Anlo-Ewe Vodu religion.

1.4 Theoretical Framework

Granted, this is an Africanist study, it is crucial to take into consideration the philosophical viewpoints of African intellectuals. This mediation comes in the wake of calls by Kambon (2017)[25] among other scholars within Africanist academic circle for researchers to consider, study, cite and critique works not only by Western scholars, but also, intellectuals of African descent.

This call is epistemically imperative because in every given society, distinguished intellectual accomplishments in the form of philosophy and history are preserved and passed on through its musicians, philosophers, artists, historians, poets, nationalists, scientists etc. In that regard, I turn to art criticism, religious-aesthetics, argumentative discussions, counter-debates and philosophical dialectics, principally through the theoretical perspectives of Nkrumah, Abiodun, Gyekye, and

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[23] See Anthony B. Pin, Introduction: The Black Labyrinth, Aesthetics, and Black Religion. In *Black Religion and Aesthetics, Religious Thought and Life in Africa and the African Diaspora.* New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009, p.1.

[24] See Kwasi Wiredu, Toward Decolonizing African Philosophy and Religion. In *African Studies Quarterly*, 1(4), 1998, p.23.

[25]Personal interaction with Dr. Obadele Kambon during a presentation of my doctoral thesis proposal (2017).

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Gbolonyo, all of whose profound thoughts I have found quite crucial to the theoretical framework of this research. My theoretical framework includes but not limited to Nkrumah's philosophical dialectics (philosophy of African art, logical reasoning, counter-colonial epistemic examples and deductive arguments). Abiodun's revised philosophical approach to studying African art will also form a core component of my conceptual framework as a synthesis of anthropology and art historical perspectives with African philosophy at the core. Other key ideas include his critical theories of aesthetics, rationalistic debates on psycho-aesthetics and the reconceptualization of empirical observations or findings of aesthetic practices in the field. Gbolonyo's analytical approaches to understanding Anlo-Ewe aesthetics, epistemology and religious philosophy will equally serve as guiding rubrics.

A general aesthetic triad will serve as a logical prism, through which the discourse of aesthetics will be assessed in order to boost a deeper understanding and appreciation of sacred Vodu art. Pietz' dialectic reasoning on the discourse of "fetishism" and Johnson's rational approach to argumentative discussion will undergird some of the debates advanced in various chapters. To further ground the theoretical framework in revisionist scholarship, it is necessary to explore developing academic trends in improving religious studies. As advocates of studying religion from a materialist perspective, revisionist religious scholars like Meyer and Houtman (2012) affirm that renewed interests and the turn to the notion of materiality in order to correct slanted Protestant views of religious beliefs and practices widely shaped the comparative study of religions ever since its inception around the mid-19th century. Addressing the significance of a materialist approach in studying 'material religion' and its key analytical concepts, Meyer and Houtman (2012) suggest that we take, as an entry point for comparative religious studies, concrete examples, for instance:

> Objects like relics, amulets, dress codes, painted or sculpted images, written words

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> and architectural spaces. Feelings and sensory experiences like seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching. Bodily performances in specific gestures, rituals, ceremonies and festivals.[26]

Meyer's materialist approach in religious studies will be principally employed in this current study taking into consideration the over-arching materialist notion of giving life, form and image to African spirits via creative or artistic interventions. As a result, the theoretical framework establishes the foundations of this research by first interrogating religious iconography and the African concept of God. At the core of this philosophical inquiry is the conscious effort to dislodge some of the misconceptions and bias towards Vodu religion.

Innumerable representations of gods, deities, totems and ancestors abound in the Anlo-Ewe Vodu iconography and yet no single representation of god or goddess could ever exhaust the limitlessness of the power of the Supreme Being (*Mawu-Sogbolisa*) in the Anlo-Ewe pantheon. What constricting theological belief accounts for this contradiction in Anlo-Ewe religious iconography? This is a phenomenon, which has for so long remained under-researched or persistently been overlooked by some iconoclastic Western scholars. A few Western scholars who have attempted to address this particular issue apparently do not have a full grasp of the African conception of the Supreme Being. For instance, commenting on the Akan conception of the Supreme Being, Ellis wrote that Nyankopon:

> Is really a god borrowed from Europeans and only thinly disguised [...] To the negro of Gold Coast (now Ghana), Nyankopon is a material and tangible being, possessing a body, legs, arms, in fact all the limbs, and the senses, and faculties of man[...] no sacrifice was offered to him. There were no priests for Nyankopon [...] consequently no form of worship of Nyankopon was established.[27]

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[26] See Johan M. Strijdom. The Material Turn in Religious Studies and the Possibility of Critique: Assessing Chidester's Analysis of "the Fetish"'. In *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 70(1), 2014, p.1.

[27]See Ellis A. B., *Twi-Speaking Peoples of the Gold Coast,* quoted in: Smith, E. W., *African Ideas of God*. p.162.

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Yet, in Akan art, there seems to be very little or no evidence of a physical representation of Nyankopon (which is apparently considered as taboo and gross sacrilege on the part of an artist who will dare to create such physical representations).[28] Neither did Ellis produce concrete ethnographic evidence of, say, a sculpture or sacred installation consecrated in Nyankopon's honour to illustrate his so-called "material" or "tangible" conception of the Supreme Being in Akan religious philosophy.[29] Other scholars include E.B Tylor, Sandra Greene and Jacob Spieth.

Greene, for instance, indicates that until their contact with the European missionaries, the Ewe neither had the concept of, nor believed in Mawu as the Supreme Being. She states that Mawu was just one of the Ewe gods and that the Ewe conferred and/or expunged the status of supremacy of any of their gods at different times.[30] Reacting to the inconsistencies and inaccuracies in Greene's posit, Gbolonyo proceeds to explain the etymological roots of the word 'Mawu'. He notes that:

> With the knowledge that contrary research exists we are better prepared to analyze the details of Greene's misinterpretations. First, there is no deity in Ewe culture that is defined as supreme other than Mawu (the Supreme God). The name Mawu, by ontological definition, means Supreme. Etymologically, two words or phrases make up the word "Mawu."
>
> *Ma* or ***Ema*** = He/She that
>
> *Wu* or ***Ewu*** = surpasses or supersedes. Thus, Mawu (***Ema*** *si ke* ***wu)***, which literary translates as '*that* which *surpasses* or *supersedes* all else', refers only to one Supreme entity (God). Mawu by Ewe definition was never a lesser deity. There do

[28] It is a shared belief in West Africa, that, the supreme deity is usually a remote creator deity who is never represented in sculptural form nor worshipped directly. Instead worshipers make offerings and sacrifices to groups of intermediate ancestral and nature spirits. See Judith Perani and Fred T. Smith. *The Visual Arts of Africa: Gender, Power and Life Cycle in Africa,* London: Pearson Publishers, 1998, p.9.

[29]It must be also stressed here that "Nyamedua" is not considered as a physical representation of the "Supreme Being" as the Akans conceived it.

[30] Gbolonyo expressed his disappointment in Greene's neo-colonial philosophical framework of writing which further promotes a condescending notion about Anlo-Ewe Vodu. See Justice Stephen Kofi Gbolonyo. Indigenous Knowledge and Cultural Values in Ewe Musical Practice: Their Traditional Roles and Place in Modern Society. Unpublished PhD Thesis. University of Pittsburg, 2009, pp.210-211.

G.K Nukunya, Insider Anthropology: The Case of the Anlo-Ewe. *Etnofoor, Jaarg. 7(1),* 1994, pp. 29.

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> exist many lesser deities in Ewe culture. However, there has never been one single lesser deity that all Ewe worshipped in time and space. Lesser deities and other metaphysical entities are subordinate to one Supreme God.[31]

Spieth also presents a parallel linguistic analysis of the word *Ma–wu*. It is interesting to note that, in his linguistic analysis on the concept of Supreme God in Ewe theology, Spieth classifies *Mawu* under "Sky Gods".[32] Such misrepresentations further deepen the myth of mislabeling *Mawu* as a "subsidiary deity". However, his submission remains relatively enlightening for this particular theological debate. According to Speith (2011:454):

> They explain, the word means "more" or "surpass". Accordingly, *Mawu* would be unrivalled, unequalled of all beings […] When you ask about the area that is surpassed or transcended by God, the answer given is as follows: *Ewu dzifo kple anyigba, ewu trɔ̃wo kple amegbetɔ̃wo haɛ̃.* "He surpasses (transcend) heaven and Earth and the *trɔ̃wo,* 'earth Deities' and human beings". The conclusion of their explanation is always expressed, *Ewu nusianu,* "He surpasses everything that exist" […] The younger people among them, particularly the educated among them, on the contrary, explain *ma* as the future form of the first person, thus: "I shall be more", or but also the negation "un", "not", and would then mean *ma-wu*, "the unsurpassed" or "insurmountable".

In fact, Spieth (2011:452) further reinforces Gbolonyo's thesis when he wrote centuries earlier that:

> It is not the advent of the Christian religion that brought to them (Ewes) the belief in God or a particular idea of God. This they had long, long before the arrival of the missionaries, but in the sense that their original perception about God has perhaps broadened[...]

Gavua (2000:84) also offers a similar theory. He states that:

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[31] See Justice Stephen Kofi Gbolonyo, Indigenous Knowledge and Cultural Values in Ewe Musical Practice: Their Traditional Roles and Place in Modern Society. Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Pittsburg, 2009, p. 213.

[32] Abraham has similarly observed that, in their attempt to discuss Akan concept of God, a number of Western writers, (like Rattray, Westerman and Meyerowitz) have made theological blunders by "trying to identify *Onyame* or *Nyame* as a "sky god", because of a supposed etymology." See William E. Abraham, *The Mind of Africa.* Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2015, p.47.

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> The indigenous religion of the Northern Ewes combines a belief in a High God, *Se, Segbo-lisa,* or *Mawuga,* who is spirit, omnipresent, omnipotent, and omniscient, with belief in other smaller gods that serve as agents of the High God and as media through which humans communicates, with this God.

Commenting on the same subject among the Asantes, Radin (1952) had this to say about the Supreme Being of the Asantes:

> The religion of the Ashanti[*sic*], like that of all the Guinea coast tribes[*sic*], is highly developed and intricate.[33] An earth goddess is acknowledged, and a supreme god in the firmament, called Nyankonpon or Nyame, from whom stems a bureaucracy of lesser gods, the Abosom, graded in a descending scale.[34]

Of particular concern here is the manner in which the concept of a Supreme Being is expressed not only in Anlo-Ewe theology but also in Anlo-Ewe socio-linguistics. Contributing to this discussion, Gavua (2000:98) advances the argument that:

> there are close similarities between the indigenous religions and Christianity. In both religions, there is a belief in a High God and intermediaries through whom human beings could communicate with Him/Her. While Christians recognize Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary, Angels and Saints as channels of contacting God, community gods, personal gods and the ancestors are the media of communication for the followers of the indigenous religion. While some Christians invoke the blood of Jesus to seek redress, their counterparts in the African religion invoke spirits of their gods. The belief in life after death and the expectation of spiritual protection from worship are also common to both religions.[35]

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[33] Radin's observation clearly invalidates Ellis' misinformed opinions about the Akan religious world view which he erroneously captured when he wrote that: 'On the Gold Coast we found a multitude of village gods, a few tribal gods, and none at all which were worshipped by the Tshi-speaking peoples as a whole […] the possession of a number of general objects of worship by the Ewe-speaking peoples, clearly marks a step made by them in the evolution of religion in advance of the condition in which we found the Tshi-speaking peoples. See A.B Ellis. *The E'we-Speaking Peoples of the Slave Coast of West Africa, their Religion, Manners, Customs, Laws, Languages*. London: Chapman and Hall Limited, 1890, pp.13-14.

[34]See Paul Radin. *African Folktales and Sculpture.* New York: Pantheon Books Inc, 1952, p.ix

[35]See Kodzo Gavua (Ed.). *A Handbook of Eweland: Volume II: The Northern Ewes in Ghana*. Accra: Woeli Publishing Services, 2000, p.98.

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Several other scholars have contributed similar ideas to the study of African religions that authenticates the concept of monotheism inherent in African religions. For example, Gérarde Magloire-Danton (2005) writes that Price-Mars "contributes to a major epistemic change in regard to Afro-Christian and African-derived belief systems by placing Vodu [...] in the same category of thought as monotheistic belief systems".[36] Again, a rational inquiry re-emerges to ascertain why Anlo-Ewe Vodu religion, like many other African religions, is still vilified in modern times by Western scholars and some African "Evangelists" as 'heathenism', 'animism', 'satanic', 'paganism', 'demon worship', 'superstition', 'ancestral worship', 'fetishism', 'juju', 'voodoo', 'black magic' and 'idolatry'? Williams provides a fitting answer to that effect by explaining that:

> The Blacks' conception of God was of a scale too grand to be acceptable to Western minds. They had to reduce it by using a term that is equated with paganism, "primitive" backwardness and barbarism. The word is "animism." But the historian and anthropologist are witnesses against themselves, still proving the very opposite of what they intend. In documenting animism as the chief characteristic of the religion of the Blacks from the remotest times they are also documenting the fact that the Blacks' belief in the existence as well as the nature of one Universal God also goes way back to time immemorial. And what is animism? As applied to Africans it is the belief that the spirit of the Creator or the Universal God permeates all of His creations would be regarded as highly "civilized" if expressed by a Westerner in some such terms as a "reverence for life." Indeed, precisely the same African religious belief becomes the doctrine of "Immanence" in Christianity.[37]

Indeed, Williams' intellectual position is still shared by many academics in modern religious studies and revisionist anthropology. Before we proceed to properly address the notion of animism falsely attributed to African religions, it is important to briefly stress the fact that, few Western scholars are cautious enough to admit errors in the formulations of early Eurocentric

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[36]Celucien L. Joseph. The Religious Philosophy of Jean Price-Mars in *Journal of Black Studies, 43(6),* 2012, p.621.

[37]See Chancellor Williams, *The Destruction of the Black Civilization: Great Issues of a Race From 4500 B.C to 2000 A.D*. Chicago: Third World Press, 1987, p.230.

University of Ghana http://ugspace.ug.edu.gh

anthropologists. Discussing the science of how the original *Homo sapiens* in Africa harnessed brain chemistry through ritual performances and religious practices, Thompson (2011:46) acknowledges "only one real religion" whose roots can be traced to ancient Africa some 50,000 to 70,000 years back. Among the practitioners of this ancient true religion are the Kung San people of Africa, the people living in present-day Bay of Bengal's Andaman Islands and the Aborigines of Australia who originally migrated out of Africa.[38] In Thompson's own words:

> All three of these tribes[*sic*] have religions striking in their similarity. They are all based on song, dance, and trance. Why? It turns out those are activities that harness some of our most powerful brain chemicals, the ones that influence pleasure, fear, love, trust, self-esteem, and attachment. So powerful was the religion our ancestors discovered that if you look closely, you still see echoes of this first religion in all of the faiths on the planet today. Just as we are all the sons and daughters of a small band of hunter-gatherers that roamed Africa less than a hundred thousand years ago, so too are all our religions.[39]

Writing about African religion, 'animism' was first used by the British anthropologist E.B. Taylor in an article in 1866. The word actually comes from the Latin word *anima*, which implies an association with the idea of spirit or soul. Africans do not believe that every object has a soul but rather that spirits can have certain objects as their abode. Acheampong (1998) has discussed this particular debate at length in his refutations of such ill-informed views. He particularly addressed various issues pertaining to this discussion. [40] It is, therefore, a misnomer.

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[38] The exact time of arrival in Australia is still an unresolved question among scholars, but the period is usually speculated to be between 50,000 to 65,000 years ago. See Clarkson et al. Human Occupation of Australia by 65,000 Years Ago. In *Nature 547*, 2017, pp. 306-310.

[39] See Anderson Thompson. *Why we Believe in Gods: A Concise Guide to the Science of Faith*. Pitchstone Publishing North Carolina. 2011. p.46.

[40] Refer to Chapter four where Talbot's "four elements of the structure of African religion" is brought under critical academic scrutiny. See Stephen Owoahene-Acheampong. *Inculturation and African Religion: Indigenous and Western Approaches to Medical Practice.* New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc, 1998, pp.49-54. Also refer to Coleen Wright. *Art and Symbolism in Ewe Religion: Ritual Objects of the Yewe and Tro Mami Worship in Klikor, Ghana*. African Diaspora ISPs, 1999, p.6.

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Another contributor to misrepresentations of African religion, Blier (1995:62), has also suggested that, "certain features of natural environment which are in some way distinctive — trees, mountains, stones, rivers, and springs for example — also are identified as Vodu."[41] This is equally an oversimplification. She also leads researchers on with no concrete information to support this debatable claim. Blier further generalizes by identifying kings as "Vodu": "not surprisingly, Kings, because they display various forms of mysterious power, are also described as Vodu."[42] This notion clearly neglects the subtle spiritual intricacies and distinction between Divine Kingship and Vodu. In response to and refutations of all these misconstrued opinions equating African religions to "animism" or "mysterious forces", Mbiti emphatically declares:

> African people are aware of all these elements religion: God, spirits and divinities are part of the traditional body of beliefs. Christianity and Islam acknowledge the same type of spiritual beings. The theory of religious evolution, in whichever direction, does not satisfactorily explain or interpret African religion. Animism is not an adequate description of these religions and it is better for that term to be abandoned once and for all.[43]

A critical etymological study of similar ideologies and terms associated with various aspects of West African religions in general reveals that they convey distorted views and concepts. For instance, Davis (1985:11) argues that:

> The orthography of the name of the Haitian traditional religion has been the source of some academic debate. The word *voodoo* comes from the Fon language of Dahomey (Now Benin) and Togo. It means simply "god" or "spirit". Unfortunately, as a result of the sensational and inaccurate interpretations in the media, Hollywood in particular, the word *voodoo* has come to represent a fantasy of black magic and sorcery. Anthropologists have attempted both to highlight and avoid this stereotype by using a number of terms including *vodun, voudoun,* and *vodoun.*

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[41] See Susan Blier. West African Roots of Vodou. In *Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou*. (Ed. Donald J. Cosentino). Chai Wan: South Sea International Press Ltd, 1995, p.62.

[42] Ibid. p.65.

[43] See J. S. Mbiti. *African Religions and Philosophy.* Frederick Praeger: New York, 1969, pp.7-8.

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> I have followed their lead because I feel, as I hope this book will show, that the rich religion of the Haitian traditional society deserves to be recognized, and what we have come to know as "voodoo" bears little resemblance to it.

I have also subsequently proceeded to follow suit by using 'Vodu' which sounds linguistically and phonetically close to how it is actually pronounced in the Anlo-Ewe language that is spoken around the regions where I conducted my field research. African religion has been denigrated, scorned and misunderstood in all respects. One of the major reasons for this problem is that Vodu (just like any other African religion) remains a religion deeply steeped in African rituals and esoteric practices, for people of African descent, and based on an understanding of the connection between the ordinary and metaphysical realm. This poses a huge challenge for Westerners and non-Vodu adherents, who lack adequate knowledge and understanding of the religion and its spiritual practices.

The problem of misunderstanding Vodu religion is apparently more pronounced in Western societies than one can imagine. McCarthy Brown (2004:166) has noted that:

> There is in the United States a perverse will to misunderstand Haitians and their religion. It is almost as if the United States needs Haiti to carry its projections, to justify our long history of racism. A strikingly persistent line of reasoning about Haiti can be traced from Moreau de St. Mery through to Laurence Harrison, a former chief of USAID, who made strikingly similar argument in summer 1993 edition of *Harper's*, at the height of Haitian suffering during the period of Aristde's exile. Vodou, Harrison argued, has no morality and therefore Haiti has no civilization. That is the country's biggest problem, Harrison argued. Haiti's case is hopeless.[44]

Such polarized viewpoints have led several scholars to empirically refute some of the misconceptions of African religion. Mbiti (1969:11) maintains that:

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[44] Karen McCarthy Brown Vodou in the "Tenth Department" New York's Haitian Community. In *Beyond Primitivism: Indigenous Religious Traditions and Modernity*. Jacob K. Olupona (Ed.), New York: Routledge, 2004, p.166.

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> The fact remains that African religions and philosophy have been subjected to a great deal of misinterpretation, misrepresentation and misunderstood. They have been despised, mocked and dismissed as primitive and underdeveloped. One needs only to look at the earlier titles and accounts to see the derogatory language used, prejudiced descriptions given and false judgements passed upon these religions. In missionary circles, they have been condemned as superstition, satanic, devilish and hellish.

Venkatachalam (2012:47) puts forward a parallel theory by stating that:

> The introduction of Christianity did not represent a break in Anlo religious history. Rather, Christianity was inserted into local religious concepts and practices, coming to function within the historical dynamics and structural schema of those local religious agents. Instead, spiritual entities in the pre-Christian pantheon were reconceptualized and often understood as satanic forces located in opposition to Christianity.

Mbiti's and Venkatachalam's observations present a general overview of how African religion is not only denigrated by the West but also Christianized Africans who do not believe in African religion also malign African religions through ignorance.

To the outsider, Vodu has long been thought of as a primitive form of magic and belief in ghosts. Most of what the average layman knows of Vodu comes only from misleading use of it in Hollywood horror movies and in paperback thrillers that emphasize the "witch doctor'' or the "sticking of pins" in "Vodu dolls." But the fact is that Vodu encompasses an exceedingly complex religion and magic with complicated rituals and symbols that have developed for thousands of years—perhaps longer than any other of today's established faiths. The believer in Vodu—and there are millions of blacks and some whites who practice it—centers his hopes and fears as strongly on it as does a follower of Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, or Islam.[45] There is more significance to the Anlo-Ewe Vodu religion than the superstitious beliefs being propagated by non-

[45] See Milo Rigaud. *Secrets of Voodoo.* New York: City Lights Books, 1969, p.7.

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Vodu worshippers. Davis (1985:72) provides a constructive definition of Vodu. By Davis' definition, Vodu is:

> A complex mystical world view, a system of beliefs concerning the relationship between man, nature, and the supernatural forces of the universe. Vodu cannot be abstracted from day to day life of the believers. In Haiti, as in Africa, there is no separation between the sacred and the secular, between the holy and the profane, between material and the spiritual. Every dance, every song, every action is but a particle of the whole [...] Vodu not only embodies a set of spiritual concepts, it prescribes a way of life, a philosophy, and a code of ethics that regulates social behavior.

Mazrui has written that while the West was going to the moon, Africans were going to the village. Perhaps they needed to go to the village. For, it is in the village that they can find their true selves as Africans. Their Africanness started in the village and their roots will remain in the village. As they return to the village, they need to understand that their village is, was and has not been a perfect place. As they look back with nostalgia to their past and reclaim their ways, they need to understand that their forebears had produced some knowledge but had not completed the process. They need to understand that their forebears were constantly searching for meanings and even welcomed intruders as part of that search. They need also to understand that their past has been interrupted in many ways. They need to understand that our villages remain tainted, adulterated or even polluted due to such intrusions.[46] The realization is dawning on many African scholars that philosophy is really a profound examination and analysis of the cultural and historical experience of a people. Philosophy is essentially a cultural phenomenon. And, therefore, to do African philosophy, Africans will have to come to grips—analytical grips—with the cultural experience

[46] See Miller et al. (Ed.). African Knowledge and Sciences: Understanding and Supporting the Ways of Knowing in Sub-Saharan Africa, in *Papers and Proceedings of an International Conference on African Knowledge and Sciences*, October 23 to 29 2005, Bolgatanga U/R Region Ghana, 2006, p. 87.

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of the African people, with the multifaceted problems of the African society and intellectual life.[47] Fanon also in his discourse on national culture discusses the need for colonized intellectuals to delve and immerse themselves into African culture and philosophy. Fanon asserts that colonized intellectuals "have decided to delve deeper. Since there is little to marvel at in its current state of barbarity, they have decided to go further, to delve deeper, and they must have been overjoyed to discover that the past was not branded with shame, but dignity, glory, and sobriety" (1963: 148).

1.5 Objectives

This research aims to:

1. Examine the philosophical role art plays in the practice of Anlo-Ewe Vodu religion in relation to the lived experiences of the people, both the purely aesthetic and the so-called functional;
2. Interrogate and redefine some misleading theories and misconceptions associated with the art of Anlo-Ewe Vodu religion.
3. Visually document Anlo-Ewe Vodu art in order to contribute a broader knowledge that would facilitate the appreciation of the significant interaction of art, religion and socio-cultural domains of life among the Anlo-Ewe people.

1.6 Scope of Research

This research scope is limited to the Anlo-Ewe Vodu religion, principally among the Anlos in Klikor, Torgodo, Dagbamete, Woe (Keta) and Afiadenyigba area.

- This study examines the significance of art, along with its philosophical dimensions and socio-religious purposes in Anlo-Ewe Vodu religion.

[47] See Kwame Gyekye. *Philosophy, Culture and Vision: African Perspectives*. Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2013, p.66.

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- The religious module of this research will focus on the artistic elements employed in the diverse aspects of Anlo-Ewe Vodu religion (such as sacred aesthetics of Brékété, Gorovodu, and Adzima).
- The arts are examined under the two main branches, namely the visual and performing arts. The areas covered include the relevance of wall paintings, shrine art, religious symbolism, iconography, installation art, pottery, textiles, sculpture, jewelry, body art, scarifications and coiffure.

1.7 Significance of the Study

Often, Ghanaian culture is defined in terms of drumming, dancing, languages, clothing, food etc. Not much attention is paid to the visual arts as an integral part of the totality of Ghanaian culture. It is in view of all these issues that this research principally aims to re-examine, critically analyse and explore the philosophy of art in Anlo-Ewe Vodu religion. This will help future scholars and the public at large to acknowledge and appreciate all the inherent qualities in the arts of Anlo-Ewe Vodu religion. Prominence will be given to Ewe women artists who have been largely under-represented in the documentation of Anlo-Ewe Vodu art. The research will also serve as a source of reference for future researchers who want to further their research in Anlo-Ewe Vodu religion and art. It will also foster a genuine understanding of the philosophical essence that underscores the arts employed in Anlo-Ewe Vodu religion. In a much broader sense, the findings produced in this research will serve as a medium of redefining Ghanaian culture and promoting Ghana's rich cultural heritage to a wider audience. It will also help to dislodge some of the prevailing misconceptions and negative attitudes towards Anlo-Ewe Vodu art and religion and in African art in general.

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CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

This chapter has been broadly classified into three topical issues and sub-topics to boost the general understanding of the various issues being discussed. The review begins with a rationale for engaging in argumentative discussion for this particular chapter. The various topics reviewed are: Western psycho-historical perspectives of African art, philosophical foundations of European accounts of African art, socio-historical roots of African "primitivism" and "fetishism," in the study of African art (among other relevant related discussions). The review also captures various intellectual discussions on African art and the colonial encounter. References are also made to African art in the religious space. Furthermore, the review traces the academic trajectory of Eurocentric bias of documenting African art and the current intellectual developments surrounding some of the prevailing negative notions associated with it. Finally, there is a summary of discussion under each sub-topic and the overall discussion has been summarized at the concluding section of this chapter.

2.2 A Historical Overview of Primary European Accounts of African Art

Engaging in a philosophical discourse on African art is not necessarily limited to a historical account, descriptive cataloguing or an "interpretative" analysis of the arts per se. The ever-growing intellectual demands of the discipline has necessitated a synthesis between anthropology, philosophy, linguistics, religion, socio-historical context, psycho-aesthetic[48] foundations of

[48] Psycho-aesthetics refers to the study of the psychological aspects of aesthetic perception but the term has perhaps broadened to capture other disciplines related to perception.

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African art and recent intellectual debates and developments within the global art world over the years. The main rationale here is to position ourselves as what Gramsci (1996) refers to as the 'organic intellectual' in order to have well-rounded academic discussions not only about art but other related disciplines as well.[49] In art history methods, this school of thought is best captured by Klonk et al. (2006):

> Since the 1970s, art historians, like their colleagues in other disciplines, have become suspicious of the kind of generalisations about the human condition and identification of transcendental ideals that ran through earlier systematic accounts. They have also become suspicious of explanations of art that refer to global changes in the economy and society. Instead they concentrate on the analysis of the specific historical circumstances in which a work of was produced. The social roots of works of art are much more concretely identified in these accounts. They include religion, politics and gender, as well as economics, without privileging any one of them.[50]

Relatedly, this review proceeds by first outlining some of the rationales and rubrics of argumentative discussion, in order to ground the philosophical dialogue along a continuum of contesting intellectual enquiries. Stressing the significance of practicing argumentative discussion, Onyewuenyi (1999) emphasizes that "philosophy thrives in the cesspool of argumentation; discussion, dialogue, using analysis and conversation that does not end in the evaporative stream of verbalization but in the systematic documentation of ideas."[51]Among other functions, the fundamental purpose of practicing argumentation is characterized by the exchange of theoretical ideas, rational persuasion and reaching a shared rationally-supported position or the common truth

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[49] See Antonio Gramsci. *Prison Notebooks*. Vol 2, Joseph A. Buttigieg. (Ed.). Colombia University Press: New York. 1996. p.202.

[50] Michael Hate and Charlotte Klonk. *Art History: A Critical Introduction to its Methods*. Manchester University Press: Manchester, 2006. pp.120-121.

[51] See Onyewuenyi, I. C. "Traditional African Aesthetics: A Philosophical Perspective". In Kit R. Christensen (Ed.), Philosophy *and Choice.* London: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1999.

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about some particular subject matter.[52] In his treatise on *'Manifest Rationality',* Johnson (2000) further expands our understanding of argumentative discussion by defining it as:

> a sociocultural activity of constructing, presenting, interpreting, criticizing, and revising arguments for the purpose of reaching a shared rationally supported position on some issue. […] This activity cannot be understood as the activity of any individual or group of individuals but rather must be understood within the network of customs, habits, and activities of the broader society that gives birth to it, that continues to maintain it and that the practice serves. An argument is a product of that practice that means that typically it is the outcome of a process of arguing that involves both the arguer and the other. [53]

In reforming intellectual ideas, the practice of argumentative discussion prevails in many regards because critical scholars usually maintain that, to rationally persuade, one needs to give strong reasons for others to assess and accept their ideas. Being the most secure route to correct views and wise policies, argumentative discussion apparently seems to be the utmost logical path to this particular revisionist philosophical discussion.[54] Yet argument is more than a set of expository or rhetorical skills. Like art itself, a successful piece of argument communicates somewhat more than it says explicitly. It stimulates readers to think in new ways not only about the author's topic but about other aspects of their lives as well.[55] While good argument is an efficient approach to present fresh perspectives and revise quaint ideas, a good indicator of a strong argument is that which is built on solid research and empirical evidence. However, merely compiling facts does not constitute a good argument. In research, facts are presented to strengthen solid arguments for

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[52] See Ralph H Johnson. *Manifest Rationality: A Pragmatic Theory of Argument*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc, 2000, p.158.

[53]Ibid. p.12.

[54]See David Hitchcock. *The Practice of Argumentative Discussion*. McMaster University: Ontario, p.1.

[55] Susan Rabiner and Alfred Fortunato. *Thinking Like Your Editor: How to Write Great Serious Nonfiction and get it Published.* W.W. Norton & Company: New York, 2002. p.71.

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effective communication and comprehension of issues being discussed. As remarked by Rabiner and Fortunato (2002:72), 'to be effective it must be intellectually defensible.'

In a related theory, Graham (2008) proposed a "disagreement hierarchy" in an essay entitled, "How to Disagree", placing different kinds of arguments into a seven-point hierarchy and observing that, "If moving up the disagreement hierarchy makes people less mean, that will make most of them happier."[56] Graham further stresses that:

> The most convincing form of disagreement is refutation. It's also the rarest, because it's the most work. Indeed, the disagreement hierarchy forms a kind of pyramid, in the sense that the higher you go the fewer instances you find. To refute someone, you probably have to quote them. You have to find a "smoking gun," a passage in whatever you disagree with that you feel is mistaken, and then explain why it's mistaken.[57]

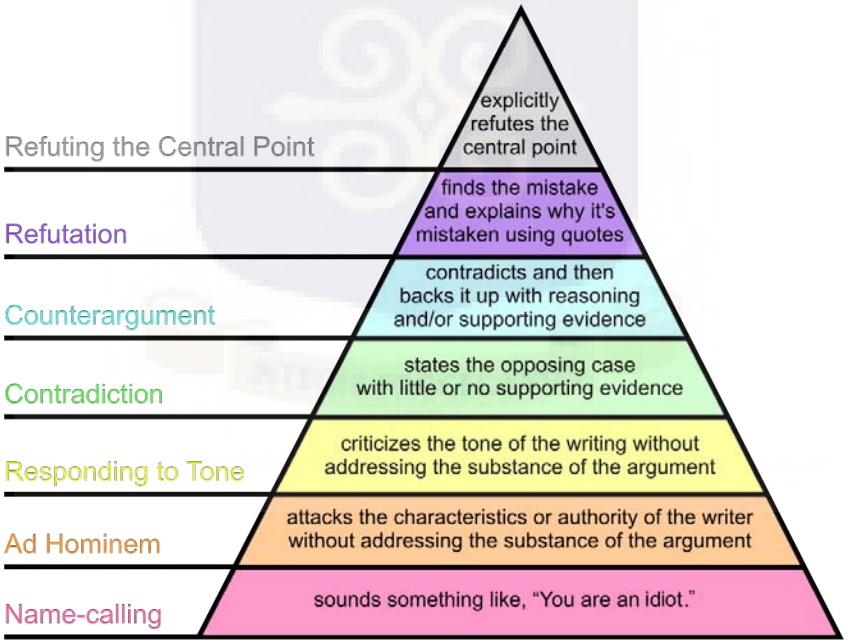

Diagram 2.0 Diagram explaining Graham's Hierarchy of Disagreement [58]

[56] Retrieved from: http://www.relativelyinteresting.com/grahams-hierarchy-disagreement/ (Accessed on 13/02/2018)

[57] Retrieved from: http://www.paulgraham.com/disagree.html (Accessed on 13/02/2018)

[58] Source of diagram: http://www.relativelyinteresting.com/grahams-hierarchy-disagreement/ (Accessed on 13/02/2018)

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To this effect, Graham's disagreement hierarchy will also serve as a guiding principle to argue rationally. The practice of rationalistic argumentative discussions, refutations and critical debates is even more prevalent in the study of aesthetics and criticism where opposing viewpoints crisscross each other in publications with various scholars trying to entrench their intellectual positions. Till today, discussions within the African art academies are tainted with raging debates and strong disagreements even though most art critics and aestheticians have similar educational backgrounds. All of this can be linked to how each and every individual, ethnicity, race, organization or society express, perceive, "interpret," appreciate or define art based on their shared philosophies and lived experiences. Solso (2003) further extends this notion by inferring that:

> The interplay between the internal (cognitive) representation of reality and the external (physical) representation is a fascinating problem in cognitive psychology, art, science, and philosophy.[59]

Engaging in critical debates with Western theoretical formulations of African art seems a valid approach to consider in reexamining African art. The significance of trained subjectivity becomes particularly indispensable in decolonizing African art scholarship. Articulating the importance of decolonizing African philosophy, Wiredu (1998) charges African philosophers to adopt analytical positions toward some of the problematic theories Western philosophy poses to African studies. He advises revisionist scholars to adopt what he refers to as a "doubly critical stance" in re-examining inherited colonial culture, religion and the colonial system of education. He notes:

> philosophical decolonization is necessarily a conceptual enterprise; it is not just a critique of doctrine but also of fundamental conceptualization. I use "critique" here in the sense of an examination of validity rather than the exposure of invalidity. Indeed, philosophy, or at any rate the best kind of philosophy, is a critique, for the most part, of fundamental conceptualization. That is to say, it is the critical

[59]See Robert L. Solso. *The Psychology of Art and the Evolution of the Conscious Brain.* Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2003, pp.228.

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> examination of the conceptual framework upon which the thought of a culture is erected.[60]

The critical examination of the academic discourse on African aesthetics must be taken into consideration in that regard and also properly documented. This becomes essential because, as an academic discipline, African aesthetics was mainly erected on racist ideologies, racist world views and racist interpretations by Western writers. As noted by Gordon (2017:24), "a problem with constructing black aesthetics is whether *aesthetics* has been so colonized that its production would be a form of colonizing instead of decolonial practice." Gordon (1997, 2000, 2008, 2014) has also argued that, "over the years that colonial and racist theory necessitated at least three intellectual responses from those it degrades: (1) critical reflection on what it means to be human, (2) meditations on freedom, and (3) a metacritique of reason." Gordon further stresses the importance of maintaining a link between aesthetics, liberation and metacritical reflection on reason.[61]

Another role to assume as a philosopher in response to colonial African aesthetics is critique, contrarian analysis and the shrewdness of a "skeptical skeptic". This simply requires philosophers to reject and subject everything to question and assume nothing is true or logical until it has been critically analysed, proven and theoretically resistant to doubt. Then, and only then, can we hold a theory to be intellectually sound and logically consistent. This approach to philosophizing is what analytical philosophers refer to as "universal methodic doubt". A prerequisite rule about logical debate, as already illustrated in Graham's (2008) hierarchy of disagreement, is that you have to produce credible logically-consistent arguments of your own and to also show where each

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[60] See Wiredu. Toward Decolonizing African Philosophy and Religion. In *African Studies Quarterly,*1(4), 1998.

[61] See Lewis R. Gordon. Black Aesthetics, Black Value. In *Public Culture* 30:1, 2017, pp.23-24. doi 10.1215/08992363-4189143

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of your "opponent's" argument is faulty. This is made possible by finding a logical fallacy, ambiguity or inconsistencies in each of your opponent's arguments. Like warfare, you need to "devise powerful offense strategies" to utterly "vanquish" your "opponent's forces" and "tough defense systems" to "protect" your "army".

Gyekye (2013:71) has also inferred in an interview that we exercise caution in making commentaries on Western philosophies in order not to make African philosophy an appendix to Western philosophy.[62] It must be stressed, however, that, in an attempt to cross-examine inherited colonial doctrines, it becomes imperative to selectively cite and critique Western publications on African art since they are among the early chroniclers and purveyors of the discipline. As revisionist scholarship becomes very necessary, African philosophers constantly need to call Western scholars out in order to address false philosophical assumptions and to also draw the thin line between fact and cynicism. African scholars certainly need to create a kind of "us versus them" dynamic to settle some of the pertinent academic grievances we are still grappling with. What will, in contemporary times, characterize African philosophy, notes Gyekye (2013), is:

> Paying attention an analytical, reflective attention to the values and assumptions of traditional society, or traditional thought system; and, second, paying analytical attention to contemporary African cultural and historical experience. This is, to me, what will bring out the "Africaness", of African philosophy. The "Africaness" will consist in paying attention to African cultural values, to the cultural and historical experience of the African people.[63]

Deductions from the preceding philosophical discourse makes it imperative that the early historiography of African art be revised and critically reexamined through the psychological filter

[62] See Kwame Gyekye. *Philosophy, Culture and Vision: African Perspectives.*Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2013, p.71.

[63]Ibid. pp.71-72.

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and philosophical framework of Eurocentrism and colonialism respectively. Since philosophical discussions of art derived their issues from the evolution of art, I will proceed in a similar academic style.[64]As such, I wish to begin this discussion by echoing some essential facts from Miller's discussions concerning the evolution of art.

Miller (2001) has documented that some archeologists have argued that art only emerged 35,000 years ago in the Upper Paleolithic period, when the first cave paintings and Venus figurines were made in Europe. They follow archaeologist John Pfeiffer's[65] suggestion that this period marks a "creative explosion" when human art, language, burial ceremonies, religion, and creativity first emerged. This is a remarkably Eurocentric view.[66] In his presentation of facts, Miller (2001) also acknowledges that the Aborigines colonized Australia at least 50,000 years ago, and have apparently been making paintings on rock ever since. If art were an invention of the Upper Paleolithic 35,000 years ago in Europe, how could art be a human universal? There is evidence from Africa of red ochre being used for body ornamentation over 100,000 years ago. This is about the latest possible time that art could have evolved, since it is around the time that modern *Homo sapiens* spread out from Africa. Had it evolved later, it is unclear how it could have become

[64] See Antoon Van den Braembussche. *Thinking Art: An Introduction to Philosophy of Art* Brussels: Springer Science + Business Media B.V. 2009, p.vi.

[65]Feder exemplifies himself as one of Pfeiffer's "followers" when he referenced in his book, "it is abundantly clear that it is in the past 40,000 years that humanity experience what more than one author has likened to an "explosion" of artistic and symbolic creativity (Conkey 1978, 74; Pfeiffer 1982, who titles his book *The Creative Explosion*). From incised bone to carved statues to cave paintings, the period beginning 40,000 years ago is marked by the beginning of human artistic and symbolic expression. See Kenneth L. Feder, *The Past in Perspective: An Introduction to Human Prehistory*. California: Mayfield Publishing Company Limited, 2000, p.216.

[66] See Miller, Geoffrey. *The Mating Mind: How Sexual Choice Shaped the Evolution of Human Nature*. New York: Anchor Books, 2001, p.260.

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universal across human groups.[67]Discussing the psychological perspectives of art and evolution, Solso provides a rough approximation of this creative burst by indicating that:

> The coincidental development of modern man and manifest art objects was enormously important because, it is hypothesized, both were the direct consequence of the rise of consciousness. To comprehend the idea that art, mind, and consciousness are essentially connected, consider the evolution of the modern brain. About 120,000 to 30,000 years ago, the effusive mass of tangled neurons took a significant new step that formed essential patterns for thoughts and greatly increased human consciousness—a special type of consciousness that would spew forth a cornucopia of artifacts, and art, as well as imagery, language, complex technology, and religion. It was *the* big step for humankind—probably the biggest since slithery creatures moved from sea to land. It also represented a fascinating type of adaptive mechanism that was based on symbolic or non-present representations.[68]

Garland (2012) validates both theories cited afore in his audio history lecture on daily life in the ancient world when he points to the fact that:

> The earliest paintings come from the Chauvex cave in Southern France and may be as old as 30,000 BC. Other examples of cave art have been found in Lascaux also in southern France dated about 15,000 BC and in Altamira in northern Spain dating 2000 years later […] Cave art however does not provide the earliest evidence of painting. Pieces of ochre inscribed with geometric patterns dated about 80,000 BC have been found in the Blombos cave in South Africa and what is fascinating here is that the art is non-representational which suggests that early man could already think abstractly and perhaps as well as symbolically.[69]

Summarizing and narrowing down the history of West African art in the past few millennia, Fosu (2004:83) states:

> Ghana shares an artistic civilization with great West African art culture, which is

[67]Ibid. p.260.

[68]See Robert L. Solso. *The Psychology of Art and the Evolution of the Conscious Brain.* Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2003, pp.39.

[69] See Robert Garland. The Other Side of History: Daily Life in the Ancient World Lecture. In *The Great Courses.* Colgate University: Teaching Company, LLC, 2012.

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> also a part of the great African art heritage. This heritage dates back to the green Sahara period of between 8000-6000 BC through the Pharoenic period of 5000BC and the ninth century BC Nok cultures of West Africa. The art tradition manifested itself through the celebrated wall paintings and sculptures of the continent. About the 10th century AD, many of the major ethnic groups which settled in the present day Ghana had formed themselves into powers with distinctive artistic cultures which found expression into in the classical art traditions of the indigenous population, namely, the Ashanti, the Fanti, the Ewe, the Ga-Adagnme, the Dagomba, the Grunsi, the Mamprusi and others [...] These were areas, which also boasted of the other ancient kingdoms of Ife and Benin as well as the ancient empires of Mali and Ghana, which were well respected for their established art.

However, since its inception, Western accounts of African art have proven to be a subject of debate for many art historians, philosophers and art critics. Based on Western academic prejudice, Africans have been portrayed as "savage", "uncivilized", "primitive" and "fetish" by most early European writers. Writers, whom Opoku (2010) advises,

> Should have appropriately acknowledged that the creative achievements of the African people measured up to other civilizations which were extolled with pride. Instead, the label "primitive" has been attached to all things African – religion, language, music, dance and most importantly art. This negation results in frequent astonishment that African artworks are comparable to arts from other areas of the world.[70]

It is with such hesitations that some Western art historians still dread to equate African art to European art which has long been perceived as the "paragon" of "civilized art" itself. As a result, the historiography of African art has been marred by controversies, misinterpretations, obscurity and limpidity depending on whom you read and in which period. Some early Western writers composed their annals of African art with imperialist and supremacist agenda. The supremacist approach was diametrically opposed to the approach and presentation of other European

[70] See Kwame Opoku. *Ile-Ife Triumphs in the British Museum, London: Who said Nigerians were Incapable of looking after their Cultural Artefacts*? p.3 Retrieved from: http://www.afrikanet.info/uploads/media/ILE_IFE_TRIUMPHS_IN_BRITISH_MUSEUM.pdf (Accessed on 13/07/2016)

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contemporaries and, later, levelheaded scholars who adopted a rather candid and sympathetic stance. This review critically examines the fundamental philosophy behind Early European accounts of African art. It also assesses the delicate aspects of European accounts, modes of presentation, terms, how they interpreted what they reported and the validity of the information they presented.

2.3 The Philosophical Foundations of European Accounts of African Art and Culture

Before the review proceeds, it is crucial to elucidate and rationalize the philosophy behind the accounts and modes of presentation in the historiography of African art. First of all, it is noteworthy to point out that the roots of the historiography of African art apparently operated within the prevailing propagandist framework of Eurocentric philosophies. Debates examining such foundations will be reviewed through argumentative discussions supported by various scholars, artists and experts from various disciplines.

To get a general understanding of how racism influenced the early documentation of African art we need to peruse the writings of some European philosophers. To begin with, Hume asserts that, "I am apt to suspect the negroes, and in general all the other species of men (for there are four or five different kinds) to be naturally inferior to the whites. There never was a civilized nation of any other complexion than white, nor even any individual eminent either in action or speculation. No ingenious manufactures amongst them, no arts".[71] Hume's Eurocentric ideas had some serious

[71] See Kenneth N. Addison. *We Hold these Truths to be Self-evident": An Interdisciplinary Analysis of the Roots of Racism and Slavery in America.* Maryland: University Press of America, 2009, p.47.

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ideological repurcussions which certainly influenced Kant's philosophical anthropology, subsequently reinforcing the disparaging notion that the African is less human than Whites:

> Mr. Hume challenges anyone to cite a single example in which a Negro has shown talents and asserts that among the hundreds of thousands of blacks who are transported elsewhere from their countries, although many of them have even been set free, still not a single one was ever found who presented anything greater in art or science or any other praiseworthy quality, even though among the whites some continually rise aloft from the lowest rabble, and through superior gifts earn respect in the world. So fundamental is the difference between these two races of man, and it appears to be as great in regard to mental capacities as in color"[72]

To situate this discussion in its proper philosophical context, it is imperative to cite these two observations:

> The true Negroes share some cultural features [...] Their achievement in plastic art not only is the highest known among aboriginal peoples, but compares more than favourably with that of major European and Asiatic civilizations. It reached its zenith in southern Nigeria, among the peoples of Ife and Benin. [73] (Radin, 1952)

> Explorers just brought new proofs, which could explicate "African inferiority." Since Africans could produce nothing of value; the technique of Yoruba statuary must have come from Egyptians; Benin art must be a Portuguese creation; the architectural achievement of Zimbabwe was due to Arab technicians; and Hausa and Buganda statecraft were inventions of white invaders.[74] (Mudimbe, 1988)

Here, Radin (1952) and Mudimbe (1988) deliver opposing perceptions of African creative achievements through the mind of Europeans. Variations of contradictory perceptions are recurrent in African art scholarship. Such contradictions only deepen the myth of "pre-European Africa devoid of arts", "pre-European Africa devoid of history, culture and social structure". It takes careful reading and critical thinking to read in between the lines concerning these kinds of

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[72] Ibid. p.47.

[73] See Paul Radin. *African Folktales and Sculpture.* New York: Pantheon Books Inc. 1952.

[74]See (Davidson, 1959; Lugard, 1905; Randall-MacIver, 1906; Sanders, 1969; Mallows, 1984) as cited by Mudimbe. in V.Y. Mudimbe. *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge*, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.1988, p.26.

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contradictions. Müller et al. (1999:428-429) note in that regard, that, two other Europeans who deserve mention in the revionist school of thought regarding Africans are Leo Frobenius (1873-1938), whom African thinkers to this day acclaim for restoring the dignity of the peoples of Africa, and Marcel Griaule (1898-1956). The latter undertook several expeditions in the 1930s, primarily to the Dogon in Mali, and impressively demonstrated that traditional societies certainly do have ideological systems which, as in the case of the Dogon, entail no less differentiation, complexity, and depth of thought than those of ancient pre-Socratic philosophers. Nkrumah also notes in his African Genius Speech that:

> Among non-African students of Ghana's history and institutions, one of the most distinguished was undoubtedly Captain Rattray. By his intellectual honesty and diligence, he was able to appreciate and present to the world the values in a culture, which was, after all, foreign to him. It is impossible to respect an intellectual unless he shows this kind of honesty. After all, Academic freedom must serve all legitimate ends, and not a particular end. And here the term 'Academic Freedom' should not be used to cover up academic deficiencies and indiscipline.[75]

Western discriminatory philosophies of African art prevailed from late 17th century to the 18th century. Hegelian imperialist philosophies particularly advocated colonial and imperialist expansion designs to conquer "virgin lands" in Africa. With the emergence of Hegelian philosophy, the "psycho-imperialist" foundations of racial supremacy were intensified and widely propagated. In addition to the imperialist ideology, the "discovery" of America in 1492 opened up new opportunities for the spread of Christianity. In an act of extraordinary arrogance, Christian conquistadors repressed and exploited the people, environment, and culture of the continent. They imposed the "new faith" through cruel punishment of those who resisted it. Having decimated the

[75]This speech was delivered by Kwame Nkrumah as the first president of the Republic of Ghana at the opening of the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, Legon on October 25th, 1963. See Kwame Nkrumah. The African Genius. In *Reclaiming the Human Sciences and Humanities Through African Perspectives, Vol. 1*, Helen Lauer and Kofi Anyidoho (Ed.), Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2012, p.911.

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indigenous population, they established a slave trade, something that figures among history's greatest crimes against humanity, the primary scene of which became black Africa.[76]

In his compelling study, *Terror in the Mind of God,* Juergensmeyer (2003:25-26) affirms a parallel argument in what he refers to as the "just-war" theory. In that regard, episodes from missionary exploits and colonial domination among the aboriginal Indians (in the Meso-America region) and Haitians (in the Caribbean Islands) further expands our notion of the gravity of the problems religious colonialism posed.[77] Similarly, in German Togoland, threatened by the Bosomfo's influence, the Germans captured and executed him, destroying his shrine and exiling most of his entourage.[78] History has proven some European colonialists to be notoriously malevolent and ruthless in conquest and material exploitation.[79] Examples of these are the series of infamous crimes they perpetrated not only on African soil but also across the entire globe from the Americas all the way to Australia. Europeans committed crimes ranging from slave raids to all manner of atrocities. Often ignored in academic discussions about the history of African art is the blatant raids and plundering of sacred African artworks by marauding colonial gangsters in various colonial territories. Till now, large collections of sacred African artworks "rest" in European museums and private collections. Mass looting during the colonial era and other illegal means of acquiring African artworks accounts for this state of affairs.

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[76] See Klaus E. Müller and Ute Ritz Müller. *Soul of Africa: Magical Rites and Traditions*. Maveville: Imprimerie Jean Lamour, 1999, p.443.

[77] See Charles Alexander Eastman. *The Soul of the Indian*. Massachusetts: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1911, pp.20-24.

[78] Meera Venkatachalam. Between The Devil and The Cross: Religion, Slavery, and The Making of Anlo-Ewe. In *Journal of African History,* 53(1), Cambridge: Cambridge Press, 2012, p.56.

[79] This is a well documented fact shared by several erudite scholars. Refer to Rodney (1972), Diop (1981), Nkrumah (1965, 1973), Williams (1987), Ginzburg (1962), Hochschild (1998), Beard (1863).

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In his PhD thesis, van Beurden (2016) discusses, at length, colonialism, cultural artefacts and their modes of "acquisition" (loot, punitive expeditions, war booty etc.). van Beurden also examines cultural heritage policies and the ambiguities surrounding negotiations, repatriation or "protective custody" of illegally held artworks in Western Museums and Galleries.[80] In 1970, Nii Kwate Owoo, a Ghanaian scholar and film maker produced a relevant documentary (*You Hide Me*) on illegally held African artworks in the British Museum. *You Hide Me* is an exposé of the theft and concealment of ancient and rare African Art hidden in plastic bags and wooden boxes in the basement of the British Museum with Owoo making a case for the artworks being returned to their place of origin. According to Owoo, 'my film was banned in Ghana in 1971 and was rejected by Ghana Television at the time for being Anti-British: it was the result of this banning which was reported and given prominent publicity by West African Magazine in 1971 that gave the film its world wide acclaim and controversy'. [81]

Sylvester Ogbechie has also been a strong advocate for the repatriation of African artworks back to their countries of origin (especially looted bronze works from Benin Kingdom where he hails). He has presented quite a number of important seminars and publications in relation to his campaigns. Chinweizu (1975) summarizes the events which led to the looting of cultural histories and artworks from the ancient Benin Kingdom:

> Under the familiar pretext of abolishing human sacrifices, the British marched on Benin and subdued it. The Oba of Benin had refused to allow British traders to enter the city and dominate its trade. But the British would not take no for an answer. In spite of the Oba's clear message that he did not wish to see them, especially not at a time when he had pressing priestly duties to perform, a party of Europeans, led

[80] See Joseph Maria van Beurden, Treasures in Trusted Hand: Negotiating the Future of Colonial Cultural Objects. Unpublished PhD Thesis. Vrije Universiteit. 2016.

[81] Retrieved from https://www.revolvy.com/page/Nii-Kwate-Owoo (Accessed on 13/08/2019)

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by the acting British consul, set out to "persuade" him to grant Europeans the right of free trade within his kingdom. For rudely forcing their avaricious company upon the Oba, they were gunned down at the command of some of the Oba's lieutenants. Here was a fine pretext for the British to attack. Stop African savagery! Abolish human sacrifices! Brandishing their usual assortment of humanitarian excuses, a British column marched on Benin, sacked the city and looted its art treasures, dragged Oba Overamwhen off the throne of his ancestors, deported him and broke the ancient but decayed power of that kingdom.[82]

Figure 2.1 British soldiers of the infamous Punitive Expedition of 1897 "proudly" posing with the looted Benin artefacts.[83]

[82] See Chinweizu. *The West and the Rest of Us White Predators, Black Slavers and the African Elite.* Lagos: Pero Press, 1975, p.44.

[83] Source of image: https://www.modernghana.com/news/233465/would-western-museums-return-looted-objects-if-nigeria-and-o.html (Accessed on 10/05/2016)

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Presenting perspectives of how the Germans are also implicated in such punitive expeditions, Apoh (2019: 259-261) recounts narratives of how German colonial aggression stripped the Akpini people in Kpando of their royal artworks. Among the artworks that were looted by colonial gangsters included ivory side blown horns with human jawbones, royal smocks, headdresses and royal drums. According to oral accounts these royal objects were stolen by Dr Gruner from the palace of the King of Kpando, Tɔgbuiga Dagadu III after he was arrested and exiled to Cameroun on trumped up charges in 1914. Some of these royal items have been catalogued and stored in database of the Ethnologisches Musuem.[84]

While some African artworks were also seized through stealth and intimidation, quite a huge collection was also consigned to flames on the orders of Christian Missionaries. Quite oddly, though, some of the same works which were condemned as "fetish" and "demonic" by the colonial gangsters and "missionaries" made their way into the private collections of European "nobles", the clergy and Papal vaults. Greenfield (1996:94) states that the Vatican also has its own museum with African objects:

> A vast collection of ethnological objects is held by the Vatican Ethnological Museum in Rome. There are more than 60,000 objects, with approximately 10,000 from Africa, 10,000 from the Americas, 20,000 from Asia, 6,000 from Oceania, and another 15,000 labelled 'prehistoric'.

Greenfield further states that:

> In 1925 Pope Pius XI organized a missionary exhibition extolling missionary work all over the non-western world. About 100,000 items were sent and after the exhibition only about half were returned. The Pope proclaimed the formation of a new museum, the Pontifico Museu Missionario-Etnologico, so that the 'dawn of faith' among the infidel of today can be compared to the dawn of faith, which illuminated pagan Rome.

[84] See Wazi Apoh. *Revealations of Domination and Resilience: Unearthing the Buried Past of the Akpini, Akan, Germans and British at Kpando, Ghana.* Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2019, pp.259-261.

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Thus, the bulk of these artworks were acquired under duress, scam, and thievery or through violence and other illegal means. Of grave concern here is how the "missionaries", mostly under the orders of the papal authorities, misuse of the bible and distorted Christian doctrines, furthered the agenda of cultural imperialism, religious indoctrination and systematic erasure of crucial aspects of African cultural values in the name of "civilization" and "comforts" of "European culture". A classic example is captured in Redpath's biography of Toussaint, which chronicles some of the horrendous mass executions and mind-numbing tortures people of African descent had to endure in their struggle for freedom, liberation and human dignity during the Haitian revolution. Redpath (1863:262) recounts an episode here:

> Among the number of these victims were female priests, who worshipped African fetish [sic] idols. That veneration for the gods of their fathers was punished with death; so little does unbelief guarantee toleration. A French General, touched with compassion at the approaching death of one of these superstitious but well-meaning women, implored that her life might be spared. Rochambeau, taking into his hands the pigmy Idols of her worship, said, "How can I save the life of one who worships these? Yet, during the fever, these very women had bestowed every attention on sick French soldiers. Unhappy women! Their charity had no other recompense than the punishment which is reserved for the vilest crimes. Base ingratitude of the commander! Here, again, on which side is the moral superiority?

There are several other accounts of very sadistic colonial/missionary "exploits" apart from the episodes cited above. Akrong (2012:309) summarizes this perverted Eurocentrism and problematic Christian ideology in a doctrine he terms 'Manifest Destiny'. According to Akrong:

> Manifest Destiny as a doctrine can be described as the colonial ideology of conquest that attempted to justify the invasive colonising enterprise on the basis of an assumed metaphysical destiny imposed on Europeans by providence. Actually, manifest 'destiny' is a quasi-theological rationalisation of the western colonial enterprise. Despite the obvious economic and political motives for colonialism, the doctrine of 'manifest destiny' theology of divine providence in which Western Europe is presumed to have been given a divine mandate often

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> described as-'the white man's burden' to civilise the world in anticipation of the fulfilment of the kingdom of God.[85]

Slogar (2005) also raises similar concerns in his PhD thesis on how such undermining views adversely influenced Western perceptions of Africans, which subsequently advanced the imperialist designs to further "justify" white supremacy. He notes that:

> G. A. Robertson, after visiting the "Kingdom of Qua" at "old Calabar," essentially called for its colonization in 1819: The remedy for this [Leopard Society masquerade] and other disgusting traits in the African character is the introduction of civilization, —the arts, conveniences, and comforts of civilized society; an improvement in their morals and minds, both of male and female, must be the necessary result.[86]

Such contestable Eurocentric doctrines led to many problems in Africa, some of which Gbolonyo enumerates in his PhD thesis.[87]A recent example of such doctrines can be gleaned from Gilley's (2017) article The Case for Colonialism, which essentially advocates the recolonization of Africa states.[88] The article caused massive public outrage and criticism on social media and in the academic community respectively, further compelling the whole editorial board (of *Third World Quarterly Journal)* to resign.[89] Other auxiliary journals and online repositories that subsequently hosted Gilley's controversial article on their academic platforms were compelled to take it down following threats. The screenshots from Taylor and Francis webpage is self-explanatory.

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[85] See Abraham A. Akrong. African Traditional Religion and Christianity: Continuities and Discontinuities. In *Reclaiming the Human Sciences and Humanities Through African Perspectives, Vol. 1*, Helen Lauer and Kofi Anyidoho. (Eds.), Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2012, p.309.

[86] See Christopher Lawrence Slogar. Iconography and Continuity in West Africa: Calabar Terracottas and the Arts of the Cross River Region of Nigeria/Cameroon. Unpublished PhD Thesis. University of Maryland, 2005, pp.87-88.

[87] See Justice Stephen Kofi Gbolonyo. Indigenous Knowledge and Cultural Values in Ewe Musical Practice: Their Traditional Roles and Place in Modern Society. Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Pittsburg, 2009, p.7.

[88] Bruce Gilley (2017): The Case for Colonialism, *Third World Quarterly*, DOI: 10.1080/01436597.2017.1369037

[89] See also http://duckofminerva.com/2017/09/the-case-against-the-case-for-colonialism.html

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Figure 2.2 Withdrawal notice of Gilley (2017) article on Taylor and Francis webpage. [90]

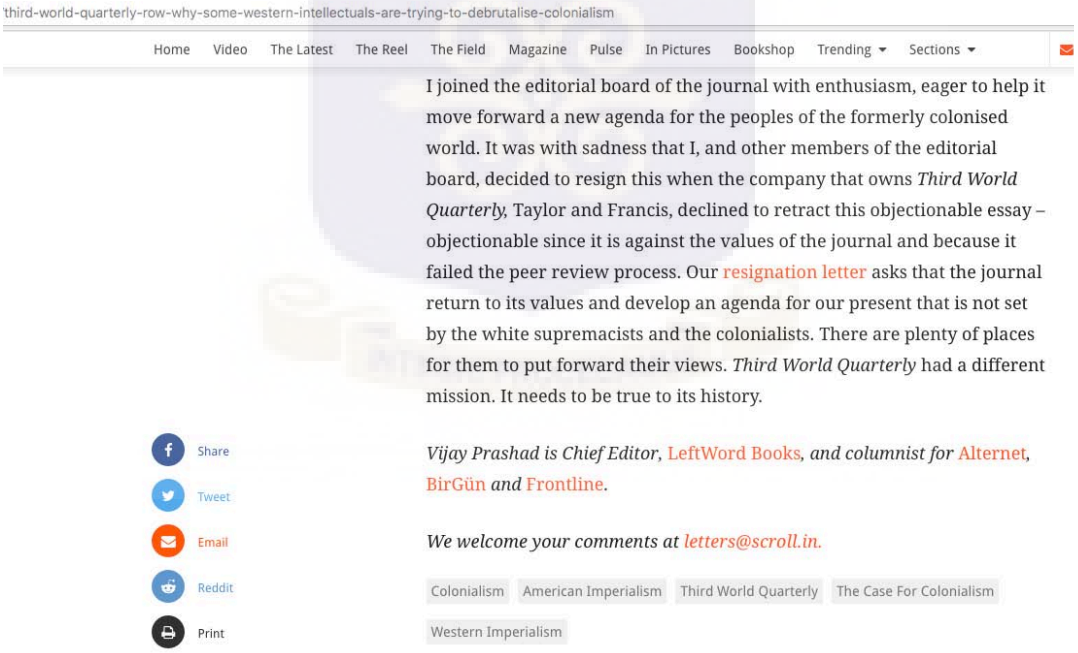

Figure 2.3 Resignation notice from editorial team of *Third World Quarterly*.[91]

[90] Retrieved from http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01436597.2017.1369037 (Accessed on 12/11/2017)

[91] See also https://scroll.in/article/851305/third-world-quarterly-row-why-some-western-intellectuals-are-trying-to-debrutalise-colonialism (Accessed on 01/12/2017).

