



## THE SOCIO-CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF IGALA BODY AESTHETICS

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### Abstract

**T**he socio-cultural significance of Igala body aesthetics serves as a means of transmitting history with the aim of documenting the importance of Igala body aesthetics, noting the symbolic meanings and to see whether they relate to the philosophical statement of the life of the Igala. The socio-cultural and political activities of the Igala are promoted through their decorative arts such that scarification enhances the close connection with ancestors and the importance of the continuity of generations. However, there are three significant occasions in the life of every Igala, that is; birth, marriage and death rites. The socio-cultural significance of Igala body aesthetics is aligned to these occasions or ceremonies, organized in the society. This concept is important in the analysis of Igala body aesthetics noting that the cultural practice, is respected among the Igala, due to its multiple socio-cultural values. More so, a good understanding of Igala body aesthetics requires identifying the socio-cultural platform that supports such cultural practice, annually. These ceremonies are essential rites of passage that uphold customs such as oduo-adu (naming ceremony), oya ene (marriage), olawo oni

(turbaning), ido- egwu (masquerade-dance), ocho and egwu festivities, among others and this platform creates room for the Igala to display every aspect that projects the

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Igala aesthetically. Lastly, the socio-cultural significance of the Igala body aesthetics serves universally to differentiate one social or cultural group from another and varies in style, perceived meaning and use. It is promoted through cultural activities that enhances close connection with ancestors and the importance of continuity for generations.

## INTRODUCTION

The “art of the body” is a form of expression which is discussed in feminist art and philosophy, an interest that represents continued explorations and critiques of tradition. Both the artistic and the theoretical modes of body exploration can be viewed as complementary elements of feminist aesthetics. Irvin (2016) observes that “this form of expression covers a broad territory that includes the mutual involvement of aesthetic norms with ethical judgments; aesthetic standards and implications about bodies that appear deviant from standard concepts of ‘normal’; and the participation of the bodily senses in aesthetic appreciation.”

The term, “body art”, “body scarification”, “body modification” and “body aesthetics” are commonly used by different authors to describe man’s ways of expressing himself, and as revealed on his body, are four important closely related concepts. Furthermore, body art comes in different forms like scarifications, which entail engraving on the human skin with sharp objects, piercing, and body painting which entails the application of different colour pigments on the human skin to create an intended pattern. Body art, in a way, turns the human body to a canvas on which artistic ideas are expressed, and man embellishes a large variety of his possession such as weapons and clothing on the body, basically for ritual or magical purpose.

According to Randall and Polhemus, in Ani and Anyaoha (2012), human beings are the only known species that deliberately alter their appearance through the customization of their body. They alter their appearances through what they wear, adorn, tattoo as well as surgical operations and body building. Although the art of body decoration, body marking, body art and body aesthetics have different approaches as some may seem similar while others vary by way of expression. Many independent studies have been carried out to differentiate them based on their definitions, with specific reference to the human body as the basis for displaying beauty.

Body decoration is a culture that is universally practised among the peoples of various ethnic groups in Nigeria, to enhance beauty and aesthetics, religious or ceremonial purposes. It serves as a source of expression of beauty and indication of one’s age, title, social status and membership of any revered group in the society. Body aesthetics on the other hand is an art of beautifying the body which includes the leg, hand, face, nose, eye, and fingernails, the filing and removal of upper teeth, piercing of lips, nose and ears for different types of ornamentations as well as skin cleansing, adornment of body with jewelries and beads, elaborate hairstyles and clothing.

The social-symbolic role that body aesthetics have played in society varies, and depends on factors such as historical period, geography, economic development, innovation and cultural diffusion although in ancient societies, adorning the body with all forms of artistic expressions were associated with permanent features of man's life, social and ethnic connections, or celebrated appearance of style that showed considerable continuity through dozens of generations.

However, body aesthetics is centrally important to the traditional Igala society, especially the adherents of African traditional religion, as well as, the mystical tenets of African traditional religion, as practised by the Igala. Hence, body aesthetics, whether made for identification, beauty purposes, curative purposes, or for which ever socio-cultural reasons, have aided many ethnic groups found in Nigeria, to define their domain, conquer it, and soothe their desire to achieve aesthetic balance. Dissanayake (1992) emphasises that "human arts did not emerge as autonomous activities; they were originally intertwined with rituals and ceremonies. Art's main evolutionary contribution was to reinforce social cooperation and group cohesion."

