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The Cultural Significance of Traditional Igbo Coiffures: *Symbolism and Identity*

By Chuka Odike

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FEATURE
IMAGE

“Ibo Coiffures” Photo: Tribes of the Niger Delta - P.A. Talbot, 1910s

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Igbo coiffures have a rich cultural and historical significance, often symbolizing status, age, marital status, and even spiritual beliefs. Here are some key traditional Igbo hairstyles:

1. **Isi Ogo (Chief's Hair):** This is an elaborate style traditionally worn by Igbo chiefs or people of high status. It is characterized by intricate patterns with parts of the hair woven into loops or raised styles, sometimes adorned with ornaments.
2. **Uli Hairstyles:** Inspired by the traditional Uli body painting, these coiffures incorporate geometric and flowing patterns. Hair is braided or twisted into shapes that mimic the Uli designs, often reflecting the artistry found among Igbos.
3. **Nkpukpo Isi:** This is a form of hair braiding often associated with young Igbo women. It involves small, tight cornrows braided close to the scalp in various patterns. It is sometimes complemented by beads and other decorative pieces.
4. **Etutu (Hair Buns):** Married women or women of higher social standing in some Igbo communities wore this hairstyle. The hair is fashioned into large buns or rolls on top of the head, symbolizing maturity or motherhood.
5. **Dreadlock-like Coiffures (Isi Oji):** Some traditional Igbo priests and priestesses wore dreadlock-like hairstyles, symbolizing their spiritual roles and connection to the divine.



6. Ogodo Style: This ancient hairstyle was primarily for warriors or men of high standing in the community. It featured bold, simple patterns, sometimes with shaved parts of the head.

These hairstyles were often created with the help of natural oils, herbs, and specific techniques passed down through generations, showcasing the deep connection between beauty, identity, and tradition in Igbo culture.

Talbot, P. A. (1932). Tribes of the Niger Delta. Frank Cass and Company Limited, London.

Cole, H. M. (1982). Igbo Arts and Culture. Los Angeles: University of California Press.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chuka Odi

I'm a dedicated civil engineer with a passion for infrastructure development and community empowerment. With a strong background in engineering, my work focuses on creating sustainable solutions for urban and rural development projects. Outside of my professional career, I'm deeply interested in Igbo history and culture. I actively explore ways to impact society by using historical lessons to inspire and educate others about the rich cultural heritage of the Igbo people, aiming to bridge tradition and modern development.



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