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Colonialism, Fanon informs us, is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it. This work of devaluing pre-colonial history takes on a dialectical significance today. When we consider the efforts made to carry out the cultural estrangement so characteristic of the colonial epoch, we realize that nothing has been left to chance and that the total result looked for by colonial domination was indeed to convince the natives that colonialism came to lighten their darkness.[92] J.A Hobson also linked the scramble for Africa to capitalism and capitalist search for higher profits from colonial conquests. For J.A. Schumpeter, in 1919, colonialism as well as its cause, imperialism, did not obey logic. It was "non-rational and irrational purely instinctual inclinations toward war and conquest" that guided "objectless tendencies toward forcible expansion, without definite, utilitarian limits."[93] From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, the merging of the radical Christian theology and the "Hobbesian-Hegelian" philosophical framework further propagated the pre-existing reasoning and mode of presenting the historiography of African art by Eurocentric chroniclers, reporters, writers, missionaries and "scholars", some of whom never set foot on African soil or made any direct observation of any African society whatsoever. Most of their works lacked factual support and merely plagiarized from pre-existing reports, travelogues and ethnographic/anthropological field notes of early writers. For instance, Pietz highlights the following observation:

> Another index of the supreme success of Bosman's account is the frequency of its plagiarization by subsequent eighteenth-century accounts. And while Labat's famous 1730 account of Guinea claimed to rely mostly on Des Marchais, many of the facts, interpretations and anecdotes about the Gold and Slave Coasts were

[92] See Franz Fanon. *Wretched of the Earth*, New York: Grove Press, 1963, p. 210.

[93] See V.Y. Mudimbe. *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge*, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988, pp.14-15.

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> drawn from Bosman, whose acknowledgement tended to be avoided for reasons of nationalism and colonial rivalry in the area. In 1743-47 there appeared the great English collection of voyage accounts by Thomas Astley, who attempted a critical edition of all the accounts in the earlier collections of Hakluyt, Purchas, and Harris. In his preface, Astley justifies the need for such a critical edition because authors so frequently copied or stole from each other, he writes, "not excepting Bosman himself".[94]

Others simply concocted preposterous speculations and inaccurate accounts of African art and customs, which are too implausible for discerning scholars to fathom, let alone integrate into a rational philosophical discourse without critical examination. A typical example is the case of the 17th century English printer and bookseller Nathaniel Crouch who plagiarized and fabricated an elaborate "anthropology" and "annals" about "West African history", complete with "taxonomies" and "illustrations". Mayer summarizes Crouch's "publication" in the paragraph below:

> Nathaniel Crouch, operating under the pseudonyms Robert or Richard Burton, adapted a number of genres for the young in his prolific plagiarising, reprinting and remarketing of late seventeenth-century texts, including versions of Samuel Crossman's *The Young Man's Monitor* (first published in 1664) as *The Young Man's Calling* (first published in 1685), *Remarks upon the lives of Several Excellent Young Persons of Both Sexes* (1678) and *Youth's Divine Pastime* (1691).Crouch also published a companion specifically for apprentices, *The Apprentices Companion* (1681). [95]

Mayer also presents a description of Crouch's annals:

> Today I present some images I came across in a work Crouch published under the name of R.B. entitled 'The acquisitions in Guinea and East India' (London, 1700). As the full title reveals, this was an expansive work, which not only described the new colonial possessions of an expanding British Empire but also offered accounts of "Religion, Government, Trade, Marriages, Funerals, Strange Customs, & others. Also, the Birds, Beasts, Serpents, Monsters and other Strange Creatures found there. Intermixt with divers Accidents…Crouch did not shy away from gory description, and indeed these may have contributed to the popularity of his works.[96]

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[94] See William Pietz. Bosman's Guinea: The Intercultural Roots of an Enlightenment Discourse. In *Comparative Civilizations Review,* 9(9), 1982, p.5.

[95] See Edel Lamb. *Youth Culture From: The Ashgate Research Companion to Popular Culture in Early Modern England*. London: Routledge, 2014, p.37.

[96] See Robert Mayer, 'Nathaniel Crouch, Bookseller and Historian: Popular Historiography and Cultural Power in

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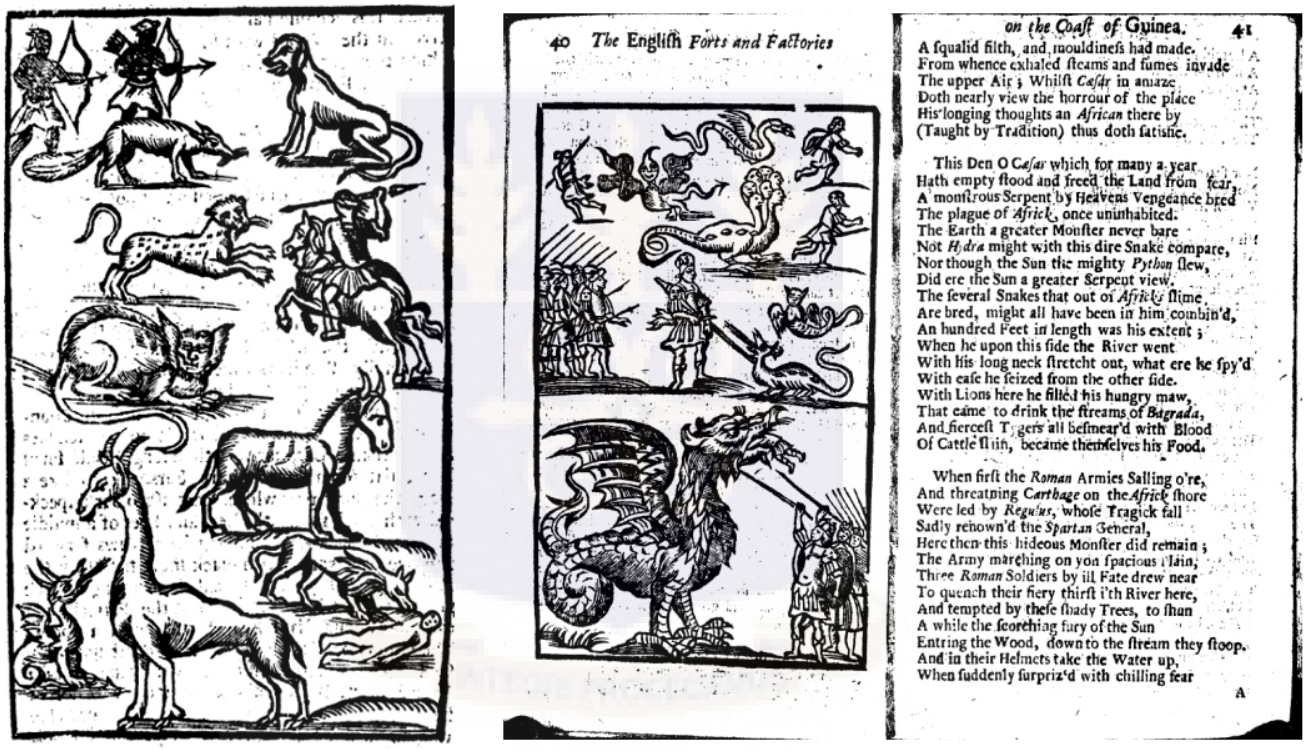
According to Brent, the woodcut illustrations of *English Acquisitions* are quite compelling, as they center almost exclusively on depictions of "Monsters and other strange Creatures" that were reported by travelers in the Indian Ocean region and coastal Africa. I suspect that most or all were plagiarized from earlier accounts, a common practice of the era. Below are the images, intermixed with extracts from Crouch's accompanying text:



40 *The English Forts and Factories*

on the Coast of Guinea. 41

A ſqualid filth, and mouldineſs had made.
From whence exhaled ſteams and fumes invade
The upper Air; Whilſt *Cæſar* in amaze
Doth nearly view the horrour of the place
His longing thoughts an *African* there by
(Taught by Tradition) thus doth ſatisfie.

This Den O *Cæſar* which for many a year
Hath empty ſtood and freed the Land from fear,
A monſtrous Serpent by Heavens Vengeance bred
The plague of *Africk*, once uninhabited.
The Earth a greater Monſter never bare
Not *Hydra* might with this dire Snake compare,
Nor though the Sun the mighty *Python* ſlew,
Did ere the Sun a greater Serpent view.
The ſeveral Snakes that out of *Africk's* ſlime
Are bred, might all have been in him combin'd,
An hundred Feet in length was his extent;
When he upon this ſide the River went
With his long neck ſtretcht out, what ere he ſpy'd
With eaſe he ſeized from the other ſide.
With Lions here he filled his hungry maw,
That came to drink the ſtreams of *Bagrada*,
And fierceſt Tygers all beſmear'd with Blood
Of Cattle ſlain, became themſelves his Food.

When firſt the *Roman* Armies Salling o're,
And threatning *Carthage* on the *Africk* ſhore
Were led by *Regulus*, whoſe Tragick fall
Sadly renown'd the *Spartan* General,
Here then this hideous Monſter did remain;
The Army marching on yon ſpacious Plain,
Three *Roman* Soldiers by ill Fate drew near
To quench their fiery thirſt i'th River here,
And tempted by theſe ſhady Trees, to ſhun
A while the ſcorching fury of the Sun
Entring the Wood, down to the ſtream they ſtoop,
And in their Helmets take the Water up,
When ſuddenly ſurpriz'd with chilling fear

A

Illustration 2.3.1 In the single page on the left are illustrations of "Creatures" of "Guinea," or West Africa.[97] In the double page on the right are more illustrations of "beasts" of Africa, accompanied in true early modern fashion by an extract from the Roman poet Lucan.[98]

Late Seventeenth-Century England', *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 27:3 (1994), 391–419.

[97]Source of illustration: visit https://benjaminpbreen.com/author/benjaminpbreen/page/6/ (Accessed on 27/04/2017)

[98]Source of illustration: visit https://benjaminpbreen.com/author/benjaminpbreen/page/6/ (Accessed on 27/04/2017)

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Here, the basis of Crouch's "accounts" clearly represents how early Eurocentric writers were merely conjecturing to suit an already formed opinion of Africans. Crouch's "armchair speculation" is also highly symbolic of how some early Eurocentric chroniclers of African culture fabricated and propagated fallacious claims to denigrate Africa as well as reinforce the notion of the "dark continent"[99] or "the white man's burden" as described in Akrong's "manifest destiny" theory. It also discredits the methodologies some early European writers employed to gather and interpret their accounts. As Plate (2005:12) cautions analytical philosophers:

> Analytic philosophy is so different from empirical research; many entering students distrust it or are puzzled by it. Its methods seem wholly speculative—totally an affair of the armchair. And armchair speculation is not what is encouraged in the empirical sciences; in fact, it is generally discouraged.

Kant (1781) also raises similar arguments in his philosophical discourse on similar issues. In *The Critique of Pure Reason,* a chapter emphasizes the fact that the human intellect, even in an unphilosophical state, is in possession of certain cognitions "a priori" essentially questions the intellectual origins of "a priori" formulations. With Kant's arguments in mind, let us briefly examine Hegel's a priori formulations. Hegel (2001: 22) in 'The Philosophy of History', ironically postulates that:

> The Philosophy of History means nothing but the thoughtful consideration of it. Thought is, indeed, essential to humanity. It is this that distinguishes us from the brutes. In sensation, cognition, and intellection; in our instincts and volitions, as far as they are truly human, thought is an invariable element. To insist upon thought in this connection with history may, however, appear unsatisfactory. In this science, it would seem as if thought must be subordinate to what is given, to the realities of fact; that this is its basis and guide: while Philosophy dwells in the region of self-produced ideas, without reference to actuality. Approaching history thus prepossessed, speculation might be expected to treat it as a mere passive material; and, so far from leaving it in its native truth, to force it into conformity with a tyrannous idea, and to construe it, as the phrase is, "à *priori*."

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The Hegelian premise reminds the historian, who studies and observes over time that history revolves around a cycle of conflict, a clash of ideas and "established truths". Hegel's "a priori" premise of philosophizing through self-producing ideas without concrete field experience was adopted by some European writers. It must be noted that Hegel was emphasizing logical reasoning and systematic thought creation. He hints readers of the distinction of how the process of thought creation and producing ideas in philosophy is not necessarily an applicable methodology in Historiography. Hegel progresses in the philosophy of history by stating specifically that:

> But as it is the business of history simply to adopt into its records what is and has been — actual occurrences and transactions; and since it remains true to its character in proportion as it strictly adheres to its data, we seem to have in Philosophy, a process diametrically opposed to that of the historiographer (2001: 22).

The Hegelian premise of self-produced ideas explains some of the inaccuracies in early African art annals as opposed to painstaking legwork, observation, studies and systematic research by some other Europeans. The critical question here is, why did he write fabricated tales to propagate derogatory perceptions about Africans without ever having set foot or making any direct field observation on the African continent? Factual support is also totally absent in his claims about Africans. Why did he also divorce Africa from world history in the same book in which he negates 'self-produced ideas'? According to Hegel's Eurocentric *Philosophy of History,* Africa is of no consequence or substance in world civilization. He further explains that:

> At this point we leave Africa, not to mention it again. For it is no historical part of the World; it has no movement or development to exhibit. Historical movements in it—that is in its northern part—belong to the Asiatic or European World. Carthage displayed there an important transitionary phase of civilization; but, as a Phoenician colony, it belongs to Asia. Egypt will be considered in reference to the passage of the human mind from its Eastern to its Western phase, but it does not belong to the African Spirit. What we properly understand by Africa, is the Unhistorical, Undeveloped Spirit, still involved in the conditions of mere nature, and which had to be presented here only as on the threshold of the World's History (2001:117).

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Considering the need for an Afrocentric idea in education, Kete-Asante presents key strategic ideas in correcting distorted information in our educational curricula. Kete-Asante (2000:107) argues that hegemonic education can only exist only so long as true and accurate information is withheld. Hegemonic Eurocentric education can only exist so long as Whites maintain that Africans and other non-Whites have never contributed to world civilization. Kete-Asante supports his theory by citing an example in which he states that:

> One cannot remain comfortable teaching that art and philosophy originated in Greece if one learns that the Greeks themselves taught that the study of these subjects originated in Africa, specifically ancient Kemet. The first philosophers were Egyptians Kagemni, Khun-anup, Ptahhotep, Kete, and Seti; but Eurocentric education is so disjointed that students have no way of discovering this and other knowledge of the organic relationship of Africa to the rest of human history. Not only did Africa contribute to human history, African civilizations predates all other civilizations. Indeed, the human species originated on the continent of Africa—this is true whether one looks at either archaeological or biographical evidence.[100]

Nkrumah (1964:153), before Kete-Asante, advanced the argument that:

> The study of history too can be warped. The colonized African student, whose roots in his own society are systematically starved of sustenance, is introduced to Greek and Roman history, the cradle history of modern Europe, and he is encouraged to treat his portion of the story of man together with the subsequent history of Europe as the only worthwhile portion. This history is anointed with a universalist flavouring which titillates the palate of certain African intellectuals so agreeably that they become alienated from their own immediate society.

The truism in Nkrumah's theory is no doubt a great problem in history. This distinction in methodology and mode of presentation helps scholars to clearly read in-between the lines of fabricated scorn literature. On the foundations of the discrepancies in annals provided by "official" and colonial records, it is possible to distinguish fact from fiction. It also grants African art history scholars a fair opportunity to reconstruct the history of their arts prior to Eurocentric accounts.

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[100] See James A. Montmarquet and William H. Hardy. *Reflections: An Anthology of African American Philosophy.* Belmont: Von Hoffman Press, 2000, pp. 107-108.

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As opposed to Europe's keen interest in African cultures and societies, some early Arab writers simply expressed a total lack of interest in African affairs as demonstrated by Ibn Haukal, a 10th century Arab writer. Haukal who simply did not see the need to write about Africans enquired that "for how could I, a lover of wisdom, intelligence, religion, justice and an orderly government, take notice of people like these or even honor them with the privilege of being written about"?[101] Accordingly, Nkrumah in his 'African Genius Speech'[102] declared that:

> Until recently the study of African history was regarded as a minor and marginal theme within the framework of imperial history. The study of African social institutions and cultures was subordinated in varying degrees to the effort to maintain the apparatus of colonial power. In British institutes of higher learning, for example, there was a tendency to look to social anthropologists to provide the kind of knowledge that would help us to support the particular brand of colonial policy known as indirect rule [...] African music, dancing and sculpture were labelled 'primitive art'. They were studied in such a way as to reinforce the picture of African society as something grotesque, as a curious, mysterious human backwater, which helped to retard social progress in Africa and to prolong colonial domination over its people.

While there has been considerable attention to the influence of voyage texts on the European literary imagination, we are just beginning to take seriously the constitutive role of the problems and categories that developed in early European colonial experience for the discourse and project of Enlightenment discourse and theory.[103]

Admittedly, the specific records of the cultural and social history of the relationship between African religions and Christianity can only be gleaned from letters and impressions of traders who

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[101] See Klaus E. Müller and Ute Ritz Müller. *Soul of Africa: Magical Rites and Traditions*. Maveville: Imprimerie Jean Lamour. 1999, p.425.

[102] See Nkrumah's "The African Genius Speech." In *Reclaiming the Human Sciences and Humanities Through African Perspectives, Vol. 1*, Helen Lauer and Kofi Anyidoho. (Eds.). Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2012, p.909.

[103] See William Pietz. Bosman's Guinea: The Intercultural Roots of an Enlightenment Discourse. In *Comparative Civilizations Review,* 9(9), 1982, p.1.

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cared to document their impressions of the religions and the cultures they came to meet on the West Coast of Africa [...] Generally, the Europeans saw the local cultures and religions as just social arrangements and institutions from which they could seek help to survive in a strange land. They ate the local food, married the local women, were treated by local medicine men and herbalists, consulted traditional priests about spiritual matters, consulted local leaders about political matters, and did so with profound due respect for the culture which provided them their means of survival.[104] A usual example is a "protective deity" for "safeguarding" the Europeans. Ellis who did some "ethnographic studies" among the Anlo-Ewes reports that:

> On the Gold Coast, nearly every sea-coast town, or village to which Europeans have been in the habit of resorting for trade, has its "Slayer of white men," but there are no protectors of white men such as are found in Whydah in the gods Dohen and Ajaruma, and formerly in Nabbaku; and whose existence may possibly be accounted for by the great importance that is there attached to commerce. Of these, Dohen brings ships and Englishmen to the English fort when that building is empty, and protects Englishmen generally. He is worshipped in the fort, where beans, and occasionally sheep and fowls, are offered to him. Ajaruma's sole function is to protect Europeans: his shrine is in the English fort, and he is represented by a tree and a clay pot. Nabbaku was a former protector of Englishmen, who is now forgotten. He is described by Dalzel as "the titular god of the English fort in Whydah."[105]

A critical mind would question why deities were created to "protect" the same Europeans who were enslaving Africans all across the continent, pillaging and "raping" African land? Akrong provides an explanation below:

> One can describe this pre-colonial interaction between traditional religion and culture as one of mutual accommodation based on means-end assessment of advantages of survival. This type of relationship was possible because the earliest European traders did not look down on Africans and their culture, rather, the traders saw the local cultures as different but comparable life-worlds capable of

[104] See Abraham A. Akrong. African Traditional Religion and Christianity: Continuities and Discontinuities. In *Reclaiming the Human Sciences and Humanities Through African Perspectives, Vol. 1*, Helen Lauer and Kofi Anyidoho. (Eds.), Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2012, p.308.

[105] A.B Ellis. *The Ewe-speaking peoples of the Slave Coast of West Africa, their Religion, Manners, Customs, Laws, Languages*. London: Chapman and Hall Limited, 1890, p.82.

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> addressing human needs, particularly their own immediate needs. And indeed, they used these cultural practices when they needed them. However, with the advent of colonialism and Christian missions, this dominant relation of reciprocity and mutual accommodation radically changed.[106]

As indicated by Akrong, the Europeans and Africans initially encountered each other on the terms of relative equality and mutual understanding. However, the story narrated below captures some of the dramatic turn of events following the clash of civilizations in Denu. The Danes who were then colonial settlers in Anlo-Ewe land had instigated a war between the Anlo-Ewes in Keta and Anloga as a result of the reckless actions of the Danish Governor who shot and killed Chief Degani for a minor "transgression". The people of Keta who secretly sought military alliance with neighbouring Anloga staged a "pretend battle" in order to secure more firearms from the Danes for a later revenge attack to punish them (the Danes) for the murder of Chief Degani. The Danes learnt about the "battle" between the people of Anloga and their "new enemies" and supplied firearms with the hope that blood relations would fight and kill one another. The Danes were unaware of the secret military designs until an unexpected incident foiled the "pretend battle". A section from Dietrich's PhD thesis captures the aftermath of such colonial interferences:

> One Keta resident accidentally shot an Anloga resident; within the chaos of the moment, a battle between the two groups ensued […] While war was brewing among former brethren, Chief Degani's paternal nephew (or brother, depending on the account), Sape Agbo, was still angered by the financial compensation for his uncle's loss of life. With revenge in mind, he ultimately killed one Dane at Agorko, which is at the boundary between Aflao and Klikor, near Denu, on the slave route at the juncture separating Denu from the Keta district. Sape Agbo was able to accomplish this feat by climbing up one of the seven royal palms (now three remain) located at Agorko on the route that colonial administrators, slavers, and the enslaved passed. He waited patiently with his cutlass until the time came when a Danish officer (or the governor himself, depending on the account), passed

[106] See Abraham A. Akrong. African Traditional Religion and Christianity: Continuities and Discontinuities. In *Reclaiming the Human Sciences and Humanities Through African Perspectives, Vol. 1*, Helen Lauer and Kofi Anyidoho. (Eds.), Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2012, p.308.

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by the palms, being carried by African servants on top of a hammock for his comfort. Upon seeing the Dane, Sape Agbo descended rapidly from the palm, frightening the carriers away. When his Anlo bodyguards ran for their own protection, the Dane was killed and his dead body became a sacrificial offering and sign of community power used to complete Xedzranovawor's DuLegba.[107]

Figure 2.4 A shot of Sape Agbo's protective Du-Legba, Denu-Hedzranawo.[108]

Du-Legba are invariably named, and serve to protect the town from all external evil in the form of malevolent spirits and disease. In fishing towns, such as Anlo-Afiadenyigba, they also ensure a regular source of fish for the towns people, protect the men from drowning, and provide general protection for children and women. Powerful medicinal and sacred herbs (ama), and in some cases,

[107] It was the Danish governor himself, the one who killed the Keta leader Tɔgbui Degani, that was passing on that day; archival sources imply that it was a lower-ranked Danish officer (ADM 39/1/237). Amenumey notes that the agent Dane may have been referred to as "Sagbadre" (meaning swallow) Colonial documents refer to the story as cited. See Christina M. Dietrich. Spirit Messengers, Divine Encounters: Practitioner Inhabitants of the Anlo-Ewe Spirit World. Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of California, 2012, p.115.

[108] Ibid. p.116.

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humans, are buried under them and give the Du-Legba their power.[109] Such episodes give readers a glimpse into the power relations between colonial power and colonized subjects. It also provides an overview of how the colonial encounter influenced or affected certain religious experiences in Anloland.

2.4 Summary of Discussion

The first section of the review concludes by stressing the often-neglected relationship between anthropology viz-a-viz colonial psychology and how it is apparently trivialized in modern anthropological scholarship. Fortunately, Marxists still insist that issues relating to unequal power struggles and class differences must constantly be taken into consideration in modern scholarship. Writers in the Marxist tradition write from a decidedly partisan point of view and their view of the public for art is also a political one. Writers on art have, of course, always recognised that spectators come in many different forms. But, traditionally, it was standard practice to differentiate only between those (well-educated and leisured) who were well able to appreciate artistic quality and the supposedly 'philistine' masses. Marxists with their radically anti-elitist political stance will have nothing to do with this, of course. They have urged consistently that spectators should be understood not by their supposed greater or lesser degree of awareness of a timeless canon of values but as interested agents within a social whole that is radically divided along class lines. [110]A quote from Assad's study on *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter* underscores this notion:

> We have been reminded time and again by anthropologists of the ideas and ideals of the Enlightenment in which **the intellectual inspiration of anthropology is**

[109] See Cudjoe 1971:191; Cudjoe-Calvocoressi 1974:55) in Michelle V. Gilbert, Mystical Protection Among the Anlo-Ewe, *African Arts,* 15(4),1982, pp.60-66+90.

[110] Michael Hate and Charlotte Klonk. *Art History: A Critical Introduction to its Methods*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006. pp.121.

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> **supposed to lie.** But anthropology is rooted in unequal power encounter between the West and Third world which goes back to the emergence Bourgeois Europe, an encounter in which colonialism is merely one historical moment. It is this encounter that gives the West access to cultural and historical information about the societies it has progressively dominated, and thus not only generates a certain kind of universal understanding, but also re-enforces the inequalities in capacity between the European and the non-European worlds (and derivatively, between the Europeanized elites and the 'traditional' masses in the Third World)[111].

Assad's observation is a reflection of how anthropologists stationed in Africa failed to recognize colonialism and Eurocentrism as a conflict of interest. Anthropology, since its inception, has, through critical studies, proven to be theoretically constrained and tainted with its complicity with imperialism and the colonial agenda. The relationship of how early anthropological studies is intertwined with colonial religious indoctrination has also been essentially undermined to some extent. At the core of this veiled colonial machinery were European "missionaries" who were laying the groundwork to reinforce such imperialistic mechanisms. Hence, the colonial encounter and its impact on the negative perceptions of African art scholarship has necessitated renewed authorship within the discipline. Assad notes:

> Quite apart from the moral objections, ulterior use of the anthropologist's position to support colonialism or the CIA is dangerous for the development of the discipline.[112]

Such ideological positions were extended into colonial educational structures in African institutions within Nkrumah's government. Nkrumah's long-standing campaign against colonialism made him poised to critically assess African educational structures through the lens of colonialism and imperialism. This is perhaps one of the academic concerns which contributed to

[111] See Talal Assad (Ed.) *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter*. London: Ithaca Press, 1975, p.16.

[112] Ibid. p.31.

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the many other reasons why he approved the dismissal of four American professors from the University of Ghana, Legon during his regime.[113] He will later avow:

> Not all the ramparts of colonialism have yet fallen. Some still stand, though showing gaping rents from the stormy onslaughts that have been made against them. And we who have battled our way to independence shall not stand quiet until the last stronghold of colonialism has been laid to the ground in Africa.[114]

In summary, early European "anthropologists" proved to be apologists of colonialism by producing propaganda texts principally in defense of white "supremacy" and African "inferiority." Operating under the pretext of being "participant observers", they were in effect clandestine agents in cahoots with colonial governments to generate primary texts in order to understand the social organization of Africans, merely for the purposes of furthering the colonial agenda to keep their colonies perpetually subjugated—in the process, alienating the colonial peoples from their culture and also deluding them into perceiving everything of theirs (particularly religion and art) as "inferior", "barbarous", "primitive" and "fetish".

2.5 Critical Perspectives of Primary European Accounts of African Art: A Case Against African "Primitivism" and "Fetishism"

Controversial debates and contradictions surrounding primary European accounts of African art is an over-flogged issue in several intellectual discussions. Revisionist African art studies welcomed a new generation of art historians who sought to develop a new study approach. Among these

[113]The four American professors also turned out to be CIA spies. See David Rooney. *Kwame Nkrumah: Vision and Tragedy*. Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 1988, p. 276.

[114] See Kwame Nkrumah. *Africa Must Unite.* New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Inc, 1963, p.x.

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revisionist scholars were Robin Poynor, Roy Sieber, Rene Bravmann, Robert Farris-Thompson and Herbert Cole. These revisionist art historians pushed the boundaries of modern scholarship by adopting new research methodologies and presentation of facts. Credit must be given to several other scholars who adopted a rather dignified approach, to correct the corrosive views of African culture prevailing in academia at the time.[115] The researcher has subsequently followed the revisionist school of thought because African art is still being bashed by some Westerners as "third-rate" art in present times. This issue is still an on-going discourse in academia, as such, this section seeks to also contribute to this raging debate.

One principal term falsely ascribed to African art in early European annals is "primitive". The term "primitive" originally referred to something primal, the earliest, or a basic quality as in the basic developmental stage of humanity or primates. But over the centuries, the term "primitive" has been politicized, demonized and has gradually assumed aggressive and derogatory connotations with particular reference to things African or non-Western.[116] As noted by Grof (2000):

> By pathologizing holotropic states of consciousness, Western science has pathologized the entire spiritual history of humanity. It assumed a disrespectful and arrogant attitude toward spiritual, ritual, and cultural life of pre-industrial societies throughout the centuries, as well as spiritual practice of people in our own society. In this view, of all the human groups in history only the intellectual elite of Western civilization that subscribes to monistic materialism of Western science has an accurate and reliable understanding of existence. All those who do not share this view are seen as primitive, ignorant, or deluded. [117]

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[115] See Edward Jesse Shaw. Ethnography of the Howard School: Art of Agency, of Resistance and Syncretism. Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Florida, 2011, p.164.

[116] See Rowland Abiodun. *Yoruba Art and Language: Seeking the African in African Art*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014, p.9.

[117] See Stanislav Grof. *Psychology of the Future: Lessons of Modern Conscious Research.* New York: State University of New York Press, 2000, p.155.

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Hackett discusses the context of "primitivism" in her article by citing Blier, who maintains:

> 'Primitive' and 'primitivism' have been virtually expunged from anthropology but they are not far from art history (Blier 1990:95f.). African art is still portrayed as primary or primeval, and static, even deviant. Many of the best collections of African art are still to be found in natural and cultural history museums (such as the National Museum of African Art in Washington, D.C Smithsonian Institution, and the Museum of Mankind in London).[118]

A current real-world example of how these negative projections remain actively in circulation is demonstrated by US-based dance artist-scholar, Dr S. Ama Wray, who reprimanded Dr. Peter Keller, President of The Bowers Museum, after she attended an exhibition opening. Carol Beckwith and Angela Fisher's poorly-worded captions in the photo exhibition titled, *African Twilight: Vanishing Rituals and Ceremonies,* apparently portrayed African cultural practices in a negative light. To quote from Dr. Wray's letter:

> As regards the captioning, much of the cultural activity was ascribed to something called "voodoo" – voodoo is a term created and defined by Euro-Americans to portray Africans as a people whose practices are deviant and dangerous. This is outdated language, it is inaccurate and inflammatory, leading to false assumptions and stereotypes that are not educational in any way. In addition, the captions also make overt negative use of other words with equally derogatory associations — 'fetish', 'sorcerer' and 'magical.' Largely speaking, the western worldview chooses not to relate to African religious practices on par with its own, therefore it objectifies others, constantly exploiting and exoticizing them. Such labeling as found in this exhibition is detrimental to African and African descended people worldwide being respected. I would like to work with the Bowers Museum to change this perpetual diminution of African people's cultures and bring a team of experts together to help you do this.[119]

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[118] Blier quoted in Rosalind I. J. Hackett. Art and Religion in Africa: Some Observations and Reflections. In *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 24(4), 1994, p.296.

See George W. K. Dor. Exploring Indigenous Interpretive Frameworks in African Music Scholarship: Conceptual Metaphors and Indigenous Ewe Knowledge in the Life and Work of Hesino Vinorkor Akpalu. In *Black Music Research Journal,* 35(2)*,* 2015, p.23.

[119] Personal communication with Dr. S. Ama Wray (3rd Spetember, 2019). To see the 'deviant representation' of African art and cultural practices accompanied by derogatory terminologies (e.g. "fetish", "voodoo", "sorcerer"), refer to Carol Beckwith and Angela Fisher's exhibition titled: *African Twilight: Vanishing Rituals and Ceremonies* at the

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To counter Westerners' assumptions, and to place the issue in its proper context, some considerable degree of criticism has been levelled against Nkrumah by a few scholars.[120] Nkrumah is "accused" of regurgitating "racist" anthropological terms for having used "primitive" in reference to West Africans in his autobiography and other works. To this effect, I have noted in the introductory section to this discussion, the non-politicized meaning of the word "primitive" which simply connotes "basic", "earliest", "fundamental" etc. Notice how Nkrumah's presentation is to an extent contextually depoliticized in comparison to that of Freud (and several other Western scholars). Nkrumah states:

> The education of the child, therefore, began seriously from the cradle. From the investigation and experiments in the field of psychology of learning by men like Mobius, Thorndike, Yerkes, Sackett, and Keeler, we know that learning is a slow and gradual process. The primitive mind of the West African grasped this fact long ago—hence the education of the child began very early in his life […] Primitive West Africa was able to carry on its culture chiefly through its secret societies. These organizations acquired their nature from the mysteries and mysticism that surrounded the primitive folk, and were the media of primitive education. (Nkrumah, 1941:88-90)[121]

Freud (1913:17), on the other hand, makes the following remarks about the Aborigines of Australia:

> The Australian Aborigines are regarded as a distinct race, showing neither physical nor linguistic relationship with their nearest neighbours, the Melanesian, Polynesian and Malayan peoples. They do not build houses or permanent shelters; they do not cultivate the soil […] they are not even acquainted with the art of pottery […] The tribes[*sic*] in the interior of the continent, who have to struggle against the harshest conditions of existence as a result of the scarcity of water, appear to be more primitive in all respects than those living near the coast

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Bowers Musem, Santa Ana, California, July 7, 2018 – January 6, 2019. For more information on this exhibition see: https://carolbeckwith-angelafisher.com/african-twilight-vanishing-rituals-ceremonies/ (Accessed on 20/08/2019).

[120] E.g. Ayi Kwei Armah, Ali Marzrui etc.

[121] Kwame Nkrumah. "Primitive Education in West Africa," *Educational Outlook* 11(2), 1941, pp. 89-90.

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Such forceful oversimplifications by Freud raise intellectual arguments about how the Aborigines coped with nature and their immediate environment. Which implements did they employ to perform survival tasks as farming, cooking, eating, drinking, storing water, herbs, medicine, potion and beverages (considering the epoch in which they were "discovered")? Evolutionary psychology and fundamental logical reasoning aptly implies that, scarcity of water will necessitate the mechanics of creating implements and receptacles to store water with its slightest availability.

Since its inception as an academic discipline, social anthropology has been conceived and treated basically as the study of non-European peoples by Europeans and Euro-Americans. Specifically, it has been regarded as the study of 'primitive' or 'backward' peoples by the "advanced, civilized Europeans and Americans." This has affected its language and outlook. It has led, on the one hand, to a rather condescending attitude by its practitioners towards peoples forming its subject matter […] From the early 1930s to the 1960s when the principal ethnographic works on the continent of Africa were published, the earlier view of Africa as the dark continent inhabited by savages, cannibals, and heathens was to be changed.[122] Thomas Jefferson, for instance, had the effrontery of denying blacks a capacity for art or poetry. In Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia* (Paris, 1784), there is the following astonishing observation:

> Never yet could I find that a black man had uttered a thought above the level of plain narration; never saw even an elementary trait of painting or sculpture […]

At this point, it must be brought to the fore that the varied "theories" and "historiographies" of African art by Western writers were originally mere hypotheses and wild speculations respectively. Such speculations about African artistic capabilities have reverberated over the centuries in art journals, travelogues, anthropological annals, voyage texts, and "scholarly" texts, with such a

[122] See G.K Nukunya. Insider Anthropology: The Case of the Anlo-Ewe. *Etnofoor, Jaarg,* 7(1), 1994, pp.25.

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questionable authority that they have been accepted by some mainstream "art historians" as "fundamental truths" in the scholarly domain. Indeed, not only does the notion of "primitive" persist, but other inexact terminologies used in describing African art are still pervasive in Euro-Western art historical scholarship, exhibition catalogues, presentations and museum labeling of African art. Labels such as "pagan", "fetish", "tribal", "ethnographic", "objects" are still widespread in Euro-Western African art academies. The etymologies of the variant designations used in describing African art have similar chauvinistic and denigrating connotations as with the word "primitive". Upon "discovery" by Europeans, African art was barely recognized as art due to ignorance and phobic prejudice. Religious sculptures were tagged as "demonic" and "idolatrous". Feminine statuettes were simply classified as "fertility symbols". According to Miller (2001:263),

> Museum collections of art from primitive [*sic*] societies routinely label almost every item a fertility god, an ancestral figure, a fetish, or an altarpiece. Until recently, archeologists routinely described every Late Paleolithic statue of a naked woman as either a "goddess" or a "fertility symbol." Usually, there is no evidence supporting such an interpretation. It would be equally plausible to call them "Paleolithic pornography."

Gradually, African artworks were tagged as "rare objects" and "curiosities" interchangeably. Gerbrands (1990:14) gives art historians a glimpse of how African art was perceived:

> The great craftsmanship of most of the objects also generated much appreciation. Souvenirs that did not fit in the well-known spectrum of everyday life, however, were quickly labelled "Curio or "rarity" and were proudly displayed by Kings and noblemen in their cabinets of curiosities.

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Below are some examples of "cabinets of curiosity":

Figure 2.5 Left: Josef Herman, the polish-British artist, at his home in London.[123] Right: Helena Rubenstein poses by her curio cabinet.[124]

The status of African art remained undecided for centuries until they were termed "art objects" by Victorian European writers. After the "discovery" of African art by artists like Picasso, Matisse and others, the status of African art was upgraded, making their way into art museums under the guise of "art objects". Typically, the research methods through which African art was first documented have largely been neglected in modern scholarship.

An interesting and observable fact that occurred during the European "exploration" and "documentation expeditions" of the African continent is that many got lost and shipwrecked in the

[123] Source of image: https://vincebevan.photoshelter.com/image/I0000ZYa02chIMzs (Accessed on 16/10/2017)

[124]Source of image: http://www.theblogazine.com/2014/11/beauty-is-power-in-the-life-of-helena-rubinstein/ (Accessed on 16/10/2017)

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process. As demonstrated by Ibn Battuta's reports and the accounts of other explorers, the geographical expertise of the Arabs was far superior to that of their European counterparts. This situation remained basically unchanged until the end of the 18th century.[125] A typical example is the case of David Livingstone (1813-73) who undertook several expeditions, the first of which he was on in 1849 [...] Often ill or suffering from total exhaustion, he had to be carried along some stretches of the journey, several times suffering life-threatening conditions. He eventually went missing, presumed dead like so many before him, whereupon the *New York Herald* sent its best reporter, Henry Morton Stanley, to Africa to look for him.[126] Some Europeans who got lost in their exploration and colonial expeditions were compelled to report on the 'ethnography', 'anthropology' and art as a result of curiosity and boredom. An example is the case of the Dutch explorers who reported on the Khoikhoins as a pastime when they got shipwrecked on the coast of the southern cape of Africa. These are classical examples of "shipwrecked crew turned historiographers", "lost explorers turned anthropologists" and "missionaries turned ethnographers". Dapper and his fellow Dutch "scholars" present a brief description of their "accurate accounts" of the artistic and creative abilities of the Khoinkhoins in the Southern African region:

> You might as well look for jewels in a sty as for art in this degraded people. Since however they wear skins sewn together with needle, they cannot be absolutely said to be without arts and crafts. Their needles are of iron (for they have mines and, as I guess, very rich ones) or of ivory, and for thread they use sinews of animals. They shave their hair skillfully with sharp razors, whence it follows that they are acquainted not only with the tailor's and barber's craft, but also with that of the smith. Hence, they are provoked to a certain flattering conceit of themselves, although in truth they are rude creatures with no tincture of any arts except the humblest (Dapper et al., 1668: 157).

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[125] See Klaus E. Müller and Ute Ritz Müller. *Soul of Africa: Magical Rites and Traditions*. Maveville: Imprimerie Jean Lamour, 1999, p.425.

[126]Ibid. p.427.

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Gravenbroeckii, on the other hand, asserts:

> There are no arts and no crafts here, and no hired workers, every man is the designer and maker of his own equipment, they have no books, no writing; everything is plunged in an ignorance darker than Cimmerian night (Dapper et al., 1668:318).

The sharp disparity in the presentation of their "facts" denigrates and obscures rather than inform scholars and art historians. These inconsistencies are very common in European annals, which were purporting to provide "accurate accounts" of African art and visual culture in general.

Lévy Bruhl is one of the founding fathers of French anthropology in the early 20th century. It was Lévy Bruhl who used the term "primitive" to describe how the ideas of "pre-modern" people differed from the ideas of "modern" people. Unlike Durkheim, Lévy Bruhl was more interested in the "pre-modern" societies and tried to explain this contrast between the "modern" and "pre-modern" in various works including the influential book called *How the Natives Think* (1910). In this book, Lévy Bruhl tended to stress the difference between what he called "primitive" people and "modern" people as a way of understanding social relations, social rituals and social categories. However, other anthropologists and scholars were more interested in structural similarities between "pre-modern" and "modern" cultures and they disliked the word "primitive"—they simply rejected that term. They wanted to think in more comparative structural terms. Some of these cross-cultural analytical scholars were Clifford Geertz, Marcel Mauss and Claude Levis-Strauss.[127] These scholars together with others advanced several intellectual ideas in sharp contrast with the "primitive" school of thought—one of the most compelling intellectual

[127]See Lloyd Kramer. The *Great Courses: European Thought and Culture in the 20th Century.* Retrieved from: https://www.thegreatcourses.com/courses/european-thought-and-culture-in-the-20th-century.html (Accessed on 26/10/2016)

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movements being "anarcho-primitivism."Anarcho-primitivism pushes the boundaries of the prevalent discourse by rejecting civilization entirely, and proposes in its place some sort of primitive or feral community, most popularly some sort of hunter-gatherer society. John Zerkan is considered one of the leading theoreticians of such an anarchism in the United States, and in his enlarged edition, *Against Civilization* (of an anthology initially published in 1999), he assembled a variety of readings that evoke, elucidate and defend its essential elements.[128]

Geertz addresses the fact that anthropology traditionally looked at so-called "primitive" art as something exotic and not being in the same category as the "fine art" of Western civilisations. Geertz also argues that although the aesthetic framework in which the so-called "primitive" societies work are not the same as the aesthetic framework of Western art, the meanings certain techniques or forms and objects have, are the same. Artworks in "primitive" art are not just random contingent objects, but follow strict rules and aesthetic standards in the same way that Western art submits to certain standards and rules in order to fit into certain genres. As noted by Ehrenzweig, from a psychoanalytic perspective:

> The psychoanalytic concept of creative sublimation implies that the highest human achievement should be linked very directly with what is lowest and most primitive in ourselves […] once we have accepted the dynamic model of creative sublimation which psycho-analysis has introduced, we can only expect that the most sublime be joined by a short-circuit with what is most debased in human nature. Nothing else will do, and squeamish readers who cannot bear such juxtapositions should keep away from depth psychology. Primitive undifferentiation turns into an instrument of high efficiency. [129]

[128]See John Zerkan (Ed.) *Against Civilization*. Los Angeles: Feral House, 2005.

[129]See Anton Ehrenzweig. *The Hidden Order of Art: A Study in the Psychology of Artistic Imagination.* California: University of California Press, 1971, p.129.

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Geertz, like Gell, contends that the work of art should be studied from within the local knowledge of the cultural system from which it emerges (Geertz 1983: 97). Geertz agrees with Henri Matisse, that "the means of art and the feeling for life that animates it are inseparable (Geertz 1983: 98)." By placing art within the local knowledge system, the collective ways in which a certain group of people define "social relationships, [sustain] social rules and [strengthen] social values" are made visible (Geertz 1983: 99).[130]

2.6 Summary of Discussion

While the intention of Westerners to "document" African religious practices is commendable, their racist, supremacist and condescending attitude associated with their efforts are flawed in scholarship. The psychological and philosophical perspectives of these discussions have addressed the various contradictions, fabrications and inaccurate notions associated with the early European accounts of African art. It also covered their modes of presentation as well. Over the centuries, there has been a vain effort by Westerners to reject Africa's contribution to world history in the discipline of art. Some Western "art historians" and "aestheticians" over the ages have propounded faulty premises to discredit the attempts of other art historians (usually of African descent) who challenge such biased historiographies presented in this section.

[130] Allen provides an extended discussion on this subject in her Masters dissertation. See Rika Allen. The Anthropology of Art and the Art of Anthropology - A Complex Relationship. Unpublished M.A Thesis, University of Stellenbosch, 2008, pp.19-20.

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CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

There is a close link between research methodology and theoretical framework and vice versa. This close link particularly becomes more vital during critical aspects of field studies and data processing. Relying on such basic principles of field research, my research questions, interviews, focus group discussions, active participation and general data collection procedures and approaches were guided and shaped by the theoretical framework established for this research in Chapter One.

Over the last six years, I have been researching into the arts of Anlo-Ewe Vodu religion to attain a full grasp of its rudimentary philosophies. Apart from desk research, one of the responsibilities of this position is to do direct field observation, participate and actively engage with the artists and practitioners of the Anlo-Ewe Vodu religion respectively. This is where practical findings from the field are meant to complement the theories from authorities and critical perspectives by experts in a given discipline. As a result, field studies granted me the opportunity to research and learn more about my identity, race, spirituality, religion, art, traditions, history and the social anthropology of the Ewes in a much broader sense. A bulk of this information cannot merely be studied from books or academic journals alone, it is enshrined in the Ewe societies. This opportunity placed me in a very unique position to successfully conduct this research as an Ewe scholar, curator and multidisciplinary artist. Through the entire learning process, I also discovered that exposure to the religious aesthetics and ceremonies of the Anlo-Ewe people gives my life

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more meaning and value. Generally, this phenomenal learning experience has also complemented and significantly enhanced my overall thesis and professional artistic practice.

3.2 Data Collection and Data Instruments

The research began through questioning, by questioning Anlo-Ewe elders. Simple questions like, what do you consider art in Vodu shrines? What does this or that artistic expression imply in sacred Vodu spaces? What are the spiritual dimensions of Anlo-Ewe Vodu sculptures? What is the role of this or that Vodu artist? What is the significance of this body art or that scarification on Anlo-Ewe Vodu devotees? What is the notion of Anlo-Ewe Vodu religious aesthetics? Why do outsiders and non-Vodu initiates fear Anlo-Ewe Vodu art? I was exceptionally curious and it yielded very good results. Making use of the answers and feedback I got from these basic questions I asked then led me on to discover other new and bigger philosophical questions. This subsequently guided my data collection process. My data collection process was also driven through artistic research methods mainly through "the Artist as a researcher" approach. Throughout my data collection process, I didn't only engage my research associates in interviews and focus group discussions, I was fully immersed in the creative process. Artistic research methods are slightly different from the research methods employed by social scientists. Artistic research methods require you to engage in an activity or an experience which is usually the creative process itself to get a better understanding of the kind of art you're researching into. Practice-based learning helped me to gain more knowledge and experience for a deeper understanding of Vodu art.

Doing an ethnographic study requires the researcher to go to the field (village, market, town square, streets) or where people thrive to engage in practical field work. The descriptive approach of the

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qualitative research method was employed in this exploratory field research. Collecting ethnographic data was done, principally, through interviews, participant observation, studying critical texts. The research instruments included Canon 70D DSL camera, microphone, Sony audio recorder, iMac, tripod, iPad, iPhone, and an external hard drive and monetary inducements and honoraria for respondents, facilitators and field assistants. Participating in the religious rites and activities of the people generally stimulated a broader understanding of the socio-cultural philosophies of Anlo-Ewe Vodu art.

Figure 3.0 Researcher participating in the communal drinking of sacred Aliha at the sacred grove of Tɔgbui Adzima Shrine in Klikor, Volta Region (2016). Photography by Research Assistant.

Figure 3.1 Focus group discussion with Tɔgbui Hutɔ Adzimashie Bali and important members of Tɔgbui Adzima Shrine, Torgodo, Volta Region (2017). Photography by Research Assistant.

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The participant observation I engaged in began through broad descriptive observations, which later shifted to focused observation and finally narrowed down to selective observations and active participations in Vodu ceremonies, performances, rituals and the spiritual creative process. I essentially conducted field studies by collecting primary data through the observer as participant method. The field studies also involved more experiential learning, active inquiry, discussions, cooperation, less-structured interviews, and building rapport with the respondents. Every ethnographer makes use of what people say during interviews, conversations, and informal interactions but anything respondents say must be subjected to cross-verification. During my less-structured interviews and focus group discussions, my respondents were mostly the ones doing the talking while I did most of the listening. I had engaged in several other formal and informal interactions and did some great listening to that effect. The feedback generated from my research associates during interviews were triangulated and cross-checked through a few other valid sources. Other data gathering activities included audio recordings, video recordings, high-resolution photography, note-taking and sketching. In the initial stages of my observation, so many actions, activities, performances, rites and ceremonies arrested my attention but with time and through extended visits, my attention span was only able to focus on specific sites and activities.

Gender	Number of Vodu spiritual leaders	Number of cultural bearers and activists	Number of Vodu devotees	Number of academics	Number of Vodu artists and "formally educated "artists	Number of Non-Vodu adherents, spiritual leaders, artists and academics.	Percentage (%) According to gender distribution
MALE	25	25	45	35	30	15	47.2%
FEMALE	10	30	80	20	45	20	55.4%
TOTAL	35	55	125	55	75	25	

Table 3.1.2 Gender distribution of key respondents (they primarily included Vodu Priests, Priestesses, Spirit Mediums, Psychic Healers, Mystics, Chiefs, Queen Mothers, Community Elders, Academics and Artists).

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Figure 3.2 Researcher interacting with Dumegawo (community elders) in Dzogadze, Volta Region (2017). Photography by Research Assistant.

Several authorities were consulted, interviewed and greatly relied upon to collect, document and analyse all the findings generated in this study. Among some of the prominent Vodu Priests, diviners, and spirit mediums were Tɔgbui Naza Kudese, Hutɔ Adzimashie Bali, Hutɔ Abinga Tɔgbui Dzokpoto, Prof Kwasi Dunyo, Tɔgbui Amedaxo "Dictionary" Sodo Atoklo, Tɔgbui Humali II, Tɔgbui Sowordo Goku, Tɔgbui Dawubo Gbadagba, Tɔgbui Nuwordor, Tɔgbui Agagli Asipodi, Fianugɔ Womegbeamewo, Komfo Bakai, Amegashie Fiakomeshie, Vodushie Yevugah, Amegashi Ablorshie, Amegashie Losu, Christopher Voncudjovi, Nana Baffuor et cetera. Some politcal authorities and cultural bearers include Tɔgbui Addo VIII (Chief of Klikor), Mama Adzorhlor III (Queen Mother of Dagbamete), and Tɔgbui Klu Agudzeamegah II (Chief of Dagbamete).

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Figure 3.3 Researcher in a meditative mood (while participating as a performer) during a Brékété worship ceremony. Woe, Keta, Volta Region (2017). Photography by Research Assistant.

Some of the artists who were engaged to broaden my understanding of certain key discussions in various aspects of this research include Brékété performers, Koku performers, Wiz Kudowor, Kwame Akoto-Bamfo, Tɔgbui Kofi Agorsor, Nyonuwofia Agorsor, Sami Bentil, Victor Ehikhamnor, Noble Kunyegbe, Kli-Adzima Xanukplɔwo. Apart from educational resources and academic guidance from my supervisors, several academics, educational authorities were personally consulted. A few of the scholars I formally and informally interacted with in order to expand ideas in the study include, Dr. Obadele Kambon, Prof. Kofi Anyidoho, Mawlana Sheikh Mohammadu Mahy Cisse,[131] Shokola Mori, Prof. Ablade Glover, Meera Venkatachalam, Prof. Birgit Meyer and other scholars. This is not in anyway an exhaustive list as it mostly includes persons who significantly contributed in one way or another to the data generated from the field or for studies

[131]Spiritual Father of the Tariqa Tijaniyya Sufi Order headquarted in Kaolack, Senegal

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especially those directly cited in the text. All interviews, unless noted, were conducted between February 2014 and May 2018.

Through experience and the need to narrow in on key research associates and spiritual authorities to collect specific data, my participation and observation skills became very selective. It was geared exactly towards what I wanted to document and what was directly relevant to my study. One efficient strategy to this approach was identifying primary social situations and locations to do my participant observation. This involved attending and participating in several Vodu festivals, ceremonies, performances, spirit mediumship sessions, and the spiritual creative process.

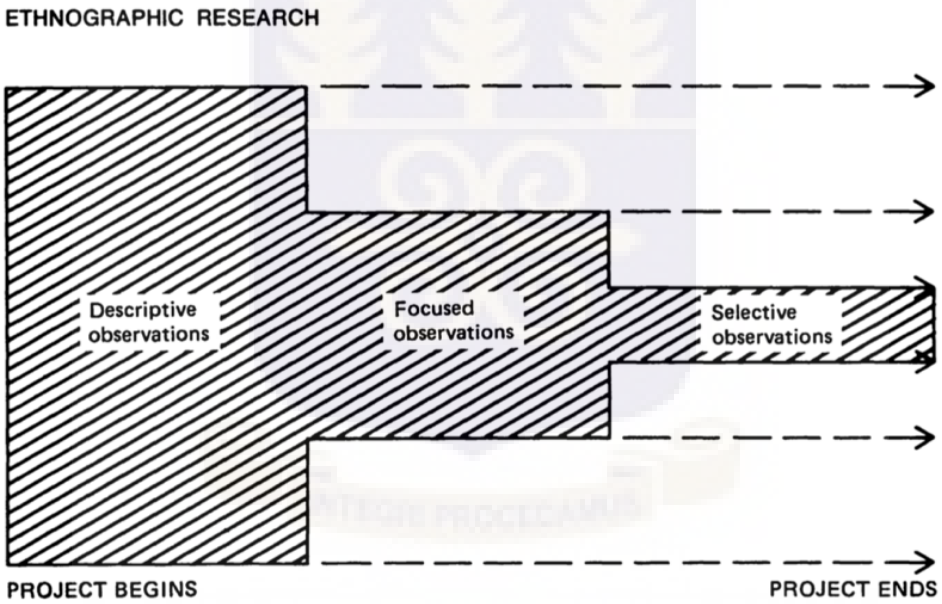

Diagram 3.3.1 Diagram showing the three stages of participant observation.[132]

Using the details of the cumulative data gathered from the field observations and interviews, data and the learning experience can be analyzed through Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle. Doing practical fieldwork usually got me involved in performing various ethnographic tasks, observation

[132] Source of diagram: See James P. Spradley. *Participant Observation.* Florida: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc. 1980, p. 34.

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and participation in activities such as establishing new friendships, eating new meals, drumming, dancing, watching Anlo-Ewe Vodu ceremonies, interviewing respondents, filming, photographing, audio recording, drawing and taking field notes. Apart from all these, I participated in a few rites, ceremonies, rituals, creative works and other activities to learn and fully grasp their deeper aspects. These community engagements were very beneficial to elicit complex and deeper meanings encoded in language, symbolism, abstraction, psychology and performative actions. The bulk of the deeper core information I uncovered was stored in the language. Language was a great tool for navigating the complex interconnected philosophy of Anlo-Ewe Vodu art. Being an insider Anlo-Ewe artist, my ability to speak and effectively communicate with key respondents as well as research assistants proved to be my greatest advantage in conducting this research successfully.

It must be stressed that being able to study and understand a culture through its language does not completely purge generalizations, skewed opinions, factual inaccuracy, historical errors or blind assumptions. The added advantage here is that language reduces the chances of these occurrences to a considerable degree which makes progress of the research rather smooth and effective. It must be further emphasized, however, that, being able to speak and understand Ewegbe was not necessarily what opened so many opportunities for me that would otherwise be denied to an outsider anthropologist. My proficiency can be attributed to a number of advantageous factors. Quite a few priests and spirit mediums were my relatives and most of my key respondents were either acquaintances or good friends of my relatives who were generally supportive in my intellectual and spiritual journey. The principal locations of where I conducted my main fieldwork (Klikor, Torgodo, Woe (Keta), Afiadenyigba and Dagbamete) are neighboring villages of where I hail from (Atiteti). Another crucial factor that actually made some of my respondents earn my trust

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and respect was the fact that my late paternal grandfather was the Chief of Atiteti. Some of the respondents, priests and devotees I interviewed actually knew him personally during his reign. There was even a coincidence in which one respondent from Afiadenyigba affirmed that she sold royal Kete to my grandfather on a number of occasions. In such instances, the attitude of my respondents towards me was generally appreciable respect and great admiration for my rare and keen interest in Vodu arts. I also personally knew some of the oral historians, sage philosophers, and local researchers like the late Dale Massiasta who was my father's classmate and research collaborator, introduced to me during my high school days. Massiasta was a leading sage philosopher and reliable researcher in Vodu matters.[133] The areas I conducted the field studies were very familiar terrains and I personally knew my bearing around most of the primary sites for data collection. I was home.

Figure 3.4 Researcher in a shot with the High Priest of Mama Vena Shrine, Tɔgbui Nuwordu, Mama Vena Shrine, Klikor Volta Region (2016). Photography by Research Assistant.

[133]Dale Massiasta, known in private life as Samson Kwaku Azameti, was the founder of the now defunct Blakhud Research Center at Klikor of which my father, Dr. Mawuli Adjei, was a co-director.

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But the most crucial aspect of doing ethnography is learning to see the world from the perspective of indigenous people being studied (Anlo-Ewe people). In that regard, I essentially had to unlearn "book knowledge" and became a new student in the field all over again in order to properly learn a way of life I wanted to immerse myself into; to "indigenize" or to learn what Africans refer to as "home sense".

Figure 3.5 One of the rare surviving pictures of my great-grandfather, Tɔgbui Akakpo Adjei I, Dufia of Atiteti. (undated).

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3.3 Population and Sampling Method

The research associates I engaged for this research were indigenous Anlo-Ewe people in the Keta and Ketu South municipalities in the southern Volta Region of Ghana. The sampling techniques employed for this research were snowball and purposive sampling. The purposive sampling method was used to define the population (in the afore-stated area) for this study. The target population sampled included towns and villages in and around Klikor and Dagbamete. Others include Woe (Keta), Afiadenyigba, Torgodo, Aflao, and Atiteti. Once the target population was defined, members of the sample frame were sampled through the snowball sampling method. The unit of observation included community and group units. Purposive sampling method was chosen to define the target population because the data gathering sources contained relevant data and also because the selected sampling method adequately met the goal of the proposed research.

Additionally, purposive sampling offered me the chance of focusing on respondents who were very relevant to the study and where there was most likely a high probability of concentrated data in the defined target population. In this regard, snowball sampling method was chosen to sample members of the sample frame in the target population primarily due to the reliability of reaching the respondents in the hidden target population. This was due to the fact that some respondents are usually denied access (mostly non-initiates of the Vodu religion) to secret traditional practices and beliefs associated with Anlo-Ewe religious art. Some were also difficult to contact because of their undocumented status and the general sensitivity of the research due to the stigma some previous researchers and Christian NGOs have attached to Anlo-Ewe Vodu religion and other aspects of spiritual practices. As a result, choosing the snowball-sampling method offered me a study sample through multiple referrals made among the respondents who knew and directed me

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to other high-ranking Vodu practitioners with relevant information. All these challenges were limited by simply finding respondents (some of whom were my close relatives) with inside information to find the key respondents for the research.

3.4 Evaluating the Pros and Cons of Conducting an Auto-ethnographic Research

It is imperative to emphasize the critical dimension of auto-ethnographic research and how my personal experience, cultural background, academic interests, artistic career and several other factors influenced the general outcome of the findings in this study. Before I proceed further with the auto-ethnographic aspects of this study, it will be prudent to engage in some of the prevailing debates in academic circles concerning auto-ethnographic scholarship. In terms of methodological approach, this research is by all means a comprehensive auto-ethnographic study that seeks to document Anlo-Ewe religious aesthetics and material culture in the broadest sense. Being auto-ethnographic in scope, this methodology comes with its advantages and drawbacks. Some scholars have raised arguments about the validity and authenticity of auto-ethnography. A major concern among these scholars is how the background and personal beliefs of the researcher influence the findings and judgments of the research. For instance, Öberg (2017) notes that:

> Auto-ethnography aims to blur the boundary through the writing process primarily. Writing the text as a story, with different narrators, that go through various elements common in storytelling, not just to build an introduction for an eventual scientific analysis, as ethnographers can often do now after the influence of postmodernism, but as the whole product itself, is part of the current tradition in auto-ethnography. It is a conscious decision, to forego values commonly associated with the scientific method, and to instead focus solely on the final text itself. This makes it very difficult to critique auto-ethnography, as auto-ethnography does not try to adhere to the same standards as regular science. It does not perturb auto-ethnography to call it unscientific, because auto-ethnography does not try to be scientific (Bochner, 2000; Ellis, 2009). The only validity and reliability an auto ethnographer has to follow, is in relation to credibility of the final text, and not in relation to the how the text came to be (Bochner, 2002, p.86). Scientifically speaking, that makes no sense. It is not about enforcing some kind

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> of unattainable ideal of objectivity, it is not about avoiding beautiful literary descriptions in the text, it is about the reader being able to trace the methodological choices and antecedent justifications. Otherwise anyone could write a convincing text, call it auto-ethnography, and publish it as a paper in a scientific journal. [134]

In addressing the "validity" or "scientific quality" of auto-ethnographic research, Hayler and Edmond (2013) assert that:

> It raises what Gee (2005) refers to as 'the frame problem' in recognising meaning as situated and opens a further area of potential debate around issues of validity and quality within educational research methodology. [...] to summarise, our own position is that 'validity' in studies which seek to authentically represent lived experience depends upon confronting the inescapable problem of representation by recognising that the link between experience and representation are inevitably problematic (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). Our work contributes to the 'rethinking of terms such as validity, generalizability and reliability' (ibid: 190), which Denzin and Lincoln called for in 2005. Similarly, the 'quality' of research can only be understood within the reader's framework of understanding which it may in itself change or extend. Issues of validity and quality within qualitative research are necessarily subjective, inter-subjective and determined by context.[135]

Generally, in research, no matter how hard researchers strive to remain objective in their findings, they still reveal thinly-veiled personal biases because every individual has his or her own bias, shaped by their experience, world view, social psychology and personal beliefs. A critical rhetorical question might suffice here: is there really such a "thing" as "objectivity" in research? Proposing counter-hegemonic academic perspectives on the question of "objectivity" for African scholars trained in Euro-Western academies and research methodologies, Ani (1994) offers a decisive solution:

> It is not possible to be objective towards Europe: Certainly, the victims of its cultural, political, and economic imperialism are not objective, if they are sane. And Europeans cannot be "objective" about their own cultural history. The question, then, becomes: What could objectivity possibly mean in terms of human mental

[134]Retrieved from: http://harrisjonesanthropology.com/2017/04/autoethnography-nonsense/ (Accessed on 25/04/2017)

[135] See Mike Hayler, Nadia Edmond. Telling Tales on Either Side of the Teacher: Methods of Researching Professional and Biographical Transformations. In the Context of Education. In *Reconceptualizing Educational Research Methodology*, 4(1), 2013, p.4.

