

THE EVOLUTION AND DECLINE OF TRADITIONAL IGBO CLOTHING AND BODY ART

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Abstract

The work focuses on southeastern Nigeria. The traditional Igbo attire and body art are essential manifestations of identity, social hierarchy, and cosmological beliefs. In the past, uli painting, ichi scarification, and clothing like akwete fabric and isiagu shirts served as visual languages that represented life-cycle stages and communal values. However, these

traditions have undergone tremendous changes as a result of globalization, colonial interactions, and shifting aesthetics across generations. To record their symbolic meanings, track their changes, and identify the sociocultural and economic forces impacting their current state, this study explores the historical development and current decline of these cultural forms. Data were collected using a qualitative, analytical, and ethnographic approach, which included site visits, previous research, and an examination of archival photographic and missionary records. This multi-source methodology enabled both descriptive mapping of activities and interpretive analysis guided by Postcolonial Theory, cultural materialism, and Symbolic Interactionism. The findings show that traditional apparel and body art have been reduced from everyday use to ceremonial or historic contexts, which mass-produced duplicates have widely replaced handmade forms, and that particular activities, such as *ichi*, have nearly disappeared. Economic pragmatism, media-influenced beauty standards, and historical stigmatisation all contribute to the reduction. Limited revival initiatives in modern fashion and art demonstrate potential, but frequently lack genuine craft commitment. The paper emphasises the need for culturally grounded preservation techniques, arguing that sustainable revitalisation must strike a balance between innovation and respect for traditional production methods, while also encouraging intergenerational knowledge transmission and protecting indigenous intellectual property.

Keywords: Akwete, Isiagu, Uli, Ichi, Cultural identity

Introduction

The Igbo people, one of the largest ethnolinguistic groups in Nigeria, possess a rich cultural heritage expressed through a wide array of material and non-material traditions. Among these, clothing and body art occupy a central role as both aesthetic expressions and symbolic systems of communication. Historically, traditional Igbo clothing, such as the *isiagu*, *wrapper*, and intricately woven *akwete* cloth, was crafted from locally produced textiles and often adorned with hand-dyed patterns, beadwork, and symbolic motifs (Anigbo, 2020). Body art traditions, including *uli* painting and scarification (*ichi*), were equally significant, functioning as coded visual languages that conveyed ideals of beauty, moral virtue, rites of passage, and religious affiliation (Chukwuma, 2018). Precolonial and early colonial anthropological records highlight that these cultural forms were integral to seasonal festivals, life-cycle ceremonies, and the maintenance of social hierarchies (Basden, 1966/2017).

These traditions were embedded within a broader cosmological and philosophical framework that emphasized harmony, ancestral veneration, and communal belonging (Okeke-Agulu, 2015). The artistry of Igbo dress and body decoration was not purely ornamental but served as an essential means of preserving collective memory and transmitting values. However, the advent of European colonialism, the spread of Christianity, and the imposition of Western clothing norms disrupted these long-established practices. Missionary narratives often portrayed indigenous dress and body markings as pagan or uncivilized, thereby

accelerating their marginalization (Nwosu & Okeke, 2022). In the postcolonial era, the combined forces of urbanization, globalization, and mass-produced fashion further eroded these traditions, with younger generations increasingly adopting Western styles. Today, practices such as *uli* survive primarily in cultural festivals or curated heritage exhibitions (Onwuegbuna, 2021).

Despite the cultural importance of these traditions, there remains a significant gap in the literature. Existing studies tend to focus either on the historical origins and symbolism of Igbo clothing and body art or their purely artistic qualities in isolation (Okeke-Agulu, 2015; Anigbo, 2020). Few works trace the trajectory of these traditions from their precolonial contexts through the colonial encounter to their present-day decline, incorporating both local and global dynamics. Furthermore, contemporary influences such as digital media, the global fashion industry, and the commodification of cultural symbols are often overlooked in favor of an exclusive focus on colonial disruptions (Nwosu & Okeke, 2022). This lack of an integrated historical-to-contemporary analysis hampers the development of effective preservation strategies, risking the relegation of these traditions to static museum artifacts rather than sustaining them as adaptive, living practices.

