

The Role of Ancient Art in Promoting Rites of Passage among Selected Ethnic Groups in Nigeria

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Abstract: Nigeria is a country rich with ancient arts and artistic expressions, which constitute its cultural heritage. Despite recent interest in Nigerian cultural heritage, one of the aspects of Nigerian culture that has been less explored is how ancient arts promote the rites of passage among ethnic groups in Nigeria. This paper aims to examine this relationship by highlighting the role of ancient arts in promoting the rites of passage among selected ethnic groups in Nigeria drawn from the country's three major ethnic groups namely; the Igbo, Yoruba, and Hausa. The paper follows culture transition theory and examines the symbolism, meaning and function of these art forms, such as masks, sculptures, and body adornments. Further, some intangible aspects of the traditions were explored such as childbirth, marital rites, burial rites, healing, etc. It discusses how these art forms reflect the social and religious values of the Nigerian people particularly in relation to rites of passage. The paper concludes by highlighting the significance and relevance of these ancient arts in contemporary Nigerian society.

Keywords: Ancient Art, Rites of Passage, Ethnic Groups, Culture, Nigeria

Introduction

Art is a universal form of human expression that transcends time and space, art can communicate or represent various things such as ideas, emotions, values, and beliefs that are often difficult to convey in words. Art can also serve as a medium of socialization, education, and identity formation. Ancient arts are the traditional artefacts, which are autochthonous to a given people. They bear direct connection with peoples' values, norms, mores, identity and cultural practices.

In many cultures, art plays a vital role in marking the stages of life, especially the transition from childhood to adulthood. This transition is usually accompanied by rites of passage, ceremonies, and rituals that signify the change in status, roles, and responsibilities of the individual. Several scholarly works have examined the concept of rites of passage (Morgenstern, 1966; Turner, 1967; Gennep, 1977; Cushing, 1998; Bell, 2003; McCray, 2018). In an elaborate study, Van Gennep highlights that a passage occurs when an individual leaves one group to enter another (Van Gennep, 1977). Art can enhance and enrich these rites of passage by providing visual, audio, and tactile symbols that represent the new identity and expectations of the adult (Brownie, 2022).

Nigeria, a country renowned for its rich cultural diversity and historical heritage, has a tapestry of tradition that has persisted through centuries. Central to these traditions are the rites of passage, essential ceremonies that mark significant transitions in individuals' lives, such as birth, coming of age, marriage, and death. These rituals not only hold profound personal meaning but also play a pivotal role in shaping the collective identity of various Nigerian communities. Amidst this cultural mosaic, ancient art stands as a testament to the ingenuity, creativity, and spiritual depth of the people of Nigeria (Fasuyi, 1973).

Nigeria's vast geographical expanse and heterogeneous society provide a unique lens through which to explore the multifaceted ways in which ancient art intertwines with rites of passage. From the vibrant masquerades of the Igbo people in the southeastern region to the elaborate *gelede* masks of the Yoruba in the southwest, and the intricately carved Ekpo society figures among the Efik-Ibibio in the south-south, each culture has its distinctive artistic forms that embody the essence of their rites of passage. These artistic expressions serve not only as visual delights but also as carriers of cultural knowledge, encapsulating the beliefs, values, and practices associated with various life transitions (Onilu, 2017).

Rites of passage hold great importance in Nigerian cultures as they mark significant milestones in an individual's life. These rituals serve as a means of initiation and transition, symbolizing the growth and development of individuals within their communities. Ancient art plays a crucial role in commemorating and reinforcing these rites of passage, serving as a visual representation of the cultural values and beliefs associated with each stage of life. Through various artistic forms and symbolism, ancient art not only honours these important moments but also strengthens the cultural identity and traditions of Nigerian societies. Rites of passage, essential ceremonies marking significant life transitions, have been intrinsic to the diverse cultures of Nigeria. These rituals, spanning birth, coming-of-age, marriage, death, and spiritual transitions, are rich in tradition and symbolism. Throughout Nigerian history, ancient art has played a crucial role in commemorating and reinforcing these rites, preserving cultural identities and spiritual beliefs.

