



Traditional Body Marks for Beautification among Selected Dangme Groups in Ghana

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

Body marking is both an elusive and a sensitive issue on various forms of discussion. Most individuals do not want to associate themselves with other people who have body marks and this has attached a sense of stigmatization to the issue of body marks as there is the vivid lack of understanding of the basis for making these cultural artefacts. There was, therefore, the need for exploration into the issue to understand the reasons for making body marks specifically for beautification and to understand the ramifications of these marks. Most literature available focuses on traditional body marks for several reasons in countries like Nigeria, Sudan, and Benin. Ghana is a country that also has body marks among various cultures and ethnic groups yet the undertones of these marks have not been explored in certain parts of the country. This study was therefore conducted to find out the various types of traditional body marks done for beautification among some ethnic groups in southern Ghana. Three ethnic groups from the Ga-Dangme tribe were selected for the study and these were Ningo, Prampram, and Ada. Data were collected from the three Dangme groups based on the understanding of body marks for beautification according to their culture. The qualitative research method was used, with interviews and observations being the main form of data collection instruments. Out of the overall accessible population of 90

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respondents, a sample size of 60 was purposively selected based on the information provided by body marks for beautification. The results of the study showed different body marks that are made for different cultural reasons among those ethnic groups.

Keywords: Beautification; beauty; body marks; markings; traditional.

1. INTRODUCTION

Body marking like culture, religion, and tradition have had countless definitions. Some of these definitions entail the purposes for which the marks are made. For a better understanding of the subject under study in this paper, various definitions of body marks over time have been discussed extensively. Also, it is important to indicate that there are two types of body marks, temporary and permanent. This paper addresses only traditional body marks that are permanent on the body. Body marks as types of marks that serve ethnic and political purposes [1]. Similarly, body marking is an all-encompassing term that is used to describe the several methods of changing the surface of the skin through intentional and potentially irreversible alteration [2]. Also, body marks are a form of identification each group of people has to differentiate their families, lineages, and tribes from others; the basic course of body marking is for identification [3].

Body marking has also been defined by [4] as an art made on the body, with the body, or consisting of the human body. The common forms of body markings are tattoos, body piercings, scarification, branding, sub-dermal implants, full body tattoo and body painting. [5] states that body marks are marks made on the body with its main uses being medical, decoration, spiritual protection and tribal or family identification. [6] compares ethnic marks to 'oriki', meaning *attributes* in Yoruba, saying that the two are in close conjunction with each other such that, it is for the purpose of identification that the two exist.

Ogunjinmi plainly states that body marks are marks that serve as a family's identity hence, it is necessary that each member of a family receives one to preserve the family lineage and culture [7]. Reveau indicated that body marks are marks used as a symbol of identity in particular tribes and they express the individual's religious or spiritual belief, self-protection, identification, social status, medical protection and mythical identity [8]. [9] also infers that they are marks

made on the body for various valid historical, cultural, medical, religious and aesthetic reasons.

Body marking is also an art that is common to certain tribes that use these marks as a form of identification, beautification, and protection [10]. [11] tops it off by defining body marks as, marks made on different parts of the body by traditional surgeons to induce healing, hence its main purpose being medicinal. Drawing from the above definitions and for the purpose of this study, body marks are defined as marks on any part of a person's body based on the individual's belief, cultural and/ or religious affiliation.

The history of body marking started in Africa between 8000-5000BC when several markings were seen on some images discovered in Tassili in the Sahara [2]. According to [12], body marks date back decades ago from marks made on fertility dolls to tattoos of tribal hierarchy. Herodotus, as cited in [13], said that ethnic marking started long ago in Egypt in the 5th century with a group of foreigners who were living in Egypt at the time. He stated that for the main purpose of identification and to differentiate them from the Egyptians, these foreigners cut their foreheads with knives. With time, different ways of marking were adopted by other tribes for different reasons.

2. THE PRACTICE OF BODY MARKING

There have been different tribes practicing body marks. Most of these tribes, according to Von Luschan's scale, fall beneath the equator (Fig. a). This is supported and further simplified by [14] that, people living close to the equator are darkly pigmented (have darker skin) and those living near the pole are lightly pigmented (have lighter skin).

Some of these tribes with darkly pigmented tribesmen still practice body marks while it remains a dying practice for other tribes. A scholar states that body marking is a way of indicating an individual's status in society, revealing a particular time of life and celebrate a change in life or just following a fashion [15].