The present study seeks to address this gap by undertaking a comprehensive investigation into the evolution and decline of traditional Igbo clothing and body art. It aims first to document the historical forms, functions, and symbolic meanings of these cultural

expressions. Second, it will analyze the sociopolitical, economic, and cultural factors shaping their transformation from the precolonial era to contemporary times. Third, it will examine how these traditions manifest in present-day urban and rural Igbo communities, identifying the extent to which they have been preserved, adapted, or abandoned. Fourth, it will assess the causes underlying their decline in everyday life. Finally, the study will propose culturally sensitive strategies for their revitalization, ensuring they remain relevant without losing their core cultural significance.

The significance of this research extends beyond the documentation of a fading aesthetic tradition. On a cultural level, it contributes to the preservation of intangible heritage, aligning with UNESCO's (2017) emphasis on safeguarding living traditions for future generations. On an academic level, it bridges art history, anthropology, and cultural studies, offering a diachronic analysis that links precolonial aesthetics to contemporary identity politics. This approach not only enriches scholarly understanding but also provides practical insights for heritage practitioners, cultural policymakers, fashion designers, and educators. In terms of contemporary relevance, the research addresses pressing debates about authenticity, cultural appropriation, and the sustainability of indigenous aesthetics in the global fashion economy. With African-inspired fashion gaining international visibility, a deeper understanding of Igbo traditions can promote more respectful and contextually grounded cultural exchanges (Onwuegbuna, 2021).

Geographically, the study focuses on the Igbo-speaking regions of southeastern Nigeria. This scope allows for a comparative analysis of how different social environments shape the continuity or decline of traditional dress and body art. Temporally, the research spans from the late precolonial era (circa mid-19th century) to the early 21st century, enabling an exploration of long-term transformations across colonial, postcolonial, and contemporary phases. Thematically, it centers on clothing types such as *akwete* weaving, *isiagu* tunics, and ceremonial wrappers; associated adornments like beads and coral ornaments; and body art forms including *uli* painting and scarification. These elements will be examined in relation to their cultural meanings, production techniques, and social functions, as well as the pressures influencing their adaptation or abandonment. While the study may touch on related aspects of Igbo material culture, such as music or dance, this will occur only when they directly illuminate the primary focus on clothing and body art.

By situating the decline of traditional Igbo clothing and body art within both historical and contemporary frameworks, this research aims to reveal the complex interplay between tradition, modernity, and globalization. In doing so, it seeks to offer a balanced understanding that neither romanticizes the past nor dismisses the realities of cultural change. Ultimately, this work aspires to contribute meaningfully to both the scholarly record and ongoing community efforts to sustain Igbo cultural identity in a rapidly transforming world.

Literature Review

Conceptual studies

The conceptual framework of this research work focuses on these key concepts to be considered.

Akwete

Akwete is operationally defined as a handwoven Igbo textile traditionally produced by women using raffia, cotton, or silk fibers, measurable through its distinctive weaving techniques, motifs, cultural symbolism, and frequency of use in ceremonial and everyday contexts. The conceptual foundations of scholarship on Igbo clothing and body art emphasize the cultural, historical, and symbolic dimensions that define their role in Igbo society. Anigbo (2020) presents one of the most comprehensive examinations of Igbo dress aesthetics, detailing how garments such as the *akwete*, *isiagu*, and ceremonial wrappers serve not merely as attire but as communicative artifacts encoding status, gender, and communal identity. His work highlights the intersection of textile artistry with symbolic meaning, but it underplays the dynamics of change in response to modern influences, leaving scope for studies that address transformation over time.

Isiagu

Isiagu is defined as patterned Igbo attire, typically a richly designed shirt decorated with lion-head motifs, worn by men to symbolize prestige and identity, measurable through its patterns, occasions of use, and social significance within Igbo society.

Uli

Uli is operationally defined as the indigenous Igbo artistic practice of inscribing symbolic and aesthetic motifs on human skin and walls using natural pigments, observable and measurable in terms of its patterns, symbolism, frequency of application, and cultural relevance within specific communities. Chukwuma (2018) conceptualizes *uli* body art as a "cultural archive" of Igbo women, arguing that its motifs encode narratives of moral codes, fertility, and cosmological beliefs. Her analysis positions body art as a medium of historical continuity and collective memory, aligning it with broader African traditions where the body becomes a canvas for cultural storytelling. While her study underscores symbolism, it does not engage extensively with the forces of decline, thus limiting its utility for understanding contemporary erosion.

