

**THE CULTURAL INTERPRETATION OF BODY MARKS AMONG  
SELECTED DANGME GROUPS IN GHANA**

By  
KNUST

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## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work towards the award of a Master of Philosophy degree in African Art and Culture and that, to the best of my knowledge, it contains no material previously published by another person nor material which has been accepted for any other degree of the university, except where due acknowledgement has been made in the text.

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## ABSTRACT

Body marks is both an elusive and a sensitive issue. Most people do not want to associate themselves with bearers of body marks and this has attached a sense of stigmatization to the issue of body marks as it is vivid that there is the lack of understanding of the cultural basis behind the making of these marks. There is therefore the need for exploration into the issue to understand the reasons for making body marks and to understand the cultural ramifications of these marks. Most literature available focuses on body marks in countries like Nigeria, Sudan and Benin. Ghana is a country that also has body marks among various cultures and ethnic groups yet; the cultural and educational 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 body marks present among some ethnic groups in Ghana and to understand the cultural interpretations of the marks. Three ethnic groups from the Ga-Dangme tribe were selected for the study and these are Ningo, Prampram and Ada. Data were collected from the three Dangme groups based on the understanding of body marks according to the culture of the Dangmes. The qualitative research method was used, with interviews and observations being the main forms of data collection instruments. Out of the overall accessible population of 90 respondents, a sample size of 60 was purposively selected based on the information provided about body marks. The results of the study showed different body marks that are made for different cultural reasons. The cultural interpretations were discussed based on religious, political, medical, social and educational interpretations. It is recommended that various reasons for pursuing body marks be brought to light by further research in order to weave members of different tribes as one to help bring unity among Ghanaians through culture.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
<b>DECLARATION .....</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>ABSTRACT .....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....</b>	<b>iv</b>
1.1 Background to the Study.....	1
1.2 Ethnographic Background.....	4
1.3 Statement of the Problem.....	6
1.4 Objectives of the Study.....	7
1.5 Research Questions.....	7
1.6 Delimitation.....	7
1.7 Limitation.....	7
1.8 Definition of Terms.....	8
1.9 Importance of the Study.....	9
1.10 Organisation of the Rest of the Text.....	9
<b>CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE</b>	
2.0 Overview.....	10
2.1 Meaning of Body Marks.....	10
2.2 History of Body Marks.....	14
2.2.1 Human Skin Colour Distribution and Body Marking.....	16
2.3 Types of Body Marks.....	18
2.4 Roles of Body Marks.....	26

2.5 Reasons for Making Body Marks .....	27
2.5.1 Marks for Beautification.....	27
2.5.2 Marks for Identification.....	28
2.5.3 Marks for Strength and Courage.....	30
2.5.4 Marks for Fertility.....	31
2.5.5 Marks for Family Pride/ Royalty.....	31
2.5.6 Marks for Medical Reasons.....	32
2.6 Perceptions of Body Marks.....	33
2.7 Body Marks and Culture.....	34
 <b>CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY</b>	
3.0 Overview.....	39
3.1 Research Design.....	39
3.1.1 Survey Research.....	41
3.1.2 Case Study.....	41
3.2 Population for the Study.....	42
3.2.1 Target Population.....	43
3.2.2 Accessible Population.....	43
3.3 Sampling Technique.....	43
3.3.1 Purposive Sampling.....	45
3.3.2 Snowball Sampling.....	46
3.4 Data Collection.....	46

3.4.1 Primary Data.....	47
3.4.2 Secondary Data.....	48
3.5 Data Collection Instruments.....	48
3.5.1 Interview.....	48
3.5.2 Observation.....	50
3.6 Data Collection Procedure.....	54
3.7 Administration of Interview.....	56
3.8 Validation of Data.....	57
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS</b>	
4.0 Overview.....	58
4.1 History of Body Marking among the Dangmes.....	58
4.1.1 Commencement of Body Marks.....	61
4.2 Names of Body Marks.....	66
4.2.1 <i>Gbeba</i> .....	68
4.2.2 <i>Bɔ</i> .....	73
4.2.3 <i>So gbɔ bɔ</i> .....	74
4.2.4 <i>Sɛ bɔ</i> .....	75
4.2.5 <i>Fɛo bɔ</i> .....	76
4.2.6 <i>Akaba</i> .....	78
4.2.7 <i>Kunɲɔ nane bɔ</i> .....	80
4.2.8 <i>Semi bɔ</i> .....	80
4.2.9 <i>Joku-joku</i> .....	81

4.2.10 <i>Pusu hiɔ bɔ</i> .....	82
4.2.11 <i>Blɔ kpɛ bi</i> .....	86
4.3 Reasons for Making Body Marks.....	87
4.3.1 Marks for Identification .....	87
4.3.2 Marks for Beautification.....	91
4.3.3 Marks for Medical Reasons.....	93
4.4 Cultural Interpretation of Body Marks.....	95
4.4.1 Religious Interpretation of Body Marks.....	95
4.4.2 Social Interpretation of Body Marks.....	97
4.4.3 Political Interpretation of Body Marks.....	98
4.4.4 Medical Interpretation of Body Marks.....	99
4.4.5 Educational Interpretation of Body Marks.....	100
<b>CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	
5.0 Overview.....	102
5.1 Summary.....	102
5.2 Conclusions.....	103
5.3 Recommendations.....	104
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>106</b>
<b>APPENDIX „A“.....</b>	
<b>123</b>	

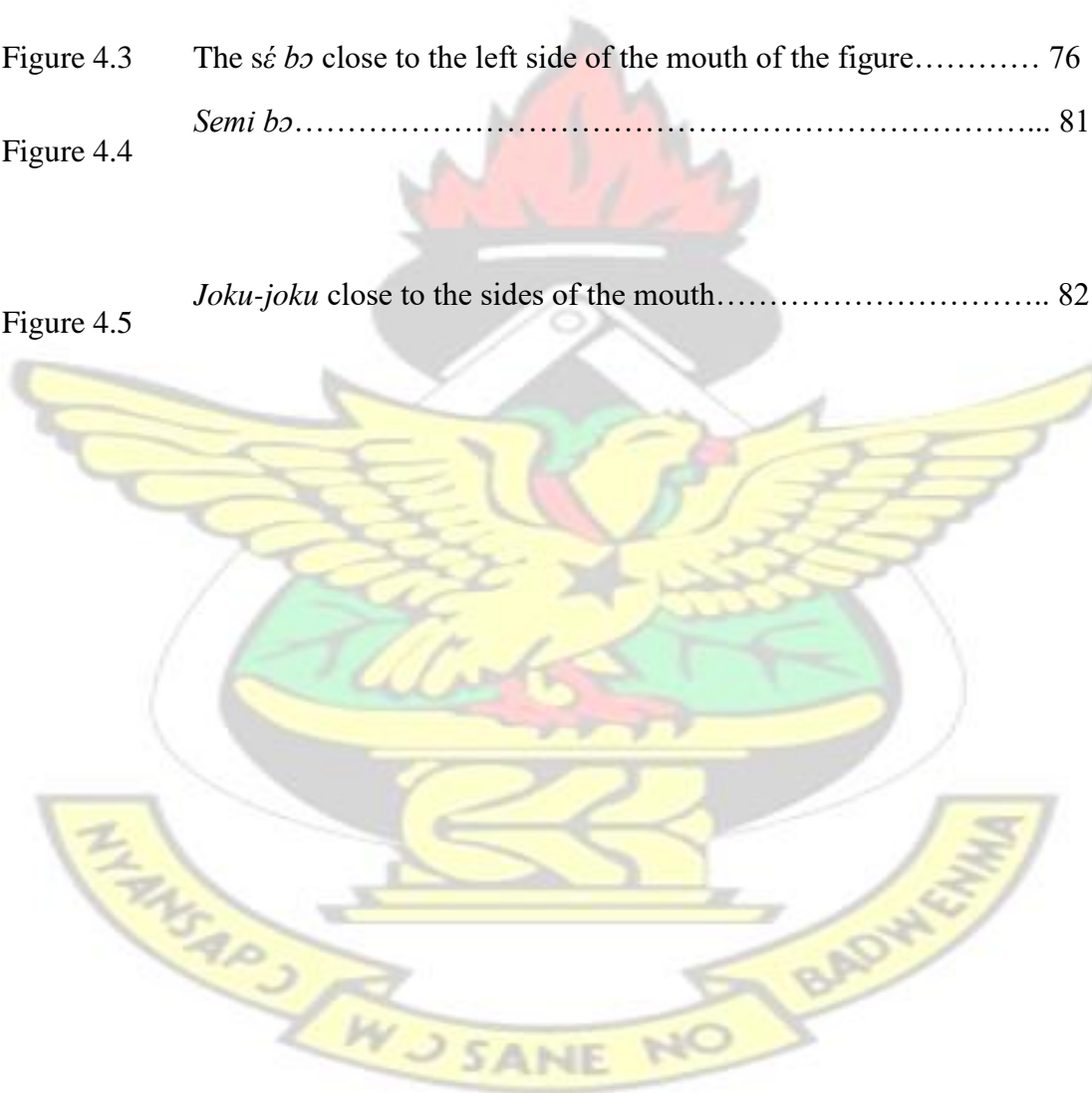
## APPENDIX

### „B“ .....125 LIST OF PLATES

Plate		Page
Plate 4.1	An elderly man with the <i>gbeba</i> close to his eyes and lips and the <i>akaba</i> on both cheeks.....	70
Plate 4.2	An elderly woman with the <i>gbeba</i> mark close to her right eye.....	73
Plate 4.3	An elderly woman in Ningo bearing the <i>so gbɔ bɔ</i> on her left cheek.....	74
Plate 4.4	An elderly woman bearing a mark for beautification ( <i>fɛo bɔ</i> ) on her left cheek.....	77
Plate 4.5	An elderly woman with the <i>akaba</i> on her left cheek.....	79
Plate 4.6	A Ningo woman with the <i>akaba</i> on her left cheek.....	79
Plate 4.7	A young man in Ada bearing the <i>pusu hiɔ bɔ</i> .....	84
Plate 4.8	The beads that leave a mark after the <i>niwomi</i> rites.....	89

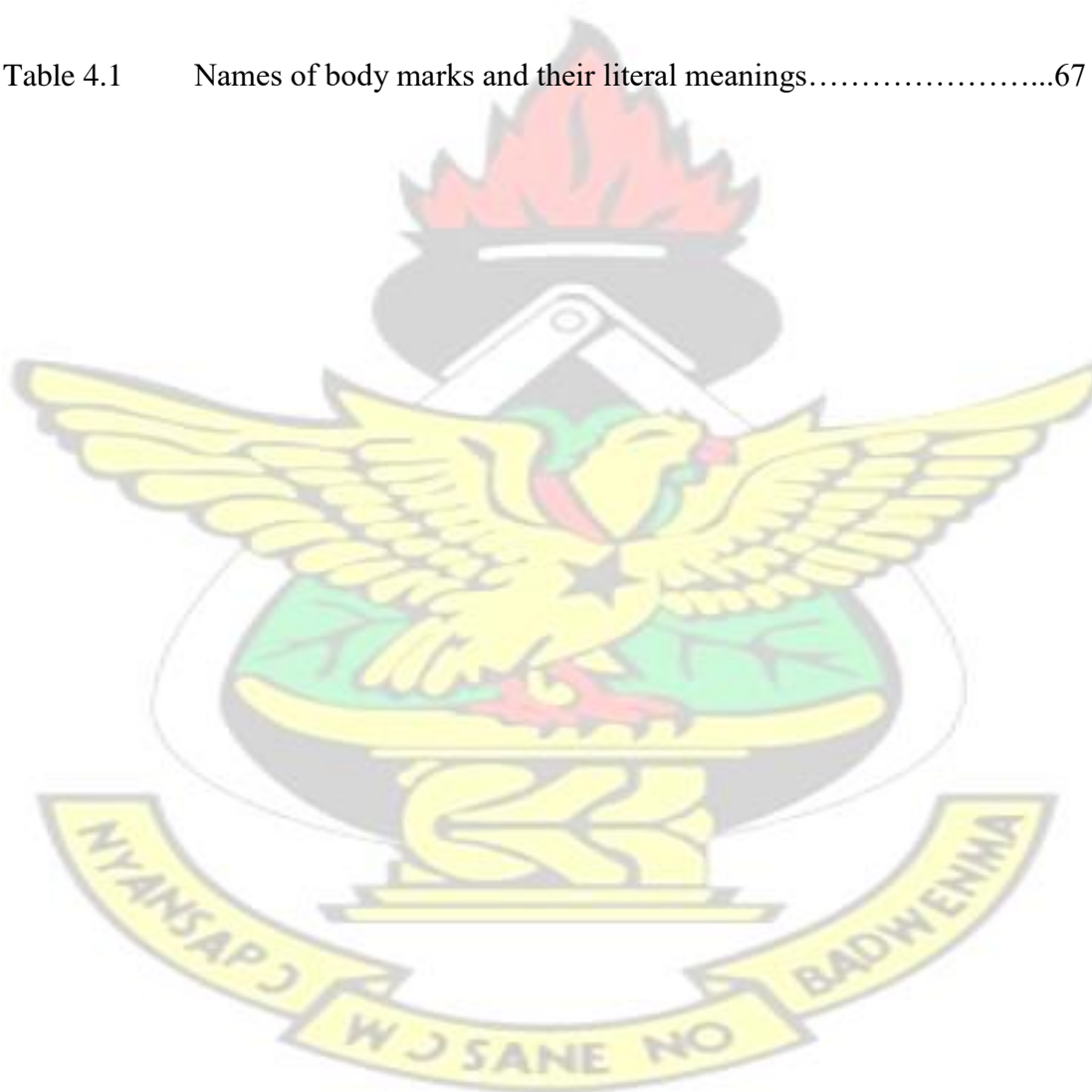
## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure		Page
Figure 2.1	Von Luschan's Chromatic Scale.....	17
Figure 4.1	<i>Agbee bi bɔ</i> on the left cheek of the figure.....	62
Figure 4.2	Three diagonal lines close to the right and left eye showing the <i>kunɲɔ nane bɔ</i> (mark of the feet of a cock) .....	65
Figure 4.3	The <i>sé bɔ</i> close to the left side of the mouth of the figure.....	76
Figure 4.4	<i>Semi bɔ</i> .....	81
Figure 4.5	<i>Joku-joku</i> close to the sides of the mouth.....	82



## 0LIST OF TABLES

Table		Page
Table 3.1	Sexes of the respondents.....	54
Table 3.2	Number of respondents with and without body marks.....	55
Table 3.3	Variables (various groups of respondents).....	55
Table 3.4	Variables and their frequency.....	56
Table 4.1	Names of body marks and their literal meanings.....	67



## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background to the Study

This research is geared towards the study of the cultural interpretation of body marks among three Dangme ethnic groups in Ghana. In addition, the philosophies behind the making of these marks and their socio-cultural undertones were considered.

There are countless definitions of what body marks are, some of which entails the purposes for which the marks are made. Ojo (2004) describes body marks as types of marks that serve ethnic and political purposes. Similarly, Ayeni (2004) states that 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. It is done in a way that makes every ethnic group have a different and distinct mark. Wrath (2005) has also stated that body marks are a form of identification different groups of people have to differentiate their families, lineages and tribes from others; the basic course of body marking is for identification.

Body marking has also been defined by Dennis (2007) as an art made on the body, with the body, or consisting of the human body. The most common forms of body markings are tattoos, body piercings, scarification, branding, sub-dermal implants, full body tattoo and body painting. Irving (2007) states that, body marks are marks made on the body with its main uses being medical, decoration, spiritual protection and tribal or family identification. Ayoolake (2010) compares ethnic marks to „*oriki*“, which means 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 (2010) plainly states that, body marks 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. Reveur (2011) indicated that body marks are used as a symbol of identity in particular tribes and they express the individual's religious or spiritual belief, selfprotection, identification, social status, medical protection and mythical identity. Ankrah (2012) 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 (Oshodi, 2013). Adesina (2014) tops it off by defining body marks as the marks made on different parts of the body by traditional surgeons to effect healing, hence its main purpose being medicinal. Drawing from the above definitions and for the purpose of this study, body marks will be defined as marks on any part of a person's body based on the individual's belief, cultural or religious affiliation.

Ankrah (2007) states that body marking is one of the traditions in Ghana that allows children of a tender age to be given marks that will identify them in the ethnic group they belong to. According to Ozongwu (2013), body marks date back decades ago from marks made on fertility dolls to tattoos of tribal hierarchy. Ayeni (2004) has stated that 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.

Herodotus as cited in Mayaki (2011) said that ethnic marking started long ago in Egypt in the 5<sup>th</sup> 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.

There are different purposes for making body marks. Body marks fall mainly under marks for religious and spiritual belief, identification, self-protection, social status, mythical identity and medical protection (Reveur, 2011). Irving (2007) also classifies the purposes as marks for tribe or family identification, medical use, spiritual protection and marks for decoration. There are also other forms of markings that are not totally decorative or for beautification but also for medicinal, ethnic and cultural reasons. Such marks are made by specialists or elders of a tribe or family (Purefoy, 2010).

