

## **AFRICAN TRADITIONAL BODY ART AND CONTEMPORARY REALITIES**

**BY**

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### **Abstract**

In the traditional African society, body art is not just an art form but a communicative canvas for transmitting cogent information about the societal lives of the Africans to the outside world. Hence, they are essential aspects of Africans world view because they showcase their socio-cultural belief system through rich display of visual artistry that connotes beauty, social status, occupation, puberty, religion and so on, in an artistically and aesthetically pleasing manner. Surprisingly, in the contemporary African society, most of these beautiful design concepts are out of vogue. In the light of this, this study employed the exploratory and descriptive methods to examine the varied traditional body arts in African continent, their sources, functional values and relevance in contemporary times. The study revealed that ancient Africa body arts are extraordinarily deep in content and rich in context as perceived in cicatrisation, scarification, tattoo, tribal marking, tooth filling, body painting, and hairdressing. The materials for the body arts were sourced from plants, animals and mineral deposits. While their functions range from effecting beauty effects to societal identity among others and that over the years colonisation and globalisation have eroded the practice of cicatrisation, scarification etc but African traditional body painting, hairdressing and cosmetic materials are still very relevant in contemporary African societies. It is recommended that the surviving body arts should be pragmatically developed for the sustenance of African cultural heritage.

**Keywords:** Africa, Body, Art, Contemporary, Traditional

### **Introduction**

From time immemorial African continent has a great level of artistry and originality in body arts, through which they emphasise some socio-cultural realities in their societies. These aforementioned designs can however be conceived in different temporary and permanent design motifs and concepts derived from plants, animals, and mineral deposits as reflective in body paintings, elaborate hairstyles, scarifications, facial markings and cicatrisations, tattoos, tooth filings among others in the African societies (Rubin, 1988, p. 14). Thus, they create an array of vibrant visual display which transforms each decorated person into a unique and aesthetically pleasing work of art that add meaning and value to what they represent within the specified societies. To this end, Rowanchilde (2005) affirms that “Africa can be called the cradle of body decoration because in nearly every tribe in African regions and landscapes, different forms of body-decoration are usually slightly changed”. In the light of this, Hewit (1997) in his appraisal of the uniqueness of the African body design opines: “The body is considered meaningful beyond its mechanistic ability to function, it is an avenue of social and spiritual meaning, and allows human kind to write their past, present and future upon the intimate and yet public self of their physical being.”

From the fore going, it is obvious that African design cogitations continually resonate in all the socio-religious lives of the Africans, via integrating the mundane with the spiritual. Viewed this way, African design concepts could be explicated as celebrations of life; which relies heavily on their cultural and religious values. As Vogel (1988, p. 410) posits: they were an essential part of the people's way of life such that there was an elaborate artistic display during festivals, wrestling matches, as well as in displays, dances and historical enactments. Artistic skills were quite dominant in body decorations.

Body art is therefore an essential decoration in the African culture, Little wonder then that within the African continent, make up is applied by men and women to define symbolic socio-cultural and political roles which include but not limited to beauty, strength, maturity, protection against spirits and weather condition, ethnic identification, social class distinction, attraction to opposite sex, age identification, and occupational delineation, etc. According to Hewitt (1997) "body designing more than any other art tends to indicate social status and social structure, explaining the continuity and way of life of a particular group or class, it nearly always follows aesthetic as well as social canons" (p. 15).

Body design, is thus a fascinating way of identifying and differentiating an individual, a group of people, as well as expressing personal ideas and preferences, where the precise meaning of the designs or patterns is unique for each person and society. For instance, among ancient Egyptians and Nubians, both men and women, particularly the aristocrats took good care of their appearances by using elaborate make-up. This goes to buttress the point made by Trowel (1960) that body adornment is a form of art in which aesthetic values are shown. In furtherance of this position, it is important to say that, the discovery of archeological evidence of cave paintings and mummified bodies as far back as 4,000BC in ancient Egypt civilisation also attest to the spiritual and aesthetic significance of body decoration among the Egyptians of that age. According to Collarafi (2009, p. 1), "not only were mineral substances such as Kohi, Soot, and hydrated unguent very effective in enhancing and beautifying the corners of the eyes and lips", they were equally effectual in the portrayal of the Egyptians' diverse characteristic moods in their various endeavours.