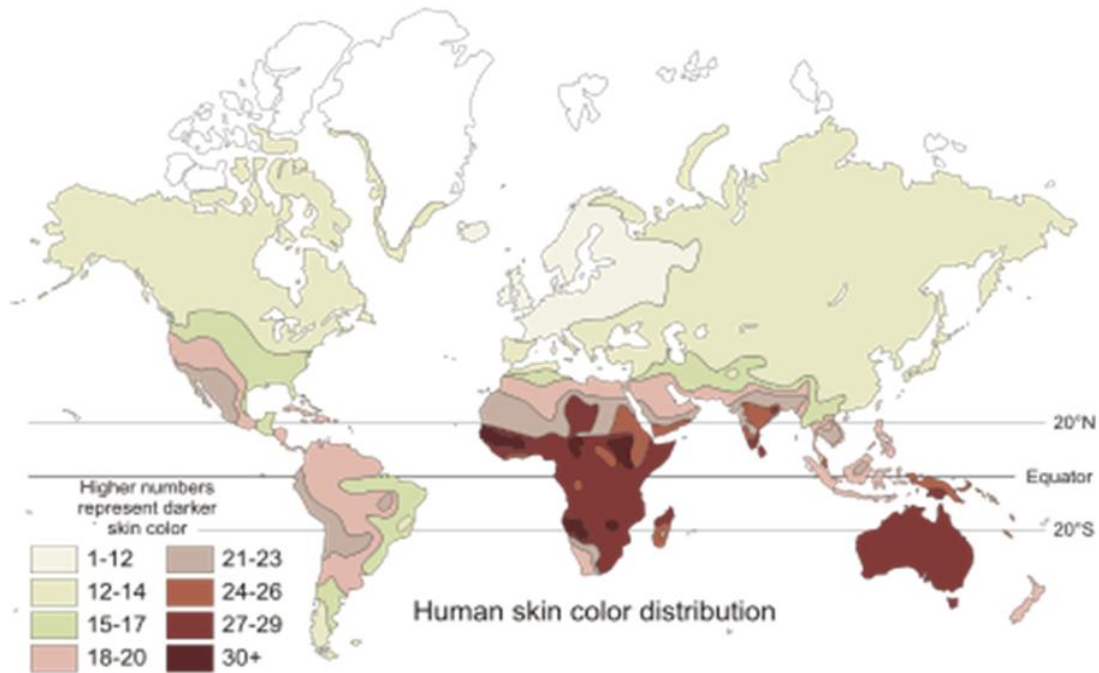


Fig. a. Felix Von Luschan's scale showing human skin color distribution

Similarly, some ethnic groups use body marks as a source of aesthetic or beautification and protection therapy [16]. Irrespective of how it may seem that body marking may have a single common purpose or reason which is for identification, among some tribes beautification seems to be the only reason and purpose for which body marks are made.

Apart from purposes of beautification and decoration, there have been a lot of reasons why body marks are made which are further simplified by [17] and [5] that, it is for the following reasons that body marks are made. These reasons also corroborate studies done by several other researchers:

- **Identification:** Body marks are used mainly to differentiate ethnic groups, they vary according to the customs and preferences of the lineage, village or family [18,17,10, [19].
- **Strength and Courage:** Scarification and body marks are viewed as a test of courage [17,20,21,22].
- **Fertility:** The willingness of a woman to go through the pain of body marking was an indication of her emotional maturity and willingness to bear children. Often, the first scars a young woman receives are those

on her abdomen, emphasizing the role of child bearing [17].

- **Family Pride/ Royalty:** Some marks indicate that the wearer, especially from a particular family or royal lineage has passed through initial initiation into the highest society thus, marking the wearer as nobility [19].
- **Medical Reasons/ Protection from Death:** In African traditional medical parlance, facial markings connote treatment of illness for children. In this, traditional healers make incisions on the faces or body of children whom ailments like convulsion, pneumonia, and measles are infected and need to be treated [16].

2.1 Marks for Beautification/ Decorative Purposes

Decorative or beautification marks can be found in both males and females but most popular among females. Most often, decorative marks are obtained by females in their teen years. However, some parents make decorative marks on their infants' face after or during their naming ceremony [23].

Most people belong to tribes that do not have specific marking, yet they choose to be scarred

for the purpose of beautification [24]. It is important to indicate that some traditional markers have had situations where adults request for these marks because they found them attractive. In the past, a person who did not receive body marks may have been teased and not accepted by other members of their ethnic group because they were termed not beautiful and unattractive. It is suggested that generally body marks were made for the purpose of beautification and that, according to some traditional surgeons, people tend to admire these marks and find the bearers attractive; this is due to the belief that such marks enhance beauty [25]. In Sudan, facial marking is a common practice that is seen on the faces of tribesmen and this not only gives identity to the tribe but beautifies the women as well.