Body marks are made on different parts of the body for protection. Marks for protection are made based on two conditions, marks made after maturity and marks made from infancy. The former are marks made when the bearer is old enough to decide whether or not he or she needs the mark and the latter are marks made when the bearer is at a very tender age (Irving, 2007). Marks for protection are made throughout Ghana and can be for people of different tribes, families and religions.

Even with the specific patterns pertaining to each ethnic group, there are some distinctions in the nature of the marks and the design (Utoh-Ezeajugh, 2009). There are often interesting, powerful and mystical philosophies surrounding marks made for protection. Irving (2007) asserts that marks for protection are usually made on the hip so they cannot be seen by others. They are often not made in infancy unless it is suggested by the traditional priest or specialist but are usually made when the person is mature. Men bear these marks because they are the ones who are believed to endure more hardship in life.

Body marking is closely related to the culture of the people who practice it.

Felsenstein (2014) said that many tribes believe in this apparent spiritual connection through the act of body marking that they incorporate it into their religious rituals. This makes it necessary and strongly attached to their culture because of the social and political significance it bears. Guynup (2004) also stated that in the Sepik Region among the people of Papua New Guinea, people without body marks or “clean skin” tribe members were traditionally not permitted to trade, sing ceremonial songs or participate in other tribal activities. According to Pitts (2003), for the sake of identity which is expressed through appearance, many cultures make use of body marking (body modification).

## **1.2 Ethnographic Background**

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 (GhanaWeb, 2013). The Ga-Dangme people settled in the Accra plains by the 13<sup>th</sup> century and still reside in the area (Randolph-Macon College, 2013).

The people of Ada are believed to be a part of the African Negro race from the Western Sudan and migrated to their current abode (Ankrah, 2013). 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. They were prevented from settling there permanently 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-Dangmes 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.

The Ga-Dangmes currently inhabit the Accra plains and are approximately 2,000,000 people in number. The Ga-Dangme people make up 8% of Ghana's population and they can be found in Ghana and Togo. Ga-Dangme is a large umbrella that contains 13 different groups with a similar language and similar cultural practices (GhanaWeb, 2013). These 13 groups consist mainly of Dangmes living in Osu, Se (Shai), La, Ningo, Kpone, Krobo, Osudoku, Gbugbla (Prampram), Ada and Agotime and Ga's living in the Anecho (Aneho) area in Togo, Ga-Mashie in the central part of Accra and Nungua (Ameka & Dakubu, 2008).

For the purpose of the study, three of the Dangme groups will be studied. These groups are Ningo, Gbugbla (Prampram) and Ada. The main occupation of the selected Dangme groups for the study is fishing and crop farming. They venture into the main occupation depending on where they reside; whether by the coast or on a vegetative stretch of land. The main religion is Christianity and Islam with a few traditionalists and some scattered non-denominational members of the group (GhanaWeb, 2013).

Ningo is located 113.3km away from Accra at latitude  $6.0500^{\circ}$ , longitude  $0.1833^{\circ}$  in the Dangme East District of the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. The town of Old Ningo is one of the oldest European settlements in Ghana situated along the Gulf of Guinea coast in the Greater Accra Region (Ghana-Net).

Prampram is a town in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. The town is located in the Ningo-Prampram constituency also situated in the Dangme East District (GhanaWeb, 2013). Prampram is about 25 miles (40 km) North-East of Accra (Tripmondo, 2014). It is a populated place with the region font code of AF/ME. Its coordinates are latitude  $5.7000^{\circ}$  and longitude  $0.1167^{\circ}$  (TravelingLuck, 2014).

Ada is a coastal town located in the Greater Accra Region. It is off the Accra-Aflao motorway, along the Volta River. The settlement of Ada lies along the road from Ada Kasseh, close to the Dangme East District capital Ada Foah (GhanaMuseums, 2014). It elevates geographically at 7 feet. Its coordinates are 5° 49" North and 0° 37" East (Maplandia, 2014).

### **1.3 Statement of the Problem**

In Ghana, there are various ethnic groups who practice body marks. Irving (2007) categorizes body marks in Ghana into medical, spiritual, identification and beautification. Ozongwu (2013) said that there has been the impression that people with body marks are uneducated and live in rural areas. Akanle (2013) also stated that people with body marks are given the identity of being untutored persons. Adshina (2013) also projects that many people do not want to associate themselves with other people who have marks on their face thereby attaching a sense of stigmatisation to the issue of body marks. This has created some misconception about body marks and people who analyse body marks tend to read their own meanings into them; in that, most bearers of these marks are misjudged and treated negatively due to the lack of understanding of the body marks. Ankrah (2012) inferred that the Westerners undermined everything African and termed body marking as scarification, rendering it an uncivilized practice. For the sake of understanding the misconception surrounding body marks in general, there is the need for a scholarly research into the topic, the cultural interpretation of body marks, to know the meaning and significance of the body marks present among the Dangmes and to educate people about the cultural ramifications of these marks.

#### **1.4 Objectives of the Study**

1. To identify and describe the various types of body marks among the three Dangme groups.
2. To discuss the cultural significance of the body marks identified among the Dangmes.

#### **1.5 Research Questions**

1. What types of body marks exist among the Dangmes?
2. What is the cultural significance of the body marks identified among the Dangmes?

#### **1.6 Delimitation**

This research dealt with the permanent body marks found on the upper torso of the body of the Dangme. The study was also limited to the purposes and the cultural interpretations of the body marks. The cultural interpretation dealt with the meanings based on the religious, social, political, educational and medical aspects of culture. Due to the extensive nature of the Ghanaian landscape, the people of Ningo, Gbugbla (Prampram) and Ada were used as case study.

#### **1.7 Limitation**

Some feasible problems encountered in the course of the study include:

There was the lack of compliance on the part of some interviewees. This was a major problem in the completion of the interview as some of them held up on valuable information and refused to show their body marks. For those who did show their marks, some of them did not approve of their pictures being taken.

There was insufficient literature relevant to the study. This was because most of the information available expatiated more on tribal and body marking among the Nigerians and most parts of the eastern African countries with little information about Ghanaian body marking.

### **1.8 Definition of Terms**

**Body marks:** These are marks found on any part of a person's body based on the individual's belief, cultural or religious affiliation.

**Body Piercing:** A hole made on any part of the body to accommodate jewellery, plates and other adornments centred on culture, religion or individual preferences.

**Branding:** This is a type of scarification where hot instruments are used on different parts of the body to leave a permanent impression.

**Culture:** The arts, customs, beliefs, values and behaviour and also material objects that constitute a people's way of life in a nation or society.

**Cultural interpretation:** The religious, social, political, educational and medical meanings attached to body marks.

**Melanin:** A substance in the skin that determines skin colour.

**Scarification:** An intentional and permanent alteration done on the body for beautification.

**Sub dermal Implants:** These are items and instruments that are embedded deep into the skin for various different reasons.

### **1.9 Importance of the Study**

1. This study will provide a deeper interpretation of body marks of the Dangmes which hitherto has been misinterpreted.
2. This study will help recognize the cultural identity of the nation by comprehending and embracing the customs of the Ga Dangmes.
3. The study will serve as a base for exploration of other areas in relation to culture in the other ethnic groups in Ghana.
4. The study will help the nation in its aim to achieve national unity and national identity by mapping out various cultural practices of different ethnic groups to create an equal level of understanding and acceptance of these practices.

### **1.10 Organisation of the rest of the text**

Chapter two deliberates on the review of literature available, accessible and relevant to the study which includes the history of body marks, the perceptions of body marks, the types of body marks there are and the meanings attached to them. Chapter three deals with the research methodology; it identified all the processes and procedures used in obtaining the data for the research. Chapter four considers the findings and the interpretation of the data. Chapter five provides the summary, conclusions and recommendations of the study.

References and appendices are also provided.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

## **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

### **2.0 Overview**

This chapter reviewed literature that was accessible and related to the topic of this study. The chapter is to help thoroughly understand the interpretations of the various body marks and to analyse and sift through the accessible literature for the study. The literature reviewed were obtained from literary sources and the internet and have been discussed under the following sub headings;

- Meaning of body marks
- History of body marks
- Types of body marks
- Roles of body marks
- Reasons for making body marks
- Perceptions of body marks
- Body marks and culture

### **2.1 Meaning of Body Marks**

Body marking is a unique feature among various cultures in the West African territory and can not only be seen on the faces and bodies of West Africans but is also evident in their works of art such as artistic wooden masks, carvings and songs (Cullivan, 1998). Anquandah (1998) affirms that, additionally, they can be found on bronze, terracotta figurines in Ile Ife in western Nigeria and these figures dates back between 100 AD and the 1600's.

Webster (2014) defines body as the main part of the organized physical substance of a plant or an animal especially as distinguished from limbs and head. Simply put, it is the physical structure including the bones, flesh and organs of a person or animal. A mark

is a spot, area or feature on a person's or animal's body by which they may be identified or recognised (Oxford Dictionary, 2014). This can be simplified as making something recognisable by indication. Therefore, body marks can be defined as marks indicated on a person's body to make them recognisable for different valid reasons.

The meanings of body marks vary such that, Gobewura (1998), Abdulai (1998), Cullivan (1998) and Ajayi & Kola-Aderoju (2009) have all suggested, in the context of their own cultures, what body marks means.

Abdulai (1998) inferred that body marks according to the Sisala in the Northern part of Ghana meant a sense of identity and a sign of hope. He further explained by saying that the Sisala people started practicing body marking during the slave trade and it was for identifying themselves so that if unfortunately one of them was captured and taken away his or her identity would forever remain intact. It was also their hope that the marks would help one identify other members of community that were captured.

Additionally these marks could be used to retrace one's roots back home. Ajayi and Kola-Aderoju (2009) support this statement by saying that in the late 1800's, tribal markings became extremely important not only for ethnic identification but because they allowed one to retain their roots even if they were captured and taken into slavery. For this reason, body marks will always have a deeper meaning than ethnic pride or identification because they enable one return home.

According to Barker (1986) domestic slaves in the northern part of Ghana, during the slave trade were treated as members of the family and could rise to positions of authority in the community yet; one with slave ancestry could never become a chief. This point was supported by Gobewura (1998) when he said that for members of the Mossi tribe,

some of the types of marks meant royalty, in that, without these marks, it is almost impossible to achieve a high position.

For Barker, body marks meant a painful reminder to its bearers. This was because slave raiders gave body marks to their captives to identify them and to apprehend them in case they should escape. Since then, these marks have been identified in Northern Ghana as marks for slaves and it ends up being a constant reminder to the bearer and his family and all who see him of his or her past history and enslavement, due to this, such people are not regarded in the society. Even today, one's slave ancestry can be used to defame one's character or cause ridicule in public. Though these marks reminded the bearers of their painful past and ancestry, Gobewura states that body marks in general help in maintaining and instilling of the culture of a group of people into the young ones and this coincides with a statement made by Adshina (2013) that, the young one's then, without compromise, become the bearers of African tradition.

Cullivan (1998) states that body marks among some tribes in Ghana indicate a sacred number or a sacred practice in that tribe. Ajayi and Kola-Aderoju (2009) have listed the meaning of marks as an indication of affluence and marks that mean reconciliation. They further explained that for marks as an indication of affluence (tracing lineages) for example, among the Oyo in Nigeria, it is possible for a child to bear two different sets of marks on either cheek. This was a clear indication that the background of the child could be traced to two very important lineages. Some of these marks were incorporated in the songs the Yoruba's sang. Two of such songs are "*Jèmùrẹkẹ, olówó pàdẹ ọmọ olóla*" meaning Jèmùrẹkẹ, the rich meets the wealthy. Jèmùrẹkẹ is the name of the mark and the rich and wealthy being the two lineages that the child can be traced to.

*Pélé ojúkan ló kọ,*

*Àbàjà ojúkan ló bú,*

*Èkó rà''yé onigoribọ*

You have *Pélé* tribal marks on one cheek,

You have *Àbàjà* tribal marks on another

Behold the experience of the one with *gombó* tribal marks

With body marks as a sign of reconciliation, Ajayi and Kola-Aderoju told a story of Bishop Ládígbòlù, who was also an Oyo Prince who encountered a conflict between him and certain eminent personalities in Oyo. Though other factors also had their input, it was alleged that the origin of the conflict were religious differences. Ládígbòlù was born a Muslim, raised a Muslim and played a very important role in the Muslim community. He even had the opportunity to call for prayers in Islam. The Muslim community therefore did not take it lightly when Ládígbòlù rejected the Muslim religion and became a Christian. There was open confrontation and with Oyo being a predominantly Muslim town, he was not safe. Many sermons from the mosque were directed at him and it was connoted that any harm done to him or his household was acceptable and would be the repercussion of his deeds. He then left for exile taking his family with him since it was expedient and his life depended on it. The conflict was eventually resolved by the Aláàfin (the king of Oyo), Oba Lámídi

Adéyemí, who declared Ládígbòlù a forgiven man. It was finally realized that Ládígbòlù was destined for the Christian path and was therefore pronounced to follow his destiny. However, for the reconciliation to be complete he had to surrender one of his children to bear the royal tribal mark, hence his daughter Adédáyọ Oyololáwà Aba

was conceded to bear the tribal marks on her face, thus becoming a symbol of reconciliation. The occurrence described above was the manner in which most wars were terminated in the Yoruba land.

## **2.2 History of Body Marks**

It is uncertain how body marks started in Africa, there are however different sets of stories surrounding the history and origin of body marks in the African continent.

Many ancient cultures have helped to provide clues as to the long history of body marking and scarification through their artistic outputs. Many of the human figures found from 8000BC – 5000BC, rock paintings found in the Tassili n'Ajjer mountains range in the Sahara and Olmec stone sculptures dating from around 1000BC found at Villahermosa in Mexico feature incisions on the face and shoulders and show markings that represent body marking (Rivers, 2011).

There is a story about an African king named Sango, who sent two of his slaves to a far-away country on an important mission. One of the servants was able to perform the task he was assigned while the other could not. The servant who was not able to achieve his mission was subjected to a hundred and twenty-two marks (122) on his face as punishment. With time, the marks healed and gave him a distinctive identity and he was fancied by the king's wives. The king got angry and he then decided that cuts should be given in the future, not as punishments but as a sign of royalty. The king Sango himself decided to get these marks to enforce the law he had passed, he was however not able to withstand the pain and could only bear two cuts on his arm.

From that day on, cuts on the arm were a sign of royalty among his people until different styles of cuts were adopted by other tribes for different reasons (Hare, 2011).

McRae (2013) submits that there is a type of tribal and bodily marking practiced by the Ouida of the southern Benin called “two times five (2 x 5)”. This was first performed by King Kpassse who was then the king of Ouida (formerly Houeda) when the kingdom of Dahomey still existed. He was said to have been threatened by a revolt led by Ghézo and his warriors in the war that took place in 1717 (Abdoulaye, 2014). He was heavily outnumbered and mistakenly entered a python-infested forest; the snakes did not attack but rather helped him defeat Ghézo and his men. Since then, all of Kpassse’s descendants have had the same scar and have held pythons while being scarred to show honour to the pythons.

According to Ankrah (2012), the art of body marking started as a form of identification of the deaf and dumb children in the society. This was done so that they can be easily identified and provided the assistance they needed when necessary.

For some ethnic groups, body marking was a positive thing to have and for others it was not. Body marking became a necessity in the olden days with the rise of communal wars and the then slave trade (Olutayo, 2013). Ethnic groups used to mark their members in the hopes that the marks will be able to guide them back to their roots (Ozongwu, 2013). Among others, the slave traders viewed unscarred faces and bodies as a sign of good health and so they did not seize tribesmen with both facial and bodily marks (McRae, 2013).

Body marks were also used to lend credence to the legitimacy of a child; in that, the proud father of the child allows the face of the child to be marked to show that he has accepted the child as his own (Ghana *Mma*, 2013).

From the above statements and narratives, it is still uncertain as to when body marking started. In the discussions, it is clear that, though there may be different stories

surrounding the history and origin of body marks, they have come a long way in the lives of different cultures and have been adopted and refined to suit the needs and requirements of these cultures.

### **2.2.1 Human Skin Colour and Body Marking**

According to Hemingson (n. d), body marking almost always happens amongst a race of people, for example dark skinned Africans, where there is so much melanin in skin that it would be difficult to see a tattoo. In accordance to this Muehlenbein (2010) states that, melanin is the single most important substance determining human skin colour. He further explains that it is produced in melanocytes, which are skin cells and it is the main determinant of the skin colour of darker skinned people. Supporting this is Von Luschan's chromatic scale (Figure 2.1) that is further simplified by Parra *et al.*, (2003) that, people living close to the equator are highly darkly pigmented and those living near the pole are very lightly pigmented. Though the Von Luschan scale was abandoned in the late 1950's, it gave rise to other chromatic scales and formed the basis of these scales by providing the general idea of the different types of skin colour.