Igala body aesthetics has an evolutionarily relevant function, which is just a culturally evolved way of satisfying a coincidentally existing demand. The evolutionary approach as a whole and their existence in aesthetical preferences is viewed in the domain of natural beauty, as designed periodically for change that evolves in the society. Durkheim in Elwell (2003) identifies the cause of societal evolution as a society's increasing moral density. Durkheim also views societies as "changing in the direction of greater differentiation, interdependence and formal control, under the pressure of increasing moral density." The Igala society has evolved from a relatively undifferentiated social structure with an explosion of body aesthetics, in all shapes, forms, and styles, making it difficult to track down a common thread in their look. The variety in form has now translated to a variety in hues of white, yellow, black and green, and are the most popular exterior colours of the day for the Igala. The evolutionary nature of Igala body aesthetics, therefore constitutes the subject matter of this research.

### **Igala Body Aesthetics**

Labija (2003), explains that the Igala kingdom in the prehistoric times had a culture that held on to the entire gamut of the people's life thereby, making its traits popular through the much publicised arts, festivals, religious beliefs, knowledge, customs, moral philosophy, crafts, dress code and language. The author recounts that, Igala traditional values were principally expressed and

transmitted by means of oral traditions such as myths, folktales, rituals, proverbs, folksongs, dances, pithy sayings, social institutions and works of art, a view affirmed by Idakwo (1989), Ataiyi (2001) and Audu (2014). The authors support the view that among the Igala, some myths are carved on woods, clay, iron, ivory and stones. Some are tattooed on the body of women, other ones come as facial marks accordingly, in different strokes, shapes and sizes. Others are represented in arts and crafts and especially in wooden stools, staffs, chairs, tables, doors, coffins, and others are retained in dances, ritual, ceremonies and on masks. Some others still, are represented in natural objects such as trees, rivers and mountains. Although, attempts were made by these authors to capture part of Igala body aesthetics, highlighting, only areas of interest which sternly lies along the lines of facial marks, traditional masquerade display and artistic display on objects, they actually, did not cover everything about Igala body arts. However, other information provided by Audu is a pointer that intra-ethnic influences can be studied through Igala art works. The information contained in their study will be a valuable addition to the study.

Audu (2014), reveals that “Igala body aesthetics, is still a feature of the Igala, and has distinct functions which were identified as the decorative function, and the decoration gives information about status, rank and the membership of people in different groups.” The author also notes that it is thus, a part of the personal development from childhood to adulthood, and also often used in ritual initiations as a clear sign of social development. In relation to a woman, the form and style of the designs may indicate whether she is married, single or betrothed; or if she is a mother or a widow.

The study by Labija (2003) highlights the struggles for identity, within traditional, political and economic frontiers of the Igala, but, Apeh (1989) and Ibenegbu (2017) reveal that Igala body aesthetics, and markings encompass a myriad of forms, that capture and address just the combination of human adornment and ornamentation, such as markings, body clothing and jewelry. More so, personal adornments are neither trivial nor meaningless, but are considered by their social functions, as an integral part of Igala body aesthetics. It also connects the aesthetic character of such adornments and their functionality. Atayi (2001) and Audu (2014) interrogate the social significance of body decoration and the way in which it created identity for different cultural groups, and as well determines boundaries between these groups. These authors, describe how in different cultural contexts, temporary and permanent forms of body decoration are related to gender, ancestors, spirits, warfare, stratification, and aesthetics. For, the purpose of this research,

however, the need to bridge the gap by investigating the socio-cultural significance of Igala body aesthetics becomes necessary.