Scars are thought to beautify the body and this usually begins from childhood for an African child (especially girls). This takes place during rituals at childbirth, a celebration of the onset of puberty and the first menstrual cycle [17].

2.2 Theory of Beauty

Although an everyday phenomenon that everybody seems to know, the concept of beauty can be very difficult to explain [26]. Some consider beauty from a subjective point of view while others consider it from an objective point of view [27]; there are others who remain on the fence, seeing beauty as both subjective and objective. In Pre-Socratic times, beauty was referred to as an aesthetic phenomenon that was mainly based on proportion and number and elements [28] which include clarity, harmony, vivid color and symmetry. This description of beauty was mainly dominant because of the arts that were produced at the time.

Later, the description of beauty was then extended to the use of mathematics and mathematical theory [27] where beauty is meant to reside in proper measure and size of parts that fit harmoniously into a seamless whole (Plato), where beauty is said to reside in order and symmetry (Aristotle) and where beauty is meant to be synonymous with geometric forms and balance (Augustine of Hippo, who clarified his point by saying that the beauty of an equilateral triangle is much more prominent than the scalene triangle since its parts were more even).

Dewey provides examples of beauty and the human form as one that contains a sensuous

charm and manifestation of a harmonious proportion of parts. At this point in time, symmetry was at the peak of beauty and it was the foundation of numerous Roman and Greek architecture and renaissance Victorian-style pillars [29]. Perhaps, the best description of beauty is the fact that it causes pleasure which can be intense and perceived in different ways. In the context of this study, beauty can be described as something that can be experienced and perceived in different ways by different groups of people per the feeling of pleasure as evident in their cultures. The physical human beauty is linked to evolutionary patterns and traits. These patterns may include the order of childlike characteristics, the mindful nature of the primary and secondary sexual organs and traits which may include tanned skin or body weight and education or culture [30].

Beauty in itself has been likened to many things such as anatomy, mathematics, symmetry, art, and psychology [31]. Beauty is also said to be mainly interrelated with the truth. This is evident from the Latin phrase "*Pulchritudo splendor Veritatis*", literally translated as 'beauty is the splendor of truth'. Certain universal and biological aspects of beauty have been identified by evolutionary psychologists as aspects that may be reshaped by cultural and historical influences [32]; [33]. Beauty is determined by multiple criteria reconciled and embodied in an organic whole. It contributes to fitness, variety, uniformity, regularity or symmetry, simplicity or distinctness, intricacy, quantity [34].

Studies done by anthropologists indicate that there are dramatically varying ideals of beauty across different cultures, however, the lure remains inescapable [35]. This indicates that different peoples have their perceived standards of beauty and what they term as beautiful. What is accepted as beautiful in one culture may be different from the accepted norms of beauty in another culture? This is evident particularly in cultural relativism where there are varied ways of behaving and perceiving activities in a culture. It may be plausible to say that beauty and all things beautiful are all around us and just needs recognition. As [36] puts it, the true theory of beauty is the fact that beauty is a part of the world and human beings enjoying the theory of beauty fit into the world like a hand fits a glove, as they possess a deeper understanding of everything beautiful in the world.

2.3 Brief History of the Ga-Dangme

Debates persist about the origin of the Ga-Dangme people. One school of thought suggests that the proto Ga-Dangme people come from somewhere east of the Accra plains while another suggests a distant locale beyond the West African coast [37]).

The people of Ada are believed to be a part of the African Negro race from Western Sudan and migrated to their current abode [38]. They originally consisted of the Ada, Krobo, Osudoku, Shai, Kpone, Prampram and Ningo. They are believed to have come from Oyo to Abeokuta in Nigeria, then to Dahomey (present-day Benin). They were prevented from settling permanently there due to hostilities in the land. They then merged with the Ewes from Ketu and travelled together to Tado and together they moved again to Ngotsie in Togo. Some of the members of the two groups, the Ga-Dangme, and the Ewes, decided to settle in Togo in the Aneho region while the rest migrated again to Lolovor which is now known as the Accra Plains.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The study employed the qualitative approach to research; with personal interviews to gather data on the body marks. In the quest to understand the meanings attached to body marks among the Dangme and to identify the various types of body marks, the qualitative research method proved to be the best option; in that, it allowed the researchers to study and understand the Dangme and the various meanings they have constructed and attached to their lives, in line with the body marks as [39] states that qualitative research method allows a researcher to study a particular group of people and understand the meanings that the people have attached to various phenomena.