Terrified White –		1	10		– Average Albino
Traumatized White –		2	11		– Embarrassed Whitey
Dead Whiteman –		3	12		– Blushing Honkey
Almost Dead –		4	13		– Dead Chinaman
Alcoholic Pink –		5	14		– Western Jesus
Geisha Girl –		6	15		– Indoor Arab
Asphyxiation Blue –		7	16		– Leper Yellow
White Russian –		8	17		– Ageing Bedouin
Alien Grey –		9	18		– Yellow Peril
Healthy Tan –		19	28		– Peruvian Pink
Controversial Yellow –		20	29		– Suicide Bomber Brown
Fake Tan –		21	30		– Muddy Waters
Happy Inuit –		22	31		– Aboriginal Brown
Sad Inuit –		23	32		– Unoriginal Brown
Powdered Ladyboy –		24	33		– Dead Blackman
Realistic Jesus –		25	34		– Black Panther
Sick Bolivian –		26	35		– Zulu Warrior
Lawrence of Arabia –		27	36		– Starry Night

**Figure 2.1: Von Luschan's Chromatic Scale**

**Source: Anthroscape Human Biodiversity Forum**

Body marking is a practice most commonly performed among Africans because of the melanin in the skin cells that allows marks and indentions to stay longer and allows for easy identification. Roper (2004) simplified it by saying that, by opening the skin of dark pigmented people, the uppermost layer of the pigment is broken and filled in with slightly lighter shades of scar tissue. There was just enough contrast for the marks to show after the wounds had finally healed.

### 2.3 Types of Body Marks

Body mark is a general term used to describe marks on a person's body, irrespective of what they look like or how they are done (Coleman, 2002). There are various types and categories that body marks fall under. Asaff (2004) suggests that they include scarification, body painting, and mud for modification, shaving and body piercing. Coleman (2002) also generalises them by terming them as scarification, cicatrisation and tattooing.

It can then be deduced that, the different types of body marks made includes scarification, cicatrisation and body painting. The use of mud for titivation, shaving, tattooing and body piercing are also types of body marking.

Scarification as body marks has been identified and defined by Schildkrout (2004) as involving scratching, etching, burning / branding or superficially cutting designs, pictures or words into the skin as a permanent body modification. Roper (2004) on the other hand defines it as an ancient African tribal body art that involves purposely scarring the skin to create raised marks and or complete patterns. Coleman (2002) also says that it is the incising of the skin with sharp objects and the controlling of the scar tissue on various parts of the body.

From the above stated definitions it can be deciphered that scarification is a type of body mark that requires the use of sharp objects to cut any part of the body. These cuts are controlled in such a way that, after the scar heals; it leaves a distinctive mark on the part of the body where it was cut. Hence, scarification is the cutting, denting and/or branding of some parts of the human body where by the scar is controlled in order to achieve a distinctive mark or effect after healing.

Cicatrization is defined again by Coleman (2002) as a special form of scarification whereby a gash is made on the skin with a sharp instrument and irritation of the skin caused by applying caustic plant juices forming permanent blisters. Keloids as a type of body mark falls under this cicatrization. Usually, dark pigments such as ground charcoal or gunpowder are rubbed into the wound to provide emphasis.

Ankrah (2012) inferred that ethnic or tribal marks are marks made on the body for various valid historical, cultural, medical, religious and aesthetic reasons. Ankrah (2007) also describes body marking as one of the traditions in Ghana that allows children of a tender age to be given marks that will identify them in the ethnic group they belong to. The main goal of ethnic marking is to identify an individual with a particular ethnic group.

There are other types of body marks used to commemorate the various stages in life. Body painting, the use of mud, shaving and body piercing were all used in the different stages of the rites of passage in many African cultures (Asaff, 2004). They were for daily decoration, used during celebrations, used during courtship or dating, for wedding and for childbirth.

Body painting is defined as a form of body art that is made on the human body. Body painting usually goes hand in hand with body art and body art consists of body painting, tattoos, body art performances, body piercings, scarification, branding and full body tattoos (Volen, 2014). The practice of body painting dates from prehistoric art and culture and has occurred since then among most prehistoric people and tribes throughout the world. According to Montañez (2013), many native people of South and Central America paint designs using *Genipa Americana* juice on their bodies.

These designs are commonly known as *Jagua* tattoos.

The indigenous people of South America however, traditionally use annatto, *huito* or wet charcoal to decorate their faces and bodies. *Huito* is also another form of semipermanent dye that mostly takes weeks to fade away. Body painting is a common method used among many African tribes and it is used in religious rituals, celebrations and to indicate ones sexual maturity (Keet, 2013). According to Gannon (2013), societies that still follow the ancient custom of face and body painting choose their colours according to the available raw materials. In ancient times, only primary and locally available colours like red, blue, yellow or white were used and sometimes by sprinkling dust or soft bird feathers, special effects were achieved. Wreschner *et al.*, (1980) stated that, while there is evidence that body painting predates cave painting, there was a resurgence of the art in the 1960"s that was substantial enough to gain public interest. They further stated that since it became public knowledge, body painting has become widespread in alternative gatherings such as festivals and demonstrations.

The Encyclopaedia of Fine Art also brought to light that, in ancient times, bodies were adorned with a variety of substances including plant and animal pigments for a multiplicity of reasons. It went further to elaborate that body painting was used to celebrate ceremonial occasions, for example puberty and marriage and it was used to identify key individuals, for example chiefs, witch doctors and spiritualists and also social castes. Additionally, war paint was used by American Indians to signify a state of hostility. Body painting was also protective; for instance among aboriginal tribes, the paint was used to protect themselves against the glare of the sun.

Today, traditional body painting survives in primitive and indigenous cultures throughout Africa, Asia and South America, parts of Australia and some Pacific Islands (Montañez, 2013). There is a constant debate about the legitimacy of body painting as an art form. This deliberation is said to have started in Chicago in 1933 at

the World's Fair where Max Factor Sr. and Sally Rand were arrested for causing public disturbance because Max painted Sally with makeup he had formulated for Hollywood films (Basten, 2012).

Cultural face painting has been used for many motives; hunting, religious reasons and military reasons (as a method of camouflage) or to scare one's enemy (Chano Metal, 2012). Some warriors entered battle naked except for a loin cloth, but their bodies were streaked in bizarre examples in red and black paint. Decoration of the human faces in different shapes and patterns has been a part of the culture of different ethnic groups since time immemorial.

Patterns used for face painting developed overtime to signify a variety of cultural events and these not only conveyed the emotional meaning but the general meaning of the cultural event that was attached to them. According to Gannon (2013), "these shapes and colours express a strong bond and meaning amongst people who have a face painting tradition. They are a connection to their past and carry a very strong cultural meaning to their lives". He further made mention of cultures where cultural practices and ceremonies evolve around face and body painting. Such is the *Kathakali*, which is a stylised classical Indian drama-dance noted for the attractive makeup of characters, elaborate costumes, detailed gestures and well defined body movements (Zarilli, 1984). All the stories depicted in *Kathakali* relate to mythological characters and the natural stage is lit by a single coconut oil fed lamp, the entire set up is designed to generate an atmosphere to suit the story. The loud instruments used, the makeup and costumes employed, the painting of the faces and the display of the *Chutti* as part of the facial makeup, are the only instruments used to achieve this objective. The individual artiste is fully submerged by the elaborate makeup. The costumes are intended to make the

play as impersonal as possible. Some tribes that are known for their traditional face painting and are known to still practice it are the

*Bororo* tribe in Niger, the *Karo* tribe in Ethiopia; specifically the *Kolcho* village, *Xhosa* tribes in South Africa and *Maori* tribe in New Zealand. Volen (2014) also elaborates that body painting still exists in North and South America, Africa, Australia, New Zealand, Polynesia, Papua New Guinea, Melanesia, Oceania, India, Middle East, China, Japan, Bulgaria, Kosovo and many more.

According to Gilbert (2003), head shaving has turned out to be common at many rites of passage in different tribes in Africa and this is believed to represent the fresh start that will be made as one passes from one to another of life's chapters. Gilbert further explained that for a tribe like Maasai, the warriors are the only members of the community to wear long hair and this they weave in thinly braided strands. Usually, two days before a Maasai boy is circumcised his head is shaved off. It is later allowed to grow and they spend a great deal of time in styling the hair (Satioti & Beckwith, 1980). The hair is dressed with animal fat and ochre and it is parted across the top of the head at ear level. The hair is then plaited and parted into small sections which are divided into two and twisted first separately then together. Cotton or wool threads may be used to lengthen the hair.

During the naming ceremony of a child, upon reaching "3 moons", the child is named and the head is shaved clean apart from a tussock of hair which resembles a cockade from the nape of the neck to the forehead. This cockade is believed to be a symbol of the "state of grace" that is accorded to infants (Amin, Willets, & Eames, 1987).

Satioti and Beckwith (1980) expound that, among these Maasai, when a woman has miscarried in a previous pregnancy; she would position her hair at the front or back of

the head depending on whether she lost a boy or girl. As the males have their heads shaved off at the passage from one stage of life to another, a bride to be will also have her hair shaved and two rams will be slaughtered in honour of the occasion (Amin, Willets, & Eames, 1987).

Many tribes across Africa practice body piercing as a social ritual and as part of tribal fashion or style and body piercing as a form of body modification is the practice of puncturing or cutting a part of the human body by creating an opening in which jewellery may be worn (Keet, 2013). It is impossible to say who the first people were with stretched ears or why they did it. Today, many cultures practice the art of ear piercing and ear stretching for many different reasons; religious, coming of age ceremonies, warding off evil spirits, sexual enhancement and physical beauty (Murano, 2013). According to Angel (2009), body marking and body modification have become a subject of serious scholarly research by archaeologists who have been hampered on studying body piercing by a scarcity of primary sources.

Ear piercing has been practiced all over the world since prehistoric times. There is considerable written and archaeological evidence of the practice. Mummified bodies with pierced ears have been discovered, including the oldest mummified body discovered to date the 5,300 year old Ötzi the Iceman, which was found in a glacier in Australia (Hesse, 2007). This mummy had an ear piercing 7 – 11mm in diameter.

Hesse (2007) further stated that the oldest earrings found in a grave dates back to 2500 BCE and they were located in the Sumerian City of Ur. Another set of earrings were found in a grave in the Ukok region between Russia and China and it was dated between 400 and 300 BCE. According to *“The Anatomie of Abuses”* by Phillip Stubbs, earrings were even more common among men of the 16<sup>th</sup> century than women, while Raphael Holinshed in 1577 confirmed the practice among “lusty courtiers” and “gentlemen of

courage” (Smith, 1908). Apparently originating in Spain, the practice of ear piercing among European men spread to the court of Henry III of France and then the Elizabethan Era of England where earrings, typically worn in one ear only, were spotted by such notables as Robert Carr, the 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Somerset Shakespeare, Sir Walter Raleigh and Charles I of England (Angel, 2009).

From European Middle Ages, there was a superstitious belief that piercing one ear improved long-distance vision and this led to the rise of the practice among sailors and explorers. The sailors also pierced their ears in the belief that their earrings could pay for a Christian burial if unfortunately they drowned and their bodies washed up on shore (Hesse, 2007).

Nose piercing also has a long history and it remains customary for Indian Hindu women of child bearing ages to wear nose studs usually in the left nostril due to the nostril’s association with the female reproductive organs in their *Ayurveda* medicine. This piercing is sometimes done the night before the woman marries (Pitts-Taylor, 2008). Nose piercing has been practiced by the *Bedouin* tribes of the Middle East and the *Berber* and *Beja* peoples of Africa as well as Australian Aborigines (Hastings, 2003). According to Murano (2013), among the *Apatani* tribes that live in Ziro Valley in the State of Arunachal Pradesh in India’s northeast, the *Apatani* women were considered the most beautiful among the Arunachal tribesmen; so beautiful to the extent that they had to wear large wooden plugs in their noses to make them look unattractive and this served as a source of protection from the invaders from other tribes.

Many native American and Alaskan tribes practice septum piercing and this was popular among the *Aztecs*, the Mayans and the tribes of New Guinea who adorned their

pierced noses with bones and feathers to symbolize wealth and among the men, virility (Hesse, 2007). These Aztecs, Mayans and Incas wore gold septum rings for adornment and to this day, the practice is continued by the *Kuna* of Panama. Nose piercing also remains popular in Pakistan and Bangladesh and is practiced in a number of Middle Eastern and Arab countries (DeMello, 2007).

The practice of stretching the lips by piercing them and inserting plates or plug was found throughout Pre-Columbian Mesoamerica and South America as well as among some of the tribes of Pacific Northwest and Africa. Lip piercing and lip stretching were historically found in African and American tribal cultures (Angel, 2009). In some parts of Malawi, it was quite common for women to adorn their lips with lip discs called a “*pelele*” that enlarges gradually from childhood and by adulthood could reach several inches in diameter. With time this alters the occlusion of the jaw (Weule & Werner, 1909). Lawman (2004) states that, the wearing of labrets was a common practice in some cultures where it is seen as a symbol of status and they remained the oldest form of high status among the *Haida* women yet the practice has dwindled due to western influence.

According to Murano (2013), some Chinese tribes also perform particular rituals such as the vegetarian festival in Phuket which is held on the Southern Thai Island in Phuket every year in October; where mostly sharp metal objects are put in the cheeks of devotees as an act of devotion for themselves and the whole community. Among the local Thais, rods, tools and equipment’s of various lengths, widths and sizes are forced through piercings made in the cheeks of young boys. They usually ignore the pain because the ritual is a rite of passage to adulthood. McRae & Davies (2006) have also said that in Mayan, there are some wall paintings that highlight a ritual during which

noble men would pierce their tongues with thorns and the blood that drips would be collected on wood barks which are later burned in honour of the Mayan gods.

## **2.4 Roles of Body Marks**

Body marks serve different roles and in diverse cultures. This is dependent on the way the people live and what they believe in or the beliefs they have attached to the different situations in their lives. Permanent body marking is used to emphasize fixed social, political and religious roles. There are diverse reasons why body marks are made; according to Roper (2004), they are made for beautification, strength and courage, fertility, family pride and protection from death. Irving (2007) also implies that, body marks are made for medical reasons, decoration, spiritual protection and tribal or family identification. Ankrah (2012) infers that they are marks made on the body for various valid historical, cultural, medical, religious and aesthetic reasons. It can then be gathered from the roles stated above that, body marks are made for beautification, spiritual protection, identification and cultural reasons.

Coleman (2002) indicated that scarification and other forms of body decoration were traditionally considered marks of civilization. This was believed to help distinguish the civilized, socialised human body from the body in its natural state and from animals. Asaff (2004) and McRae (2013) both agree to this fact, stating that it is what differentiates the human being from animals.

Among the Tiv in Nigeria, respect is given to women with marks on their bodies because they are believed to be more sexually demanding and are more likely to have children than women without marks on their bodies (Coleman, 2002). Further in the discussion, Coleman suggested that the Tiv claim that the raised scars stay sensitive for many years and they produce erotic sensations in both men and women when touched

or stroked. McRae (2013) inferred that among the Benin, if a woman is able to withstand the pain of being scarred or being marked, she can withstand the pain of child birth.

## **2.5 Reasons for Making Body Marks**

There have been different tribes practicing the making of body marks. Some of these tribes still practice body marks while it remains a dying practice for other tribes.

Schildkrout (2004) 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. Uzobu, Olomu and Ayinmoro (2014) have said that some ethnic groups use body marks as a source of aesthetics or beautification and protection therapy. There have been a lot of reasons why body marks are made but they are further simplified by Roper (2004) and Irving (2007) that, it is for the following reasons that body marks are made:

- Beautification/ Decorative Purposes
- Identification
- Strength and Courage
- Fertility
- Family Pride/ Royalty
- Medical Reasons/ Protection from Death

### **2.5.1 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 (Cullivan, 1998).

Ibrahim (2008) stated that, most people belong to tribes that do not have specific marking yet, they choose to be scarred for the purpose of beautification. He further went on to say 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. Falola and Ngom (2009) suggested that generally, body marks were made for the purpose of beautification and that, according to some traditional surgeons, people fall in love with these marks and find the bearers attractive as it enhances beauty. 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, celebration of the onset of puberty and the first menstrual cycle (Roper, 2004).

### **2.5.2 Marks for Identification**

Different sets of people have similar body marks that differentiate them from people from different lineages or villages. Since these body marks are used mainly to differentiate ethnic groups, they vary according to the customs and preference of the lineage, village or family. Ibiyemi (2014) said that because of these variations, there are marks on the cheeks, forehead, on the temple, under the chin and so on and there are vertical lines, horizontal lines, both vertical and horizontal lines on both cheeks.

Roper (2004) also said that the cuts that are generally made on the face of a person will show the individual as belonging to a specific tribe or clan. Even with a simple tribe, people will have marks that differentiate them from people from different lineages or

villages. The parts of the body where a person is marked and the way in which the marks are made all help in identifying a person as belonging to one group or another. For example, Oshodi (2013) indicated that the Pele style of marking peculiar to the Yoruba of Nigeria has three different versions:

- i. The Pele Ijesa which are thick, half-inch vertical lines on both sides of the nose down to the mouth.
- ii. Pele Ekiti, a quarter inch horizontal line
- iii. Pele Akoko, quarter inch horizontal and vertical lines.

An individual's tribe or family typically dictates the pattern in which tribal marks are inscribed on their faces, stomachs or legs.

Body marks were used as a source of identification in ancient tradition and custom of Africa and it was a rich culture; it was also a form of legitimacy in some cultures. They were used at an augmented pace during the times of tribal war and slavery. The marks helped in identifying people as coming from a particular tribe, town or family (Thicc , 2012).

