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### **Decoded: The Use of Facial Markings as Cultural Barcodes**

Nobody knows when or where facial marks were first used as tribal and spiritual signifiers on the African continent. They seem to have existed as long as the human need to categorise and identify objects, people and places. On inquiry the only given explanation of its origin is that it is a tradition that has always been performed. It is a rite of passage for many, an inclusion into a group for some and an act of cleansing for others. There is a common African expression “Your face is your passport” and it is believed that this saying originated from the popular practise of facial markings. Knowledge of one’s tribal group, royal status or believed reincarnation tendencies could be divulged by a single glance therefore giving a sense of belonging when with kindred and alienation in distant lands. Markings vary from group to group and the subtle differences give even greater explanations. In essence, the marks carry data. Although once commonplace, facial scarification is not as widely practised in Nigeria because of modernisation, education and contradictory religious beliefs. In 2003, The Child Right Act (CRA) was passed in Nigeria which prevents the tattooing and scarification of any person under the age of 18 for traditional and religious beliefs. This paper explores the struggle between modernity and antiquity by questioning the role of facial markings in today’s society and if there is a place for it in the future.