The methods used include ethnographic practices such as observations and interviews. In this case, the body marks of the Dangme were described in detail and the meanings expatiated with less prominence on the statistical aspect of data collection. [40] supports this by stating that, the relevant data when gathered can be generalized to the group of people in a study. The data that was gathered aided in generalizing its results to the people of Ningo, Gbugbla (Prampram) and Ada.

3.2 Survey Research

Since it was important to obtain information from a representative selection of a population and from the population being studied, a sample was drawn rendering a survey research method very paramount in this study [41]. The findings from the sample were meant to be representative of the entire population. In this research, a sample was drawn from the entire population of the people of Ningo, Prampram, and Ada, which was representative.

3.3 Population for the Study

It was important to study a collection of individuals or objects known to have similar characteristics [42], in the three communities in which the research was conducted to ascertain the veracity of data being collected. The target population for this study was the inhabitants of the three indigenous communities, all of whom were with or without body marks. The total accessible population was 90 respondents; 30 from each of the three Dangme groups. However, out of the overall accessible population of 90 respondents a sample of 60 was selected based on the fact that they provided the adequate information about the traditional body marks for beautification among the Dangme.

3.4 Data Collection

The main forms of data collection employed for this study were interviews and observations. Data were collected from traditional leaders, elders (the elderly in the community) and the youth (18 years - 40 years). Marks for beautification, being the phenomenon under study, in the context of the Dangme people, were explained and elaborated upon as specific marks performed by specific families and clans in the Dangme ethnic group for beautification purposes based on the understanding of the Dangme people. The respondents used for the study were interviewed based on their knowledge about these traditional marks for beautification. Face-to-face interviews were conducted in order to attain a detailed and first-hand information about the traditional marks for beautification among the Dangme. The interviews again included questions about what the body marks for beautification were among the Dangme, which specific families and clans practiced them, how and why these marks were performed, the history and trend of these marks, philosophies guiding the making of these marks and concepts

and indigenous theories surrounding the making of these marks. The elderly people were interviewed based on general information about body marks before detailing marks for beautification out. This was done because most of the elderly people were involved in the practice of body marking for years before its alleged decline. They provided detailed information about traditional body marking for beautification and the connotations of these marks. The traditional leaders also provided detailed information about these marks as most of them were traditional surgeons and were involved in performing these marks for members of their respective communities. The youth that was interviewed seemed to have a varying array of information ranging from very little knowledge to detailed knowledge depending on where the individual grew up. The information they provided included; not knowing about traditional body markings for beautification at all and that making these marks provided a deeper sense of belonging to the bearer. It was however not common to find young people bearing the marks for beautification as it was their perception that these marks rather altered the beauty of its bearer than make the bearer beautiful.

4. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1 History of Body Marks among the Dangme

The selected Dangme groups have all spent a great deal of time together from migration to their current settlement hence there exist some similarities in their language, cultural practices and the totality of their way of life [38]. Some schools of thought exist about the history of body marking among the selected Dangme groups in Ghana. On one hand, the history of body marking is traced to ancestry, being that body marks existed in the family or village where their ancestors hailed from and the art of body marking is done as a sign of respect to the ancestors. On the other hand, it is considered to be an inspiration drawn from the gods as there was the vivid belief in the spiritual world among the Dangme (E. B. Nubuor, personal communication, 6th April 2015).

In the past, body marking was done based on the family the bearer comes from. Though it is not all the families among the Dangme ethnic group practice the art of body marking, among the families that practiced it, each family had a distinctive mark that distinguished its members

from other families. This is still seen today where some families practice body marking while other families do not indulge in the practice.

Body marking among the Dangme is a delicate issue. Despite the different reasons for making body marks, they all had one thing in common. The natives of Dangme consider the art as an all-spiritual affair. Native Dangme believed in the existence of a spiritual world aside from the physical one in which we live. For something to manifest in this world, they believed that it ought to have happened in the spiritual world. In past years, before body marking was done, the help of a traditional priest or priestess was needed and these priests or priestesses were consulted to verify the identity of a child the moment the child was born. For families that practiced body marking, they consulted these priests or priestesses (who served as intermediaries between the physical and the spiritual world) to find out whether or not a child should be marked. The main reason for consulting the gods before the marking took place was to seek the consent of the gods, considering the fact that the child would still have been marked because of the family the child came from. There were occurrences where children were believed to embody the souls of past kings and queens and the souls demanded, through the priests or priestesses, that the children be marked for identification (S. Attiapah, *Personal Communication*; 3rd February, 2015).