Body art in most African societies can therefore be associated with permanent markings of the body through incision as evident in cicatrisation, scarification and teeth filing, while the temporary designs are exemplified in hairdressing, and body painting and others in order to emphasise fixed social, political and religious roles. These African body adornments will be explained thus:

### **Body scarification, Tatoo and Cicatrisation in Africa**

Scarification is permanent pattern of scar incised on the skin. In many traditional societies, in which climate and custom permit scanty clothing, body designing is common and is considered to be artistically and socially viable. As Trowel (1960, p. 45) observes, "The exposure of more parts of the body, because of their hot climate, made the African skillfully decorate the body". He stresses that, the African man living in a hot climate has more exposed parts of his body to decorate and he does this with thoroughness with which he could decorate a calabash or any other vessels. Among the Northern nomadic tribes too, such as the Boran, Oromo and Gabbra bodies and functional items were extensively decorated. The Tswana people who live in one of Kenya's harshest environments still accord great care and attention to the decoration of both the body and personal objects.

Among the Baule of Ivory Coast, for instance, permanent body designing is made purely for cosmetic purposes. The Baule presents a good example of the fashion of body designs, which varied from time to time and from place to place. Vogel (1988, p. 82) identifies a common pattern which was recurrent among the Baule. “This consisted of three, six or nine small scars on the nose”. On the whole, one can rightly say that every society has their pattern of designs with significant meanings which varies widely from one society to another. In alignment with this observation, Rubin (1988, p.14) in his anthropological exploration of Africa also observes how the dynamics of the beautiful patterns of body decorations among the Africans define and reflect their cultural world view as well as their experiences, and submits that in sub-Saharan Africa the most important “mark of civilization is cicatrisation, while in North Africa and the Saharan, ancient tradition of tattooing prevails”.

The above submission, is however in correlation with the fact that, from paleolithic times to date, among most countries in North Africa and Asia intricate body designs evident in tattoos have been predominant in their design repertoire based on the notion that they were somehow erotic and as such largely associated with femininity and fertility. This point is supported by Gronning (1974, p.194) view, when he states that “by the time of first civilization in Egypt women of social status have adopted the art of painting their bodies into fashion”. This gives credence to the fact that the art of body tattooing is an age-long tradition of body decoration in Egypt. In the like manner, Cristina, (2002, P.18) also reiterates that fashion sense among Ethiopian’s entertainers who danced and sang at social gatherings at that time, was prominent in the tattoos they wore on their breasts, thighs, arms, torsos, chins and even nose in order to evoke sensual, spectacular and breathtaking effects from the audience.

From the foregoing, there is no doubt that the art of tattooing has been a strong force in the history of North Africans body design repository in line with Rubin (1988, p.14) submission. However, his assertion that cicatrisation was the most important marks of civilization in sub-Saharan Africa, cannot be said to be entirely true. It is important to emphasise that historically as far back as 17<sup>th</sup> century, the unique features of body designs among the West African Countries were not conceptualised and amplified in cicatrisation marks alone, but also scarification, teeth filing, hairdressing, and body painting among others (Kingsley 1897, p.530).