Although some Nigerians think that Igala culture is not preserved and have no common cultural colour attire like the Tiv: black and white, the Idoma: black and red, and the Igede: white and blue. According to Ukwede (2013), and Ibenegbu (2017) in a recent study reveals that, “the generally accepted Igala colour is yellow and black with white or green or blue stripes, noting that the black and yellow means a lot to the kingdom”. The Igala believe that, *black connotes their fertile land which is good for agriculture and rich in mineral resources like crude oil, coal and others*. Ukwede (2013) affirms that, “the coal at Okaba and crude oil in Ibaji land that are available in commercial quantity are being represented by ‘black’ (*edudu*), which he said literally symbolises ‘prosperity or wealth’ of the people. The author adds that, *the yellow (odo) in the Igala dress code is a symbol of hospitality*. These colours used on Igala attires known as ‘*otogbo*’ and ‘*achi*’ materials are woven together.

In traditional Igala festival, as recounted by Labija (2003), body aesthetics plays, a significant role because the public form part of the festivals, the type of dress worn during the festivals by the menfolk attracts alot of attention, first from the fabric itself and the way local weavers and local embroiders harness various design patterns, sewn on the fabric such as gowns, jumpers, trousers, hats or caps. The author further describes the designs as usually abstract in shape, while others have shapes of animals, birds or emblems designed on them depending on the weaver. The hats or caps are part of the dress, and they add to the beauty of the ceremony too. Designs of shapes, patterns, objects, flowers, birds or animals are embroidered by hand stitching method using different yarns of various colours. Those made for the royalty have cowries and feathers stitched on them.

The typical Igala woman's dress, as observed by Atayi (2001) has three major embroidery stitches, other than the method of production of textile wares. The embroidery on dresses are made from the coloured yarns produced locally, and the patterned designs are abstract in shape, at times coloured interlaced yarns are used for the royal dresses, horse saddle covers and neck hangings.

One common attribute during cultural festivals, according to accounts by Labija (2003), is that all Igala chiefs paint their face with a copper colour to represent authority. They pierce their ears, and dress with colorful beads with braids created at the bottoms of longer hair. Notable also are three scars on the cheeks with adornment on the body using beads, feathers and lip plates that are worn with glass beads, fragrances, soaps and oils. Labija further writes that, women often wore vibrant copper pins in their hair and these pins had



intricate designs and were thought to bestow power. The Attah, uses, as many as 26 highly decorated staves to symbolize different things, such as ancestors, friendship, hope, and cleansing during the ceremonies.

However, throughout the centuries, as observed by Ataiyi (2012), people of various cultures and ethnicities have expressed their vision of body aesthetics as ‘ideal’, praising it through art and fashion. The Igala are not an exception with their own unique perception of body aesthetics. They no doubt possess a long standing history of body aesthetics as decorative arts unique and significant to their culture. The author further opines that, an Igala may perceive his or her particular work as self-defining and empowering, even though their choices are limited and moulded by culture. Idakwo (1989) specifically, identifies the meaning of the word mark in Igala language as ‘*ina*’, while beauty is ‘*unyo*’. This view was documented also by other authors like Apeh (1989), Atayi (2001), Rex (2013) and Ibenegbu (2017), all identifying the importance of Igala markings generally, noting that when both words are used together, the meaning reveals how it will be used to describe visible markings on faces, and other parts of the body. The *ina* generally identifies an Igala person, and it is meant for identification and beautification. The mark is common and has two horizontal lines cut downwards from the eye, level running across partial part of the face. It also stretches across the mouth area. Cut from a side of the mouth vertically towards the sides of the face to the ear. It imposes order, according to the author, on its nature and acts as a measure of the wearer’s social worth and self- esteem. Mouth Adepeba (1986) and Aniakor (2002) agree that, *ina ofa* marks made on the neck region are adopted by the Igala region of Kogi state and it is meant for healing. That means, it is therapeutic, as it serve to prevent further demonic attacks especially when a sick person is left unconscious. The mark is common and has seven drawn vertical lines, cut downwards, either behind the neck or the side of the neck. The marks are lightly cut and show patterns of stylized shapes of the popular *agbonagbo* masquerade helmet mask. On the other hand, Maiyaki (2016), observes that, “an examination of the literature on facial marks, reveals that they represent two distinct processes which produce visibly different results, even though slight variations of the practices occur among ethnic groups”.