No matter the reason for bearing a mark on any part of the body, the gods in the spiritual world needed to be consulted before the mark was made and this attached spiritual reverence to the practice of body marking. Spirituality, as defined by [43], is a quality that goes beyond religious affiliation that strives for inspiration, reverence, awe, meaning, and purpose, even in those who do not believe in God. Spirituality among the native Dangme is very important as it forms the basis of their lives and though there are civilization and religious growth, the lives of most Dangme are shaped by their belief in mysticism.

There is a long line of narratives when it comes to the history of body marking among the selected Dangme groups and Dangme as a whole, some of which were influenced by others. With time, different clans and families among the ethnic groups have adopted body marks to serve their various needs and for different valid reasons.

4.2 Commencement of Body Marks

Body marking started among the people of Ada when desperate women in need of children started consulting oracles and deities for help [44]. After the women were granted the children they needed, the terms of these deities were for the children to bear the mark of the deities on their faces (especially their cheeks) to show how powerful the deities were and to identify the children as children of the deities. An example of such a mark was the *Agbee bi bo* (Fig. 1). When these children obtained from deities grew older they were sometimes made to serve these deities.

Based on the beliefs of the Dangme, it was a common knowledge among the people that since the deities were able to grant the barren women children, the deities could further help them with their various health challenges. The priests and priestesses were consulted continuously with cases of childbirth and other health-related issues. The deities provided the people with all the help they needed irrespective of the situation brought before them (deities). This made the practice of body marking very common as the deities always demanded that in return for their assistance the people must bear the marks of the deity [45].

In Ningo and Prampram, there are different anecdotes surrounding the commencement of body marking. Most families in Ningo practice the art of body marking hence there is no particular account as to its origination. For one particular family, body marking started with the sorrowful

tale of a sick and dying child. This child, *Enjoy Kabu*, was the first born of her parents and shortly after her birth she started showing signs of ailment. She continuously fell ill and cried almost every day. There was a man called *Tovoe* who hailed from *Tefle* in the Volta region of Ghana who was operating with a Hausa god also living in Ningo at that time; he was a cripple. *Tovoe* was once passing by the house where this sick child resided with her parents; the moment he heard the cries of the child, he asked to see the child because he did not think the sound of her crying was a good omen. One look at the child and the man was able to determine that she had just a week to live and that without the right treatment she might pass away. He then told the parents the amount of money they were to pay him for the treatment of their child with a list of herbs that would be used to make a black powder (*this black powder is prepared by first drying the herbs; the herbs are then pounded till they are in flakes. They are further ground till a fine powder form is achieved. Wood ash is sometimes added to the ground leaves as it is what makes the mark more pronounced when it heals. The combination is then mixed with water to attain a thick paste and this is what is put into the gash to stop the bleeding and perform the necessary healing activity*).

At first, the parents were trying to question whether or not what *Love* said was true and also being a poor settlement at the time, though they agreed to the fact that their child could be dying, they had a difficult time getting the amount of money the man needed for the treatment.

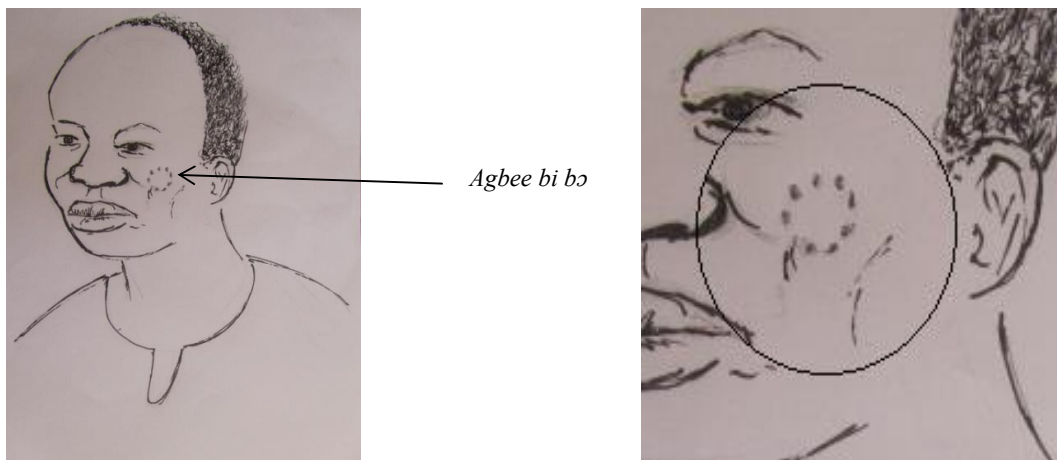


Fig. 1. Agbee bi bo on the left cheek of the figure

Source: Illustration by the researchers

They were only able to come up with the money at the end of the week and they then summoned *Tovoe* for him to take their child through the healing process.