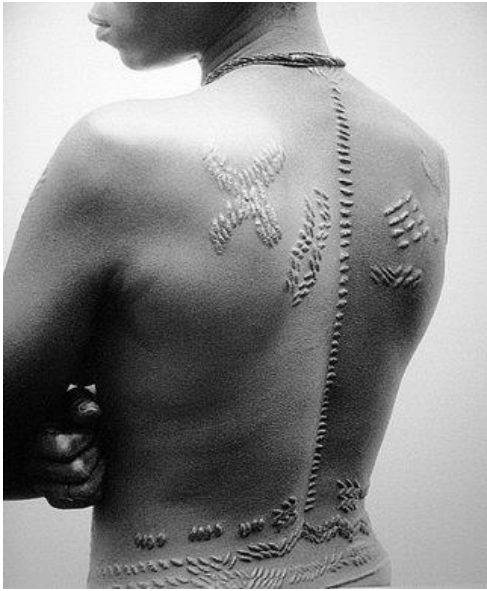
In view of this, Lyndersay (2011, p.16) argues that examples of aesthetic and spiritual permanent skin decoration or scarification marks could be found on one of the earliest archeological finds in Nigeria among the Nok, Igbo, Ukwa, Ife, and Benin people respectively. She however consolidates her argument with the denudating and enlightening description of the enthralling body decorations on the Benin bronze plaques of a young woman and a male servant in the late 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century.

Oziogu (2011, p. 4) also posits that within the Nigerian culture facial marking is common among the Yoruba, Gobirs and the Kanuris as well as other tribes. According to him, this mark “is more pronounced among the Yoruba. This is because; they have different names for different types of facial marks according to the number and the length or breadth of lines and arrangement”, to showcase their beauty, social ranking, self-identity and ethnic identification. In Negri’s (1976, p.9) opinion, example of some of such Yoruba permanent body marks can be visualised in the Ògbómòshó face marks which are drawn as gashes from the edge of the scalp to the jaws” as a distinguishing factor for identifying families and tribes within a geographical location, while the second category is “Fín-

fin cuts made into groups to form geometric patterns on almost all parts of a woman's body" to indicate beauty and fertility.

In alliance with Lyndersay (2011, p.16) earlier observation, Uzochukwu (1987, p.39) also highlight that permanent body markings were once in vogue in the past among various Igbo ethnic groups in Nigeria. In tune with this statement, he identifies facial scarification marks of Igbo Ichi among the Igbo people as the symbol of honour, valour, and integrity on those who wore them or are still wearing them in the Igbo community. Likewise, he espouses the spiritual purification quality of Itu Mbubu/ Mbib cicatrisation tattoos excised on young ladies abdomen as the rite of passage to womanhood before they are finally betrothed to their future husbands. Moreover, in the area of beauty, he explains that Idu Nki artistic body cuts were aesthetically pleasing marks worn as body decoration all over the bodies of both males and females in the Igbo culture in the olden days. (Basden 1966, p. 76) also gives evidence of the passing trends in body adornment among the Tiv of Nigeria. He observes that "Tiv body adornment is purely aesthetic and the designs may mark the wearer's generation, since the patterns change about every ten years or according to fashion".

Similarly, up to today, among many tribes in Ghana, Kosanma and Donko facial marks are highly acknowledged as the elixir for stopping the re-occurring death of children believed to have reincarnated many times from their past lives into the same family. On the other hand, in northern and upper west region of Ghana, Bakarewe marks are still notable as a special type of sign-post for identifying Ghanaians that descended from Ivory Coast in order to prevent inter- lineage/ethnic marriages that could incur the wrath of their ancestors on them, since it is a taboo for people of the same lineage to marry one another in the Ivorian culture. The Yombe people of Zaire are also famous at advancing female beauty through body art. Elaborate body markings that stretch from the front to the back of their women are mostly employed to showcase a "lengthy process which begins at the age of ten and is completed when a woman reaches adulthood and is eligible for marriage, the patterns mimic the patterns apparent in basketwork and textiles" (Hooper 1977, p. 182).



