

AFRICAN TATTOO TRADITION AND THE MASCULINE TURN IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY: THE NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

Body modification, which involves body tattoo, was basically used for identification as well as for aesthetics purposes in traditional African culture. In the decades preceding the turn of the 21st century, body modification aesthetics had been mediated essentially through manual technology, which women nevertheless were content to patronize almost exclusively. At the turn of the new century, however, the aesthetics of body technology has taken a liberal dimension in which the complexity associated with gender discourse is implicated. This way, accounting for body modification dynamics, the paper considers the peculiarities of male and female body modification. It examined the masculine turn in tattooing as body modification and interrogated the radicalization along gender line which today places men ahead of women. Drawing upon ethnographic data collected over a period of time in Ibadan among its residents whose tattooing patronage has redefined their understanding of body aesthetics, the paper posits that the evolutionary processes culminating in the radical gender transposition of tattooing, engages new meanings and emerging forms of knowledge in the understanding of tattooing as body aesthetics, together with the hierarchies of values that ascribe radical importance and recognition to a previously feminizing social practice.

Keywords: African Tattoo, Tradition, Masculine Turn, Feminized social practice, Twenty-first Century