For the whole treatment to be successful they needed a kitchen knife and the black powder. They also had to dig a hole for the child to be placed in it because of the following reasons:

4.2.1 Placing the child in the hole

This is said to connote the burial of the child. When one dies, a burial is needed in an attempt to provide closure to the family of the dead and to show respect to the deceased person. Once the burial is complete the soul of the deceased is believed to be at rest. The child is put in the hole that is not covered with sand connotes her incomplete burial. To prevent her from dying physically, she is grabbed from the hole representing the snatching of the child from the hands of death. Psychologically, there is the satisfaction that since the burial was incomplete any final revival strategies could be performed to awaken the child. Whether or not these revival schemes would work depending on the state of the child who is thought to be deceased considering the fact that in those days there was no medical equipment to test if the child was actually dead.

4.2.2 Cutting the face of the child

For this second stage, the kitchen knife is used to make incisions on the face of the child particularly close to her eyes and on the sides of her mouth. According to [46], there are vital arteries that provide oxygenated blood to the brain and organs in the head including the mouth and eyes. It might have been possible that these incisions were made on the sides of the mouth and close to the eyes to allow the medicine that is inserted into the cut to work faster.

4.2.3 Application of the black powder

The final stage is not just applying any powder but one from the combination of various herbs such as *Nyonya*, commonly known as hyssop (*Hyssopus officinalis*), *nya ba* (literally meaning 'mouth leaf') and *to lile* (literally meaning 'goat tongue') and commonly known as Tigernut grass (*Cyperus esculentus* L.) which contains healing abilities that can save and heal the child completely.

The child was first naked and was placed in the hole after which she was then "snatched" out of the hole. After this, *Tove* started with his incantations. Shortly after he was done with his communication with the deities he made three marks close to both the right and left eye of the child with the knife. The three diagonal lines represent the feet of a cock (Fig. 2). This is because the cock is the totem of Ga-Dangme; the mark of the ethnic group on the face of the child therefore represents the acceptance of the child into the Dangme ethnic group. The medicine man then put the black powder into the incisions on the child's face. The powder which was made up of various herbs could help in healing the child and to stop the child from bleeding as well as accelerate the healing process.

When he was done with the incision there was no wailing or crying from the child. He pronounced the child dead because of the delay in treatment. Out of pain and frustration, the grieving father snatched the knife from the medicine man and asked "*Yie bi ke the feo no ma go lo?*" literally translates "Does that mean this beautiful daughter of mine is dead?" With that, he made a deep gash in the left cheek of his child. The pain from the gash is what was believed to have woken the child with a wail from her. The awakening of the child was allegedly attributed to the fact that the gash was made by her grieving father and because of the spiritual connection they shared. It is said that the soul of the child felt the pain of her father and therefore returned to the child's body bringing the child back to life.

From then on, though the help of a traditional priest or priestess is needed, the process of cutting and application of the black powder or any medication for that matter is made by a blood-related family member (A. Kabu, *Personal Communication*, 14th September 2014).

4.3 Body Marks for Beautification among the Dangme

Of all the six reasons for making body marks outlined under the reasons for making body marks, the Dangme practice three of these reasons. These are marks for identification, marks for beautification and decorative purposes and marks for medical reasons as well as protection from death with their own variations. For the purpose of this study, the marks for beautification and the reasons why they are made are discussed extensively.

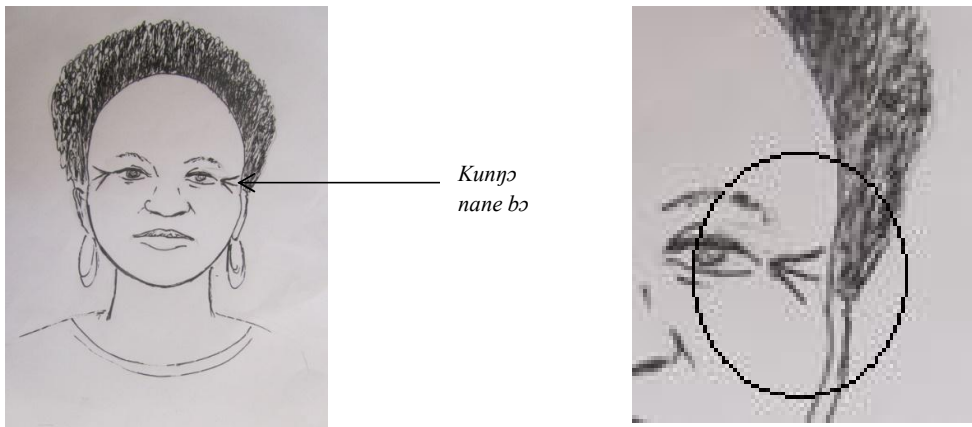


Fig. 2. Three diagonal lines close to the right and left eye showing the *Kunḡḡ name bɔ* (mark of the feet of the cock)