**A man with scarification**

**Two African boys with cicatrization marks on his back marks on their cheeks**

**Photo Credit:** Pinterest



**Photo Credit:** Pinterest

**A female with traditional Yoruba tribal mark on her cheek. Photo Credit:** Pinterest

### **Filling, Chipping and Removal of Teeth as African Traditional body Decoration**

Interestingly, another ancient practice in the art of permanent body adornment in Africa is the filling, chipping and the removal of teeth. Unfortunately, today, these customs are presumed to be in complete extinction in most African countries, although, history still has the record that they are very important forms of body modification and alterations used in the past for religious, cultural and aesthetics purposes among the Africans. To this end, Damello (2007, p.81) espouses the cultural and spiritual significance of this tradition among the Bali people in south-eastern Ethiopia by mentioning that their teeth were usually chipped down into varied impressive designs to eradicate negative emotions such as anger, jealousy, maliciousness, and unforgiving spirits from people exhibiting such traits in that community, whereas in the same community their boys teeth were sharpened to connote rite of transition to adolescents.

It is also recorded that some indigenous cultures in Africa also exploited various teeth filing techniques and designs to establish gender supremacy. Frazer (2006, p.187) opines that among the Upoto in central Congo region, the men filled only the teeth in maxillary arch to connote their patriarchy status while the women filled both the maxillary and the mandibular arches as an indication of their matriarchy subordinate status within their family unit in that community. He further expatiates

that in some parts of Africa, some natives ingeniously and creatively imitate the image of animals into their teeth filing designs. Example was drawn from Inter-tropical Africa tribes who adopted shark motifs into their teeth filling designs for spiritual supplication and empowerment. Nevertheless, some people in Africa did not limit this practice to filing or sharpening of their teeth alone, they also engaged in permanent removal of their teeth; leaving a wide parting mostly used by them as dental decoration and beautification. This was evident among the people of western-cape in South Africa who were noted for removing their canines for aesthetic effect.

### **Traditional Hairdressing in Africa**

Aside the incision and tooth filing motifs of the African descent, Africa is rich in ancient hair tradition and styles. Lyndersay (1988, p. 39) also informs that one of the most dynamic artistically and intricately produced forms of temporary body adornment in Africa, is the hair style of the Northern Nigerian Coiffures which in her explanation involves the technique of “pleating, plaiting, braiding, tying, shaving, and an elaborate construction of clay, wax, reeds, grass, oils combs, and cloths” to the hair so as to establish socio-status, beauty, and identity particularly among the wearers in the Sahel, Fulbe, and fulani societies. Fascinating dreadlocks from Himba tribe of Northwestern Namibia are also extraordinary hairstyles that have close semblance to that of the Fulani of Northern Nigeria. Ground ochre, goat hair, and butter are mixed and used by their females and males to create dreadlocks that indicate age grades, rite of passage and marital status. Young girls wear dreadlocks that hang over their faces to indicate puberty, while unmarried women tie their hair up to show their faces as mark of attraction to would be suitors, and unmarried men wear a single braid to project their bachelor status, but once married they cover their heads permanently.

According to Adeoye (1980, p.170-174) African hairdressing can also be visualised in the Yoruba female traditional hairstyles of western Nigeria such as *kòlèsè* ( a style of hair woven from the front to the back), *Ìpàkó ẹlédè* ( the hair woven from the back to the front), *sùkú* ( hair woven from the front of the head to the crest of the head), *Mọremí* ( hair plaited and tied with local thread to the centre and the sides of the head), *Ògún párí* (spiral plaits with thread to the back of the head), and *Láyípo* (the style of plaiting the hair to the sides of the head), among others, in order to reinforce beauty and elicit aesthetic effect and attractiveness from their male counterparts.

The mentioned hairstyles are however different from other forms of hair modifications and alterations found in *irun dídán* (scraping of the hair) *irun gígé* (barbing of the hair) and others mostly donned by the Yorùbá males for beauty enhancement and personal hygiene. Except in some few cases where men weave their hair for religious and spiritual reasons; this is customary with Sango priests who wear female hairstyles such as *agogo* to assume the role of Sango’s wives while performing the worship rites of Sango (the mythological god of thunder and lightning in Yoruba cosmology).