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> attitudes? […] It is a concept that acts to mystify Europe's victims: one of the most effective tools of European ideology. The claim to an absolute ultimate truth is a psychological necessity for the European mentality. And since we have accepted it, it is an edict that has constrained most of us who have been trained in European academies. […] As African scholars, it is our responsibility to create systematic theoretical formulations which will reveal the truths that enable us to liberate and utilize the energies of our people. In this view, the self-determinist, the revolutionary, and the scholar are one, having the same objective, involved in the same truth-process.[136]

In a similar academic style, Postcolonial theorists profess a corresponding logic:

> Postcolonialism maintains that universal claims are mistaken since they assume that a certain white, Western identity or position is the template for all people, and that cultural differences are ignored. Indeed, the very term 'postcolonial' suggests this, evoking as it does histories of empire, resistance and decolonisation […] Postcolonial theory asks this: what would history look like if it were written from the point of view of the periphery? What stories would history tell if, rather than the perspective and values of the colonised voice narrated and evaluated? What if the colonizer ceased to speak for the colonized, and the colonized spoke instead for the colonizer? Postcolonial history, then, might be described as the periphery talking back to the centre, as the viewpoints of the marginalized or the colonized. It challenges or questions the authority of some voices, and demands that others be heard.[137]

Alacovska and Gill (2019) put it much more pointedly: 'Like the postcolonial critic, the ex-centric scholar might be thought of as a 'party pooper' who will upset and destabilise the taken for grantedness of congealed knowledge claims.' Building on postcolonial theory and Ani's (1994) critical perspectives, it can be deduced that, in modern ethnographic and anthropological studies, one needs not to be only objective but also some appreciable amount of subjectivity is required to level the academic field which is marred by prejudice, racism, sexism and false philosophical

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[136] See Marimba Ani. *Yurugu: An African-Centered Critique of European Cultural Thought and Behavior*. Trenton: Africa World Press, 1994, p. 23

[137] Ana Alacovska and Rosalind Gill. *De-Westernising Creative Labour Studies: The informality of Creative Work from an Ex-centric Perspective*. Retrieved from http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1367877918821231. See also Ang I. *On not Speaking Chinese: Living between Asia and the West.* Psychology Press. 2001.

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assumptions. This is a permissible academic practice in auto-ethnography and revisionist ethnographic work in general. Thoughful academic perspectives and revised approaches to ethnographic research were taken into consideration since this type of research involves intensive participant observation, personal experience and what Geertz terms "thick description". This is what revisionist anthropology/ethnography researchers refer to as "trained subjectivity" or "critical subjectivity." Bernard (2006:22), who has worked extensively on modern anthropological research methodologies, states:

> We need more, not less, science, lots and lots more humanistically informed science, to contribute more to the amelioration of suffering **and the weakening of false ideologies—racism, sexism, ethnic nationalism—in the world**. Humanism sometimes means a commitment to subjectivity—that is, to using our own feelings, values, and beliefs to achieve insight into the nature of human experience. In fact, **trained subjectivity** is the foundation of clinical disciplines, like psychology as well as the foundation of participant observation ethnography.

Ladkin (2005), on the other hand, has developed a connection between what Husserl[138]describes as the enigma of subjectivity and the challenge of retaining critical subjectivity in action research. She identifies three common threads of phenomenological thinking which have particular relevance to issues of subjectivity in action research, the most significant one being: "An aim to apprehend the world in a way which reveals its truth, and acknowledging the way in which our subjectivity contributes to truth".[139] The re-emergence of divergent views about the relevance of re-examination, academic critique, argumentative discussions and critical subjectivity in African philosophy, auto-ethnography and auto-anthropology (or modern scholarship) makes the

[138]See Donna Ladkin (2005). 'The Enigma of Subjectivity': How might Phenomenology Help Action Researchers Negotiate the Relationship Between 'Self', 'Other' and 'Truth'? In 3(1), pp.108-126, 2005, University of Exeter. See also Husserl, E. The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology. An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy. Trans. David Carr. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1970.

[139] See Alan George. *Aesthetic in Practice: Part A, Chapter 3, a Theoretical Framework.* p.71 (Publishers and year of publication unavailable).

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intellectual positions of some of its noteworthy proponents very instructive. For instance, Uchendu noted in his book *The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria* (1965) that the culture bearer:

> is emotionally involved in his culture, especially in regard to its 'sensitive' zones. This fact has been advanced as a reason why he should be restricted to the role of an educated informant. But this emotional involvement is in itself relevant to our science: it guides the reader in his assessment of the writer, and methodologically, it can help us to determine the degree of objectivity (when we know how) with which social scientist in general approach sensitive topics in other areas of human behavior.[140]

However, other scholars are still hesitant and disagree with such intellectual positions. Uchendu's position was challenged by Nukunya (1960a: 20) who cautioned against bringing emotions into the analysis and suggested that, "the most important single asset in field work is proper training in research methods. This alone can alleviate the disadvantages emotional involvement in cultural values entails."[141] Besides the "academic bashing", Öberg quite candidly also acknowledges the fact when he stated:

> To be fair, auto-ethnographers give a voice to people's concerns about social representation. That is to say that they acknowledge the experienced importance of gender, race, class, and a multitude of other social divisions, and of course all experiences are real, so these social divisions do matter to the people in the field where the (auto) ethnographer finds itself. [142]

Auto-ethnography has gained prominence in methodological approach in conducting research for the "marginalized" by the "marginalized researcher"—often yielding fresh perspectives and new insights. Based on the on-going discussions, the crucial academic networks have been outlined in auto-ethnography, critical debates, philosophical decolonization and subjectivity in research.

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[140] See Uchendu (1965:10) as cited in G.K Nukunya. Insider Anthropology: The Case of the Anlo-Ewe. *Etnofoor, Jaarg,* 7(1), 1994, pp. 24-40.

[141] Ibid. pp. 24-40.

[142]See http://harrisjonesanthropology.com/2017/04/autoethnography-nonsense/ (Accessed on 25/04/2017)

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These areas were linked in the critical debates and argumentative approach in presenting the discussions and ethnographic materials throughout the various chapters.

3.5 Experiential Learning and Active Research Participation

The experiential studies I undertook will be analyzed through *Kolb's four-stage experiential learning cycle.* They include: Concrete Experience, Reflective Observation, Abstract Conceptualization and Action Experimentation.

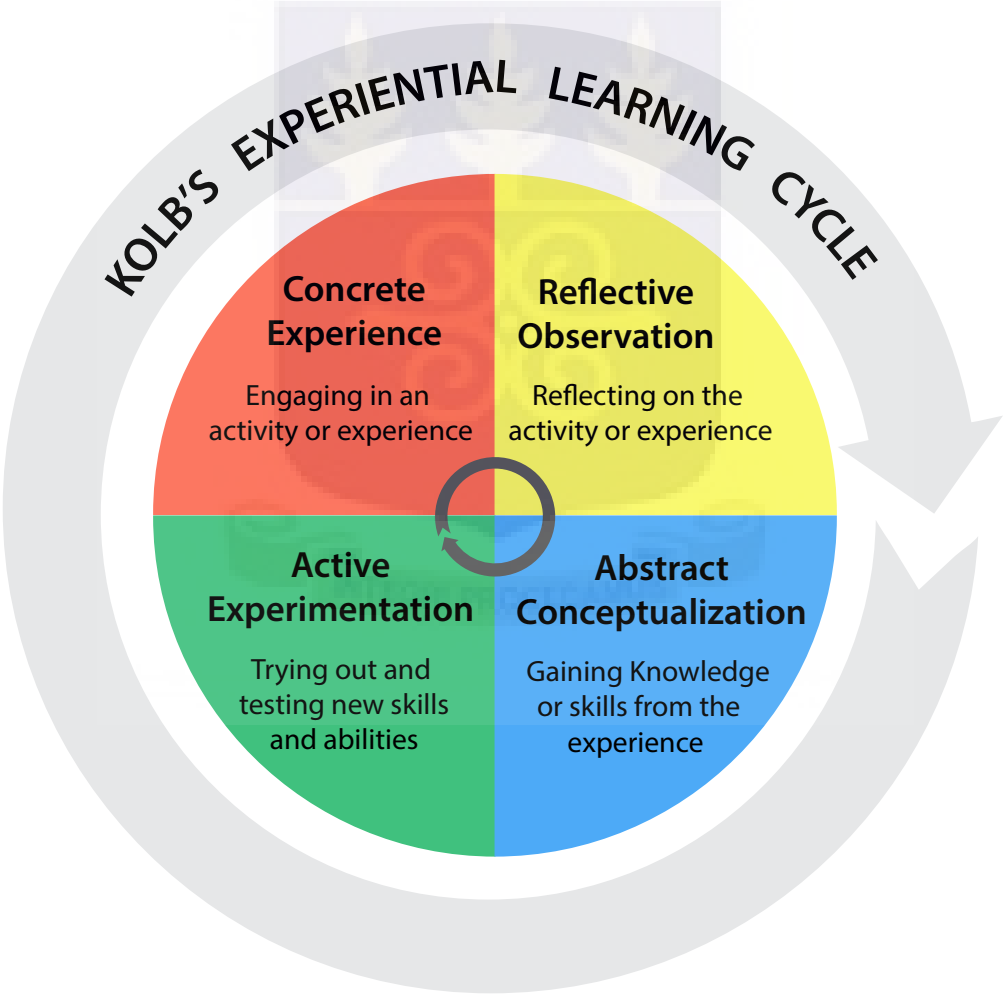

Diagram 3.5.1 Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle. Diagram illustrated by Researcher.

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3.5.1 Concrete Experience

Before my field studies and experiential learning period began, I engaged myself in pre-fieldwork preparations, background reading and revisions of related literature, with focus on Anlo-Ewe art, African symbolism, philosophy of art, Vodu religion, performing auto-ethnography and religious aesthetics. I also watched several documentaries on Vodu religion, Vodu performance and Vodu art. These resources proved to be very helpful. When I got to the field, the first thing I did was to first establish rapport with my research assistants and key respondents for my experiential learning period. We agreed to meet twice a week to have informal interviews and focus group discussions for a period of two hours. I later followed up with photography, guided tours, demonstrations and active participation in some selected creative processes, rituals and performances.

3.5.2 Brief description of my learning experience (practical evidence of field research) What did I do?

I engaged selected religious leaders and priests in extended and intensive interviews **(**These engagements also involved observations, focus group discussions and informal interactions). Methodologically, it proved to be advantageous to conduct the interviews in large groups to generate diverse perspectives of the issues we discussed. I identified and observed Brékété performances in Woe (Keta), Dagbamete, Dansoman and Ashaiman respectively to gain a deeper understanding of the various artistic elements and religious aesthetics employed during Brékété worship. I photographed some selected sculptures, murals, pottery, architecture and drums. I also recorded Hu-koku performances and live Brékété music and dance performance.

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Figure 3.6 I learnt how to think, talk, ask questions and behave in new ways. I also enhanced my ability to ask the right question to get the right information from the right person I am speaking to. I honed my observation skills, information gathering ability and analytical thinking in relation to my research. I participated in the creative process at every step of the way during my research. Dagbamete, Volta Region (2016). Photography by Curtis "Fo Kordzo" Andrews.

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3.5.3 Where did I work, how many days, what was my position as a researcher?

As a lead researcher, I conducted several interviews, observations, focus group discussions and photography principally in the Volta Region. Below is a general sample of my activity outline.

Table 3.6.1 Activity Outline/Work Plan Timeline Employed for Research and Field Studies.

Task	**Data collection activities**	**Town//Village/ Region**	**Duration**
Review the literature on the Anlo-Ewe religious art and symbolism	Extensive reading, watching of documentaries, Reviewing photographs of Anlo-Ewe art and symbols. Notes	Accra Greater Accra Region	**18 weeks**
Engage select leaders in extended and intensive interviews.	Interviews, focus group discussions Audio recordings Focus group discussions Video recordings Sketches Notes	Woe (Keta) Klikor, Torgodo, Afiadenyigba Volta Region	**16 weeks**
Engage *amεgashies* and religious leaders in some specific case studies of *dzogbεshie*, Spirit mediumship.	High resolution photography, Interviews, focus group discussions Audio recordings Sketches Notes	Woe, Keta Volta Region	**12 weeks**
Studying, understanding and documenting the art and philosophy behind spirit mediumship and spirit possession performances in Anlo-Ewe religion. This	High resolution photography, Interviews, focus group discussions High resolution photography Audio recordings	Woe (Keta) Klikor, Aflao, Afiadenyigba, Torgodo, Volta Region	**14 weeks**

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include sculptures, textiles, murals, pottery, jewellery, body art, scarifications, installation art etc.	Video recordings Sketches Notes		
Observing, understanding and documenting the various art forms employed in Brékété/ *Gorovodu* performance and religion. This include sculptures, textiles, murals, pottery, jewellery, body art, scarifications, installation art etc.	High Resolution Photography, Interviews, focus group discussions Audio recordings Video recordings Sketches Notes	Woe, (Keta), Klikor, Dansoman, Dagbamete, Volta Region	**16 weeks**
Develop the literature on Anlo-Ewe visuality, focusing on the aesthetic tradition in which special colour symbolism, body markings, body art, and visual symbols are constituted and displayed during special music and dance performances, especially on contexts of royal, spiritual, ritual and highly framed performance contexts.	Sketches, Word processing, Proof reading Internet research High resolution photography Library research Photo editing, Photo Enhancement	Dagbamete, Klikor, Woe (Keta), Alakple, Torgodo, Afiadenyigba, Volta Region	**18 weeks**
Studying and Understanding the art and philosophy behind art in Ewe spirituality. This include sculptures, textiles, murals, pottery, jewellery, body art, scarifications, installation art etc.	High Resolution Photography, Interviews, focus group discussions Audio recordings Video recordings Sketches Notes	Klikor, Woe (Keta), Torgodo; Atiteti Dzogadze, Dagbamete Anyako Volta Region	**10 weeks**
Studying, understanding and documenting the art and performance in Anlo-Ewe religion. This includes sculptures, textiles,	High resolution photography, Interviews, focus group discussions Audio recordings	Afiadenyigba, Klikor, Dagbamete, Volta Region	**14 weeks**

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symbolism, murals, pottery, jewellery, body art, scarifications, installation art etc.	Video recordings Sketches, Notes		
Data analysis, findings, conclusion, recommendations.	Charts, diagrams, transcription, photo editing, cross-referencing, proof reading, interviews, library research.	Greater Accra and Volta Regions	**20 weeks**

3.5.4 Reflective Observation

3.5.4.1 Challenges and Brief Analysis of the Effects of how and what I did Filtered through my own Concepts

I realised very early on that the philosophy behind Vodu art is inextricably linked to the guarded esoteric secrets exclusively among the Vodu priests, spirit mediums and some leading members of the various Vodu shrines. Sacred barriers and religious exclusivity posed a huge challenge in getting access not only to important gnosis but also entering certain ritual domains to access information. One effective strategy was to promote the research as a good cause in favour of educating the public about Vodu religion, which has been maligned, misinterpreted and demonised not only by Western propaganda but also by the non-Vodu indigenes. My research partners and I even went a step further to propose a future partnership with the shrine to be their official cinematographers for their annual Brékété festival in order to promote the religion to a larger audience to enable them understand it better. We went an extra mile by recognising and agreeing to seek help from religious authorities to support the shrine in terms of logistics for their annual festivals. This was like altering the research procedures to enhance the outcome of our findings.

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This strategy did not only build rapport and trust but it also made information more easily accessible to us than before, even though they still withheld certain sacred knowledge from us.

3.5.5 Abstract Conceptualization

Vodu art comprises creative elements inextricably linked to the Vodu religion itself. In a typical ritual space like a Vodu shrine, artistic elements are required and employed in performing almost all religious rites and ceremonies. In a technical sense, the priests, the performers and the devotees display a heightened awareness of the arts and apparently adhere to religio-aesthetic principles ordained by the deities. They also display creativity in diverse ways. I gained in-depth knowledge about the religious concepts and philosophies associated with Anlo-Ewe Vodu art and aesthetics. Several authoritative theories explain or support most of the data I collected and what I learnt during my experiential learning period. As such, academic sources have been used extensively and appropriately to support critical academic discussions in the subsequent chapters.

3.5.6 Action Experimentation

One of the important places that I used concept of participant observer is when I was invited to come and witness the Brékété music and dance performance sessions. I adapted to some of the tactics I used during my previous field experience, which involved photography, videography, taking notes, sketching, active participation and informal interviews. The feedback from the respondents was largely positive. I can subsequently replicate this research procedures by simply transferring and applying this knowledge to new/different ethnographic settings during the course of my research and experiential learning period. The learning experience in my research has boosted my field research skills and confidence to quite a significant level as demonstrated through

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Dale's Cone of Experience. Introduced by Dale (1946) in his textbook on audiovisual methods in teaching, the Cone of Experience is a visual device meant to summarize Dale's classification system for the varied types of mediated learning experiences. The organizing principle of the Cone is a progression from most concrete experiences (at the bottom of the cone) to most abstract (at the top) (Molenda, 2003:1). See diagram below:

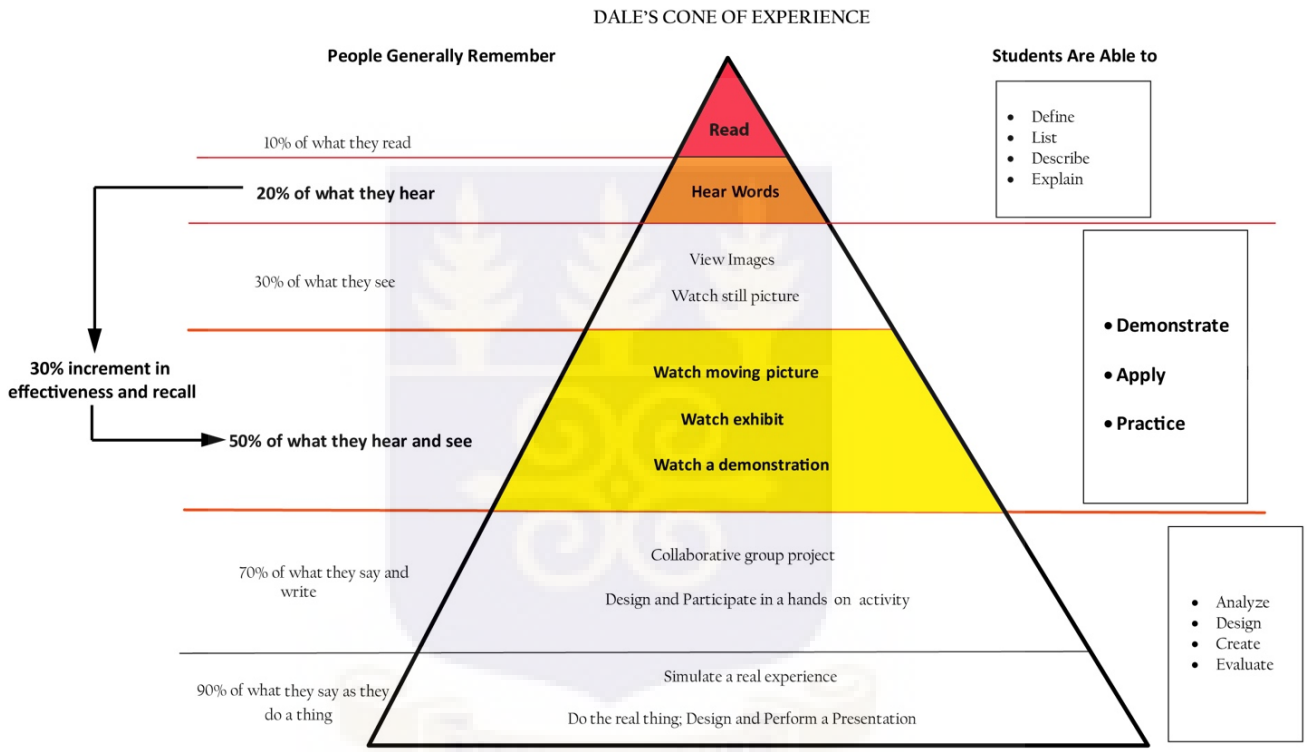

Diagram 3.6.2 Dale's Cone of Experience. Diagram by Researcher.

3.5.7 Presentation of findings

In his discourse on *The Interpretation of Cultures*, Geertz proposes pragmatic approaches to deep understanding of cultures in order to produce a rigorous interpretation, "thick description" and reliable documentation of cultural practices:

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> In anthropology, or any social anthropology, what the practioners do is ethnography. And it is in understanding what ethnography is, or more exactly what doing ethnography is, that a start can be made toward grasping what anthropological analysis amounts to as a form of knowledge. This, it must immediately be said, is not a matter of methods. From one point of view, that of the textbook, doing ethnography is establishing rapport, selecting informants, transcribing texts, taking genealogies, mapping fields, keeping a diary, and so on. But it is not these things, techniques and received procedures, that define the enterprise. What defines it is the kind of intellectual effort it is: an elaborate venture in, to borrow a notion from Gilbert Ryle, "thick description." [143]

In modern ethnographic methodologies, various researchers have advanced and developed Geertz' approach to "thick description" by employing other effective means of documentation, rigorous analysis, presentation and communicating findings through photography, tables, visual inquiry etc. To this effect, the presentation of findings in the forthcoming chapters comparatively employs thick description, philosophical dialogues, argumentative discussions, documentation of facts and novel approaches of arts-based research and auto-ethnography. This approach aims at broadening the understanding of researchers about the powerful roles and infinite possible uses of visuals in ethnographic research. Visual data breaks down complex ideas, theories, concepts into smaller units to support generalizations. It breaks down field data more easily into readily discernible units which makes information processing simple and comprehensive. Images leave visual imprints in the long-term memory of the human brain. Visual aids serve as aide memoires in storing, processing, retrieving and recollecting information for a better understanding of any issue being discussed. In discussing improved ways of how students learn, Brown, a gestalt psychologist affirms that for a long time it was thought that forgetting was due primarily to traces in the long-term memory decaying, but experiments on recall and recognition suggest that memories may be

[143]Clifford Geertz. *The Interpretation of Cultures Selected Essays*. New York: Basic Books, Inc. Publishers,1973, pp.5-6.

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stored permanently. The major deterioration occurs in the working memory and the retrieval mechanism. (Brown, 2004: 24).

But some scholars have raised concerns about using pictures to replace text or break down complex concepts. Among such concerns is the worry that readers might read multiple meanings into the images which might distort certain facts. However, once titles and brief captions are provided, the advantages of integrating visuals into text and its comprehension benefits far outweigh its disadvantages. All over the world CEOs, business executives, thought leaders and academics alike are ditching their wordy-text laden presentations and boring statistical figures to replace them with rich multi-sensory experiences and innovative presentations of facts, innovative ideas or research findings. In modern presentations, multimedia contents sell ideas faster and have proven to be much more persuasive and efficient in changing minds than mere text. Why? Simply because this has been scientifically proven. In a study titled "*A Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning*," multimedia psychologist, Mayer has argued that it is far more effective to explain concepts using multiple methods of sensory inputs—such as auditory, visual, and kinesthetic. Mayer is convinced that one of the most important areas of study in cognitive psychology is the understanding of how multimedia can foster student learning. In Mayer's experiments, students who were exposed to multisensory environments—text, pictures, animation, and video—always, not sometimes, always had much more accurate recall of the information than those students who only heard or read the information. Mayer said the principle should not be surprising. When the brain is allowed to build two mental representations of an explanation—a verbal model and a visual model—the mental

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connections are not just a little stronger. They are much, much stronger.[144]

3.5.8 Major Challenges Faced During Research

Even though I was familiar with some key Vodu authorities within the Vodu communities I experienced some slight difficulties. I initially faced some challenges concerning the anonymity of my research associates during my data collection process. Some research associates were quite noncommittal about revealing their faces for a number of valid reasons. The main reason was due to their past experiences with earlier researchers who take photographs of devotees or Vodu sculptures and publish them with derogatory captions. A few Christians practice some form of religious syncretism that requires them to participate in certain ceremonies during Vodu festivals. Such members made it clear that their pastors would 'sack them out of the church if they should see them engaging in Vodu-related activities so they were a bit cautious about publicizing their pictures.' But as time went on, I noticed that the as I built stronger rapport with them, they became more relaxed and willing participants of my research interests. Despite all the permission I got to do my photography, I made sure to protect the anonymity of my research associates who wanted to remain anonymous in my work. This leads me on to stress the importance of building trust and rapport with research associates for them to see me as a member of the community who shares their values, aspirations and interests. I want to clearly establish the fact that I didn't go into the field as an undercover researcher. My intentions were clearly declared to my research associates. I got the permission of the chief priests and they gave me their full support and approval to conduct

[144] See Carmine Gallo. *Talk like Ted: The 9 Public-Speaking Secrets of the World's Top Minds.* New York: St. Martin's Press., p.176-175. See also Richard Mayer. *Multimedia Learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 57.

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my research before I started any information gathering process. I did not misuse my privileged position or abuse the permissions granted me in any way whatsoever. I followed the protocols, I observed the rules, I also respected customs and practices of the Vodu community members which proved to be quite helpful in getting the right information I needed to further my research.

Figure 3.7 Tɔgbui Dzokpoto pouring libation and asking for the blessings of the Vodu dieties in his shrine before I commenced my research. Woe, Keta, Volta Region (2016). Photography by Researcher.

Throughout my research I performed 'Dzadodo' in various shrines. 'Dzadodo' is the act of giving a small token or offertory in appreciation of a service, help or performance (dance, art, music, drumming, singing, creative work) etc. One often reads in Western accounts that the indigenous people make them 'pay exorbitant fees' to attend Vodu ceremonies or participate in Vodu performances due to the fact that Westerners are perceived to be "rich". This is not the case—'Dzadodo' is ingrained in Anlo-Ewe ritual practices, particularly divination.[145]

[145] For instance, Dietrich wrote in her doctoral thesis that 'there were a few rare cases where I was invited to an event only to find out that because I was culturally an outsider (and comparatively rich) I was expected to pay exorbitant fees to see the celebration. This, in a way, was a type of **community insult**, as events are generally free of charge to all initiates'. See Christina M. Dietrich. *Spirit Messengers, Divine Encounters: Practitioner Inhabitants of the Anlo-Ewe Spirit World.* Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of California, 2012, p.396.

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I took thousands of pictures in the field which made the sorting and editorial process in photoshop a very daunting task considering the fact that submission of the thesis was time-bound. For this reason, I had to be very efficient at combining thesis writing and my sharp photo editing skills. Because of my communication design background, I'm a stickler for details when it comes to design and multimedia related work so I spent endless hours editing the photographs to make them "look perfect" (the photographer's nightmare). There were also a few Vodu initiates and spirit mediums who declared that their Vodus do not like them to be 'photographed'. In fact, in Dagbamete, people are not permitted to photograph the deities in the shrine mainly because non-Vodu initiates post them online and write derogatory things about them. Taking pictures of the deities was strictly prohibited. There are numerous accounts about how Zakadza, the Chief Deity in Nogokpo, apparently "fries memory cards" of mobile phones, smart devices and photographers who take pictures "without his consent". Though I didn't experience any of these challenges, there was one instance where I took pictures and filmed the performance of some *Brékété* performers which turned out very blurry and a bit over-exposed. But that was as a result of a the spiritually-charged giddiness, my own negligence or poor camera settings and not some supernatural forces 'acting on the functions' of my camera.

With all these experiences in mind, I knew what, whom and how to photograph without showing the faces of respondents or 'deities' who wanted to support my research without revealing their identities. As the anonymity of my respondents is my topmost priority as a researcher, I made sure to preserve the anonymity of my respondents the moment they declared to me they did not want their faces to appear. Tiny bits of information like these guided my visual ethnographic data gathering process. In the heat of the performances, it was quite difficult to interview the

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performers as they were busy in action. In certain instances, I was strictly not permitted to follow the High Priests and medicine men to the inner sanctum of the shrines in the forest and sacred groves to observe their purification and sacred rites of spiritual renewal. Even though I had the special privilege as an insider anthropologist, I was not given exclusive privileges to photograph certain deities or any of their associates. I was also denied knowledge and answers to certain questions because they were sacred and I ought to have been initiated into certain societies to retrieve such information.

3.5.8 Concluding Remarks

Generally, some key issues I personally observed have to do with the fact that, one of the primary goals of field studies and experiential learning in research is to learn from one's mistakes; uncover new information; acquire knowledge; acquire or develop and harness research skills (hone my observation skills, information gathering ability and analytical thinking in relation to future research). I certainly think experiential learning is a very effective way to learn because individuals learn best from experiences. It also instils confidence in the learner to learn more about what he/she is researching about. Spending extended periods in the Volta Region, meeting the religious leaders, priests, spirit mediums and observing Vodu worshippers and performers was a great learning experience for me. It is my hope that this chapter will particularly inform future researchers on the basic methodology and practical approaches to engage respondents, observe and participate in the field activities when conducting similar studies.

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CHAPTER FOUR

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS: PART 1

4.1 Is there an African Aesthetic? Towards Defining African Aesthetics

Aesthetics is key to conceptualizing, defining, appreciating and critically engaging with any form of art (visual, sculpture, performance, music, dance etc.). In defining aesthetics in anthropological literature, Van Damme (1991:167) advances the notion that aesthetics "originated" in Western cultural philosophical background. In the study of aesthetics, German philosopher, Alexander Baumgarten, is often cited by Western scholars as the "founding father of aesthetics" for having coined the term in the 18th century. For instance, Budd (2005) credits Baumgarten for having derived aesthetics from the Greek word, ***aisthanomai***, which means *perception by means of the senses*. He further indicates that, by way of categorization, aesthetics consists of two distinctive parts:

- ⇒ The philosophy of art,
- ⇒ The philosophy of aesthetic experience and character of objects or phenomena that are not art. [146]

Such views are noticeably Eurocentric and inaccurate, which only invites argumentative perspectives. Citing Tatarkiewicz, Van Damme (1991:167) goes on to explain, that, within the indigenous societies conventionally studied in anthropology:

> it appears that a term comparable to the Western word 'aesthetics' does not exist; but as we have just seen, it did not exist within the Western tradition either until two and a half centuries ago. Yet what is nowadays called aesthetics had at that time been discussed in Western philosophy for more than two thousand years (cf. Tatarkiewicz 1980: 311-12). Similarly, we may expect aesthetics to be part of other cultural traditions as well.[147]

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[146] See Malcolm Budd. Aesthetic Concepts. In *The Shorter Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy.* Edward Craig (Ed.), New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2005, p.4.

[147]See Tatarkiewicz (1980) cited in Wilfried Van Damme. Some Notes on Defining Aesthetics. In *The Anthropological*

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Similarly, Haase has argued in her studies on *Beauty and Esthetics* that, 'the German philosopher Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten introduced the term aesthetics in 1753, but the study of the nature of beauty had been pursued for centuries. In the past it was chiefly a subject for philosophers. Since the 19th century, artists also have contributed their views.'[148]Evolutionary psychologists also maintain the fundamental notion that certain behaviours and cultural attributes exist universally in all cultures. For instance, take into consideration, one of the lengthiest and most cited categories of cultural universals, by the American anthropologist Donald Brown. Brown's (1991) proposed cultural universals include:

> the existence of and concern with aesthetics, magic, males and females seen as having different natures, baby talk, gods, induction of altered states, marriage, body adornment, murder, prohibition of some type of murder, kinship terms, numbers, cooking, private sex, names, dance, play, distinctions between right and wrong, nepotism, prohibitions on certain types of sex, empathy, reciprocity, rituals, concepts of fairness, myths about afterlife, music, color terms, prohibitions, gossip, binary sex terms, in-group favoritism, language, humor, lying, symbolism, the linguistic concept of "and," tools, trade, and toilet training.[149]

By way of definitions, we are told that aesthetics is that branch of philosophy that has tried to answer such questions as, ''What is Art?" "What is Beauty?" Dagobert Runes defines aesthetics traditionally as the branch of philosophy dealing with beauty or the beautiful, especially in art, and

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Literature, JASO, 22(2), 1991, pp.161-181.

[148] See Fee-Alexandra Haase. *Beauty and Esthetics Meanings of an Idea and Concept of the Senses: An Introduction to an Esthetic Communication Concept Facing the Perspectives of its Theory, History, and Cultural Traditions of the Beautiful.* Universität Tübingen, 2008, p.7. Kaku (2018) has also noted that humanity shares common core values and this notion applies to our sense of aesthetics. See also Michio Kaku. *The Future of Humanity.* New York: Penguin Random House. 2018.

[149] Thus, although there might be little evidence of a general adaptation for an aesthetic sense a disparate collection of emotion-producing activities and entities may structure what we consider aesthetic. For further explanations of aesthetics as cultural universals. See Donald Brown. *Human Universals.* New York: McGraw-Hill. 1991, p.115. See also Robert M. Sapolsky. *Behave: The Biology of Humans at our Best and Worst.* New York: Penguin Press, 2017, p.254.

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with taste and standards of values in judging art.[150]Runes' definition sounds very compelling and well thought out but not the least satisfactory in intellectual scope. The idea of restricting the definition of aesthetics to the notion of "beauty", "the beautiful," "perfection" or confining aesthetic experience to "the good", or what is "pleasing to the eye", and so on, is a relatively flawed approach and quite inaccurate in aesthetic scope. It simply fails to cover the rich diversity within the realm of aesthetics from a cross cultural perspective.

The term aesthetics actually has very little to do with "beauty" if we carefully study its etymology and how it was applied in some of its earliest studies within the field. Also, the critical question here is, if aesthetics, as an academic discipline, originally had very little to do with what we have come to know today as "beauty," "order," "the good", or "the beautiful," why do such aesthetic definitions make "beauty" a central determinant in broadening our understanding of aesthetics? Not to mention what Runes refers to as "standards of value" in "judging" art. Like Runes, other scholars may argue that is aesthetics not a complacent field of interest itself? Is aesthetics not obsessed with beauty (natural and artificial), high culture, fine arts, collectors' tastes, and other bourgeois interests? The answer, of course, is yes and no. Yes, this is certainly the predominant understanding of aesthetics today, both in and out of the academy: When one hears the word "aesthetics," one tends to think of art and beauty (or of plastic surgery and beauty parlors). But this is not a complete answer, for there are other ways to understand aesthetics.[151] In that regard, Plate (2005) suggests that:

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[150]See Innocent Onyewuenyi. Traditional African Aesthetics: A Philosophical Perspective. In Albert G. Mosley. *African Philosophy: Selected Readings.* Michigan: Prentice Hall, 1995, pp.421-422.

[151]S. Brent Plate. *Walter Benjamin, Religion, And Aesthetics Rethinking Religion Through the Art.* New York: Routledge, 2005, pp.1-2.

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> A more productive way to understand aesthetics is to start with the term's etymology. Stemming from the Greek *aisthesis*, aesthetics has to do with "sense perception." Its focus is on how we perceive (and, simultaneously, create) our worlds through vision, taste, smell, touch, and hearing, among other possible senses.

As Plate (2005) has pointed out, aesthetics originally had to do with all the human senses including extra-sensory perception; as such, relying only on such inexact gauges like our visual senses alone to attain a complete aesthetic experience would be quite impractical. Eaton, on the other hand, in discussing what true beauty is actually made of, notes: "with all due respect to Plato, I am inclined to think that it is philosophical folly to try to link 'beauty' or 'ugliness' to a single, precise definition or attempt to restrict the number of kinds of jobs for which individuals use these words" (2006:40). Taking beauty and ugliness out of context, Eaton further explains that, the 'dilemma – beauty or ugliness is strictly a matter of personal preference'.[152]

Judging from the previous discussions, it can be clearly deduced that aesthetics is a phenomenon and social construct shared in every given society. Critical studies and research into African aesthetic concepts and indigenous creative practices reveal comparably valid findings which agree with the refutations expounded by Tatarkiewicz and Haase. A few classic examples are captured by Farris-Thompson (1983), Dor (2015), Gyekye (1996) and Perani et al. (1998) Farris-Thompson (1983) notes:

> The Yoruba assess everything aesthetically—from the taste and colour of a yam to the qualities of a dye, to the dress and deportment of a woman or a man. An entry in one of the earliest dictionaries of their language, published in 1858, was *amewa,* literally "'knower-of-beauty" or "connoisseur," one who looks for manifestation of pure artistry. Beauty is seen in the mean (*iwontúnwonsi*)—in something not too tall or too short, not too beautiful (over handsome people turn out to be skeletons in disguise in many folktales) or too ugly. The Yoruba appreciate freshness and improvisation per se in the arts. These preoccupations are

[152] Marcia Muelder Eaton.Beauty and Ugliness In and Out of Context. In *Contemporary Debates in Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art*, Matthew Kieran. (Ed.), Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006, pp.40-41.

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especially evident in rich and vast body of works celebrating Yoruba religion.[153]

Perani et al. (1998) have also documented that, among the Frafra of northern Ghana, there is a recognition of creative ability as well as a mastery of technique and style. For example, Frafra wall painting, which is a female activity, exhibits highly creative and individualistic treatment. Although the Frafra do not have a term that translates as "art," they do recognize skilled or creative behavior, *gano,* and two aesthetic concepts: *bambolse* and *pupurego.* Most African societies, in fact, do not have a separate category designated as "art" It is important to point out that for the Frafra, *gano* is not restrianed to those skilled in producing or decorating material forms, but also includes other activities such as soothsaying, dancing, playing a musical instrument, or hunting. *Bambolse* as a concept means "embellished, decorated, or made more attractive," but it can also refer to any design or motif that has no specific name (Smith 1978: 36). In addition, this concept conveys more than just the placing of a motif on a particular form. The intention of that action must have been primarily to increase the aesthetic merit of the form if the decoration is to be classified as *bambolse.* [154]

Categorizing the significance and quality of various types of cloths among the Ewe, Dor (2015:22) notes that, Akpalu privileges only one type of cloth that the Ewe use; the process of mapping, in order to invoke and parallel a variety of Ewe song types, will normally juxtapose other kinds of cloths with their attendant cultural and socio-political values to *agovor* (the 'ago' or "velvet-type

[153] See Robert Farris Thompson. *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy.* New York: Random House, Inc. 1983, p.5.

[154] Judith Perani and Fred T. Smith. *The Visual Arts of Africa: Gender, Power and Life Cycle in Africa,* Pearson Publishers. Prentice Hall, 1998, p.7.

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cloth"), which Akpalu had implied as a superior body wear. Accordingly, Dor (2015) provides a further explanation of more types of cloths among the Ewes:

> *Avor*, the Ewe word for cloth, may carry prefixes or suffixes that serve as adjectives that qualify the type, quality, monetary and social value, and/or its contextual functionality. Hence, *hovivor*, pronounced with the tone bands [low-high-high], and which literally and taxonomically means inexpensive cloth [money-little- cloth], is the opposite of *hogavor* [low-high-high tones] that stands for expensive cloth [money-big-cloth]. Synonymously, *tsivivor* [high-high-high tones] or ("money-small- cloth"), whose cheaper quality is also evident in color or dye of the cloth that fades faster and frequently when washed, is diminutively implied in the designation, as against *tsigavor* [high-high-high], precisely translates (money-big-cloth), which the Ewe consider as a cloth type that is produced with good quality color and dye. The words "ho" and "tsi," as used in this context, bear the same meaning, but they represent the Anlo [southeastern Ghanaian] and southern Togolese dialects of the Ewe language, respectively. Another Ewe name for an expensive cloth is *avorfufui* [low-low-high-high], which semantically translates "the dried-cloth" and means a "well-processed cloth." [155]

Explaining Ewe creativity, Gbolonyo (2009), stresses the importance of originality in Ewe musical compositions and general artistic expression.The Ewes also assess a work of art through various aesthetic judgements or simple expressions such as *eɖo atsyɔ* (it is aesthetically pleasing) or *me ɖo atsyɔ o* (it lacks aesthetic grace or qualities), *adanukaka* (intricate design), *edze nunye* (it satisfies me, I really appreciate), *me nya akpɔm o* (it is an eyesore/distasteful), *eŋunyɔm* (it is repulsive) and so forth. Discussing the crucial considerations in Yoruba religious aesthetic canons, Farris-Thompson (1984) refers to character as an everlasting aesthetic quality. To quote from an elder of Ipokia in his research, "beauty is a part of coolness but beauty does not have the force that character

[155]See George W. K. Dor. Exploring Indigenous Interpretive Frameworks in African Music Scholarship: Conceptual Metaphors and Indigenous Ewe Knowledge in the Life and Work of Hesino Vinorkor Akpalu. In *Black Music Research Journal, 35*(2)*,* 2015, p.23.

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has. Beauty comes to an end. Character is forever."[156] Similarly, the Akans attribute beauty to character. Beauty, according to Gyekye (1996: 132), is measured in one's character when:

> An Akan says *ne suban nnye fe; 'bre nnye fe.* The Akan equivalent of the expression "it is not beautiful" in reference to character or behaviour is generally used to indicate both aesthetic and moral disapproval. Similarly, the word "ugly" (Akan: *tan*) is used as both an aesthetic and moral term. Thus, the Akans say, " His character is ugly" (*ne suban ye tan*). There are other aesthetic expression used to designate moral approval or disapproval, such as' 'it is unbecoming (ense), as in the moral statement, "As for this behaviour, it is unbecoming of you"; "it is agreeable to the eyes". (*Eso aniwa*); it is tasteful" (*Eye akondo*).

In *African Cultural Values*, Gyekye (1996:127) further explains the concept of "fittingness" (*nea efata)* as an important criterion of aesthetic value and judgement in Akan aesthetics. Clearly, such aesthetic concepts have been observed and passed on for several generations. Gyekye further outlines the multi-faceted notions of African aesthetics, its application and what is worthy of aesthetic contemplation to the African. Generally delineating African aesthetics, Gyekye (2003) observes that:

> The objects that are aesthetically valued are works of art in fields of visual arts (such as painting and sculpture), verbal or literary arts (such as epic and dramatic poetry), and musical arts (such as dance and song). Equally valued aesthetically are events, scenes, the human figure, humanity itself, and morality (or moral behaviour). Beauty is the central notion in African aesthetics (as it is in the aesthetics of other cultures), but the scope of its application – reflecting the focus of its concerns – is much wider in the African aesthetic experience and valuation than it is in to the cultures.[157]

Discussing aesthetics and criticism in textile art among the Akans, Sagoe made the following observation:

> The Akans are people imbued with a sense of aesthetics and this knowledge is acquired through a protracted interacting with the works of art. The Akan critics also have clear, lucid minds and strong articulate voices that help them to measure

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[156] See Robert Farris-Thompson. *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy.* 1983, New York: Random House, Inc. p.9.

[157] Kwame Gyekye. *African Cultural Values: An Introduction*. Accra: Sankofa Publishing Co, 2003.

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the qualities of art works with objectivity and accuracy. [158]

Such aesthetic considerations and often ignored perspectives demonstrate that aesthetic practice and application have been at the core of African art way before Western aesthetic theories were coined or formulated. Aesthetics is a shared and lived human experience which is prevalent in almost every society. African art reflects a multiplicity of philosophical features such as metaphysics, divinity, existentialism and aesthetics, yet Western art historians and aestheticians still question the authenticity and the existence of an aesthetic faculty inherent in African art. It is also intentionally manifest or articulated at the foreground for both expressive and specific contextual or functional needs.

Early anthropologists such as E. Vatter (1926), in *Religiose Plastik der Naturvolker (Religious Sculpture of Primitive Peoples),* proposed a fundamental difference between African art and Western art. He hypothesized that the artist's role is not, as it has generally been in modern Europe, to express his own personality, but rather to serve the community. Further, he noted, that, "the African artist is anonymous," an idea that remained unquestioned until recent decades.[159] Other anthropologists had their own theories as to what characterized African art as ethnographic, and therefore different from Western art. Raymond Firth, a sociologist, takes a functionalist approach to examining African art in his book *The Social Framework of Primitive Art* (1951). Firth sees the artist essentially as a craftsman, not working for aesthetic pleasure, but rather acting out a role in a complex social and economic system. He views "primitive art" as reflective of social rather than

[158] Isaac Kismet Sagoe. (1981), Criticism in Akan Traditional Visual Arts. Unpublished M.A, Thesis, KNUST, Kumasi.

[159]As cited by Balsamao. See Jana. C. Balsamo. Aesthetics or Ethnographic: Historical and Contemporary Dilemmas in Exhibiting African Art. Seton Hall University Dissertations and Theses (ETDs). Paper 510. 1999, p.4.

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individual experiences.[160] Ernest Gombrich, an art historian whose numerous essays (e.g., 1960) reached a wide public, repeatedly characterized all "primitive art" as rigid, frontal, timeless, marked by undifferentiated expression. This type of representation belonged together with the art of children. Herbert Read, another influential writer on art (e.g., 1956), took care to separate the arts of the primitive [*sic*] —inspired by emotions, mainly fear—from the intellectual efforts of civilized artists. Behind these observations lies the widespread, negative higher values intrinsic to European civilization. Motivated by the unthinking, childlike violence and fearful irrationality, Africans had customs not culture.[161] Such unquestioned 'authorities' of African art further inspired and spawned more problemtic ideas of African art in Western minds. Wilkinson (2000:384) advances the premise below:

> The result is that African art, its status still unclear because it does not fully fit the requirements for art, hovers as a hybrid at the edges, with the art of Western countries continuing to occupy centre stage. African art therefore is seen as something less than the other "pure" art, a sort of poorer cousin as it were.

The views expounded by all the authors cited above obscure rather than inform. Such debatable views about African art prove to be quite obsolete and no longer fit within the revisionist framework of genuinely appreciating African art or broadening the understanding of African aesthetics. For instance, Radin (1952) has observed a particular approach to appreciating African art in which he states:

> There are two ways of looking at African Negro sculpture that, for fifty years, impeded a true understanding of that art. One is the notion that an African carving or casting is "pure art" and that its quality can be fully assessed by European

[160] See Jana. C. Balsamo. Aesthetics or Ethnographic: Historical and Contemporary Dilemmas in Exhibiting African Art. Seton Hall University Dissertations and Theses (ETDs). Paper 510, 1999, p.5.

[161] See Monni Adams. African Visual Arts from an Art Historical Perspective. In *African Studies Review,* 32 (2),1989,pp. 55-103.

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> aesthetic standards, without reference the culture in and for which it was made. The other and opposite view sees in an example of Negro sculpture not work of art but merely a primitive [*sic*] utilitarian object made by a tradition-fettered artisan for a barbarous community devoid of aesthetic feeling of any kind.[162]

Relatedly, Braembussche (2009) offers a comparable analogy:

> To judge any artwork in terms of the artist's "original emotion" is what Clive Bell refers to as the '*pathetic fallacy*'. If there is anything at all that is expressed by art, then it is the expression of a deep and universal emotion, which, at least in principle, is common to *all* eras and people and which is therefore not unique to a specific artist or a particular age. This explains why artworks from a distant past or even from cultures entirely different from ours are still able to move us. [163]

Abiodun (2001:18) further expands the discussion by stressing that, "Scholars today, however, are more cautious and are trying to avoid the same old error: of believing that if artistic procedures in other cultures do not take the familiar Western form, they must be absent." This goes to prove that, any form of disdain for African art is clearly based on biased reasoning coupled with ignorance of what is and not considered as "pure art". The West's attitude of contempt for anything African is an all-pervading canker even in the academic community that needs to be intellectually addressed. With common academic unanimity, revisionist researchers have produced sound arguments to dislodge such inconsistent views of African art in modern scholarship. Carrol's (1999) philosophical discussion of art initiates an argument which implies that a social scientist's assessment or analysis of art is markedly different from the philosopher of art. According to Carrol (1999):

> We cannot discover the concept of art by polling. Why not? Many people have false beliefs about what is art. In the decades of the twentieth century, the vast majority of people thought that in order for paintings to count as artworks, they

[162]See Paul Radin. *African Folktales and Sculpture.* New York: Pantheon Books Inc, 1952, p.323.

[163] See Antoon Van den Braembussche. *Thinking Art: An Introduction to Philosophy of Art.* Brussels: Springer Science + Business Media B.V. 2009, p. 72.

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> had to be representations. But this was wrong. A social scientist relying on such poll this would miscount all the artworks in Paris in 1930; he would overlook too many paintings by Mondrain, Malevich, Kandinsky and others.[164]

Carrol's exposition here is especially helpful because it breaks through the barriers of racist stereotypes in the appreciation of art universally. In his study, *The Innocent Anthropologist,* Barley (1983:10) shared the same view regarding prejudice in academia when he wrote that:

> Outrage was quite general within the discipline when Malinowski, the 'inventor' of fieldwork, was revealed as a rather human and flawed vessel in his diaries. Even he had been infuriated and bored by 'blacks', tormented by lust and isolation. It was widely felt that the diaries should have been suppressed, that they were a 'disservice to the subject', that they were gratuitously iconoclastic and would lead to all manner of disrespect for the elders. This reveals a rather intolerable hypocrisy on the part of purveyors of the art and should be remedied at every opportunity.[165]

Some Western researchers often do not rely on critical discussions and publications by African scholars in the documentation of African art and aesthetics. This position subsequently leads to a failure in appreciating African art in the light of its philosophies and cultural origins. Sieber et al. (1987) proposed a conceptual framework for contemplating aesthetic problems in appreciating African Art:

> Each work of African art springs from an ethnic unit that has a particular history and that has made certain decisions about style, form, and aesthetics […] It is necessary also to be careful in our use of the term aesthetics, which carries a great deal of associated baggage in our culture. The literal meaning, the perception of the beautiful or tasteful, is often based on the arts of the Greeks, and that perception is carried as the canon for all works of art anywhere and anytime. (Sieber & Walker 1987:14)

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[164] See Noel Carrol. *Philosophy of Art: A Contemporary Introduction,* New York, Routledge Publishers, 1999, pp.11-12.

[165] Nigel Barley. *The Innocent Anthropologist: Notes from a Mud Hut.* Eland, 1983, p.10.

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Some of these persisting academic concerns by Euro-Western scholars led Nukunya (1994) to write:

> Since its inception as an academic discipline, social Anthropology has been conceived and treated basically as the study of non-European peoples by Europeans and euro-Americans. Specifically, it has been regarded as the study of primitive or backward people by the advanced, civilized Europeans and Americans. This has affected its approach, language and outlook. It has led, on one hand, to a rather condescending attitude by its practitioners towards people forming its subject matter and, on the on the hand, to a patronising one. Though anthropologists have devoted some attention to Europe and America during the past few decades, the basic conception has not changed and old attitudes and prejudices remain. From the very beginning to the present, Africa, especially Sub-Saharan Africa, has been a principal area of its concentration.[166]

Thus, as late as 1983, Verdon could write that his work on the Abutia Ewe was addressed to the Anglo-Saxon world. Fortunately, the position had changed, indeed long before Verdon. Not only are the hitherto primitive [*sic*] peoples able to read what the foreign anthropologists have been writing about them, but scholars from these primitive[*sic*] cultures and societies have become trained anthropologists.[167] Discussing improved approaches to understanding African art, Willett (2002:150) stressed that:

> It is important for us not to deceive ourselves into believing that we can understand the intention of an African Sculptor simply by looking at his work. For a true understanding, we should pay particular attention to studies which are based on direct observation in the field. Studies in the field have frequently disproved generalizations formulated by scholars in their museums and studies, and in doing so have sometimes produced new concepts.

From a standpoint of evolutionary psychology of art, Solso (2003:18) infers that, in the beginning, art emerged as the result of a brain able to image things internally and to represent those imaged

[166] See G.K Nukunya. Insider Anthropology: The Case of the Anlo-Ewe. In *Etnofoor, Jaarg*, 7(1), 1994, pp. 24-40.

[167] Ibid. p.29.

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things externally. Art critics and philosophers of art followed. When art became a topic of academic investigation, opinions were spun off with a passionate centrifugality in which theories of art were flung to the far corners of social theory, political ideology, psychoanalysis, aesthetic principles, religion, and philosophy—to name but a few of the aroused regions.[168]

To briefly digress, Willet was not alone regarding effective ways of appreciating and understanding not only African art but art in general. Coomaraswamy, a Tamil Hindu artist/intellectual who spent several years researching into Indian art, embarked on an intellectual campaign to properly educate the West on Indian art. Coomaraswamy (1908) made the following observation:

> It must be admitted also that a certain prejudice has led European investigators to think of classical Greece naturally as the source of all art, and to suppose that the influence of Classic Art must have been as permanently important in the East as in the West. At the same time, it is to be remembered that is not generally realised by Western scholars, who are not often artists, that Eastern Art, whether Indian, or Chinese, has a value and significance not less than that of the Western Art of any time. The main difficulty so far seems to have been that Indian art has been studied so far only by archaeologists. It is not archaeologists, but artists who are the best qualified to judge of the significance of works of art considered as art, and unravel the influences apparent in them.[169]

Carrol (1999:12) further reinforces Coomaraswamy's argument by stressing that:

> [...] the analytic philosopher of art is concerned with a different direction of research from the empirical social scientist, her methods are different. For reflecting upon the nature and structure of our concepts, like the concept of art, logic, definition, thought experiments and counterexamples (including imagined ones), and deductive argument are her primary tools—rather than laboratory experiments, polls, ethnographies, empirical observations, and the like. Of course, this is not to deny that social scientists may also avail themselves of the strategies that are so fundamental to analytic philosophers, but only to note that these

[168]See Robert L. Solso. *The Psychology of Art and the Evolution of the Conscious Brain.* Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2003, p.18.

[169]See Churnjeet Mahn. *British Women's Travel to Greece, 1840–1914: Travels in the Palimpsest (Nineteenth Century Series).*New York: Routledge, 2016, p.45.

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> strategies are at the very soul of analytic philosophy, whereas their use is generally less central and frequently optional for the social scientist.

Carrol, Chanda and several other philosophers of art, aestheticians and art historians invalidate misleading theories in the raging debate as to whether African art is "pure art" or not. According to Carroll (1999: 115), "Artwork is still art, even if it fails to discover a significant form, that is, many artworks are formally inadequate, and bad for that reason, yet they are still artworks; a theory cannot render bad art nonexistent."

In his discourse on African aesthetics, Onyewuenyi (1995) argues that African aesthetic values are very different orientation from modern Western aesthetic values. He further asserts that:

> The primary objects of aesthetic appreciation in modern Western culture are removed from everyday life and preserved in museums as objects of contemplation. They are valued in proportion to how much they reflect the creativity and uniqueness of particular individuals. In contrast, the arts within traditional Africa were intimately involved with communal values and the practical realities of daily living. Building on Temples' notion of an ontology of forces [....][170]

From an Africanist perspective, Abiodun (2001:2), one of the founding fathers of revisionist African art studies, also contributes his opinions in this regard:

> Aesthetic values of Western art historians are shaped by European philosophical aesthetics and uniquely Western visual preferences. With the generally low esteem for and marginalization of African art within the broader field of art history, Africanist art historians have begun not only to reexamine their Western derived methodologies but also to search for theoretical alternatives, lest they lose the "African" in African art. To make any substantial progress in dealing with the problems of cross-cultural translation as it pertains to the study and presentation of African art, however, we must consider both indigenous as well as Western aesthetic perspectives.

[170]See Innocent Onyewuenyi. Traditional African Aesthetics: A Philosophical Perspective. In Albert G. Mosley. *African Philosophy: Selected Readings.* Michigan: Prentice Hall, 1995, pp.420.

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Apart from Abiodun, other aestheticians/artists have called for the re-evaluation of African aesthetics and the accommodation of Western aesthetics in African art. Uche Okeke, who—as an art student at the Nigerian College of Arts, Science and Technology, Zaria (now Ahmadu Bellow University) in the late 1950's, and as a founding member of a radical student group, Art Society—articulated one of the earliest points of decolonized aesthetics in the manifesto *Natural Synthesis,* which sought not the outright erasure of Western aesthetics but an accommodation to it, by making research into local forms a crucial part of art education.[171]In a similar effort, Fosu (1997:84) provides evidence of the synthesis of Western aesthetics and African aesthetic elements:

> Colonial education introduced a new kind of art expression in Ghana, which differed markedly from the classic traditions of the indigenous art. The generation of artists of this pioneering period was more inclined to the figurative. They chose for their subjects the indigenous cultures, which touched on pageantry, folklore, social life, market activities and domestic chores, and for the first time also the artists demonstrated a choice for individual styles. A hybrid of art combining aspects of modern European esthetic conventions of frontal and rigid poses characteristic of Ghanaian indigenous art was introduced. Henceforth every art expression in Ghana will demonstrate this contemporary transformation.

Quite on the contrary, the Black Arts Movement in America advocates the direct opposite of embracing and integrating Western aesthetics into "Black aesthetics."

> The Black Arts Movement is radically opposed to any concept of the artist that alienates him from his community. Black Art is the aesthetic and spiritual sister of the Black Power concept. As such, it envisions an art that speaks directly to the needs and aspirations of Black America. In order to perform this task, the Black Arts Movement proposes a radical reordering of the western cultural aesthetic. It proposes a separate symbolism, mythology, critique, and iconography. The Black Arts and the Black power concept both relate broadly to the Afro-American's desire for self-determination and nationhood. Both concepts are nationalistic [...] A main tenet of Black Power is the necessity for Black People to define the world

[171]See Okwui Enwezor and Chika Okeke-Agulu. *Contemporary African Art Since 1980.* Bologna: Grafiche Damiami, 2009, p.18.

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> in their own terms. The Black artist has made the same point in the context of aesthetics.[172]

Aesthetics is prevalent in every culture, as such, what is aesthetically pleasing in one culture might seem insignificant or tacky in another culture or society. The negative sentiments Westerners impute to Legba or Nkisi[173] sculptures (nail-studded sculptures) which they deem "primitive" or "fetish" is the same manner "pissing Christ"[174]will be utterly "insignificant" to a typical African living in a remote village in the Congo forest. This is in no way to infer that Africans lack proper aesthetic judgments—most African cultures demonstrate a high awareness of aesthetics and artistry. Aesthetic appeal is simply culture-specific.

Discussing alternative approaches in conceiving art and aesthetics, Wingo presents conceptual factors that make up the aesthetic essence of an artwork. Wingo's focus of aesthetic inquiry further veers towards Clive Bell's (1969) aesthetic attitude of "detachment" to fully grasp the relationship between art and aesthetics. For Wingo (2004):

> The content of an art object is what is of primary importance. The focus is on what is represented, not on the representation itself. From this standpoint, people can approve or disapprove of a piece of artwork based upon its moral worth. The fact that something has form and is made by an artist does not make it an artwork until the moral element has been assessed. According to this view, elephant dung on a representation of Jesus is ugly – nay, is non-art. [175]

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[172]See James A. Montmarquet and William H. Hardy. *Reflections: An Anthology of African American Philosophy.* Belmont: Von Hoffman Press, 2000, pp. 353-354.

[173] Typical sculptures among the Loango coast and lower Congo. See Klaus E. Müller and Ute Ritz Müller. *Soul of Africa: Magical Rites and Traditions*. Maveville.: Imprimerie Jean Lamour, 1999, p.168.

[174]''Pissing Christ'' is a very ''controversial'' artwork. On Palm Sunday protesters in Avignon tried to smash a blasphemous work of art with a hammer. The artwork, called "P— Christ", is a statue of Christ submerged in urine. Its display had provoked anger among Christians in France: On 18th April, 2011 about 1,000 people marched in protest against it. Archbishop Jean-Pierre Cattenoz of Vaucluse called the work (by Andres Serrano) "odious". Visit: http://www.catholicherald.co.uk/commentandblogs/2011/04/21/debate-is-it-a-sin-to-destroy-a-blasphemous-artwork/ (Accessed on 06/01/2017)

[175] See Ajume H. Wingo The Many-Layered Aesthetics of African Art. In *A Companion to African Philosophy*

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Figure 4.0 Left: "Immersion - P--- Christ", a 1987 photograph by American artist Andres Serrano, pictured after it was attacked on Sunday (AP Photo/Claude Paris).[176]Right: Nkisi nail sculpture.[177]

Lao Tzu, the ancient Chinese philosopher, summarizes this discussion with a Taoist quote, ''When people see some things as beautiful, other things become ugly. When people see some things as good, other things become bad."[178] Let us briefly examine the following situation to further broaden our scope of aesthetics. Kenneth and Mamie Clark's 'Doll Test' experiments best explain the situation discussed afore. In the 1940s, psychologists Kenneth and Mamie Clark designed and conducted a series of experiments known colloquially as "the doll tests" to study the psychological effects of segregation on African-American children:

> Drs. Clark used four dolls, identical except for color, to test children's racial perceptions. Their subjects, children between the ages of three to seven, were asked to identify both the race of the dolls and which color doll they prefer. A majority of the children preferred the white doll and assigned positive characteristics to it. The Clarks concluded that "prejudice, discrimination, and

Kwasi Wiredu (Ed.), Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004, p.426.

[176] Source of image: http://www.catholicherald.co.uk/commentandblogs/2011/04/21/debate-is-it-a-sin-to-destroy-a-blasphemous-artwork/ (Accessed on 06/01/2017)

[177]Source of image: http://www.randafricanart.com/images/Nail_fetish_figure_134.jpg (Accessed on 22/12/2017)

[178]See Lao Tzu. *Tao te Ching.* Translated by Stephen Mitchell,1994, p.1.

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segregation" created a feeling of inferiority among African-American children and damaged their self-esteem. [179]

Figure 4.1 Drs. Clark's "Doll Test".

On that note, Neal (2000) cautions that:

> Unless the Black artist establishes a "Black aesthetic" he will have no future at all. To accept the white aesthetic is to accept and validate a society that will not allow him to live. The Black artist must create new forms and new values, sing new songs (or purify old ones); and along with other Black authorities, he must create a new history, new symbols, myths and legends (and purify old ones by fire). And the Black artist, in creating his own aesthetic, must be accountable for it only to the Black people. Further, he must hasten his own dissolution as an individual (in the Western sense) painful though the process may be, having been breast-fed the poison of "individual experience."[180]

Neal validates Fanon's recommendation when he wrote earlier, that, "destroy the culture and you destroy the people. This must not happen. Black artists are culture stabilizers; bringing back old values, and introducing new ones. Black Art will talk to the people and with the will of the people stop impending "protective custody"."[181]

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[179] See http://www.naacpldf.org/brown-at-60-the-doll-test (Accessed on 27/04/2017)

[180]See James A. Montmarquet and William H. Hardy. *Reflections: An Anthology of African American Philosophy.* Belmont: Von Hoffman Press, 2000, pp. 353-354.

[181]Ibid.

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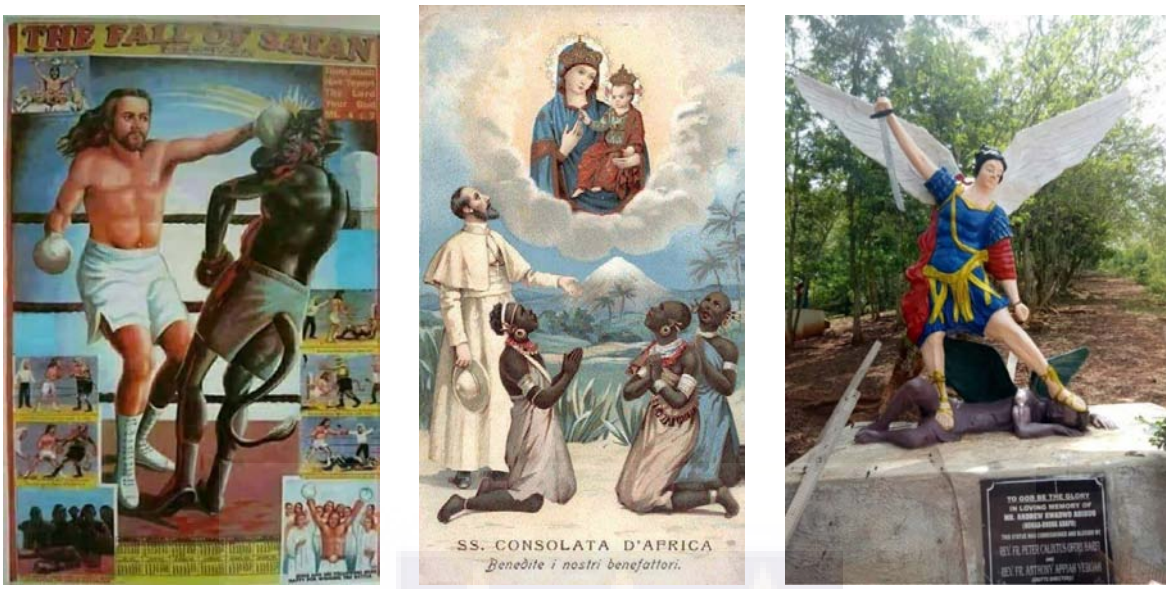

Figure 4.2 Racist illustrations positioning the Caucasian race as "superior" to the African race through fabricated religious doctrines.[182]

With all these intellectual perspectives about the true nature of aesthetics, as scholars, we would not be contributing much to the study of modern aesthetics as an academic discipline if it were merely reduced to "beauty", "order" or "the beautiful."