Source: Illustration by the researchers

Bɔ is a term that basically means mark in the Dangme language. It is done on the face of a child usually by the decision of the child's parents. If the mark is not done by the parents' decision, it can be done if it exists in the family. Families and clans among the Dangme ethnic group have their peculiar practices and such is the art of body marking. Body marking is performed in some families and clans while other families and clans do not perform them. For families and clans that do perform them, they are done for various reasons and their names are spiritual or pertain to the reasons for making them. As *bɔ* means mark, it is sometimes preceded by the part of the body where the mark is made, the name of the mark or the reason for which the mark is made. The *fɛo bɔ* and the *semi bɔ* are names of marks for beautification that mean "beauty mark" and "back mark" respectively. The Dangme interpret and assign the *fɛo bɔ* (Fig. 3) and the *semi bɔ* (Fig. 4) as their marks for beautification due to the nature of these marks.

The *fɛo bɔ* is a mark that is usually faint and small and can be done on one or both cheeks of a child. This is a type of mark that is done for fun and/or beautification. It can be done at any age per the insistence of the parents if the bearer is a child or by personal demand if the bearer is an adult. This mark is usually a faint mark as the cut is only sealed with the grounded herbal medicine to stop the bleeding and wood ash, which usually makes the marks more pronounced. However, in this particular mark, the wood ash is often not applied into the incision that is why it looks faint after the healing of the gash (Fig. 4).

The *fɛo bɔ* is done mostly by mothers in the Dangme ethnic groups for their children as it is believed that it makes the children more beautiful and makes them look more appealing.

The definition of beauty varies greatly among different people, groups and or societies and the experience of beauty involves an interpretation of some entity as being in balance and in harmony with nature. This may very well lead to feelings of attraction and emotional well-being. The matter of beauty can be a subjective experience hence it is often said that beauty lies in the eye of the beholder [47]. What the Dangme term as beautiful is based on the understanding that they have drawn for the term as a united group of people. Beauty varies with respect to age, body structure, a community and a race. The *fɛo bɔ* and the *semi bɔ* were marks that were continuously done for the purposes they carry as beautification; hence it remained a main source and form of beauty among the Dangme.

The *semi bɔ* is a type of marking that is done on the back (Fig. 4) and as the name implies, *semi bɔ* means 'mark on the back'. It can be done on the back of the neck and space between the dimples that are located slightly above the buttocks. The sizes of these marks range from 1 cm to 2.5 cm depending on the choice of the bearer. This is usually done on the backs of Dangme women and the reason for doing this is to show that the back of the lady has no skin flaws, rather beautiful marks to display. This is termed as "*kwɛsem gbowe zo*" literally translated as 'the back is not shy'. This mark existed in the earlier years when all that was needed



Fig. 3. An elderly woman bearing a mark for beautification (*fεo bɔ*) on her left cheek

Source: Researchers

to cover the body were cloths. In those days, for the marks to show, the women usually wore their cloths exceptionally low. This mark was believed to beautify the backs of the women and make their backs appealing to their partners.

The perception of the Dangme about these marks for beautification is what rendered the bearers of such marks as beautiful. This is supported by [48] that the characterization of a person as “beautiful” whether on an individual basis or by community consensus is often based on some combination of inner beauty and outer beauty. From the findings of this study, it was evident that the Dangme also perceived the *fεo bɔ* and the *semi bɔ* as marks that bring out the inner beauty (by having the perception of bearing a ‘deformed’ face yet appearing as exceptionally beautiful) hence a combination of both the inner and outer beauty make the bearer all the more beautiful. According to Dutton, there is evidence that perceptions of beauty are evolutionarily determined that things that are termed beautiful are typically found in situations likely to give enhanced survival of the perceiving of human genes. During the research, it was made evident that beauty in the early ages, particularly among the Dangme meant having something peculiar that differentiated an individual from other people. It is not just the general appearance of an individual but the presence of something different on the person’s face that draws the eye of an onlooker. In the researcher’s definition of beauty, the peculiarity is strongly considered such that there are people who have striking beauty, others do not and there are other people who have an inner beauty that seems to project outward that makes them appear uniquely beautiful. Bearing a body mark for beautification

might be a way of bringing out the perception of the bearer of what is beautiful as it is peculiar, it does actually appear as beautiful to the onlooker.