This paper explores the linkages between ancient art and rites of passage across diverse cultures in Nigeria specifically it examines such practices as traditional birth ceremonies, coming-of-Age rituals, marriage and dowry traditions, symbolism and tradition, healing and spiritual transitions finally funeral and ancestral artifacts among Nigeria's three major ethnic groups namely Igbo,

Hausa/Fulani and Yoruba And further demonstrates that artifacts from different historical periods and cultural backgrounds, serve as tangible windows into the intricate rituals and ceremonies that define generations and their symbiotic relationship between ancient art and rites of passage.

Theoretical Framework

The theory of culture transition denotes the movement from one cultural practice to the other. In traditional African societies such process of transition in culture context is termed rite of passage. Nancy Schlossberg, posits that any transition “results in a change in assumptions about oneself ...” (Schlossberg 1981, p. 5), that is, it implies adequate or less adequate (i.e., crisis-type) self-identity transformations. According to Abrams (2020), people take diverse cultural paths; yet, in spite of their diversity, these journeys also share common characteristics: the need to recognize, and possibly adapt to, new situations, people, beliefs, practices, and ways of communicating. Thus, proponents of culture transition posit that as individuals grow they also transition to higher levels of cultural norms, value, identity or practice (Schlossberg, 1981; Ryba et al.,2016). From an intercultural theoretical perspective, Abrams (2020) found out that the process of cultural transitions, includes change from an individual’s old self to an intercultural one. Such transition includes various cultural responses such as cultural adaptation, involving the process through which individuals move from culture shock to adjust or adapt to new cultural contexts.

In a related account, the cultural transition model as Ryba et al.,(2016) elaborate, aims to keep in mind conventional processes or phases of cultural transition (pre-transition, acute cultural adaptation, and sociocultural adaptation) and considers how the mechanisms of cultural adaptation (social repositioning, negotiation of cultural practices, and meaning reconstruction) are interconnected to the entire processes of change.

In the context of our study, we seek to explore the various ways in which an individual moves from one cultural standpoint or position to the other as he or she ascends the cultural ladder, thus such process which involves rites of passage is suitably understood from the theoretical remit of cultural transition.

Methodologically, we review existing studies and extant literature in the broad themes of arts and rites of passage in Nigeria. Our main focus is to identify and link such cultural transition process to ancient arts to understand the various roles of such arts in strengthening the rite of passage.

Rites of Passage in Nigeria and Associated Art Objects

Rites of Passage is the movement from one stage or phase of life to another. It is known to play crucial role in the socialization, and transition of an individual from one cultural phase to the other .Rites of passage entails various cultural observance, rituals and different stages in an individual’s growth and development as well as the person’s intimacy, interaction and relationship with the community at large. van Gennep identified three major phases of rite of passage linked to a broader understanding of the processes of rite of passage. van Gennep(1977) contends that rites of passage have three phases: separation, liminality, and incorporation. Though each phase is distinct, van Gennep (1977) identified the linkages between one phase and the other when he called the rites of separation from a previous world, preliminal rites, those executed during the transitional stage liminal (or threshold) rites, and the ceremonies of incorporation into the new world postliminal rites. According to Ani (2023) rites of passage are valued deeply in various cultures by observing them, as they are passed key down culturally, socially and sometimes religiously, involving teachings and traditions into posterity. It is a ceremony that clusters around the great crisis of life, or periods of transition from one status to another The rites of passage is always marked with different sacraments through the use of objects and associated intangible expressions, these objects which include songs, dance, mask, various tests, ordeals, tattooing etc. are relics of traditional arts and symbols, which are utilized as tools of cultural verification and ritual symbolism. Thus, in most African societies, art objects play an important role in various rites of passage.

During these transitional periods, individuals are considered to be especially vulnerable to spiritual forces; hence, art objects are therefore created and employed to assist in the rite of passage and to reinforce community values (Clarke, 2006). It can therefore be affirmed that African art is one of the few artistic traditions that naturally incorporates itself into one’s cycles of life.

In Nigeria, ancient art plays an essential role in commemorating transitions among different ethnic groups. These customs are unique to each ethnic group and there are many rites of passage with associated activities and sacraments along various cultural lines; which thus article tends to highlight.

Traditional Birth Ceremonies

In this subsection, we examine traditional birth ceremonies among the Yoruba, Igbo and Tiv of north central Nigeria. Traditional birth ceremonies in Nigeria are significant cultural events that mark the arrival of a new member into a family and community. These ceremonies are deeply rooted in tradition and accompanied by diverse rituals and artistic expressions. Ancient art plays a crucial role in these ceremonies, with symbolic artwork used to welcome the newborn and bless them with good fortune and protection.