4.2 Concluding Remarks

This chapter has basically provided a general introduction to Aesthetics as a discipline. It also discussed Western constructs of African aesthetics from renewed perspectives. Through argumentative discussion of contemporary debates and prevailing studies in African aesthetics, this chapter concludes by emphasizing the intellectual need for redefining African aesthetics and

[182]Ghanaians reacted angrily to a 'racist' statue commissioned by the Catholic Church in Ghana. The statue was reportedly unveiled at the Tepa Roman Catholic Grotto in Manfo in the Brong region and it depicts a Caucasian angel overpowering a dark-skinned "devil" beneath its feet. Ghanaians on social media strongly condemned the statue as racist, giving credence to the white supremacist ideology. Source: https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/Racist-Catholic-statue-causes-anger-in-Ghana-733689 (Accessed on 23/02/2018). See also: https://blackeyemag.wordpress.com/2016/11/17/war-on-black-people-pt-6-religionspirituality/ (Accessed on 23/02/2018).

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reclaiming Black Art scholarship through academic discourse, constant research and assuming unapologetic positions in criticizing Western aesthetic formulations of African art. Forthcoming chapters outline some of the misconceptions surrounding sacred Vodu art in academic discussions. The chapter further proceeds with identifying how the Western aesthetic establishments and academic institutions still undermine African aesthetic through damaging Eurocentric opinions. It also presents Vodu aesthetics as a shared and everyday experience which permeates the lives and religious world view of the Anlo-Ewe.

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CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS: PART 2

Towards Redefining Ewe Vodu Aesthetics: A Primer to the Discourse on "Fetishism"

5.1 Introduction

The religion of the African is intertwined with the totality of African culture and philosophical knowledge systems. This forms an integral part of the African psyche. African spiritual life has evolved over the ages through various esoteric practices and socio-cultural experiences. However, Vodu religious practices and spiritual philosophies, like most other indigenous African religions, as Mbiti (1969) has already noted, have been subjected to a great deal of misrepresentation and misunderstanding. For instance, various arguments have been raised to ascertain whether African religions are monotheistic or polytheistic. For that matter, we need not stress our intellectual muscles in this particular debate. But just to briefly point out to future readers who may encounter these writings, no matter how plausible some of the arguments questioning monotheistic philosophies of African religions may sound, one still needs critical judgements to read in between the lines. It can be deduced, according to Vodu philosophy and field interviews, that Vodu religion is monotheistic at its very core. To deny this fact is to only disregard the complex and interconnected hierarchical power structures of the Vodu pantheon.

To begin with, Africans believed that they were constantly at odds and vulnerable to malevolent spirits that threatened their very existence and social order. Similarly, Ewes believed that there is an all-pervading, unsurpassed supernatural cosmic force (Mawu) who presides over all the affairs of humanity and has delegated auxiliary deities, elevated ancestors and deities to intercede on some of these basic human affairs (such as politics, kinship, death, health, medicine, economics,

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nutrition, magic, art, music, warfare, natural disaster, fortune, tragedy, love, occupation etc.).[183]

As Dzobo has rightly captured:

> The Anfoega-Ewe in their religious life may appear to be worshippers of many gods but in their own thinking they are not, because they believe in one supreme god called Se whose varied attributes find embodiment in different other gods on earth.[184]

A sketchy example of a Brékété Vodu pantheon has been reproduced to illustrate this point in the diagram below:

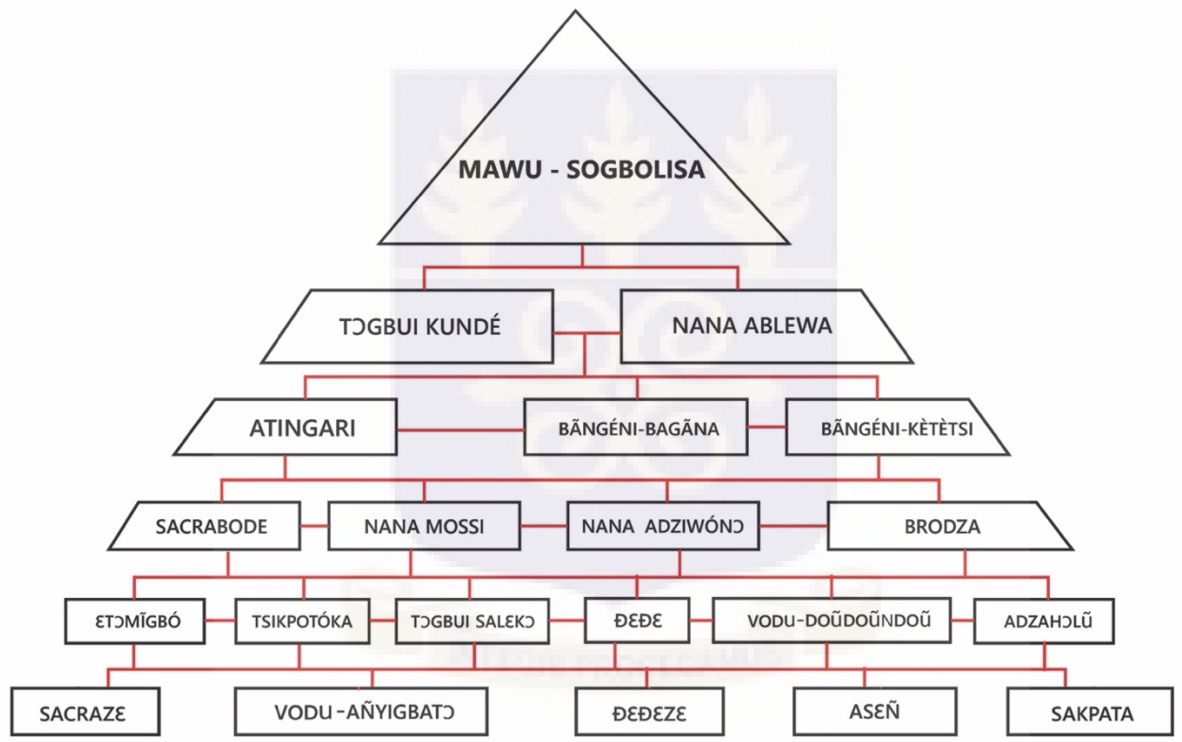

Diagram 5.0 A diagram of Brékété pantheon in Tɔgbui Dzokpoto's Shrine in Woe, Keta. Diagram by Researcher.

Upon their first encounters with some of the ritual practices and esoteric processes surrounding such spiritual arbitrations, colonialists, chroniclers, explorers and missionaries alike, described

[183]Acheampong advances propositions in his discussions of the nature and structure of the spirit world in Akan religious conceptions of the Supreme Being. See Stephen Owoahene-Acheampong. *Inculturation and African Religion: Indigenous and Western Approaches to Medical Practice.* New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc. 1998, pp.51-72.

[184]Ibid. p.52.

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them as "fetish" out of sheer ignorance and phobic prejudice. The term "fetish" has actually been ascribed in all manner of ways to African spiritual practices.

In his philosophical reflections on inculturation and African religions, Acheampong (1998:51) expressed his worry about how some Africans, diasporans and colonial scholars alike "fail and constantly fail in their attempt to give an accurate presentation and interpretation about African traditional beliefs and religious practices."[185] Acheampong's observation goes to prove how many 'great scholars', at best, only have a superficial knowledge about the "inner workings" of Vodu and the sacred arts. This dearth of information has subsequently created an intellectual gap that needs to be filled by well-informed insider anthropologists and ethnographers or the real adherents of the faith itself. The aesthetics of Ewe Vodu arts have for long been an understudied and poorly documented field. It is my hope that the critical perspectives discussed in this and other subsequent chapters will help dispel some of the misconstrued beliefs about Vodu for better appreciation of the arts associated with the faith. This discussion will essentially trace the philosophical foundations of "fetishism" from its inception to recent scholarship in the disciplines of religion, socio-linguistics, art appreciation, aesthetics and criticism of art. These areas will form the core discussions in this particular chapter.

[185] Personally speaking, aside a few reliable Western scholars and some distinguished diasporan and West African intellectuals, a bulk of the discussions I have studied on Vodu art, so far, usually lacks in-depth analysis, critical insights and "thick description." The philosophical aspects are almost always lost and not adequately discussed. See Stephen Owoahene-Acheampong. *Inculturation and African Religion: Indigenous and Western Approaches to Medical Practice.* New York: Peter LangPublishing, Inc. 1998, p.51.

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5.3 Intercultural Roots of "Fetishism": A Theological Overview

Growing up as a child, my parents forced Christianity down my throat. Like many Ghanaian parents, they simply did not give me the chance to explore other faiths or belief systems and this posed a great challenge to me. The problem was not Christianity, per se, but how Christian doctrines were used as a bargaining chip in indoctrinating and "conditioning" my mind to reject and despise African art as well as African religion itself (which is still erroneously perceived to be the polar opposite of Christianity till today). This was simply because Christianity was constantly being projected as the "most ideal faith" — "the only way to salvation". There are a few ambiguous verses in the Bible which seem rather odd in respect to how certain aspects of non-Christian rites and rituals are demonized as "unworthy practices."[186] In the broader scheme of things, this relatable episode of my personal experience has socially manifested itself in the form of religious indoctrination of children against African religions and art through neocolonial educational ideologies and distorted Judeo-Christian teachings in some urban and rural Ghanaian homes, schools, and religious institutions. The Christian institutions and mass media have particularly gained prominence regarding their "contributions" to this social dynamic.[187] A few Bible verses may suffice here to buttress the concerns being raised:

> Now concerning food offered to idols: we know that "all of us possess knowledge." [...] Therefore, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that "an idol has no real existence," and that "there is no God but one." For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many

[186] See Acts 15:28-29, 1 Corinthians 8: 1-7, Ezekiel 9:5-7, Corinthians 10:14-22, Deuteronomy 25:11-12.

[187]Nkrumah earlier made this same observation decades ago when he wrote that 'Perhaps one of the most insidious methods of neo-colonialism is evangelism'. Refer to last Chapter of Nkrumah's seminal work on Neo-Colonialism, where he discusses at length, the "advanced" mechanisms of white supremacy organizations, neo-colonial "propaganda machinery" and how these calculated psychological pressures affect the general mental well-being of Africans. See Kwame Nkrumah. *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism.* New York: International Publishers, 1965, pp.247-254.

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> "gods" and many "lords"— yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist. However, not all possess this knowledge. But some, through former association with idols, eat food as really offered to an idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled (1 Corinthians 8: 1-7).
>
> Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written. [...] Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. Consider the people of Israel: are not those who eat the sacrifices participants in the altar? What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he? (1 Corinthians 10:14-22)

In academic circles, some theologians, religious critics, religious rights activists and social scientists prefer to be very "diplomatic" and "politically correct" in their critiques and refutations of such ambiguous verses in the Bible. For instance, Swedenborg (2009:233), an ecclesiastical reformist, and an advocate of the revival of indigenous religions, presents this thought-provoking argument in his philosophical discussion on *Divine Providence:*

> The Israelites worshipped a golden calf in the wilderness and acknowledged it as the god that had brought them out of Egypt, yet Jehovah saw this from Mt. Sinai nearby and did not warn against it. This occurred in the desert of Sinai near the mountain. It is in accordance with all the laws of divine providence recounted so far and with those to follow that Jehovah did not restrain the Israelites from that atrocious worship.

As an ecclesiastical reformist, Swedenborg (2009) also makes several theological arguments, which suggest that there are many levels of worshipping God. As such, if "idolatry" is what, say a group of people have chosen as their path to experience the divine or establish a mystical union with their Supreme Being, they should be left entirely on their own to worship through such means

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in total freedom (and not coerced into an alien form of worship).[188] Quite on the contrary, though, art critics, analytical philosophers, free thinkers, philosophers of art, African fundamentalists and discerning minds are more candid in their critiques and simply like to call such ambiguous verses in the Bible exactly what they appear to be—"spurious accounts" written by fallible scribes.[189]

In order to delineate logic from religious prejudice and vague presuppositions, I refer to Blocker (2003) to further expand the discussion. Contemplating a rational philosophical allegory which indirectly advocates revisionist scholarship in African art, Blocker narrates the following situation:

> Suppose I am an early missionary to West Africa. I see people making what appear to be "sacrifices" and "offerings" and "prayers" to carved wooden figures which they call by what I have been told are the names of their "gods". Hence, I am led to believe that they worship these idols, and so I write in my next report home that the natives worship pieces of wood, that these carvings are idols worshipped as gods. But this claim or interpretation of mine clearly assumes that these people themselves believe that as well. Let us say that they come to my mission school and begin to learn English, and after some years, they inform me that they do not consider the carving itself to be the god, but only to represent it, or to be the temporary abode of the god who can occasionally enter and occupy it. Then, assuming I believe what my informants are now telling me, I would have to admit that I had been wrong in my earlier report and to deny now that the practices I had observed in connection with the wood carvings were instances of idolatry.[190]

Nukunya stressed on this paradox when he wrote that "the fact remains, however, that the insider anthropologist has brought a new dimension and perspective into the subject. He is born and bred in the society he is now studying. As such, language is not a problem to him. Also, having

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[188] `See Emanuel Swedenborg. *Divine Providence.* pp.119-120, 233. (Publishers and place of publication unavailable)

[189]See Richard Dawkins. *The God Delusion,* London: Bantam Press Publishers, 2006, pp.117-118.

[190] See Gene Blocker. Is Primitive Art "Art"? In P. H. Coetzee. *Philosophy from Africa: A Text with Readings.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, p.411. Abiodun has pointed out Blocker's inconsistency in the "primitive" versus "classical/naturalistic" dichotomy. Blocker's continued use of the term "primitive" demonstrates the powerful hold of a biased art-historical paradigm on a scholar who, even today, attempts to repudiate it. Refer to Rowland Abiodun. *Yoruba Art and Language: Seeking the African in African Art*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014. p.9.

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participated as a full member in the society, he is to a large extent his own informant."[191] Nukunya further noted that:

> Not only are the hitherto primitive [*sic*] peoples able to read what the foreign anthropologists have been writing about them, but scholars from these primitive [sic]cultures and societies have become trained anthropologists. […] Today the phenomenon of the insider anthropologist has become a fact of life, no more a possibility. [192]

The basis of Nukunya's reasoning and Blocker's rational inquiry into African religious worship proves the established notion of "idolatry" to be quite faulty and inaccurate. Even as a child, I had my own reservations about such skewed notions in the Bible, though I did not completely denounce my faith as a Catholic until I started researching into African religions.[193]

I vowed to myself, my mind would not be shackled by such 'dangerous' religious concepts; in short, I wanted to break my wild spirit free. My stance even became more justified when I much later delved into African history and began to study the works of Kwame Nkrumah, Marcus Garvey, Malcolm X, Chancellor Williams, Franz Fanon, Jacqueline Chanda, Mirimba Ani, Akosua Perbi, George James, Kwame Gyekye, J.S Mbiti, and other great African thinkers. Nearing the end of my first degree at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, I went into a self-imposed 'solitary confinement' and pored aimlessly on any philosophical treatise I could lay my hands on till I started having a sense of intellectual direction. Other non-African thinkers whose

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[191] See G.K Nukunya. Insider Anthropology: The Case of the Anlo-Ewe. *Etnofoor, Jaarg,* 7(1), 1994, pp.24-40.

[192]Ibid. pp.29.

[193]Vogel's interview with Prof. El Anatsui, also reveals that Anatsui shares a religious view that is not too dissimilar to the personal reservations I had, growing up as a child. See Susan Mullin Vogel. *El Anatsui: Art and Life.* London: Prestel, 2012, p.24.

Nkrumah (1957:15-16) also shares a similar experience concerning his religious views during his Achimota days in his autobiography.

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works proved to satisfy my curious mind include Thomas Paine, Immanuel Kant, Alan Watts, Lao Tzu, Gautama Buddha, Confucius, Friedrich Nietzsche, Vladimir Lenin, Helena Blavatsky, Elaine Pagels, Helen Ellerbe, Ananda Coomaraswamy, Musashi Miyamoto, Jidu Krishnamurti, Richard Dawkins, Emanuel Swedenborg, Sri Swami Vivekenanda and several other philosophers.

Almost as soon as children learn to talk, they ask: Where did I come from? Where do people go when they die? What's beyond the sky? How did the world start? Who made God? Why are one and one two and not three? From the very beginning of our lives, we start to ask the questions that make up philosophy.[194] Although philosophy begins with wonder and questions, it does not end there. Philosophy tries to go beyond the standard answers to these questions that we may have received when we were too young to seek our own answers. The goal of philosophy is to get us to answer these questions for ourselves—to make up our own minds about our self, life, knowledge, art, religion, and morality without simply depending on the authority of parents, peers, television, teachers, or society.[195]

Many of our religious, political, and moral beliefs are beliefs that we accepted as children long before we could question them or understand the reason behind them. Philosophy examines these beliefs. The aim is not to reject them but to learn why we hold them and to ask whether there are good reasons to continue holding them. In this way, our basic beliefs about reality and life become our own: we accept them because we have thought them through on our own, not because our parents, peers, and society have conditioned us to believe them. In this way, we gain a kind of independence and freedom, or what some modern philosophers call autonomy. The goal of

[194]Manuel Velasquez. *Philosophy: A Text with Readings*. Belmont: Wadsworth/Thompson Learning, (8th Ed), 2002, p.4.

[195]Ibid. p.4.

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philosophy, then, is autonomy: the freedom of being able to decide for yourself what you believe in by using your own reasoning abilities.[196] This independent reasoning ability is one of the essential pillars of developing an enlightened mind.[197]

5.4 "Intellectual" Roots of "Fetishism"

"Fetishism" as an "academic discipline" has generated a lot of controversy and heated debates in anthropological scholarship, but the problem actually lies in the origins of the "fetishism discourse" itself. Which ideology was "fetishism" framed around anyway? How did the "fetishism discourse" ensue?

During the age of what Europeans chose to call "enlightenment," its advocates were in search of a theory that was diametrically opposed to the theories being advanced at the time to promote the discourse on "enlightenment." "Reason" and "rationality" during this age ("enlightenment"), served as the cornerstone for constructing the academic segregation between "enlightenment" and what is today referred to as "fetishism." Disciplines falling outside the intellectual range of "enlightenment" or sub-disciplines of "unfamiliar" origins were to be "intellectually policed" by adherents of this movement. Progressively, writers operating within the European academic framework of "enlightenment" fabricated a mock version of a "pristine Africa", paradoxically, in hope of dislodging superstitious beliefs and widespread misconceptions about the continent.[198]

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[196] Manuel Velasquez. (8th Ed) *Philosophy: A Text with Readings*. Belmont: Wadsworth/Thompson Learning, 2002, pp.4-5.

[197] See Schmidt, J. (Ed.), (1996). *What Is Enlightenment? Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions*. University of California Press. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt4cgf8z
See also Immanuel Kant. *An Answer to the Question: "What is Enlightenment?"* Konigsberg. 1784.

[198] See Tobias Döring. *African Cultures, Visual Arts, and the Museum: Sights/Sites of Creativity and Conflict.* Amsterdam: Brill Rodopi, 2002, p.135.

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"Primitive religion" or African "superstitious beliefs", they felt, was not "intellectually stimulating" enough so this theoretical problem had to undergo "intellectual reforms" which apparently led to the ideological foundations of "fetishism". Thus, "fetishism" which came to "represent" African spiritual, artistic and performative practices and the African world view in general exemplified a world without "enlightenment."[199] Müller et al. (1999:168) provide a deeper explanation that supports this argument:

> The colonial peoples of Africa gained the reputation for being "stupid", amoral fetishists" who worshipped trees, animals, and stones. Travelers, missionaries, and colonialists, who at best had only a superficial idea of African cultures, took up the expression as being meaningless but useful. Fetishism was set alongside witchcraft and superstition. It was associated with any object which had anything to do with magic or cult ideas and practices; this might be a sculpture of a traditional hero or royal insignia, an ancestral statue, or a piece of fortune telling apparatus. The local people were seen in the same way, so Europeans referred to fetish huts, fetish services, fetish priests, fetish ceremonies, fetish people, protective fetishes and so on. The "history of the fetish" draws on a misunderstanding on the part of Western civilization; the use of the term in more recent ethnological and religious literature. It is considered to be not only old-fashioned but also offensive.

Addressing the significance of a materialist approach in studying 'material religion' and its key analytical concepts, Meyer (2012) highlights the roots of the discourse of fetishism:

> With the rise of the critique of religion in the name of rationalism in the Enlightenment, the fetishism discourse transformed. Held to represent religion in its rawest and most primitive [*sic*] form – 'as it were, African Catholicism and Despotism in one'– fetishism was to be destroyed as a prerequisite for enlightenment and progress. It was held to sustain an irrational attitude which, in turn, sustained deeply problematic, sticky power structures (not unlike the *Ancien Régime*). Here lie the roots of the discourse of fetishism as an irrational attribution of life, agency and will to a 'mere' thing.[200]

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[199] See William Pietz. Bosman's Guinea: The Intercultural Roots of an Enlightenment Discourse. In *Comparative Civilizations Review,* 9(9), 1982, p.16.

[200]See Birgit Meyer. *Mediation and the Genesis of Presence: Towards a Material Approach to Religion.* Universiteit Utrecht Faculteit Geesteswetenschappe, 2012, p.16.

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Discussing Bosman's accounts[201] and the intercultural roots of the "enlightenment", Pietz (1982) provides a closer textual analysis of the anthropological problem surrounding the discourse of fetishism. It is imperative to refer to Pietz for a rational understanding of the discourse on "fetishism" and its intellectual developments since his essay remains particularly enlightening for this analytical discussion. Pietz (1982) broadens our knowledge on the origins of "fetishism" by stating that:

> It was the pidgin word "*fetisso*" that emerged on the coast especially around the trade fort of Elmina, which most clearly expressed this radically novel cross-cultural situation. For thirteenth-century Portuguese priests the word "*feitico*", named the amulets and non-Christian talismans worn by common people for certain magical effects; "*feitico*" was a synonym for 'witchcraft' but without necessary attribution of actual traffic with the Devil. *Feiticos* were understood to be produced by ignorant, simple people; *feiticos* might indeed produce effects through the natural magic of God's created world, but their users might also, either purposely or unknowingly, draw on demonic powers and might even call forth the devil himself. In any event, *feiticos* were in direct competition with the cruxifixes, rosaries, and little saints proper to the Christian code, and their use was both heretical and illegal.[202]

De Brosses is credited as one of the foremost exponents on the discourse of "fetishism". In 1757, members of the Academie des Inscriptions et Belles-lettres were incensed after De Brosses presented his essay on "fetishism". De Brosses' spurious essay was not merely dismissed by the Academie for being framed around the idea of "fetishism" but also due to its ahistorical claims and flawed methodology employed in acquiring such "historical" information. This led de Brosses

[201] In his travelogues, Bosman refers to the rich body adornments worn by Akans as "fetish". See Bosman (1712: 119).

[202]See William Pietz. Bosman's Guinea: The Intercultural Roots of an Enlightenment Discourse. In *Comparative Civilizations Review,* 9(9), 1982, p.3.

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to publish his essay anonymously in Geneva in 1760 which he later smuggled into France.[203] According to Pietz:

> De Brosses defined "fetishism" as "any religion which has for its cult object animals or inanimate terrestrial beings. It was thus, as Diderot wrote to de Brosses in 1757 after reading the manuscript, *"la religion première, gènérale et universelle*." In the late eighteenth century, fetishism [*sic*] had been widely accepted as the general form of primitive [*sic*] religion[204]

In spite of all these intellectual concerns and on-going debates on the subject of "African fetishism", some revisionist anthropologists and ethnographers have still proven to be "resistant" to historical facts. Other researchers, completely oblivious of the etymological roots of the word "fetish", still persist in using this old-fashioned propaganda to denigrate aspects of African religion and African art in their discussions, in the process, glorifying and validating Eurocentric approaches in studying non-Western religious art.[205] Silva (2017:92) has indicated in her discussion on the intellectual developments of "fetishism" that:

> Since its invention on the Guinea coast in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the concept of the fetish has been a fantasy of Europeans with hardly any knowledge of Africa. The concepts of art and cult object were similarly built on the unsteady foundation of ignorance. The great anthropology and art museums of Western Europe and North America held staggering numbers of African objects collected since the nineteenth century, but these objects arrived with little to no information.[206]

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[203]De Brosses was never admitted as a member of the French Academy, Voltaire actually opposed De Brosses' entry into the elite upper echelons of the French Academy. See Rosalind C. Morris and Daniel H. Leonard. *The Returns of Fetishism: Charles de Brosses and the Afterlives of an Idea. With a New Translation of On the Worship of Fetish Gods.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017, pp.2-8.

[204]See William Pietz. Bosman's Guinea: The Intercultural Roots of an Enlightenment Discourse. In *Comparative Civilizations Review,* 9(9), 1982.

[205] For renewed intellectual discussions and on-going academic debates on the discourse of "fetishism" refer to Rosalind C. Morris and Daniel H. Leonard. *The Returns of Fetishism: Charles de Brosses and the Afterlives of an Idea. With a New Translation of on the Worship of Fetish Gods.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017.

[206]Sónia Silva. Art and Fetish in the Anthropology Museum, *Material Religion*, 13(1), 2017, pp.77-96.

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Till today, the academic discourse on "fetishism" has been expanded and ascribed to highly complex non-Western religions, art forms, sacred aesthetics, and spiritual practices. For instance, Rosenthal's description of Legba is quite inaccurate within the framework of religious aesthetics, taking into consideration the stately importance of Legba and what they actually represent in Vodu religious order. Legba essentially serve as guardians of the land in Ewe societies. Legba is considered by Vodu priests and devotees alike as one of Mawu's children, who serves as an intermediary between the Supreme Being (Mawu) and human affairs. Like Du-Legba, Legba are named. The former protects the whole town, but the latter are family deities; although each Legba is associated with an individual in the sense of having been "planted" for a particular person, it guards the whole house, that is, the family members living in one compound. The main work of these deities is to protect against witches, thieves, and all evil spirits. Some may be used to cure insanity, some to cure diseases of children. Others may be used for general guidance, for protection from enemies and from outside forces, for long life, for children, and for prosperity in trading or fishing[207] (Gilbert, 1982:60).

As pointed out by Gilbert, Legba is mostly called upon or invoked to intercede on behalf of mortals in times of need. This is done through harnessing of spiritual energies, various rites and other psychic practices. The harnessing of spiritual energies and supernatural forces for the purposes of healing, protection as well as exorcising malevolent spirits from individuals and at community level, forms an integral aspect of maintaining social equilibrium and the preservation of life in Vodu religious order. Likewise, the use of magic, chants, percussion, dance, appellations,

[207] See Michelle V. Gilbert. Mystical Protection Among the Anlo Ewe. In *African Arts*, 15(4), 1982, pp. 60-66+90.

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sacrifice, prayers, meditation, amulets, talisman and protective charms aid in harnessing or invoking spiritual energies to perform specific tasks.

Figure 5.1 Legba stationed around the vicinity of Kli-Adzima Shrine in Klikor, Volta Region (2017). Photography by Researcher.

Indeed, Shoko Mori, a Ghanaian-based Japanese researcher, gave a remarkable testimony after Legba extended his benevolence and healing mercies to save her son from a life-threatening illness suspected to also be a "witchcraft attack". Mori (2017) drew parallels between Vodu and Shinto sacrificial practices:

> Sacrifice of a goat to block the attack of evil spirits on left and two chickens to protect my son's life in the right. Then we moved two bowls of offerings to the shrine of Legba. I never expected to experience all this process when I learnt about contemporary religious practice worldwide as well as "magic", "sorcery" and "witchcraft". Neither did I expect to experience these rituals when I studied anthropology of religion lectured by my supervisors of Tokyo University Foreign Studies. No culture is savage or barbarous, here in Black Africa too, as well as other indigenous beliefs, thoughts, practices and philosophies. Sacrifice and

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> offerings represent a fruit of each land. In Japan, it would be fish, rice, crops and sake (local alcohol made with rice).[208]

Mori (2018) further outlining the similarities between Vodu and Shinto religious practices, philosophy, and beliefs, asserted that:

> Herbs and locally distilled alcohol are essential elements in Vodu ritual practice. A variety of offerings are served for spirits and gods, such as local crops like yam and cassava, and animal sacrifices such as goat, chicken and cow. On the contrary for Shinto priests, *sakaki* (indigenous evergreen leaves) is an important tool for ritual practice. As rice is main agricultural product in Japan, rice and *sake* (local alcohol made by rice) are significant offerings. [Isejingu 2015] Also, all sorts of sacrifices are offered to *kami* (deities) such as rice cake, salt, water, fish, seaweed, seasonal vegetables and fruit, and bird meat. [Association of Shinto Shrine 2011, Iwai & Niwa 2007] As people share say, goat soup after Vodu ritual sacrifice, people in Japan also have communal dining to share those foods to get spiritual strength from the deities.

A critical comparison of Rosenthal's description of Legba to the perspectives cited afore produces quite a contrary representation. According to Rosenthal:

> Legba is **part clown**, a figure of exaggerated phallic proportions **lacking in physical elegance or stately importance**, a self-indulgent, **Dionysian monster god** (**an aggresive *imago***). Yet Legba thinks, just as the gorovodus think […] **His lack of humanly beauty** and his rank as second (one of his roles is that of a servant, perhaps even a slave) are his personal marks of symbolic castration […] The other vodus have a **Legba fetish** or other guardian vodu protecting them […] Such an **outrageously enormous** and erect penis, but no separate **guardian fetish!**Being itself, selfhood via language, whether human or divine, requires a lack, a hole, even (especially?) when the phallus is of **super fetish like proportions.**[209]

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[208]Personal communication with Japanese researcher, Mori (May, 2017). In fact, Allman also recounts similar instances of other Japanese tourists consulting Tongnaab in the remote Tong Hills of Northern Region of Ghana: "Perched amidst the granite boulders at the summit of the Tong Hills, we felt as though we had chanced upon one of the most remote and magical places on earth. Surely we must be among only a handful of foreign visitors who had ever journeyed to this secluded sacred place. As we picked our way down from the cave after our consultation with the oracle, a man whom we would come to know well, "Assemblyman" John Bawa Zuure, broke the silence. "Ah, you know, we have been very busy these days. This morning we had visitors from Asante and just yesterday six tourists came here from Japan to consult with Tongnaab." See Jean Allman and John Parker. *Tongnaab: The History of a West African God*, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2005, p.3.

[209] See Judy Rosenthal. *Possession, Ecstasy, and Law in Ewe Voodoo*, Virginia: University Press of Virginia, 1998, p.135. (emphasis by Researcher)

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Figure 5.2 Du-Legba on the way to Atiteti township in Ketu District of the Volta Region (2017). Photography by Researcher.

Gilbert's (1982) description of Legba is also captured below:

> The **roughly modeled images** are regarded as the guardians of the Anlo Ewe towns […] Their eyes are usually defined by cowrie shells, and the bodies are frequently covered with pieces of cloth or necklaces of palm fronds. […] Most have **stumpy arms** and/or out-stretched legs. Sexual organs are usually portrayed, and very few figures are hermaphroditic […] The amount of modeling on the head and body varies. Most are very **roughly formed**, presumably because they represent spirits; Cudjoe was told infact that du-legba should not be too realistic.[210]

It does not take the stretch of one's imagination and critical thinking skills to note that Rosenthal's veiled Eurocentric bias and poorly worded "aesthetic judgements" are vulnerable to criticism. The approach employed in her "critique" and "appraisal" of Legba is deeply troubling as she leads researchers on with no methodical aesthetic logic and anthropological evidence to undergird some of her errorneous claims.[211] As one of the primary goals of philosophy is to arrive at truth and

[210] See Michelle V. Gilbert. Mystical Protection Among the Anlo Ewe. In *African Arts,* 15(4), 1982, pp. 60-66+90.

[211] For instance, Rosenthal notes in her work that "often there were admissions to lack of evidence of the wickedness of fetishes[*sic*]; there was simply a "conviction" that they should be banned "for the good of the people": Although I have very few facts to produce, I am inclined to the opinion that the Fetish [*sic*] is a bad and dangerous one…" See Judy Rosenthal. *Possession, Ecstasy, and Law in Ewe Voodoo*, Virginia: University Press of Virginia, 1998, p.92.

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shared beliefs through a series of rational argumentative discussions, the discussion will proceed accordingly. To begin with, Terkper (2009) has stressed that, criticism requires "brainpower and critical thinking, not just mere knowledge and application of theories but power of the mind to pass quality judgement, eliminating all forms of prejudices, fantasies or dreams."[212]Silva (2017) posits that it has become imperative to produce counter-arguments to close the epistemic gap between false philosophical assumptions and aesthetic logic:

> From the vantage point of postmodernity, we may argue that the African arts curators attempted to disparage the old, problematic concept of the fetish by introducing the newer, yet equally problematic concepts of art and culture […] Similar to many anthropology museums prior to the 1980s (prior to the so-called crisis of representation in anthropology), the Portuguese curators did not include African voices in their exhibits—voices that could, if not reduce the gaps of knowledge concerning objects collected in the distant past, at least fill that void with contemporary perspectives of Africans living in Africa or Europe.

Discussing the evolution of culture, Skinner (1973) acknowledged the undeniable fact that, "each culture has its own set of goods, and what is good in one culture may not be good in another. To recognize this is to take the position of 'cultural relativism'".[213]Along similar lines, MacIntyre has also pointed out that each vital culture contains a continuity of conflict, which allows divergent behavior. Furthermore, in the age of globalization, cultures are not converging. They seem to be growing farther apart. MacIntyre is of the view that all cultures are wonderful and they are all wonderful in their own unique way.[214] It must be emphasized here, that, the religious or aesthetic experience of one cultural group may contradict the religious experience of another and quite often the religious views we personally hold most dearly in our hearts may influence or dictate how we

[212]Gordon Terkpeh Sabutey. Aesthetics, Appreciation and Criticism Among Indigenous Asante Kente Weavers: Implications for Art Education and National Development. Unpublished PhD Thesis, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, 2009, p.42.

[213] See Burrhus Frederic Skinner. *Beyond Freedom and Dignity.* Pelican Books, 1973, p.127.

[214] Alasdair MacIntyre cited in David Brooks. *The Social Animal: The Hidden Sources of Love, Character, and Achievement. New York: Random House.* 2011. p.263.

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aesthetically assess and appreciate other religious artworks. Even in recent times, racist ideologies, problematic curatorial practices and derogatory terminologies used in "appraising" African art in Western academic circles are yet to be thoroughly expunged from art exhibition catalogues and anthropological scholarship.

Figure 5.3 Observing the creative process of sculpting a Legba.[215] Torgodo, Volta Region, (2017). Photography by Researcher and Research Assistant.

[215] While conducting field research at an Adzima Shrine in Torgodo, Volta Region, I had a very rare opportunity to observe the reconstruction of a new Legba. The sculpture was later imbued with the spiritual life force after the creative process. I was also granted exclusive rights to film and photograph the creative process of sculpting the Legba.

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5.5 On Aesthetics, Art Criticism and Genuine Appreciation of Vodu Arts (Part 1)

The initial concerns raised against Rosenthal's claims goes deeper than mere prejudice and misrepresentation. It is a common notion in applied epistemology that being an expert in a particular discipline does not necessarily make you an expert in another related field. Critical perspectives of trained art critics and philosophers of art take a markedly different approach. If a well-grounded aesthetic scrutiny is to be carried out, to that effect, it will reveal the wobbly intellectual foundations on which Rosenthal established her emphatic opinion. To properly address this misnomer, I will first begin by "scanning" Rosenthal's claim's through Kieran's Aesthetic triad below:

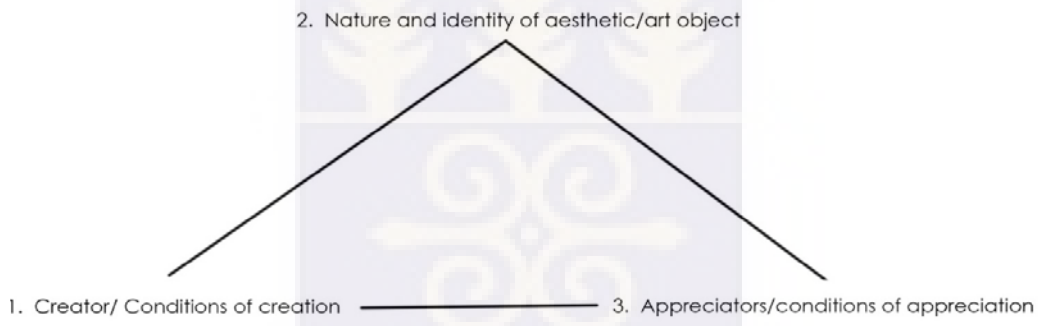

Diagram 5.3.1 Kieran's (2006) Aesthetic triad.[216]

In a similar effort, Bongmba expands Kieran's aesthetic triad within the context of African art, aesthetics, which he argues, must be understood as "triadic" in nature— "addressing a 'feeling' resulting from the visual dimension of the artistic production, 'framed' by power dynamics associated with the social context of the 'art,' and finally as a 'spiritually'-oriented 'experience".[217]

[216] See Matthew Kieran. Introduction: A Conceptual Map of Issues in Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art. In *Contemporary Debates in Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art*, Matthew Kieran. (Ed.), Oxford: Blackwell Publishing. 2006, p.6.

[217] Bongmba cited in Anthony B. Pin. Introduction: The Black Labyrinth, Aesthetics, and Black Religion. In *Black Religion and Aesthetics, Religious Thought and Life in Africa and the African Diaspora.* New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009, p.10.

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In Kantian theory of aesthetics, art is evaluated in what he defines as "reflective judgment". Kant is of the opinion that appreciating a great piece of artwork is an intellectually stimulating activity in itself, rather than merely making aggressive judgments. According to Kant (1793:25):

> To deem something good, I must always know what sort of thing the object is intended to be, i.e., I must have a concept of it. That is not necessary to enable me to see beauty in a thing. Flowers, free patterns, lines aimlessly intertwining-technically termed foliage have no signification, depend upon no definite concept, and yet please.

From the above theory, one can deduce that it is impractical to have a standardized set of laws for 'defining beauty' or evaluating art. The principles of commonality and necessity are creations of the human mind or "common sense". Thus, by embedding the delight of artistic creations in the elevated structures of the human mind, Kant resists the slanted conclusion that art is what is 'beautiful' or whatever is immediately aesthetically pleasing. Similarly, the act of perception is a thick process. It is not just taking in a scene but, almost simultaneously, weighing its meaning, evaluating it, and generating an emotion about it. In fact, many scientists now believe that perceptions are akin to aesthetic or sensual perceptions, emanating from many of the same regions of the brain.[218] Evidently, Kant is of the view that the artist is not necessarily a "skilled" craftsman, per se, but rather an exceptionally sensitive and superior individual who expresses ideas and emotions through art. Over the years, modified approaches to art appreciation have been fully integrated into studies in aesthetics. Practically, it is best captured in Ladd's lamentation of recent scholarship by writers he refers to as the "new critics":

> Now it is a frequent mistake to art critics (e.g. the "new critics") to assume that it is possible to appreciate a work of art without knowing such things as the artist's

[218] See David Brooks. *The Social Animal: The Hidden Sources of Love, Character, and Achievement.* New York: Random House. 2011. p.478.

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> intentions. In the case of African art, it has frequently been pointed out that one cannot really understand a piece of sculpture, without knowing the cultural and social contact for which it was intended. Indeed, simply the symbolic or representational aspects of a work require some knowledge of the ideology of the society in which it was made. It seems obvious to me that it would be impossible fully to appreciate a medieval painting of the crucifixion without knowing the story. Why should one expect to appreciate a piece of tribal art without having a similar kind of knowledge?

In his discussions on the phenomenology of aesthetic experience, Berlean (2000) explains aesthetic theory as a cognitive discipline:

> A genuine aesthetics should offer what is initially a phenomenological account. It must begin by being primarily descriptive rather than judicial, and develop its normative standards from an observational base. Rather than starting from *a priori* standards of relevance and excellence, an empirical aesthetics should try to identify such standards through a careful examination of the nature of aesthetic experience itself. Instead of prejudging aesthetic phenomena by a theory accepted in advance, the first step for a methodologically sound aesthetics is to identify *all* the relevant phenomena. Moreover, the criteria of relevance for the data of art are not established exclusively by a theory; the standards must come rather from a close examination of the independent evidence of the experience of art. It is necessary, then, to acknowledge all the data associated with art and the aesthetic, and to develop a theoretical explanation inductively from them. Thus, the role of aesthetic theory is no different from what it is in any other field of inquiry.[219]

Promoting new reforms and approaches to studying philosophy of art, Van den Braembussche (2006) encourages the exclusion of what he terms "narrow mindedness" in the philosophy of art and the realm of art generally. In order to do justice to art, he further notes, "the philosopher should be accommodating and generous."[220] But on occasional instances, philosophers who propound unsubstantiated emphatic claims to entrench a false ideology truly deserve a "similar taste" of their

[219] Arnold Berlean. *The Aesthetic Field: A Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience.* Cybereditions Corporation: Christchurch, 2000, pp.20-21.

[220] See Antoon Van den Braembussche. *Thinking Art: An Introduction to Philosophy of Art* Brussels: Springer Science + Business Media B.V, 2009, p.viii.

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own bigoted views as established in Eaton's attempt to dismiss the notion of instantaneous "beauty" as "philosophical folly".[221]

In putting forward the argument cited above, Kieran (2006:5) admonishes Eaton's view to be apparently at odds with epistemic factors that influence our ability to make aesthetic judgements based on what is deemed pleasurable. Philosophy of art is a diverse discipline that requires a broad knowledge of aesthetics from different socio-cultural backgrounds in order to make critical reflective judgements. Thus, limited knowledge of an artwork and its socio-cultural background can hinder the process of proper aesthetic evaluation or genuinely appreciating it. This phenomenon is exemplified in yet another extract from Rosenthal's work:

> It is as if the fetish were a *Passage a l'acte* (an acting out) that outsiders were loath to gaze upon, or a glance at the rendu — a brush with the Real that remained unsymbolized — the knowledge of which produced something like horror or shame in many Western observers […] The Vodu fetish of the colonial period thus disturbed many foreign or Christian observers […] The Christian and colonial administrators often wrote of the repungnance that they felt towards fetishes and possession. Such "idols" and "hysterics in a stupor" possessed a shock value that left Western hearts deeply troubled.[222]

Such racist accounts, widely accepted in the time of European colonization and beyond, writes Sarah Nuttall, "present the African continent as the metaphor par excellence for physical ugliness and moral decay".[223] It is fascinating to notice that, the so-called "aesthetics of negativity" supposedly produced "horror" and "shame" in many Western observers. Yet, in the same breath,

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[221] See Marcia Muelder Eaton.Beauty and Ugliness In and Out of Context. In *Contemporary Debates in Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art*, Matthew Kieran. (Ed.), Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006, p.46.

[222]As Suzanne Preston Blier comments on the subject of Beninese Fon sacred objects:" *Bocio* arts… press not only an aesthetic of negativity, but also what [Julia] Kristen calls *frappe* or shock" (1995) See also Judy Rosenthal. *Possession, Ecstasy, and Law in Ewe Voodoo*, Virginia: University Press of Virginia. 1998. p.91-95.

[223] Sarah Nutall cited in Anthony B. Pin. The Black Labyrinth, Aesthetics, and Black Religion in *Black Religion and Aesthetics, Religious Thought and Life in Africa and the African Diaspora.* New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009, p.6.

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reflections on *Contemporary Debates in Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art* by a later generation of these same stock of "deeply troubled Western hearts" drove Kieran (2006) to make the following observation:

> There is a particular species of the beautiful in which delight is commingled with terror, horror, or fear. In such cases are the negative feelings merely coincidental with a pure delight that is the mark of the beautiful or is there some deeper internal relation? And if so what does that tell us both about this particular kind of beauty and the nature of beauty in general?[224]

Prior to Kieran's aesthetic reflections, Dubuffet (1985) had made similar remarks:

> The increasing knowledge of the thinking of so-called primitive peoples, during the last fifty years, has contributed a great deal to the change [in modern cultures] – especially the acquaintance with works of art made by these people... It may be refinement, celebrations, depth of mind, are on their side, not ours. Personally, I believe very much in values of 'savagery'; I mean: instinct, passion, mood, violence, madness.[225]

In fact, the so-called "savagery", "primitivism", "repugnance" or "macabre aesthetics of negativity" ascribed to African art laid the building blocks of some of the manifestos that apparently propelled the aesthetic foundations of what later grew in popularity as "shock art" in the Western art world. A "modern art" movement which incorporates disturbing imagery, dingy colours, odours, trash, and bizarre sounds in order to create a shocking aesthetic experience to its audience. Such artworks were dismissed as "cultural pollution" by some leading conservative New York art critics at the time.[226] In recent times, New York art critic Jerry Saltz (2014), is among a few American art critics questioning the rise of what he terms "crapstraction" or what Robinson

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[224] See Marcia Muelder Eaton.Beauty and Ugliness In and Out of Context. In *Contemporary Debates in Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art*, Matthew Kieran. (Ed.), Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006, p.5.

[225] Jean Dubuffet, cited in "Primitivism" in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal with the Modern. (Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1985) See Ben Burt. *What is African Art? Support for Teachers.* The British Museum, London.

[226] The parallels and neglected symmetries between "Modern Western art" and sacred Vodu art has been discussed at length in Chapter eight.

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(2014) refers to as "Zombie formalism".[227] Massow, clearly referring to celebrated weird works by publicity-seeking artists such as Creed, Tracey Emin and Damien Hirst, also maintained a similar repugnance to the shock art establishment. He outlined his reasons for resigning as ICA chairman:

> The protesters were there to complain that they're no longer shocked - they're bored. The irony is, now that shock has become the new establishment, that the ICA has morphed into a pillar of the shock establishment - cultivated by the Brit pack. Like me, art lovers have all sat and watched a naked woman fire a peach from her vagina knowing full well that it won't make the local paper. They've also smelt endless faeces, been titillated by pornography and scared by a chamber of horrors paraded as 'art'.[228]

A few thought-provoking questions are hereby applicable to this particular development: where did this "cultural pollution" come from and why did it cease to be "fetish" or assume "aesthetic modernity" under the guise of various "isms" once it crossed over to the Western art world?

Indeed, Norbert Elias (2002) has pointed out that, the very process of civilization demand that you must acquire new tastes and giving up old ones. What you found disgusting you may learn to love. This process of personal re-education extends along the entire spectrum of human activity. One aspect of a genuine revolution in society is that affects will be transformed or restructured on both

[227] See Jerry Saltz. Zombies on the Walls: Why Does So Much New Abstraction Look the Same? 2014. Retrieved from: https://www.vulture.com/2014/06/why-new-abstract-paintings-look-the-same.html (Accessed on 17/05/2018). See also Walter Robinson. Flipping and the Rise of Zombie formalism. 2014. Retrieved from: https://www.artspace.com/magazine/contributors/see_here/the_rise_of_zombie_formalism-52184 (Accessed on 17/05/2018). Chris Wiley. The Toxic Legacy of Zombie Formalism, Part 1: How an Unhinged Economy Spawned a New World of 'Debt Aesthetics' Retrieved from: https://news.artnet.com/opinion/history-zombie-formalism-1318352 (Accessed on 26/07/2018). Who has the cure for Zombie formalism? https://hyperallergic.com/169198/who-has-the-cure-for-zombie-formalism/(Accessed on 26/07/2018).

[228] Ivan Massow was the chairman of Institute of Contemporary Art (London) from 1999 to 4th February, 2002. See his reasons for resignation in Ivan Massow. *The pillar of shock establishment has proved it can't stand dissent.* 2002. Retrieved from: https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2002/feb/06/arts.highereducation (Accessed on 27/05/2018)

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the individual and collective levels. New objects of disgust appear, and old ones vanish or are displaced into ordinariness.[229]

It is instructive to note that despite all these inconsistencies and misrepresentations of Ewe Vodu art by some misinformed Western scholars, other critical researchers are providing concrete theories and counter-arguments to override such old-fashioned descriptions[230] and notions about African art prevailing in academia.

5.6 On Aesthetics, Art Criticism and Genuine Appreciation of Vodu Arts: Part 2 – Towards Conceptualizing Visual Identity in Vodu Aesthetics

Having dealt with the creative conditions of the artist and the ideological premise of the "appreciator", this section proceeds to discuss the first aspect of "nature and identity" to give a general idea of the spiritual beliefs, philosophies and socio-cultural background in which Ewe Vodu art is situated. To fully grasp the second stage of the Kieran's aesthetic triad, it is imperative to begin by revisiting earlier discussions in order to reexamine phrases and "aesthetic labels" like these in Rosenthal (1998:135) research:

- Most (Legba) **"are very roughly** formed;
- "The **roughly modeled images** are regarded as the guardians of the Anlo Ewe towns;
- "A self-indulgent, **Dionysian monster god[231] (an aggresive imago)**;
- **"Legba is part clown**, a figure of exaggerated phallic proportions **lacking in physical elegance or stately importance**;
- **"His lack of humanly beauty** and his rank as second (one of his roles is that of a servant, perhaps even a slave);
- **outrageously enormous**

[229] See Rawdon Wilson.*The Hydra's Tale: Imagining Disgust.* Alberta: University of Alberta Press, 2002, p.28
[230] Like the ridiculous terms and descriptions Rosenthal chooses to use in her works.

[231] It is a widespread notion in Vodu circles that alcoholic drinks are not offered to Legba so equating Legba to 'Dionysian monster god' is a rather bizzare mislabeling.

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- **Fetish worship**
- **"when the phallus is of super fetish like proportions**;
- **"guardian fetish!"**;
- **"Legba fetish"**;
- **"Vodu fetish"**;

Some of the above misrepresentations and negative formulations by Rosenthal and other Western scholars have largely remained critically unexamined from a philosophical standpoint. However, a few aestheticians have overturned such crude notions of "art appraisal" or "aesthetic criticism". For instance, in a critical merger of aesthetics and rationalism, Ani (1994:222) discredits some mythical notions of "beauty" or "the good" based on Eurocentric aesthetic constructs:

> The European philosophical statement of aesthetics acts to support European cultural imperialism and control of other cultures in a crucial yet dangerously subtle manner […] Consistent with the dynamics of European culture, this "scientific" or "philosophical" aesthetics seeks to influence and control the emotional experience of what Europeans consider beautiful; while, on the other hand, the philosophic aesthetics takes its shape, its form, and its styles from those habits of mental organization that are "emotionally" appealing to the European mind: the *utamawazo*.[232]

It is vital to trace the psycho-aesthetic foundations of why some Europeans adopt such intolerant inclinations or biased posture in 'appraising' African artworks. As discussed in the introductory section of this chapter, Legba is dismissed as "fetish" based on ignorance and phobic prejudice. An equally critical perspective to this discussion may be posed as follows: if Legba is not supposed to be a realistic representation of abstract/immaterial spiritual forms, why are they being appreciated through the 'distorted lens' of European "standards" of aesthetic "appeal" (of "immitationalism", "idealism", "beauty" or "art for art's sake")?—Considering the fact that Maquet (1979: 47) cautioned European aestheticians against the intellectual risks involved

[232] See Marimba Ani. *Yurugu: An African-Centered Critique of European Cultural Thought and Behavior*. Trenton: Africa World Press, 1994, p.222.

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in exporting Western aesthetic concepts into the study of non-Western art. Silva (2017:85) provides a fitting explanation which leads to the notion that *fetiche* denoted an excessive fixation on materiality and an erroneous valuation of worthless objects. Based on Pereira's account, the Portuguese *fetiche* was also imbued with aesthetic, sensory, and emotive overtones, being often described as filthy, hideous, repulsive, and frightening.[233]

At its most fundamental level, Vodu aesthetics is essentially a projection or a representation of an artist's inner psychic being, repressed spiritual memories, emotional state, unconscious expressions psychically comingled and manifested through the power and influence of the Vodus themselves. Through mediumship, Vodu spirits apparently dictate the aesthetics that suits their "tastes", "desires", "choice of colours that please them" and the "functional" roles of the arts. That is, perhaps, one of the many reasons why in certain instances, it is believed that disgruntled spirits of *kuvɔ̃* (bad-death) victims dictate to distressed relatives how they prefer their sculptural receptacles to be fashioned during propitiation rites and rituals. This comes with high aesthetic specificity from the "herbs", "drinks", right down to the "colour scheme", "type of wood" and the "specific artists they (the spirits) assign to carve" the receptacles that will serve them as a temporary place of abode. Through interviews and informal discussions, it was revealed to me that Vodus have a say in all these aesthetic matters. All this information is elicited through dreams, reveries, "spiritual visitations", invocations, or spirit mediumship with the authoritative assistance of an *Amegashie.*

I personally experienced a similar situation when I was "summoned" to Adzimashie's shrine "on

[233]See Sónia Silva (2017). Art and Fetish in the Anthropology Museum. In *Material Religion*, 13:1, 77-96.

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the orders of a Vodu deity" to paint a newly "manufactured" Vodu receptacle stationed at the entrance to Tɔgbui Adzima's Shrine. Having conducted previous field studies in Mama Vena shrine which adorns its walls, with a brighter shade of blue, I proceeded to mix similar shade only to be cautioned by Adzimashie not to apply the shade of blue I mixed for the paint job. I was surprised to discover that there was a particular shade of "navy blue" Adzimashie insisted on:

> Without getting that iconic bisi colour (navy blue) our ancestral deities prefer, Adzimashie cautioned, "we can't proceed with the mural on the shrine walls. You have to continue mixing the blue properly till I see the right "colour" Tɔgbui Adizma in particular prefers, lest we upset the cluster of all the other ancestral deities within the shrine premises. The deities will not be too pleased if we should purposefully ignore their aesthetic values or violate the sacred aesthetic principles laid down for Vodu artists. They have their own colours they strictly prefer. Any other colour shade will be a misrepresentation on our part. We need to obey their wishes.[234]

Figure 5.4 Hunɔ Amegashie Abinga, praying to the deities and the ancestors to seek their approval and get their final blessings before I commence the painting of the shrine walls, pots and sculptures. Notice the tri-colour scheme of red, white and blue (or sometimes black) in our dress code and the entrance of the shrine. Torgodo, Volta Region (2017). Photography by Research Assistant.

[234]Personal communication with Hutɔ Adzimashie Bali (November, 2017)

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Figure 5.5 Researcher painting the walls of Tɔgbui Adzima's Shrine. Torgodo, Volta Region. (2017). Photography by Research Assistant.

Figure 5.6 Researcher painting a Vodu sculpture in front of Adzima's Shrine. Hutɔ Adzimashie Bali sits close by (in white shorts) to observe and supervise the creative process. Torgodo, Volta Region (2017). Photography by Research Assistant.

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Figure 5.7 Putting finishing touches to the painted Vodu sculpture. Torgodo, Volta Region (2017). Photography by Research Assistant.

Concerning what was deemed acceptable by the ancestors and Vodu deities, priests were apparently not in the position to violate the spiritual laws and principles laid down without their approval. It is interesting to note that such principles apply in other spiritual realms. For instance, Egyptian gods in the sacred Temple of Edfu required matching codes of beliefs and diligence on the part of the High Priest. Not all fabrics could be brought before Egyptian gods in the sacred Temple of Edfu. Sauneron speaks of rituals that ensue after the god is satisfied with the food it has been served, which also leaves the altar of the temple. Sauneron (1960) outlines the requirements of the High Priests who cater for the domestic needs of the gods in the Sacred Temple of Edfu:

> The meal finished, the toilet begins: the god is washed, his clothes of the previous evening are removed, he is dressed in new material, then he is painted. We know that all material was not acceptable to the gods and the priests: wool, in particular, could not under any circumstances be brought near the consecrated beings and

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> objects. It is the byssus, the fine linen, which alone served to clothe the sacred personnel; it is this also which furnished the necessary material for the divine statues. A specialized priest, the stolist, 'the one who enters the sanctuary to dress the gods with their apparel," had charge of these materials and the monopoly on their use. The toilet of the god is continued then by the successive offering of four strips of material of fine linen, first placed in the wood casket in the sanctuary; the white fabric first, then the blue, the green, and finally the red. In practice, the divine clothing was not renewed each day; it was only done at the solemn services which took place once or twice a week. But daily the symbolic offering of the four strips of material took place.[235]

Till today, Sauneron's description of the sacred shelter, personal care, colour preference and acceptable fabrics to the gods in the Temple of Edfu bears a striking resemblance to the shrines of some Anlo-Ewe Vodu deities and ancestors. Indeed, most Vodu deities have their own preference of fabric, colour and the kinds of foods and drinks they strictly prefer. Under no circumstance will these values be compromised without their approval. In fact, Voncudjovi remarked in an interview that, there are certain drinks legba strictly abhors. He further noted that, "if you severely want to punish a wrong-doer or a malevolent spirit, all you have to do is to offer such drinks to Legba and say Mr X asked me to offer this "drink" to you. He knows you don't like it but insisted I offer it to you and added that you're incapable of doing "anything." Fully understanding the "coded language" of the ruse, Legba will in turn visit his wrath on the said "offender". Legba is a trickster even in the traditional folklore; as such, you must employ creative strategies like these to enable him perform efficiently."[236]

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[235] Serge Sauneron (Translated by Am Monissett) *The Priests of Ancient Egypt.* New York: Grove Press Inc., 1960, p.85-86.

[236]Personal Communication with Christopher Voncudjovi, High Priest of Afrikan Magick Temple, Spintex Road, Accra, (November, 2017).

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Figure 5.8 A back shot of the entrance to Hutɔ Adzimashie's Shrine. On the left sits Legba swathed in bisi (navy blue) calico fabric covered in a make-shift shelter draping with strips of red, white and blue fabric.[237] Torgodo, Volta Region (2017). Photography by Researcher.

Figure 5.9 Vodu sculptures representing Tɔgbui Salɛkɔ and Đɛdɛ. Woe, Keta, Volta Region (2016). Photography by Researcher.

[237] (Notice all the details in the colours, fabric strips and subtle similarities in relation to Sauneron's descriptions of Edfu's Temple).

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5.7 Concluding Remarks

This chapter has traced the ideological foundations of "fetishism" and explained how unproductive some of the ideologies rooted in "fetishism" hampers a genuine appreciation of Vodu art. Counter-arguments invalidating faulty Western ideologies and false philosophical assumptions have set the pace for new perspectives of appreciating Vodu through a systematic approach of art appreciation. This chapter brings to a conclusion, the first and most important aspect of the aesthetic triad which entails a thorough understanding of the aesthetic conditions involved in creation of Vodu sculptures. The subsequent chapters will delve deeper to further discuss the second aspect of the aesthetic triad (the nature and identity of Vodu aesthetics) already initiated in the concluding part of this chapter. Essential philosophical underpinnings of Ewe socio-cultural and socio-religious concepts will be discussed to situate Vodu art in a broader context for an exhaustive understanding of Vodu aesthetics.

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CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS: PART 3

6.1 Symbolism and Psychological Properties of Blue in Ewe Vodu Aesthetics

To properly appreciate the spiritual significance of blue in Vodu art, it is important that we briefly understand its application in design. We also need to time-travel into antiquity to trace its symbolism and artistic significance in the ancient world. Psychologically, blue is generally considered as one of the colours most restful to the human eye and emotionally calming to the soul as well. It has been used over the ages, mostly in spiritual rituals and esoteric healing practices. In ancient times, blue colarants were available in nature. Plants like the Indogofera Tinctoria, rich in natural dye had to undergo a series of chemical processes to extract blue dye. According to Adeyanju et al. (2011),

> Many plants have been identified as potentially rich in natural dye content and some of them have been used for natural dyeing for quite some time. Normally natural dyes are extracted from roots, stems, leaves, flowers and fruit of various plants[…]Indigo has long been regarded as one of the most valuable and imported of all colouring matters. It was in India and Egypt long before the Christian era. It was introduced into Europe in the sixteen centuries. The generic name is derived from the Latin word indicum, indicating that the plants came from India itself. [238]

However, scholars have also observed that unlike indigo blue and other colours which were easily obtained from tree saps, soils, natural bark dyes, animal fat, or leaves, certain shades of blue were produced artificially in ancient times. Discussing the nanoscience of blue as an ancient pigment, Salguero et al. (2013) classified the higly priced Egyptian blue as one of the world's first synthetic pigments. Blue was considered a special and important colour to use in painting tombs, statues,

[238] See Olusola Adeyanju, Emmanuel S. E. and Akomolafe S. F. Extraction of Indigo Dye (Powdered, Form) from the Leaf of Indigofera Tinctoria in *International Journal of Physical Science, 6 (1), 2011.*

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gods, jewelry, pots, temples, shrines, burial chambers and other relics in the ancient Mediterranean world.[239] Egyptian Blue was indeed an exceptional and highly revered pigment in spiritual circles due to its scarcity. To the ancient Egyptians, painting was considered as a praise-worthy act to honour the gods and pharaohs. It was a purely sacred activity, as such, artists and a group of priestly class devoted to the spiritual arts, dedicated time to experiment with pigments.[240] Egyptian blue quartz frit or Lapis Lazilu pebbles were among some of the precious stones which were pulverized into fine powdered pigments or shaped into sculptures, forms or objects.

Figure 6.1 Variations of Egyptian Blue Lapis Lazuli pebbles and stone [241]

[239] Darrah Johnson-McDaniel, Christopher A. Barrett, Asma Sharafi, Tina T. Salguero. Nanoscience of an Ancient Pigment. In *Journal of the American Chemical Society*, 2013, 135 (5).

[240] See Serge Sauneron (Translated by Am Monissett). *The Priests of Ancient Egypt.* London: Evergreen Books Ltd, 2000.

[241]Source of images: https://locolapis.com/pages/lapis-history (Accessed on 17/09/2017), https://almaleonor.wordpress.com/2017/04/30/universo-azul/ (Accessed on 17/09/2017)

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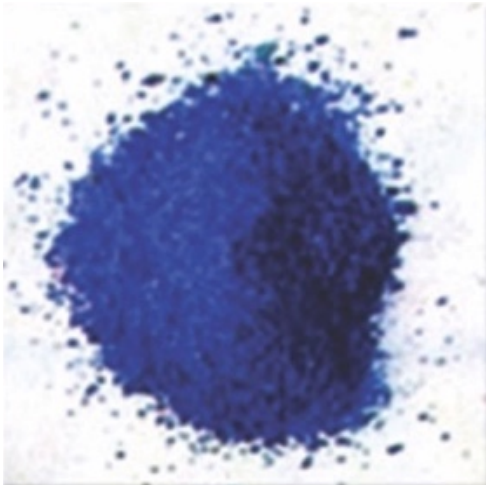

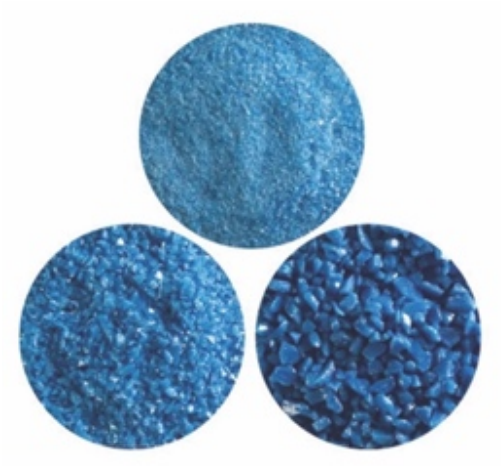

Figure 6.2 Samples of the pulverized pigment Pile of Egyptian blue frit and pebbles.[242]Blue is the colour of all-inclusiveness.