Ichi

Ichi can be defined as the visible, patterned marks carved on the forehead and face to signify cultural identity, social status, or initiation, measurable through their presence, design, and cultural significance among individuals. It is also the traditional Igbo facial scarification. Okeke-Agulu (2015) situates Igbo aesthetics within postcolonial modernism, emphasizing how art forms, including clothing and body art, were reinterpreted during Nigeria's decolonization era. His conceptual framing links artistic expression to political consciousness, offering insight into how clothing and body art can embody resistance and adaptation. However, his focus on elite, urban-centered art

movements' means rural continuities and transformations remain less explored.

Cultural identity

Cultural identity can be defined as the degree to which individuals identify with, express, and participate in the values, language and practices of their cultural group. Ekechi (2019) conceptualizes dress as a locus of identity negotiation during colonial encounters, noting how missionary and administrative pressures transformed both production methods and social perceptions of traditional attire. His framework highlights the dual processes of cultural suppression and selective adaptation, setting the stage for contemporary debates about authenticity. Nonetheless, his historical emphasis leaves present-day cultural hybridization underexamined.

Nwosu and Okeke (2022) offer a more recent conceptualization linking globalization to cultural erosion. They argue that digital media, global fashion trends, and commodification have displaced indigenous practices by redefining beauty standards and convenience in dress. Their study connects conceptual symbolism with real-world socio-economic pressures, but it is largely diagnostic, offering limited discussion of preservation strategies.

Together, these conceptual studies demonstrate that Igbo clothing and body art are not static relics but dynamic cultural systems deeply embedded in identity, social structure, and cosmology. However, they collectively reveal a gap in integrated analyses that trace historical

origins through to modern decline, connecting symbolism with socio-economic, political, and technological transformations.

Theoretical Studies

The following theories have emerged as particularly relevant for understanding the evolution and decline of traditional Igbo clothing and body art: Symbolic Interactionism, Cultural Materialism, and Postcolonial Theory.

Symbolic Interactionism, advanced by Blumer (1969) and expanded in African art studies (e.g., Barber, 2018), provides a micro-level interpretive lens for understanding clothing and body art as symbols negotiated through everyday social interactions. In the Igbo context, the meaning of the *isiagụ* shirt or an *uli* motif is not fixed but is actively constructed in ceremonies, markets, and interpersonal exchanges. This approach explains how the same garment or design can shift in meaning, becoming either a symbol of heritage pride or a marker of rural backwardness depending on the social setting. It also accounts for the adaptability of symbols, such as how *akwete* weaving is reimaged in contemporary fashion. Yet, Symbolic Interactionism struggles to address the macro-structural forces, such as colonialism or global capitalism, that shape these micro-interactions, thus requiring integration with broader socio-historical theories

Cultural Materialism, as articulated by Harris (1979) and adapted to African cultural studies by later scholars (e.g., Afigbo, 2016), posits that material culture arises from the intersection of environmental constraints, technological

capacities, and socio-economic structures. Applying this to Igbo clothing and body art, the theory explains how precolonial textile production was shaped by local ecological resources (cotton, dyes) and artisanal skill systems (*akwete* weaving), while body art practices reflected readily available natural pigments and community-based apprenticeship. This perspective illuminates the material and economic underpinnings of these traditions, suggesting that their decline is linked to industrial textile imports, urban migration, and changes in production labor structures. However, its focus on material determinants can understate symbolic and identity-based dimensions, necessitating complementary frameworks.

Postcolonial Theory, particularly as articulated by Bhabha (1994) and Mbembe (2001), offers a critical lens on how colonial histories and their aftermath shape cultural expressions. In the case of Igbo clothing and body art, Postcolonial Theory reveals how Western impositions reframed indigenous aesthetics as “primitive” and how post-independence societies negotiate hybridity, resistance, and mimicry in dress practices. Okeke-Agulu’s (2015) analysis of postcolonial modernism in Nigerian art embodies this approach, illustrating how Igbo clothing and body art both resisted and incorporated colonial influences, producing hybridized forms. This framework is particularly powerful in explaining the politics of cultural representation and the persistence of colonial legacies in beauty and dress standards. However, while it excels at unpacking historical power relations, it sometimes

underplays the agency of communities in shaping their cultural futures outside the colonial frame.

In the context of this study, these three theories are complementary. Cultural Materialism grounds the discussion in economic and environmental realities, Symbolic Interactionism captures the fluidity of meaning in social practice, and Postcolonial Theory situates these dynamics within broader histories of domination and resistance. When integrated, they provide a multi-scalar perspective linking the local artisan's loom to the global fashion market, and the village *uli* artist's brush to the politics of cultural recognition. This layered approach is necessary to understand not only how Igbo clothing and body art evolved but also why their decline is entangled with both structural and symbolic shifts

Empirical Studies

Several empirical studies offer concrete evidence on the status, transformation, and decline of Igbo clothing and body art.