Ritualistic objects, such as traditional masks and sculptures, are also employed to invoke ancestral spirits and ward off evil during the birth ceremony. Additionally, traditional art forms, such as mural paintings or textiles, depict the journey to parenthood and convey the cultural values and beliefs surrounding childbirth. Using ancient art, these birth ceremonies not only commemorate the event itself but also reinforce the cultural traditions and values associated with this important rite of passage.

In Yoruba culture, birth ceremonies are celebrated with vibrant artistry. A key element is the "*aso-oke*," a hand-woven textile adorned with intricate patterns and symbolic colors (Chloe, 2023). The newborn is wrapped in *aso-oke*, symbolizing protection and acceptance into the community. Additionally, beadwork, particularly beaded necklaces known as "*ileke*," is used to adorn the baby. These beads are believed to have protective qualities, reinforcing the child's well-being and safeguarding against negative forces.

In some Yoruba communities, *Gelede* masks are employed during childbirth celebrations, symbolizing the protective spirits of mothers. These intricately carved wooden masks, adorned with vibrant colors, are believed to ensure a safe delivery and a healthy life for the newborn. *Gelede* ceremonies are mostly staged to honor the dead, especially during the annual festival, it can also be staged at any time of the year to cleanse the society of pestilence, to induce rain to enrich human fertility and to enlist the support of supernatural forces (Onilu, 2017).

Among the Igbo people, birth ceremonies feature unique art forms, including carved wooden sculptures and masks. The "*ichi uzo*" ceremony involves marking the baby's forehead with a special dye, creating intricate patterns. Carved wooden items, such as "*ulo mmiri*" (water pot) and "*okwa odo*" (wooden dish), are used during offerings, signifying hospitality and unity within the community. Igbo artistry in pottery also finds expression in crafting ornate vessels used to hold ritualistic items during the ceremony. Also, the, *uli* body art, characterized by geometric designs and natural motifs, is applied to pregnant women during the *Omugwo* ceremony, signifying fertility.

Similarly, among the Hausa-Fulani tradition, henna artistry, known as "*lalle*," is a prominent feature of birth ceremonies. Elaborate henna designs are applied to the mother's hands and feet, symbolizing blessings, beauty, and protection. Additionally, calligraphic art featuring Arabic inscriptions is used to create decorative nameplates for the newborn. These artistic nameplates often adorn the child's room, emphasizing the child's identity and cultural heritage.

Coming-of-Age Rituals

Another important cultural ceremony linked to ancient arts is the Coming-of-age rituals, which are an important part of many cultures in Nigeria. These rituals mark the transition from childhood to adulthood and are often accompanied by various ceremonies and celebrations. Ancient art plays a significant role in commemorating and reinforcing these rituals.

Among the Efik people of Cross River State, South-South Nigeria, Ekpe society masks are utilized in male initiation ceremonies. These masks, carved from wood and adorned with symbolic patterns, represent ancestral spirits guiding young men into adulthood.

In contrast, the Idoma people of Benue State Middle Belt, Nigeria, mark female initiation with *ichu* anklet beads, intricately crafted from colorful glass beads, serving as a tangible symbol of womanhood and marital eligibility.

The Yoruba people of southwestern Nigeria use art to reinforce cultural values, beliefs, and norms during coming-of-age rituals (Mahmud, 2022). In her study Mahmud (2022) examined Yoruba traditional marriage as a rite of passage, which involves several arts and traditional artefacts. Art is used to create a sense of identity and belonging among the youth. Praise poetry, or *oriki*, is an important form of art that is used to celebrate the achievements of young people and to encourage them to embrace their cultural heritage.

A well-known rite of passage among the Igbo of Eastern Nigeria is the *Iwa Akwa* (entry into manhood) ceremony among the Obowo, Irite Uboma, Mbanjo and Umuahia Igbo. It is a ceremony that depicts entrance into manhood by young boys or youths when they attain a certain age. The ceremony is marked with sumptuous dishes, drinks and traditional dances, masks and other forms of art are used during coming-of-age rituals. These masks represent spirits or ancestors and are believed to have protective powers. They are also used to teach young people about their cultural history and traditions.