Figure 6.3 From left, 1. Pinedjem I Worker 1 Faience, 13.6 cm 21st Dynasty, 1026 Circa Dutch private collection 2. Henuttawy A Worker 1 Like worker 2 Faience, 11.7 cm 21st Dynasty, 1040 Circa. Dutch private collection 3. Ushebti figure (servant of the defunct Pharaoh Seti I) 1301-1290 BCE, 19th dynasty.[243] (Photo credit – VB).

[242] Source of images: http://www.webexhibits.org/pigments/indiv/recipe/egyptblue.html (Left) https://www.slumpys.com/Fusible-Art-Glass/90-Egyptian-Blue-Opalescent-Frit004 (Right) (Accessed on 17/09/2017)

[243] Retrieved from: https://www.ushabtis.com/royal-cache-db320/(Accessed on 17/09/2017)

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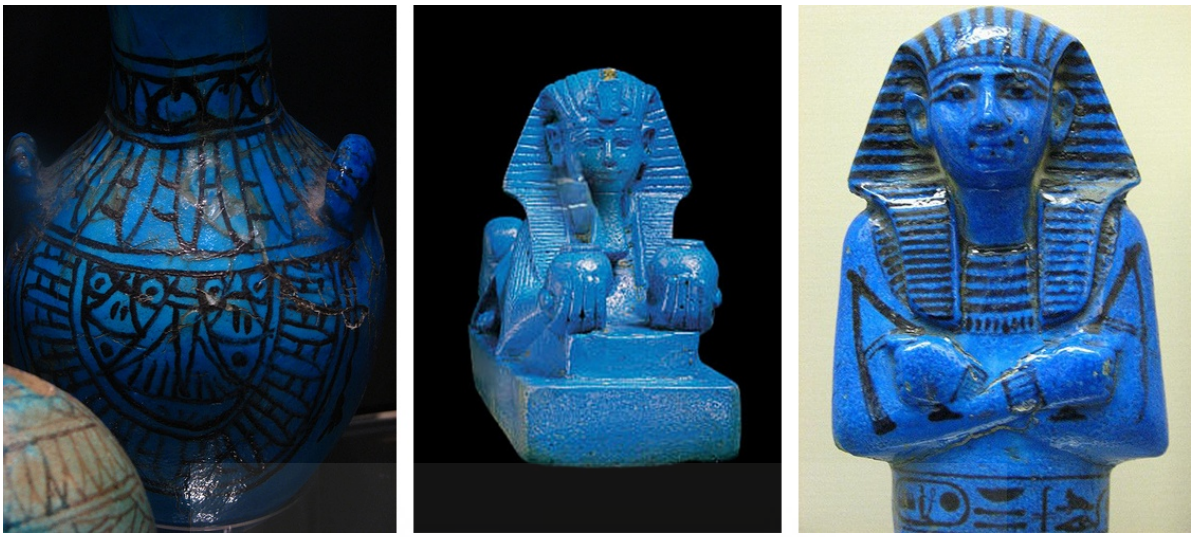

Figure 6.4 From Left, 1. Egyptian cobalt blue glaze vessel, Louvre, 2. The sovereign's sphinx Amenothep III bidder to the gods, 3. Egyptian blue mummy.[244]

Figure 6.5 From left, 1. Egyptian Faience Beads, 2. Ancient & Medieval History - Egyptian Faience Collar Necklace, Late Period, C. 664-332 circa, 3. New Classic Egyptian Lapis Lazuli Stone Chain Beads Necklace. [245]

The seemingly upside-down columns used for support by the Minoan and Mycenaean cultures were painted red and blue. Ceilings in Egyptian temples were colored blue to give the impression

[244] Retrieved from: https://www.veniceclayartists.com/egyptian-pottery/(Accessed on 17/09/2017)

[245] Source of images: https://i.pinimg.com/564x/60/82/19/608219d3c3318233286a09536e837d72.jpg http://www.sandraevertson.com/shop/egyptian-faience-beads (Accessed on 17/09/2017) https://i.pinimg.com/564x/1d/7b/0a/1d7b0a34005c97b5390f522e9a3084ca.jpg (Accessed on 17/09/2017)

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of looking up at the night sky (Mendoza, 2004:2). The Egyptians had a close bond with the color blue as it not only represented to them the heavenly realm as seen in the sky, it was also one of the colours used in painting as representative of the goddess Isis, wife of Osiris and one of the most important deities in ancient Egyptian religion (Birren, 1963). The Egyptian temples are filled with an abundance of symbolic colours. The Egyptian temple, Mountain of the God of Ur, was constructed in four phases, representing the dark underworld, the habitable earth, the heavens and finally the sun. Each phase was represented by paint of a different color, blue being used as the colour of the heavens. This same connection between blue and the colour of the heavens can be seen in the ceilings in these temples which were painted a deep blue and then superimposed with paintings of the constellations to refer to the night sky. Bright reds and blues were often used in contrast with the black ebony wood used in furniture (Pile, 1997).[246]

Figure 6.6 Left: Remains of the Knossos palace in Heraklion of Crete. Right: The-Throne-room-at-Knossos palace in Heraklion of Crete.[247]

[246]See Plier cited in Hannah Rose Mendoza. *Pale Intrusions into Blue: The Development of a Color*. Unpublished MFA Thesis, The Florida State Univeesity, 2004, p.67.

[247] Source of image: http://www.lastampa.it/2016/08/19/societa/viaggi/48-ore/ore-a-heraklion-sullisola-di-creta-8w8sFvHaiPbgzjtLVKDsXN/pagina.html right https://travelpassionate.com/top-things-to-do-in-heraklion-crete/ (Accessed on 17/09/2017)

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Figure 6.7 Ancient human sacrificial rituals by the ancient Mayans and other Meso-American regions involved smearing of blue pigments on the people condemned to death (as "offerings" to the gods). Still shots of Aztec human sacrificial ritual re-enacted in Mel Gibson's award-winning movie *Apocalypto.*

Similarly, Vishnu, the Preserver in the Hindu Trinity, is also depicted with blue skin, but for a different reason. Vishnu means all-pervasive (*Sarvavyapi*) and the sky-blue skin is emblematic of his formless and infinite extent. Their response to all these sets forth an emotional or mental chain reaction of interconnected network of spiritual associations with the divine. Rama and Krishna are frequently depicted in blue color because they are Avatars (human manifestations) of Vishnu. [248]

Figure 6.8 Left: Lord Ram, as Rama is called in India, surrounded by worshipers Right: A boy with his face painted blue like the Hindu god Shiva, stands near a sculpture of Ganesh before immersing it in the River Ganges.[249]

[248] Retrieved from http://historum.com/asian-history/121142-why-indian-gods-blue.html (Accessed on 17/09/2017)
[249] Source of images, Left image: http://oddstuffmagazine.com/idols-of-hindu-elephant-headed-god-lord-ganesh-are-immersed.html/india-hindu-festival-2 Right image: http://amorysabor.com/arrow-of-the-blue-skinned-god-part-1/ (Accessed on 17/09/2017)

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Blue is the color of all-inclusiveness. You will see in the existence, anything that is vast and beyond your perception generally tends to be blue, whether it is the ocean or the sky. Anything which is larger than your perception tends to be blue because blue is the basis of all-inclusiveness. It is based on this that so many gods in India are shown as blue-skinned.[250]

According to psychologists, the popularity of the blue may take root in our evolutionary development. In the hunting-and-gathering days, those drawn to positive things—like, say, clear skies and clean water—were more likely to survive, and, over time, this preference for the color blue may have become hard-wired.[251] This developed over eons through several stages of evolution and environmental adaptation. Our pre-programmed primal instincts enabled us to relate, recognize and understand the language of color in nature. The evolution of our sensory perception has subsequently shaped humanity's innate ability to navigate the universe, adapt to different environmental conditions and to ultimately survive. Through different tones, tints, shades or textures of colour, we are able to recognize poisonous fruits, unwholesome foods, and unsafe drinking water. Coloured patterns or coloured spots on animals helps us to recognize friendly pets or distinguish between threatening predators and detect potentially dangerous situations that put our lives at risk. In navigating the world around us, colour provides us with all these messages and signals which are sent to our brains through our sensory organs in the form of electrical impulses.

[250] Retrieved from http://isha.sadhguru.org/blog/yoga-meditation/history-of-yoga/why-is-krishna-blue/ (Accessed on 17/09/2017)

[251] Source: https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-a-brief-history-of-blue. (Accessed on 17/09/2017)

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Colour also plays a significant role in the development of our sensory awareness. Our very survival can sometimes depend on how the human sensory organs pick up information that threatens our lives or send electrical impulses to navigate the environment around us. Even in modern times, these programmed survival instincts are still deeply buried in our intuitive senses, but this does not diminish its power as captured by Groenholm:

> When light strikes the eye, the different wavelengths do so in different ways; the eye constantly adjusts and long wave colors require the most adjustment. In the retina, they are converted to electrical impulses that pass to the hypothalamus, the part of the brain that governs our hormones and endocrine system. Thus, color sets up complex physiological reactions, which in turn evoke a psychological response. Every living creature on earth responds to the messages implicit in the play of light and color.[252]

Colour is essentially light, traveling to us in waves from the sun. Spectral hues are among what forms the basic components of colour. Scientifically, color is the principal cue to composition – i.e. the initial thing we register when assessing anything. Hence, a powerful communication tool. Therefore, it is arguably the most critical element of design. When light strikes any colored object, the object will absorb only the wavelengths that exactly match its own atomic structure and reflect the rest – which is what we see. Although we are unaware of it, our eyes and our bodies are constantly adapting to these wavelengths of light.[253] Our intuitive response to light and colour is particularly more evident in art therapy and chromatherapy. Colour affect humans in diverse ways, as such they play significant roles in shaping the aesthetics and spiritual world view of cultures.[254]

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[252] This whitepaper is largely based on work by Angela Wright (psychologist of Queen Mary's Hospital, Roehampton, England, and at Carmel, California, USA) who studies both unconscious thought processes and the dynamics of color harmony in her exploration of color psychology. See Micco Groenholm. Colour *Psychology: The Colour Affects System.* p.6 (Publication details unavailable).

[253] Ibid. p.6.

[254] This phenomenon differs from society to society.

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But specific colours convey connotations and universally appeals to our primal emotions, drives and instincts due to several generations of neural programming in the evolution of human response to colour and the natural environment. For instance, even in contemporary times, Blue still remains one of humanity's favourite colours. From a communication design background, blue is the most popular colour for corporate logos and branding in some of the world's leading companies and organizations (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Samsung, Linked In, Ford, Philips, Visa, HP, Unilever, etc.). Thus, it dominates the aesthetics of the corporate branding. Colour symbolism is considered the esoteric language for the soul in some spiritual circles. Similarly, colour symbolism and the psychology that drives colour combinations employed in Vodu ritual practices inspires great awe. However, it is one of the most understudied areas in African aesthetics. An often-neglected area is the colour symbolism in Vodu worship, spirit mediumship and spirit possession which forms a major component of Vodu religion. In Vodu colour symbolism, an interplay of aesthetics, psychotherapy and spirituality is highly accentuated. This interplay produces effective healing results similar to art therapy, chromatherapy and modern psychoanalytical healing practices. The seamless integration of psychology, symbolism, aesthetics and spirituality is an understudied area in Vodu religious studies that researchers must endeavor to deal with.

In Vodu colour symbolism, blue[255] appears to be one of the sacred colours that dominates throughout visual communication and creative expressions. Apart from being used as a form of shrine branding, aesthetic appeal and purposes of identifying spiritual affiliation or power ranks, bisi (blue) also represents Vodu deities and ancestral spirits in diverse ways. However, due to the closely guarded nature of these aesthetic knowledge systems, its real esoteric properties were not

[255] Mostly dark shades of blue (midnight blue, navy blue, indigo etc.) and other lighter shades of blues.

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fully revealed during my interviews and discussions. However, there are several examples of aesthetic principles and colour combinations that give us an idea of the very essence of Vodu colour symbolism. Blue is associated with healing and spiritually calming properties. It raises one's spiritual awareness and also enhances spiritual communication due to its meditative and psychologically calming properties. Red is the color of blood and has associations with war, death, mourning, danger, aggression, anger, power, spirituality, eroticism etc. Red can also represent love, affection and healing. In fact, as noted by Winn (2000) in his discussion on the mental and the psychological effects of colour in medical practices:

> some people who are given placebos even claim to suffer side effects as well as improvements. And some people, given red, yellow and blue placebos to try as a headache cure, reported back that only one colour pill worked. The most popularly effective placebo was the red one![256]

Various shades of blue are reflected in the aesthetics of Anlo-Ewe Vodu body adornments, body art, costumes, pots, designs and sculptures used in Vodu worship. Head priests swathe themselves in blue calico cloth to distinguish themselves from the crowd. It also signifies their rank in Vodu spiritual hierarchy and serves as a form of identification to inform people of the particular deity they serve or the specific shrine they are affiliated to. All this information can be gleaned from the colour symbolism and esoteric visual codes. Bisi (Blue) appears to be one of the most prominent and dominant colours in Ewe Vodu aesthetics. In fact, Jenkins (2005) has documented that everyone that has a ritual role in the Adzima shrines wear the bisi (blue cloth):

> The multi-faceted way in which links between the people and deities are established, creates a kind of community centred upon the deity that extends

[256] Denise Winn. *The Manipulated Mind:* Brainwashing, Conditioning and Indoctrination. London: The Octagon Press, 2000, pp.128-129.

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> beyond the 'shrine-owning' lineage. In this community, people take on a variety of roles distinguished by their structural relationship to the deity and the 'shrine-owning' lineage. However, in all cases, those with specific ritual roles and formalised relationships to the deity through initiation are distinguished from others through the bisi (blue cloth). The bisi is a powerful symbol for those in formalised ritual roles in the Adzima shrines.[257]

It must be emphasized that, during my research, the sacred spaces of selected Vodu shrines where I conducted much of my participant observation and interview had a tranquil aura and emotionally soothing blue ambience. Information gathered through interviews and extended discussions revealed that blue (and other sacred colours), in Vodu symbolism is primarily for the purposes of *dzɛshiɖɛɖɛ,* which simply means specifically identifying devotees, shrines, deities, and grasping various psycho-aesthetic concepts. However, in Vodu worldview and cosmic consciousness, it appears there are compelling associations of blue with spiritual beliefs among the ancients. For instance, in some of the creation myths they held, which suggested the notion that the Supreme Being lived in the firmaments, blue was widely revered for its sacred associations with royalty and the divine. By identifying themselves through the symbolism of blue, Vodu priests, spirit mediums, performers, artists, high-ranking Vodu officials and ordinary devotees alike are subliminally forming mystical or psychological associations with the divine through the auxiliary deities and the ancestors they serve or venerate.

[257] Julie A. Jenkins .'Wives of the Gods': Debating Fiasidi and the Politics of Meaning. Unpublished PhD, Thesis. University of Sussex, 2005, p.89.

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6.2 Photographic Documentation of the Aesthetics of Blue in Kli-Adizma, Mama Vena and other Vodu Religious Rites and Worship.

Figure 6.9 Left: A Vodu Sculpture on top of Mama Vena Shrine, Klikor, Volta Region. Right: A Vodu Sculpture in fron of Adzima Shrine, Torgodo, Klikor (2017). Photography by Researcher.

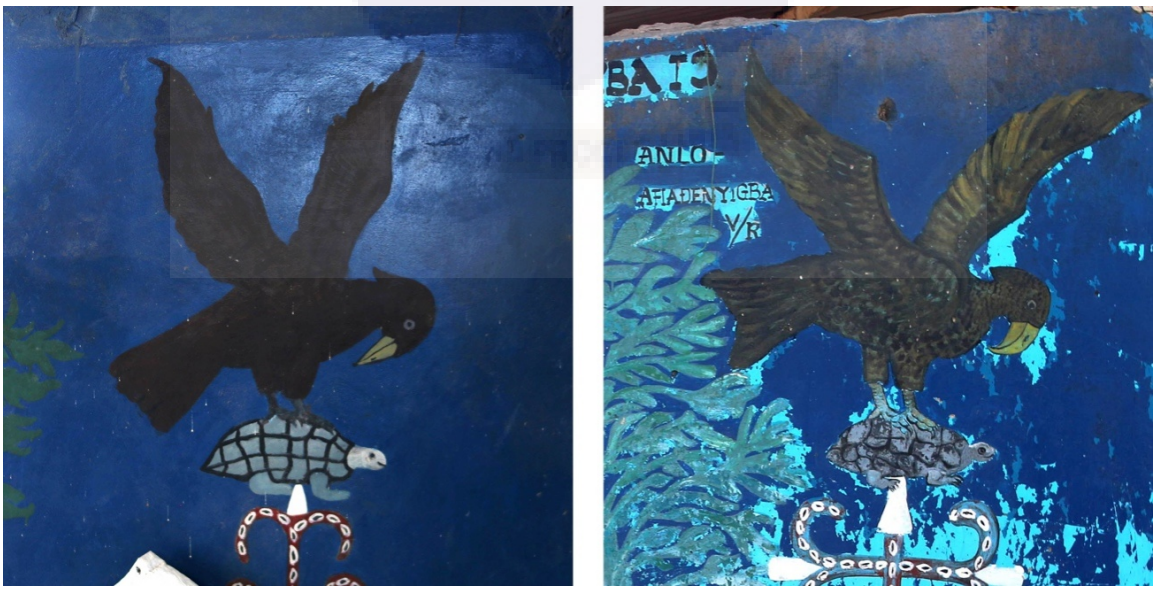

Figure 6.9.1 *Ɛhɔmɛfoa klo* emblem. YeƱe Shrine, Afiadenyigba, Volta Region (2016). Photography by Researcher.

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Figure 6.9.2 Left: *Ɛhɔmɛfoa klo* emblem represented on the sign board of Tɔgbui Aƒetɔku's Shrine. Dagbamete, Volta Region (2015). Right: In the 2018 American superhero film titled *Black Panther*, costume designer, Ruth Carter incorporated the *Ɛhɔmɛfoa klo* emblem into the costume design of the 'River Tribe Elder', Isaach de Bankolé.[258]

Ɛhɔmɛfoa klo emblem is a popular Anlo-Ewe Vodu emblem which can be seen on some shrine walls and religious artefacts. In Anlo-Ewe Vodu, it is used to represent Tɔgbui Aƒetɔku[259], a powerful deity in Dagbamete, Volta Region. Aƒetɔku literally means "master of death" and the deity's main focus is protection against malicious spiritual activities.[260] Tɔgbui Aƒetɔku's protection and power over malicious spirits is captured in *Ɛhɔmɛfoa klo*, an emblem that represents the philosophy of security for Aƒetɔku devotees. According to 'Super', an Aƒetɔku devotee:

> The eagle who tries to attack and devour a tortoise can only die of starvation. The eagle can try, but can do no harm to the tortoise because once the tortoise senses danger or a threat; it simply recoils into its shell. The eagle, finding nothing to attack or devour drops the 'worthless' tortoise shell out of exhaustion and frustration. Such

[258] Source of edited image: https://www.syfy.com/syfywire/black-panther-designer-ruth-carter-reveals-the-african-symbols-embedded-in-the-costumes (Acessed on 20/05/2018).

[259] Apart from Tɔgbui Aƒetɔku, other shrines (eg. Yeʊe shrine) in Volta Region use *Ɛhɔmɛfoa klo* as an emblem to symbolize the power and security of their deities.

[260] http://www.curtisandrews.ca/galleries_ghana.htm (Accessed on 11/04/2015).

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> is the fate of anyone or spirit who tries to capture or harm any of Tɔgbui Aƒetɔku's 'children' (devotees).[261]

This concise philosophy is further explained to Tɔgbui Aƒetɔku's devotees in a spiritual analogy that malicious spirits can try to harm or attack Aƒetɔku's devotees but he will promptly recoil them into his protective shell to dispel any danger or threat. The *Ɛhɔmɛƒoa klo* emblem is powerful and so pervasive in Aƒetɔku veneration that it is incorporated into the paraphernalia and visual arts of Tɔgbui Aƒetɔku devotees.

Figure 6.9.3 Mama Vena Shrine, Ablotsivia, Klikor, Volta Region (2016). Photography by Researcher.

[261] Personal communication with 'Super', a member of Tɔgbui Aƒetɔku Shrine in Dagbamate, Volta Region, 4th April 2015.

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Figure 6.9.4 Ritual Procession of Fiasidiwo. Klikor, Volta Region (2016). Photography by Researcher.

Figure 6.9.5 Left: Tɔgbui Naza Kudese two weeks before he joined the ranks of the Ancestors.[262] Alakple. Right: Tɔgbui Kli-nua Atsimeku captured during the Kli-Adzima spiritual festivities in Ablɔgame, Klikor, Volta Region (2017). Photography by Researcher.

[262] A relative whom I only met after seeing his picture in Muller et al.'s book. Tɔgbui Naza Kudese happens to be my grand uncle. I had read about him in Muller's book so I requested to pay him a visit for an interview. He sadly passed on to the ancestral realm just a few weeks after I had interviewed him.

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Figure 6.9.6 An Amegashie fully clad in her spiritual regalia. Klikor, Volta Region (2016). Photography by Researcher.

Headgears, wrist bands and ankle bands are also worn by devotees for aesthetic, functional and identification purposes. It is worn by Vodu priests to firmly ground and give them stable spiritual centre of gravity to protect them from evil spirits or spiritual attacks. Head gears are also used to indicate ranks in Vodu hierarchical power structures. Distinct head gears can also be worn by spirit mediums, priests or priestesses, to specifically signify the ancestral spirits or deities they are associated with. In other instances, some priests or priestesses are not obliged to wear head gears. Primarily, head gears serve as symbols of spiritual power, esoteric wisdom, rank, and in subtler

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ways they also connote sacred aesthetic values and norms.It must be added here that it is extremely crucial to notice the interconnectedness of the colour symbolism, the aesthetics and how these minute artistic elements serve as signals, communication cues, symbolic codes and status symbols in the upper echelons of Vodu leadership and spiritual torch bearers who lead devotees and the community in the path of spiritual enlightenment.

Figure 6.9.7 A group of Hunuawo in a procession exiting the sacred grove where prayers are offered through libation and animal sacrifices made to Kli-Adzima for spiritual renewal. Fianugɔ (in lead), Tɔgbui Agagli Asipodi, Tɔgbui Nuwordor Afadi and Tɔgbui Humali (who apparently does not appear in this particular shot) Kli-Adzima Festival. Klikor, Volta Region (2016). Photography by Researcher.

Verbal art plays an immense role in divination. Various forms of verbal art which includes panegyrics, sacred mantras, incantations, chants, appellations, prayers are all employed by Vodu

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priests in the act of invoking the divinities and spirit mediumship. These forms of art and several others play very vital roles in divination and ancestral veneration. To Vodu devotees, art forms an integral part of Vodu religion which underscores the notion of how art is inseparable from African religion in general.

Figure 6.9.8 Tɔgbui Humali saying prayers and interceding on behalf of Kli-Adzima and Mama Vena devotees at Mama Vena Shrine, Ablɔgame, Klikor, Volta Region (2016). Photography by Researcher.

An equally important area to capture is the aesthetics of spiritual communication with the Supreme Being, Mawu, through the assistance of the ancestors who serve as intermediaries to intercede on behalf of the priests and the entire community occurred libations. Accordingly, the performative act of pouring of libation is heavily laced with profound spiritual aesthetic values and norms.

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Figure 6.9.9 Left: Fianugɔ Womegbeamewo pouring libation to the the ancestors and community deities. Right: Ritual procession after the *Tagbayiyi*[263] spiritual prayers, libation and sacrificial ritual at the sacred grove during the Kli-Adzima Festival. Klikor, Volta Region (2016). Photography by Researcher.

Despite the different types of sacrifices, sacred rituals and libations performed during Kli-Adzima religious practices, each ritual act was employed at designated periods in specific areas for different purposes, specific reasons, and with unique aesthetics.

[263] *Tagbayiyi* is a combination of two words *tagba* and *yiyi*. Tagba simply refers to bush or grove. *Yiyi* means to be on the move or the act of going, hence Tagbayiyi can be loosely translated as 'going to the bush (or grove)'. The bush/grove in this particular context is a well demarcated area within the Klikor community reserved for shrine activities and ceremonies dedicated to the Adzima cluster of shrines (usually during annual festivities or on important occasions). The demarcated area has been walled and well preserved. It is usually swept and well kept to ensure that the environment for sacred activities is always clean.

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Figure 6.10 Fianugɔ Womegbeamewo pouring libation to the ancestors and community deities, during *Tagbayiyi* spiritual prayers, libation and sacrificial ritual session at the sacred grove of the Kli-Adzima cluster of Shrines. Despite the fact that these prayers and libations are collectively being performed by the three High Priests (and few high-ranking representatives) of all the Adzima cluster of shrines, Fianugɔ Womegbeamewo publicly presides over all these rituals and activities. Similarly, all the three High priests follow the lead of Fianugɔ Womegbeamewo during processions and performance of collective rituals. Klikor, Volta Region (2016). Photography by Researcher.

Figure 6.10.1 Fianugɔ Womegbeamewo pouring libation to the the ancestors and community deities in front of the Kli-Adzima Shrine. Notice the subtle aesthetics, performative gestures and nuanced differences in the costumes in each libation pouring session. Klikor, Volta Region (2016). Photography by Researcher.

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Another often ignored area in Ewe Vodu aesthetics which has not been well-documented is body art and body adornments. Body art, commonly displayed in Vodu worship and performance, includes a wide range of artistic elements and symbolism expressed through coiffure, scarifications, tattoos, incisions and body markings such as smearing of kaolin on specific parts of the body of the performer, devotee or Vodu priest or priestess. Jewelries and ornaments such as beads, cowries, shells and special seeds are threaded and worn on various parts of the body of the Vodu priest and Vodu adherents as charms, talismans and amulets. They are either worn to attract good luck or to repel evil or bad luck. These forms of body art or body adornments are purposely done either during the initiation of a Vodu priest to make a permanent bond with his or her divinity or during divination to repel malevolent spirits.

Figure 6.10.2 The aesthetics and symbolism of blue incorporated into an Amegashie's beads. Klikor, Volta Region (2016). Photography by Researcher.

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Figure 6.10.3 The aesthetics and symbolism of blue incorporated into an Amegashie's beads. Klikor, Volta Region (2016). Photography by Researcher.

Figure 6.10.4 Komfo Bakai, formerly a Christian, now a Vodu Priestess. After futile attempts to resist Vodu spirituality, she finally relented and obeyed the demands of the deities who "chose" her to serve. She now serves Afram and Tigare. Klikor, Volta Region (2016). Photography by Researcher.

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Figure 6.10.5 The aesthetics and symbolism of blue incorporated into coiffure. Klikor, Volta Region (2016). Photography by Researcher.

Figure 6.10.6 The aesthetics and symbolism of blue incorporated into bead necklace. Klikor, Volta Region (2016). Photography by Researcher.

Figure 6.10.7 Aesthetics of white and blue incorporated into body painting of Gɔvu performers in Mama Vena Shrine, Ablotsivia, Klikor, Volta Region, (2016). Photography by Researcher.

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Figure 6.11 Sacred aesthetics of blue evident in the body painting by members of Brékété Vodu. Woe and Dagbamete respectively, Volta Region, (2016). Photography by Researcher.

Figure 6.11.1 Aesthetics of white and blue incorporated into body painting of Goʋu performers in Mama Vena Shrine, Ablotsivia, Klikor, Volta Region (2016). Photography by Researcher. Tɔgbui Agagli indicated (in a personal communication) that during the slave trade era, children were disguised in slave markets by smearing kaolin and natural pigments on their faces and body parts so that their parents and other relatives would have difficulty recognizing them.

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Figure 6.11.2 Close up shot of a young Govu performer during Kli-Adzima festivities in Mama Vena Shrine, Ablotsivia, Klikor, Volta Region (2016). Photography by Researcher.

Avenorgbor (2008) has noted the therapeutic benefits of blue in chromatherapy. He further indicated that a common treatment for premature babies born with potentially fatal jaundice is to bathe them in blue light, which for reasons not fully understood, eliminates the need to transfuse their blood. Blue surroundings also significantly lower a person's blood pressure, pulse, and respiration rate.[264] Yurdakök (2015) reveals the prophylactic properties of blue in his contribution to new medical developments of phototherapy in newborn babies. In the proceedings of the 11th International Workshop on Neonatology, Yurdakök (2015) presented scientific findings about the

[264] See Stephen Kofi Avenorgbo. Aesthetic Impact of Ghanaian Socio-Cultural Practices on the Environment and its Protection in Ghana. Unpublished PhD Thesis. Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, 2008, p.163-164.

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efficacy and safety of prophylactic phototherapy in preventing jaundice in preterm infants:

> Blue light, particularly in the wavelength range of 405-470 nm, exhibits a broad-spectrum of antimicrobial effect against bacteria (either gram- positive and gram-negative bacteria). Moreover, blue light therapy is a clinically accepted approach for *P. acnes* infections. Clinical trials have also been conducted to study the use of blue light which was delivered from a diode laser via a exible optical ber passed through the biopsy channel of the endoscope for *H. pylori* stomach infections and have shown promising results. Studies on blue light inactivation of important pathogenic bacteria, including *St. aureus* and *P. aeruginosa* have also been reported. The mechanism of blue light inactivation of bacteria is proved to be the photo-excitation of intracellular porphyrins and the subsequent production of cytotoxic reactive oxygen species. Certainly, further studies are required to optimize the optical parameters (e.g., wavelength, radiant exposure) and to ensure effective and safe blue light therapies for infectious disease.[265]

Due to the powerful psychological properties of colour and its therapeutic effects in chromatherapy and mental conditioning, specific amounts of measured of light waves emitted by colours must be taken into consideration. If blue, for instance, is to be used in combination with other colours for therapeutic purposes, there needs to be specific measurement (or balanced distribution) of the colours to achieve desired psychological or medical results. For instance, in his research in mental manipulation, brainwashing, conditioning, and indoctrination, Winn (2000) has observed that:

> involuntary body processes could be successfully conditioned to such a degree that people who were trained to react physiologically in one way to a series of blue lights and in another way, physiologically, to a series of red lights shown in a certain order, were actually physically sick and developed severe headaches when shown the lights in a jumbled order.[266]

Apart from a few notable scholars, contemporary researchers in Ewe Vodu religion mostly ignore the overarching significance of sacred Vodu aesthetic values and practices. Chromatherapy, branding and the colour psychology behind the prophylactic aspects of Vodu aesthetics is a whole

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[265]See Yurdakök M. Phototherapy in the Newborn: What's New? In *J Pediatr Neonat Individual Med.* 2015; 4(2): e040255. doi: 10.7363/040255

[266] Denise Winn. *The Manipulated Mind:* Brainwashing, Conditioning and Indoctrination. London: The Octagon Press, 2000, p.79-80.

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field fit for an entirely new research.[267] Other essential related aspects to these areas will briefly be explored in Chapter 8 accordingly.

6.3 Ewe Vodu Tri-Colour Aesthetics in the Context of African Spirituality

A critical analysis of the issues briefly discussed in the previous chapter merely demonstrates how philosophical beliefs, identity/race politics, misconstrued socio-political constructs and cultural "standards" also shape the experience and meaning of aesthetics from culture to culture, society to society. African aesthetic canons are grounded in spiritual underpinnings or belief. The criteria for the physical appearance and beauty of an object are determined by indigenous knowledge and the spiritual philosophies of the people.[268]

In Ewe Vodu shrine iconography and sacred aesthetics, three dominant colours permeate most sacred spaces and visual expressivity. For instance, black cloth, *avɔ yibɔ,* white cloth, *avɔ yi,* and red cloth, *avɔ dzie*[269] drape the doorways or entrances into Vodu shrines and cubicles respectively. The Vodus, priests and devotees alike can also be found swathed in these principal colours or a

[267] I actually met Angelantonio Grossi, a PhD candidate from Utrecht University conducting his doctoral research on how some Vodu priests brand themselves on digital media platforms. Grossi's forthcoming research delves into the adoption of digital technologies among indigenous religious adherents in Ghana as a way to both promote a stigmatized religion and commune with spirits. Personal communication with Angelantonio Grossi (August, 2019).

[268] Jacqueline Chanda. *African art and Culture (Art and Culture Series)*. Ohio: Davis Publishers, 1994, p.53.

[269] In most parts of Southern Ghana especially among the Ewes and Akans, red and black represent the principal colours used as funerary cloths for mourning the dead. For instance, *agumevor* [low-low-low-high] ("death-cloth") or *yormevor* [low-low-high] ("grave-cloth") references the cloth used in burying the deceased—the cloth in which somebody dies or one of the deceased person's most favorite cloth, while *kutefevor* [high-low-mid-mid] "death-place-cloth" stands for cloths often used for funerals because of their black or red color symbolisms, proverbial motives, and specific cloth names. See George W. K. Dor. Exploring Indigenous Interpretive Frameworks in African Music Scholarship: Conceptual Metaphors and Indigenous Ewe Knowledge in the Life and Work of Hesino Vinorkor Akpalu. In *Black Music Research Journal,* 35(2), 2015, p.23.

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combination of them. In instances where black is absent, a darker shade of navy blue (indigo) is commonly seen as a substitute.

Figure 6.11.3 Right: Entrance to Brékété shrine in Ashaiman, Greater Accra Region. Left: Entrance to a Vodu cubicle. Klikor, Volta Region (2017). Photography by Researcher.

Figure 6.11.4 Researcher (in red) with Tɔgbui Hutɔ Adzimashie Bali (in white cloth) and Tɔgbui Hunɔ Abinga (in navy blue cloth) saying prayers before pouring libation to seek approval from the Vodus and ancestors. It was very necessary for me to be present in this ceremonial prayer before my research commences in the premises of Adzima Shrine, Torgodo, Volta Region (2016). Photography by Research Assistant.

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Figure 6.11.5 White kaolin and the aesthetics of red, white and blue incorporated into the sacred costumes and physical make-up of Brékété adherents of Brékété Vodu in Tɔgbui Dzokpoto's Brékété Shrine. Woe, Keta, Volta Region (2016). Photography by Researcher.

Figure 6.11.6 Left: A common sight to behold on the walls of most Adzima Shrines is an intersecting palette of red and white splashes on a large expanse of black or indigo colour fields. A shot of the Researcher posing in front of Kli-Adzima Shrine, Klikor, Volta Region. Photography by Research Assistant. Right: Indigenous drums, Dagbamete, Volta Region (2016). Photography by Researcher.

It is believed that the red and white splashes on the black colour fields (on the shrine walls), signify the act of "sacrificial propitiation", "slaughtering", "spilling of enemy blood" in physical/spiritual warfare and the general carnage of malevolent spirits or military opponents. Hagan's

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documentation of comparable colour schemes and symbolism among the Akans may suffice here to justify my observations:

> Kobene is full of ambiguities. Akans generally point to blood as the paradigm of this colour cluster and much of the ambiguity in the symbolic meaning of the colour derives from the mixed associations of blood. Blood stands for life and vitality, and the word mogya (blood) means the fire (gya) of creation (bo). Akans believe that blood is the means by which a Kra might be given human form, but as blood stands for life, so does any blood which does not give life, or is spilled wastefully, stand for death.[270]

In Vodu colour symbolism, white has connotations of spiritual purity, it also symbolizes renewal, death and victory over military opponents or malevolent spirits. The large expanse of the black background is a manifestation of Vodu power, military stealth, invincibility, spiritual security or limitless protective spiritual shield against malevolent forces. It also represents the inner workings of the dark gloomy battle field of the spiritual world which is concealed from mere mortals. Symbolically speaking, the repetitive rhythm of the intersecting splashes is a psycho-spiritual reassurance to Vodu adherents, of the endless military victories the *trɔwo* (deities) have amassed over the ages.

Largeness of scale in these forms of visual representations also flaunts or advertises the infinite limits of their spiritual powers and military prowess to Vodu adherents. It is believed to be the ultimate manifestation of the militaristic attributes and formidable powers of the war gods in the most flamboyant manner. This symbolism in turn, subconsciously assures adherents of spiritual security. In short, it psychologically assuages the fear of death or spiritual attack on Vodu adherents on a very subliminal level. In fact, not many Vodu adherents or the artists were willing

[270] See G.P. Hagan. *A Note on Akan Colour Symbolism*. In *The African e-journals*, 8-14, 1970, p.8.

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to reveal some of these closely guarded esoteric aspects and deeper values of the shrine paintings. When asked, one respondent simply replied:

> You don't have to be told, you just feel it in the air by the spiritual aura the Vodu and *trɔwo* emanate. That is how they sometimes communicate with their 'children'. Their way of telling us to keep calm, they are in "control" of our spiritual affairs. Just as there is unemployment in our own physical world, some of these formidable war gods are merely waiting for you to just come and employ them to render spiritual military services. Once you employ them, you will truly understand what I actually mean.[271]

Osei-Agyemang has documented in a related observation that seems to affirm that, in Africa, prevention of evil or the security, survival and continuity of the race are thought to be impossible without harmony between the visible and invisible worlds. For this reason, the people employ wood carvings in magico-religious rites to establish rapport with the benevolent spirits who are believed to be capable of protecting the people from all manner of evil. Therefore, by the aid of wood sculptures, Black Africans wish to gain control over evil forces and the hazards of nature. When this situation is achieved, the people tackle their socio-economic duties without fear, but with hope, confidence and courage.[272] Religion is thus part of a survival strategy and serves practical ends, immediate or remote, social or individual.[273] Hence, by identifying themselves through the symbolism of red, white and black (or blue), priests, spirit mediums, performers, artists, high-ranking Vodu officials and ordinary devotees alike are subliminally forming

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[271] Somé offers comparable beliefs among the Dagaara people in Burkina Faso. See Somé, Sobonfu. *The Spirit of Intimacy: Ancient Teaching in the Ways of Relationships.* Albany, CA: Berkeley Hills Books, 1997.

[272]See Opamshen, Osei-Agyeman. The Importance of Wood Carvings in Black African Cultures (Publication details unavailable).

[273] David Millar and Bertus Haverkort. African Knowledges and Sciences: Exploring the Ways of Knowing of Sub-Saharan Africa. In African Knowledge and Sciences: Understanding and Supporting the ways of Knowing in Sub-Saharan Africa, 2006, p.24.

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psychological associations with the divine through the auxiliary deities and the ancestral spirits they venerate.

Figure 6.11.7 Left: Kli-Adzima devotee seeking spiritual assistance casually leans against a pillar supporting Tɔgbui Adzima Shrine in Klikor. Right: A group of traders (also Kli-Adzima devotees) sit in a pensive mood while awaiting the arrival of the Adzima priests from the *tagbayiyi* ceremony in the sacred grove. Klikor, Volta Region (2016). Photography by Researcher.

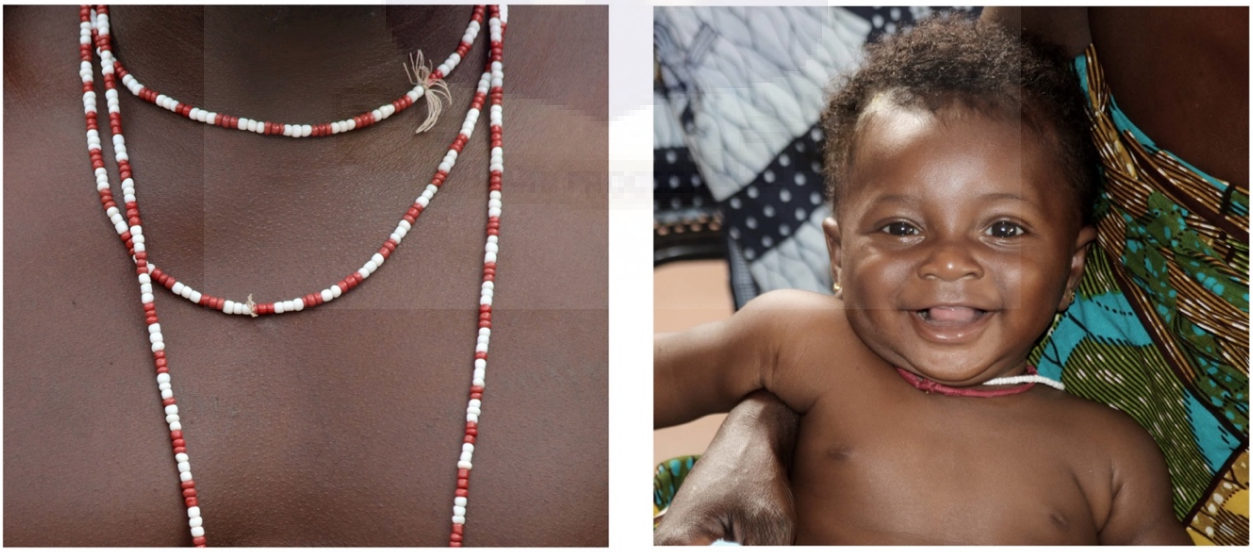

Figure 6.11.8 Notice the colours of the beads that adorn the neck of the Kli-Adzima devotees during the 2016 Kli-Adzima religious Festival. Klikor, Volta Region (2016). Photography by Researcher.

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The inner psychology formulated around aspects of sacred Ewe aesthetics, colour categorizations is quite hazy, but Gavua (2000:112) provides a rather generic colour categorization system:

> A wide array of colours are used by the Northern Ewes, however, only three major types, black, *nu yibɔ,* white, *nu fufui,* and red, *nu dzie* or *nu babia*, are named locally and recognized traditionally. Each type is characterized by range of colours that have no conventional names in the local language but otherwise named differently in English. For example, Black refers to all darkish colours such as brown, deep blue and deep green. White comprises light colours like gray, ash, and cream, while red, pink, maroon, and violet are in the domain of red. Green yellow, orange and gold are recognized and described in relation to the colour of naturalistic features. Green, for example, is likened to the colour of a fresh leaf, *amakpa mumui,* after the colour of a ripe fruit *mumɔe ɖiɖi* or a withering leaf, *amakpa ɖiɖi.*

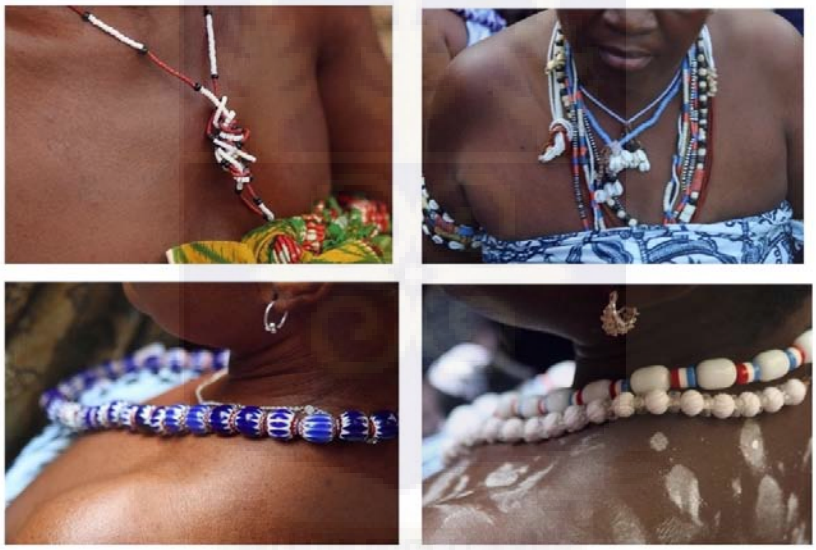

Figure 6.11.9 Tri-colour aesthetics and symbolism: red, white and black (and blue) incorporated into bead necklace. Klikor, Volta Region (2016). Photography by Researcher.

Documenting the religious aesthetics among people of African descent in the diaspora, Farris Thompson (1983:222) reveals that:

> In Haiti a man procures from a ritual expert, when necessary, a special shirt made of strips of red, white and blue to break up the power of the evil eye. Nelly Bragg an old black woman of Warrensville heights, Ohio, was asked "why one red sock and white sock was worn deliberately mismatched?" to which she replied, "To keep spirits away".[274]

[274] Robert Farris-Thompson. *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy*, New York: Random House, Inc, 1983, p. 222.

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Farris-Thompson further indicates in another section of his aesthetic reflections and representations of the followers of Shango, the Yoruba Thunder deity:

> She wears the characteristic red and white beads of the thunder god that refer to, among other images, a line of the praise-poem, "water by the side of fire at the centre of the sky." The two colours also suggest the friendship of fiery "red" Shango and Obatala, deity of creativity, whose honorific colour is white.[275]

Hagan (1970), in his general analysis of Akan colour symbolism, provides a related tri-colour scheme among the Akans[276] which remains particularly relevant to this discussion. Thus, the aesthetics of red, black (blue) and white in sacred Anlo-Ewe colour symbolism is noticeably shared by both the Anlo-Ewes, the Akans and other ethnic groups in Ghana.

Figure 6.12 Performers in a 'frozen' pose during a funerary procession at Tɔgbui Kporku's Funeral. Alakple, Volta Region (2017). Photography by Researcher.

[275]Ibid. p.87.

[276] See G.P. Hagan. *A Note on Akan Colour Symbolism*. In *The African e-journals*, 8-14, 1970, p.8.

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6.4 Vodu as Combat Science: Healing, Psychic Warfare and the Psycho-Spiritual Dimensions of the Arts.

The belief in spirits, ghosts and demons, spooks and apparitions, visions, dreams and omens continues to hold undisputed sway in the face of the centuries-old teachings of Christianity, which seems quite powerless to dislodge these ancient and deep-rooted attitudes.[277] War deities are essentially militaristic in nature but they also double as "specialists" in the general well-being of their "children" (devotees), most especially children who are vulnerable to physical and spiritual attacks. In that regard, when they are not busy fighting spiritual battles on behalf of their "children" (devotees) they heal the sick, especially children with common or chronic diseases. and also help ward off evil spirits or protect vulnerable children from witchcraft attacks. You can also send other personal problems to most war deities for spiritual guidance or solutions. Having cured you of an illness or saved you from and impeding disaster or spiritual attack, these deities must be propitiated in return for the healing or spiritual services rendered. An example is Tɔgbui Salɛkɔ, who can be rewarded through a variety of ways, but it is primarily through animal sacrifice, prayers and spiritual devotion. It is believed that his most preferred "sacrificial meals" include goats, fowls, pigeons, cola nuts and locally distilled gin.

Usually, war gods are called upon in times of distress. In the spiritual world, it is believed most of the Vodu deities "operate in stealth mode" to make their detection very difficult. They are not supposed to been seen, felt or heard when approaching enemy spirits. It is believed that being swathed in *bisi* or *avɔyibɔ* symbolically reinforces their invincibility which also grants them the

[277] See Kwame Nkrumah. Mind and Thought in Primitive Society: A Study in Ethnophilosophy, With Special Reference to the Akan Peoples of the Gold Coast, West Africa. Unpublished PhD Thesis, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1944, p.211.

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ability to efficiently perform assigned duties with speed, precision and finality. Acting as a kind of "military uniform," the dark-coloured fabric serves as spiritual camouflage to cover up their tracks or conceal their impending designs from malevolent spirits. Đɛɖɛ is a Vodu that neutralizes recurring deaths, (e.g. *dzikui-dzikui* - infant mortality) and potentially fatal spiritual curses. It also symbolically absorbs problems or the negative energies around you and spiritually "consumes" it on your behalf for good. Affected victims are symbolically "cleansed" with a fresh white egg. The egg is then "offered" to *Đɛɖɛ.* As the egg rots away, so do your problems, ill-health or negative energies "rot" away.

Figure 6.12.1 From left to right: Vodu sculptures representing Tɔgbui Salɛkɔ, Đɛɖɛ and Adzahɔlu. Woe, Keta, Volta Region (2016). Photography by Researcher.

As most of his Vodus are made up of war deities, there are over 21 Vodu sculptures installed in the premises of Tɔgbui Dzokpoto's Brékété shrine. Some of the deities in the shrine, incIude Sakpata, Sakrazɛ, Đɛɖɛzɛ, Adzahɔlũ, Ɛtɔmĩgbó, Bãngéni-Kètètsi, Bãngéni-Bagãna, Brodza, Vodu-Añyigbatɔ, Vodu-Doũdoũndoũ Asɛñ, Đɛɖɛ, Tsikpotóka, Tɔgbui Salɛkɔ, Nana Adziwónɔ, Nana Mossi, Sacrabode, Atingari, Nana Ablewa, Tɔgbui Kundé etc.

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Most of the shrines I visited also had multitudes of Vodu sculptures and spiritual installations intended to serve specific purposes. Probing the significance of having a multitude of divinities and ancestral spirits as most of them perform similar functions, Tɔgbui Dzokpoto simply explained that:

> It's a whole army, you need a multitude of them to function as an efficient army unit. They all have specific tasks they perform. Usually, every priest thinks s/he has a complete and invincible Vodu cluster until they hear of a very efficient Vodu that so and so has acquired somewhere in his/her shrine. Usually these newly acquired Vodus perform similar functions as the original Vodu*s* in the *Brékété* pantheon but they have additional "functions" (other Vodus fall short of) which make them perform exceptionally well than the other ones. The new Vodu*s* I acquired over the years, he explained, essentially serve as "back up" just in case the other Vodus need "reinforcement" in "spiritual warfare" when the need arises. Sometimes some of these malicious spirits are too powerful to be dealt with by just one Vodu. Besides malicious spirits and sorcerers are constantly "inventing new spiritual attack schemes" and modifying their modus operandi, why stand still? Why not "upgrade" your spiritual defenses too?

One of my research assistants explained that, Vodu deities work like the mechanisms of a clock. Different parts endowed with specific powers and different functions converge to make all the Vodus tick and animate in unison. All the arduous tasks and complex mechanisms are cleverly shielded from mere mortals. One only sees their manifestations in the form of blessings, security, prosperity, jurisprudence, retribution, justice, social equilibrium, sustenance of life and most importantly the constant quelling of malicious spirits. Vodu is life and life, Vodu. "Vodu is not just a religion, it is a way of life, an entire science on its own; to fully grasp the philosophy of Vodu religion, you must first understand the science of Vodu.[278] Claudine (2002) provides a fitting explanation here:

> Like member of other persuasions, those who participate in Vodu life and rituals, believe in creating harmony, in keeping a balance, in cultivating virtues such as justice, beneficence, benevolence, patience, forgiveness, and cooperation, in

[278] Personal communication with a Brékété Priest.

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> respecting elders, and instilling desirable values in children. Vodu is not a system imposed from above; it is a democratic and functioning religion, embedded in the vicissitudes of its followers' daily existence, and in their struggle for survival. In Vodu, as in African and other non-Western traditions, there is a complete unity of religion and life.

In this regard, Gyekye proposes improved approaches to developing a modern technology. He advocates a new paradigm shift on the part of African people regarding this attitude of cautiously guarding gnosis, qua scientific knowledge and esoteric practices. Gyekye (2013: 554-55) proposes that:

> The acquisition of scientific and technological outlook will in turn require a new mental orientation on the part of the African people, a new and sustained interest in science to provide a firm base for technology, a new intellectual attitude to the external world uncluttered by superstition, mysticism, and other forms of irrationality; the alleged spirituality of the African world, which was allowed in many ways to impede sustained inquiries into the world of nature, will have to come to terms with the physical world of science. Knowledge of medicinal plants, for instance, qua scientific knowledge, must be rescued from the quagmire of mysticism and brought into the glare of publicity, and its language made exoteric and accessible to many others.

Quite on the contrary, an interview with Mama Adzorhlor III,[279] the Queen Mother of Dagbamete, revealed that, cautiously guarding Vodu secrets, indigenous rituals and other esoteric practices is very necessary because knowledge of Vodu spiritual practices is very dangerous to the ill-trained or the uninitiated. She also expressed her worry and the fear of a proliferation of centuries-old esoteric practices in the public domain, which have for generations been preserved and limited to certain priestly class, families, lineages, clans, nobility and royalty. Mama Adzorhlor III notes that:

> In the past Vodu spiritual practices permeated all areas of life and our very livelihoods. Vodu oracles were consulted before waging wars. Vodu was also employed as a means of protection during the frenzy battles of conquest, domination and subjugation. Powerful Vodus were employed in devising strategies to vanquish enemy forces during war. We simply didn't find the need to

[279] Personal interraction with Mama Adzorhlor III (Interview: Saturday, 29th, October, 2016, Dagbamete, Ghana)

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> let such valuable secrets enter the public domain let alone exchange such knowledge with our neighbours or enemies. We're afraid they will use it against us, should such delicate information reach them.

Slogar also speaks of the secrecy behind esoteric meanings of the nsibidi script. He notes that:

> The history of nsibidi remains subject to speculation, however, in part, because of the secrecy maintained by its most prominent custodian, the men's Leopard Society, whose members are forbidden to discuss the full meanings of nsibidi with outsiders […] while some aspects of nsibidi are public knowledge and widely recognized, its deeper, more esoteric meanings are often kept secret by the various local societies that employ it.[280]

Guarding Vodu secrets from the public is applicable to the shielded mystical practices of Jewish Kabbalah and other mystical customs. The practice is everywhere and there is a rationale behind the secrecy of these centuries-old traditions, artforms and practices. Anlo-Ewe Vodu is certainly not an exclusion. As in the case of Haiti, Vodu practice, art and aesthetics have been transported across the Atlantic and have been firmly established in Afro-Caribbean, West Indian and Latin American culture as survivals of African religion, particularly the Candomble Nago in Brazil, (with close affinity to the Yoruba Orisa). Candomble (a Portuguese term for Afro-Brazilian religion) denotes the large body of ritual practices brought to Brazil by enslaved Africans and in current usage "includes the ideological corpus of the group—its myths, belief system, worldview, cosmology, values, rituals, and ethics" (Omari, 1994:135-39).[281]

An equally vital dimension to the discussions surrounding Vodu secrecy, is also the issue of intellectual property or sacred information reaching the 'wrong hands' or untrained minds

[280] See Christopher Lawrence Slogar. Iconography and Continuity. In West Africa: Calabar Terracottas and the Arts of The Cross-River Region of Nigeria/Cameroon. Unpublished PhD, Thesis. University of Maryland, 2005, pp.4-7.

[281] The paradox here is that, whereas these religious practices of African origin have recovered extensive scholarly attention, Anlo-Ewe Vodu—in all its manifestations and expressions has quite not received detailed attention and documentation.

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(concerning Gyekye's recommendation). Landry (2013) has outlined some repurcussions and concerns raised during his field studies for his PhD thesis on Vodu tourism in Benin:

> Local fears that "white people" will improve on *Vodún*, or that "white people" may take *Vodún's* secrets and turn them against the progenitors of the religion, are felt by many Béninois I encountered. Indeed, many of my informants spoke of *Vodún* as their "last real weapon" that they could use to fight off a "foreign invasion." Sadly, many local people imagine foreign visitors to be smarter, richer, and more focused on the future. [282]

Despite these concerns, tourists and researchers who venture into Vodu to tap esoteric wisdom hold divergent views which leads to the impression that access to Vodu powers should be "given to anyone who seeks it." Infact, Landy (2013) has affirmed that tourists are trooping to Benin in their ever-increasing numbers to pay as much as $10,000 USD to get "intiated" into various Vodu orders. Quite on the contrary though, some Vodu priests have affirmed that most of these tourists are yet to see the inner sanctum of a real "Vodu initiation chamber". In an informal interview on this particular issue with renowned Ghanaian Art Professor Ablade Glover, he stated that:

> If you want people to make esoteric knowledge free and open to the public, intellectual property negotiations must first be made with the custodians of the esoteric knowledge system in question. They should be immeasurably compensated financially for the value of the information they agree to let into the public domain because it is their intellectual property which has been passed down from generation to generation.[283]

The metaphysical properties and transformative power of *amma* (herbs), especially in the cornucopia of Vodu psychic chemistry cannot be over-emphasized. Natural chemical compounds

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[282] For discussions on Vodu and secrecy see. Timothy R Landry. When Secrecy Goes Global: Vodún, Tourism, and the Politics of Knowing in Bénin, West Africa. Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Illinois, 2013, p.116.

[283]Personal communication with Prof. Ablade Glover at Artist Alliance Gallery, Labadi, Accra (November, 2016)

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and the secrets of harnessing psychic energies for the purposes of elevating the human soul and spiritual enlightenment was exclusively reserved for the priestly class, kings, queens, royals, warriors and important social dignitaries. In a similar discussion about adherents of the powerful anti-witchcraft/warrior god, Koku, Muller et al. (1999) notes that:

> The ethnic variety of the inhabitants of Ewe settlements ensures that Koku's characteristics are made up of traditions and ideas of the most varied origin. Like all "medicine cults" he draws his special power from a combination of active substances, which are collected at quite specific places, frequently in cemeteries. Which of the substances used in which combination for what purpose remains a secret of the cult.[284]

Jenkins (2015) in her research on the cluster of Adzima war deities in Klikor, also indicated in her findings that:

> symbolic elements associated with the procession to the tagba are also linked to "war", particularly through an understanding of the deity being powerful in relation to danger. As I indicated previously, this is the only time of year that the priest is allowed to wear a shirt, which has been described to me as a shirt of "spiritual protection" (dagbawo). One elder explained it in these terms: "[it is] the god's shirt...if you wear that shirt, and they fired a gun, it would not touch you. The bullets would pass another way. If they raise a cutlass at you, no. It is not an ordinary shirt, it is power".[285]

[284] See Klaus E. Müller and Ute Ritz Müller. *Soul of Africa: Magical Rites and Traditions*. Maveville: Imprimerie Jean Lamour, 1999, p.154.

[285] Julie A. Jenkins .'Wives of the Gods': Debating Fiasidi and the Politics of Meaning. Unpublished PhD.Thesis, University of Sussex, 2005, p.108.

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Figure 6.12.2 Tɔgbui Agagli Asipodi (left) and Fianugɔ Womegbeamewo (Right), both Vodu Priests of Kli-Adzima Shrine, Klikor, Volta Region (2016). Photography by Researcher.

Remnants of powerful war oracles can still be found in Kete Krachi and other parts of the Volta Region till date. Kete Krachi was home to the famous shrine and its oracle, known as the Dente Bosomfo, regarded as a successful war oracle in the sub-region. Threatened by the Bosomfo's influence, the Germans captured and executed him in 1894, destroying his shrine and exiling most of his entourage. [286]Relly Beard (1863) speaks of how priests were instantly hanged for trying to defend innocent women against French brutality in Haiti.[287] This subversive religious terrorism has "progressed" into present-day Haiti as Hurbon (1995) has captured:

> The Catholic Church, strongly aided by the government and the bourgeoisie, threw itself into a vast national crusade called "Anti-Superstitious Campaign" or the

[286] Meera Venkatachalam (2012). Between the Devil and The Cross: Religion, Slavery, and The Making of Anlo-Ewe. In *Journal of African History*, (53), Cambridge, Cambridge Press, pp.56-57.

[287] James Relly Beard. *Toussaint L'overture: Biography and Autobiography*. Boston: James Redpath Publisher, 1863, p.52.

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> "Campaign of Rejections" which aimed to force every Voduist to reject, by oath, each belief and practice of Vodu. The campaign took on the trappings of a veritable inquisition, and enabled the sacking of Vodu temples, the destruction by fire of cult objects, arrest of Vodu priests and initiates, and public denunciations.[288]

In the Volta Region, although the British monitored religious groups closely, they allowed the Krachi people to resurrect Dente worship, believing that suppressed religious groups surreptitiously worked to the detriment of colonial authority.[289] However, the British adopted a rather "suspicious" attitude towards religious groups in Igboland under British colonial rule. Harneit-Sievers (2006:73) captured an episode here:

> The district commissioner saw the Ogbunorie as a security threat dangerous enough to necessitate its destruction by a military "escort" that was "visiting" towns in the area, and to arrest twelve of its priests and "heralds." […] From time to time, reports about "jujus" continued to concern the British administration even after the First World War. The Haaba A[w]gulu (also called "Abala," "Agbala," or "Raba Juju" in the colonial files) in the Obe quarter of Agulu (south of Awka), originally destroyed in 1906, was proscribed and destroyed for a second time in 1921, after it had begun to exercise judicial powers and act as an "appeal" institution overriding native court decisions. [290]

The Haitians were also known to invoke Vodus and oracles in times of war. Historically, at Bois Caïman, Vodu inspired Haitians to rebel against the French for their freedom, and more recently Vodu priests and priestesses have served as healers, counselors, and mediators between rival families.[291] Indeed, the Vodus played a very instrumental role in the Haitian revolution. They were ever faithful to the Haitians and when they resorted to them (Vodu war oracles) during the Haitian revolution. After Toussaint's imprisonment in France, Dessalines led his fellow war generals and

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[288]See Laennec Hurbon. American Fantasy and Haitian Vodou in *Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou*. Donald J. Cosentino (Ed.), Chai Wan: South Sea International Press Ltd, 1995, p.190.

[289] Meera Venkatachalam. Between The Devil and The Cross: Religion, Slavery, and The Making of Anlo-Ewe. In *Journal of African History*, 53(1), Cambridge, Cambridge Press, 2012, p.57.

[290]See Axel Harneit-Sievers. *Constructions of Belonging Igbo Communities and the Nigerian State in The Twentieth Century.* University of Rochester Press: Rochester, 2006, p.73.

[291] See Felix Germain. The Earthquake, the Missionaries, and the Future of Vodou. In *Journal of Black Studies,* 42(2), The Earthquake of 2010: The Politics of a Natural Disaster, pp. 247-263.

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together with a vengeful army, unleashed a devastating war against French colonial rule with one goal in mind—white extermination. Accounts of the Bois Caiman is captured in Haiti's national history where Boukman Dutty, Cécile Fatima, a Vodu priestess and freedom fighters made the sacred pact with a Vodu deity (Erzuile Dantor) during a ceremony, in hopes of vanquishing the French army. The ceremony remains a seminal event in the minds of many Haitians.[292]To this day, the decisiveness of battle and the devastating defeat of the French has left many Western writers dumbfounded, subsequently spreading ugly rumours suggesting the notion that the Haitian freedom fighters had "signed a pact with the Devil". Such bizarre propositions reverberate in recent discussions as captured in the text below:

> It is a matter of well-documented historical fact that the nation of Haiti was dedicated to Satan 200 years ago. On August 14, 1791, a group of houngans (voodoo priests), led by a former slave houngan named Boukman, made a pact with the Devil at a place called Bois-Caiman. All present vowed to exterminate all of the white Frenchmen on the island. They sacrificed a black pig in a voodoo ritual at which hundreds of slaves drank the pig's blood. In this ritual, Boukman asked Satan for his help in liberating Haiti from the French. In exchange, the voodoo priests offered to give the country to Satan for 200 years and swore to serve him. On January 1, 1804, the nation of Haiti was born and thus began a new demonic tyranny.[293]

Such harsh pronouncements are inconsistent with the ideological roots and historical sensitivities of sacred Vodu practices. In short, the fear of Vodu religion is deeply rooted in some of these childish tales merely meant to create a negative perception of a very respectable religion. Such is the case in the Volta Region and Ghana at large, mainly due to the influence of Christianity as well as brainwashing by colonial/neo-colonial education.