Markings and scarification's are not only used to identify people as belonging to a particular tribe, lineage, family or village; they are helpful in identifying collected objects such as Dengese figure of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Chokwe Chihongo mask of Angola and the Luluwa figure also of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

### **2.5.3 Marks for Strength and Courage**

Body marks and scarification are viewed as a test of courage. Body marking is quite painful and requires great personal strength to get through the procedure without crying

out in pain; to do so would mean humiliation. The amount of body markings and scars on a person's body correlate directly with his or her perceived strength, in other words, the more scars a person has, the more respected that person is in the community (Roper, 2004). Ulwazi (2013) states that in some tribes marks show manliness and is a sign of pride.

According to Osewa (2006), in Nigeria, some communities and families viewed these marks as marks of bravery and those without the marks were regarded as cowards who would not face a knife. A research by Rupert (2003) on the Tiv tribe suggested that in Africa, body marking serves as a symbol of strength, fortitude and courage in both men and women. The rite of acceptance into the age group as an adult is an important moment in a young man's life. It is usually a moment when one has to prove his worthiness for such a social rank. This becomes evident usually by the courage shown in enduring the painful and hard moments of marking the body. Some parts of the body where these marks are made are the chest, the upper arm and the sides of the head for males while it extends to the bellies and backs of the female according to the customs of their specific clans.

According to Murano (2013), most *Dinka* boys and girls do not cry when the local sorcerer takes a red-hot knife to their dark faces. It is believed that if they wince or cry or even show the least bit of reaction to the pain they will lose face in the community hence they sit peacefully through the whole process. Murano further expatiated that, men of the *Dinka* tribe in the South Sudan scar their faces with three parallel lines across the forehead in a rugged display of courage to their tribe and that, boys receive their scars around adolescence to mark their transition to manhood, when they take the responsibilities of the other men in the nomadic tribe.

#### **2.5.4 Marks for Fertility**

An article from the Gallery Ezakwantu indicated that a woman's eagerness to tolerate pain 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. Different designs were later added from youth and continued through adulthood.

Body marking was especially prized among young women of marriageable age. These abdominal scars, as stated earlier, were seen as an indicator of a woman's willingness to bear children. According to Roper (2004), among some African cultures, this was considered as a very desirable quality in a future wife. The scars are looked upon as erogenous due to their tender nature and it was believed to make a woman more receptive to her husband's sexual intentions and sometimes increase the libido of a man.

#### **2.5.5 Marks for Family Pride and Royalty**

In Akiga's story, body marks proved to be of great importance to the people of Tiv. They believed that it separated the "Bush people" and the Fulani; they also saw body marking to be a matter of family pride. One coming of age ceremony for a young man includes asking his sisters to endure a ritual beating that leaves their backs scarred and bloody. The scars are viewed as signs of love and respect from the sisters for their brother and the girls have to endure the ritual without showing their pain. This, they believed, brings honour and pride to the entire family.

Ichi-marks were marks made on the face, worn by mainly the men of the Igbo people of South-East Nigeria. This particular mark indicates that the wearer has passed through

initial initiation into the highest society thus, marking the wearer as nobility (Thicc , 2012).

### **2.5.6 Marks for Medical Reasons**

Spirituality plays an important role in African culture and many Africans believe in the presence of spirits around them; both good and evil. There are some people who are thought to die and return back to life countless times. Among the Ga-Dangme such people are called “*gbo balo*” or “*gbo balihi*”. They are marked several times on their faces to make them less desirable to the spirit of death for them to stay and get a chance to live their lives (Ankrah, 2012). In Nigeria, they are termed as “*abiku*” and seven marks evenly placed on both sides of the cheeks are given to them, also to prevent the spirit of death from consuming them (Oshodi, 2013).

According to Uzobu *et al.*, (2014), 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. Most times, these marks are made on any part of the body where the ailment infects and various medications are inserted into the scars to heal them of these ailments.

### **2.6 Perceptions of Body Marks**

Perception (from the Latin *perceptio*, *percipio*) is the organisation, identification and interpretation of sensory information in order to represent and understand the environment (Goldstein, 2009). From Goldstein’s definition, identification and interpretation of anything is from the information the mind provides to represent the

understanding of the environment. If the mind is providing the information according to what the mind sees as right, there is a tendency of this information given to be what the mind wants it to appear as. Simply put, every individual has a way of perceiving things; this gives rise to different opinions from different people at different times.

Perceiving is a process comparable with discriminating, differentiating and observing. The term is customarily used to refer to relatively complex receptor and neural processes which underlie our awareness of ourselves and our world (Munn, 1946). The perception of objects, situations and relationships is often correlated with particular overt reaction, for example, if a detour leads off to the right, one is likely to take it, if not the path is continued as it is or when we perceive that a package is heavy we automatically use both hands to lift it, otherwise we use one hand. Munn (1946) further states that in general when we perceive a difference between objects, we behave differently towards each of them and when we do not perceive a difference we fail to exhibit differential behaviour. Similarly, body marks nowadays, are perceived as negative due to the lack of understanding of the meanings behind them and they have been perceived by individuals differently. Ozongwu (2013) said that there has been the impression that people with body marks are uneducated and live in rural areas.

Everyone has a way of perceiving things. Some perceptions towards a phenomenon can be negative and others could be positive. Body marks generally have raised questions and concerns. By some perceptions, it is a negative rite that needs to be abolished and for others it is a form of religious and traditional identification that should still be practiced.

Akanle (2013) also stated that “people with body marks are given the identity of being local persons”. Many people do not want to associate themselves with other people who

have marks on their face attaching a sense of stigmatisation to the issue of body marks (Adshina, 2013). From the different views stated above, it is quite evident that the issue of body marks is a delicate one that has been misinterpreted and is not clearly understood. These misconceptions have led to the issue at hand and the reason for embarking on this research. According to Wolmer (2014) it is even a misconception to believe that some marks mean nothing at all if you, as an individual, are unaware of the meaning.

## **2.7 Body Marks and Culture**

The existence of different cultures and the rise of different ethnic groups have brought about various patterns of beautification which necessitated some forms of human body markings. These body markings conveyed their own meanings such as information of status, identification, power and beauty (Rainer, 2006). The link between culture and body marks seems to be narrow and to understand this, the definition of culture will be considered extensively.

Culture as defined by Lederach (1995) are shared patterns of behaviours and interactions, intellectual or cognitive constructs and affective understanding that is learned through a socialization process. It is the shared knowledge and the schemes that a group of people create for perceiving, interpreting, expressing and responding to all the social realities around them. Bodley (1994) defines culture as the thoughts, behaviours, languages, customs, the things a group of people produce and the various methods they use in producing them. Jervis (2006) sums it all up by defining culture as what a group of people think, what they do and the material products they produce.

Culture is also a manifestation of a group or a community and of an individual's experience within the community and away from the community; it could simply be a

membership in a discourse community that share a common social space and history with common imaginings (Levy, 2007). According to Ajala (2011) the total way of life followed by members of a society is what is generally termed as culture. It is also a tradition and a social legacy which an individual acquires from his group.

Taylor (n. d) as cited in Preserve Articles (2011) finally defines culture as the complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of a society.

From the above stated definitions there is a common inkling that culture in summary is the way a group of people behave, what they believe and what they are coined from. It is in no way different to state that body marking forms a part of a particular group of peoples' culture as it is passed down from generation to generation and the people attach meaning to these marks based on their way of life. According to Achilike (2013) there are highly religious, cultural and basic identification reasons attached to body marking in most societies and amongst most ethnic groups in Africa. Due to this link between culture and body marking, it is evident that there are a plethora of reasons why the practice of body marking is still relevant today.

Teav and Sok (2013) state that culture is divided into three most important parts and these parts also carry their own sub sections;

- Knowledge: Beliefs, Moral, Religion, Sciences
- Practice: Tradition, Learning, Education, Law
- Information: Literature, Language, Information/Media

Religion is the belief in and worship of a supernatural controlling power especially a personal god or gods. It is a particular system of faith and worship and is said to include rituals, sermons, commemoration, sacrifices, festivals, meditation and other aspects of

human culture. According to James and Mandaville (2010) religion remains a relatively bound system of beliefs, symbols and practices. These beliefs, symbols and practices address the nature of existence in which communion with others is lived and it both takes in and spiritually transcends socially grounded ontologies of time, space, embodiment and knowledge.

It is therefore acceptable that to follow religion and to stay in tune with one's culture certain practices will be performed to maintain a spiritual contact and such practices include festivals and other cultural practices which body marks fall under. Taking the close relation religion has with culture, it is therefore right to say that all the tentacles of culture with body marks are closely related to each other.

According to Ossai-Ugbah and Ogunrombi (2012) body marking identifies different tribes and ethnic groups, giving them the privilege to be easily identified while provoking close unity among a group of people.

Taking another definition of culture, Zimmerman (2012) states that, it is the characteristics of a particular group of people defined by everything from language, religion, cuisine, social habits, music and arts. Culture was also defined as, the shared patterns of behaviours and interactions, cognitive constructs and affective understanding that are learned through a process of socialization (CARLA, 2014).

According to Oshodi (2013) body marks are a common art among certain tribes where the marks and designs are used as identification, beautification and a form of protection. For example, the „*oria*” designs of the Yoruba have a typically symbolic significance that is connected to various life stages such as puberty and marriage. McRae (2013) also suggests that body marking is a story of sorts that is read by fellow countrymen which tells a tale of the bearer and his or her ancestors and it shows a genetic line that

stretches beyond human memory. This is an indication that, body marking forms an integral part of one's culture and it provides a genetic link from a past ancestor to a current descendent of that ancestor in relation to various ethnic groups in West Africa and some parts of Ethiopia.

Though modern Africa is not fighting tradition, it is disputing the historical rules, practices and superstitions that claim to assign individuals to their tribes or clans. Aside this fact, Ozongwu (2013) states that when marks of beauty are made among some African tribes for the girls during their puberty, the value of their cultural adornment is normal and accepted. Ayeni (2004) also states that the mere fact that the practice of body marking is still performed in some parts of Africa is an authentication to the high social value placed on the practice.

From some characteristics of culture as stated by Kumar (2011) being social as it does not exist in isolation and it is also not an individual phenomenon. It is a product of society and it originates and develops through social interaction; body marks then forms part of the culture of a group of people as its existence and understanding is shared by members of the society. It is therefore right to say that, body marking and culture are heavily embedded and intertwined with each other as it is a part of some of these cultures that an individual be marked for the sake of identification (and other reasons) to that particular culture.

# KNUST

The logo of Kenya Methodist University (KNUST) is centered in the background. It features a yellow eagle with its wings spread, perched on a green shield. Above the eagle is a black mortar and pestle with a red flame rising from it. Below the eagle is a yellow banner with the Swahili motto 'WAINAPAKUWA SANE NINABALWEIMA'.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

#### 3.0 Overview

This chapter describes the methodology employed in undertaking the research and obtaining relevant data on body marks. The materials for the study were obtained from various sources, but by the very nature of the research the techniques that were employed were historical findings from libraries and other sources as well as fieldwork, where oral information were derived from interviews and conversations with the bearers of body marks, people who had information about the marks and the some non-bearers of body marks in the selected Dangme groups. This chapter focused on the research

design, the population for the study, the sampling techniques and the data collection procedures.

### **3.1 Research Design**

The study made use, mainly, of the qualitative approach; with personal interviews to gather data on the body marks. In the quest to understand the meanings attached to body marks among the Dangmes, the qualitative research method proved to be the best option; in that, it allowed the researcher to study and understand the Dangmes and the various meanings they have constructed and attached to their lives, in line with the body marks as Merriam (2009) 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. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) also assert that qualitative research method makes data collection easier when a group of people are studied in their natural setting and their understanding of different phenomena are explained. In this thesis, the use of the qualitative research method made data collection easier because the Dangmes were studied in their natural setting and the phenomena, which in this case are the body marks, were interpreted according to the meanings that the Dangmes bring to them.

Sandel (1989) states that qualitative research is a type of research providing detailed narrative descriptions and explanations of phenomena investigated with lesser emphasis given to numerical qualifications. The methods used include ethnographic practices such as observing and interviewing. In this case, the body marks of the Dangmes were described in detail and the meanings were expatiated with less prominence on the statistical aspect of data collection. Sibanda (2009) supports this by stating that, the relevant data when gathered can be generalized across the group of people in a study.

The data that was gathered aided in generalizing its results across the people of Ningo, Gbugbla (Prampram) and Ada.

The main reason for the use of the qualitative research method was because; the method focused on the descriptive aspect of the study. The descriptive method involved the narrative facet; what these body marks are and their cultural interpretations which rendered the data collection procedure valid. According to Kusi (2011) the natural setting of interest is the direct source of data, in that, the locale of a selected group is where data collection is most relevant and most concrete. He further states that qualitative research is mostly concerned with how people make sense out of their lives and it focuses on the perspectives of the subject of a study. This research focused on understanding the cultural ramifications of body marks according to the lives of the Dangmes and also the opinions of other people about these marks.

### **3.1.1 Survey Research**

Survey research is a very valuable tool for accessing opinions and trends which can dramatically change strategies (Shuttleworth, 2012). According to Bell (1999) survey is aimed at obtaining information from a representative selection of a population and from this population a sample is drawn. The findings from the sample are meant to be representative of the entire population. In this research, a sample is drawn from the entire population of the people of Ningo, Prampram and Ada and this sample were able to present the findings as being representative of the Dangmes in Ningo, Prampram and Ada. According to Shaughnessy, Zechmeister and Jeanne (2011) survey research is often used to assess thoughts, opinions and feelings and survey research can also be specific and limited or it can have more global widespread goals. Kusi (2011) also indicated that survey research involves a set of methods used to gather data in a

systematic way from a range of individuals, organizations or other units of interest. This study made use of the survey research through interviews to seek the opinions, thoughts and feelings and meanings of the body marks among the Dangme groups that were selected pertaining to their culture.

### **3.1.2 Case Study**

Case study is a descriptive, exploratory or explanatory analysis of a person, group or event. An explanatory case study is used to explore causation in order to find underlying principles. Case studies may be prospective or retrospective (Shepard & Greene, 2003). This was therefore used to describe, explore and explain the body marks that were found among the Dangme groups and were later analysed. According to Leedy and Ormrod (2005) a case study is a research method that looks into a particular individual(s), program(s), event(s) or subject(s) in depth for a defined period of time. The research therefore focused on both bearers and non-bearers of the body marks and sought information about them from the inhabitants of the selected communities for the period in which the field research took place.

Siegfried (2005) also stated that a case study is said to be a research strategy, an empirical enquiry that investigates a phenomenon within its real-life context. Generally, this research made use of the case study to enquire and acquire information about the cultural interpretation of body marks and explain it as it is in the context of the culture of the Ga-Dangmes.

### **3.2 Population for the Study**

Noheli (2011) defines a population as a well-defined collection of individuals or objects known to have similar characteristics. The number of people that are covered during a study is the population. In other words, it is a set of people under consideration in a

study hence; Population is generally a large collection of individuals such as the Dangmes in Ningo, Prampram and Ada who form the main focus the study to be conducted. According to Explorable (2009) a research population is known as a well-defined collection of individuals or objects known to have similar or common bonding characteristics or traits. Jobling, Hurles and TylerSmith (2003) also defined population as a group of people who share a common language and can communicate with each other and have similar characteristics such as language, cultural practices, beliefs, norms and sometimes preferences. For the sake of this study, the population used were the Dangmes in Ningo, Prampram and Ada.

### **3.2.1 Target Population**

Cox (2013) defines target population as an entire set of units for which a survey data is to be used to make inferences. According to Lavrakas (2008) the target population defines those units for which the findings of the survey are meant to generalise. Explorable (2009) also defines target population as an entire unit to which a research is interested on generalising conclusions. The target population for this research were the selected Dangme groups

- Inhabitants of Ningo
- Inhabitants of Prampram and
- Inhabitants of Ada

All of whom are with or without body marks.

### **3.2.2 Accessible Population**

Mack (2014) defines the accessible population as a group that a researcher can actually measure. According to Trochim (2000) it is a group that is usually smaller than the

target population. An accessible population can also be a group of people that can easily be reached by a researcher and whom a conclusion could easily be generalized upon. The accessible population for this study were selected Dangmes in Ningo, Prampram and Ada with or without body marks, all of whom were able to be interviewed extensively by the researcher. The total accessible population was 90 respondents; 30 from each of the three Dangme groups.

### **3.3 Sampling Technique**

It is nearly impossible to study every single individual in the population of a study. The population of the Dangme is large in size and an attempt to study every individual will be expensive, time consuming and almost impossible. To make the research cost effective, less expensive and less time consuming, researchers developed the sampling technique. Farmer, Miller and Lawrenson (1996) have stated that, sampling is a method that allows researchers to infer information about issues from a subset of a population without having to investigate every individual. According to Pelham and Blanton (2006) sampling helps researchers to make decisions of limiting the research to a subset of the population and in so doing; it has an important implication for the applicability of the study results. A sample is often defined as a subset of a population to be studied. The information about body marks were inferred from the sample size of the Dangmes without having to interview every individual who resides in the selected Dangme groups. The main decision of limiting the research to the subset of the population of the Dangmes is what made the results applicable.