Elaborate hairdressing is equally an important aspect of body decoration among the Ibibio women of south eastern Nigeria apart from spectacular body designs. To this effect, Umoteuk (1985, p.32) articulates that in most historical accounts of the Ibibio fashion, these hairstyles are closely related to headgear and dress because of their bogus outlook. She further remarks that two methods are employed in achieving these impressive hair styles. “The first method according to her required artistic weaving of the hair into braids without the use of thread, while the second involved the use of thread in tying the hair into patterns”.

Hence, Mkpuk Eba, Mkpum, Fiom Inyang, Uto Eku Etine, and Eba-Nkaiferi and so on, have undoubtedly become very symbolic and common hair styles in variety of ways in the Ibibio society as

they are selectively worn for different special occasions by women to connote beauty, fashion, age-group, as well as marital and social status. An analogy to this tradition can also be perceived in one of the collection of pictures of Herbert Lang anthropological expeditions between 1909 and 1915, where he showcased the royal hairstyles of Zande people of Democratic Republic of Congo through Bagbadi headdress; an elaborate fan-shape hairstyle worn by Zande queens for beauty effect in accordance with the customs of the Congo basin people.



**Nasara, one of the wives of Akenge with typical fan-shaped style of the Zande, Democratic Republic of Congo.**

**Photo Credit: Herbert Lang Expedition, 1909-1915.**



**A lady with Yoruba traditional hairstyle**

**Photo Credit: Pinterest**

### **Traditional Body Painting in Africa**

Apart from hairdressing, temporary body designs reflective in body painting has also been recorded as possessing great social values for the many ethnic groups found in the African continent. Two types of temporary body paintings are predominant among the many design practices – the



temporarily indelible make-up designs which lasted a few days, weeks or months as the case may be; and the instance make-up designs that washed-off straight away. In this body art certain colours and patterns are usually applied to represent specific aspects of the wearers' lives such as beauty, power, achievement, social class, celebration, and sexual maturity among others. In most cases, the body painting colours were sourced from natural environment among plants, animals and mineral deposits including red and yellow clay ochre, ant hume, black charcoal and manganese, dyes and even insects' secretions (Gronning 1997, p.194).

Among the Nuba tribes in southern Sudan for instance, we are told that body painting was a way of life, Hence, Agostino (1987, p.40) informs that "the aesthetic value of the design, especially, its ability to enhance the human form, transcend any meaning or ceremonial content in the design". Therefore, men and women practiced this art to connote beauty, membership of a particular age-grades and family as well as celebration. Thus, colours such as yellow, red ochre, white, and black were employed in designing their bodies. This practice is mostly synonymous with young males between 17 to 30 years of age who engaged in painting their bodies from time to time to indicate their transition to adulthood.

Gronning (1970, p. 95) equally indicates that; "Studies show that among the Kenyans, the art of body painting could be traced to a long and influential tradition". Throughout the country, there are many examples of rock art and cave paintings of early man, and of similar designs and motifs carried through centuries. Many Kenyan traditional societies placed great significance on decoration of both functional and ritual objects, as well as the body. In tribes such as the Kuria and the Samburu, Phillips (1996, p. 130) observes that body decoration was raised to the form of high art. "The Samburu place great significance on physical beauty, especially the warriors who take great care with their physical appearance using hair styles and ochre body make-up to create an impression of great delicacy". It was the highlighted trait that earned them their name 'Samburu' (Butterflies), given by the other tribes.

For the Maasi people, the use of decorative beads is extremely significant. Jewelry and body designs are used to emphasise social status and to signify stages in the initiation process and rite of passage. During the Mozan festival "they painted their legs with white and their bodies with red ocher. They wear their hair in tiny braids also coloured in red ochre" as a mark of their newly acquired strength (All About Africaart.com, n.d, para.5).s The Himba from northern-province of Namibia are also noted for enhancing their beauty and attractiveness with local hair colourant they invented for temporarily dyeing their hair into unique reddish- brown colours derived from the plant and animal produce of red-ochre, ash, butter, and herbs.