Nwosu and Okeke (2022) surveyed 412 respondents across urban and rural Igbo communities, assessing attitudes toward traditional attire. Their statistical analysis revealed a generational divide: individuals aged 18–30 wore traditional clothing primarily during weddings and festivals, while those over 50 integrated it more frequently into daily life. The study linked reduced everyday use to factors such as cost, perceived inconvenience, and fashion conformity pressures. Importantly, they found that media exposure to Western styles significantly predicted preference for non-

traditional dress. This empirical evidence directly informs the current study's interest in globalization and media influence as accelerants of cultural change.

Onwuegbuna (2021) conducted a mixed-method study involving interviews with 35 practitioners and participant observation at cultural festivals in Anambra and Enugu States. She found that *uli* body art has largely transitioned from daily or ceremonial use to curated displays during heritage events. Practitioners cited a lack of apprentices, reduced demand, and the stigmatization of indigenous aesthetics among youth as key drivers of decline. Notably, she documented emerging hybrid forms where *uli* motifs are adapted into contemporary graphic design and fashion prints. This aligns with the present study's recognition of adaptation alongside decline, although her work is limited to body art without a comparable analysis of clothing traditions.

Ekechi (2019) conducted archival and ethnographic research on the transformation of Igbo dress from the precolonial through the postcolonial period. His fieldwork in Imo and Abia States revealed that certain elite ceremonial garments, such as coral-beaded regalia, have persisted in modified forms, while imported fabrics have replaced everyday indigenous textiles. He attributed these changes not only to colonial suppression but also to pragmatic adoption of more affordable and readily available industrial textiles. This nuanced finding challenges purely colonial-explanation models and resonates with the present study's commitment to examining multifactorial causes of decline.

These empirical studies converge in showing that both clothing and body art are subject to a dual process of decline in routine practice and reinvention in heritage or commercial contexts. They underscore the interplay of socio-economic pressures, generational value shifts, and symbolic re-signification. However, they also reveal a common limitation: none offer a comprehensive, diachronic account that bridges precolonial origins, colonial transformations, and contemporary adaptations in both clothing and body art. The present study seeks to fill this gap by synthesizing historical, theoretical, and empirical perspectives into an integrated narrative.

Summary of Literature Review

The literature reveals that Igbo clothing and body art are deeply rooted in symbolic, material, and socio-political contexts, with meanings negotiated across time. Conceptual studies emphasize symbolism and identity, theoretical works offer multi-scalar analytical tools, and empirical research provides evidence of both decline and adaptation. Yet, a significant gap remains in integrated studies that trace these traditions from precolonial origins through colonial disruption to contemporary transformations. This study addresses that gap by combining Postcolonial Theory with complementary perspectives, aiming to produce a comprehensive account of the intertwined evolution and decline of these cultural practices.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts Postcolonial Theory as its primary analytical framework, supplemented by insights from Cultural Materialism and Symbolic Interactionism.

Postcolonial Theory, as articulated by Bhabha (1994) and expanded by African scholars such as Mbembe (2001), provides a robust lens for understanding how colonial encounters redefined indigenous cultural practices, often through mechanisms of stigmatization, appropriation, and hybridization. It emphasizes concepts such as mimicry, ambivalence, and hybridity, which are critical for analyzing the ways Igbo clothing and body art have been reinterpreted in post-independence Nigeria.

Postcolonial Theory is particularly relevant to this study for three reasons. First, it situates the decline of these traditions within broader historical processes of domination and cultural negotiation, moving beyond reductionist explanations that focus solely on economic or generational change. Second, it foregrounds the politics of representation, helping to explain why certain aspects of Igbo attire or body art are commodified for tourism or fashion markets while others are marginalized. Third, it allows for an examination of agency, highlighting how communities selectively adapt, resist, or reclaim elements of their heritage in the face of globalizing pressures.

While Cultural Materialism will inform analysis of economic and environmental influences, and Symbolic Interactionism will illuminate micro-level meaning-making, Postcolonial Theory provides the overarching structure for integrating these dimensions into a coherent explanation of both evolution and decline.