The most common forms of body art today among the Igala are [tattoos](#) and [body piercings](#) in which artists use or abuse people’s body to make their individual statements. More so apart from the above mentioned, generally, more extreme body art can involve mutilation or pushing the body to its physical limits. In more recent times, as observed by Irvin (2016), the [body](#) has become a subject of much broader discussion and treatment than can be

reduced to body aesthetics in its common understanding. Utoh-Ezeajugh (2006) states further that, tattooing has had a long historical presence, starting from prehistoric times, where sharp tools were dipped into pigment and then used to pierce the skin. While, analyzing the nature of scarification, the author posits that, it involves cutting or making an incision into the skin, and then allowing the wound to heal, leaving a permanent scar.

Other significant items that uniquely reveals Igala body aesthetics are the royal beads of Igala kingdom. According to Rex (2013) “it is important to note that, the use of beads as a mark of respect evolved in Igala kingship a very long time ago.” And to be so recognized, one has to pass through investiture ceremony, where one is expected to be publicly honoured, and beaded. The beading entails presentation of several items of insignia of office as symbols of authority. These royal objects are: beads ‘oka’, neck-lace ‘okw’ robe ‘olawoni’ red-cap ‘olumada’ and flywhisk ‘otih’. The two important objects of royalty that are usually worn on the wrist and neck respectively by highly placed and beaded traditional rulers are: the ‘Okwu’, a beautifully designed pectoral bead that is blue in colour and the ‘Oka’ meant for the wrist. The author further notes that, among the high profile personalities in Igalaland, that wear the royal beads are; Atta Igala who is draped from head to toe, in a complete over flow, that captures a good description of the attributes needed to be described as an example of body aesthetics. Others are the *Achadu*, the royal councilors, major town and regional chiefs and other beaded chiefs. For the Scepter ‘Okpa – Atta’ Rex (2013), recounts that, they are commonly known as a decorated rods or sticks, usually carried by reputable kings or queens as a symbol of their power and authority. Universally, it is one of the oldest insignia of office. Today, the use of scepter has dramatically extended beyond the sphere of kingship. For instance, in a democratic set up, the Senate President and Speaker of the House of Representatives and Speakers of various state assemblies, use the scepter, which they call mace, as symbols of power and legitimacy.

Basically, one might not be too far from saying that Igala body aesthetics should project the rich cultural heritage of a people and reasons abound as it might be significant to a person who chooses to adorn himself or herself. Rex (2013) affirms that, whether the body is clothed for aesthetic purpose or personal adornment, the reasons are definitely one of the most commonly known all over the world, which is for beautification and identification. Ethnic symbols vary, and reasons for body aesthetics were generally the same; ranging from marriage, rite of passage and beautification. Idakwo (1989) recalls that, in the past, Igala teenage girls wore on their bodies, names of their

future husbands, just as engaged ladies wear engagement rings indicating her romantic commitment to her fiancé.

The author further notes that, apart from visible body markings, some of the best traditional gala works are woven stitching, with special characteristics that occur on particular garments. On wide trousers, for instance, the stitching is usually loose on caps and gowns. Stressing also, that the appearance of Igala stitching is affected by established preferences for particular types of thread, trousers, being more often decorated with wool or loosely spun, silky thread, whereas caps and women's dress as are usually sewn with fine cotton. An example is the material worn by the young girl in figure 4.

The work of individual embroiders also differs so that, stitches widely spaced in one man's work may be very close in another's. The Igala see this means of identity as unique even in the absence of the markings, and would love to be identified based on this new accepted cultural attire which can be sewn and worn completely as agreed by Ataiyi (2001) and Bondunde (2007). Labija (2003) affirms that, another comparatively new kind of embroidery, which employs designs that are figurative, and occasionally of considerable charm, is being made by the Igala on masquerade dress and a variety of masking and ritual clothes and as part of the masquerade's dress: bangles, ornaments, beads, rings and anklets are added to the visual spectacle of the festival.