Ezeagugh (2006, p.40) also submits that temporary make-up for the Egyptians included rouge made of iron oxide, while Malachite, a copper ore was the basis of a green make-up used to adorn the eye and the colour of which symbolised fertility. Dark grey eye paint was also employed and this was a derivative of a lead ore called Galena. Eye make-up was also believed to have had magical and medicinal purposes. Galena for instance, not only protected its wearer from the 'evil eye', but also contained disinfectants and deterred flies. Apart from Egyptians,

In Nigeria, Negri (1976, p. 14) also observes that, the application of temporary body designs are widespread practices imbued with different socio-cultural values. This informed why they are variously applied to depict beauty, elegance, joy, and personal hygiene in that society. To buttress this point, henna body tattoo painting otherwise known as Làáli in Northern part of Nigeria is a typical



example of temporary body make-up that has become a widely accepted tradition in Nigeria. This is because it is a beauty regimen that has transcended ethnic and religious boundaries to attain socio-religious relevance in Nigeria and across the globe. Henna dyes are usually sourced from henna bush (Mignonette plant). There are two variety of henna in Nigeria. There is the Rani and Dices. The rani produces red pigment on the body, whereas the dices give a dark hue colour outlook to the skin.

Shedding more light on the significance of henna tattoo painting within the Nigerian culture, Olonishuwa (2014, p.13) avers that “in the Northern part of Nigeria, the night of henna is an established practice usually celebrated as part of marriage rites among Kanuri, Shuwa Arabs, Fulani, Ilorin, and Nupe women”. On this highlighted night, she emphasises that henna pigments of varied colours are usually manipulated to intricately and extensively design the hands and the feet of the future brides so as to usher in love, fertility and prosperity into their marriages

Uli or Uri body design tradition among the Igbo is another temporary makeup practice that is found in the repository of Nigerian body art. In fact, the fascinating appearance of this design has stimulated so much interest and attention from many scholars including early European visitors who met the Igbos already practicing the make-up technique. Basden (1966, p. 95) in his book *Niger Ibos* which he wrote in 1917, after having spent seventeen years among the Igbos, narrated seeing both men and women wearing the designs. Scholars such as Eze (2005, p. 56) identifies two categories of Uli – the somatic and the mural Uli. The former is on the human body. The latter is on the walls. The one on the human body consists of simple to intricate geometric patterns or other diverse expressions. All sorts of objects including human, animal, plant, and iconic figures are just some of the examples. Eze goes further to submit that:

One way to gauge the importance of a special event was whether wearing the somatic Uli was obligatory or strongly recommended. Rites of passage, wedding, and second funeral are only some of such celebrations where the bearing of somatic Uli was de rigueur.



**Traditional bodypainting – Southeast Nuba, Sudan**  
**Photo Credit: Leni Reifentstahi**



**Traditional Uli body design**  
**Photo Credit : Pinterest**

### **Africa Indigenous Cosmetics**

Africa holds a large reservoir of raw materials for their traditional cosmetics and beauty recipe for body and hair. Most of these traditional materials are got from plant, animal and mineral deposits. These organic materials are used for effecting beautiful hair and skin and at the same time they are equipped medicinal ingredients for the treatment of many ailments. Most African countries are topographically blessed with natural ingredients like avocado oil, aloe vera, shear butter, macadamia nuts, jojoba seed, bee wax among others for example in Nigeria amongst the Yoruba people is Osùn also known as Urie in Igbo land. Burkill (1995 p.857) asserts that traditionally, this cosmetic variant is primarily prepared from red cam-wood extracted from the bark of *Baphia nitida* tree; a quintessential plant highly revered for its soothing effect. Consequently, this explains its efficacy at smoothening and soothing the rough edges of the skin. A trait that has warranted its wide-spread application in many communities in Nigeria, most especially, among nursing mothers and children who derived great pleasure in toning their skin with this unique makeup- material to make their body look smooth and supple without any skin imperfection and diseases.