Art is also used during coming-of-age rituals in northern Nigeria. The Hausa people, for example, use henna designs to decorate the hands and feet of young women during their coming-of-age ceremony. These designs are believed to bring good luck and prosperity.

Marriage and Dowry Traditions

Marriage and dowry traditions are an integral part of Nigerian culture and ancient art plays a significant role in commemorating these customs. The different ethnic groups in Nigeria have unique marriage and dowry traditions that have been passed down through generations. Few of the ethnic groups of Nigerian are considered in this study.

The Hausa-Fulani culture showcases the symbolic significance of Kanuri embroidered veils, worn by brides during marriage ceremonies. These veils, embellished with intricate embroidery and beadwork, represent the bride's purity and her family's wealth.

The Yoruba has a rich cultural heritage that is reflected in its marriage customs. The union of man and wife begins with courtship, followed by the introduction ceremony, where the two families become acquainted. In the Yoruba tradition, the bride's family presents the groom with the "*ori-ire*" crown, a beaded crown symbolizing honour, prosperity, and a blissful marriage. These artifacts not only reinforce the marital bond but also encapsulate the cultural essence of the union.

Ancient cultural objects play a crucial role in commemorating and reinforcing traditional marriage ceremonies among the Yoruba people. These objects carry deep cultural and spiritual significance, connecting the present generation to their ancestors and preserving the rich heritage of the Yoruba people. Highlighted below are the ancient cultural objects as well as intangible expressions that contribute to Yoruba traditional marriage ceremonies.

There are also Symbols, artefacts and Traditions among the Yoruba such as Irukere (Horse Tail Whisk), which is often used by Yoruba chiefs and royalty. In marriage ceremonies, it symbolizes authority and purity, signifying the groom's readiness to take responsibility for his bride.

Equally, *Ileke (traditional coral beads)* feature prominently in Yoruba culture and has various meanings. During weddings, beaded jewelry is worn by both the bride and groom, symbolizing fertility, beauty, and marital blessings.

There is *Ori* (Head) symbol. Thus, the head is considered the most important part of the body in Yoruba belief. Certain head ornaments and sculptures are worn during ceremonies, representing not just physical beauty but also spiritual essence and destiny.

There is *Ifa* (Divination) tools, which are important symbols, arts and artefacts. *Ifa* divination is essential in Yoruba culture. During marriage ceremonies, *Ifa* priests may use divination tools like the divining chain (*opele*) and divining totem (*iroke Ifa*) to seek guidance and blessings for the couple.

Related arts are found in textiles and fabrics among the Yoruba such as *aso-oke* a hand woven fabric, often used in Yoruba weddings especially the couple. The patterns and colors of the fabric can indicate the couple's lineage, social status, and sometimes even convey specific messages or proverbs.

There is Adire which is a tie-and-dye fabric made by Yoruba women. It is sometimes used in weddings, with specific motifs conveying meanings related to love, unity, and marital happiness.

Among the Yoruba, ceremonial utensils constitute ancient arts which reinforce transitional rites such as *Opon Ifa (Divination Tray)*, used in *Ifa* divination. It could be present during marriage ceremony. It symbolizes wisdom and knowledge, essential qualities for a successful marriage.

The Igba Iwase (Palm Wine Cup) is another important artefact. It is used during the sharing of palm wine from a ceremonial cup. It signifies unity and the coming together of two families. The cup itself may have intricate carvings, representing the couple's shared journey.

There are several oral traditions, which are symbolic and useful in advancing Yoruba culture. For instance, there is the use of proverbs and oral blessings. In Yoruba culture, elders often use Yoruba proverbs and oral blessings during ceremonies. These convey wisdom and well-wishes, reinforcing the importance of the marital institution within the context of Yoruba traditions.

The Ekun Iyawo (Young maidens farewell song to a new bride). This is an ancient tradition among the Yoruba. It is a traditional cultural practice that is associated with the womenfolk in the Yoruba socio-cultural community in Southwest Nigeria. The practice is an indispensable corpus of oral tradition at traditional marriage ceremonies and is usually conducted by young ladies within the age group of the bride. Their role is to accompany the bride around the nooks and crannies of the community to bid farewell to all her immediate and extended family before her departure to her husband's house. The essence is for them to pray for her since Africans strongly believe in the efficacy of prayers.