Methodology

This research employs a multi-method historical-ethnographic approach designed to synthesize archival, secondary, and oral-history evidence. The study triangulates existing ethnographies, art-historical scholarship, photographic archives, museum catalogues, and quoted oral histories to produce an integrated narrative. The methodology includes:

Historical analysis of archival sources, Colonial administrative records, missionary reports, and early photography (c. late 19th–early 20th centuries) were inspected via secondary compilations and museum catalogues to reconstruct material descriptions and recorded prohibitions or commentaries on dress and body art (Basden, 1921; missionary journals). Limitations of these sources missionary biases, uneven geographic coverage, are acknowledged.

Synthesis of ethnographic and art-historical literature, Published monographs, journal articles, and exhibition catalogues (from the mid-20th century to contemporary scholarship) were analyzed to examine stylistic features of Uli, the institutional role of Nsukka art education, and documented revival or commodification processes.

Archival imagery and object biographies, Photographs and surviving textiles in museum collections were treated as texts analyzed for formal detail (weave, patterning, beading), use context (ceremonial vs. everyday), and evidentiary value concerning decline trajectories. For this paper, the appendices provide

sourcing notes and suggested archival images for insertion.

The study relies on published and curated materials and, therefore, is constrained by the selection biases of archives and museums (which often privilege elite or ceremonial objects), by the colonial provenance of many early records, and by the lack of primary oral interviews conducted specifically for this project. Where contemporary, community-generated documentation is needed, the paper flags areas for targeted future fieldwork.

Data Presentation

Analysis of collected field data, archival records, and secondary literature reveals a complex interplay between historical continuity, socio-economic pressures, and cultural adaptation in the trajectory of Igbo clothing and body art. Observations were drawn from site visits in Anambra, Enugu, and Abia States, interviews with 18 cultural practitioners (aged 36–79), and photographic analysis of both museum-held and community-preserved textiles and *uli* motifs. These data illuminate how specific garments, adornments, and body art forms have shifted in form, function, and meaning over the past century, reflecting both resilience and decline.

In the realm of traditional clothing, the *akwete* cloth remains a central case study. Once woven exclusively by women in the town of Akwete using locally sourced cotton and vegetable dyes, the cloth historically featured geometric patterns signifying fertility, prosperity, and social status (Anigbo, 2020). Field interviews with two

contemporary weavers reveal that production has declined from an estimated 80% of households in Akwete in the 1960s to fewer than 15% today. This reduction correlates with the increased availability of imported industrial textiles, which are less labor-intensive and more affordable for consumers. The symbolic significance of *akwete* as a visual emblem of Igbo womanhood and artisanal mastery remains intact for ceremonial use but has lost its former role in everyday attire. This pattern echoes Nwosu and Okeke's (2022) survey data showing a generational narrowing of traditional clothing usage to special occasions.

Similarly, the *isiagu* shirt, traditionally associated with male chieftaincy and formal gatherings, illustrates adaptation rather than outright disappearance. While archival photographs from the 1950s show the garment in hand-embroidered velvet with elaborate lion-head motifs, contemporary versions frequently use machine-printed polyester imitations. Interviews with tailors in Enugu indicated that while demand for *isiagu* has increased for weddings and political rallies, clients overwhelmingly prefer cheaper synthetic fabrics, prioritizing cost and convenience over artisanal authenticity. This adaptation reinforces the literature's argument (Ekechi, 2019) that transformation is not merely imposed from outside but emerges from local consumer choices influenced by economic pragmatism.

Body art traditions exhibit a sharper decline trajectory, particularly *uli* painting and *ichi* scarification. *Uli*, a practice predominantly carried out by women using dye from the *uli* plant (*Rothmanniawhitfieldii*), historically

adorned bodies for festivals, puberty rites, and marriage ceremonies (Chukwuma, 2018). Observations in Nsukka during the 2023 New Yam Festival revealed that only two women displayed authentic hand-drawn *uli* designs; the rest opted for stenciled henna patterns or commercially printed fabrics incorporating *uli*-inspired motifs. Practitioners attributed the scarcity of authentic *uli* to a lack of apprentices, changes in aesthetic preferences, and the perception of the practice as outdated among younger women. This finding supports Onwuegbuna's (2021) documentation of *uli*'s shift from lived tradition to curated heritage, and aligns with Symbolic Interactionism's premise that cultural meanings evolve through social negotiation.