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[292] See Paul C. Mocombe (2016): The Anti-dialectical Signification of Erzulie Danthor and Bois Caiman of the Haitian Revolution, African Identities, DOI: 10.1080/14725843.2016.1143803

[293] See https://redtory.wordpress.com/2010/01/13/haiti's-"devil-pact"-explained/ (Accessed on 25/08/2017)

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6.5 Concluding Remarks

This chapter concludes with an emphasis on the distinctiveness of Ewe Vodu aesthetics with parallels drawn from distant religious traditions from the ancient world and from proximate Akan culture. Divergent views and insights were extracted from science, medicine, art therapy and evolutionary psychology to generate a deeper understanding of the colour symbolism in Vodu aesthetics and the spiritual psychology that influences it. Another important area captured in this chapter is the significance of how Vodu aesthetics is extensively incorporated into healing practices and how Vodu therapeutic aesthetics contributes to the general emotional and psychological well-being of Vodu devotees in the realms of spiritual warfare. High resolution photographs based on field studies and extended participant observation complemented the analysis of the findings provided in this chapter. All the photographs and deeper insights highlighted in this chapter give us a clearer picture of how nothing about the spiritual aesthetics of Ewe Vodu is left to chance or some contrived principles or aesthetic "standards" formulated by a single individual or "intellectual authority". Vodu aesthetics is a communal one each and every member of the community shares primarily with the guidance of the deities and ancestors. The most significant aspect of this chapter is how Vodu aesthetics has been discussed and situated in the context of Ewe sociology as well as the tangible and intangible aspects of Ewe cultural practices.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS: PART 4

Towards Redefining Ewe Vodu Aesthetics

7.1 Introduction

This chapter concludes the discussion on appraising Vodu art through the aesthetic triad and paves way for deeper discussions and understanding of African aesthetic constructs. The discussions also address how appreciating African art through the lens of Eurocentric Western aesthetic constructs hampers the genuine aesthetic experience. The analysis has been broken down into the most basic philosophical dialogues with various view points from both Western and African academic courts. Other related issues include the relationships between neo-colonial Western ideologies and Ewe Vodu socio-linguistics. How does this relationship obscure the rich and diverse esoteric etymologies of Vodu nomenclature which serve as an entry point in grasping the basic concepts of Vodu philosophy?

7.2 On Western Aesthetic "Standards" and Critical Perspectives of Ewe Vodu Aesthetics

All the aesthetic considerations and contributions to the discussion in the previous chapters give researchers an idea of how the "tastes" and "aesthetic standards" of early Western "anthropologists" and contemporary "researchers" on religious studies still undermine all these understudied aspects of Vodu aesthetics. The foundations of such "tastes" were shaped by early European writers who mainly focused on the "exotic" forms or what they deemed as "fetish" in Vodu religion. Another reason was the incessant need to "critique" or "appraise" African artworks from biased aesthetic standards and anachronistic European theoretical notions of art (such as "beauty", "order", "balance", "imitationalism", "perfection", "symmetry" etc.) In instances where

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the aesthetics of African art did not conform to such European "standards", it was merely disregarded as "impure art". In their "analysis" of "beauty" with the aim of "delineating" "aesthetic standards", analytic theorists like Henry Home, Lord Kames, William Hogarth, and Edmund Burke set forth to condense beauty into a series of attributes and formal properties. Discussing aesthetic considerations, philosopher Denis Dutton identified seven universal signatures in human aesthetics:

> (1) ***Expertise or virtuosity*** - Technical artistic skills are cultivated, recognized, and admired; (2) ***Nonutilitarian pleasure*** - People enjoy art for art's sake, and do not demand that it keep them warm or put food on the table; (3) ***Style*** - Artistic objects and performances satisfy rules of composition that place them in a recognizable style; (4) ***Criticism*** - People make a point of judging, appreciating, and interpreting works of art. (5) ***Imitation*** - With a few important exceptions like music and abstract painting, works of art simulate experiences of the world; (6) ***Special focus*** - Art is set aside from ordinary life and made a dramatic focus of experience; (7) **Imagination** - Artists and their audiences entertain hypothetical worlds in the theater of the imagination.[294]

Dutton's *"Seven Universal Aesthetics Ideals"* builds upon ideas formulated in a medieval treatise on painting and neo-classical aesthetics written by Italian architect Leon Battista Alberti. All these aesthetic "ideals" and "standards" can subsequently be remotely traced to antiquated Greek philosophy and is most especially deeply rooted in the Aristotelian conception of "beauty":

> In his Metaphysics, Aristotle claims, the chief forms of beauty are order and symmetry and definiteness, which the mathematical sciences demonstrate to a special degree. (Aristotle 1928: 8, book 13, ch. 3, section 1078b). In Plato's Philebus, for example, Socrates assures Protarchus, "measure and commensurability emerge always as what constitute finest and excellence" (Plato 1997:46e, p.454).[295]

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[294] See Dennis Dutton, in Eugene Goodheart. *Darwinian Misadventures in the Humanities*, London: Transaction Publishers. 2009, p.14.

[295] See David Feeney. *Toward an Aesthetics of Blindness: An Interdisciplinary Response to Synge, Yeats, and Friel (New Studies in Aesthetics)*, Peter Lang Inc., International Academic Publishers, 2007, p.213.

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It has already been established in the preceding chapters, that Europeans who first encountered African art treated it as the "other", a "subsidiary", an "adopted child of European art" and not a self-consistent creation. They looked at it solely against a backdrop of European aesthetic theory, not against the spiritual setting from which it had sprung. European painters, sculptors, and critics in the first two decades of the 20th century were constantly on the lookout for examples of primitive [*sic*] art that did not conform to naturalistic convention which had dominated the art of their continent for more than two thousand years.[296] Thus, in comparison to Western art, especially ancient Greek sculpture, much "African sculpture was considered ugly, the antithesis of beautiful by early observers". Such an initial reaction to African sculpture is still felt today by many Westerners who find the art forms to be stiff and lifeless, with oversized body parts and features that are treated in a stylized way and with compact, unnaturalistic proportions. These first impressions, should be "tempered with some tolerance until the aesthetics and the meanings become more familiar" [297]

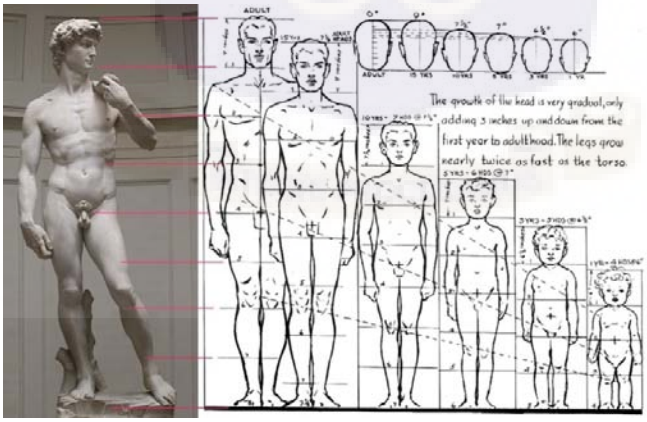

Figure 7.1 Michaelangelo's David marble statue juxtaposed by Andrew Loomis' illustration of the head length theory. These proportions apparently form the widely accepted "standards" for the

[296] See Paul Radin. *African Folktales and Sculpture.* New York: Pantheon Books Inc, 1952, p.324

[297] Seiber and Wlaker (1987:11-14) cited in Judith Perani and Fred T. Smith. *The Visual Arts of Africa: Gender, Power and Life Cycle in Africa,* Pearson Publishers. Prentice Hall. 1998 p.7.

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constructive human anatomy in figure drawing and sculpture. The scale assumes that the child will grow to be an ideal adult of eight head units.[298]

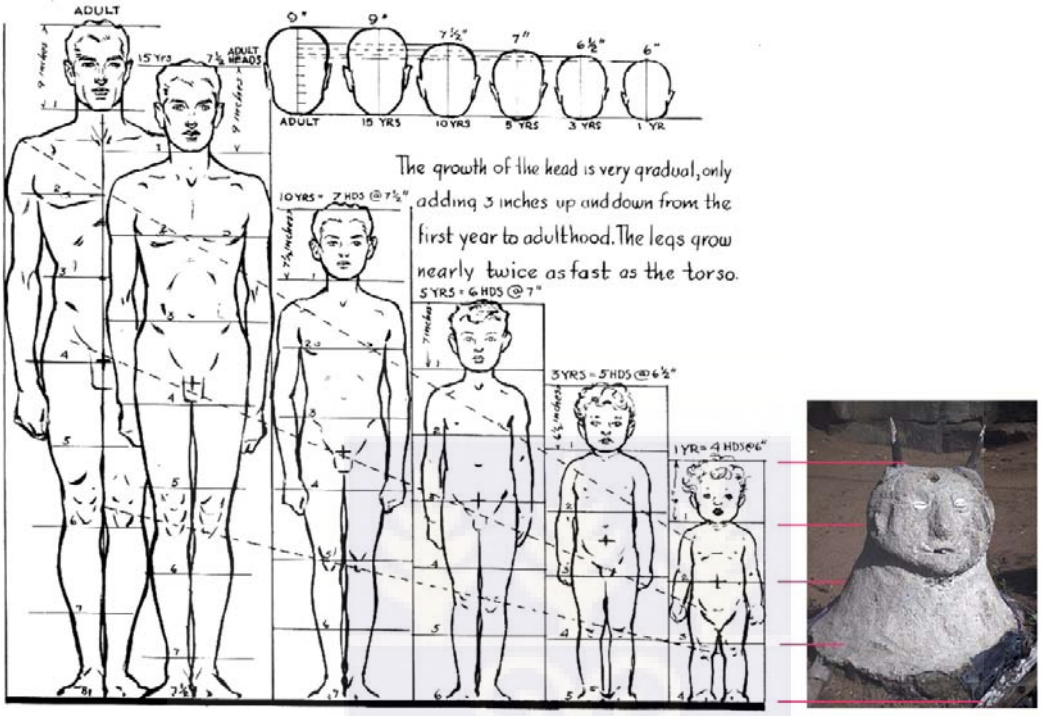

Figure 7.2 Ɛtɔrmigbo (sculpture) juxtaposed by Loomis' illustration of head length theory. Woe, Keta, Volta Region (2016). Photography of sculpture by Researcher

Such established perceptions and Western aesthetic frameworks still influenced how African art is still being "documented", "criticized" and "appreciated" by Europeans. The "new critics" still deem African art as "pre-modern", "fetish" or "inferior representations" of the human form due to aesthetic ignorance and lack of cultural awareness:

> The idea that African art is primitive [*sic*] builds on the idea that realism in art is superior to nonrealism or abstraction and that fine arts is superior to applied art. […] The non-realism of medieval painting was perceived as a lack; these artists had not yet learnt the art of perspective or the effects of light. They painted as they did because they did not know any better. When this criterion for value judgment was applied to African art at the first moment of the European colonisation in late

[298]See Andrew Loomis. *Figure Drawing for all its Worth: A Book of Fundamentals for an Artistic Career,* p.29. (Year and publisher's information unvailable) Source of David's Statue: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_(Michelangelo) (Accessed on 23/07/2017)

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> eighteenth and early twentieth centuries, it suffered the same fate: it was considered primitive [*sic*], with connotations of childishness.[299]

Such misinformed views were deeply influenced by what philosophers of art refer to as the "imitation theory". Kandinsky (2008:22) addresses this particular issue at length in his art manifesto on spiritual art:

> Every work of art is the child of its age and, in many cases, the mother of our emotions. It follows that each period of culture produces an art of its own which can never be repeated. Efforts to revive the art-principles of the past will at best produce an art that is still-born. It is impossible for us to live and feel, as did the ancient Greeks. In the same way those who strive to follow the Greek methods in sculpture achieve only a similarity of form, the work remaining soulless for all time. Such imitation is mere aping.[300]

Twentieth century philosopher, Morris Weitz, similarly advocated the abandonment of art definitions and proposed that philosophers pay attention to the roles and specific ideas artworks actually represent.[301] Thus, the assessment of art comes down to what Braembussche (2009) terms "significant form". All other criteria are irrelevant. Only significant form can explain the very peculiar nature of the aesthetic experience. It embodies the autonomy of the artwork. From the principal idea, it follows, firstly, that, from a purely aesthetic viewpoint, imitation is irrelevant. The similarity between the visual artwork and "reality" is entirely unimportant.[302] Braembussche (2009:75) further stresses the essence of how the "significant form" aides in achieving an aesthetic experience by highlighting this aesthetic paradox:

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[299] See Petersen, Kirsten Holst, Art, Power and Aesthetics: A discussion of Ablade Glover's township paintings, Kunapipi, 34(2), 2012, p.71.

[300] See Wassily Kandinsky. *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, Auckland: The Floating Press, 2008, p.22.

[301] See Morris Weitz, "The Role of Theory in Aesthetics,". In *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism,* XV, 1956, 27-35.

[302] See Antoon Van den Braembussche. *Thinking Art: An Introduction to Philosophy of Art.* Brussels: Springer Science + Business Media B.V. 2009*,* pp.70-71.

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> How could a twentieth century West European be aesthetically enraptured by African sculpture if not through the experience of significant form? The fact, Bell argued that we know nothing about the social, religious or magical backgrounds of these sculptures and yet are moved aesthetically by them, only goes to prove that the essence of art is "significant form".

Having outlined all these general assumptions and disparities, it is important to also refer to the aesthetic reflections of other Greek philosophers on classical Greek art. Some Greek philosophers actually denounced the "frivolousness" of "realism", "perfection", "representation", "mimicry" and the "imitative arts". For instance, Plato had very little admiration for idealism, illusionism and mimicry in painting. He found such aesthetic "ideals" rather irritating, because he felt it was untruthful and aimed at deceitful appearance, based on proportions that may have appeared to be beautiful but which in fact were not. [303] The imitation theory, according to Braembussche (2009), is often associated with the concept of "mimesis", a Greek word that originally meant "imitation", "representation" or "copy", specifically of nature.[304] Quite often, "skill deficiency" has been pointed as a primary "indicator" of "artistic flaw" in the African creative spirit. This is perhaps what Holst cites in his discussion as "connotations of childishness". This is equally a misnomer and does not necessarily imply that the African artist, and by extension the Vodu artist, is "inept" or has completely "failed" in his execution of "capturing" the human or natural form "proportionately". Rather, aesthetic emphasis is directed towards certain prominent features. For instance, the head is seen as the seat of wisdom. The practice of giving figures large heads as is common in Ewe Vodu art forms (sculptures, figurines etc.), is often attributed to the fact that the African regarded the head as the seat not only of intellect but also of the emotions. The sculptor

[303] See Antoon Van den Braembussche. *Thinking Art:An Introduction to Philosophy of Art.* Brussels: Springer Science + Business Media B.V., 2009, pp.19 -20.

[304]Ibid. p.16.

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stressed its importance by exaggerating its size (Dogbe, 1989 :14). Analyzing African sculptures, Underwood equally observed that:

> The head, regarded as the seat of all human wisdom, is a symbol the meaning of which, in Europe, belongs to the heart. There are a few exceptions to this general rule where the proportions of the heads to the bodies are in the ratio of 1:5 for example in the Female Figure, and even 1:12 as in the Staff, Mbuun,[305]

Relatedly, Fernandez (1966:56), further expands our understanding of African aesthetic canons and principles in relation to carved human figures when he noted that the Fang recognize well enough that the proportions of these statues are not the proportions of living men—that what the statue represents is not necessarily the truth, physically speaking, of a human body but a vital truth about human beings, that they keep opposites in balance.[306] Discussing the case of highly representational Benin and Ife bronze works, Abraham (1992) observed that:

> […] when they do depict a full figure, the body tends to be truncated and the head made disproportionately large. Severed heads and stunted torsos would indeed be grotesque if intended to be decorative. A clue to their real purpose should instead be sought in the fact that many African societies, and certainly the Kwa-speaking, which include Benin, do associate a spiritual factor with the human head […] [307]

Similarly, Kandinsky drew the following conclusion:

> There are, of course, many people who deny that Primitive Art [*sic*] had an inner meaning or, rather, that what is called "archaic expression" was dictated by anything but ignorance of representative methods and defective materials. Such people are numbered among the bitterest opponents of Post-Impressionism, and indeed it is difficult to see how they could be otherwise.[308] […] All this does not

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[305] Leon Underwood cited by Buckner Komlar Dogbe in The Influence of African Sculpture on British Art, 1910-1930. Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of St. Andrews,1989, p.14.

[306] See James W. Fernandez. Principles of Opposition and Vitality in Fang Aesthetics. In *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 25 (1), 1966, pp. 53-64.

[307]See William E. Abraham. Sources of African Identities. In *Person and Community: Ghanaian Philosophical Studies, Vol. 1,* Kwasi Wiredu and Kwame Gyekye. (Eds.), Washington D.C., Cardinal Station, 1992, p.50.

[308] See Wassily Kandinsky. *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, Auckland: The Floating Press, 2008, p.8-11.

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> presume to say that the "symbolist" school of art is necessarily nobler than the "naturalist." I am making no comparison, only a distinction. When the difference in aim is fully realized, the Primitives [*sic*] can no longer be condemned as incompetent, nor the moderns as lunatics, for such a condemnation is made from a wrong point of view. Judgement must be passed, not on the failure to achieve "naturalism" but on the failure to express the inner meaning.

It must be emphasized here that, abstract aesthetic concepts embedded in African art does not fully exemplify the rich diversity of the varied aesthetic canons employed in creating artworks. In fact, the abstract human proportions employed in sculpting Legba is not entirely representative of all African sculptures which attempt to capture the human form. African artists had a thorough understanding of accurate anatomical proportions and employed sophisticated bronze-casting techniques in capturing the anatomically proportionate human form. The Europeans who first encountered realistic life-sized Benin bronze sculptures attributed such remarkable artistic achievements to "Portuguese influences". The "natives" were deemed as "savages," and their creative productions hitherto had held no interest for Europe which perceived African artworks as visible evidence of their "barbarism". To quote from Radin (1952):

> When the bronzes from Benin appeared, of which Luschan wrote, "Celline himself could not have made better casts, nor anyone else before or since to present day," an explanation had to be found. It could not suppose that unenlightened savages [*sic*] had produced such remarkable examples of bronze-casting without aid. Finally, the representation of certain figures in Portuguese garb on some of the plaques suggested that the method of bronze-casting had been imported by the Portuguese on their first visit to the capital, in the fiftheenth century. To bear out the theory, one English researcher managed to discover a tradition, allegedly local, to the effect that one Ahammangiwa, a member of the first party of white men to set foot in Benin, in the reign of Oba Esigie, introduced bronze-casting. This theory, however, has now been generally abandoned. There is no evidence that the Portuguese had any such skill to communicate. And in the light of a better knowledge of African history, an analysis of the stylistic features of Benin art shows it to be fundamentally negroid:[309]

[309] See Paul Radin. *African Folktales and Sculpture.* New York: Pantheon Books Inc, 1952, pp.330-331.

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Figure 7.2.1 Legba sculpture (left) paired with Benin Bronze sculptures (right). [310]

Reflecting on the general ideas and philosophical perspectives presented so far, only leads us to deduce that equating abstraction in African art to skill deficiency or lack of aesthetic appeal is merely a "ludicrous enterprise". Apart from artists, trained art critics and aestheticians, some discerning scholars, curators and art collectors have developed renewed approaches to appreciating African art. In his contribution to the discourse on African art, Henry Moore outlines his inspiration from exhibits in the British Museum (now known as Museum of Mankind) as follows:

> I was particularly interested in the African and Pacific sculptures and felt that "primitive" was a misleading description of them, suggesting crudeness and incompetence. It was obvious to me that these artists were not trying—and failing—to represent the human form naturalistically, but that they had definite traditions of their own (British Museum Publications, 1981, p.11)[311]

[310] From left to right: Mark Walker, grandson of Capt. Herbert Walker, posees with a life size bronze statue outside the palace of the Oba (king) of Benin, now in Edo State, Nigeria. In 2014 he returned Benin Kingdom bronzes looted during the 1897 Benin Punitive Expedition. The stolen Benin bronze works Britain returned to Nigeria. For source of images, refer to: https://emotan.wordpress.com/2015/11/03/old-benin-kingdom-stolen-brass-statues-returned-after-over-a-century/. (Accessed 30/08/2018). See also https://urbanintellectuals.com/britain-returns-stolen-treasures-nigeria-117-years/ (Accessed 30/08/2018).

[311] See Ben Burt. *What is African Art? Support for Teachers.* The British Museum, London. (publication details unavailable).

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At this point, I go back to Rosenthal's work which, paradoxically, has gradually assumed "intellectual authority" and quite often serves as an 'entry point' for some Western researchers into the realms of Gorovodu. Her misleading notions and pronouncements have led a few other Western scholars to follow suit as captured in Earle Strange's monograph below:

> I have to profess near total ignorance of the main subject of the this [sic] paper, the cult of Tɔgbui Nyigbla, before I began my research, and I have to confess near total ignorance as of this moment. Because of an excellent **book by Judy Rosenthal called, Possession, Ecstasy and Law in Ewe Voodoo,**[312] I was not nearly as ignorant about the subject of the second portion of this paper, Gorodovu, but still only had any knowledge of it through the lens of another American anthropologist.[313]

As an "authoritative documentation" on Gorovodu spirituality, Rosenthal's work remains critically unchallenged. Europeans wrote a lot of lies and propaganda in their voyage texts and accounts about African culture; admittedly some Europeans, might be probably more "knowledgeable" than others in some African religions and indigenous practices.[314] And for that matter, contemporary anthropological publications by Europeans might seem "reliable" to other researchers today. But, using Rosenthal's work as a kind of "authoritative entry point" into the realms of Gorovodu, to document it or thoroughly understand Vodu matters, is indeed problematic. It is not surprising that Earle Strange's monograph is littered with the same ambiguous terms ("fetish", "god-object") from Rosenthal's work. A classic case of confirmation bias. Simply because a "charismatic" figure wrote it, and it "proved" to be "right" on several occasions, it was

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[312] In this same book, Rosenthal actually stresses "how difficult it is to make a synthesis of material, because the culture is not unified. The south is a nightmare for an ethnographer". See Judy Rosenthal. *Possession, Ecstasy, and Law in Ewe Voodoo*, Virginia: University Press of Virginia, 1998, p.46.

[313] See Stuart Earle Strange. The Strangers From the North and Grandfather From the East: Mimesis, Alterity and Divinity in Afife Ewe Life, p. ii. (Year, publishers and place of publication unavailable).

[314]See http://accradotaltradio.com/2017/02/click-bait-journalism-in-ghana-and-the-problem-of-cultural-erasure/ (Accessed on 08/10/2017)

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not subjected to critical academic scrutiny.

There are several instances where "researchers" have ignorantly mistranslated indigenous practices and terms into English by coining ridiculous labels when unable to find an appropriate linguistic equivalent. Some non-Western practices are better understood through their indigenous names. Thus, a whole new generation of Western anthropologists are following in the academic path of regurgitating colonial theories of African art, thereby furthering a new wave of Eurocentric anthropological scholarship. Eurocentric bias has been normalized and institutionalized in anthropological scholarship of non-European societies, or what they prefer to call "primitive societies". Presenting renewed concepts in contrarian analysis and the art of critical decision making, Roberto provides the following perspectives:

> We should engage in contrarian analysis, we need to actually assign people to make counter arguments to poke holes in our hypothesis, to poke holes in our pre-existing beliefs, to expose where our pre-existing assumptions may not be valid. And finally, they say we need to be careful about our reliance on the experts in our organizations. Often, we defer rather blindly to the experts. We trust their judgments, we put a great deal of faith in their judgments but we shouldn't take their word for it. They may be too wordy to their existing beliefs so we need to probe their decision process and the logic of those experts, not simply relying on their expertise because they happen to have a lot of experience on the matter, because they happen to have been right on many occasions in the past.[315]

Further compounding the delicate politics at the heart of the controversial subject matter is how some of these Western researchers overgeneralize issues they claim to "observe" and "document" in the field. For instance, Dietrich, a researcher implores her readers to engage in a series of imaginative exercises to visualize the "kind of place her research was conducted":

> Imagine a place where dirt cakes the daily-swept floors and everything must be

[315] See Michael A. Roberto Art of Critical Decision Making. *In the Great Courses: European Thought and Culture in the 20th Century.* (Audio Lecture) See also http://www.thegreatcourses.com/courses/art-of-critical-decision-making.html Accessed on (13/09/2017)

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> hand washed; and where families without running water must carry heavy jugs from parasite-infested lagoons or communal water spigots, sometimes for distances up to a mile, causing arthritis and back aches for mothers and their young. Imagine a place where the goat you see chewing on the trash may become your afternoon meal; where food is cooked over hot kilns, outdoor pots, or campfire stoves; and where malaria and tuberculosis are prevalent, motorcycle accidents are increasing, and early deaths are more commonly becoming a way of life. [316]

In this photographic age, Dietrich further extends this "imaginative exercise" and despite all these 'vivid' descriptions, she failed to produce valid statistics and photographic evidence to support some of these instances she purports to have "observed in the field". Indeed, Dietrich might have "observed" instances of some of the episodes she reports in her thesis but it is by no way representative of the entire region where she conducted her studies. Such distortions within the courts of the Euro-Western academies should give African scholars a cue to pause and critically reflect. Some of these spurious 'academic' formulations and problematic approaches in the preceding discussions to modern approaches to anthropological scholarship led scholars like Gbolonyo to question how many Western researchers bring back their theses for the village folks to read? He further notes:

> It is worth noting that a few non-African scholars try to engage with scholarly works of African scholars and thereby not only augment their research findings but also give voice to the indigenes and let Africans speak for themselves. Unfortunately, many other Euro-American researchers and scholars (for reasons I cannot explain) blatantly ignore scholarly works by African scholars as Prof Akin Euba (one of the prominent scholars of African culture) rightly pointed out in a speech he delivered at SEM in Atlanta, GA (see also Euba 2008). They rather prefer and often cite works of non-Africans and thereby continue to perpetuate the very subjectivity and misrepresentation that underlies those works. How far and how long can some researchers go to deny Africans of what they think their concepts and beliefs are?[317]

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[316] Christina M. Dietrich. Spirit Messengers, Divine Encounters: Practitioner Inhabitants of the Anlo-Ewe Spirit World. Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of California, 2012, p.8.

[317] See Justice Stephen Kofi Gbolonyo. Indigenous Knowledge and Cultural Values in Ewe Musical Practice: Their Traditional Roles and Place in Modern Society. Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Pittsburg, 2009, p.218.

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Admittedly, this problem is also prevalent within the Africana academic circles. We must first direct this criticism to some African scholars who are equally guilty of ignoring essential works by their African colleagues in their publications. As researchers, reporters, investigators, critics and analysts, it is important that African scholars recognize the privilege and the power relations it affords, when they write about subjects and communities with marginalized knowledge systems. For in the end, what is written ends up becoming history more than what is spoken.[318]In a similar effort, Meyer (2002) advocates fresh perspectives, anthropological paradigm shifts, practical approaches and methodologies for trans-disciplinary research on religion. She stresses that:

> The point is to grasp the specific dynamics of power that constitute and 'normalize' the academic study of religion within historically and socially specific formations, showing how ways of studying religion reflect ways of perceiving the world at large. We need to spotlight biases, blind spots and inadequacies in these established and perhaps all-too-familiar ways, enabling us to imagine new, alternative directions for our work. In my present environment in the humanities and with my own background in the anthropology of religion I feel well positioned to contribute to making this happen. [319]

Based on all these critical perspectives, it is quite difficult to validate the 'logic' with which some Western researchers designate significant aspects of vodu as "fetish". A common case would be the labeling of Vodu shrine as "fetish house", when indeed the indigenous names are boldy written in Ewe on the shrine walls, sign posts and entrances to most these shrines. As such, Rosenthal's usage of derogatory terms like "fetish house", "fetish child", "fetish shrine", "fetish priest", and other ambiguous terms like "god-object" are highly disconcerting on scholarly grounds. Apart from the earlier cited "descriptions", Rosenthal (1999) makes further scandalous claims:

- 'Vodu and tro …mean deity, spirit, or god-object, as does fetish, from fetico (made thing), the fifteenth-century Portuguese designation, **which has been co-**

[318]See http://accradotaltradio.com/2017/02/click-bait-journalism-in-ghana-and-the-problem-of-cultural-erasure/(Accessed on 08/10/2017)

[319]See Birgit Meyer. *Mediation and the Genesis of Presence: Towards a Material Approach to Religion.* Universiteit Utrecht Faculteit Geesteswetenschappen, 2012, p.10 -13.

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> **opted by Vodu worshippers and holds no pejorative connotation for them.** (1999:1)

- *fetish* (*fétiche* in Togo) —the word that was used by the first European explorers who saw and described the god-objects and the word of preference among colonial administrators—**has been fully recuperated by Vodu people.** Tro, vodu, and fetish refer to the spirit and host during possession ceremonies as well as god-objects. They can mean deity, nature spirit, divinized ancestor or slave spirit, or guardian divinities of kinds, and each term includes the god-object that is never entirely separable from the spirits themselves, the "made thing" without which the spirits are not divinized. (1999:60)

Indeed, Rosenthal's uncritical propositions did not escape the intellect of Gbolonyo, who exposed some of her distorted claims. For instance, Gbolonyo (2009: 211) draws the attention to the inconsistencies in Rosenthal's work:

> Judy Rosenthal, in her chapter "Religious Traditions of the Togo and Benin Ewe," wrote: While there are vodou orders or worshippers who at times refer to high god, and for some that would be the same as the Christian and/or Muslim God, others admit to no almighty or all-powerful creator. For many, God is 'the whole thing,' xexenu (nature, or the world). The high god, including the God of the Bible, is usually called Mawu these days, for that is the word that the missionary translators of the Bible chose, although Mawu was a vodou in times past.

Following Gbolonyo's invalidation of areas in Rosenthal's research, which undervalue and misrepresent the existence of a Supreme Being in Ewe cosmology, I will further proceed to analyse aspects of Ewe religious vocabulary she erroneously labels as "fetish". Rosenthal presents very distorted notions about certain aspects of Vodu, which must be properly examined. Her claims may sound "plausible" from her perspective, but her explanation does not quite sum up the etymology of "fetishism" and the real issues surrounding its problematic intellectual developments. The logic used in supporting her claims and explanations are dubious rather than informative. To begin with, 'fetish' has not been co-opted in anyway by Vodu devotees and the adherents even show strong disapproval if their deities are referred to as 'fetish'.

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Figure 7.3 Du-Legba Shrine, Alakple (2017). Photography by Researcher.

The evidence is everywhere in the villages, yet most of these "researchers" completely ignore them, fabricate tall tales and yet constantly fail to produce photographic evidence to support some of their preposterous claims they purport to "observe" in the field. It must be emphasized that, Vodu devotees still refer to their Deities, Priests and various Vodu art, orders and elements by their indigenous names and not 'fetish'. For instance, "made thing" or "god object"— Vodu; "fetish priest"— bokɔ or hunɔ; "fetish taslisman"—dzosasa/dzoka; "fetishist" – Mawu subɔla; "fetish chants"—gbesasa; "fetish body adornments"—dzonu; "fetish market" —Vodushime, etc.

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Figure 7.4 Entrance to Tɔgbui Hutɔ Adzimashie's Adzima Shrine. Torgodo, Volta Region (2016). Photography by Researcher.

Figure 7.5 Mama Vena Shrine, Klikor, Volta Region (2016). Photography by Researcher.

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Figure 7.6 Shrine Painting on the wall of Tɔgbui Hutɔ Adzimashie's Adzima Shrine. Torgodo, Volta Region (2017). Paintings by "Prof" 'Sampayo-Togo'. Photography by Researcher.

Figure 7.7 Sign-post leading to Hunɔ Amegashie Abinga and Tɔgbui Hutɔ Adzimashie's Adzima Shrine (2017). Photography by Researcher.

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Figure 7.8 AFƆKPA. AWU. KUKU. KPLE. TAKU. MEVAA KPƆME O. The caption literally translates as, "shoes, clothes, caps/hats, and scarfs cannot enter the shrine. In the shot is the researcher posing with Xanukplɔ, a modernist Vodu artist at Mama Vena Shrine in Klikor, Volta Region (2016). Photography by Research Assistant

Figure 7.9 A Sign-post to Tsabashi Dorkenu Shrine, Afiadenyigba Junction, Volta Region (2017). Photography by Researcher.

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Note that there is no mention of "fetish", neither is there a caption of anything insinuating the notion of "fetishism" in any of the shrine art or sign-posts leading to the shrines. "Fetish" is virtually not part of their descriptions of Vodu art or paraphanelia.

Most importantly, almost every single Vodu or priest has a unique name derived through an array of creative socio-lingustic classifications or metaphysical characteristics. This makes it extremely important to understand Vodu terms in the original language. As Gbolonyo has accurately observed, research has shown that the Ewe do not just name people, things, concepts, or places only for the sake of naming them. Socio-linguistics of Ewe names proves that they conjure a high degree of linguistic complexity and semantico-cultural significance within the society. For instance, he notes that the word Hunɔ in Ewe literally translates as – Hu (Spirit) and Nɔ (Mother) hence - 'Mother of the spirit'. Hunɔ (lit. the mother of hu spirit divinity) and Bokɔnɔ (lit. mother of bo spirit power) are some of the titles for priest and spiritual leaders irrespective of their sex.[320] In his studies on the Ewe people, Spieth notes that:

> The greatest among all these deities is *Agbasia,* namely, "Nobody puts a hot bowl on the roof; the house would burn down." His nick-names are: 1. *Agbogbo,* "something very powerful" or also "productive". 2. *Agbasia masia ɖe xɔta* (meaning see above). 3. *Gedidi,* god of the broad open plain. 4. *Getrɔ̃sia me àde dzo Agbasia mea?* Do you want to set fire to *Agabsia* this afternoon? that is do you want to excite him or spur him on?[321]

[320] Critiquing Greene's faulty conception of Mawu, Gbolonyo presents a more detailed linguistic analysis of some names of Ewe Deities in his PhD Thesis See Justice Stephen Kofi Gbolonyo. Indigenous Knowledge and Cultural Values in Ewe Musical Practice: Their Traditional Roles and Place in Modern Society. Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Pittsburg, 2009, pp. 82, 213-214.

[321] See Jacob Spieth. The Ewe People: A Study of the Ewe People in German Togo (translated by Emmanuel Tsaku, Marcellinus Edorh, Raphael Avornyo, Mary Esther Kropp Dakubu, edited by Komla Amoaku). Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2011, p.477.

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Pietz (1982) also raises similar concerns about such approaches in the criticism and revisionist discourse of "fetishism". He provides a closer textual analysis of the anthropological "Problem of Fetish". Pietz (1985), further interrogating this recurring 'problem' in anthropological scholarship, reconsiders Rattray's (1927) position of maintaining African terminologies as a justified methodology for reclaiming racist colonial-era text by translating terms like "fetish" back into African languages. Pietz dismisses "fetish" and other stigmatized terminologies in colonial/neo-colonial texts that obscure the real meaning of the spiritual practices and artworks of diverse non-Western societies.[322]

It is interesting to note that, in other religions, say the Christian tradition, in Catholicism for example, specific names are designated to all their deities, religious artworks and iconography but when it comes to Vodu religion, every significant feature of the faith is boxed into one category and tagged "fetish" when, in fact, the devotees have specific names for each deity, orders and artworks grounded in very complex metaphysical socio-linguistics. So, in Christian Catholicism, we have, say, the rosary, the chalice, crucifix, communion, statue of Christ or "Virgin" Mary, incense, stained glass etc.—every single object or artwork has a specific name. Why is spiritual reverence not accorded to sacred Vodu artworks? For instance, in Western thought, the blood-stained religious artworks of the Ewes, Fons and the nail-studded Nkisi sculpture works are regarded as "primitive" and "fetish", yet the bloody iconography of the battered Jesus Christ was not regarded by the early Christian missionaries as "fetish"? It is also worth bringing to our attention that the statue of Jesus Christ as a sculptural piece is also studded with nails—even bigger

[322] By following this same line of reasoning, my intellectual stance would coincide with views of other analytic philosophers advocating similar views regarding the arguments being raised here. See William Pietz. The Problem of Fetish. In *Anthropology and Aesthetics,* No. 9,1985*,* pp. 5-17.

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nails, yet it is "revered" and held in 'high esteem' and "holier" than African religious sculptures. It is critical to draw the connection between Christian sculptures and the notion of "idolatry" deceitfully ascribed to Vodu sculpture.

Figure 7.9.1 A set of three rusty crucifixion nails. Photography by Matt Reier, Intellectual Reserve, Inc. [323]

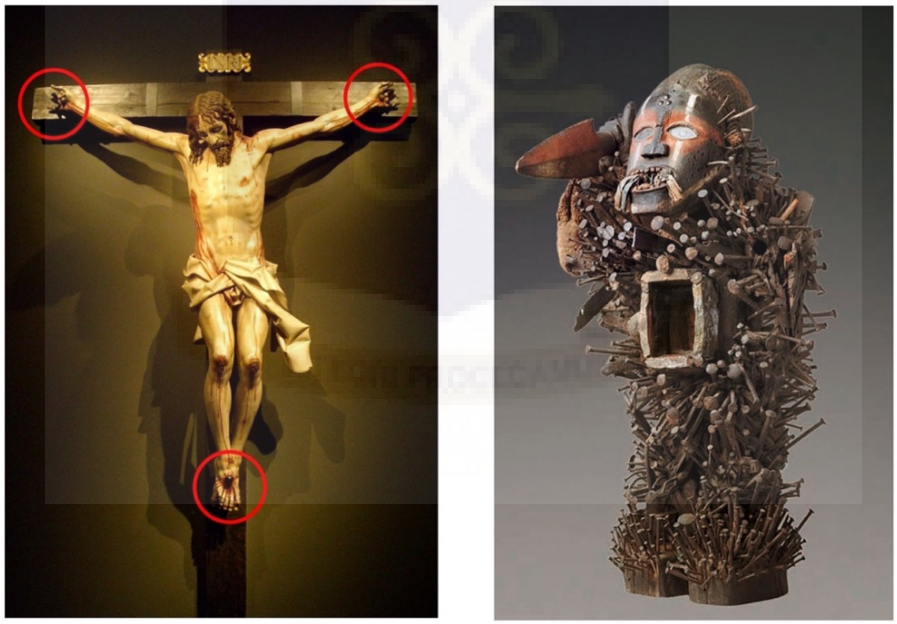

Figure 7.9.2 From left to right: A Jesus sculpture[324] juxtaposed by a Nkisi nail sculpture.[325]

[323] Source of image: https://rsc.byu.edu/archived/volume-14-number-1-2013/crucifixion-reclamation-cross (Accessed on saturday 27/05/2017)

[324] Source of image: http://padrejosemedina.blogspot.com/2014/04/catequesis-del-papa-esta-semana-nos.html (Accessed on 27/05/2017)

[325] Source of image: https://www.pinterest.com/pin/437482551298799860/ (Accessed on 27/05/2017)

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Despite the lack of discourse on the crucifixion of Jesus Christ and its surviving antiquities in modern times, Strathearn has conducted research to examine the historical significance and scriptural teachings about the crucifixion. He reviews some of the details of crucifixion in antiquity, including what pagans thought about the fact that Christians worshipped a god and how Paul counters such arguments.[326] On a very basic level, Christian crucifixion sculptures and sacred sculptures used in African religion are functionally identical. In fact, Blavatsky identifies the often-overlooked spiritual link between Judaism and Vodu in her seminal work *Occult Theocracy.* With perspectives from theosophy, Blavatsky (2012:75) supports the viewpoints advanced in this discussion by arguing that:

> Judaism would be best described as a rite or compendium of rites, for, if one lends belief to the existence of the Jewish Lawgiver, Moses, one must bear in mind that he first studied among the high initiates of Egypt, and later, became the pupil and son-in-law of black Jethro, the Ethiopian magician whom one might call the Father of Voodooism, name given to the magic practices and rites performed by the negroes.

Discussing the 'infallibility of religion', Blavatsky further questions the Church's authority on spirituality and outlines some of its heinous historic crimes. She notes that:

> Christian legends and dogmas, they say do somewhat resemble the heathen, it is true; but see, while the one teaches us the existence, powers, and attributes of an all-wise, all-good Father-God, Brahmanism gives us a multitude of minor gods, and Buddhism none whatsoever; one is fetishism and polytheism, the other bald atheism [...] And so, to gain over new converts, and keep the few already won by centuries of cunning, the Christians give the "heathen" dogmas more absurd than their own, and cheat them by adopting the habit of their native priests, and practicing the very "idolatry and fetishism" which they so disparage in the "heathens" (2012: 531).

[326]See Gaye Strathearn. Christ's Crucifixion: Reclamation of the Cross. In *Religious Educator,* 14(1), 2013, 45–57.

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Figure 7.9.3 This image visually sums up Blavatsky's observation in a certain wry cynical manner.[327]

Based on earlier discussions, if we are to follow the logic of Meyer's and Blavatsky's arguments, then the sculptural representation of the battered Jesus or the Crucifixion iconography stands on the same level with "idolatry" and, in essence, "fetish" by all intellectual standards. Blavatsky's observation is undeniably true that this has been a never-ending cycle and indeed some 'educated' Africans despise their own religion to the extent that, they would rather choose to display a portrait of the battered dead European "Jesus Christ" in their living rooms than an African mask.[328]

[327]Source of image: http://www.nairaland.com/4326181/ (Accessed on 13/04/2018)

[328] An example is my own mum who based on her slanted Christian teachings at church, was completely appalled and horrified to see that I keep a modest collection of African masks and sculptures in my room. She would not step into my room for over a year because I was very adamant to remove the masks from my wall. When I later transferred the artworks from room to a newly-built art studio, she insisted on inviting a "pastor" over to sprinkle "anointing oil" and "pray" over my entire antique collection and my paintings to "exorcise" all the "demons" and

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The term "fetish" has indeed found its way into national discourse and lexicon. However, it is widely used by some Christianized Africans to denigrate African religion, and not the Vodu worshippers as Rosenthal claims. In my best guess, Rosenthal is referring to the Christians and not the Vodu worshippers themselves as captured below by one reporter named Dagyena in one of Ghana's most widely read weekend newspapers, *The Mirror*:

> During the search, a preacher came to the scene, preaching that the people of Akwadum should repent from their "evil ways", alleging that "sin" had engulfed the community, hence the calamity. Just then, a rastaman by name Nana Afrifa Brambram, who claimed to be a fetish priest, also came around to help retrieve the body of the boy through his fetish antics.[329]

In a pamphlet in which African religious practices are analyzed through the prism of Christianity, Achampong-Baifi (1989) stresses that:

> A fetish Priest pouring Libation to the fetish gods (demons), the stool gods (demons) and the ancestral spirits (demons) at a State Function in Ghana...choose for yourself this day whom you will serve either the True and Living God through-Jesus Christ or Satan. For religious syncretism (mixed worship) is worse than apostasy. [330]

Another episode surrounding a similar reportage inspired me to publish an educative online article titled: "Click Bait Journalism in Ghana and the Problem of Cultural Erasure."[331] This article was a response to the manner in which the spiritual performances staged at the burial ceremony of the

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"spiritual principalities" out of them. I also encounter similar episodes during my art exhibitions. In one example, a collector ridiculously enquired from me: "I want to collect some of your artworks, so how does this work? When I purchase them do I have to "pray" over them before I hang them my room? Because I don't want any spirits lurking in my home you know".

[329] McAnthony Dagyena. *Boy Drowns in River Densu over GHC120 Gamble.* The Mirror, 2016, p3.

[330] See Kwaku Achampong-Baifie. *The Sacrifices of God: The Pouring of Libation,* Accra-North: Pinamano Press Limited, 1992.

[331] See Sela Adjei. Click Bait Journalism in Ghana and the Problem of Cultural Erasure: http://accradotaltradio.com/2017/02/click-bait-journalism-in-ghana-and-the-problem-of-cultural-erasure/8 (Accessed on 12/09/2017)

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late Nana Afia Kobi Serwaa Ampeem II, Asantehemaa (Asante Queen Mother), was reported by Ghanaian media. Accounts from most of the Ghanaian news organizations repeatedly used terms like 'fetish priest', 'chief fetish priest', 'Aflao God' (from the Aflao settlement in the Volta Region of Ghana) and other ridiculous labels to describe aspects of indigenous performance and spiritual practices. Several media reports were ahistorical, with poorly-worded descriptions of mystical guardian spirits of people from parts of the Volta Region of Ghana.

36 Opinion Visit www.graphic.com.gh YEARS ON Daily Graphic, Monday, March 27, 2017.

Fetishes and charms

• Bible by Africans for Africans

By Enimil Ashon

Figure 7.9.4 News clipping depicting derogatory terms used in describing African religions. (Daily Graphic, 17th March, 2017 edition).

In their zeal to condemn aspects of African religious beliefs, such reporters sometimes even make it sound like an 'educated' and 'elitist' thing to do by labeling African religious practices as "fetish". To further emphasize the gravity of this disturbing trend it would be apt to chip in one of Soyinka's pithy rhetorical questions: "are we thinking clearly?" It is interesting to note that, behind the scenes, some of these same "Pastors", "Bishops", "Evangelists", "Prophets" and so-called "Men of God" apparently busily dabble in *ebo, adze, dzoka, gbesasa* and other "unorthodox rituals" for nefarious purposes. Lovell (2002:113) captures a comparable account of a Togolese "Pastor" who was arrested by the Togolese police for dabbling in unorthodox spiritual practices:

> Police in Togo [...] had found a hunchback's hump, vulture eggs, hyena paws and a panther's pelt when they raided the church of a pastor accused of using satanic practices to woo worshippers. […] 'These so-called pastors say they have their own God, but if they still need to use us secretly, despite denigrating us on television and radio […]

Quite erroneously though, occult activities and witchcraft-related rituals have for so long been

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equated or misconstrued as "Vodu" in the misinformed public eye. Such generalizations and mislabeling are based on the fact that some of these practices have the root word "Vodu" in their designations as suffixes. So, *adze* (witchcraft) is labelled as *adze-Vodu*[332] (anti-witchcraft Vodu), *ebo* (malevolent power) becomes *bo-Vodu* and so on.

Figure 7.9.5 Adzevodu, Afiadenyigba (2004). Image Courtesy: Meera Venkatachalam.

Similarly, the Asantes (like several other Ghanaian ethnic groups) maintain a clear distinction between *okomfo* (diviner/priest) and *bayifuo* (Witch), *bosom* (deity) and *bayie* (witchcraft) and so forth. In contrasting between Vodu as a faith-based religious construct and *ebo,* Lovell (2002:113) clarifies that:

> The issue of the relationship between vodhun, witchcraft and 'modernity' needs to be examined more closely. Vodhun are, as we have seen, mostly defined as divinities, cosmological beings whose presence on earth is necessary for the well-

[332] Adzevodu is an anti-witchcraft deity. It's a bit like 'Koku' in a sense that it protects individuals from impending physical harm. It's rituals and modus operandi are similar to other anti-witchcraft societies like Goruvodu etc. Personal communication with Meera Venkatachalam, (August, 2019)

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> being and perpetuation of humankind. By contrast, witchcraft (*ebo*) is most accurately described as a malevolent action requiring human intervention and, as in many other parts of Africa, can become embedded in certain descent groups where it is inherited among family members.[333]

Just as in other religious faiths, there are nonconformists, ideological sects, extremists and other reactionary elements who seek to corrode the essence of authentic spiritual values for the advancement of personal gratification and ulterior motives, so it is in certain aspects of Vodu-related practices. So, in effect, Vodu, Voncujovi explains, acts as a "knife" which causes either good or harm, depending on the character that wields this "knife" or what he or she chooses to use it for. It is not the Vodu itself that actually renders the act of evil or misfortune but, rather the fallible human medium who summons the Vodu to abuse or distort the use of its power becomes the agent of evil. Bear in mind, there are quite a number of ways to come into contact with Vodu, harness it or channel its psychic energies. Vodu can "mount" or possess an individual to serve it, it can be acquired (or found), it can also be "manufactured", inherited or transferred. Meyer (1999) writes about *dzo* that could be transformed by worshippers into new *Trɔwo* and then be known as *dzozutrɔ* (*dzo* that became *Trɔ*).[334] Similarly, Nukpe (2007) has hinted that, the single shrine in the bedroom is believed to be more powerful than the nine in front of the house.[335] Venkatachalam (2015:55) has noted that, 'an individual could 'marry' a *Trɔ* or *Vodu* for a number of reasons: on account of his or her *amedzotɔ*, or for protection against witchcraft.' Vodu can also be channeled by harnessing psychic energies through the esoteric use of *amma* (powerful herbs), animal sacrifices, hard liquor, sacred invocations (libation, spells, chants, mantra, music), swearing of

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[333] See Nadia Lovell. *Cord of Blood*: *Possession and the Making of Voodoo*. London: Pluto Press, 2002, p.113.

[334] Meyer 1999: 67, cited in Meera Venkatachalam. *Slavery, Memory, and Religion in Southeastern Ghana, c. 1850-Present.*

[335] See Nukpe, L.Y.F.L The Indigenous Ewe Shrine as a Spiritual Storehouse for Healing, in Ghana. In *Journal of Science and Technology*, 27(1), 2007. p.134.

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oaths and sheer will-power. Nukpe (2007) has documented some significant procedures of harnessing Vodu psychic energies and the establishment of new spiritual shrine houses:

> Late at midnight, as the ritual progresses, the recipient of the spiritual power is made to strip naked whiles the linguist performs another round of libation pra yers to invoke the gods for their presence and blessings for the ceremony. Strong alcoholic drinks such as schnapps and the locally brewed Akpeteshie are used for the libation prayer. Still under the cover of darkness, various powerful herbs that have been identified as efficacious are laid into the hole that was dug earlier on. A chicken is then killed through strangling till its head is severed from the body. The resultant blood is sprinkled on the herbs in the ground. The medicine man does all these amidst murmurings of some inaudible words of incarnations and finally, the carcass of the chicken is laid on the herbs in the hole, the head of the chicken is made to project out of the hole. This placement is believed to symbolise victory over evil and therefore success in their ritual activities. [336]

At the centre of all these practical modes of Vodu acquisition and the establishment of new shrines is the fallible human agent, susceptible to corrupt morals or unethical social values. It must, however, be pointed out that, due to these moral concerns and ethical spiritual standards, certain charms, malicious rituals, and other Vodu practices have been outlawed within Vodu spiritual circles and from Anlo-Ewe society in general. Members or practitioners who are caught violating such moral values and ethical standards are strictly punished or excommunicated. An example is "*sibisaba"* which acts as a very powerful hypnotic charm for several underhanded purposes, the most common being sexually attracting women or keeping an individual spiritually bound under a spell for ulterior reasons. In some areas where this research was conducted, Vodu priests actually require license for spiritual authorities to legally practice as certified psychic healers, herbalists, or spirit mediums.

[336] Ibid. pp.135-136.

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7.3 Concluding Remarks

Philosophy of African art and the aesthetic concerns addressed in this chapter dismantles the faulty premise preconceived by some Eurocentric writers that "Africa had no arts or any sense of aesthetics". The critical perspectives advanced in this chapter also bring into focus some of the neglected details on Vodu aesthetics. Several argumentative discussions provided new perspectives to discredit "fetishism" as a false philosophical construct in representing Vodu religion. Equally important in this discussion is how counter-arguments from diverse academic disciplines were used to challenge some misconstrued and fallacious claims about Vodu aesthetics. Intellectually constrained assumptions about Vodu aesthetics have marred African art scholarship, as such further critical insights are still very much needed in Vodu scholarship. Misrepresentations by Rosenthal and other scholars goes to prove how some Westerners still fail to understand that African art is an epitome of modern art in the broadest sense. It is a creative expression, which can appropriately be appreciated only through the perspective of its socio-cultural background. African art is not necessarily reduced to "imitationalism", "representational," "art for art's sake", or merely photocopying what is perceived in nature or our surroundings. Exactitude is not truth, as such, artistic "standards" must not necessarily conform to the tyranny of representation to be considered worthy of aesthetic contemplation.

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CHAPTER EIGHT

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS: PART 5

8.1 Introduction

Ever since the West "discovered" African art, various African art forms have spawned several art movements, theoretical studies and art historical research. Dogbe discusses the influences of African Sculpture on Western art in his doctoral thesis. In his research, he outlines how African art and its association with British art and artists in the process of modernization has not been properly studied. This phenomenon, according to Dogbe (1989), has been related to the French and German artists in Paris, Munich and Dresden. He further laments that, of the several publications on African art, only few included materials on the relation of it to modern art.[337]

In the last few decades, much research has accordingly been conducted by quite a number of distinguished scholars including Abiodun, Odita, Okediji, Onobrakpeya, Enwezor, Drewal, Vogel, Picton, Jegede, Visonà, Pieprzak, Ogbechie and others. In fact, Ogbechie himself spearheaded the advocacy for African art scholars to take a keen interest in and venture into this particular under-researched area in the discipline. Several weeks before a Triennial conference of the Arts Council of African Studies Association in 2007, Ogbechie contacted a group of colleagues in the USA and South Africa and assigned everyone a task – that of preparing a presentation on a specific approach in which authors develop into a book chapter on modern African art. The collection of the articles ended up as book chapters dedicated to a compendium on African modernism.[338]

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[337] See Buckner Komlar Dogbe. The Influence of African Sculpture on British Art, 1910-1930. Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of St Andrews, 1989, p.4.

[338] See Gitti Salami and Monica Blackburn Visona (Eds.). *A Companion to Modern African Art.* West Sussex: John Wiley and Sons, 2013, p. xx.

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This chapter does not necessarily focus on how African sculpture influenced British art alone, but rather discusses the influences of African art (especially aspects of Vodu aesthetics) on Euro-American "modernism". This chapter builds on Ogbechie's research advocacy and Dogbe's lamentations on the inadequate research into how African art may help realize what we have come to know as "modernism" on the global art stage. Coupled with visual ethnography, this chapter contributes to the on-going discussion by filling in some of the "missing links" in bridging the gap between "modern art" and "traditional art". It is my hope that, the art historical perspectives and aesthetic reflections supported with ethnographic data and high-resolution photographs presented in this chapter will shed more light on the critical issues discussed in the several publications and efforts initiated by some of the early exponents of the discipline.

8.2 'Tradition' versus 'Modernity' in Art: Myth, Reality or Mirage?

The application of 'Modern art' has always been in use, in reference to style, in the Euro-American context, and has a specific art-historical connotation of a period style. Such 'Modern art' movements as Futurism, Expressionism and Dadaism diverged from the realistic representation of form. It must be emphasized that the tendencies of these movements are unique products of Euro-American artistic experience and cannot therefore be used to distinguish 'Contemporary African art' with the same clear meaning and reference. However, to certain kinds of African critics and scholars, the choice of "Modern African art" over "Contemporary African art" still means more than life itself. In the minds of those Africans who are also eager to achieve foreign Euro-American status, consciously or unconsciously, the use of the term "Modern African art" counts for more than African ideas and ideals.[339] Clearly, such 'labels' needs revision and an all-inclusive

[339] See Okechukwu Odita Vitu, Soyan, Sankofa, and Ijinla. *Foundations of Contemporary African Art* (Year and

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approach. The exponents (Bendix, Gusfield, Lloyd and Rudolph) of 'modernization revisionism' have argued that, in the first place,

> the concepts of modernity and tradition were inadequately defined and never elaborated sufficiently to allow comparisons between societies; secondly, lack of precise conceptual definitions generated unwarranted generalizations and neglect of variation within the orbits of modernity as well as tradition. The degree of variation with any so-called 'traditional society' was more substantial than differences between modern and traditional societies, and the suggested dichotomy was meaningless, as was the tendency of modernization theorists to adopt a kind of zero-sum view of the relationship between modernity and tradition.[340]

Likewise, Gusfield has emphasized the notion that the pitting of tradition against modernity or innovation are overly abstract, unreal and very unnecessary. Gusfield (1967:361) particularly demystifies these delusions of the "traditional"/"modern" schism when he wrote that:

> The all too common practice of pitting tradition and modernity against each other as paired opposites tends to overlook the mixtures and blends which reality displays. Above all, it becomes an ideology of anti-traditionalism, denying the necessary and usable ways in which the past serves as support especially in the sphere of values and political legitimization, to the present and the future. We need a perspective toward change which does not deny the specific and contextual character of events.[341]

As revisionist scholars embarked on broadening the understanding of African aesthetics with sound critique of 'primitive' and 'tribal', 'traditional' has become the more 'acceptable' term to describe African art. For instance, Hackett (1994) notes that:

> if 'traditional' is not taken to mean static, but as drawing on inherited cultural

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place of publication not available)

[340] See Randall and Theobald (1998:45), cited by Per Hernae. The 'Traditional' and the 'Modern' in West Africa In *Reclaiming the Human Sciences and Humanities Through African Perspectives, Vol. 1*, Helen Lauer and Kofi Anyidoho. (Eds.), Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2012, p.644.

[341] See M.D. Litonjua. *Creative Fractures: Sociology and Theology.* Bloomington: AuthorHouse, 2011, p.26.

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> patterns and responding gradually to change, then it is acceptable to many scholars (Vogel 1991:32f.). In this respect, there is no moment when 'traditional' art ends and 'neo-' or 'post-traditional' begins. Valentin Mudimbe argues that, despite the continuities, new 'artistic thresholds' have emerged as contemporary African artists have responded to the rupture of the colonial and post-colonial world (Mudimbe 1991:276f.). In this vein, Mudimbe distinguishes between three trends in current African art: tradition-inspired, modernist, and popular.[342]

Such revisionist approaches to ethnographic and anthropological scholarship sought to eschew the West's notion of "Fetishism" or "Primitivism" in African Art. Other emerging art historians and aestheticians challenged the widespread hoax propagated in Euro-Western art academies that Manet, Monet, Duchamp, Metzger, Picasso, Pollock, Frankenthaler, Rothko among others were the "inventors" of "Modern art." The ensuing discussions in this chapter re-examine and further expose such misrepresentations and falsehoods surrounding the artificial distinction of "modern art" and "traditional art" by Western scholars in their academic discussions. Relying on revised aesthetic theories, all these issues will be discussed through psychoanalytic perspectives of spiritual art.

8.3 Modern Art and Sacred Vodu Aesthetics: Neglected Symmetries

Based on earlier philosophical reflections and the research findings, the underlining premise outlined in this Chapter only leads us to further reject the Western notion of "modernism" until its precepts and inclusivity have been properly revised in academic circles and on the global art stage. This artificially fabricated categorization simply ignores, scorns, or undervalues the significant contributions of the real custodians of modernism, a lot of whom still remain unrecognized or are

[342] See Rosalind I. J. Hackett. Art and Religion in Africa: Some Observations and Reflections. In *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 24(4), 1994, pp. 294-308.

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yet to be properly documented. It is also very difficult to validate that "modern art" is a Euro-Western designation of "civilized art" while African Art is condescendingly tagged as "primitive", "fetish", "tribal", "untamed", "exotic", "pre-modern" etc. It must be clearly emphasized that African Art has always embodied the essential features of "modernism" centuries before its theories and numerous manifestos were formulated. The fact that it was not formulated in "theories" and "rousing manifestos" does not necessarily mean modernist art schools were never present in African creative expressivity. For instance, Ellis (1890:81) describing an Ewe Shrine reports that:

> 'the images of the gods are placed inside, usually on a raised rectangular platform of clay; and before them are the earthen pots and vessels, smeared with the blood, eggs, and palm-oil of countless offerings. Many of these images have long since, owing to exposure to the weather, become **mere heaps of rubbish**, but no one would dare to remove the **sacred dust.**

Figure 8.0 Dankoli Vodu Art Installation (Photo by Catherina Unger)[343]

Between November 1959 and 10th March, 1960 (well over 70 years later after Ellis' observation) Gustav Metzger would be hailed by the European art world for "inventing" a kind of "modernist

[343] Source of Images: https://hiveminer.com/Tags/benin,ritual (Accessed on 12/02/2018)

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art" style called "auto-deconstructive art". The so-called artistic invention is apparently what A.B Ellis had earlier described and labeled as **"mere heaps of rubbish"** or **"sacred dust"**. Well informed art historians would acknowledge the fact that this type of abstract art installation had been in existence within the ritual space and sacred sites of shrines among Vodu practitioners several centuries ago. Modern imagery of sacred Vodu aesthetics and religious iconography can verify such claims.

Figure 8.1 Left: A Sacred Vodu (Legba) installation at the entrance to Tɔgbui Adzima's shrine in Torgodo, Volta Region (2016). Photography by researcher. Right: Gustav Metzger collected a pile of rubbish, put it in a brown paper bag and declared it as "art" which was subsequently exhibited at the Tate Modern Gallery in London (2004).[344]

The bag filled with discarded paper and cardboard was part of a work by Gustav Metzger, said to demonstrate the "finite existence" of art. It was accidentally thrown away by a cleaner[345] at the London Gallery, which subsequently retrieved the damaged bag. The bag of rubbish was part of

[344] Source of image: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/3604278.stm (Accessed on 05/02/2018)

[345]Quite a number of these artists apparently get publicity with some of these art scams. Ivan Massow (past Chairman of ICA) was summarily arraigned before a board council blowing the whistle on the peddling of some of these artworks and ridiculed most conceptual art as what he described as "pretentious, self-indulgent craftless tat that I wouldn't accept even as a gift". Ivan Massow resigned as the chairman of Institute of Contemporary Art (London) from 1999 to 4th February, 2002. Mr Massow's resignation from the ICA was undoubtedly sparked by his daring critiques of the "conceptual art" establishments. See Massow's article in The New Statesman in which he criticised conceptual art - typified by Martin Creed's Turner Prize winning room in which a light flickers on and off.

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Metzger's Recreation of the "First Public Demonstration of Auto-Destructive Art"[346] Such pretentious "elitism" and elusive "neo-liberal trash art" is what Metzger "theorized" as "Auto-Deconstructive Art" which still dominates the so-called "Modern Art" world in the West.

Figure 8.2 Left: Dankoli Vodu Installation (Photo by Catherina Unger).[347] Right: Alexander Duncan's installation titled "Cove'[348] (2007-2017). Duncan's art installation brings together sculpture, new media and print, to question what is real and what is constructed. The artist explores the materiality of objects, the physicality of their being, and their semantic language.