The *Ekun Iyawo* (Songs by the new bride) tradition is a symbolic representation of the utilitarian nexus of African oral tradition. The songs are presented or performed to the listening audience to enable the audience to judge the intellectual ability of the bride-to-be as she switches from one category of audience to another. For instance, the songs/chants range from adoration or panegyric poetry of her parents thanking them for proper grooming to satirizing her mother's enemies. At other times it could be prayer that she should not encounter jealous co-wives in her husband's house etc. (Aare, 2020).

In essence, these ancient cultural traditions serve as both tangible and intangible links to the Yoruba heritage, reinforcing the sanctity of traditional marriage ceremonies. They imbue the ceremonies with deep cultural meaning, ensuring that the essence of Yoruba traditions is passed down through generations.

Similarly, there are distinct but related marriage and dowry traditions among the Igbo of South Eastern Nigeria. The Igbo culture is rich in unique ceremonies (Amadi & Agena, 2015), one of which is the Igba *nkwu Nwanyi*, or the Bride's Wine Carrying Ceremony. This ceremony is a vital part of the Igbo traditional marriage rites. During this ceremony, the bride publicly points out the man she wants to marry. The bride's father or eldest uncle prays traditionally for the bride, blessing her marriage in future, and then he gives her a gourd of palm wine to find the man she intends to spend the rest of her life with. Unlike Western customs, Igbo culture does not recognize marriage proposals with rings, instead the groom pays the bride price to the bride's family to formalize the marriage (Eneogwe, 2018).

The *Igba nkwu* process consists of several stages as highlighted below.

- i. *Ikuaka (Inquiry/Knocking)*: The groom and his family visit the bride's family to declare his intention to marry. The bride's acceptance of kola nuts from the groom signifies her consent.
- ii. *Umunna Consent*: Both families inquire about each other's background, looking into family history, health, and other factors. If both families agree, the groom seeks the consent of the *Umunna* (bride's extended family) with gifts and drinks.
- iii. *Ugwo Ishi Nwanyi (Bride Price)*: Negotiations occur between the groom's and bride's families. The bride price, paid by the groom to the bride's family, is discussed and agreed upon. This stage also involves the presentation of a marriage requirement list, which includes various items like yams, wrappers, drinks, and other necessities.
- iv. *Igba nkwu Nwanyi (Bride's Wine Carrying)*: This is the final and celebratory stage. The bride's family hosts a wedding party at their home. The bride carries a cup of wine at times accompany by friends and searches for her groom among the guests. When she finds him, she offers him the wine. If he accepts and drinks it, the marriage is confirmed. The couple receives blessings from their parents and the guests, followed by feasting and dancing.

It is important to note that in the past, only traditional calabash gourds, bowls, or cups are acceptable for this process. Today, these objects are now disappearing and are being replaced with plastic jars, and glass cups.

There are several cultural objects associated with the *Igba nkwu Nwanyi* tradition among the Igbo people. They play important roles in the various stages of the traditional marriage ceremony. These cultural objects not only add to the vibrancy of the *Igba nkwu Nwanyi* tradition but also carry deep symbolic meanings within the Igbo culture. The significance of a few of them are briefly explained below.

- i. *Kola Nuts*: Kola nuts are offered as a sign of goodwill and respect during the initial stages of the ceremony. They are presented by the groom and his family to the bride's family.
- ii. *Palm Wine*: Palm wine is a traditional alcoholic beverage made from the sap of various species of palm trees. It is often offered during the inquiry and negotiation stages of the ceremony.
- iii. *Iko (Cup)*: A special cup, often made from calabash or other materials, is used during the Bride's Wine Carrying ceremony. The bride carries this cup of wine and presents it to her groom as a symbolic gesture.
- iv. *Wrappers*: Colorful traditional wrappers are an essential part of Igbo attire. During the *Igba nkwu Nwanyi* ceremony, both the bride and groom are often dressed in beautifully woven and dyed wrappers.
- v. *Palm Fronds*: Palm fronds are used for decorative purposes during the ceremony. They are often used to adorn the seats of the bride and groom and other important areas.
- vi. *Gourds*: Gourds are traditional containers made from dried and hollowed fruits. They are used for various purposes, including serving palm wine and other beverages during the ceremony.
- vii. *Traditional Musical Instruments*: Instruments like drums, flutes, and other traditional musical devices are used to create music and accompany traditional dances during the celebration.
- viii. *Igba (Ichafu) Scarfs*: These scarfs are worn by the bride and are often beautifully decorated, as significant accessories during the ceremony.