In furtherance of the expatiated position, Nzu (Kaolin), Efun (Talc), Eluu (Palm kernel oil), Òrí (shea butter) and Tíròò (Galena eyeliner) are also highlighted and described by Imoukhuede (1991, p.34) as traditional make-up materials that enjoy cross-cultural patronage in Nigeria. He stresses that for aesthetic appeal, Nzu and Efun are usually rubbed raw all over the body in many parts of Nigeria as beauty agents that keep the skin smooth, fresh, and clean from the negative effect of heat and sweat. In contrast to this, he observes that the oils obtained from Eluu and Òrí are also locally processed and applied as treatment on sprains and swellings of the body, aside their primacy at effecting glowing skin and healthy hair. He added that, this does not in any ramification limit their attributes as decorative

and spiritual embellishments applied on the faces of maidens and priests participating in traditional marriages and festivals.

In addition to the above, he surmises that *Tíròd* (in Yoruba), otherwise called *Kwali* (in Hausa), *Uhie* (in Igbo), as well as *Atido* in *Ibibio* culture is a native antimony of Galener eyeliner used across Nigeria, long before the advent of western mascara eyeliner into the Nigerian society. Significantly, up to today, *Tirro* is still engaged in outlining and emphasising the eyelids, eyebrows and eyeballs of the wearers especially females, in order to reinforce their beauty values and enhance their attractiveness. But, irrespective of its aesthetic essence, it is worthy of attention, to highlight that the uniqueness and functional values of *Tíròd* are equally embedded, entrenched, and articulated in the traditional belief of various ethnic groups within the Nigerian society, that it is very effective for the prevention and cure of various eye ailments such as ophthalmologic infections (Chukwuma, 1997, p.399).

### **Contemporary Realities of African Body Art**

In contemporary African societies, traditional body art has been highly influenced by the concept of globalisation owing to the cross-cultural interaction and exchange that ensued between African countries and the rest of the world on the global space from the start of 15th century to 21st century Obidoa (2018). This exposure to foreign cultures however brought about negative and positive changes in Africa cultural values and traditions. To this end, the African permanent traditional body art of scarification, tattoo and cicatrisation for example, did not benefit much from the globalisation influence because the cultural and artistic aesthetics created and cherished by Africa founding fathers in their original designs as symbols of their cultural identity and societal co-existence were lost to their descendants in contemporary times due to the fact that the meaning of the visual metaphor in the designs were eroded by the negative interference of western civilisation. Thus, nowadays the aforementioned permanent body designs are ostracized and classified as ugly, old fashioned or archaic with their attendant exaggerated health implications in many Africa societies. This way, the highlighted body art is rapidly dwindling into extinction because Africans generally do not practice them again, except in few rural communities where their significance is still understood and upheld.

Surprisingly, the influence of globalisation on Africa traditional body painting is a positive one. Indeed, the ancient body painting whose colourful designs are got from ash, chalk, clay and ochre pigments to mention a few are creatively applied to the body for the transmission of cultural standard of beauty and religious and socio-political obligations. This was achieved with the new consciousness in body art of late 20<sup>th</sup> century which articulated liberalisation of thoughts and wider acceptance of public expression and cultural freedom in body expression in United States and Europe (Pereira, 2016). This movement however resulted in the unprecedented revival of ancient body painting in Europe and America and invariably in Africa through global cultural interaction and transmission.