Figure. 4: Igala cultural attire; <https://www.naij.com/1093741-linda-ikejis-net-worth.html> An Igala child Wearing the current Igala attire (http: igalapedia project (2016)

Squire (2011) in his analysis of an explanation of the concept of Igala body aesthetics reveals that, the body endowment has evolved to such a degree in modern and contemporary art that, as an aesthetic paradigm, it is adopted not as a form, but as a functional entity. By this, Siebers (2000), opines that, the functionality of the body or of its individual parts, forces itself upon one's attention, when that functionality fails. That is because, art makes people



aware of things in the same way as the body makes them aware of itself by invalidating the functional aspects of things. However, considering the body in functional terms, rather than formal terms, it is thus possible to account for one of the essential processes of art, which consciously causes a break in the normal pattern of perceptions. The author admits that, Igala is a sign of the rich cultural endowment which, applies to the new myth of the formally perfect body of a contemporary society and raises the same suspicion as that which has always been raised by art, pursued for purely aesthetic purposes in the representation of human bodies.

### **The Socio-Cultural Significance of Igala Body Aesthetics,**

The socio- cultural significance of Igala body aesthetics is aligned to ceremonies, organized in the society. This concept is important in the analysis of Igala body aesthetics noting that the cultural practice, as opined by some respondent, is respected among the Igala, due to its multiple socio- cultural values. However, Igala subgroups are many and diversely domiciled around the different regions of Kogi state and basically serve as a means of adornment meant to identify these subgroups, and differentiate sub- clans within large subgroups, and as well, as their sedentary host communities.

Ibrahim and Aduku (2018) noted that, “Igala body aesthetics serves as beautification and a means of attraction of the opposite sex, during courtship and when seeking possible suitors during socio- cultural ceremonies.” It is noteworthy, to mention that there exists other aspects of the culture which possess certain dynamics or key values that are hinged on some Igala socio-cultural practices. The author mentioned that, some are child-bearing; naming ceremonies, circumcisions (*amonoji*) (*amonoji* means eunuchs which is different from circumcision which in Igala is *epieda*) widowhood practices redolent with so much oppression, deprivation, discrimination, rejection, humiliation, abuse and injustice; ‘*ikpakachi*’ (spirit husbands), high bride price, marriages, levirate marriage (*oya-ogwu*); second burial (*ubi*) rites; masquerade cults; coronation and initiation of traditional rulers. The issue of caste system or descendants of slaves (*amoma adu*); use of charms; incisions, oath-taking, rain-making, or reincarnation rites and traditional festivals. Some of the cultural or traditional practices mentioned above have gone extinct in some areas of the land, but are still prevalent in many other places as affirmed by the respondents.

More so, there are other socio-cultural practices which may not be directly related to traditional religion but have values which need to be identified, cherished or modified. Eje Ofu also said that such values include the use of Igala

proverbs, myths, legends, language, sculpture, greetings, facial markings, tattooing, and body decoration, discipline, dressing and agriculture. However, the researcher's concern is with the obvious visible appearance of the complete body aesthetic of the Igala resulting from social practice of adornment, painting, scarification, branding, piercing, and tattooing which has served as marks of distinction in Igala societies. Noting also the evolutionary documentation of socio-cultural transformation in the nature of the designs artists have developed as a new 'ethnic' style.

Although, the latter too has changed: eyebrows, noses, lips, and tongues are now commonplace targets for the piercer's needle among some ladies; while clothing marks the large increase on display. The 'modern styles, deliberately echoes the customs of pre-literate Igala societies, producing the sense of a shifting, urban Igala people locating themselves socially and culturally through inter-marriage and current bodily expression.

More so, the entire regalia of the Attah represents full Igala body aesthetics as each item worn represented different generations as is not easy to establish a chronological growth of the kingdom as culture is meant to be passed on from generation to generation but a kind of symbolic and mystical presentation is established. Each period witnessed and is still witnessing the era when personal body aesthetics is highly revered and what differentiates a typical Igala person now is not really in the unique facial body marks alone that served as marks of identity but the ethnic costume which is inform of the Yoruba *asho-oke* with adopted colours of yellow, royal blue, gold, ash and brown, combined to display the current trend in Igala body aesthetics.

The socio-cultural significance of Igala body aesthetics can be expressed through cultural means, because without which, nobody can be recognized. This is informed by the fact that the beads confer on the chief position of superiority and impose on him traditional ritual rites. The beads bestow on the ruling elite accords enough rights, privileges, honour and respect anybody can command in his community.