The Igbo are also very versed in oral tradition. During the *Igba nkwu Nwanyi* ceremony, as mentioned earlier, Kola nuts are one of the prominent things available. According to Dokosi (2020), the kola nut plays a significant role in Igbo culture and is considered a symbol of hospitality, friendship, and respect. During the *Igba nkwu Nwanyi* ceremony, the kola nut is broken and shared among guests as a sign of unity and hospitality.

The kola nut is presented in an Okwa Orji (Kolanut Saucer), preferably a wooden platter prepared and kept for the sole purpose of presenting kola nut. The host presents the knolanut. But the kola nut cannot be broken without the saying of prayers or incantations by the chieftain or eldest in the gathering as exemplified. This has given rise to the proverb "He who brings kola brings life" because, in the kola nut prayers, the elder also requests for peace, long life and protection from all ill fortune (Dokosi, 2020). It is blessed with traditional rituals (oral libation to the gods). The number of cotyledons on the kola nut determines its significance. Kola with three cotyledons is called *oji ike*, *oji ikenga*, that is, kola of the valiant. Only warriors or brave men and consecrated or ordained persons are permitted to consume this kola. Kola with four cotyledons is called "*oji udo na ngozi*", that is, "kola of peace and blessing". It is the normal kola. The number four is very sacred among the Igbo people. Kola with five cotyledons is *oji ubara*

mmadu, *omumu na ukwuoma* symbolizes an increase in procreation, protection, and good luck. Kola with six cotyledons indicates communion with the ancestors, that is, "*oji ndi mmuo na ndi mmadu jiri gbaa ndu*". The smallest part or cotyledon is not eaten but is thrown away for the ancestors to eat. In like manner, kola with one cotyledon is not eaten by man because it belongs to the ancestors (Dokosi, 2020). Thereafter the host first takes a nut and puts it to his lips, thus, signifying that it is about to be offered in good faith. This symbolic gesture absolves him from malice. The dish is, thereupon, broken and passed round to the visitors.

Traditional marriage ceremony among the Tiv of North central Nigeria shares similar cultural relationship. The Tiv people are an ethnic group in Nigeria that is known for their rich cultural heritage. The Tiv traditional marriage ceremony is called "*I gyor sha*" which means "to give a woman out in marriage". The ceremony is usually performed by the bride's father or an elder in the family. The groom's family is expected to bring gifts such as yams, goats, and other items to the bride's family as part of the marriage rites. The bride price is also paid during this ceremony (Onyima, 2014).

The Tiv people have a rich artistic tradition that includes various forms of art such as pottery, weaving, and woodcarving. However, I could not find any information on how ancient art is used to commemorate and reinforce traditional marriage among the Tiv people.

Ancient art has been used to commemorate these customs through various mediums such as sculptures, paintings, and carvings. These artworks depict different aspects of marriage and dowry traditions such as courtship, engagement ceremonies, and wedding ceremonies. They also serve as a reminder of the rich cultural heritage of Nigeria.

Healing and Spiritual Transitions

Healing and spiritual transitions are integral part of Nigerian culture, and ancient art has played a significant role in commemorating these customs. The different ethnic groups in Nigeria have unique healing and spiritual traditions that have been passed down through generations.

The Yoruba ethnic group has a rich cultural heritage that is reflected in its healing and spiritual customs. The tribe believes in the power of "orishas," which are deities that represent different aspects of nature. The tribe uses art to depict these deities and the art is used in various ceremonies to invoke their power. In traditional Yoruba medicine, Ifa divination trays, carved with geometric patterns, are used by diviners to communicate with spirits and diagnose ailments. These trays are not only functional but also represent the intricate fusion of art and spirituality.

Among the Tiv people, "Tsav" sculptures, crafted from wood, are believed to house protective spirits. These sculptures are instrumental in warding off evil forces and promoting healing within the community.

Ancient art has been used to commemorate these customs through various mediums such as sculptures, paintings, and carvings. These artworks depict different aspects of healing and spiritual traditions such as invoking the power of orishas, wine-carrying ceremonies, and *Ruqyah*. They also serve as a reminder of the rich cultural heritage of Nigeria.