Kusi (2011) stated that sampling is the process of choosing actual data sources from a larger set of possibilities. Agrawala (2010) also defines sampling as a statistical process of selecting and studying the characteristics of a relatively small number. The Dangmes

that were interviewed by the researcher for the relevant information were chosen from the relatively large population of the Dangmes residing in Ningo, Gbugbla (Prampram) and Ada to draw statistically valid inferences about the characteristics of the entire population.

The data collected for this study were from some traditional leaders, elders (the elderly in the society) and youth, with ages ranging from 18 years to 40 years, living in the community with ample information about body marks and some of the bearers of the different types of body marks. The total sample size extracted from the accessible population was 60 respondents. The main form of data collection was by interview and the information received from the interviews was used in the data analysis.

### **3.3.1 Purposive Sampling**

Purposive sampling is a form of non-probability sampling in which decisions concerning an individual are taken by a researcher. The criteria for this may be due to the specialist knowledge of the individual or the willingness on the individual's part to partake in the research (Oliver, 2006). Also known as judgemental sampling, in purposive sampling, the subjects are selected based on their knowledge, a particular characteristic or the purpose of the study (Crossman, 2014). In purposive sampling, researchers use their expert judgement to select participants that are representative of the population. The researcher considers the factors that might influence the population and purposefully selects a sample that adequately represents the target population on the variables needed for the research (Korb, 2012). According to Leedy and Ormrod (2005) purposive sampling is used in qualitative research in order to select those individuals who can give the most information about the topic under investigation. Thus, the participants or respondents chosen for the study had adequate information

about body marks among the selected Dangme groups. Tongco (2006) purports that the purposive sampling technique is the deliberate choice of an informant due to the qualities the informant possesses. Bernard (2002) asserts that purposive sampling is a non-random technique that does not need underlying theories or a set number of informants. Kumeckpor (2002) also stated that purposive sampling is carried out intentionally in order to select respondents for the study because these respondents are believed to provide better information that was helpful to the study; hence, the respondents selected for this study were chosen based on their in-depth knowledge about body marks.

### **3.3.2 Snowball Sampling**

Goodman (1961) terms snowball sampling as chain sampling or chain-referral sampling and it is a non-probability sampling technique where already existing subjects refer to possible future subjects among their friends and associates. Morgan (2008) compares this to an analogy of a snowball increasing in size as it rolls down a hill. In the comparison it is stated that this technique is used to obtain information from extended associations through previous acquaintances. This metaphor is used because as relationships are built from previous associations, relevant information could be shared and collected. Trochim (2000) simplifies this by stating that one respondent who meets the criteria of the study is idled out and this respondent is asked to recommend others who are also possible to meet the criteria. Berg (2006) supports this point by stating that the first subject refers the researcher to a friend; the friend also refers to another friend and so on. Snowball sampling was used in this study to gather necessary information on the body marks as not all the members in the accessible population could provide the information that was relevant and relates to the subject at hand. The respondents

who could provide the appropriate information for the study were asked to recommend other acquaintances that could also provide the necessary information for the study.

### **3.4 Data Collection**

According to Hawe, Degeling and Hall (1990) data are usually collected through qualitative and quantitative methods. Qualitative approaches as being used in this thesis aims to address the „why“ and „how“ of the problem. The qualitative approach also uses unstructured methods of data collection to fully explore the topic. Hansen *et al.*, (2005) deem it appropriate to use the mixed methods research saying that they may mean a number of things, that is, a number of different types of methods in a study or at different points within a study. This was confirmed by Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2009) when they stated that mixed methods encompasses multifaceted approaches that combine to capitalise on strengths and reduce weaknesses that stem from using a single research design. Using this approach to gather and evaluate data may assist to increase the validity and reliability of the research. This is the reason why surveys, interviews and observations were used for this particular project. This helped in reducing the weaknesses of each approach where the other was lacking.

Nalzar (2012) states that data collection is the process by which a researcher collects the information needed to answer the research problem. The selection of data collection instruments should be based on the following:

- The identified research problem
- The research design and;
- The information gathered about the variables

For this research, the data was collected using mainly interviews to gather information about body marks that proved relevant in providing possible answers to the research questions and attempting to solve the research problem.

### **3.4.1 Primary Data**

Primary data is collected by a researcher with a specific goal in mind. It may be collected through surveys, focus groups, in-depth interviews or through experiments. The primary data for this research were collected from some traditional leaders, elders (the elderly in the society) and youth, with ages ranging from 18 years to 40 years, all of whom were bearers and non-bearers of body marks who had ample information about body marks. This was done mostly through face-to-face interviews and observation.

### **3.4.2 Secondary Data**

Secondary data is data that has been previously collected by another researcher. Secondary data offers savings in both time and cost (Curtis, 2008). Secondary data was collected from the General Art Studies Library in the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, the George Padmore African Research Library in Accra, different related theses, books, publications, journal articles and documents from the internet.

## **3.5 Data Collection Instruments**

The research made use of two main instruments that aided in the data collection procedure. These instruments are interview and observation.

### **3.5.1 Interview**

Interview is a conversation between two or more people where questions are asked by the interviewer to stimulate facts and statements from the person being interviewed.

According to Seidman (1998) qualitative research interviews seek to describe the meanings of central themes and the main task of interviewing is to understand the meanings of what the interviewee says. The central themes in this case are the body marks and the meanings are derived from what was constructed by the Dangmes in relation to their beliefs and norms. He further stated that it is a technique used to understand the experiences of others. Weiss (1994) also stated that compared to something like a written survey, interview allows for a significantly higher degree of intimacy with the participants often revealing personal information to their interviewers in a real-time, face-to-face setting. The interview was the main form of data collection tool used in this study. The face-to-face interview approach was used as it helped the researcher identify those with body marks and it also made it easier for the respondents to share the needed information.

There are mainly two forms of interview and these are structured and semi-structured interviews. Structured interview, according to Moore (2014) are interviews where all the interviewees are asked the same questions and asked to choose answers from among the same set of alternatives. This format is useful for those not practiced in interviewing. This means that the questions are predetermined and they are asked precisely as they are worded in the same order for each interviewee. The researcher then records the responses and makes it a point not to deviate from the prepared questions. Semi-structured interview on the other hand is a data collection mode characterised by predetermined questions or themes; however, interviewers have the flexibility to augment prepared questions with others that emerge from exchanges with the interviewees (Sandel, 1989). This type of interview allows the free flow of other questions and answers that are generated from the interaction with the interviewees. The semi-structured interview method was adopted for the study because, it allowed for

the respondents to provide information freely and this information gave rise to other questions that were answered and aided in the better understanding of the meanings of body marks among the three Dangme groups.

Seidman (1998) listed out some characteristics an interview should possess; whether structured or semi-structured. They are the following:

- Listening
- Asking questions to follow up and clarify
- Be respectful of boundaries
- Beware of leading questions (questions that suggest or imply an answer)
- Do not interrupt; and
- Make the participant feel comfortable

The above characteristics were followed strictly and this helped in achieving answers to both written and unwritten questions all in the pursuit of understanding the cultural interpretation of the body marks present among the Dangmes. As personal interviews were conducted, the main medium of communication was the Ada language as most of the respondents, though familiar with the English language, were much more comfortable expressing themselves in their local dialect. The English language became the main medium of communication among some of the youth in the society.

### **3.5.2 Observation**

According to Kawulich (2005), observation, particularly participant observation has been used in a variety of disciplines as a tool for collecting data about people, processes and their culture in qualitative research. Observation enabled the researcher to describe existing situations using the five senses and providing a “written photograph” of the subject under study (Erlandson, Harris , Skipper, & Allen, 1993); the subject under

study in this thesis is the interpretation of body marks among the Dangmes. DeMunck and Sobo (1998) describe participant observation as the primary method used by anthropologists doing fieldwork. Fieldwork, according to DeWalt and DeWalt (2002), is the process that enables a researcher to learn about the activities of a group of people living in their natural setting through observing and participating in those activities; hence the fieldwork is what aided the study of the Dangmes living in Ningo, Gbugbla (Prampram) and Ada as that was their natural setting. DeWalt and DeWalt (2002) further stated that it is the active looking, improving memory, informal interviewing, and the detailed writing of field notes and perhaps most importantly patience on the part of the researcher.

Schmuck (1997) asserts that observation provides a researcher with ways to check for nonverbal expressions of feelings, determining who interacts with whom, grasp how a group of people communicate with each other and check for how much time is spent on various activities. Kawulich (2005) also specifies that participant observation allows researchers to check for the definition of terms that participants use in interview, observe events that the informants may be unwilling to share when doing so will be impolitic, impolite or insensitive and observe situations that informants have described in interviews, thereby making them aware of distortions or inaccuracies in description provided by those informants.

Schensul *et al.*, (1999) listed certain reasons for using participant observation in research:

1. To identify and guide relationships with informants
2. To help the researcher get the feel for how things are organized and prioritized, how people interrelate and what cultural parameters exist.

3. To show the researcher what the cultural members deem to be important in manners, leadership, politics, social interaction and taboos.
4. To help the researcher become known to the cultural members, thereby easing facilitation of the research process.
5. To provide the researcher with a source of questions to be addressed with the participants.

The above reasons proved to be relevant during the research as they provided the researcher with the necessary information almost effortlessly. The relationship between the inhabitants of Ningo, Prampram and Ada was easily established such that, though they were aware of the on-going research, there was the flow of information from the both the researcher and the people. From the history of the practice of body marks provided, there was a clear distinction of how things were done among the Dangmes and there was also a structure of how they were done as defined by the culture of the three ethnic groups. There was also the meaning of what body marks are when it comes to the Dangmes and whether or not they were necessary to have at certain stages in one's life. Observation helped the researcher get acquainted with the Dangmes as there was no language barrier which in turn aided in the asking of the right questions and gathering of relevant data.

Gold (1958) also listed four observation stances suitable for qualitative research, these are:

1. **Complete Participant:** This is an extreme where the researcher becomes a member of the group being studied by concealing his or her role as a researcher so as not to disrupt normal activity. The disadvantage of this stance is that, the members of the group may feel distrustful of the researcher when the research

is revealed hence the ethics of the situation are questionable since the group members are being deceived.

2. **Participant as Observer:** This is the stance where the researcher is a member of the group being studied but the group is aware of the on-going research activity. In this stance, the researcher, who is a member of the group, is more interested in observing than in participating. There is also a disadvantage to this role in that, the depth of data revealed to the researcher may not be solid as there is usually low confidentiality provided to and from the group.
3. **Observer as Participant:** This stance enables the researcher to participate in the group activities as desired, yet the main role of the researcher is to collect data and the group being studied is aware of the researcher's observation activities. In this stance, the researcher is an observer who is not a member of the group and who is interested in participating as a means for conducting better observation and hence generating a more complete understanding of the group's activities.
4. **Complete Observer:** The researcher in this stance is completely hidden from view while observing. It could also be the stance where the researcher is in plain sight in a public setting, yet the public being studied is unaware of being observed. In both cases, the observation is unobtrusive and unknown to the participants.

Observation was used for this study because the researcher was able to participate in the activities of the Dangmes when required in order to gather information. Observation was also used to help take the appropriate field notes to record the surveillances made and to check for non-verbal expression of feelings. The people in Ningo, Prampram and

Ada were aware of the on-going research hence they provided the needed information for the study.

Through it all, Merriam (1998) states that “where to begin looking depends on the research question, but where to focus or stop action cannot be determined ahead of time”. The research questions for this study as stated earlier are

1. What types of body marks exist among the Dangmes?
2. What is the cultural significance of the body marks identified among the Dangmes?

The cultural significance from the definition of the terms is the religious, social, educational, political and medical meanings attached to body marks. The questions asked were channelled in a way that provided answers for the research questions.

### **3.6 Data Collection Procedure**

The main form of data collection for this report was done through interviews and the data was collected from traditional leaders, elders (the elderly in the community) and the youth (18 years - 40 years). Data was collected from 90 respondents which formed the accessible population; 30 from each of the selected communities, that is, Ningo, Prampram and Ada. Out of the 90 respondents, a sample of 60 was drawn and the information provided by the sample was used in the discussion of the results and findings. Table 3.1 indicates the number of respondents in the sample in relation to the sexes.

***Table 3.1: Table showing the sexes of the respondents***

<b>Sex of Respondents</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Female	45	75%
Male	15	25%

	60	100%
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From the table above, the number of female respondents representing 75% of the total sample size of 60 were 45 in number and the male respondents representing 25% of the sample size of 60 were 15 in number.

**Table 3.2: Table showing the number of respondents with and without body marks**

<b>Variations</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Respondents with body marks	30	50%
Respondents without body marks	30	50%
	60	100%

Data from both bearers and non-bearers of body marks were needed to solve the problem of knowledge about body marks and to tackle the issue of stigmatization hence, an equal number was required of both the bearers and non-bearers of body marks. 30 of the respondents from the sample size had body marks while the other 30 did not have body marks.

The respondents from whom data was collected were traditional leaders, elders (the elderly in the community) and the youth as shown in Table 3.3. The number of traditional leaders from the sample size was represented by 15% of the total sample who were 9 in all; 3 from each ethnic group, that is, 3 from Ningo, 3 from Prampram and 3 from Ada. The next variable or group of respondents were the elders (the elderly in the community), they formed 40% of the total sample as they had ample information about the interpretations of the body marks identified. The total number of elderly people in the community from the sample size was 24.

**Table 3.3: Table showing the variables (various groups of respondents)**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Traditional leaders	9	15%
Elders (41 and above)	24	40%
Youth (18-40)	27	45%
	60	100%

The rest of the 45% according to the sample size were the youth, with ages ranging from 18 years to 40 years and they were 27 in number.

There were 20 respondents from Ningo, 16 from Prampram and 24 from Ada; all these respondents fall under the groupings of traditional leaders, elders (the elderly in the community) and the youth. As shown in Table 3.4; 3 out of the 20 respondents from Ningo were traditional leaders, 8 of them were the elderly in the community and the remaining 9 were the youth from whom data was collected making a subtotal of 33.3%. Again, 3 of the 16 respondents, represented by 26.7%, from Prampram were traditional leaders leaving 13 of the respondents divided into 7 and 6 who were represented by the elders and the youth respectively. Ada also had 3 traditional leaders, 9 elders and 12 youth making 24 in all also making a subtotal of 40% of the sample size.

**Table 3.4: Table showing the variables and their frequency**

	<b>Traditional leaders</b>	<b>Elders</b>	<b>Youth</b>	<b>Total</b>
Ningo	3	8	9	20
Prampram	3	7	6	16
Ada	3	9	12	24
Total Sample Size	9	24	27	60

### **3.7 Administration of Interview**

By the very nature of the interview schedule, the questions were asked in a particularly explicit order such that the respondents provided answers to questions based on their tribal origins. There was then the build-up to more interactive questioning and answering where detailed questions about body marks were asked and the respondents provided corresponding answers.

### **3.8 Validation of Data**

Sarantakos (1994) has asserted that validity is a methodological element not only of the quantitative but also of qualitative research. In other words, it is a quality that data gathering instruments have that enables them to determine whether or not the data is reliable. Interview guide and observations were employed to collect data from respondents. Ahead of the data collection, the authenticity and clarification of the questions were checked, the questions were presented to peers and some lecturers both for review and to make them error free. The main reason for doing this was to be sure the questions were clear and easily understandable.

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## CHAPTER FOUR

### PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

#### 4.0 Overview

This chapter presents the analysis and discussion of data gathered from the fieldwork. Data collected and collated through the use of interviews were transliterated in narrative and descriptive forms. The chapter discusses in detail the history of body marks among the Dangmes, the names of the body marks found in Ningo, Prampram and Ada, the reasons for performing the body marks identified and the cultural interpretation of the body marks found.

#### 4.1 History of Body Marks among the Dangmes

The selected Dangme groups have all spent a great deal of time together from their migration to their current settlement hence there exist some similarities in their language, cultural practices and the like (Ankrah, 2013). 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 hail 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 Dangmes.

In the past, body marking was done based on the family the bearer comes from. Though 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 Dangmes 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 Dangmes believed in the existence of a spiritual world aside the physical one in which we live. For something to manifest in this world, they believed that it has to have happened in the spiritual world. In past years, before body marking is done, the help of a traditional priest or priestess is needed and these priests or priestesses were consulted to verify the identity of a child the moment the child is 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 get the concern 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*; 3<sup>rd</sup> 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 is made and this attaches spiritual reverence to the practice of body marking. Spirituality as defined by Murray & Zentner (1989) 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 Dangmes is very important as it forms the basis of their lives and though there is civilization and religious growth, the lives of most Dangmes are shaped by their belief in mysticism.