According to Ademul and Hussein (2018), a good understanding of Igala body aesthetics requires identifying the socio-cultural platform that supports such cultural practice, annually. Socio-cultural ceremonies abound throughout the year. These ceremonies are essential rites of passage that uphold customs of the Igala and the youths actively participate in these rites of passage; be it a *odu a du icholo odu edu* (naming ceremony), *oya ene* (marriage), *olawo oni* (turbaning), *ido- egwu* (masquerade-dance), *ocho* and *egwu* festivities, among others. During such occasions, youths interact with the elderly ones, in order to copy exquisite motifs and patterns that can be translated into meaningful

items of adornment. These avenues, as observed by Okokliko Okoliko (2018), served as a means of displaying new motifs and patterns to several clans within the different regions of Ankpa and other parts of Kogi State Nigeria.

The naming ceremony of children normally provides an avenue for likely immediate demonstration of culture whereby lacerations are made on parts of the body by interested families after which names are given to the new born. According to Eje Ofu (2018), after inscribing marks of identity on the child, subsequent aspects of body aesthetics, are taken care of by the family. Moreover, body aesthetics ranging from the use of *otajile* for the eyes, the use of beads, tattoos and hairstyles indicative of clan affiliations. This ultimately strengthens the bond of brotherhood, friendship and internal solidarity within the family, and eventually the community.

Adamu and Okoliko (2018) stated that, “both men and women apply *otajile* decoration on the eye during special occasions for beautification. During *oya ne* (marriage ceremonies), it is applied by young women to show solidarity to a friend engaged in her first marriage ceremony. On another occasion, *otajile* is applied along with charms by hunters for good omen in hunting activities. Similarly, medicines are mixed with *otajile* for efficacy, and applied on the hands, when hunters are ready for a hunting expedition according to the author. Although, the ignorant person might assume that the hunter’s mixture is meant to beautify him giving it a dual function.

Igala women seem to be adorned all over the body before they attend important socio- cultural ceremonies within their communities. The respondents further explained that items of adornment such as beads of different colours, *otajile*, *akor*, *ugbogbo*, *ojah*, *iloji adudu*. *Elika*, *akor ago pkai* *akor ere* and *achi* are worn on the head, around the waist and the breast. They are a basic component used to complete the dressing and beautification of a woman before any outing. They use the *otajile* which is a dark textural substance to effect dark colour on the skin, which correlates with lighter tones of the *otajile*; arranged side by side that creates a pleasing contrast on the skin. The opaque nature of *otajile*, as the respondent observed ideally lasts for about three weeks; brightly coloured at the onset and fades away eventually. Though, the significance of its use is simply for beautification among the Igala female.

Another significant socio-cultural aspect that play important role is the *ido-egwu* (masquerade-dance), when male and female Igala applied items of recognition and showcasing different dance style on cultural dance ceremonies with all forms of lacerations on the body from cashew liquid and displaying images that identify them as members of the masquerade group.

According to Adamu and Agboni (2018), the visual literacy of representing events and engagement with the aid of cashew liquid communicate without uttering words. The cashew is applied on the top skin of the hand and cheeks to indicate the name of the fiancée of the lady some create this name pattern to stamp their legitimate ownership of the man. This design suggest that a relationship has been established.

The respondents witnessed the use of '*otagile*' mainly applied on the eyelid to enhance the beauty of ladies. It is made to look like colorants and as a conditioner for a woman's skin, the use is mainly general among both elderly and young ladies. Though, meant for beautification purpose even without its use for makeups, it is still used for curing eye problem according to some respondents who claim that their ancestors taught them to use it when they notice that their eye have little problem.

An Igala man nevertheless, spends much time and care, to decorate his body with colourful traditional attire, for different ceremonies such as, *ocho* and *egwu* festivities. The ceremony, as observed by Eje Ugwolawo (2018), defines the actual outlook that encourage cooperation, friendly disposition and mutual understanding among the several Igala clans within the region. During *ocho* ceremonies, the complete exhibition of elaborate display of different items of adornment on the regalia or attire of the Attah are displayed like Jewelry and other accessories that may express and even enhance more of the beauty of the wearer than the clothing does. Various styles of brass materials, precious stone, bone, and iron bracelets are used not minding the gender, or religion. In some cases, much of a person's wealth is worn in the form of gold jewelry, caps, and the jewelry may be decorated with beadwork in designs that represent a certain idea or message. These items are worn by the men during the festivities and they reveal nothing in particular.