Funeral and Ancestral Artifacts

Burial rites in Nigeria are diverse and vary across different cultures. These rites are often steeped in tradition and are an important part of the cultural heritage of the people. The deceased may be wrapped in his clothes for burial and covered with the skin of a slaughtered animal. In some groups, the body is wrapped in a linen shroud. Personal items are often buried with the deceased to help him on his journey.

The Yoruba, for example, include food, clothes, fowls (*Adiye Irana*) or other animals, while other cultures may include spears, shields, or pots and pans, so the deceased has all he needs in the afterlife.

One striking funeral artifact in the northwestern part of the country is the *Dakakari*. The *Dakakari* people who live near Zuru in Sokoto State are well known for their funerary sculptures. These sculptures serve as burial markers and memorials in the graves of Chiefs, warriors, renowned hunters, and social elite. Some of the various stylized human and animal figures were found on skillfully sculpted, graves made of clay. Graves were usually surrounded by small walls made of clay for families and stones for prominent men.

Among the Igbo traditional burial rights are integral cultural festivals that must be observed before the dead is finally laid to rest. If the deceased is an old woman married with children, depending on her age and affluence, in some part of Igbo such as the Owerri, her maiden people are informed and certain burial rights are performed without, which she could not be buried such families could be offered a live cow in appreciation for the woman's good works and old age to her husband's people. The ceremony is called *Idu Ehi* festival (Issuance of Live cow). Such burial is seen as a source of joy and blessing. Also if a man lived long, his burial is also a celebration of life. Among the Owerri Igbo, the burial will involve the council of elders (Nde Oha), who brandish cultural artefacts

and perform certain rituals and libations and would outline the basic burial rites. However ever among the Owerri Igbo, without the maternal home of a deceased man, he cannot be buried (Amadi & Agena,2015). They perform the *Ika mma Ala* festival (marking of the spot for the burial of the corpse).

Generally in African culture untimely deaths are forsaken, some cultures refer to them as a taboo, or abomination especially where a man or woman buries his/her own child. Thus, Igbo culture reinforce long life and prosperity.

Conclusion

From the ongoing analysis, this paper has demonstrated the role of arts and cultural practices in promoting rites of passage. These artistic practices have been facing challenges for several decades to date. The missionaries without knowing the relevance of the African rites of passage, condemned them as devilish and savage. Without understanding the real anthropological, social, and cultural meanings of the customs, they tried to abolish traditional moral African customs. It has been observed that there is always a connection between objects and religion or tradition (Adetunmibi, 2017). Rituals and rites are kind of religious expression and means of concretizing one's belief system; They are a means of expressing one's experience of the supersensible world and the supernatural beings and are acts of forms of worship or communion and communication between one and one's objects of worship (Adelowo, 2024). The practice of these religions as the paper demonstrates are associated with objects peculiar to the locality and identity of the people. The religion (Islam and Christianity) we embrace is a fusion of a belief system and tradition.

Ancient arts and traditions play significant roles in commemorating and reinforcing rites of passage in different cultures. Through artistic representations, such as birth and naming ceremonies, the cultural importance of these events is visually depicted and celebrated. Artifacts and objects used in coming-of-age rituals also serve as tangible symbols of transition and growth. Ancient art not only reinforces cultural identity by depicting symbols and traditions but also acts as a tool for preserving cultural heritage and transmitting cultural knowledge to future generations. It facilitates spiritual connections, promotes social cohesion and unity, and strengthens inter-generational bonds.

Generally, some rite of passage is riddled with a lot of negative consequences which are detrimental to life of the people involved and the society in general. While some have their positive impacts. In Nigeria, one cannot shy away from the fact that many of the traditional objects and activities associated with rites of passage have become altered over time, but the core value of celebrating the different rites of passage in the life of an individual and the community remains intact (Mahmud, 2022). The elaborate chronicles that these artifacts convey within the social and religious frameworks of our respective society and cultures are enormous. They help to sustain our identity and promote communication, education and social control and as well sustain and preserve the heritage and tradition of our society.

Not all rites of passage are human rights violations, and not all alternatives currently being proposed reinforce misogyny and gender inequality (UNFPA, 2020). Therefore, there is the need to respect and enhance positive cultural values that rite of passage promotes.

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