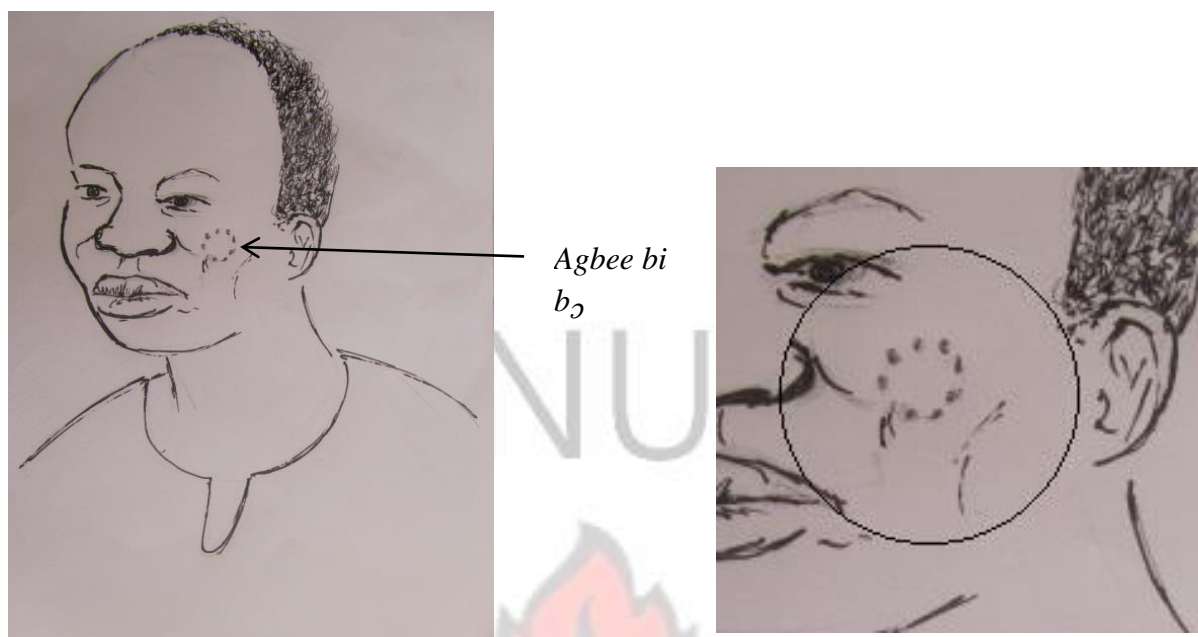
The spiritual attachment body marking has is what makes it a continuing practice among families in the traditional areas. This is because there is the fear that members of the society will be punished by the gods if certain practices are not observed appropriately, one of such practices is the art of body marking. For instance, where it is demanded by the soul or by the gods that a child be marked and the family chooses to disobey, there is the belief that the wrath of the gods will be upon that particular family. On other occasions, spiritual advice is needed before undergoing any type of body marking and spiritual leaders or traditional healers are consulted before any form of body marking takes place. The consultation of these traditional healers and spiritual leaders is usually done to be certain not to offend any spirits during the act of body marking and also because the spiritual leaders and traditional healers serve as intermediaries between the gods and the people.

Hypothetically, there may be no punishment that is rendered onto the family by the gods and ancestors yet the mere fear of the fact that something bad might happen to one's family is what draws members of the society to obey the laws of the gods. The fear of the gods taught members of the society to obey laws and do as they were told. This can be further expatiated in relation to „the ultimate reality of the gods“ with ultimate reality

defined by Meister (2012) as the belief about a transcendent reality underlying the natural, physical world. He further explained by stating that ultimate reality is conceived of and described in terms of a personal God who is creator and sustainer of all and perfect in every respect. “*Ultimism*” is an opinion of ultimate reality that is articulated by Schellenberg (2005) that the best one can do from a religious perspective is to have faith that there exists a metaphysically and axiologically ultimate reality and that from this reality an ultimate good can be attained. In the researcher's point of view, with reference to the above stated points about ultimate reality and “*Ultimism*”, the Dangmes had no option but to believe in the gods who they saw as their protectors and to hope that whatever reasons the gods had for asking them to go through certain practices was for a greater good and for their own benefits.

#### **4.1.1 Commencement of Body Marks**

Adjonyo (2014) stated that body marking started among the people of Ada when desperate women in need of children started consulting oracles and deities for help. 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* (as seen in Figure 4.1). When these children obtained from deities grew older they were sometimes made to serve these deities.



***Figure 4.1: Agbee bi bɔ on the left cheek of the figure***

***Source: Illustration by Sylvester Lumor***

Most of the children who are conceived by the help of these deities often do not only have the body marks but some also have special names that identify them as such.

Adjonyo (2014) further indicated that the people reasoned 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 child birth 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.

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, *Adjoyo 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 Ningbo 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 and leaves 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 grounded 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 *Tovoe* 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. 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. The main purpose of use of these three items was:

**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 being 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 depended on the state of the child who is thought to be deceased considering the fact that in those days there were no medical equipment's to test if the child was actually dead. Then,

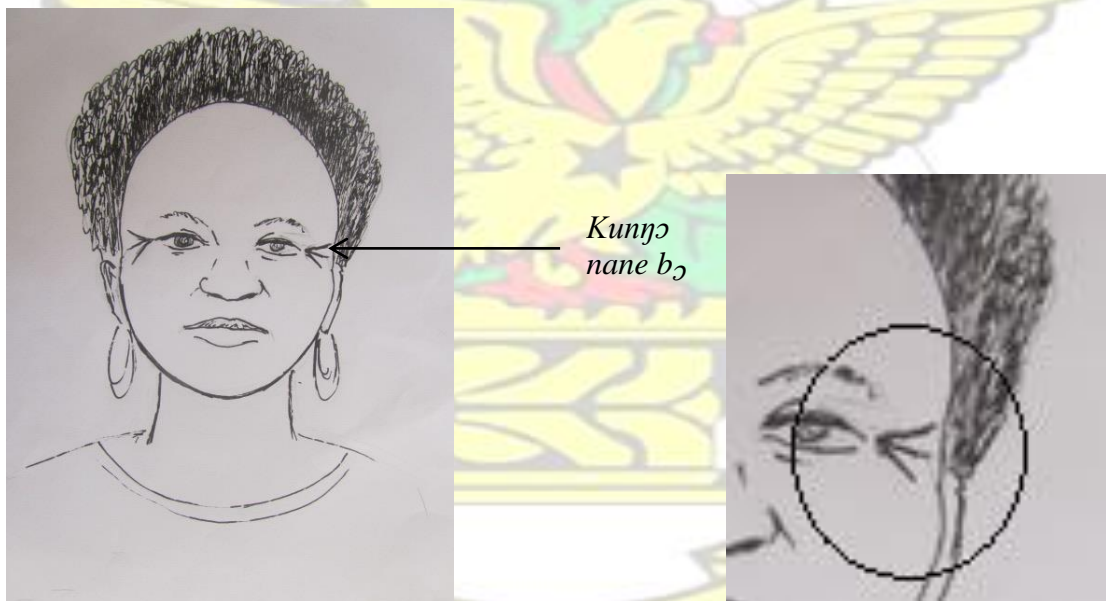
**Cutting the face of the child;** for this, the kitchen knife is used to make incisions on the face of the child particularly close to her eyes and on the sides of her mouth. According to Taylor (1999) there are vital arteries that provide oxygenated blood to the brain and organs in the head including 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. Finally,

**Application of the black powder;** this is not just any powder but one from the combination of various herbs such as *nyenyraa* commonly known as hyssop

(*Hyssopus officinalis*), *nya ba* (literally meaning „mouth leaf“) and *to lilɛ* (literally meaning „goat tongue“) commonly known as Tigernut grass (*Cyperus esculentus* L.) that contain healing abilities that can save and heal the child completely.

The child was first naked and was placed into the hole; she was then “snatched” out of the hole. After this, *Tovoe* started with his incantations; shortly after he was done 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 as seen in Figure 4.2. 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 was made up of various herbs which could help in healing the child and stop the child from bleeding.



**Figure 4.2:** Three diagonal lines close to the right and left eye showing the *Kunɔ nane bɔ* (mark of the feet of the cock)

**Source:** Illustration by Sylvester Lumor

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 northerner and asked “*Yie bi ke ehe feo no ma gbo 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, the pain of the father was felt by the soul of the child thereby waking her up.

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*, 14<sup>th</sup> September, 2014).

There is a long line of narratives when it comes to the history of body marking among the selected Dangme groups and Dangmes 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 Names of Body Marks**

Body marks found in various parts of Ghana are usually addressed by the name of the first practitioner, the part of the body where it is found or a general name that has been accepted by the people (Nubuor, 1985). The names of the body marks found in Ningo, Prampram and Ada are mostly based on the part of the body where the marking was made or the reason for which the mark was made. In all the three traditional groups body marking is generally termed as “*bo pomi*”. “*Bo pomi*” has its origin from „*bo*”

which simply means mark and „*pomi*“ which means the act of cutting something, making it the ideal term since it means the cutting of a mark. There are no variations in the name of these marks due to the similarities in the language and other salient parts of the culture of the people of Ningo, Gbugbla (Prampram) and Ada. Some of the names of body marks identified during the study include:

***Table 4.1: Table indicating the names and literal meaning of the body marks identified***

NAMES OF BODY MARKS	LITERAL TRANSLATION
Gbeba	“Die and come back”
So gbɔ ɔ	“Clan mark”
Sɛ ɔ	“Chair mark”
Fɛo ɔ	“Beauty mark”
Akaba	“Slash”
Kunɔ nane ɔ	“Mark of the feet of a cock”
Semi ɔ	“Back mark”
Joku-joku	“Strokes”
Pusu hiɔ ɔ	“Heavens sickness mark”
Blɔ kpɛ bi/ Agbee bi ɔ	“Middle of the road child”/ “Child of a deity”

#### 4.2.1 Gbeba

The term “*gbeba*” is the same as what the Nigerians term “*abiku*”, and it is a mark given to a child believed to die every time it is born. *Gbeba* is a combination of two Dangme words, “*gbo*” or “*gbenɔ*” which means death and “*ba*” which means come; put together, it is “death and come” and it is the type of mark that is given to a child that passes away every time it is brought forth into the world. It is thought to be justified that when a woman experiences the death of two babies of the same sex at birth or shortly after birth, the third baby of the same sex is marked as it is believed that the same child keeps trying to come back but dies shortly after it is born. The reason for marking the child is because it is believed that, when the spirit of death sees the face of the child it will reject the child as the spirit prefers „perfect“ children or children without a flaw.

As stated earlier, the *gbeba* is a mark that is done for the same reasons as the *abiku* of the Nigerians where a child is marked in order to prevent the child from dying shortly after its birth. *Gbeba* is sometimes called *Oɔɔkɔ* in the Ningo language which is the Dangme way of saying *Donkor* and *Donkor* is also a type of mark given to children who pass away shortly after birth. This *Donkor* mark also exists among the Asantes.

Though the *gbeba* mark is given to a child after the third or fourth birth, it goes beyond the fourth child for some families. One of such a situation that was studied in the research revealed that the child, belonging to the Attiapah family in Ningo, was marked after the sixteenth birth and death. This was even after the *jema wɔ* (deity) of the family insisted the child be marked and given the name “*Swalaba*”. These children after they are marked are believed to appear unappealing to the spirit of death and they are the

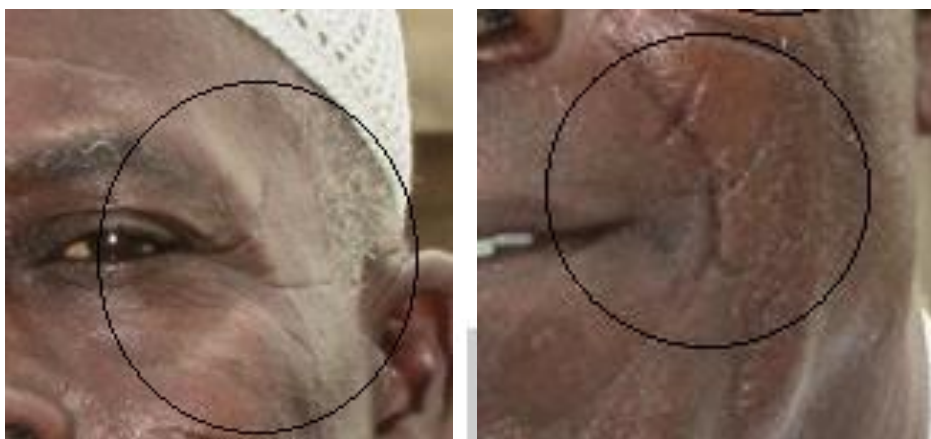
ones who end up staying alive. There are variations when it comes to the *gbeba* mark and different conditions under which the *gbeba* mark is given.

One such form of giving the *gbeba* mark (as shown in Plate 4.1) is when twin or triplet children are born. There are situations where one of the children or two in case of the triplets die, and to prevent the remaining one from dying, the face of the child is marked. It is very common for the remaining child to die as it is believed that the souls of the deceased children summon the soul of the remaining child from the earth.

As spirituality is the basis for the making of these marks, it is the belief of the Dangmes that after the remaining child is marked he or she will not die.



*Gbeba and  
the Akaba*



***Plate 4.1: An elderly man with the gbeba close to his eyes and lips and the akaba on both cheeks Source: Researcher***

The actual issue may be the fact that since one of the twins or two in the case of the triplets has already passed away, there might have been something the parents were not doing right or there may be an ailment that is genetic and may have been passed down to the children. When the child or children pass away, extra care is given to the remaining child and the parents tend to do everything possible and act positively to prevent the child from also passing away. The researcher thinks that it may not be the marks that prevented the children from dying but the fact that the parents were extra careful in the upbringing of the remaining child.

Among some of the Dangmes, the *gbeba* mark is not always given when the continuous death of a child occurs. As body marking is common among some families whereas other families do not practice it; for the families that do not practice body marking, where there is the continuous death of the child of the same sex to the same mother, libation was poured to pacify the gods and plead for life on behalf of the child. This proved to be effective as the life of the child was pardoned and the problem of continuous death of children were drastically reduced.

Another form of the *gbeba* mark, which is the common type, is when a child is born and it dies. If this continues onto the third or fourth birth, the child is given the *gbeba* mark immediately it is born. There could also be the situation where the child is continuously miscarried; the one that is finally born is given this mark. Before the mark is given, there are certain procedures that are followed to ensure that the child will not die. These include, on some occasions, taking the child to a cemetery and giving appalling names to the children. Among some of the Dangme ethnic groups, when the child is taken to a cemetery, it is left on the ground for about five minutes and then is later taken home for the body marking to take place. The significance of this is to tell the soul of the child that since he or she feels the need to die every time it is born, the cemetery is the appropriate place for it. As the spirit of death cannot physically grab the child, it was a way of telling the soul that it is the parents of the child who are willing to accept the child as their own hence they take the child home and mark it as theirs. Such children are given names that are believed to anger and deter the spirit of death away from them. Examples of such names are *Ekpale* (he or she has returned), *Zu ta* (the sand from the earth is finished) and *Sugba ta* (there is no more land left). *Kuku*, which in the Ada language means “dumpster”, *Gbooyaa* and *Obaaya*. The name *Gbooyaa* is a question and it means “now that you are dead, where are you going?” The name *Obaaya* also literally means “you will go” yet in this context it is to mean that the body mark will be given to see if the child will die. The names that are given to such children are commonly termed as “*Gbeba bie*” literally meaning “*gbeba* names”, simply put, “names given to children who die and come back” and these names are common among the selected Dangme groups and even the

Dangmes as a whole (R. Ocansey and K. Attiapah, *Personal Communication*, 3<sup>rd</sup> February, 2015).

The *Gbeba* mark as stated earlier is usually done on the face. It is done on both the left side and right sides of the eye. It is easily identified because of the way it is done. The *gbeba* mark is done 0.5cm away from the side of the eyes and it is usually 2.5 cm long; it is done in a way that represents the feet of a cock as shown in Plate 4.2. The cock being the totem of the Ga-Dangmes is what is represented on the child's face and with this mark on the face of the child, the spirit of death refuses to take the child as this individual is bearing the mark of a traditional group and is accepted by that group as a member.



***Plate 4.2: An elderly woman with the gbeba mark close to her right eye Source: Researcher***

The gbeba mark was one of the common marks that were identified during the study and out of the sample size of 60, 30 of the respondents that were interviewed had body marks and of this 30, 6 of them making 5% of the total sample size bore the gbeba marks. According to them, the information their parents passed on to them was that they were the third and fourth born of the same sex to their mothers and it was alleged that they (babies) died shortly after their birth. To prevent them from dying again they had to be given the gbeba mark. Four of these respondents indicated that the meaning of the mark was not relayed to them and it was something they had to learn about from other people and from their own experiences.