Figure 8.3 Dankoli Vodu installations, Benin. Image Courtesy: Catherina Unger.[349]

[346] It is worth mentioning that a cleaner at the Tate Gallery "mistook" Gustav's "Auto deconstructivist art" for exactly what it was - pure rubbish that is. He almost lost his job for throwing it into the bin. Visit the BBC webpage for more details on this particular incident: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/3604278.stm These incidents happen all the time and in many cases most of them go unreported. Source: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/3604278.stm (Accessed on 05/02/2018)

[347] Source of images: https://hiveminer.com/Tags/benin,ritual (Accessed on 05/02/2018)

[348] Source of image: http://meanqueen-lifeaftermoney.blogspot.com/2017/04/art-is- not-always-what-it-seems.html (Accessed on 05/01/2018)

[349]Source of images: https://hiveminer.com/Tags/benin,ritual (Accessed on 05/02/2018)

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Figure 8.4 "My bed", a messy installation, surrounded by used condoms and dirty knickers. British Artist Tracey Emin, has insisted she is actually 'very neat' as she unveiled her £2.54 million unmade bed - complete with discarded condoms - on its return to its 'home' at the Tate. My Bed became notorious when it was shortlisted for the Turner Prize and displayed at Tate Britain in 1999.[350]

Figure 8.5 Left: Pia Männikkö's *Still Live*, 2010. Unfired clay, 260 x 290cm. In the Glasgow School of Art Degree Show, the floor of the room, (Mackintosh building) was covered with 400 kilos of clay. While the clay was still fresh and soft, Männikkö made toe prints on it. Following installation, the clay had a life of its own – it started to dry, shrink, crack and change colour to lighter gray. The process continued through the exhibition. Right: Erik Kessels photo flood-printed image uploaded to Flickr in 24hr period.[351]

[350]Source of image: http://saziz2.workflow.arts.ac.uk/informative-file-3. See also http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3018285/I-make-bed-day-Tracey-Emin-insists-s-actually-neat-messy-installation-surrounded-used-condoms-dirty-knickers-returns-Tate.html (Accessed on 04/03/2018)

[351] Source of image: https://piamannikko.com/works/still-live-2010/ (Accessed on 30/ 01/2018)

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Figure 8.6 Olafur Eliasson-Riverbed (2014). Olafur Eliasson's take on Louisiana is radical, fascinating and unique. The central work in the first solo exhibition at the museum by the DanishIcelandic artist is a huge, sitespecific project that reverses the relation between nature and art.[352]

The so-called "modern artworks" also labelled as "conceptual art", [353] as demonstrated, can be remotely traced to several generations of conceptual Vodu art installations already in existence before it was theorized under the "modern art", "conceptual art" or "auto deconstructive art" labels and several "isms" of the Western "modern art" academy. The grand philosophical ideas surrounding conceptual art is most often "credited" to Marcel Duchamp. A typical example of such ideas can be gleaned from Kosuths glorification of Duchamp as the "pioneer of conceptual art":

With his first *ready-made*, Duchamp redefined the essence of art. The avant-garde movements before him, up to and including cubism, were preoccupied with form. Although they tried out new things, they nevertheless all spoke the same language. Thanks

[352]Source of image: https://en.louisiana.dk/exhibition/olafur-eliasson (Accessed on 12/02/2018)

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> to Duchamp, the language of art was thoroughly changed: no longer was it the form, but the content, the "what", that took front stage. This change from "appearance" to "conception" marked the beginning of true "modern" art. It also heralded conceptual art. After Duchamp, all art became essentially conceptual. [354]

This formulation may sound "plausible" but lack historical credibility and consistent logical progression. Which makes it rather difficult for critical art historians to accept these claims, and indeed, Essel and Acquah (2016) have invalidated such Eurocentric views and also outlined the creative foundations about the true origins of conceptual art:

> Conceptual art is one of the twentieth century art movements that has gained popular attention in the contemporary art world. It has received much scholarly prominence in the Western world, and perceived as an emergent art of European origin[...]It concludes that the adoration and idolization of Marcel Duchamp as the father of conceptual art is contestable since the art was many centuries old in Africa before the twentieth century artists began to practice it in the West.[355]

Indeed, Kandinsky has acknowledged the genuine roots of modernism in art and made his stance on this matter rather clear:

> Just as art is looking for help from the primitives [*sic*], so these men are turning to half-forgotten times in order to get help from their half-forgotten methods. However, these very methods are still alive and in use among nations whom we, from the height of our knowledge, have been accustomed to regard with pity and scorn.[356]

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[354] See Kosuths cited in Antoon Van den Braembussche. *Thinking Art:An Introduction to Philosophy of Art.* Brussels: Springer Science + Business Media B.V. 2009, p. 53.

[355] See Osuanyi Quaicoo Essel, Ebenezer Kwabena Acquah. Conceptual Art: The Untold Story of African Art. In *Journal of Literature and Art Studies, October 2016,(10), 1203-1220.*

[356] See Wassily Kandinsky. *Concerning the Spiritual in Art,* Auckland: The Floating Press, 2008. p.43

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Figure 8.7 Vodu shrine sculpture Installation – Brékété Shrine, Dansoman, Accra (2017). Photography by Researcher.

Figure 8.8 *Dzawuwu* (as in thanksgiving or first-harvest offering to the ancestors and divinities). Entrance to the shrine of Dumega Koku Nyonator. Atiteti, Volta Region (2017). Photography by Researcher.

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Nkrumah in his PhD thesis also alludes to how the "unusual", the "sublime" and primordial rubrics of aesthetics are already deeply embedded in African art. According to him, "the African has been acclaimed a masterful technician in some phases of modern artistic expression. To him beauty does not necessarily mean an exact expression; there is beauty even in ugliness" (Nkrumah, 1944: 197). Nkrumah's theory validates the fact that aesthetic faculties and sensory awareness of the African artist is heightened and broad enough to accommodate what is worthy (or "unworthy") of sustained aesthetic contemplation. In general sense, aesthetics is not merely limited to the "beautiful" or "pleasurable experience". Even in contemporary scholarship, most aestheticians and art critics repeatedly restrict aesthetics to the superficial notions of "beauty". A typical example can be gleaned from Sarpong's (1971:37-38) misperception about the reasons for blackening Akan stools:

> The stools, they argue, are destined to receive sacrifices and be smeared all over with blood and certain other mixtures […] White wood, treated in this way would be too ugly to look at. But when the wood is made black, the nauseating effect it would otherwise produce when it comes into contact with blood is avoided.

Sarpong further outlines quite a number of reasons for blackening Akan ancestral stools, the most doubtful being that, "the stools are blackened in order that they may not appear too nasty".

In his reflections on anthropological scholarship, Van Damme (1991) expressed dissatisfaction with this flawed approach to understanding the rubrics of aesthetics or the aesthetic experience:

> This restriction to the beautiful is also found in Mveng's definition: 'aesthetics is both science and art. It has as its object the norms of the Beautiful as they are revealed throughout works of art. Thus, its domain embraces the whole of artistic and literary expression' (1975: 68). When one bears in mind, on the one hand, that Mveng's definition restricts itself to the beautiful, and realizes, on the other, that both in the West, and in, for example, Sub-Saharan Africa, certain art forms are purposely created to convey ugliness (see Van Damme 1987: 53-66), it becomes clear that Mveng's conclusion, namely that aesthetics, as defined as such, refers to

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> the *whole* of artistic and literary expressions, cannot be justified in practice. [357]

African art and aesthetic practices are not merely limited to "beautiful" aesthetic constructs as many are led to believe. There is also the sacred, the spiritual, the sublime, and the mundane. In fact, certain art forms purposely employ mundane aesthetic practices to express the concept of intentional "ugliness". Thompson (1971b: chs. 3 and 4) is considered as one of the earliest researchers to draw attention of scholars to the notion of "intentional ugliness" or what he terms as "anti-aesthetics" in purposefully "ugly" Yoruba Masks or what Biebuyck (1976: 346) refers to as the "aesthetics of the ugly" in African sculpture among the Lega in Congo. In the ever-expanding field of aesthetics, Van-Damme further cautions researchers against the exclusion of "intentional ugliness" in the study of aesthetics and the diverse aesthetic categories in the discipline.[358] Vandenhoute (1961) similarly hinted that the exclusion of intentional ugliness from the study of aesthetics is generally avoided:

> As long as the aesthetic experience of a work of art is conceived as equivalent to the perception of the beautiful, it will be difficult or even impossible for us to use the word "aesthetic" in an ethnological study, as well as in a sociology of art in general' (1961: 375). Indeed, as Vandenhoute adds, were we to equate the aesthetic with the beautiful, a great part of artistic production would be excluded from ethno-artistic study. He proposes to remain we to *aesthesis=,* in the sense of perception, and to leave room for the perceptive experience not only of beauty, but also of ugliness.[359]

As an academic inquiry, it is crucial to trace and highlight the art historical trajectory of the influences of African art on European art and global "modernism". Dogbe has already pointed out

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[357] See Wilfried Van Damme. Some Notes on Defining Aesthetics. In *The Anthropological Literature*, JASO 22(2), 1991, pp. 168-169.

[358] Ibid. p.167-81

[359] Vandenhoute (1961) cited in Wilfried Van Damme. Some Notes on Defining Aesthetics. In *The Anthropological Literature*, JASO 22(2), 1991, 168-169.

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in his doctoral thesis that Western art historians mainly focused on how African art was influenced by colonialism and European contact and kept rather silent on how African art influenced European artists.

Figure 8.9 Apart from mainly focusing on the "tribal", "functional" and "exotic" aspects of African art, early Western writers also focused their attention on how colonialism and Christian missionary activities influenced African art.

According to Bortolot (2003), non-utilitarian items such as jewelry, beads, mechanical toys and curiosities, and alcohol also met a receptive audience. Catholic countries such as Portugal were, in theory at least, forbidden by papal injunction from selling items with potential military uses to non-Christians, although it is unclear how closely this order was followed in practice. In exchange for their wares, Europeans returned with textiles, carvings, spices, ivory, gun, and African slaves.[360]

Like, Dogbe, other African art Historians have established the fact that critical aspects of African aesthetic practices and absraction have influenced and shaped what is now known as "modern art" or "conceptual" aesthetic practices. The influence of African art on Picasso's cubist paintings has been widely documented. According to Ehrenzweig (1967:117):

> "The greatest modern painter, Picasso, did attack conscious sensibilities in an outright deliberate manner. His systematic fragmentation of pictorial space at the

[360] See Alexander Ives Bortolot (2003) *Trade Relations among European and African Nations* Retrieved from: https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/aftr/hd_aftr.htm (Accessed on 24/03/2018)

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> height of his cubist experiments comes perilously near to schizophrenic fragmentation and its self-destructive attacks on the ego. The schizophrenic literally attacks his own language function and capacity for image making. He twist, contorts words in the same weird way in which he draws and paints his images.

Picasso himself responded with intense emotion to a magical force he sensed in the "tribal art" objects he encountered in the Trocadero Museum. He regretted that the Western tradition lost touch with the primordial sense of image-making as a magic operation. Tribal [sic] art led him back to such origins.[361] Picasso clearly indicated here that there is a magical/spiritual component in African art that European art lacked, yet Picasso publicly denied ever having heard of African art. When he was asked. He replied: "L'art nègre"? Connais pas ("African art? Never heard of it").[362]

Some early European "art historians" and the so-called "experts" of art claim that the figures in Picasso's Les Demoiselles D'avignon was inspired by the shape of "a Leaf" and has "got absolutely nothing" to do with African masks. This claim is based on "rough sketches" found in Picasso's sketchbooks. Ingo Walther supports such claims in his Picasso Monogram, for Taschen which erroneously projects the notion that Picasso discovered the figurative design "for himself", "by himself." Brooks (2011:270) has stressed on the fact that, Picasso inherited the traditions of Western art, but he also responded to the masks of African art. The merging of these two idea spaces created Les Demoiselles d'Avignon and Picasso's fantastic burst of creativity.

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[361] Qouted from "Primitivism" in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal with the Modern. (Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1985), p. 17 as cited in Ben Burt. *What is African Art? Support for Teachers.* The British Museum, London.

[362] Linda Goddard. Cubism and Silence. In Harry Cooper (Ed.), *The Cubism Seminars*, CASVA / Yale University Press, 2017, p.78

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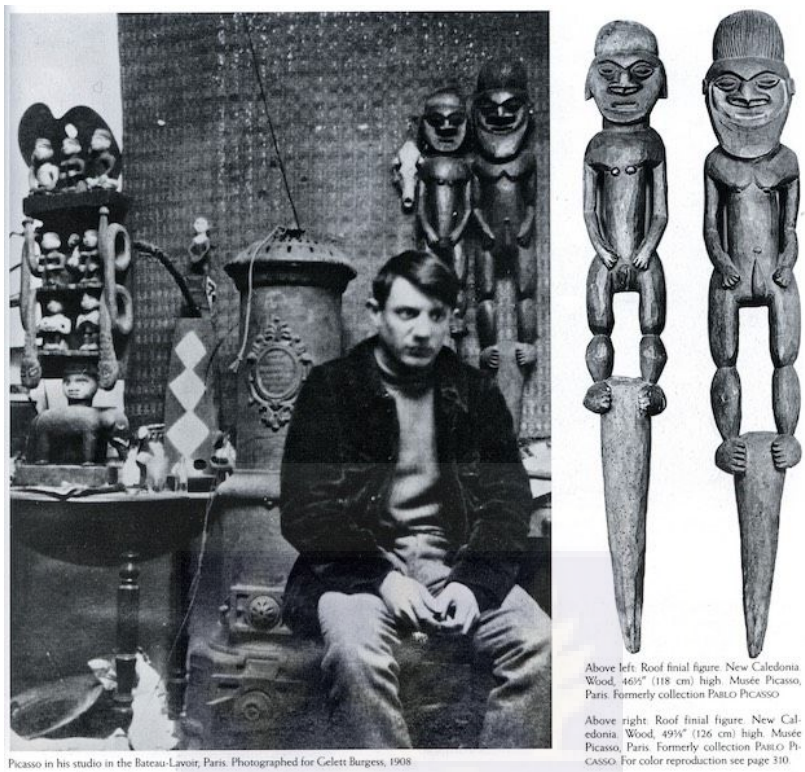

Figure 8.9.1 Picasso in his studio in the Bateau-Lavoir, Paris. Photographed for Gelett Burgess (1908)[363]

It is not surprising that a few years after its "invention", "cubism" eventually waned as an art movement because it was "invented" by a group of unoriginal artists mimicking abstract artistic ideas already being practiced by African artists. It was not an European "invention". Kandinsky has accurately observed that:

> The search for constructive form has produced Cubism, in which natural form is often forcibly subjected to geometrical construction, a process which tends to hamper the abstract by the concrete and spoil the concrete by the abstract. The harmony of the new art demands a more subtle construction than this, something that appeals less to the eye and more to the soul. This "concealed construction" may arise from an apparently fortuitous selection of forms on the canvas. Their external lack of cohesion is their internal harmony. This haphazard arrangement of forms may be the future of artistic harmony. Their fundamental relationship will finally be able to be expressed in mathematical form, but in terms irregular rather than regular". [364]

[363]See Hugh Honour and John Flemming. *A World History of Art*. 7th Edition, London: Laurence King Publishing

[364] See Wassily Kandinsky. *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, Auckland: The Floating Press, 2008, p.108.

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The following paintings by Picasso, who is touted by the West as "the greatest modernist painter", have been juxtaposed by African masks and sculpture works to present a clearer idea for a better understanding of the issues being discussed here:

Figure 8.9.2 A close up of Les Demoiselles D'avignon juxtaposed by an Mbuya Mask, Pende peoples – The Mask can be found in Royal Museum for Central Africa or RMCA, Tervuren, Belgium. Pablo Picasso (1881-1973). - Les Demoiselles d'Avignon, 1907 – Painting can be found in The Museum of Modern Art or MOMA, New York[365]

As indicated by Nkrumah earlier, African Art (Vodu art particularly) laid the very foundations of surrealism and the expressionist art movements. As an artistic movement, expressionism emphasized on the expressive and particularly, the spiritual aspects of art. This is a fact well acknowledged in Kandinsky's well-known treatise on spiritual art. In his treatise, Kandinsky tries to explain the inner resemblance between European artists and the "primitives". Kandinsky repeatedly emphasizes the pure artist's obligation and desire to give form and image to his or her inner spiritual world. This notion still remains one of the predominant foundations of "Modern

[365]Source of image: http://www.antiqueafricanart.com/picassos-works-bear-striking-resemblances-to-these-notable-african-pieces-of-art/ (Accessed on 19/03/2018)

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art". However, the West has "hijacked" the notion and practice of "modern art" as their reserve when, in fact, there is ample evidence to show the Wests' indebtedness to African spiritusl art and have indeed been influenced by them.

Figure 8.9.3 Left: Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) - Horse, "Parade" (Cocteau, Diaghilev, 1917) paired with a Baulé Mask on the right, Ivory Coast. Former Lévy Collection.[366]

Figure 8.9.4 Left: Details from Picasso's "Guernica" (1937) compared with the head reminiscent of the Baule mask on the right.[367]

[366] Source of image: http://www.antiqueafricanart.com/picassos-works-bear-striking-resemblances-to-these-notable-african-pieces-of-art/ (Accessed on 19/03/2018)

[367]Source: http://brunoclaessens.com/tag/baule/#.WmOO_hO0Pxo (Accessed on 19/03/2018)

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Below are other European painters whose works are juxtaposed with African sculptures:

Figure 8.9.5 Henri Matisse, Portrait of Madame Matisse (1913) and a Shira Punu Mask from Gabon placed side by side, in a "Primitivism" Catalog[368]

Figure 8.9.6 A "modern" painting by Paul Klee [369] juxtaposed with an Akan Akuaba doll.[370]

[368]Penney, David W. Rev. of "Primitivism" in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and Modern, by William Rubin. *African Arts.* 1985, p.91.

[369] Source of image: http://www.randafricanart.com/Asante_akuaba_doll_3.html (Accessed on 12/02/2018)

[370] Source of image: http://www.tuttartpitturasculturapoesiamusica.com/2012/02/paul-klee-1879-1940-swiss-expressionist.html (Accessed on 12/02/2018)

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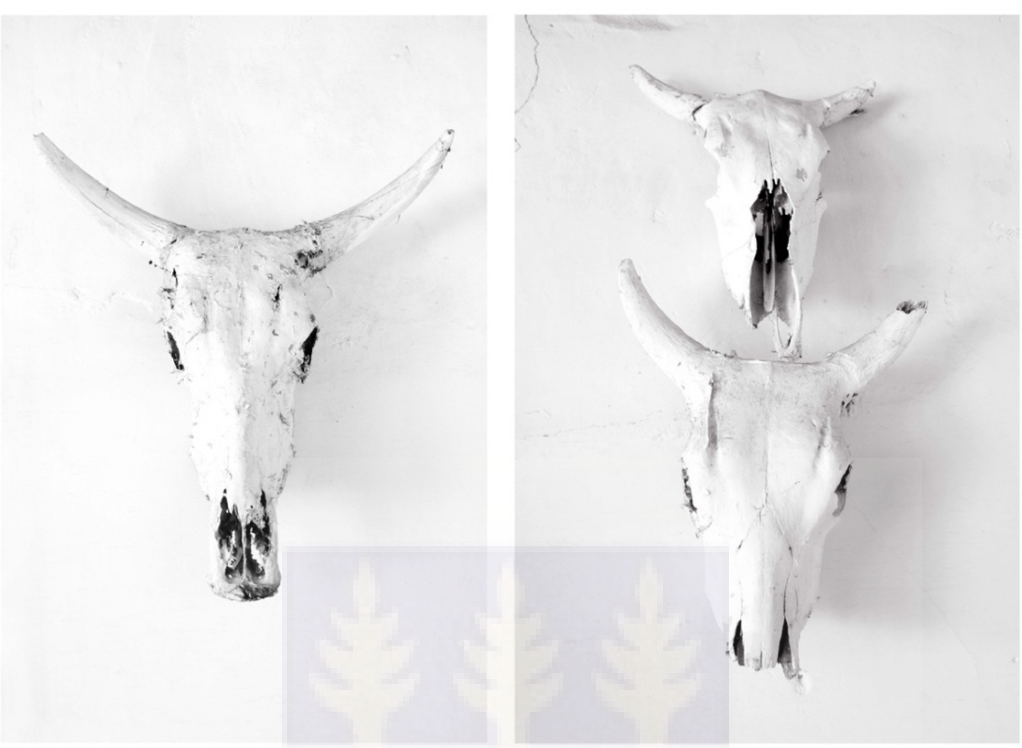

Figure 8.9.7 Vodu Shrine sculpture Installation – Brékété Shrine, Dansoman, Accra (2017). Photography by Researcher.

Figure 8.9.8 Gloria O'keefe popularly regarded as the "mother of Modernism" standing by her work.

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Figure 8.10 Vodu shrine Mural at Kli-Adzima Shrine in Klikor, Volta Region (2016). Photography by Researcher.

Figure 8.10.1 Abstract painting by Cy Twombly. According to widewalls website, one of the most "intelligent,""erudite," "sophisticated" and "emotionally eloquent" artists of our age, Cy Twombly is a figure of "great authority in modern art."[371]

[371] Source: https://www.widewalls.ch/cy-twombly-paintings/ (Accessed on 10/02/2018)

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Also, take note of the two paintings below, one a Vodu shrine mural and the other, an Euro-Western modernist work.

Figure 8.10.2 Researcher painting on the wall of an Adzima Shrine in Torgodo, Volta Region (2017). Photography by Research Assistant.

Figure 8.10.3 Jackson Pollock Painting in his studio (1950). Jackson Pollock was also touted by New York times as the "Greatest Modern artist."[372]

[372] Source: http://www.fronterad.com/?q=14513&page=&pagina=2 (Accessed on 10/02/2018)

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In summary, the juxtapositions which were self-evident, have become necessary in order to dismantle the claims of Western scholars and art historians as originators and practioners of "modern art". African art, by extension Ewe Vodu art, predates these Western artforms.

8.4 Modernism, Abstraction, and the Sublime in Art: A case for Ewe Vodu Aesthetics.

The art movement that ushered in the postwar triumph of American art, Abstract Expressionism—is most closely associated with an artist named Jackson Pollock (1912-1956). [373] Jackson Pollock, who was also influenced by Picasso, is well known and credited for shaping abstract expressionist painting style known as action art which involves dripping and splashing paint onto a substrate, a painting technique he observed in Siqueros' workshop in 1936, which involved the use of industrial paints. This process of using industrial paints in Siqueros' workshop was described by Axel Horn: "we poured it, dripped it, splattered it, hurled it at the picture surface. It dried quickly, almost instantly and could be removed at will even though thoroughly dry and hard. What emerged was an endless variety of accidental effects. Siqueros soon constructed a theory and system of accidental effects."[374] Abstraction in art has a long history in the complex evolution of modern *Homo sapiens*. Nearly all ancient artworks reveal some level of abstraction, and indeed Simblet (2009) has also acknowledged that:

> abstraction is not easy to define, and it has been with us. It was not invented in the 20th century, only rediscovered. From one point of view, all pictorial representations are abstractions of reality. From another view point, many non-

[373] See Early 20th Century Avant-Garde "High Modernism":The Avant-Garde in the Early 20th Century. p.7.(Publication details unavailable)

[374] See Pere Karmel (Ed.). *Jackson Pollock: Interviews, Articles, and Reviews*. New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1998. p.108.

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> Western cultures have highly sophisticated abstractions at the core of their art, and have been making abstract drawings for centuries–Japanese calligraphy, for example, Indian Mandalas, and Aboriginal art. Perhaps in Western art we bred this intuitive freedom out of ourselves in our insistence upon complex figuration.[375]

Yet, Simblet (2009) clearly glosses over the contributions of African artists[376] in the historical trajectory of the real origins of abstraction. It has accordingly been captured by Nkrumah (1963) and discussed at length by Essel and Acquah in their research on the African origins of conceptual art:

> The scanty written records on Africa's art, led to the Westerners description of African art as "distortion to forms" (Nkrumah, 1964a, p. 65). They were not privy to Africa's conceptual and contextual hybridity of aesthetics that celebrate ideas expressed in her artworks. With no hindsight of this forethought imbed in African art, some of the Westerners who began to write on African art, took interest in studying European influence on African art and kept silent on how the art of Africa brought renewed interest in the twentieth century art. They also dwelled solely on its symbolic nature, functionality, religio-magical and socio-political dimensions to make it appear inferior to Western art in a way to maintain the apparatus of colonial power.[377]

What Western scholars fail to acknowledge is that, a similar style of painting has been in existence and been practiced for several generations in Ghana and several African regions. There has been very little documentation of this style of painting which is very prevalent in Ghana, most especially in the south and the three Northern regions. It is necessary to further dwell on the pre-eminence of African aesthetics and how it has (and still continues) to influence modern art globally.

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[375] Sarah Simblet. *The Drawing Book: An Innovative, Practical Approach to Drawing the World Around You*, London: DK Publishing 2009, p. 219

[376] Even though the Aborigines of Australia can be traced back to Africa, there is no mention, trace or linkage to prehistoric Africa as the source of all prehistoric artworks.

[377] See Nkrumah (1963, 1964a) cited in Osuanyi Quaicoo Essel, Ebenezer Kwabena Acquah. Conceptual Art: The Untold Story of African Art. In *Journal of Literature and Art Studies, October 2016,* 6(10)*, 1203-1220.*

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As demonstrated through the various photographs in the forthcoming pages, most of the artists who created the modernist shrine murals apparently have no "artistic training" in Western art academies. In the rural areas where most of the arts is produced by the local artists who had minimal contact with either post-colonial aesthetics, little or no regard for Western influence is expressed in the field of art and creativity. But beyond the Western/African aesthetic contrast, African aesthetics always prevails over Western aesthetics in rural African communities. The religious and social functions of African art make it essential to incorporate indigenous aesthetics in the creative process of art.

In re-examining the cultural, symbolic and aesthetic aspects of indigenous art, Appau Asante and Opoku–Asare (2011) discuss the cultural identity in the murals of Sirigu women and their role in art education and social sustainability in the introductory summary of their findings:

> Although mural art, unlike pottery, is not widely practiced by African women, the predominantly female art known as 'Bambolse' in the indigenous language of Sirigu, in the Upper East Region of Ghana, performs a number of important social functions, from adornment and communication to the assertion of cultural identity and the preservation of traditional values. The murals employ traditional motifs and symbols, and are either representational, geometric or a combination of the two. Despite Bambolse's significance in the local culture, however, there has been very little formal chronicling of its aesthetics and iconography.[378]

But the reality is that pre-colonial African art attached no interest to the Western artistic canons—perspectival details, accurate proportions and representationalism. Instead, it created conceptual art that put the ideas expressed at its heart rather than the materials used. This objective truth about Africa's art was not articulated. Conceptual art had lived with Africa for centuries though it was

[378] SeeAsante, Eric Appau; Opoku–Asare, Nana Afia. Cultural identity in the murals of Sirigu women and their role in art education and social sustainability. In *International Journal of Education Through Art,* 7(2), 2011, pp. 187-202

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not named as such. This story in African art is untold, making some scholars to claim that conceptual art was Western invention, and labeling it as emergent art. [379]

This lack of recognition has accentuated interest in African art for many African art scholars who are still researching to uncover some of the apparently "unrecognized" or "suppressed" modern art schools in Africa. The lack of proper documentation of African art by African scholars prior to the evolution of the discipline granted Western scholars the "autonomy" of taking credit for anything "modernist" in art. Hence, so "artfully" have such "conceptual" guises and the so-called "high modernist" Western artworks insinuated their way into the "modern art" world as the "pace setters" of the "highest" epitome of "civilized art". Inherited colonial art curriculum creates further confusion in this particular matter. One observes that, some "art historians" usually cite the beginning of painting in Ghana at the time when colonial educational training of the arts was reformed in Achimota from the 1900s. As a result, many are errorneously led to believe that Western mode of canvas painting is all there is to painting in Ghanaian culture. However, several ethnicities are known to indigenously practice one form of painting or another. Some of these early Ghanaian art scholars (e.g. Antubam) who propagated the erroneous notion that painting is not an indigenous form of Ghanaian art were merely misinformed. Other fairly recent claims in academic circles also insinuate the notion that "modern art" was introduced into the Ghanaian art curriculum by colonial educators in various forms (such as "stretched canvas on easel painting", "abstract painting", "installation art", etc.) — a rather bizarre proposition at best, taking into consideration the rich modernist painting customs and installation artforms that pre-existed all over

[379] See Osuanyi Quaicoo Essel, Ebenezer Kwabena Acquah. Conceptual Art: The Untold Story of African Art. In *Journal of Literature and Art Studies, October 2016,* 6(10)*, 1203-1220.*

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Ghana[380] prior to the introduction of the colonial art curriculum. In an abstract to a seminar presentation at the Institute of African Studies (Legon), Larbi (2017) claimed that:

> The introduction of Western art offered Ghanaian painters the opportunity to depart from traditional art and its conventions to a new medium, and determine aspects of their heritage to paint. This paper discusses the trajectory of how Ghanaian modern painters negotiated between classical traditional art and Western techniques and medium through the selection of subjects and subject matter to portray a Ghanaian identity. The painters also became sensitive to changes in Ghana's modernization while they drew inspiration from these changes, reorganized Ghanaian traditions and aesthetics in the new trend and underlying principles to depict their culture and identity.[381]

Larbi's misinformed view is indeed regrettable. The truth couldn't be further away from such mistaken views as demonstrated by Kudowor's (1981) reflections in the informative extract from his thesis:

> The early painters were basically objective realists with strong expressionistic undertones despite the long tradition of abstraction in our decorative arts. There is no doubt therefore that this approach was very much inspired by Western academic training which was characterized by the "hand to eye" training. This required the student to observe and represent objectively and the introduction of figurative composition into painting. The works of Antubam, Sam Ntiforo and Amonoo suggest an attempt at realistic rendering of the genre of traditional life. With the exposure of these painters to the various styles of modern Western movements and the concepts of Neo-colonialism and Africanization propounded by Kwame Nkrumah, they were encouraged to help retrieve the lost culture and develop the African image.[382]

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[380] Southern, central and the three northern regions of Ghana share a long history of indigenous paintings styles and techniques. It follows that other regions beyond Ghana equally share unique indigenous painting styles and techniques. See Emmanuel Antwi. Paint and Painting in Traditional Ghanaian Art: Evolution, Application and Meaning. Unpuublished doctoral Thesis. Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, 2015.

[381]Refer to Amoah Larbi'spresentation at the Instititue of African Studies thursday seminar on 16th March, 2017, 9am. The paper is entitled "The Creation of a Ghanaian Identity Through Half a Century of Modernist Paintings (ca 1950's-1990's), Kwabena Nketiah Hall, University of Ghana, Legon.

[382]See Wiz Edinam Kudowor. Some Trends in Contemporary Ghanaian Painting. Unpuublished undergraduate Thesis. Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, 1981, p.8-9.

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Kudowor's reflections can be gleaned from Nkrumah's speech advocating the motion for independence in 1953. Interestingly, the idea expressed in the oratory by Nkrumah can be philosophically traced to an Adinkra symbol which aptly and accurately captures Nkrumah's philosophical proclamation. His declaration about knowing our history to understand the present and future is vividly and graphically captured in "Sankofa", an adinkra symbol which conveys a maxim that going back to recover the past is not abhorred or frowned upon. In philosophical language, this can be paralleled to Nkrumah's declaration because it illustrates the fundamental idea and concept of visiting one's past and knowing one's history and traditions in order to build a magnificent future. In a related discussion, Atta Kwami provides a matching ideology to suit this particular debate. Particularly in his essay, Kofi Antubam, 1922–1964: A Modern Ghanaian Artist, Educator, and Writer, Atta Kwami (2013) presents a biographical study that examines Antubam's critical relationship with Nkrumah's philosophy of the "African Personality," and the artist's stance on "Sankofa" – a return to the aesthetic principles and artistic values of the past – as his "strategy for understanding modernist expression." In Atta Kwami's view:

> *Sankofa* was widely discussed during the period surrounding independence and is what ultimately allowed Antubam to create his own "natural synthesis," that is, to bring his misconceptions and contradictions to a resolution. *Sankofa* occurs in Asante art as a bird looking back towards its tail, with the implication that there is nothing wrong with learning from the past; it is also the name of a stylized pattern and *adinkra* symbol. [383]

Situating the issue in a historical context, Sei'dou et al. (2015) present a chronology of colonial educational structures leading to the creation of the Achimota Art Department which later evolved into what is now known as College of Arts and Sciences in KNUST:

[383]See Atta Kwame's Chapter on Antubam in *Gitti Salami and Monica Blackmun Visonà* (Eds.), *A Companion to Modern African Art*. West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, Inc. 2013, p.232.

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> KNUST was established in 1961, succeeding the colonial Kumasi College of Technology (KCT) which was set up in 1952. However, the College of Art has a longer history than KNUST itself. It began in colonial Gold Coast as a small art department in Achimota (Prince of Wales) College in Accra in the period between the two World Wars where Kwame Nkrumah, who was later to become the first President of Ghana, was among the students of the first art master, G. A. Stevens Before Stevens, there was the vocation list curriculum called Hand and Eye Work (a.k.a. Manual training for boys) which was introduced c. 1909. Hand and Eye was an outgrowth of Scandinavian *Slöjd*, the German *Gewerbeschule* and the drawing by rote Somerset House-South Kensington system of the Victorian Era.[384]

Sei'dou et al. (2015) go on to explain how such colonial art curricula in the West African region led to creative revolts like the *Natural Synthesis* of the Zaria Art Society led by Uche Okeke and his collaborators. This and several other opposing creative practices by artists undergoing such colonial art training was a critical response to the ostensible Eurocentrism prevailing in African art colleges and institutions at the time. Silva (2017: xv) provides a broader explanation of some of these misconceptions from a curatorial perspective. Silva follows up by stating:

> We realized very quickly that there was a fault line in terms of knowledge and practice, whether artistic or curatorial, and there was an urgent need to address gaps in art education as with other countries across Africa, Nigeria inherited a British colonial educational system. Whilst independence ushered in a new era in which self-determination was the cornerstone, the colonial educational system remained intact and its legacies remain discernible today—barely changed and largely unchallenged.[385]

"Politiczed" meanings of "traditional" and the needless compulsion of categorizing several critical African art schools under the "traditional art" label has inadvertently obscured some of the rich modernist African art schools. This sort of loaded marginalization has denied some major African modernists of visibility and sustenance, obliterating the overall significance some of Africa's

[384] See kạrí'kạchä Seid'ou et al. Silent Ruptures: Emergent Art of the Kumasi College of Art. In *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science,* 5(10), 2015. pp.131-132

[385] See Bisi Silva. Asiko: On the Future of Artistic and Curatorial Pedagogies in Africa. Lagos: Centre for Contemporary Art,. 2017. p.iv

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greatest modernist art schools, most of them located in remote villages (usually limited to the sacred). Such developments further emphasize the necessity for aestheticians, art historians and art critics to adjust themselves academically to fully embrace the whole scope of modern art which is most often devoid of the important achievements and contributions by "traditional" African artists, especially elderly women. In his research works, Appau Asante, has documented significant roles of some Ghanaian women in selected indigenous Ghanaian visual arts for national and socio-economic development of art and visual artists respectively.[386] The immense creative contributions of African women to national development and the rise of and global "Modernism" or what is popularly known today in the art world as "contemporary" or "conceptual art" cannot be overemphasized here.

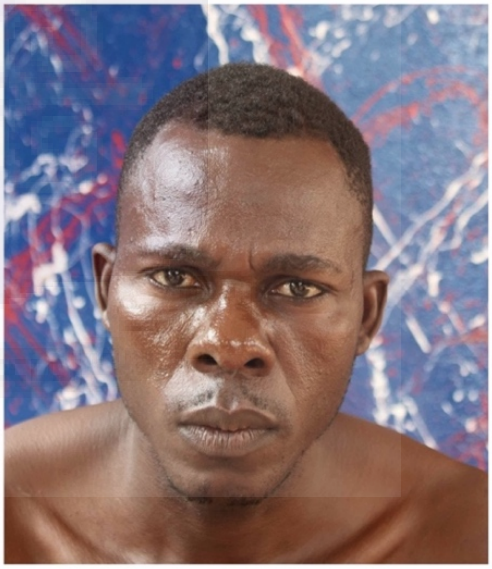

Figure 8.10.4 Left: Mama Vena Shrine Xanukplɔ. Right: Noble Kunyegbe, two of the principal artists in the Kli-Adzima cluster of shrines. Klikor, Volta Region (2016). Photography by Researcher.

[386]See Eric Asante Appau. A Study of Selected Indigenous Ghanaian Women in Some Indigenous Visual Arts. Unpublished PhD Thesis, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, 2009.

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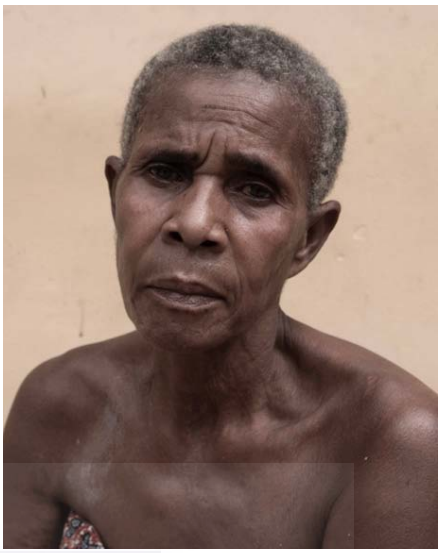

Figure 8.10.5 Left: Afanyehu Nuwordu Right: Rose AUadada. Both body painters, Mama Vena Shrine. Klikor, Volta Region (2019). Photography by Researcher.

It is equally important to highlight Ogbechie's (2010) critique of Enwezor's curatorial approach of framing "contemporary African art" as a context of essentially Western replications of "modernism". Ogbechie's presentation sufficiently addresses Enwezor's 'problematic' curatorial practice which is merely geared towards "feeding" the nauseating appetite of the capitalist White art market at the detriment of the unsung custodians of modernism located in African villages and rural communities on the continent:

> It is obvious that Enwezor's valorization of a contemporary African art largely defined through the work of artists of African Diaspora artists has had the paradoxical result of validating a form of contemporary African art that negates critical engagement with the history and development of modern and contemporary art in Africa itself, or with indigenous forms of African art whose contemporaneity remains to be theorized. His curatorial work thus produces ahistorical interpretations of contemporary African art in general and advances a self-referential narrative of contemporary practice using limited number of artists recycled in closed-loop exhibitions.[387]

[387] Retrieved from: http://aachronym.blogspot.com/2010/06/curator-as-culture-broker-critique-of.html (Accessed on 20/05/2018)

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To further strengthen Ogbechie's case, it is crucial to add here that, while most of the 20th century "high modernists" and "conceptual artists" were in search for "new" mediums and "modernist' approaches for creative expression in the mechanical age, African artists had long traversed such artistic impediments. Sacred Vodu aesthetics still remains a true manifestation of mystical creative expression, which simply reflects the heights of metaphysically-charged art. Vodu artists serve as creative messengers for the whole community by giving form and image to the unknown spiritual forces surrounding them—a creative expression connecting the Vodu artist's inner soul to the Divine and the metaphysical realm. Abraham (1992) has noted that the African artist assumes a priest-like role who serves as a medium tasked to invoke spiritual energies, concretize unseen forces, channel spiritual messages and communicate with deities and ancestors. The African artist in essence becomes a vital link to bridge the gap between the unknown spirit world and the physical world. [388] These esoteric practices, spiritual communication and mystical connections can appropriately be appreciated through the perspective of Anlo-Ewe spiritual beliefs and socio-cultural background. Stressing on the significance of expressing spiritual essence or what he terms as 'inner meaning' in art, Kandinsky made the following observation:

> All this does not presume to say that the "symbolist" school of art is necessarily nobler than the "naturalist." I am making no comparison, only a distinction. When the difference in aim is fully realized, the Primitives[*sic*] can no longer be condemned as incompetent, nor the moderns as lunatics, for such a condemnation is made from a wrong point of view. Judgement must be passed, not on the failure to achieve "naturalism" but on the failure to express the inner meaning.[389]

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[388] See William E. Abraham. Sources of African Identities. In Kwasi Wiredu and Kwame Gyekye. (Eds). *Person and Community: Ghanaian Philosophical Studies, Vol. 1,* (Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change Series II), Washington D.C.: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy.1992, p.50.

[389] See Wassily Kandinsky. *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, Auckland: The Floating Press, 2008, p.11.

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All these perspectives are not merely meant to gloss over the rich diversity of shrine art in Ewe Vodu religion which explores various artistic elements and creative expressions. In fact, it is very common to see folk narratives and legendary accounts of Vodu Deities and their mystical powers captured in elaborate paintings, sculptures and murals on shrine walls. Notwithstanding, these artforms are not representative of a religion whose art is predominantly characterized by abstraction.

Below is a photographic presentation of the creative and spiritual process of creating the shrine murals during the Kli-Adzima Spiritual Renewal Festival. A creative process deeply rooted in generations of modernist artistic practices.

Figure 8.10.6 Ngɔgbeda Sodolo Tekpe leading Mama Vena (Ablɔgame) fiasidiwo to trek in single file procession from the shrine to a sacred site to collect kaolin (The sacred site is less than 2 kilometers from the shrine and is within the Klikor community). Klikor, Volta Region (2016). Photography by Researcher.

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The kaolin is mixed with holy water to form a sticky paste used in plastering the wall. The next stage of the creative process is exclusive to a single artist (known as the Xanukplɔ) for each of the satellite Kli-Adzima Shrines. The Xanukplɔ engages her creative faculties by employing dripping, splattering, soak-staining and splashing techniques to grace the plastered shrine walls. Prayers, chants, and other supplications are made during the creative process of plastering the shrine walls. The devotees engage in meditative prayers and make her final supplications on the finished masterpiece mural before leaving the shrine. This ritual performance and creative process is strictly limited to the women devoted to Kli-Adizma and Mama Vena.

Figure 8.10.7 Kli-Adzima devotees pulverizing sacred kaolin (mixed with sacred water) into a fine paste while waiting for their turns to plaster the shrine walls. Klikor, Volta Region (2016). Photography by Researcher.

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Figure 8.10.8 Kli-Adzima devotees in the process of *'balili'* (plastering the shrine walls with sacred Kaolin). Klikor, Volta Region (2016). Photography by Researcher.

Figure 8.10.9 Kli-Adzima devotees in the process of *'balili'* (plastering the shrine walls with sacred Kaolin). Klikor, Volta Region (2016). Photography by Researcher.

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Figure 8.11 Mama Vena Shrine Xanukplɔ, engaged in the dripping, splashing and sprinkling process of making abstract expressions on the plastered shrine wall. Klikor, Volta Region (2016). Photography by Researcher.

Figure 8.11.1 Ablɔgame Xanukplɔ engaged in the dripping, splashing and sprinkling process of making abstract expressions on the plastered shrine wall. Klikor, Volta Region (2016). Photography by Researcher.

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Figure 8.11.2 A finished modernist *'balili'* mural on Kli-Adzima Shrine wall. The spontaneous splashing, soak-staining, dripping and sprinkling of edza (millet-based solution) produces interesting accidental effects and highly sophisticated artistic results. Klikor, Volta Region (2016). Photography by Researcher.

Figure 8.11.3 Kli-Adzima devotees pose in front of the freshly painted *'balili'* mural on Kli-Adzima shrine walls. Klikor, Volta Region (2016). Photography by Researcher.

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Figure 8.11.4 Vodu devotee in a contemplative pose making her final supplications on the finished *'balili'* masterpiece mural. Klikor, Volta Region (2016). Photography by Researcher.

Figure 8.11.5 Close-up shot of *'balili'* mural on Mama Vena Shrine wall. Ablɔgame, Klikor, Volta Region (2016). Photograph by Researcher.

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Apart from creating these impressive murals, women render many other acts of service in honour of the deities. Women are generally in charge of cooking, cleaning, sweeping, running other domestic errands as well as ensuring hygienic and sanitary conditions within the confines and environs of the shrine.[390] Some of these modern art schools date back several centuries. Hence, the fact that these art schools have been passed down from generation to generation through indigenous pedagogies does not necessarily constrain all their essential aspects within the confines of "traditional art." African religious aesthetics is mostly employed in the ritual context or sacred space. It is also deeply grounded in the moral and the sacred. In his PhD studies on Environmental Aesthetics, Avenorgbor (2008:94) makes the observation that:

> In Ghanaian indigenous or cultural context, aesthetic principles are mostly related to moral and religious values, and there is usually strong emphasis on the formal aesthetic aspects of the objects (including the natural environment) and the moral and religious ideas they express.[391]

African aesthetics emphasizes the tenet that different cultures have unique aesthetic values in different places in the world. African art is not necessarily reduced to "imitationalism", "art for art's sake", or photocopying what is perceived in nature or our surroundings. Fosu (2004:84) also presents his perspective on pre-colonial indigenous Ghanaian aesthetics:

> The creative works produced by Ghanaian traditional artists were not controlled by strict duplication of the exactness of the subject. Rather it was the idea embodied in the subject perceived which determined the visual meaning and function of the works. Thus, a piece of art work, expressed in the abstract or in the realistic with polished or rough finish and embellished in simple or intricate decorative designs, was appraised on the basis of the communicative symbolism unified within its physical type-form. Both the functional and the esthetical [*sic*] values of the art

[390] Men also perform selected domestic roles in the shrines.

[391] See Stephen Kofi Avenorgbo Aesthetic Impact of Ghanaian Socio-Cultural Practices on the Environment and its Protection in Ghana. Unpublished doctoral thesis. Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, 2008, p.94.

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> were critical to its appreciation. This was the convention for the evaluation of Ghanaian classical art traditions before colonialism.

Primarily, modern art is created through an array of subliminal creative processes, operating below the level of consciousness. It evokes in us, primal instincts, deep emotions or leads us to vividly perceive things in the spiritual world that we otherwise can't perceive in the physical world without the impressions or expressions of a modern artist. Similarly, appreciating modern art is a highly intellectual and spiritualized activity that arrests the human soul, engages our psyche or evokes our extra-sensory organs to experience the divine and other profound spiritual dimensions. Other experiences may manifest in the form of ephemeral shock, grief, ecstasy, pain, love, anger, aggression, liberation, security, lust, passion, sexual arousal, or even a mystical union with the artwork itself etc. In the contemplative process of being engaged in a full aesthetic experience, Vodu devotees say prayers and make spiritual supplications to the Deities for their divine favour, blessings, good health, prosperity, security, long life, and generally paying homage and respect to them. Apart from chants, mantras and esoteric rituals, Vodu devotees use aesthetic meditation as a route to enter the vortex of Vodu psychic energy to experience the sublime, the sacred or forge a mystical union with the divine.

Early European writers on African art mainly focused on its functional aspects merely to obscure the powerful essence and rich aesthetic qualities embedded in African creative expressions. Knowledge systems, spiritual dimensions and deeper philosophical aspects of African art were lost to false assumptions and misrepresentation on the part of Europeans. Silva (2017:85) captures this phenomenon by underscoring recent attempts of Western Museums and Galleries to “undo” the notion of “Fetish” by reconsidering renewed curatorial approaches in labelling and presenting African art. Through this approach, African art garnered a powerful refreshing aura with its long

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overdue importance and dignity it has been denied by Westners. They were no more to classed as "inferior objects" or "primitive fetishes". In Silva's (2017:82) own words:

> Curators never researched in any depth the existing connections between materiality and transcendence in African religious life, as one might perhaps expect in an anthropology museum. Instead, they chose to undo the concept of the fetish by displacing the African religious objects to the European domain of modernist art. Mounted on pedestals and bathed in light, the African religious objects ascended to the realm of universal art. These objects were no longer 'primitive fetishes'; they were cult objects surrounded by an aura of religious and aesthetic spirituality.[392]

Figure 8.11.6 Researcher posing by a variation of Modernist soak-stained mural on the mud walls of Tɔgbui Adzima Shrine in Torgodo, Volta Region (2016). Photography by Research Assistant.

In recent times, urban Ghana modern artists re-emphasize Ghana's culture through their creative works. First of all, there are those who have successfully repositioned Ghana's own cultural symbols as successful artistic tools, explored them and given them personal and new modernist

[392]See Sónia Silva (2017). Art and Fetish in the Anthropology Museum. In *Material Religion*, 13(1), 77-96.

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twists in diverse styles. Some of the major early generation of "formally trained" Ghanaian modern artists include: Ablade Glover, El Anatsui, Grace Atta, Kofi Antubam, Kwami among others. These artists and several others, recreated Ghana's entire culture by appropriating old forms and reinventing them into refreshing cultural expressions. They are engaged in constant communion with both the past and the present environment. According to Kudowor (2003:1), one of the leading Ghanaian modernists of our times:

> I am continually redefining my perspectives on life in general, my personal experiences in particular and my interaction with various elements of my environment […] I explore elements of my cultural background using visual language inspired by African symbolic imagery, and mythology dating back to Egypt. I sometimes dwell on some of the inherent aesthetics of my immediate environment and pipe my very personal and intimate experiences into rectangles, squares, circles and colours on canvas.

Schooled through an Europeanized art curriculum at the then Kumasi College of Art (now KNUST), El Anatsui also had this to say about his own Sankofa paradigm shift:

> Sankofa syndrome was a reaction to a conscious and forcible attempt to denigrate a people's culture and replace it with an extraneous one [...] I had taken the habit of working with adinkra symbols, and the funerary cloth and symbols were intriguing [....] I studied them for about five years, right from when I left [Kumasi]. I set out to practice engraving the symbols that they print on the cloth, engraving them on trays used in the market to display tomatoes fish—anything . I would go there with chalk and spend the day drawing shapes, at times different forms from the regular round ones they normally produce [...] I did this for about four to five years and got conversant with the forms and their structures. I tried my own variations of them and begun to create my own signs after.[393]

Like Wiz, Anatsui, (and other prominent precursors), several African artists are going through the Sankofa phase to realize their own personal *Natural Synthesis.* They are digging into the past archives, the esoteric vaults. They are drinking from the well of life.

[393]See Susan Mullin Vogel. *El Anatsui: Art and Life.* London. Prestel, 2012, p.26-27

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Figure 8.11.7 A young child poses in front of Tɔgbui Adzima Shrine wall. Pay attention to the Vodu mural. Klikor, Volta Region (2016). Mural by Noble Kunyegbe. Photography by Researcher.

Indeed, as a professional artist myself, I'm still undergoing this spiritual phase where I apparently no longer make any conscious effort to integrate Anlo-Ewe symbols and sacred Vodu aesthetics in my art exhibitions. It just emerges in my creative expressions. I have become one with the inner creative spirits. Like one of the shrine artists explained to me in an informal interview; *'You must have been very lucky to be among the 'chosen few'. If the 'deities themselves' have 'chosen you' as a vehicle to manifest their creative power, your creative expressions will gradually assume a'potent' spiritual aura'.* Indeed, ever since I begun to experience this "spiritual paradigm shift" as an artist, I most often feel the urge of the creative spirit flowing through the inner depths of my very soul. This enlightening research has broadened my creative vision and exposed me to an endless supply of creative essence and spiritual expressions I could tap and explore and create my own unique aesthetic values in future art exhibitions.

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Figure 8.11.8 A group of German academics appreciating my artwork during an art exhibition in Accra. Title of artwork – Shaka's Military Reforms (130cm x 175cm) (2017). Photography by Researcher.

Figure 8.11.9 Incorporating symbols and aspects of modernist Vodu body art into the installation performance for my Purple Harmattan Exhibition opening at Alliance Francaise in Accra. The Performer being decorated is Ghanaian Choreographer, Sena Atsugah (2017). Photography by Research Assistant.

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Figure 8.12 Kli-Adzima devotee being decorated by Afanyehu Nuwordu ahead of performances at Mama Vena Shrine. Klikor, Volta Region (2016). Photography by Researcher.

Figure 8.12.1 Repetitive circles incorporated into body art of a Vodu performer during the 2016 Kli-Adzima Festival. Mama Vena Shrine, Klikor, Volta Region (2016). Photography by Researcher.

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Figure 8.12.2 Young Ewe performance artists. Alakple and Klikor respectively (2017). Photography by Researcher.

Figure 8.12.3 Young Ewe performance artists. Avenɔƒeme, Volta Region (2018). Photography by Researcher.

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Figure 8.12.4 Tɔgbui Afadi on his way to join Tɔgbui Agagli Asipodi and Fianugɔ Womegbeamewo for spiritual renewal ceremonies in honour of Kli-Adzima and Mama Vena, Klikor, Volta Region (2016). Photography by Researcher.

Figure 8.12.5 Researcher and a Brékété adherent in a pose with a spot-painted sacred sculpture of Nana Adziwonor (a protective occupational deity). Woe, Keta, Volta Region (2016). Photography by Research Assistant.

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Figure 8.12.6 An Amegashie sitting in front of her spot-painted shrine (Tsabashi Dorkenu Shrine), Afiadenyigba, Volta Region (2017). Photography by Researcher.

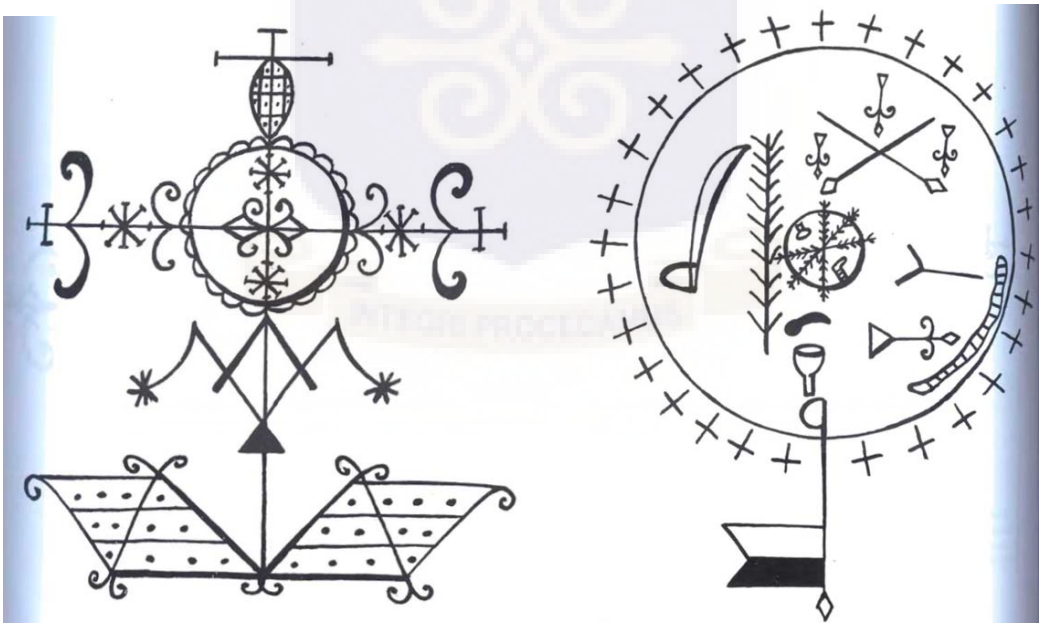

Diagram 8.12.6.1 Left: Sim'bi Right: Sim'bi Africain. Circles incorporated into Veve symbols in sacred Vodu symbolism among people of African descent in Haiti.[394]

[394]See Milo Rigaud. *Secrets of Voodoo.* New York: City Lights Books, 1969, pp.393-400.

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According to Rigauld (1992:67), Veve ritual diagrams are, as a matter of fact, condensers of astral forces and ritual attractors of planetary powers to which they are mysteriously bound by a geometrical occult chain, from which writing and language, architecture and cybernetics were born.[395] The circle is a very powerful symbol in Vodu symbolism and ritual practices. It symbolizes the totality of life, spiritual power, sanctity, security, mystical protective cover and sacred purity. It is also deemed aesthetically pleasing and most often associated with the divine and feminine attributes. Spherical shapes, mandalas, cylindrical forms, curvilinear designs and spirals are age-old intuitive symbols that abound in nature and still remains one of humanity's most preferred symbols throughout the ages. These primordial shapes, forms and designs had a great influence on the evolution of spiritual symbolism and still permeates several ancient religions, ritual dances, magical symbols and mystical arts. Since Vodu is a religion closely linked with natural forces and universal energies, Ewe-Vodu mythology draws on its linkage with nature to break down certain complex aspects of Ewe Vodu cosmological beliefs. Take for instance, the creation myth of the Fons of Dahomey as noted by Michel and Bellegarde-Smith (2006: 43):

> Dahomeans also believe that the calabash which constitutes the cosmic sphere is surrounded by a large calabash welded in the same manner as the small one. Beyond the larger calabash is the abode of the deities. The calabashes are separated by a large body of rain water. Since the small calabash is mobile, it is said that the "little calabash floats in the larger one". The small calabash contains the visible world with its elements: earth, water, fire, and air. According to Dahomean mythology, when Mawu Lisa arranged the universe from pre-existing materials, she traveled throughout the universe and stopped at the "four quarters of space," which correspond to the four cardinal points of the earth. At each halt, she gathered materials with which she formed each half of the calabash, solidifying the dirt from which the earth is composed and determining the location of the waters. [396]

[395] Ibid. p.67

[396] Refer to (Mercier, 1954:220) cited in Michel, C., Bellegarde-Smith, P. (Eds.) Vodou in Haitian Life and Culture: Invisible Powers. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, p.43.

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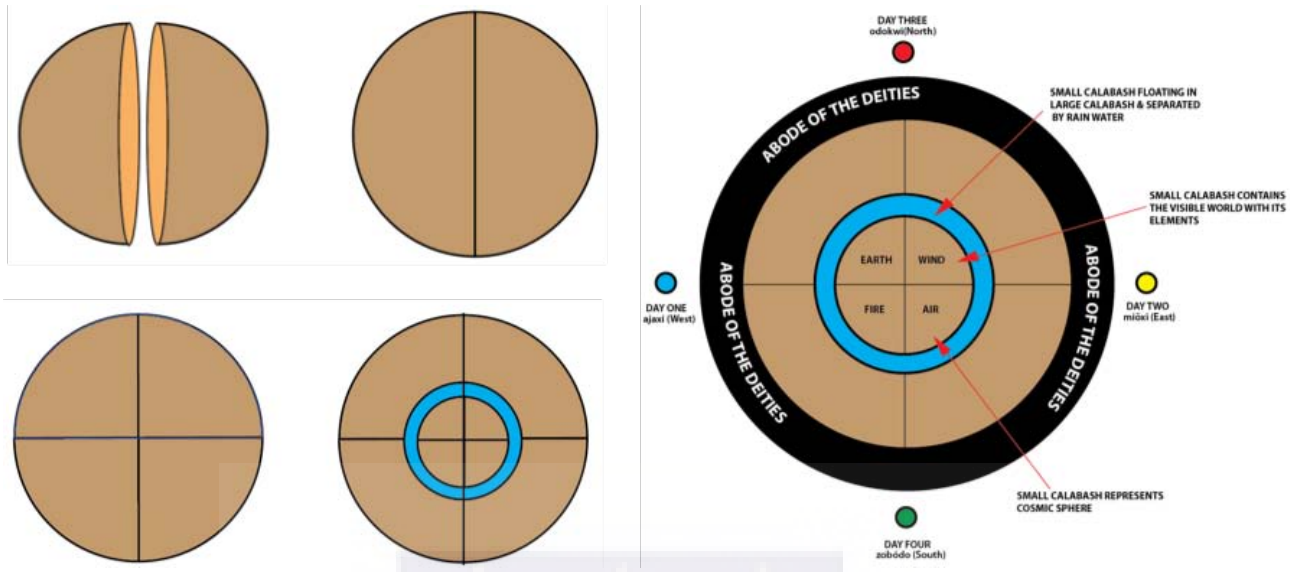

Diagram 8.12.7 Visual representation of the Fon creation myth. Diagram by Researcher.[397]

All these cosmological ideas and aesthetic concepts cannot be merely dismissed as myths, generalizations or wild speculations because the universe actually operates in circles, spherical forms, spirals and elliptical motions. Spirals and elliptical motions form the basic building blocks of life and the cosmological principles that shape the universe. Indeed, the spiral vortex, as found in whirlpools in water and in the double helix structure of the DNA molecule — just two of myriad examples — is nature's favoured form for the transmission of its energy, both economically and efficaciously, radiating out and drawing in simultaneously, infinitely and eternally. The archetypal image of the spiral came to render itself in the idea of a path that could be climbed in stages to reach God, a notion fundamental to the Kabbalah and several ancient religions and mystical practices.[398]

[397] Similar cosmological worldviews can be observed in other cultures like the Akan. Refer to to the Bono (Akan) Spiritual-Temporal Worldview in Kwasi Konadu. *Indigenous Medicine and Knowledge in African Society*. New York: Routledge, 2007.

[398] Retrieved from: https://medium.com/@geoffjward/the-spiral-the-eternal-sign-of-the-creative-and-organising-principle-at-work-in-the-universe-8889ba092300 (Accessed on 18/09/2019).

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In a profound way, the Anlo-Ewe people are not only connecting to their deities and ancestors through their creative expressions but they are also in harmony with the natural laws of the universe. Anlo-Ewe Vodu aesthetic concepts are essentially operating in tune with the natural forces and universal energies the Priests harness into spiritual entities. As such, circles, dots, spheres, round and cylindrical shapes are among the most popular shapes, forms and symbols that permeate Vodu iconography. For instance, in Adzima, or say, Brékété worship, libation is poured through a semi-spherical calabash, body art of devotees consists on body markings in the form of dots, spot and circles. The Shrine is constructed in a cylindrical form, some of the Vodu deities, the shrine walls are decorated with circles, dotted blotches or spot painting. The ritual symbols, performances and spiritual regalia of the priests also have circular elements and designs incorporated into them (such as beads, staffs, headgears, sacred symbols, spiral dance moves, curvilinear performance formations etc.)

Similar beliefs and aesthetic concepts about circles, semi-circular forms or curvilinear shapes abound in studies on African symbolism. Excerpts of similar beliefs and spiritual philosophies can be gleaned in the annual Swazi ceremonial of Incwala in which first harvest and the eating of first fruit is enacted. The Incwala ritual is meant to maintain, renew and increase the King's vigour. His mystical powers align with the forces of nature. He becomes a symbol or an 'embodiment' of nature itself, upon whom depends, rainfall, fertility of the soil, success of harvest and the increment in his personal power is linked to the nation's advancement and social equilibrium.[399]

> The time for holding the Incwala is fixed by reference to both sun and moon. It must begin when the moon is "dark" so that as the moon waxes the king may wax with it in strength […] when he is resting in his hut and is about to leap out to start

[399] See Edwin W. Smith. African Symbolism. In *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 82 (1), 1952, pp. 13-37.

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> his journey anew: "The King races with the sun". The gathering of the people, all dressed in their finery, demonstrates and cements the unity of the tribe [*sic*]. The dancers first assume the shape of a crescent and then that of a circle. This is not pure symbol: they represent the wing moon; and their vigorous dancing imparts such vigour to the king that he too may wax in fullness of power. [400]

Thus, the circle is considered to be an essential and elementary geometric shape, form or symbol in aiding spiritual communication and mystical union with the divine. Umeh (1977:22-25) provides interesting perspectives in a related study among the Igbos in South Eastern Nigeria:

> Traditional circular dances are known to exist in Africa, Europe, Asia and elsewhere. Again, the explicit/implicit theory that circular, spiral, curvilinear, rectangular, triangular, linear and other motifs used in isolation, is not tenable in Igboland (or the rest of Africa for that matter). […] The theory held by some that some motifs are creative while others are not, is not necessarily correct. For example, Dr. Livingstone's theory that the circle is evidence of barbaric lack of inventiveness in Africans cannot be shared by even his fellow Europeans who in fact see the invention of the wheel-the-circle-as the soul of their industrial and technological revolution and inventiveness.[401]

Clearly, ficticious binaries have also been drawn in the manner in Livingstone's "aesthetic judgements" which only resonates with condescending connotations of "barbarism". Yet in the same breath, if a similar artwork is created by, say, an European artist, is "hailed" by "modern art" critics or curators as "ingenuity", "pure artistry" or "creative brilliance". For instance, in 2014, Damien Hirst created a group of resin pill multiples as an evolution of his "successful Pharmaceutical Series". Damien Hirst observes, "Pills are a brilliant little form, better than any minimalist art. They're all designed to make you buy them... they come out of flowers, plants,

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[400]Ibid. pp. 13-37.