The significance of the ceremony is to unify the Igalas and remind them of the need to uphold the legacies of their individual clan and recognition of ancestral clans. Masquerades from different clans dance in colorful draped materials covering their entire bodies. The ladies wear coloured wrapper tied at the waist, a smaller cloth worn over the first wrapper or over the left shoulder, and a long-sleeved blouse. They look attractive to participants because of the elaborate rich adornment often displayed on their bodies. Adejoh and Adoga (2018) affirm that, "these decorative items are used by the very wealthy who have the man power to afford all sorts of items of adornment needed in their complete set of *otajiya*, *acor*, *otili*, *achi* and *odugbo* to attract attention."

Another significant socio- cultural platform for the acquisition of dominance by adolescent Igala boys (*ujah abokele*) amongst some clans that adds color to

festivals is not really common again. The adolescents boys come out bare to the arena with different marks with designs of animal and leaf motif on their back, while some represent cult groups they belong to in order to show dominance. The markings reveal their identity with strong pride. This has long been considered irrelevant because of its display of violence creating acrimony amongst clan as observed by some respondents. Although, the ocho festival became more recognized and provided avenue for socialization among Igala, adolescent persons are often influenced by peer- groups' pressures to make additional body aesthetics of different forms, to impress one another and the ideas created, might not really align with the existing rule that negates supernatural influences. Thus, exquisite tattoos, scarifications, beadworks, hairstyles and other components of body aesthetics on display are regarded as signs of prestige (status symbols) and preferences in new fashion trends, by the participants.

*Ocho, Oganyi Angwa, Erolu, and Italo* are annual events celebrated by the Igala based on lunar calendar, the Ocho festival held last in 1954 after it was banned by the British during the reign of Attah Ameh Oboni I the man often referred to as the “*ugbakolo etotolo*” Meaning the mystery tree among other trees. It is a hunting festival embraced by the Igala to reenact the famous unifying festival which many people have no knowledge of. Bead decorations (*akor*) are commonly on display, during the festivals. The *okebechi* ranging from necklaces (*ileli*), crown bead to anklets and waist- beads; multi- coloured are arranged intricately in pleasing tonal effect, by the wearers to impress onlookers. The beadworks are worn by both young boys and girls, to grace important socio- cultural ceremonies within the communities. Non-royal clan members who are young unmarried girls are identified with decorative mufflers items on their bodies. Other products of beadworks include (necklace) worn around the neck by all the clans for beautification purpose.

Aside from its visual beauty, beadwork as opined by Karl (1998) “has been used for social and religious reasons, as well as for an elaborate system of communication.” It was designed and worn to distinguish young girls from elder women. Similarly, Ojogbane the secretary to HRH Attah Igala on traditional issues stressed that, the beads used during festivities are equally different in colour and size.

The socio-cultural significance of Igala body aesthetics widely exposes the structured traditional beliefs and practices popular among different clans with various common purposes such as: developing ethnic identity, social sanctions and to have a religious sanction. Self-mutilation, self-sacrifice to unseen



powers and purity of the body which are distinct from other social activity among the male that probably shows allegiance to, or a unifying identity.

There are three significant occasions in the life of every Igala, that is; birth, marriage and death rites. These special occasions are marked in such a way that it is always recalled in belief that identifies them after death with their own relatives. But nowadays due to the effect of social change, modernization and westernization, some Igala still attach importance to traditional rites in marriage. Similarly, some socio-culturally significant rites have caused change in their religious life, these changes appeal to society and has a way of dictating the beliefs and practices that are performed either routinely by its members or performed whenever the occasion demands. Hence, the Igala have festivals and dances that are peculiar to different clans. These activities are carried out by the society because they seem to be necessary and uniquely concerned to ethnic groups.