#### **4.2.2 Bɔ**

*Bɔ* is a term that basically means mark. 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. **4.2.3 So gbɔ bɔ**



So gbɔ bɔ



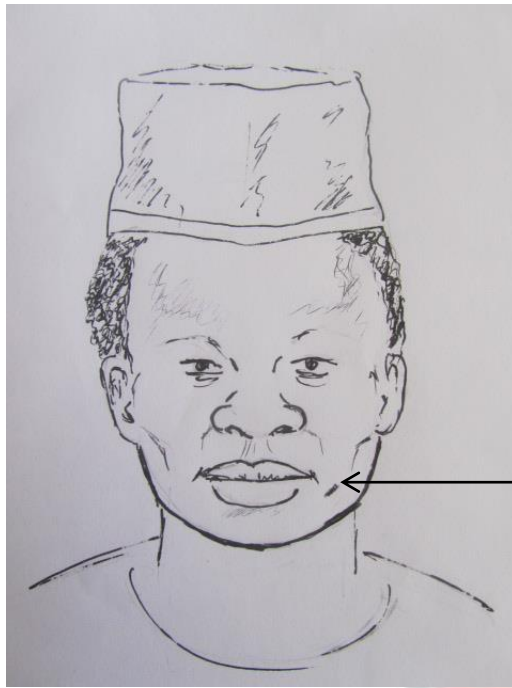
**Plate 4.3: An elderly woman in Ningbo bearing the so gbɔ bɔ on her left cheek**  
**Source: Researcher**

*So gbɔ bɔ* (as seen in Plate 4.3) is a mark that is given to a child because of the clan the child is from; as stated earlier, these body markings exist among some families and clans and the specific name given to body markings done because of one's clan is the *so gbɔ bɔ*. The *so gbɔ bɔ* is one of the faintest marks and is sometimes difficult to see as it is done for the sole purpose of identification to a clan. Usually, the only form of medication that is inserted into the cut is to stop the bleeding and this because this mark is usually done to identify an individual with a clan. Among the selected Dangme

groups (Ningo, Prampram and Ada), about 63% of the sample size agreed to the knowledge that the *so gbɔ bɔ* is a mark that one bears because of the clan the bearer is from and out of the 63% that had knowledge of the *so gbɔ bɔ* 12% bore the mark on their faces. The practice of the *so gbɔ bɔ* is very common among the people of Ningo. 5% of these respondents in Ningo indicated that there may be another reason for bearing the *so gbɔ bɔ* and this could be due to the fact that a member of the family or the family head may have consulted the deities for a special juju to protect all the members of the family hence in return for the favour of the gods and for the protection, the members of the family will have to bear the *so gbɔ bɔ*.

#### 4.2.4 Sɛ bɔ

There is also the *Sɛ bɔ* that is done for members of the royal family who are entitled to the throne. Such people are marked from childhood depending on their lineage. *Sɛ bɔ* (as illustrated in Figure 4.3) literally translates “chair mark” and this is to mark the child entitled to the throne. The *Sɛ bɔ* is one of the smallest types of body marks that is done on the face of the bearer. The *Sɛ bɔ* is about 0.5cm and is found close to the mouth of the bearer; it is barely visible from afar.



*Sé bɔ*



**Figure 4.3:** *The Sé bɔ close to the left side of the mouth of the figure*

**Source:** *Illustration by Sylvester Lumor*

#### **4.2.5 Fɛo bɔ**

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. It is also a faint mark as the cut is only sealed with medicine to stop the

bleeding and no wood ash to make it more pronounced. An example is shown in Plate 4.4.



***Plate 4.4: An elderly woman bearing a mark for beautification (fεo bɔ) on her left cheek***

***Source: Researcher***

With reference to the sample size, 42 respondents representing 70% of the sample size stated that the *fεo bɔ* exists and it makes the bearers of those marks appear beautiful.

They further indicated that generally, when going in for any type of body mark it is the belief and the intention of the bearer or the parents of the bearer that makes the mark work. If the bearer sees the *fɛo bɔ* as a beautiful mark in his or her mind, it is that positive thought and positive energy that exudes to the onlooker to make the person believe that the mark actually makes the bearer beautiful.

#### 4.2.6 Akaba

This is a term which also means mark; it is done on the face for identification, as seen in Plate 4.5 and Plate 4.6. It is a 3cm - 3.5cm long diagonal gash done on the left cheek of the bearer. *Akaba* is performed among the selected Dangme groups under study and it is done for identification, as is the *Kunɔ nane bɔ* (literally meaning feet of a cock). This type of body marking was done to bring variations between the body marks for identification. It is merely a straight line while the *Kunɔ nane bɔ* is in three strokes. *Akaba* is widely practiced among the three Dangme groups Ningo, Prampram and Ada. 5% of the total sample size bore the *Akaba* on their left cheeks.



*Akaba*



***Plate 4.5: An elderly woman with the Akaba on her left cheek Source: Researcher***



Akaba



***Plate 4.6: A Ningo woman with the Akaba on her left cheek Source: Researcher***

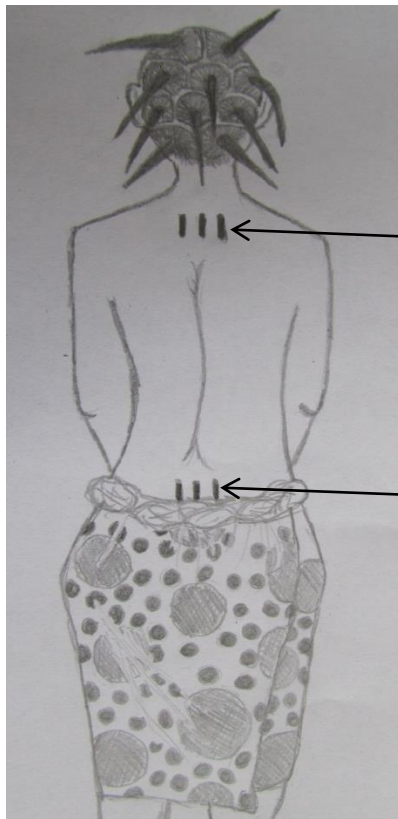
#### 4.2.7 Kunɔ nane bɔ

The term literally means „the mark of the feet of a cock“. As stated earlier, the cock is the totem of Ga-Dangme and members of the Dangme tribe deemed it appropriate to have on their face, the totem of the ethnic group they belong to for the sole purpose of identification as members of the Dangme tribe. It is rare finding this type of mark and this is due to the fact that the *Akaba* also serves the same purpose and it is that which is often seen on the faces of Dangmes. The *Kunɔ nane bɔ* is done on the left cheek of the bearer to represent the feet of the cock. The symbol identified as *Kunɔ nane bɔ*, that is, the three diagonal strokes resembling the feet of a cock can also be seen in the *gbeba* mark where three diagonal strokes are made for medical reasons and protection from death. In the case of the *gbeba* the three strokes are not serving the purpose of identification but rather serving medical purposes by protecting the bearer from death. The length of the *Kunɔ nane bɔ* usually ranges from 3cm to 4cm depending on the person making the incision.

#### 4.2.8 Semi bɔ

This type of marking is done on the back (as illustrated in Figure 4.4) and as the name implies, *semi bɔ* means „mark on the back“. It can be done on the back of the neck and the 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 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 “*kwesem gbowe zo*” literally translated as „the back is not shy“. This mark existed in the earlier years when all that was needed 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.



**Figure 4.4: Semi b<sub>3</sub>**

**Source: Illustration by the researcher**

#### **4.2.9 Joku-joku**

The *joku-joku* is done in three strokes and it is usually found close to the sides of the mouth as indicated in Figure 4.5. It is also done for children who allegedly die shortly after their birth. It is done to deter the spirit of death from consuming them. The three strokes are usually horizontal strokes on the sides of the mouth, 2cm – 3cm long.

Shortly after the marking is done, traditional medicine is put into the gash to stop the child from bleeding and to serve its purpose of deterring evil spirits away from the child.



*Joku- joku*



**Figure 4.5: Joku-joku close to the sides of the mouth**

**Source: Illustration by Sylvester Lumor**

#### **4.2.10 Pusu hiɔ bɔ**

This type of mark is done on very rare occasions. According to some of the Dangmes, there is a point in time where the heavens are believed to “suck up” children. This in other words is termed as convulsion but in the language of the Dangmes it is “*hiɔwe saa jukwewihi*” literally meaning “heavens suck up children”. These are the serious kinds of convulsion where the children shake and shiver uncontrollably and the pupil of their eyes either get dilated or vanishes completely. If a child has experienced this

convulsion before, there is the high tendency of this child experiencing the convulsion again. According to Heller and Zieve (2015) there are recurring convulsions (with no cause) or seizures as they are sometimes called. Recurring convulsion in a person is a main symptom of what is termed epilepsy. When these convulsions occur, there is the shaking of the arms and legs, change in consciousness, the movement of the eye in different directions and sometimes loss of stool or urine. Among the Dangmes when a child experiences convulsion, the child is given this peculiar mark to prevent such an incident from happening again. In the opinion of the researcher, drawing from a realization by Heller and Zieve (2015) that epilepsy can be controlled well with medication; there could have been the possibility that after the mark was given and treated, different forms of medication were administered to the child to control the convulsion therefore the need for the Dangmes to specifically state that the said child is alive because of the mark.

As stated earlier, the *Pusu hiɔ bɔ* is done by a few as they have been the only ones to experience this doleful event. The *Pusu hiɔ bɔ* is a small mark ranging from 0.8cm to 1.3 cm and it is done on both cheeks of the bearer. On both cheeks, two incisions are made and a mixture of herbs is put in the cut. An example of such a mark is seen in Plate 4.7.



***Plate 4.7: A young man in Ada bearing the *pusu hiɔ bɔ* Source: Researcher***

5% of the total population bore the *pusu hiɔ bɔ*. “At the time that the mark was made, my parents claim to have tried every possible medication yet I was still experiencing extreme convulsions. I strongly believe I am alive today because of these marks that I bear” (J. Bulley, *Personal Communication*, 4<sup>th</sup> February, 2015). These were common beliefs that run through the respondents with the *pusu hiɔ bɔ* as they all claim to have stopped experiencing convulsions.

There are also other conditions under which the *pusu hiɔ bɔ* can be given to a child; such is that the father of the child dies before the child is born. The spirit of the father is believed to occasionally visit his child and this causes extreme convulsion in the child. After such a child is marked, there is the possibility that he or she will not experience the convulsion again. Sometimes, there are names that are given to the child to accompany the marks as a silent way of telling the father to leave the child alone. An example of such a name is *Ajesiwɔ* which literally translates as “we have been left”. On other occasions, if the father of a child dies shortly after the child has been conceived, the deceased father’s wife is given to a relative of his in marriage and this relative is usually his brother. Due to the new marriage between the brother of the deceased and the deceased man’s wife, the name of the child changes from the agreed name between the deceased father and the mother. This is done to remind the spirit of the dead father that the child does not belong to him anymore. The common name given in such a situation is *Doku* if the child is a boy and *Dokuyo* if the child is a girl.

Another condition that calls for the *pusu hiɔ bɔ* is a belief that a child experiencing convulsion has had a dead sibling, whether miscarried or dead immediately after birth. It is alleged that the spirit of the dead child pays regular visits to the living child and this causes the child to convulse as the boundary between the living and the dead has been breached ( C. Nubuor, *Personal Communication*, 12<sup>th</sup> September, 2014).

Sometimes, children convulse for no reason and that is what is usually termed as the “heavens sucking up children”. The name given to the mark made on the face of such a child is called *pusu hiɔ bɔ* or *Ablami*.

#### 4.2.11 Blɔ kpɛ bi

In an event where children are obtained from deities some peculiar marks are given to them to identify them as such. These marks are usually done close to their eyes for easy identification. There have been instances where people who have offended children obtained from deities experienced extreme ailments and sometimes even death (Adjonyo & Avickson, 2014). This could be a mere coincidence yet it is usually associated with the wrath of the gods on the life of the person. The case of a child obtained from a deity having to bear the mark of the deity among the Dangmes is similar to that of Nigeria where the witch-doctor or native doctor's marks are put on the child. This mark is called *Yoombo* which means purchased child among the Nigerians. *Blɔ kpɛ bi* is the general name given to children who are obtained from deities. Such children are also known as *Wɔtɛ bi* or *Agbee bi*.

*Niwomi* is the traditional puberty rights of the Ada; this rite is done for the wealthy in the society as it requires a lot of money to go through this process. *Niwomi* is a Dangme word that literally means "wearing something". The young girls who are meant to go through the rites are kept in a room for a week. This is done prior to the day of the big festival "*Asafotufiami*", which is performed on the first Friday in August; the girls are kept in a room one week before the beginning of the festival. On the day of the outdoorings, the Saturday of the durbar, the girls come out carrying a huge brass pan which contains everything that a married woman can use to dress and polish herself up. Some of the stuff includes cloths, powder, perfumes, combs, just to mention a few.

They come out and parade around in single profile wearing beads on their arms just above their elbows with dyed raffia to put two of the beads together and they are made to perform the traditional *Klama*, *Kpatsa* and *Awa* dances. After this, they are meant to

continue wearing the beads, never to take them off, until the bead leaves a permanent mark on their arms. For those with tough skins, the beads are removed and a sharp edge such as a blade is used to make tiny incisions around the arm and the beads are fixed again as it is supposed to leave a permanent mark. This then becomes a mark of identification for such people to show that they have undergone the rite (C.

Nubuor, B. Nubuor & K. Adjonyo, *Personal Communication*, 12<sup>th</sup> September, 2014).

### **4.3 Reasons for Making Body Marks**

Of all the six reasons for making body marks outlined in the review of related literature, the Dangmes practice three. These are marks for identification, marks for beautification and marks for medical reasons or protection from death each of which has their own variations. The research revealed certain possibilities about the practice of body marking and the reasons for performing them; these will be discussed sequentially.

#### **4.3.1 Marks for Identification**

In the past, identification among different clans was a major issue as it helped clan and tribe members in diverse ways. An individual was able to be identified by the mark he or she bore on a part of the body. As stated in the literature review by Roper (2004), cuts that are generally made on the face of a person show the individual as belonging to a specific tribe or clan. It helped individuals who had lost their way to trace their steps back to their homelands; this was very common during the era of the slave trade and this was supported by Ajayi and Kola-Aderoju (2009) that tribal markings became common in the 1800's not only for ethnic identity but because it allowed one to retain their roots. It was very necessary to bear the mark of the tribe or ethnic group one belonged to on some part of the body.

In an attempt to validate the information unearthed about marks for identification, the names of the marks were deliberated upon in all the interviews and 31 of the respondents representing 51.6% of the sample studied (which constituted both bearers and non-bearers of body marks), stated that the recognized body marks for identification among the three Dangme groups are the *so gbo bo*, *Akaba*, *Kunjo nane bo* and the mark obtained after the *niwomi* rites (Plate 4.8) as they are the marks that identifies people as members from a clan and members from the Dangme ethnic group as a whole.





***Plate 4.8: The beads that leave a mark after the niwomi rites***

***Source: Researcher***

These marks seen on the faces and arms of the bearers identify them as members of the Dangme tribe and though they may be similar to marks existing in other ethnic groups, they have their own purposes and interpretations. In a personal communication with Mr Samuel Attiapah (an elderly resident of Ningo), he revealed that among the Dangmes identification became a major issue between different families after their final settlement from their migration. He further stated that after settlement from migration, families needed to differentiate themselves from one another for better protection of

fellow family members hence the rise of the *so gbɔ bɔ* (refer to Plate 4.3) especially among the Ningbo people as the mark is given because of the clan one hails from. The *so gbɔ bɔ* was done on a large scale for people belonging to the same clan for the purpose of identification. With time, other types of body marks rose also for the purpose of identification but these „new“ marks did not only identify one as a member of a clan but as a member of the Dangme ethnic group. Some examples of these marks are *Akaba* (refer to Plate 4.6) and the *Kunɔɔ nane bɔ* (refer to Figure 4.2).

The *Kunɔɔ nane bɔ*, literally meaning the mark of the feet of a cock, also represented people as members of the Dangme ethnic group. As the name implies the *Kunɔɔ nane bɔ* made on the face of the bearer resembled the feet of a cock and since the cock is the totem of the Ga-Dangme tribe, it was only deemed right to bear a mark of the totem of the group on a part of the body for proper association of oneself to the group.

There is a possibility that the main reason for bearing such a mark was for members to show commitment to the ethnic group they belonged to. When committed to a group, it is only advisable to go according to the laws of the group and portray the respect and devotion the individual has for the group, and among the Dangmes one of the ways of showing their respect and commitment was to bear the mark of the group. This can be compared to the level of devotion among some Chinese tribes as stated by Murano (2013) that show devotion to oneself and the community where young boys of Southern Thai in Phuket insert sharp metal objects into their cheeks as a sign of devotion. Another of the marks for identification is the one obtained from the *Niwomi* rites of the people of Ada which is also a way of showing respect and commitment to Ada by the bearers of such marks.

#### 4.3.2 Marks for Beautification

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 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 (Martin, 2007). The Dangmes interpreted and assigned the *fəo bɔ* and the *semi bɔ* as marks for beautification. Though the *fəo bɔ* is similar to other marks such as *Akaba* which has a totally different purpose, the perception of the Dangmes about these marks for beautification is what rendered the bearers of such marks as beautiful. This is supported by Rhodes (2006) 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 study finds it was evident that the Dangmes also perceived the *fəo bɔ* and the *semi bɔ* as marks that brings 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 makes the bearer all the more beautiful. According to Dutton there is evidence that perceptions of beauty are evolutionarily determined and 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 Dangmes 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 (“Study Finds”, 2014). In the researcher’s definition of beauty, 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 *fɛo bɔ* and the *semi bɔ*. According to 61.7% of the respondents, the *fɛo bɔ* which literally means „mark for beauty“ is a major umbrella under which any other marks done for beautification may fall. Since there are two well-known marks for beautification, the variation where other marks will fall under the *fɛo bɔ* seems to be non-existent. The *fɛo bɔ* (refer to Plate 4.4) 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, Ibrahim (2008) stated that most people belonging to tribes that do not have specific markings sometimes choose to be scarred 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.