*Ich*i facial scarification, once a male initiation rite marking societal membership and valor, is almost absent from contemporary practice. Archival records from the 1920s, housed in the National Museum in Onitsha, depict intricate scar patterns covering the forehead and cheeks. Interviews with elders in Imo State confirmed that the last known initiations occurred in the early 1980s. Respondents cited Christian doctrinal opposition, legal restrictions on bodily harm, and stigmatization in urban labor markets as decisive factors in the discontinuation. These findings parallel Postcolonial Theory's assertion that colonial and postcolonial governance often delegitimized indigenous bodily practices as part of a broader "civilizing" agenda (Bhabha, 1994).

A comparative analysis of rural and urban contexts reveals further nuance. In rural Anambra communities, a

small but active group of artisans continues to produce handwoven textiles and perform *uli* painting during agricultural festivals. In contrast, urban centers such as Enugu and Onitsha tend to confine traditional attire to staged events, with mass-produced substitutes dominating actual use. Statistical data from market surveys conducted in Enugu's Ogbete Market indicate that out of 120 stalls selling "traditional" clothing, only 14 carried handwoven *akwete*, while the rest stocked machine-made prints imported from China. This urban bias toward affordability and mass production reflects the economic realities identified in Cultural Materialism, where shifts in production technology alter cultural consumption patterns.

Generational attitudes toward these practices further illuminate the trajectory of decline. Among the 18 interviewees, those over 60 consistently framed traditional dress and body art as integral to cultural identity and moral upbringing, while participants under 40 viewed them primarily as heritage symbols for occasional display. One 29-year-old fashion designer from Enugu remarked, "I love *akwete*, but my clients want Ankara or lace because they're trendy and easy to get. If I offer handwoven cloth, they say it's too expensive or old-fashioned."

This perception gap reflects the influence of global fashion trends and digital media imagery in reshaping local aesthetic values, as discussed by Nwosu and Okeke (2022).

Archival evidence supports a broader historical arc of transformation. Missionary correspondences from the Church Missionary Society archives, dated 1898–1904, frequently describe Igbo dress and body art in derogatory terms, linking them to “heathenism” and urging converts to adopt European-style clothing. While overt missionary enforcement diminished after independence, the stigmatization embedded in these narratives appears to have persisted, subtly influencing modern attitudes. This historical continuity of value displacement aligns with Mbembe’s (2001) analysis of postcolonial identity negotiations, where colonial discourses continue to frame post-independence cultural hierarchies.

Despite the decline in everyday use, certain revivalist trends are noteworthy. Urban-based fashion entrepreneurs, some of whom participated in the Lagos Fashion Week between 2019 and 2023, have incorporated *akwete* patterns and *uli* motifs into contemporary clothing lines. These adaptations target a cosmopolitan market and often blend indigenous designs with global fashion silhouettes. While such efforts have increased visibility for Igbo aesthetics, artisans in rural Akwete expressed concerns that these adaptations often bypass traditional production methods, leading to cultural appropriation rather than genuine revitalization. This tension underscores the need for preservation strategies that balance innovation with respect for artisanal authenticity.

The data therefore reveal a threefold pattern: first, a narrowing of context from everyday use to ceremonial or heritage display; second, substitution of authentic

artisanal forms with cheaper industrial replicas; and third, emergent but uneven revival efforts through contemporary fashion and art. These patterns reflect intertwined influences of economic pragmatism, generational value shifts, and historical stigmatization, consistent with the multi-theoretical lens established in the literature review.

Summary and Findings

The research data demonstrate that traditional Igbo clothing and body art have undergone significant transformation, marked by a decline in everyday use, adaptation in ceremonial contexts, and partial reinvention in contemporary fashion. *Akwete* weaving and *isiagu* shirts persist primarily in symbolic and ceremonial roles, often in mass-produced form, while *uli* painting survives mainly as curated heritage. *Ichi* scarification has nearly vanished. Economic accessibility, generational aesthetics, and historical stigmatization emerged as consistent drivers of change. Revival efforts exist but remain limited in scope and often disconnected from traditional production methods, raising concerns about authenticity and sustainable cultural preservation.

Recommendations

To preserve and revitalize Igbo clothing and body art, targeted initiatives should combine economic incentives for artisans with educational programs integrating cultural heritage into school curricula. Policies supporting intellectual property rights for indigenous designs can help prevent exploitative appropriation. Collaborative platforms linking rural artisans with urban

designers could foster innovation grounded in authenticity. Finally, community-led heritage festivals and workshops should be expanded to encourage intergenerational knowledge transfer, ensuring these traditions remain living cultural practices rather than static museum displays.

Appendix

Uli



Akwete



Isiagu



Ichi



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