Igala body aesthetics took its very outlook from the physical appearance of the Attah who is the custodian of Igala culture. Everything about the display of whatever any Igala wears is attributed to the royal clan. HRH Attah Gaberiel Igonoh The Onu Eje of Ugwolawo stated that, “*Odudu I chanę ichanę-n* “it is from the beginning (the roots) one can cook any edible object well”. An Igala adage goes thus, “*Ẹtẹ ma hi ma m’ahi ogbọ n*” (from the beginning they cook and it would not be tasteless). These are idiomatic expressions suggesting that the Igala race has developed as it is today and has evolved from its roots. Establishing that Igala body aesthetics started from the beginning with HRH the Attah Igala.

More so, the traditional Igala person believes in divinities or deities who are said to be next in hierarchy to the Supreme Being. However, such are personified in certain natural forces and phenomena, especially in rivers, lakes, trees, the wind, deserts, stones, hills e.g. *Aijenu* (Water Spirits), *Ikpakacha* (spirit husband), *Ane* (earth goddess), *Ichekpa* (fairies or bush babies), *Ejima* (twins), and *Egbunu* (goodluck). Socio-culturally they adopt some of these elements as motif in their designs. Three basic elements of worship are easily identifiable, namely, Sacrifice, Music/ dancing and Prayer; Certain people are regarded as Sacred e.g. family heads (elders) village heads or town leaders i.e. the traditional rulers, who most often act as chief priests before traditional shrines; they also believe in Oracles or divination e.g. *Ifa-anwa* (by seeds), *ifa-ebutu* (by use of sand), *ifa eyo-oko* (by cowries), *Ifa-omi* (by water). While making these sacrifices, as earlier mentioned, certain materials are used to create motif and pattern on the body. These include patterns of, (birds) ewe, (hens) *ajuwe*, chicks (*ebune*), cocks (*aiko*), pigeon (*oketebe*); Animals such as

She-goats (*ewo-ole*), She-goats (*obuko*), ram (*okolo*), cow (*okuno*), tortoise (*abedo* or *aneje*), agama -lizard (*abuta-oko*); other items also employed could be articles of clothing, pieces of white (*achi efu fu*), red or black cloths (*ukpo edudu*), money, especially coins or cowries, red feather (*uloko*), and alligator pepper (*akorkor*).

It is noteworthy, at this juncture to stress further that, there exists other aspects of the culture which possess certain dynamics or key values that are hinged on some of the practices that are of socio-cultural significance as summarized. Among them are: Child-bearing and the male-child Phenomenon (fecundity or fertility cults); Naming ceremonies, circumcisions (*amonoji* done by the artist (*ama depi*)). Some of the cultural or traditional practices mentioned above have gone extinct in some areas of the land, but are still as prevalent in many other places as observed by some respondents.



Fig.15: HRM MICHAEL IDAKWO AMEH OBONI II ATTAH IGALA Wearing The Otogbo made with Achi Igala Woven With Cotton And Silk Threads (Photograph By Igalapedia. 2017)

Consequently, an attempt has been made in this chapter (Obviously, a chapter that you needed to have properly reworked to meet the standards of an article for publication) to analyse the different samples of Igala body aesthetics that cuts across all areas that sum up Igala body aesthetics. This includes general art forms used as beautifying apparels that appeal to the whole human body such as worn by the Attah in fig. 15. More so, markings, tattoo, scarifications and the general embroidery worn on the body that identifies an Igala person, painting of

finger nails; the filing and piercing of lips, nose and ear for different types of ornamentation as well as skin cleansing; adornment of body with jewelries and beads; elaborate hairstyles and clothing each of these is analyzed along the three selected period of reign of three successive Attah from 1964 till date.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, Igala body aesthetics were somehow influenced by neighbors and the sudden cross cultural influence of European tattoo arts from global

contacts through modern education and internet influence. This however, made certain professions carry out research on the aesthetic nature and the philosophy backing the influence of Igala body aesthetics. More so, it is obvious that no research has been done to examine the possible periodic and evolutionary changes of Igala body aesthetics. Based on the gaps noticed a possible field research became necessary to further enhance a proper documentation of the research by the researcher to bridge this gap.

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