The revival of body painting in Africa however came with new sensibility and impetus because its application transcended the traditional practice to incorporate modern artistic technology while still drawing from indigenous design motifs of ancient body painting, fine art, alternative arts, mythology, and current affairs such as sporting events. Hence, in contemporary times, it is fast becoming new trends in body arts with exotic artistry and aesthetically pleasing designs that transform the body into canvas of communication encoded with meaningful messages for the viewers by the wearer. To this extent, African contemporary body paintings have become a very useful tool in entertainment industry

as it is used in fashion shows, event advertisements, T.V realities and video performances to get audience attention and instigate great cultural exposure via social media.

On the other hand, Africa traditional body modification and alteration found in filling, chipping and removal of teeth were strenuous beauty procedures that did not enjoy much patronage in contemporary times. In fact, it has become a forgotten tradition in most of the African societies where they were practiced in the past. But interestingly, Jabr (2018, p.1) explained that the durable surrogate materials such as metal and plastic used for replacing removed teeth in dental health care nowadays are used to make fashion statement by some youths in some African societies.

Traditional Hair dressing in modern African society has for some time suffered some level of neglect as a result of cultural inter-connectedness with the western world. The beautiful and visually appealing traditional African hairdressing found in most African countries in the past have been largely replaced by western fashion by both female and male. Dickson(2019, p.5 )informed that “natural hair including twists, dreadlocks and large cornrows have for a long time been disregarded and classified as inappropriate leaving those who do not want to wear a weave or chemically straighten hair feeling marginalised as their natural hair is unacceptable” This statement implies that the fashion of perm hair, weave on, curly hair and other hairstyles peculiar to Western culture have been trending in African societies from the time of colonial civilisation. But, of recent through Afrocentric fashion movements some of the discarded elaborate traditional hairdressing are now rebranded and displayed by Africans at home and in diaspora in their daily lives and fashion scenes to make strong statement about the beauty and functionality of African fashion.

Since the time of colonisation of African continent by western world, and the globalisation culture that followed afterwards, the functional values of most of the quintessential African indigenous cosmetic variants got from plants, animal and mineral deposits such as shear butter, Aloe vera, coconut oil, muscovite mica, goat milk and so on have been seriously ignored and subverted by more advanced technologically produced cosmetic products from Europe, US, Asia and others due to cultural integration. But, with the noticeable adverse effect of the carcinogenic ingredients of the foreign cosmetics on the human skin and attendant health risk, the natural organic composition of Africa ancient cosmetics has become the next frontier for cosmetics products in Africa and the world at large. Awosika (2018) confirms this when she states that; “African indigenous cosmetics are easy to prepare and their raw materials are cheap and readily available in many geographical locations from natural and non-injurious sources”. Concomitantly, in Africa today, cosmetologists, beauticians, makeup artists and manufacturers are now successfully experimenting and applying these natural cosmetics to beautify the skin and cure other body ailments without fear of health hazards.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has highlighted the varieties of body arts on the African continent from the prehistoric time to date. Through the perspectives of many scholars the centrality of body designs perceived in permanent or temporary, to the socio-cultural sphere of traditional African societies has also been examined to reflect that these traditional design practices play important roles in a wide range of events dealing with rites of passage, healing, war, agriculture, marriage and many others, thus, foregrounding the enormous potentials abounding in African body design traditions. Also, from our findings it is revealed that the face of body art in the African continent changed with the advent of Europeans unto the African soil through colonialism and cross- cultural tool of globalisation which

brought about acculturation where most of the cherished traditions of the African societies were discarded for more modern culture of the whites. In view of this, permanent African body art of scarification, cicatrization, tattoo, tribal marking, and teeth alignment were generally abandoned in many African societies under the guise that the practice was dangerous to human health and as such they were tagged obsolete, archaic and obnoxious. But, interestingly, temporary African traditional body art found in body painting, elaborate hairdressing and cosmetic products continue to be relevant regardless of globalisation influence. The paper therefore recommends that the immense potentials in the surviving African body arts should be developed for communal, national and global benefits as well as the sustainability of African cultural heritage.

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