[401]See John Anenechukwu Umeh. *After God Is Dibia: Igbo Cosmology, Divination, Sacred, Science in Nigeria*. London: Kamak House, 1977, pp.22-25.

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things from the ground, and they make you feel good, you know, to just have a pill, to feel beauty."[402]

Figure 8.12.8 The Qatar Museums Authority's Al Riwaq exhibition space in Doha is decorated as a giant Damien Hirst spot painting.[403]

Figure 8.12.9 Damien Hirst's "Pharmaceutical Series"[404]

[402]Source: http://www.josephklevenefineartltd.com/artists/damien-hirst/damien-hirst.html (Accessed on 24/12/2017)

[403]Source of image: http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/13/arts/design/damien-hirsts-spot-paintings-at-gagosian-in-eight-cities.html (Accessed on 24/12/2017)

[404] http://www.josephklevenefineartltd.com/artists/damien-hirst/damien-hirst.html (Accessed on 24/12/2017)

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Figure 8.13 Close-up shot of an Amegashie sitting in front of her spot-painted shrine (Tsabashi Dorkenu Shrine), Afiadenyigba, Volta Region (2017). Photography by Researcher.

Figure 8.13.1 Damien Hirst's spot paintings — some with dots about the size of pinholes, others 60 inches across — have long been celebrated, and disdained, for a certain anonymous, machinelike industrial uniformity.[405]

[405]Source: http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/12/arts/design/damien-hirsts-spot-paintings-the-field-guide.html (Accessed on 19/11/2017)

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Figure 8.13.2 Left: Ife Mask paired with "Golden heads (Female)" by Damien Hirst[406]

Damien Hirst has in recent times grown increasingly unpopular amidst critical reviews for his highly controversial and seemingly plagiarized works. Victor Ehikhamenor, a renowned Nigerian artist, expressed his disapproval of Hirst's "cultural appropriation" of Ife mask during the 2017 Venice Biennale. Ehikhamenor was also a participant at the same Biennale together with a few other Nigerian artists. According to him:

> The British are back for more from 1897 to 2017. The Oni of Ife must hear this. "Golden heads (Female)" by Damien Hirst currently part of his Venice show "Treasures from the Wreck of the Unbelievable" at Palazzo Grassi. For thousands of viewers seeing this for the first time, they won't think Ife, they won't think Nigeria. Their young ones will grow to know this work as Damien Hirst's. As time passes it will pass for a Damien Hirst regardless of his small print caption. The narrative will shift and the young Ife or Nigerian contemporary artist will someday be told by a long nose critic "Your work reminds me of Damien Hirst's Golden head". We need more biographers for our forgotten.[407]

[406]See Phoebe Parke. Damien Hirst Accused of Copying African Art at Vernice Biennale. Retrieved from http://edition.cnn.com/2017/05/10/africa/damien-hirst-appropriation-venice-biennale/index.html (Accessed on 19/11/2017)

[407] Retrieved from: https://artstrings.africa/modern-art-hirsts-appropriation-victor-ehikhamenors-call-biographers-forgotten/ (Accessed on 05/02/2018)

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Figure 8.13.3 Left: Damien Hirst's "Prodigal Son" exhibitionism paired with "*latsotso*" (Vodu sacrifice) during the Kli-Adzima Festival in Mama Vena Shrine, Klikor, Volta Region (2016). Photography by Researcher.

Similarly, a critical re-examination of the geometrical abstraction embedded in artworks from *De Stijl* art movement clearly reveals influences of African modernism. The goal in these visual presentations is not merely a comparative visual analysis of Western Art and African art per se. Rather, it is meant to draw the attention to the ever-growing hypocrisy and double academic standards of key players in the Western art establishments and institutions respectively, who are so quick to relegate African art to "Fetishism" and "Primitivism" while the arts from Euro-Western societies are hailed as "high modernism" or "civilized art". As discussed in Chapter 4, in visual ethnographic methods, photographs serve as a 'simple truth-revealing mechanism'[408] geared towards shaping minds and gaining a thorough understanding of a subject matter to influence a fundamental paradigm shift in the minds of readers. The powerful potential of visual ethnography in the study of cultures cannot be overemphasized as captured by Bateson and Mead (1942):

[408] Elizabeth Edwards. *Anthropology and Photography 1860-1920*. New Haven: Yale University Press in association with the Royal Anthropological Institute, London. 1994.

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> we are attempting a new method of stating the intangible relationship among different types of culturally standardized behavior by placing side by side mutually relevant photographs[...] By the use of photographs, the wholeness of each piece of behavior can be preserved, while the special cross referencing desired can be obtained by placing the series of photographs on the same page.[409]

To cite further instances, works by Piet Mondrian almost at once draws our attention to the homomorphism (similarity of forms) in Ndebele art and indigenous African settlements rooted in abstract designs and architecture of accretion. The similarity of concrete abstract visual forms in *De Stijl* as compared to Ndebele geometric abstraction is surely no coincidence. Ironically, Piet Mondrian[410] is widely believed (by Euro-Western scholars) to be one of the "founding fathers" of "modern abstraction".

> With Mondrian's accompanying conviction that artworks should be restricted to primary colors, white, and black—and clean vertical and horizontal lines […]In 1927, as he continued to develop his painting style, Mondrian also laid out an interior design philosophy, calling for homes to be a series of "colored and colorless planes, combined with furniture and equipment, which must be nothing in themselves but constituent elements of a whole." He even suggested turning any representational paintings to face the wall, such that they would become plain rectangles in step with the lines of an architectural space.[411]

But how could this have been possible when Piet was born in 1872 and abstraction had been thriving in Africa for thousands of years? For instance, the painting style (*De Stijl*) he and his cohorts claimed to have "invented" is merely a "clever" reconceptualization of the modernist abstract wall painting traditions of the Ndebele people of Southern Africa region. The use of basic geometric shapes outlined in bold black lines filled with vibrant primary colours on white

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[409] See Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead. (1942). *Balinese Character: A Photographic Analysis.* New York: New York Academic of Sciences. 1942. See also Douglas Harper. An Argument for Visual Sociology. In *Imaged-Based Research: A Sourcebook for Qualitative Researchers*. Jon Prosser (Ed.), London: Falmer Press,1998.

[410] Piet Mondrian, the "inventor" of "*De Stijl"* is a Dutch painter from Amersfoort, Netherlands.

[411] Retrieved from: https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-mondrian-turned-studios-giant-abstract-paintings.(Accessed on 13/11/2017)

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backgrounds has been a modernist style of mural painting among the Ndebeles long before Mondrian and his associates "invented" "*De Stijl*". Ndebele art thrived and flourished as a coded visual communication language to stage protests and insurrections against the harsh brutalities of the Boers around the mid-18th century. Even in present times the Ndebele modernist style of painting still form part of their everyday life. The art form is represented in their fashion, body adornments, huts, and even their cars.

Figure 8.13.4 Two Ndebele women sitting in front of their colourful house[412]

[412] Source: of image: https://www.pinterest.se/pin/298363544036070032/ (Accessed on 22/06/2017)

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Figure 8.13.5 Shot of an Ndebele artist painting a modernist mural on her wall. [413]

Figure 8.13.6 Esther Mahlangu. Image courtesy of 34FineArt.[414]

[413] Source of image:http://images.inmagine.com/400nwm/iris/photononstop105/ptg02180250.jpg
[414]For more information on Esther's artistic works Visit: https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-esther-mahlangu-is-keeping-africa-s-ndebele-painting-alive .(Accessed 22/06/2017)

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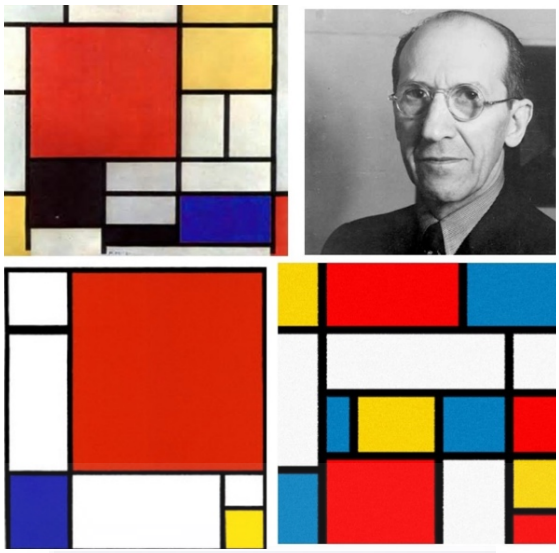

Figure 8.13.7 A Photomontage of Piet Mondrian and three of his paintings.[415]

Mondrian thought art and life should be the same and imagined a future where Art would be undetached from life. Mondrian's daydreams of envisioning the "future of art" are nothing but "futuristic fantasies", which have already been imagined and lived by Africans for eons well before he conceived such ideas. Relatedly, Eglash (1999:8) has noted that there is striking evidence that some of the sources of mathematical inspiration for European fractals were of African origin.[416]

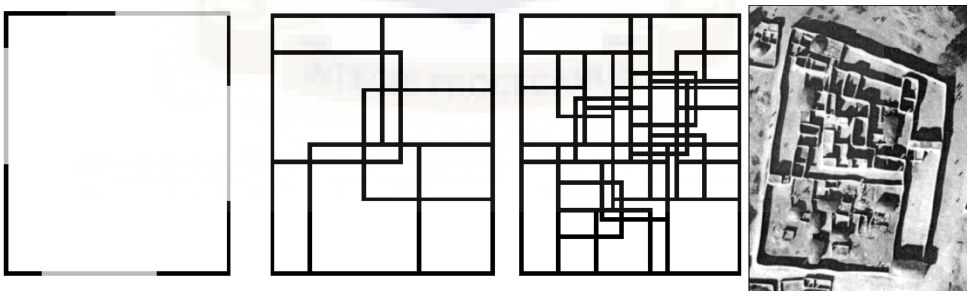

Figure 8.13.8 Rectangular fractal models and developed from an Aerial view of the city from a chief's palace in Longone-Birni, Cameroon.[417]

[415] Source of image: http://blocs.xtec.cat/artsandcrafts2016/2016/11/18/a-pierre-mondrian-lesson-primary-colours/

[416] See Ron Eglash. *African Fractals: Modern Computers and Indigenous Design*. London: Rutgers University Press1999, p.8.

[417]Source of images: https://www.plataformaarquitectura.cl/cl/764371/disenos-biologicos-una-arquitectura-en-armonia-con-el-ser-humano-y-su-entorno-natural/55116993e58eceb2700003e1 (Accessed on 15/08/2019)

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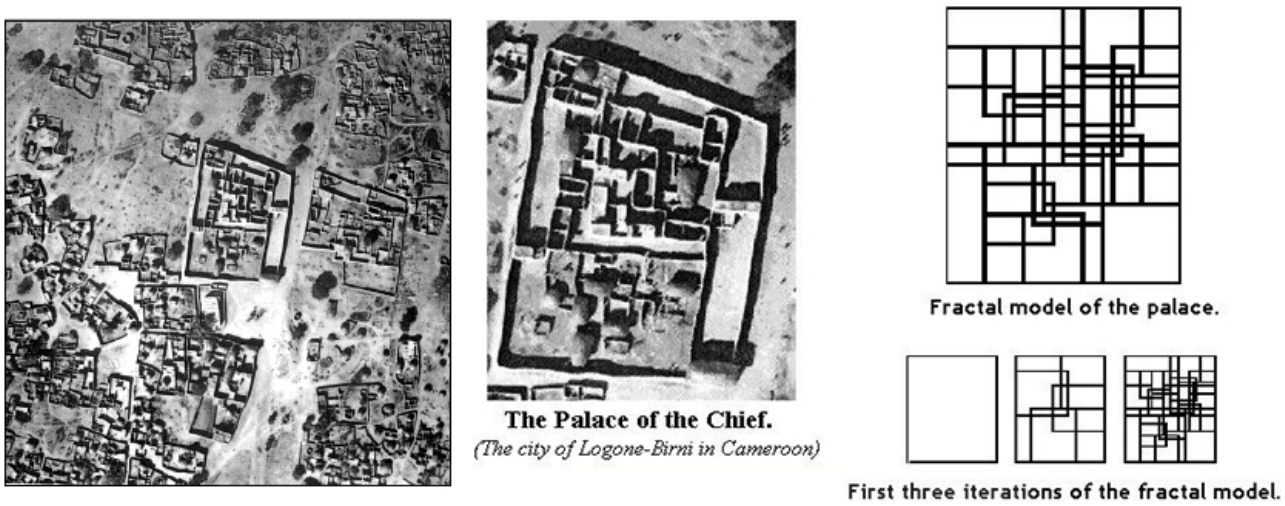

Figure 8.13.9 Aerial view of the city Logone-Birni, built by the Kotoko people of Cameroon. The buildings, made of clay, are examples of architecture by accretion. New enclosures were built around older, often sharing walls with the older rooms. [418]

The decisive impact of African geometric designs and its influence on modern European art and minimalist architecture cannot be over emphasized here. Western artists drew immense inspiration from African art spawning several imitations, yet some scholars still tag African art as "primitive" and question the inherence of aesthetic faculties in African art.

In modern times some Western aestheticians still hold African art in the utmost disdain and only appreciate them with contempt or a sense of poorly veiled false modesty. Most Western museums still refuse to acquire or exhibit contemporary African work because it does not 'measure up' to stereotyped standards of African art. Even after some Western museums changed their collection and acquisition strategies, making room for contemporary African or other Third-World art, the policy became: 'only as long as the contemporary art of a region bears some relation to the

[418] Source of images:
https://users.math.yale.edu/public_html/People/frame/Fractals/Panorama/Architecture/AfricanArch/Kotoko.html
(Accessed on 15/08/2019)

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"traditional" art'.'[419]The works of many contemporary artists from Africa and other parts of the non-Western World are still dismissed by many museums, galleries, and art experts in Europe and the United States as second-rate. Wolfgang Bender[420] quotes a European museum official as saying of contemporary non-Western art:

> It seems like third-rate artwork to us because the art presented here emulates the Western tradition - this is a criterion for selection - and because it is always lagging behind, regardless of how commendable the efforts might be basically. Every comparison with the present international art scene is therefore not in its favour. It cannot escape the critical eye of the Western art world; thus it is superfluous - if I might put it so bluntly... It is . . .an open secret that museums have always refused to take over such displays and always managed to find a new excuse and friendly reasons to dismiss them courteously and painlessly.[421]

Quite appropriately, Nkrumah (1944: 196) in his PhD dissertation paints a picture that makes the West's disdain for African art derisible. He asserts:

> The discovery of the new value of African art coincided with the new philosophy of art with which the youth of Europe were busily experimenting: Cubism, Expressionism, Dadaism, Futurism and Surrealism. These found the basis for artistic revolution. They opposed all that stood for the reproduction of reality. The geniuses destined to lead this movement were Pablo Picasso, Matisse, Modigliani, Lipschuz and Sontinee. The inspiration which gave it its impetus was African art.

Fosu (1975:35) sheds more light on Nkrumah's premise by stating that, "[The]… art of Africa was a factor that helped to save modern European artists from artistic decay and boredom. When Cubism and expressionist art were introduced to Europe for the first time, after centuries of their existence in Africa, it brought new vitality to European museums and galleries and also brought underserved economic gains to some European collectors and connoisseurs." A fitting extract from

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[419]Olu Oguibe, & Okwui Enwezor, (Ed.). *Reading the Contemporary: African Art from Theory to the Marketplace*, MIT Press: Cambridge, Mass, 1999, p.216.

[420] Ibid. p.216.

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Ehrenzweig's psychoanalytic discourse on modern art further strengthens the validity of both Nkrumah and Fosu's thesis. According to Ehrenzweig (1967:70-77):

> Before the advent of our modern art innovations could be accepted as an enrichment of existing tradition, not as self-conscious outright attacks on conscious order and reason. Even sixteenth-century Mannerism did not purposely destroy renaissance conventions. The manneristic painters despaired of emulating the great of the past and rather tamely set out to twist sensibilities in order to get highly sophisticated effects. They certainly lacked the destructiveness of our modern art and its avowed "primitivism." With rousing manifestoes our modern art tried to sweep aside all pre-existing art as no longer meaningful for modern times. [...] It is perhaps due to the fact that our own modern art is often content to work from low irrational levels of the mind alone, that our civilization has become so receptive to the art of other civilizations, prehistoric, historic, primitive[*sic*] and exotic.

Universally, art in its most basic form is a reflection of an artist's inner spirit not necessarily an external replication of reality. Folk aesthetics in Miller's (2001:248) assessment, is what ordinary people find immediately beautiful; elite aesthetics concerns the objects of art that highly educated, rich elites learn are considered worthy of comment by their peers:

> With folk aesthetics, the focus is on the art-object as a display of the creator's craft. With elite aesthetics, the focus is on the viewer's response as a social display. In response to a landscape painting, folks might say "Well, it's a pretty good picture of a cow, but it's a little smudgy," while elites might say, "How lovely to see Constable's ardent brushwork challenging the anodyne banality of the pastoral genre." The first response seems a natural expression of typical human aesthetic tastes concerning other people's artistic displays, and the second seems more of a verbal display in its own right.

Miller (2001) further infers that:

> Where ordinary folks prefer bright cheerful colors, elites may prefer monochromes, subtle pastels, and elusive off-whites. Where folks prefer good technique and manifest skill, elites may prefer expressiveness, randomness, psychoticism, or a childlike rejection of skill. Where folks prefer realism, elites prefer abstraction**.** With these preferences, elites can display their intelligence, learning ability, and sensitivity to emerging cultural norms. But to an evolutionary

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> psychologist, the beauty that ordinary people find in ordinary ornamental and representational art says far more about art's origins.[422]

Kramer hinted in a lecture that,' the purpose of art was to reach a reality that cannot be defined or represented by logic'.[423] In his treatise on the *Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche espoused parallel ideas suggesting the notion that, art transcends the logical and the rational. Articulated within the context of modern abstraction, Nkrumah, an adherent of Nietzsche, notes in his PhD thesis that "there is no logical thinking in the production of a work of art; in fact, artistic expressions do not travel on logical lines, otherwise there would be a perfection in art. Thus, the ideal of modern art is to express values and not to imitate."[424] Works of art arouse an extremely emotional, nearly religious experience. Art transports us to a world of aesthetic exaltation that transcends daily life. Art refers to the unnameable and unspeakable that shines behind the world of appearances. It brings us into contact with a metaphysical or supernatural reality, which awes us into reverential silence. [425] Art gives us a deeper understanding of religious practices. Artists take the sentiments that are buried in inchoate form across many minds and bring them to the surface for all to see. They

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[422] See Miller, Geoffrey. *The Mating Mind: How Sexual Choice Shaped the Evolution of Human Nature*. New York: Anchor Books, 2001, p.284.

[423]See Lloyd Kramer. The *Great Courses: European Thought and Culture in the 20th Century.* Retrieved from: https://www.thegreatcourses.com/courses/european-thought-and-culture-in-the-20th-century.html (Accessed on 26/10/2016)

[424] See Kwame Nkrumah. Mind and Thought in Primitive Society: A Study in Ethnophilosophy: With Special Reference to The Akan Peoples of The Gold Coast, West Africa. Unpublished PhD Thesis, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania.

[425] See Antoon Van den Braembussche. *Thinking Art: An Introduction to Philosophy of Art.* Brussels: Springer Science + Business Media B.V., 2009, p.70

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express the collective emotional wisdom of the race. They keep alive and transmit states of mind from one generation to the next.[426]

Ehrenzweig in his studies on the psychology of artistic imagination also stresses that "it has been said that the spirit of Surrealism begot new movement in modern art. This is another way of saying (as we always did) that modern art aimed at disrupting or twisting one's normal sensibilities as a matter of principle."[427] Contributing to the discussion, Kandinsky provides a broader explanation in his treatise *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*:

> Naturally this does not mean that the artist is to instill forcibly into his work some deliberate meaning. As has been said the generation of a work of art is a mystery. So long as artistry exists there is no need of theory or logic to direct the painter's action. The inner voice of the soul tells him what form he needs, whether inside or outside nature. Every artist knows, who works with feeling, how suddenly the right form flashes upon him. Bocklin said that a true work of art must be like an inspiration; that actual painting, composition, etc., are not the steps by which the artist reaches self-expression.[428]

Such philosophical perspectives are also shared by Van den Braembussche (2009). Noting the inherent value and intrinsic ideological qualities of art, he stresses that:

> The highest beauty is not to be found in physical or spiritual beauty, but in the pure Form or Idea. Only the pure Idea of beauty is true beauty. All other forms of beauty are merely beautiful to the extent that they resemble – or are an imitation of – this pure Idea of beauty. Only the Idea of beauty is eternal and true.[429]

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[426] See David Brooks. *The Social Animal: The Hidden Sources of Love, Character, and Achievement.* New York: Random House, 2011, p.590.

[427] See Anton Ehrenzweig. *The Hidden Order of Art: A Study in the Psychology of Artistic Imagination.* Carlifornia: University of Carlifornia Press, 1971, pp. 69-75.

[428] See Wassily Kandinsky. *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, Auckland: The Floating Press. 2008. p.134-135.

[429] See Antoon Van den Braembussche. *Thinking Art:An Introduction to Philosophy of Art* Brussels: Springer Science + Business Media B.V, 2009, p.19

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Solso has also observed through psychological research in modern art that "a characteristic of abstract art is that it is an arty Rorschach test in which everyone can give his or her personal interpretation of an object, even if that interpretation is totally irrational. No rule says that art or its interpretation must be sensible."[430] Several other scholars have propounded enlightening theories in that regard. One of the most penetrating being Barthe's *Death of the Author* theory which essentially argues that the personal views, political stance, intended "meanings" and interpretations of creative work must not be explained lest it become tainted by the artists personal bias. Even as an insider anthropologist, I particularly experienced much difficulty in trying to (but with very little success) elicit some secret and hidden meanings of Vodu art usually accompanied by pithy phrases like: *wo mɛdɛ'a Vodu gɔmɛ fia amɛ o* and *hutɔr mɛƒoa ɛnu tso Vodu ntsi fuu o*; which translates as "We don't reveal all the "hidden meanings" of vodu art" and "Vodu priests don't 'speak too much' about vodu art". Such positions were markedly different from other instances (in my queries about Ewe aesthetics) in which I was introduced to the notion of "*atsyɔkoe"*. For instance, a Vodu devotee spotted in an elaborate *yibotsi* or *atsifwifwi* hairstyle will simply respond "*de ko me koe wɔ atysɔkoe"*- "this is merely meant for heightening my overall aesthetic effect, that's all." In that sense, "*atysɔkoe"* can loosely be translated as "aesthetics for aesthetics sake".

[430] See Robert L. Solso. *The Psychology of Art and the Evolution of the Conscious Brain.* Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2003, pp.12-13.

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Figure 8.14 A Kli-Adzima devotee adorned with *yibotsi* hairstyle. Klikor, Volta Region (2016). Photography by Researcher.

This, for me, was a significant dimension to Ewe aesthetics considering the widely held notion that African aesthetics is merely restricted to functionality. It also validates Gyekye's observation in Akan art appreciation, based on an equivalent notion of the pure aesthetic qualities in a work of art. According to Gyekye (1996:126):

> […] there are objects that have no functional use, but that, nevertheless are enjoyed because of their purely aesthetic qualities. In Akan such objects are called "items of beauty" ("afɛɛfɛde"). Thus, after seeing a particular dance performance, an Akan may say, "this dance is beautiful", elegant: "Asa yi yɛ fɛ. That person's appreciation of the dance performance will be a purely aesthetic appreciation, unrelated to his consideration of functionality of the art form.[431]

Considering all these discussions on "modern art" in comparison to African art and aesthetics, a few critical questions may suffice here. Are the aesthetic canons and characteristics of "modern

[431]See Kwame Gyekye. *African Cultural Values*. Accra: Sankofa Publishing Company, 1996, p.126.

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art" in academic discussion not embodied in African art centuries before all these theories were even formulated? So why reduce African art to "primitive art", "third-rate art," "impure art," or "fetish" when it has essentially embodied modernist concepts in its approach, expression, quality and function, since its inception. African art has deep philosophical dimensions. African aesthetics emphasizes and proves beyond all the findings in this research, the tenet which implies that, different cultures have unique aesthetic values in different places in the world. Chanda (1994:53) affirms this point by noting, "African aesthetics canons are grounded in spiritual underpinnings or belief. The criteria for the physical appearance and beauty of an object are dictated not by individual caprice and imagination, but by spiritual philosophies of the people".

Judgements of taste, aesthetic preference or what is deemed aesthetically "pleasing" are essentially based on emotional gratification or contentment and not beauty per se. Okafor (2000) further entrenches this aesthetic notion by explaining that:

> Masks worn by masquerades are artistically designed to induce certain emotion in the beholders during the performances of certain rituals or other traditional ceremonies. The success of the masquerade in achieving this objective is the basis for the qualifying it as beautiful. This concept of beauty may be safely referred to as ontological beauty or in simple expression, functional beauty. This is so because it is beauty derived from the inner meaning and being as well as the function of the object.[432]

The parallels and commonality espoused by scholars cited so far, reflect the intrinsic value and inherent aesthetic qualities embedded in the works of the African creative spirit. Thus, by embedding the delight of artistic creations in the elevated structures of the psyche and human mind, both scholars withdraw from limiting the African aesthetic experience to the slanted conclusion

[432] See Fidelis U. Okafor, "African Aesthetic Values: An Ethno-Philosophy Perspective". In *Frontiers of Transculturality in Contemporary Aesthetics*. Nsukka: University of Nigeria, 2000, p.154.

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that art appreciation or aesthetic contemplation is merely characterized by what is "beautiful" or whatever is aesthetically "pleasing". Building on some of these aesthetic arguments, it is reasonable to deduce that "beauty" is not the property of a "beautiful artwork". On a neurological level, when we judge something to be "beautiful", it is not because we perceive the property of what we deem "beauty" in the object. The spiritual energy an artwork radiates, drives our interest and sense of awareness, which evokes in us, powerful thoughts, associations, experiences and emotions that subsequently leads to various sensations. Yet beauty does not yield pleasure in some direct, physical way: it is not, at least on the face of it, a physical property (such as emitting certain electromagnetic waves) that could affect us without being aware of it. So, beauty is a source of pleasure only when we are aware of it. But now suspicion may arise that the source of our pleasure is not beauty itself but a mental state involved in our awareness of it.[433]

In a nutshell, aesthetic appeal or aesthetic judgments are basically a state of awareness driven by primal feelings based on the subjective grounds of how we appreciate a work of art. Art appreciation is also largely influenced by shared beliefs or personal experiences. All these conditions create a unique aesthetic experience for each individual hence the popular notion that aesthetic appeal differs from one individual to another and one culture to another. Again, "beauty" is not necessarily situated in an artwork itself or an object worthy of aesthetic contemplation. It is purely a spiritual sensation we become aware of through our extra-sensory perception faculties.

[433]Berys Gaut and Dominic Lopes (Ed). The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics. New York: Routledge, 2001, p.304.

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Figure 8.14.1 Beads trader posing with Ewe beads during the Kli-Adzima festivities. Klikor, Volta Region (2016). Photography by Researcher.

Figure 8.14.2 Kli-Adzima muralist, posing before a finished sacred mural in Mama Vena Shrine. Klikor, Volta Region (2016). Photography by Researcher.

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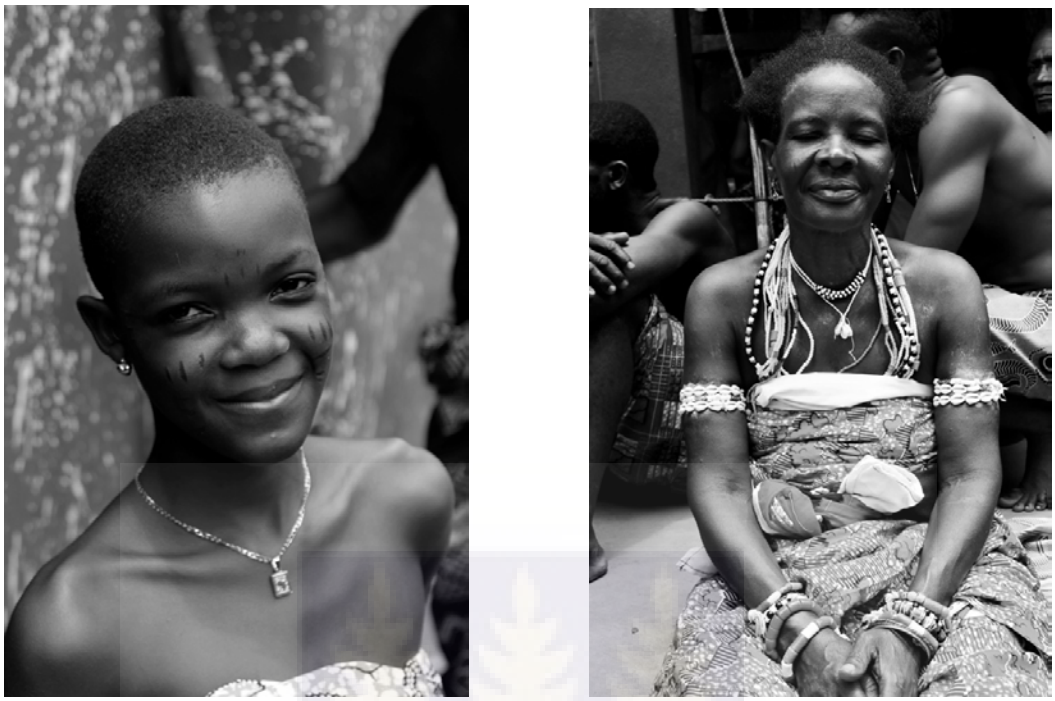

Figure 8.14.3 Notice the different expressions and aesthetic responses to shrine art, Kli-Adzima creative ritual processes and general social experience within the sacred space. Klikor, Volta Region (2016). Photography by Researcher.

Figure 8.14.4 Notice the facial expression and tactile aesthetic response of the Kli-Adzima devotee being decorated by Afanyehu Nuwordu artist ahead of performances at Mama Vena Shrine. Klikor, Volta Region (2016). Photography by Researcher

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8.5 Concluding Remarks

The various arguments and aesthetic deliberations advanced in this Chapter dismantle the faulty premise and fictitious binaries of the "modern" and "primitive" or "traditional" in the art world. These fictitious binaries which essentially "glorify" Western art over any other art form was weakened through visual presenatations of high-resolution photographs from the field. Subsequently, discussions of the research findings discredit uninformed notions of "creative inferiority" associated with African art to be a "clever hoax". Based on these aesthetic deliberations, one can deduce that it is impractical to have a "standardized set of laws" for defining aesthetics or evaluating art. Kudowor (1981:68) also provides thoughtful remarks in that regard:

> Generally, Western art has reached a sort of blind alley where the artist no longer knows what he expresses. The artist's work therefore is expressing the waning culture of the West. Unlike in Western art where the abstract experiments have moved the artists away from his audience, Ghanaian paintings still maintain a link with the artist's world along with its aesthetics of colour and form, which the Western artists have eschewed. [434]

In consonance with Kudowor's observations, Bonham-Carter and Hodge (2013:6) have noted that, "today, by contrast, new art is no longer dominated by avant-garde movements asserting their militancy at every turn. Strident collective manifestoes are rarely published now, and "isms" have become hard to discern."[435] Till now, the "New art" movement remains a major phase in the "modern art" world which has left many Western artists in an endless time-consuming goose chase in hopes of producing the "bold", "provocative", "sublime" and "shock-laden" artworks.

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[434]See Wiz Edinam Kudowor. Some Trends in Contemporary Ghanaian Painting. Unpublished undergraduate Thesis, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science nd Technology, 1981, p.68.

[435] See Charlotte Bonham-Carter and David Hodge. *Contemporary Art: The Essential Guide to 200 Groundbreaking Artists*. London: Carlton Publishing Group, 2013, p.6.

See Miller, Geoffrey. *The Mating Mind: How Sexual Choice Shaped the Evolution of Human Nature*. New York: Anchor Books, 2001, p. 262.

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Figure 8.14.5 "Vomit Artist" Millie Brown creating one of her infamous "Vomit Paintings"[436]

Based on all these argumentative aesthetic critiques and renewed discussions of African art, it stands to reason to conclude that Picasso, Metzger, Manet, Breton, Dali, Monet, Mondrian, Braque, Pollock, Duchamp and other Western artists did not "invent" "Modern Art" and all the "isms" of art ascribed to them. This is a well-documented fact, which has been the intellectual stance of many well-read scholars in several academic publications, conferences and art education forums. Modern art as facts have proven, predates 20th century "modernism". Essel and Acquah (2016) have also fittingly captured a parallel theory in that regard:

> The early conceptual artists including Duchamp did not just borrow; they adapted the practice hook, line and sinker and named it *conceptual art*. Boden's (2011) argument that Duchamp's attempt was so much challenging the notion of art is

[436]Source of image:http://www.ripleys.com/weird-news/millie-brown-vomit-artist/ (Accessed on 24/12/2017)

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> highly contestable since that art practice was already in existence in Africa. That may be tantamount to reinventing the wheel.[437]

Sections of this Chapter also covered visual presentations of Vodu iconography, sacred aesthetics and the inherent qualities of modern abstraction in African art. This discussion will be misjudged by some Western art critics as a squabbling "debate" of what is modern art or what does not constitute modern art. Rather, it must be understood as a rational inquiry of "who" has the monopoly or sole authorship of defining modern art or "standardizing the rules" of aesthetics. Recent attempts by Western aestheticians, art historians and curators to "extol" African art in online blogs, exhibition catalogues, magazine articles and mainstream art disciplines is nothing but a slapstick farce to critical African art historians. Western "art historians" and "aestheticians" over the ages have propounded faulty premises to discredit the attempts of other art historians (usually of African descent) who dare to reposition African art in its rightful place—at the very apex of 'civilized art' itself.

[437] See Osuanyi Quaicoo Essel, Ebenezer Kwabena Acquah. Conceptual Art: The Untold Story of African Art. In *Journal of Literature and Art Studies,* 6 (10), 2016, pp.1203-1220.

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CHAPTER NINE

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 Conclusion

The major findings in this study has exposed the fictitious binaries of European constructs of "Modern art" and "Primitive art" or "traditional" African art. Presentation of these major findings have been explored through comparative photographic analysis to highlight the neglected symmetries between modern art and sacred Vodu aesthetics. Supporting ethnographic data from interviews, focus group discussions and participant observation generated from extended field studies complement the analysis of the findings provided in this research. Divergent views and insights were extracted from science, medicine, art therapy, art history and evolutionary psychology to generate a deeper understanding of the philosophy behind Ewe Vodu aesthetics. Another important aspect captured in this research is the significance of how Vodu aesthetics is extensively incorporated into healing practices, psychic warfare and the psycho-Spiritual dimensions of the Arts. Other essential areas captured in the findings includes how Vodu therapeutic aesthetics contributes to the general emotional and psychological well-being of Vodu devotees in the realms of spiritual warfare.

The historical trajectory of academic hegemony and Eurocentric bias in 'documenting' African art and the intellectual developments surrounding some of the prevailing dogma was clearly established in this research. The history of African art and anthropology has been 'littered' with racist ideas and theories which have been invalidated and demolished, thanks to the compelling arguments and empirical findings based on fieldwork. As a new generation of scholars, our best

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guess is that the future of anthropological scholarship and philosophical inquiry into African art holds similar intellectual prospects. The future of African studies in general, will see African scholars gaining a firm analytical grip on revisionist anthropology and African philosophical studies to shape the destiny of a very powerful race. Gyekye (1997) has emphasized that, philosophical concepts, ideas, and propositions can be found embedded in African proverbs, linguistic expressions, myths, folktales, religious beliefs and rituals, customs and traditions of the people.[438]

Building on Gyekye's observation, it must be stressed that, African philosophy needs to form a core part of African educational curriculum right from kindergatten level. In 2009, an entire conference held in Mauritius was dedicated to advance the teaching of philosophy to pre-school and primary school children.[439] Similarly, in *Philosophy: A School of Freedom* [440], UNESCO published some groundbreaking surveys and findings on related discussions on the essence of teaching philosophy to children. The theoretical basis of teaching philosophy to children along with the pedagogical benefit African philosophical teachings weild needs to be carefully explored in African educational structures. Reinforcing and integrating vital aspects of African philosophical systems into pre-schools and primary level education should be of primary concern to educational policy makers. Policy makers must also ensure that African art and aesthetics forms

[438] Gyekye, K. *Tradition and Modernity: Philosophical Reflections on the African Experience*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

[439] On 7th and 8th September, 2009 in Port Louis, the Republic of Mauritius hosted the High-Level Regional Meeting on the Teaching of Philosophy in Anglophone African countries, co-organized by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Human Resources of the Republic of Mauritius, the Mauritius Institute of Education, the Mauritius National Commission for UNESCO and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). See UNESCO. Teaching Philosophy in Africa Anglophone Countries. Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2009, p.10

[440] Refer to Chapter one of Philosophy: A School of Freedom.Teaching Philosophy and Learning to Philosophize: Status and Prospects. Paris: UNESCO Publishing, 2007.

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an integral part of pre-school and tertiarry education programs to foster a healthly psycho-social attitude toward African art and culture. The main hope of African sociocultural advancement and holistic mental development lies in the proper education of the younger generation.

9.2 The Need for Further Investigations and Research into African Art: With Special Reference to the Performing Arts

One aspect of this research that I was not fully able to cover and properly document is the aesthetics of Ewe religious performances. This is an area which lacks serious theoretical documentation and archival preservation. Indeed, several scholars and researchers have expressed their concern about the general lack of information, analysis and documentation in the field of performing arts in Africa. However, recent researchers have been able to decipher the languages, art, esoteric knowledge, and messages communicated in performances. Even though performing arts have gained prominence within the academic community, little is still known of their aesthetics, social and philosophical context. Another reason is the fact that the performers are constantly in motion that an investigator caught up in the moment can barely distinguish between the artform and the performer. Performing arts research (which is persistently being studied from a Western epistemology viewpoint) is inundated with studies in dance, music, oratory, and drama to the detriment of the aesthetics and visual culture of indigenous African performance practices. Drewal (1990:40-42) contextualizes the problem of documentation and analysis of performing traditions in Africa by stating that:

> The documentation, analysis, and interpretation of masqueraders pose unique problems. For one thing, they don't stand still. The Igbo say, "you do not stand in one place to watch a masquerade" (Cole and Aniakor 1984, xii), that is, one needs multiple perspectives to comprehend such an artistic happening. Masked performers are multimedia experiences involving many arts occurring simultaneously. To study such phenomena requires an all-embracing approach. We have read and then they danced for too long [...] To date, studies of art in

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> performance contexts, have proliferated, but there, are very few studies of performed art. I am making the distinction here between performance as context background and performance as an ever-emerging text which art objects are an integral.

Similarly, Avorgbedor also expresses concern about the inadequate research and information on the visual arts in Anlo-Ewe performing arts tradition. He states:

> There has not been any significant progress, especially in the area of iconology and the visual arts. It is mostly scholars in the disciplines of African art history, folklore, comparative literature, and cultural anthropology—including subfields of aesthetic and symbolic anthropology who are visibly interested in the performing arts in which the visual occupies a significant performative space. It is, therefore, very important—especially in this crucial stage of research and scholarship in African music—that scholars who truly wish to commit to a fuller understanding of performance conventions and their sociocultural universe must devote time and resources to the visual, kinesics, and the total synesthetic environment. It is easy to overlook cultures such as the Anlo-Ewe in which there are no active traditions of wood carving comparable to, say, the Yoruba but records of appropriation, articulations, and modes of appreciation in regard to the visual arts in performance and ritual contexts strongly suggest a strong awareness of the rhetorical, aesthetic, and supra-ritual functions of the visual.[441]

Performing arts serve as an endless supply of raw data on African art and aesthetics. A cross-cultural analysis of performing arts in Africa reveal that, it is usually displayed during initiation rites, rites of passage, festivals, military campaigns, fertility rites, agricultural rites, mediumship (communicating with spirits, dead relatives or ancestors), funerary rites, divinity rites, exorcism and healing rituals. As such, the social functions of art in performing arts becomes more evident when there is a seamless appreciation of the performance itself and the artworks being used for the performance. Each type of artwork exhibited in African performance traditions represents a range of meanings associated with the ethnic group's religion, metaphysics, history, mythology and

[441] Daniel Avorgbedor. The Place of the Visual in Constructing and Extending Affect and Meaning in Ewe Performance Traditions, With Attention to Du*f*ozi: Some Theoretical and Methodological Implications. [Unpublished Paper Submitted to: "African Music in the 21st Century – An Iconic Turn? An International Symposium Celebrating the 21st Anniversary of the African Music Archives Mainz]

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world view. Artworks mainly exhibited in indigenous performances include beads, masks, sculpture, headdresses, ritual symbolism, helmets, jewelry, fabric, shields, insignia, flags and others. Body art and modification such as scarification, tattoos, lip plates, piercings, body painting, earplugs are also exhibited during indigenous performances. Even though some of these creative artworks displayed during Vodu performance were captured in this research, they were not thoroughly analyzed like other areas.

In performing arts, the artworks, just like the performance itself, convey socio-religious, philosophical, cryptic and double-entendre meanings. For instance, McCarthy Brown[442] (2006:12) notes that, the "rattle, which is the emblem of the Vodu priesthood, is not used to make music but to signal key changes in the drum rhythms in a Vodu service, as well as to summon and send away the *lwa"*. Similarly, colours and numbers also have religious meanings in many African religions. In short, there is such a vast storehouse of information to document that even upon all this research and documentation, I have merely initiated the dialogue. As such, one of my main recommendations seeks to encourage future researchers to concentrate on the arts and aesthetics employed and exhibited in Ewe Vodu performances. In an effort to revise research methods in order to fully deconstruct complex religious societies like the Anlo-Ewe society, I must stress the importance of learning basic Ewegbe for future researchers which will enable them build working rapport in order to collect the exact information they need from their respondents.

On the basis of this scholarship, the conclusion to be drawn is that, in spite of much research and theorizing by the various scholars, there is still much grounds to be covered. Researchers into

[442] See McCarthy Brown's article: 'Afro-Caribbean Spirituality: A Haitian Case Study' in Claudine Michel And Patrick Bellegarde-Smith. *Vodou in Haitian Life and Culture Invisible Powers*. 2006. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. p.12.

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African religions seriously need to extend their expertise to unite religious studies with visual culture, religious aesthetics and performance traditions. Research into these areas need to even push further beyond the frontiers of the visual and delve more into the domain of the sacred, spiritual, hermeneutics, transformative powers of psychic arts, therapeutic properties of art, embodiology, neurotheology, neuroaesthetics, kinesthetic aesthetics, haptic aesthetics, histrionics, tactile aesthetic experience and haptic feedback in Vodu art and spiritual performances.

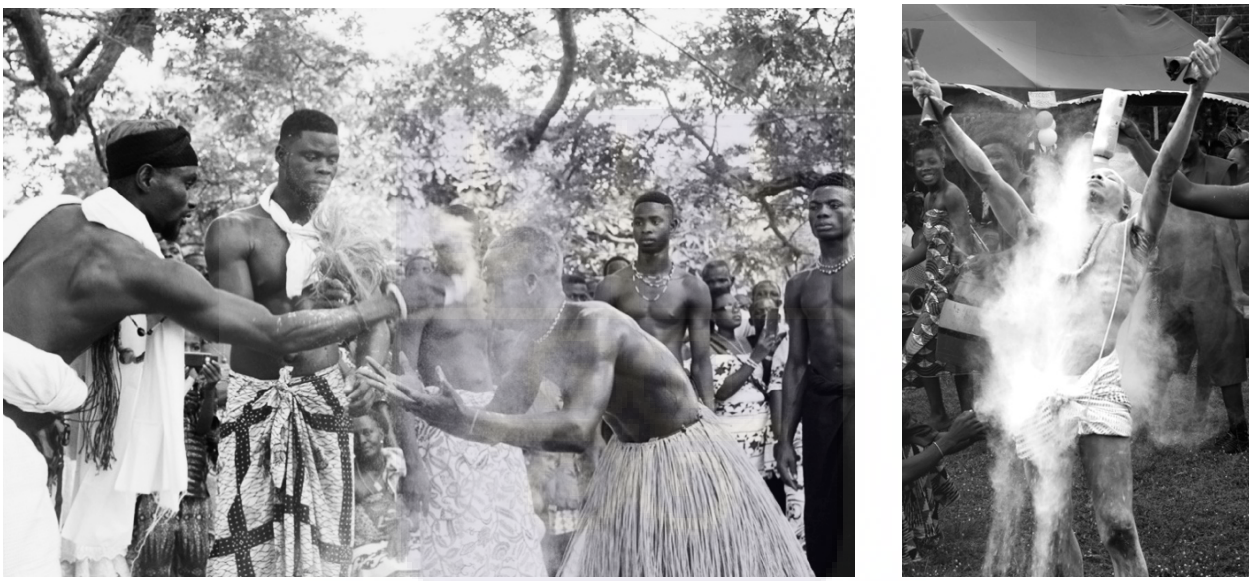

Figure 9.0 Left: Hutɔ Adzimashie Bali in a performance with a Kokushi. Right: Powder being sprinkled on a Vodu Performer. Dagbamete and Dzogadze respectively, Volta Region (2016). Photography by Researcher.

9.3 The Need for Further Philosophical Inquiry and Multicultural Research in African Studies.

A key area I wish to highlight in my recommendation is the need for further philosophical studies, interdisciplinary research and multicultural approach to African scholarship. Future researchers must also adopt African-centered educational approach in conducting studies into African-related issues. In education, centricity refers to a perspective that involves locating students within the context of their own cultural references so that they can relate socially and psychologically to their

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cultural perspectives. Centricity is a concept that can be applied to any culture. The centrist paradigm is supported by research showing that the most productive method of teaching any student is to place his or her group within the centre of the context of knowledge. (Kete-Asante, 2000)[443]. Speaking in an interview on some of the new questions being raised in African philosophy today, Gyekye (2013: 69) stresses that:

> I think African philosophers should pursue analytic investigations into traditional beliefs and assumptions. And the other relates to philosophers' analyses of contemporary African experience. I think modern African philosophy will have to be constituted by studies or research on contemporary African issues, postcolonial, if you like, post-colonial African problems. But we should not do this to the neglect of the examination of traditional African philosophical thought.

Similarly, Hountondji contributes to Gyekye's viewpoint by emphasizing the need for internal debate within indigenous African cultures in order to develop new alternatives. In examining a given tradition, writes Hountondji, two temptations should be resisted: The temptation of contempt and rejection, and the temptation to justify and idealise.[444]

Articulating the necessity and significance of philosophy in academia, Nkrumah has rightly pointed out that law, medicine and the arts are the arms and legs of learning but philosophy is the brain.[445] Nkrumah later declared in his 'African Genius Speech' that African Studies, in the form in which they have been developed in the universities and centres of learning in the West, have

[443]See James A. Montmarquet and William H. Hardy. *Reflections: An Anthology of African American Philosophy.* Belmont: Von Hoffman Press. 2000. pp. 105-106.

[444] See Paulin Hountondji. Tempting Traditions: Internal Debate Needed in Indigenous Cultures. In *Compas Magazine*., 2001, p.12.

[445]See Kwame Nkrumah. *The Autobiography Kwame Nkrumah.* Panaf Books Limited. London.1957. p.26.

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been largely influenced by the concepts of old style "colonial studies," and still, to some extent, remain under the shadow of colonial ideologies and mentality.[446]

In a symposium on "Black and African Cultures and Challenges of Globalization," organized under the auspices of centre for Black and African Arts and Civilization of Nigeria, the well-known Nigerian historian, J.F. Ade Ajayi, in his remarks as chairman of the occasion, asserted that "globalization is about competition and struggle for dominance, which encourages, more than anything else, the continuation and expansion of Western imperialism in the new millennium."[447] In a discussion that followed, participants of the symposium noted:

> [...]"That globalization fosters increasing disruption and marginalization of the arts and cultures of Black and African peoples;'
>
> "That globalization imposes alien cultural values on African societies, thereby distorting the African value system and identity;"
>
> "That globalization is a fresh phase in re-colonization of African societies which attempts to continue the promotion of Western linguistic heritage and literary and aesthetic canons at the expense of African indigenous languages and literature."[448]

In response to these findings, Gyekye dismisses the observations Ajayi and his fellow scholars made about globalization. Gyekye (2013:123) notes that:

> The observations made by the participants of the symposium are to my mind, a tissue of errors and perhaps groundless suspicions. They betray a sense of inadequacy, of passivity and inactivity, and of the inability to respond adequately to situations in defense or in pursuit of one's interests.

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[446]This speech was delivered by Kwame Nkrumah as the first president of the Republic of Ghana at the opening of the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, Legon on October 25th. SeeKwame Nkrumah. The African Genius. In *Reclaiming the Human Sciences and Humanities Through African Perspectives, Vol. 1*, Helen Lauer and Kofi Anyidoho. (Eds.), Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers. 2012. pp.910-911

[447] See Kwame Gyekye. *Philosophy, Culture and Vision: African Perspectives.* Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2013, p.121.

[448]Ibid. p.121.

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Gyekye deems such genuine concerns as 'groundless suspicions' but the recent 'soft imperialist' developments on the continent proves otherwise, which makes Ajayi's conclusions even more valid now than they were first formulated.

For instance, Vogel's (2012) observation is in agreement with Nkrumah's and Ajayi's stance on 'Europeanization of African Studies' when she stressed that 'the greatest shortcoming of the Kumasi (now KNUST, *my emphasis*) program was its art history course, which focused entirely on European art.[449] Vogel's opinion is not too farfetched. In my undergraduate program (Communication Design) in Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, books written by scholars and artists of African descent were hardly ever put on the essential reading list. Evidently, the early colonial art curriculum was structured in a 'certain way' to ensure that our 'naive young minds' were constantly being fed with the pompous notion that European artists like Da Vinci, Dali, Rembrandt, Matisse, Monet, Michaelangelo, Picasso and the likes were the "grandmasters" of art. Yet, the same university has produced quite a number of distinguished artists and academics like Ablade Glover, El Anatsui, Grace Salome Kwami, Nana Afia Opoku-Asare, Lee Nupke, Ato Delaquis and others who have contributed significantly to the study of African art and art in general. The situation at the library was not any better as it was disproportionately stocked (at the detriment of African art) with books about European, Oceanic and Meso-American art.[450]

[449]See Susan Mullin Vogel. *El Anatsui: Art and Life.* London: Prestel, 2012, p.26.

[450]I even had a colleague who was only skilled in drawing Europeans because the figure drawing books in the library were filled with illustrations and images of Europeans. My colleague was highly skilled in illustration but anytime he tried to draw Africans they would end up looking like 'Europeanized Africans.' He occasionally brought his illustrations and comics to me to add 'essential features' to make them look more African.

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It appears this situation has prevailed for quite a number of decades because El Anatsui before me confronted a similar problem. Discussing the concept of what he refers to as "indigenize", Anatsui, who was quite uncomfortable with the Europeanized tertiary art curriculum in KNUST, revealed in an interview with Vogel that, when he left art school, his idea was to kind of try to indigenize—to get a bit of indigenous material into his psyche. Anatsui recalls how he and his fellow university students began to see there was something missing in their program and went searching to find it elsewhere. He recalls how he later began what would prove to be a lifelong research into African arts and culture, with a special focus on graphic symbols.[451] It is in the same vein that I decided to embark on this challenging intellectual quest into African art and culture to dig deeper and deeper to 'find that something' in order to 'indigenize' not only my art but also my cultural identity as a true African.

In an interview ahead of his exhibition in 2014, one of Ghana's most prolific painters, Wiz Kudowor, revealed that all things influence his work, including local history, spirituality and symbols. He asserts, "I'm not ashamed to use Adinkra elements in what I do. They are ours. They are powerful. I believe that we should not let them go."[452]Gavua (200:112) equally shares corresponding aesthetic values:

> In general, colour, various kinds of gesture, visual arts, body decorations, and costume items are the major channels of self-expression. With the spread of Christianity and other forms of Western European cultural practices, travel and commercial activity, traditional symbolic behaviour is becoming limited. Traditional costume items, for example, are becoming too expensive for the local people to possess and the meanings assigned to traditional symbols are becoming blurred. Many symbols are therefore only interpreted and explained by only a few

[451]See Susan Mullin Vogel. *El Anatsui: Art and Life.* London: Prestel, 2012, p.26

[452]See http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/entertainment/Artists-Alliance-to-host-Wiz-Kudowor-325702 (Accessed on 07/12/2016)

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> knowledgeable persons including followers of the indigenous religion who are the main custodians of the traditional values of the people.[453]

Anastui's lifelong research into African graphic symbols and Kudowor's insistence on retaining them goes beyond doubt to prove the significance and inclusion of indigenous elements and symbolism into a nation's cultural psyche. In his studies, *Man and his Symbols,* Jung (1964:81) implores that:

> The further we delve into the origins of a "collective image" (or, to express it in ecclesiastical language, of a dogma), the more we uncover a seemingly unending web of archetypal patterns that, before modern times, were never the object of conscious reflection. Thus, paradoxically enough, we know more about mythological symbolism than did any generation before our own. The fact is that in former times men did not reflect upon their symbols; they lived them and were unconsciously animated by their meaning.

To further compound the issue, all these multifaceted problems recur in an age where neglecting our arts or tagging African visual culture as “backward” seem to be the 'elite' thing to do. We still live in a nation (Ghana) where the educational curriculum has been structured in a very biased way where students with very poor grades are admitted to the visual art departments while students with excellent grades are sent to the sciences neglecting the fact that it is art that drives modern science and technology. In connection, Gyekye (2013:122) is of the view that:

> If individual Africans endowed with artistic or aesthetic talents continue to exercise those talents to develop the arts to high degrees of excellence such as will appeal to the aesthetic sense of many others outside Africa, as in the past and, indeed, today, globalization will not - cannot - subvert the exercise of artistic talents, nor is there a reason why African artists will have to totally abandon their own indigenous artistic expressions in favor of, say, the European or the Chinese, or to abandon the cultivation of the music and dance forms of Africa.

From the ensuing discussions it can be deduced that Gyekye’s (2013) recommendation needs slight revision. As a researcher, I must acknowledge the fact that, Nigerian intellectuals are making very

[453]See Kodzo Gavua (ed.). *A Handbook of Eweland: Volume II the Northern Ewes in Ghana.* 2000. Accra: Woeli Publishing Services. p.112.

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great strides in the intellectual arena and it is imperative that other African intellectuals constantly liaise with one another to draw vital lessons from shared intellectual deliberations. The participants of the symposium have every reason to draw the earlier cited conclusions on the effects of Globalization on the African continent. Speaking as a professional artist, it would be quite an idealistic goal to wait for 'individual Africans' endowed with 'artistic or aesthetic talents' to develop the arts to 'high degrees of excellence' to counteract the effects of Globalization as Gyekye puts it. What is missing in Gyekye's recommendation is merely collective/collaborative efforts, not individualism. Collaborative efforts in the form of dialogue, joint research, partnered art projects, educational art exhibitions, cross-cultural analysis of the creative arts and so forth. Put that way, we can see common problems and address them collectively as artists, philosophers, cultural critics, psychologists, visual anthropologists, social anthropologists, media practitioners, researchers and policy makers. “Talents” and “individualism” alone cannot in anyway solve the multi-faceted problems globalization presents to Africans. Quite noticeably, our efforts require a much more pragmactic approach and governments must enact new cultural policies and enforce already existing ones to preserve Africa’s rich heritage. Educational policies must also be reconsidered and embedded with deep cultural values and practical measures to safeguard the interests of African art and African-centered scholarship. The concerns being raised here have been clearly spelt out in Ghana’s cultural policy (refer to sections 8, 9 and 10 of Ghana’s Cultural Policy, pp.34-42).

The critical question here is, why are all these policies not being properly enforced? Evidently, it is only through government and national support that we can take charge of our own historical narratives and cultural preservation. Ghanaian President, Nana Akuffo Addo (2017), in one of his “Ghana Beyond Aid” public speeches, stressed that:

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> It is time to build our economies that are not dependent on charity and handouts. We understand the aid fatigue phenomenon. We have learnt from long and bitter experience that, no matter how generous the charity, we would, and, indeed, we have remained poor […] What we need to do in this 21st century is to move Africa away from being cup in hand and begging for aid, for charity, for handouts […] We need to have a mindset that says we can do it, others have done it, we can also do it. And once we have that mindset, we will see this as a liberating factor for ourselves.[454]

Indeed, this ideology must certainly be extended to our educational policies. It must also be echoed in our tertiary institution seminars to support young emerging researchers in the African academic community, who are compelled to depend on Western "grants", "aids", and "funds" to conduct basic research in and about Africa. This 'development', according to Zeleza (2003:157) , has led to "the transformation of African intellectuals into 'paid native informants' for foreign donors".[455] Prominent Ugandan scholar Mahmood Mamdani (2011) has argued that the market-driven model of African universities has resulted in a "pervasive consultancy culture" and an "NGO-ization of the university.[456] As a result, new generation of scholars and future researchers must promote and encourage bold, innovative and self-reliant initiatives to fund African scholarship without necessarily depending on Western "Charity", "hand-outs" and "support" structures.

9.4 Vodu and Community Development

[454] Retrieved from: https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/Africa-beyond-aid-possible-Akufo-Addo-602699 See also: https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/Africa-must-stop-depending-on-foreign-aid-Akufo-Addo-606111 (Accessed on 28/11/2017)

[455] Zeleza, P. T. (2003). Academic Freedom in the Neo-liberal Order: Governments, Globalization, Governance and Gender. In *Journal of Higher Education in Africa*, 1(1), 149–194.

[456] See Wendy Willems. Provincializing Hegemonic Histories of Media and Communication Studies: Toward a Genealogy of Epistemic Resistance in Africa. In *Communication Theory, 24(4),* 2014, pp. 415–434.

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I wish to conclude my recommendations by listing some of the commendable developments Vodu has bestowed on the people of Dagbamete (one of the many locations I conducted my field studies). Dagbemete is a village located in the Akatsi District of the Volta Region. The rural setting, dirt roads, and still common thatch-roof huts give the settlement a distinct village feel. Most of residents are related to the founder, Tɔgbui Zatekpa, who settled in the area in the late 18th century. The village has developed a national and international reputation for its Vodu shrine, for its festivals, and for its summer music school. Hundreds of visitors from America, Europe and elsewhere visit the village each year.[457] After observing and understanding certain aspects of the Aƒetɔku-Gbodzi religious activities and the amount of development it has bestowed on Dagbamete, I concluded that Tɔgbui Aƒetɔku is worthy of respect like any other deity in other religions. Despite the punitive expeditions, missionary demonisation and destruction of most Ewe religious deities, Dagbamete still upholds the rich cultural values and religious practices of the Anlo-Ewe ethnic group. Tɔgbui Aƒetɔku-Gbodzi is a powerful force to be reckoned with because it has survived and dominates the lives of some Anlo-Ewe devotees even in the middle of modernity.

In Dagbamete, the Tɔgbui Aƒetɔku (Vodu deity) exists to serve the community's needs, more than any entity. All income generated from the existence of the Vodu belongs not to one person, but to the community, and the organizational structure that was put in place decades ago oversees the utilization of these funds for the development of the community.[458]"Traditional Religion and

[457] http://www.dagbamete.org/ (Accessed on 11/04/2015).

[458] It must be noted that, none of the above are related to the shrine itself or serve the shrine's needs. They benefit the community and visitors to the community. Compared to other shrines operating in the area (and perhaps the whole country), this is unique and remarkable. Interview with Curtis "Fo Kordzo" Andrews. January, 2018.

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Development" is a common theme that runs through the activities of the shrine and many remarkable achievements have been undertaken by the shrine via the economic and spiritual blessings of Tɔgbui Afetɔku. These include:

- Electrification of the village (Dagbamete)
- Construction of accommodation for patients
- Construction of teachers and headmaster's accommodations
- Construction of accommodation for visiting members
- Construction of a medical clinic and accommodation for staff

Below are pictures of some recent developmental projects to serve the people of Dagbamete community:

Figure 9.1 Left: Lorry park under construction in Dagbamete Community. Right: Accommodation for shrine members during festivals. Image Courtesy: Curtis Andrews (2017).

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Figure 9.2 Left: View of the clinic that will serve Dagbamate Community. Right: Old accommodation in Dagbamete community. Image Courtesy: Curtis Andrews (2017).

Figure 9.3 Left: A shot of the new community hostel in Dagbamete. Image Courtesy: Curtis Andrews. Right: Tɔgbui Sri poses with his entourage, the Chief of Dagbamete and high-ranking members of Tɔgbui A*f*etɔku Shrine and the Dumegawo of Dagbamete (2017). Photography by Researcher.

I was present during the 2017 Dagbamete A*f*etɔku-Gbodzi festivities to witness and photograph the inauguration of a newly-built hostel for the community as well as the sod-cutting ceremony for the construction of a new palace for Dagbamete.

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Figure 9.4 Tɔgbui Sri III in a sodcutting pose flanked by his entourage, the Chief of Dagbamete and high-ranking members of Tɔgbui Afetɔku Shrine and the Dumegawo of Dagbamete community (2017). Photography by researcher

I wish to use this opportunity to entreat everyone to exercise restraint in passing hasty judgements for or against Vodu practices without a proper understanding of Vodu religion. Neither should we be too quick to condemn or dismiss Vodu practices as "ungodly" or "backward" based on warped religious sermons, prejudice, ignorance or neo-colonial educational mind-frame. It takes extraordinary patience and effort to study, analyze and to genuinely grasp the basic concepts of Vodu religion and the arts associated with it. To fully understand Vodu, one must first try to understand Ewe culture and sociology. I have personally enjoyed this challenging intellectual journey. Most importantly, my spiritual life, to a large extent, has been greatly expanded into an enlightened state of socio-cultural awareness.

I pass on the challenge to African scholars to completely wrest African art research and anthropological scholarship from the stranglehold of Euro-Western academy. Such academic endeavours can be fostered through more critical thinking, analytical studies, proper archival documentation, constant people-oriented research, constructive criticism and a careful re-examination of Euro-Western publications about Africa and Africans. Western scholarship concerning Africa and Africans must be subjected to rigorous academic scrutiny by African academics and concerned scholars alike irrespective of race. It will equally be ruinous to maintain a position that only Western publications must be critically perused.

Despite all the information collected, analysed and documented, I have merely scratched the surface of mountains of data that is yet to be gathered, analyzed and properly documented. I must declare that I have not in any way thoroughly exhausted all the comprehensive studies that needs to be done in this emerging field. With the areas I have been able to document, it is my hope that,

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this research will pave the way for other future researchers in Ewe-Vodu aesthetics. I hereby conclude this thesis by encouraging future scholars to delve deeper into Ewe religious aesthetics to contribute broader insights into this emerging discipline to foster a genuine appreciation of Vodu Art.

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