In the Ningo, Prampram and Ada communities selected for the study, there are two well-known marks for beautification, that is, the *fεo bɔ* and the *semi bɔ*. According to 61.7% of the respondents, the *fεo bɔ* which literally means ‘mark for beauty’ is a major umbrella under which any other marks did for beautification may fall under. Since there are two well-known marks for beautification, the variation where other marks will fall under the *fεo bɔ* seems to be non-existent. The *fεo bɔ* became very common when there was a different perception of beauty and this was a time when parents started marking the faces of their female children for them to appear beautiful and young girls also started going in for marks on their faces because they thought it made them more beautiful. From the review of related literature, [25] stated that most people belonging to tribes that do not have specific markings sometimes choose to be scared for the purpose of beautification. Ibrahim further stated that in the past, a person who did not receive body marks may have been teased and not accepted by other members of their ethnic group because they were termed unattractive.

Based on the foregoing reasons, the most common and well-known beautification marks were the *fεo bɔ* and the *semi bɔ*. The *fεo bɔ* was made on the face while the *semi bɔ* which means “mark on the back” was done on the back particularly between the shoulder blades and middle of the dimples slightly above the buttocks.

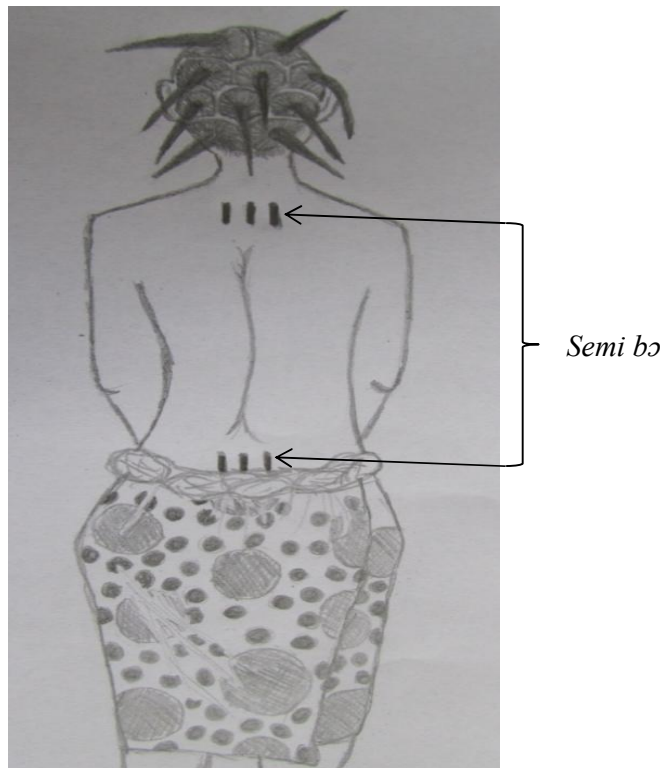


Fig. 4. Semi bo

Source: Illustration by the researchers

5. CONCLUSION

Body marks for beautification as pertaining to the Ghanaian way of life needs to be understood before conceptions and/ or misconceptions are drawn. Beautification marks exist in many of the ethnic groups in Ghana and though they all have a similar reason, beautification, there are varied periods for which they are made and for varied meanings. The well-known body marks for beautification, identified as the *fɛo bo* and the *semi bo* are done on the face and back respectively. It is the belief of those who bear these marks that their beauty is heightened when they have these marks and as such, they are admired by all. They, therefore, see no reason for doing away with their culture of marking the face or back for beautification purposes.

The practice of facial marking for beautification is only common to certain clans and families, as is the general performance of body marking for other purposes among the Dangme. Members of these families and clans often deem it an honor to have such marks on their bodies. With this, it is quite evident that the philosophies, concepts and indigenous theories of the people, pertaining

to the practice of traditional body marking for beautification, is followed religiously by the families and clan members who practice them. It, however, seems that, with the advent of laws guiding marking, scarring and inscribing the skin or human body, the traditional body marking for beautification has been on a decrease although it has not ceased out rightly.

From this research, it is quite evident to note that, the meanings of body marks in one tribe may differ from another hence an equal understanding needs to be drawn when it comes to the issue of body marks with respect to the various reasons for making them among the ethnic groups that practice them.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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