The most common and well known beautification marks were the *fɛo bɔ* and the *semi bɔ*. The *fɛo 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 between the dimples slightly above the buttocks. The *semi bɔ* (refer to Figure 4.4) was commonly done during a period when women usually covered themselves with cloths so this enabled them to show an ample part of their backs hence fulfilling the purpose of “*kwesem*

*gbowe zo*” (the back is not shy) which was said to be the main reason for doing the *semi bo*.

#### 4.3.3 Marks for Medical Reasons

Marks made for medical reasons are one of the common types of marks practiced in Ghana (Ankrah, 2007). Before the advent of alternative medicine and orthodox drugs, traditional medicines or herbal medicines were the most common forms of cure for any ailments. This is supported by Elujoba, Odeleye and Ogunyemi (2005) that traditional medicine is a major African socio-cultural heritage that has obviously been in existence for hundreds of years and traditional medicine is the first choice healthcare treatment for at least 80% of Africans who suffer from high fever and other common ailments.

Body marks for medical reasons, being one of the common practices among the Dangmes through which medication is given to children and members of the society are most sought after in the health care of the Dangmes, and however these drugs were administered were based on the expert knowledge of the herbalist and/ or the traditional priest. As „superstitious“ as they may seem, there is the belief that some of these marks could protect one from death because once the bearers receive these marks they tend to live longer and any ailment that may cause their death is prevented. The *gbeba* (refer to Plate 4.1), *joku-joku* (refer to Figure 4.5), *pusu hiɔ bo* (refer to Plate 4.7) and *Agbee bi bo* (refer to Figure 4.1) are known to be done for medical reasons and to protect the bearer from further ailing conditions. These among 77% of the respondents are the well-known marks for medical reasons and among the elderly they were quite common.

Factually, there are possibilities why these marks work for the Dangmes, one of which is supported by Brofman (1987) that everything begins with the consciousness; everything that happens in a person’s life and everything that happens in the body

begins with something happening in the consciousness. He further stated that while it is true that germs cause diseases and accidents cause injuries, it is also true that this happens in accord with what is happening in the consciousness of the person involved. Germs are everywhere; why are some people affected and not others? Something different is happening in their consciousness. Why do some patients in hospitals respond better to treatment than others? They have different attitudes. When someone is injured in an „accident“, why is it that a very specific part of the body is affected and that it is the same part that has had habitual problems?

The same rule applies to body marks for medical reasons as it works effectively because of the strong belief that the Dangmes have in them. In the same way, Dangmes strongly believe in the cultural practices that have been passed down from generation to generation and even if they do not necessarily need the marks to be healed or „protected“, due to the thoughts and happenings in their conscience, they think it is what protects them and heals their children. This belief, whether consciously or unconsciously, is passed on to the children and as it is a part of their culture they find it difficult to depart from. In a discussion of beauty, Rhodes (2006) states that a preference for outward beauty emerges early in child development and that the standards of attractiveness are similar across different genders and cultures. Similarly, as the beliefs and practices among cultures, preferences emerge in child development where the child builds standards that he or she is supposed to meet according to the culture and according to the beliefs that are passed down from generation to generation.

#### **4.4 Cultural Interpretation of Body Marks**

According to Munn (1946) the Greeks in 500BC, in gaining an interpretation for the behaviour and the actions of man, had gone beyond the idea of a man within man. It

was obvious to the Greeks that the invisible man (the man within man) even assuming his existence was no explanation at all and they sought a more subtle explanatory principle. They did however retain the idea of an invisible something as the cause of behaviour and experience and this they named the „psyche“ which means the soul or mind. For the purpose of the research, the following interpretations were based on the psychological thinking (psyche) and the consciousness of the Dangmes.

The cultural interpretation of body marks as stated in the definition of terms is the religious, social, political, educational and medical meanings attached to body marks hence the meanings of the sub terms would be elaborated in relation to the meaning the Dangmes have attached to them.

#### **4.4.1 Religious Interpretation of Body Marks**

Religion is an essential factor in most people's lives as it is what draws them to a greater being of worship. Religion is defined by Taylor (1871) as the belief in spiritual beings; a detailed definition by James (1902) is that the feelings, acts and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider divine. Divine in this context is any object that is godlike whether it is a concrete deity or not. Astrow, Pulchalski and Sulmasy (2001) have elaborated on the term religion by stating that religion is a set of beliefs, practices and language that characterizes a community that is searching for transcendent meaning in a particular way, generally based upon the belief in a deity.

As religion is the belief in and worship of a supernatural controlling power, it forms an integral part of the lives of most Dangmes and most people in general. The main religion of the Dangmes is Christianity followed by Islam and traditional religion. Through it all, much reverence is given to the issue of body marks as it forms an aspect of their

spiritual lives and an expression of their spirituality is the appropriate practice of religion; this is supported by Mohr (2006) that religion is an expression of spirituality. Among the Dangmes, there are no marks that are done for religious reasons yet there are occasions when body marks are made that are closely related to religion.

There is the belief that human beings have lived former lives before, perhaps as another human being or maybe even as another organism (Meister, 2012). Dangmes generally believe in reincarnation, spiritual life and life after death. In their belief, some children that are born are believed to be ancestors or they are believed to have souls that have visited the earth before. For such souls, when they are born again, they ask (through traditional priests and priestesses) to be marked for all to see who they were and who they are now. The children are then marked per the insistence of the souls of the ancestors that are believed to possess the body of the new born babies. Some of the body marks are given to children after the family deity insists on it. Such marks are done with no questions asked as to the reasons for doing them. The name of the marks given to children who were believed to be traditional priest and priestesses is called *Agbee bo*. This is a mark that is done in tiny dots to form a circle on both cheeks.

The meaning given to religious marks according to the Dangmes is that bearing a mark due to religious reasons or for reasons closely related to religion shows the respect and the extreme belief the bearer has for his or her religion such that in believing in something celestial certain practices emerge which allows an individual to experience a transcendent connection with his or her celestial God or gods. This is said to be felt through some of these body marks as they are believed to be practices that have emerged from religion and spirituality.

#### 4.4.2 Social Interpretation of Body Marks

Body marks among members of the Dangme community is something that is seen as a fundamental part of their culture. In the past, there was the belief that only children obtained from deities are to possess body marks hence there was a form of stigmatization amongst community members towards such children. Stigmatization was a common issue as most people who bore other marks (not the mark of the deity) were stigmatized. An example was a Ningo woman who had a mark on her left cheek due to medical reasons. According to her, people never asked of the meaning of her mark or why she had it yet they drew their own conclusions about her and chose not to involve her in certain activities and this made it difficult for her to even maintain a job. When she was of marriageable age, she tied the knot with a Senegalese and though the people of Senegal also had marks of their own, hers was different and as they did not understand her marks they always treated her as an outsider by passing offensive comments and even insulting her in the presence of her children and her husband. Since people barely understood her marks and chose not to ask about it, it caused her to keep to herself and stay away from people in general which to her has affected her relationship with people as she finds it difficult to accept comments and rather acts defensively (N. Kabutey, *Personal Communication*, 8<sup>th</sup> February, 2015).

Children who had body marks used to suffer from stigmatization a lot in the early days, not for the fact that people used to make fun of them but because they were feared. As time went on and people realised the need for these marks the stigmatization reduced yet remained with some people. Some community members who bore these ignominious marks tend to shy away from social activities. The evolution of the *Akaba* and *Kunŋɔ nane bɔ* brought about acceptance of such people in society. The body marks gave its bearers an upper hand in society as they were without compromise the bearers

of their tradition. It was an honour for tribe members to bear the *Akaba* and *Kunjo nane bo* as it meant that the souls of the bearers have actually accepted the tribes they were in as their own and such people are believed to be deeply rooted in their culture.

#### **4.4.3 Political Interpretation of Body Marks**

As in some cultures, a king or a chief having a flaw is not accepted; this does not apply to the Dangmes when it comes to body marks. Whether a king, chief or clan head possesses body marks, it is not a bother. It is rather accepted on a broader front if such a person of high esteem bears a type of body mark, especially that for identification which makes it easy to tell where this particular patriarch hails from. Members from royal families who were soon to be crowned kings were usually delighted to have these marks because they knew it meant they could be chosen over other candidates who did not have these marks.

Some members of the royal family who were entitled to the throne were marked. The name of this mark was the *Sé bo*. This mark is usually done close to the mouth and it is as tiny as 0.5 cm, so minute that it might almost look like a scar that is healing. It is also done irrespective of the sex of the bearer. The meaning behind this mark is to indicate that the bearer is of royal blood and should be treated as such no matter where he or she finds himself or herself. Failure to do so would mean the wrath of the gods on the family of whoever shows disrespect.

#### **4.4.4 Medical Interpretation of Body Marks**

The implication of body marks done for medical reasons is a main pivot in protection; whether from death or other unseen forces. These types of marks were done in all Dangme tribes and with the assistance of spiritual healers so as to receive the complete package when it comes to health care. As most of the marks identified were for health

care, it is easy to imply that Dangmes took their health seriously in relation to the many joys and consequences of body marks. Having these marks that have been filled with special medication prescribed by a spiritual healer made the bearers of marks made for medical purposes feel invincible as they knew for sure there was no way they were going to fall ill. This even made some people go in for the marks without suffering from any ailment just to be certain of their medical wellbeing as they knew it meant them living longer. There is the major possibility that, as stated earlier, the beliefs of the Dangmes who practice body marks is what allowed these marks to work effectively for them. Wolf (1999) asserts that a person's thought pattern affects the health of the body such that one can create an unease or „dis-ease“ in the body basically by the way the person thinks. If how an individual thinks is what creates how the person feels physically, then it can be said that those who go in for marks for medical reasons and protection from death have preconceived their minds to believe that once they receive the marks, nothing evil is ever going to come their way.

#### **4.4.5 Educational Interpretation of Body Marks**

“I believe these marks were done to educate our young ones not only about what these marks look like but the variations there are and what it means to have these marks as a Dangme” (P. Osifodoe, *Personal Communication*, 9<sup>th</sup> September, 2014). Education about body marks began as a means of informing people about these marks so as not to mistaken the identity of someone when it came to the different types of marks. Adjonyo (2014) stated that, for example, children who were obtained from deities were to be revered. Members of the community were taught how to identify others with these marks so as not to fault them for fear of what might happen to those who wronged them

and the generations that follow. Education amongst the society proved to be the foundation of all they stood for and without education, it would have been difficult to study and understand their culture. Some members of the Ningo, Prampram and Ada ethnic groups who have studied about these marks perceive themselves as learned persons in the field as any information required is gotten from them. This drove most people to also study these marks into details so as to don themselves with the knowledge of these marks which in turn helps them to maintain a deeper understanding of their culture.

### **Major Findings**

At the end of the research, it was realized that many people living in the selected traditional areas Ningo, Gbugbla (Prampram) and Ada have little or no understanding of the body marks hence find it difficult to explain to others for an easy understanding to be reached. Due to the lack of understanding of the body marks, the general misconception about people with these marks being tagged as rural and untutored persons were very perceptible.

Some major findings from the discussions are as follows

1. Though there was some information about body marks from the elderly, most of the respondents lack the understanding of the basic concepts behind making body marks and attributed these body marks to ancestral veneration and the worship of smaller gods.
2. Majority of the respondents who were the youth, who had body marks were either angry at the negative remarks they received because of their marks or needed to know more about the reasons behind them bearing the marks as some of them never had the opportunity to clarify the meanings of the marks with

their parents. Some of them also showed apprehension with respect to the health risks involved.

3. The body marks identified had different meanings and though they were similar in appearance, they all had their individual roles they played.
4. The research revealed that the people of Ningbo, Prampram and Ada hold the significance of body marks in high esteem though the practice has dwindled greatly over time.
5. Though body marks are not highly practised as they used to be, majority of the respondents thought it would be fair if body marks are incorporated again into the lives of Dangmes through formal or informal education, as it gave them a sense of belonging and taught them their culture on a richer level.
6. The research revealed that the people of Ningbo, Prampram and Ada respect body marks and have accepted them as a part of who they are and they believe it keeps them on a transcendent level with their ancestors.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMENDATIONS**

#### **5.0 Overview**

In an attempt to contribute to the expansion of knowledge about body marks and to promote the study and understanding of different cultural practices pertaining to Ghanaian tribes, the study of body marks among different ethnic groups is essential as it broadens our understanding of our culture as Ghanaians. This chapter deals with the summary, conclusions and recommendations for the study.

## **5.1 Summary**

The main purpose of this study was to understand body marks and their significance among the Dangmes to educate people about the cultural significance of these marks and to gradually eradicate the misconception surrounding body marks in general. To achieve this, two main objectives were set; first to identify and describe the various body marks present among the Dangmes then to discuss the cultural significance of these marks into details. There were research questions that were to be answered at the end of the study. To obtain the necessary information, interviews were conducted with Dangmes living in Ningo, Prampram and Ada.

The interviews revealed that there were different types of body marks that were practiced for different purposes. All these body marks have different names also. The names of the body marks are based on the reason why they are made, the part of the body where they are done and the local name given to body marks in general. The meanings based on the common language and culture of the people of Ningo, Prampram and Ada and Dangmes as a whole were also elaborated thus the religious, social, political, medical and educational meanings attached to body marks were all discussed. It was observed that, the practice of body marks, though not practiced as it used to be was observed as something positive in the eyes of the people as it made them understand who they were and allowed them to accept their culture irrespective of how raw it appeared.

## **5.2 Conclusions**

The results derived from this study indicate that body marks as pertaining to the Ghanaian way of life needs to be understood before conceptions or misconceptions are drawn. 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. From the major findings, it could be concluded that:

1. Since there is very little known about body marks, it is usually attributed to ancestral veneration and the worship of smaller gods which according to this study is not the concept behind the making of body marks.
2. Negative remarks are given to bearers of body marks which draws resentment from them because they are not conversant with the various reasons for bearing certain types of body marks.
3. There are different types of body marks with different meanings. Some of these marks are similar in appearance yet they all have different roles they play in the lives of the Dangmes.
4. Body marks have dwindled over time but their significance is still seen as an important part of the culture of the people of Ningo, Prampram and Ada.
5. The Dangmes hope that body marks be practiced more and the meaning and reasons behind the making of these marks be incorporated in both formal and informal education such that the understanding of the concept behind making of body marks is passed on to the children whether at home or in school.
6. Body marks are an accepted part of the culture of the people in Ningo, Prampram and Ada as it is heavily entwined in their culture and it helps them carry beliefs of their forefathers in their ways of life.

Furthermore, there is the view that body marks may be a barbaric and outmoded practice. This is based on individual differences and individual perceptions. For example, the multiple marks given on the face of the *gbeba* is termed by some as a deformity to the face of the bearer which also attracts ridicule.

### 5.3 Recommendations

1. Adequate research should be done about body marks in detail especially among the Ga-Dangme ethnic group as a whole and other ethnic groups who practice body marking so as to totally eradicate the misconception about it being based on ancestral veneration and worship of smaller gods.
2. There should be education among members of the society about the various reasons for pursuing body marks; this will in turn enlighten the general public, especially the youth, about the reasons behind the making of body marks.
3. The elite among the different ethnic groups in Ghana should work hand in hand to explore more on other peculiar types of body marks that serve different purposes to further impart that knowledge onto the people.
4. The various reasons for pursuing body marks should be brought to light by further research to be able to weave members of different ethnic groups as one to help bring unity among Ghanaians through our culture.
5. Various clan heads, traditional leaders, kings and chiefs in different ethnic groups all across Ghana should corporate together to point out which traditional practices should be maintained and which ones should be eradicated.
6. The government should device ways of dealing with delicate subjects such as body marks and other practices that were performed in the beginning that kept people on their toes and brought about unity. This might be an alternative to solving some pertinent issues in Ghana that continue to be a barrier in the nation's development.

# KNUST

The logo of KNUST (Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology) is centered in the background. It features a yellow eagle with spread wings, perched on a shield. Above the eagle is a red flame. The shield has a green and yellow design. Below the eagle is a yellow banner with the text 'NYAYAPU WU SANE NO BADIYINMA'.

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## APPENDIX „A“ – INTERVIEW GUIDE

**KWAME NKRUMAH UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY**

**DEPARTMENT OF GENERAL ART STUDIES**

**“THE CULTURAL INTERPRETATION OF BODY MARKS AMONG  
SELECTED DANGME GROUPS IN GHANA”**

**INTERVIEW GUIDE**

1. Are you a native of Dangme?
2. Which of the Dangme ethnic groups do you belong to?
3. Do you practice the art of body marking?
4. When did body marking start in your ethnic group?
5. Are there any peculiar body marks that identify you as a native of Dangme?
6. Is there any specific one identifying you as a member of your ethnic group?
7. Among the Dangmes, are there common body marks that run through all the ethnic groups?
8. What are the various categories of body marking as practiced in your ethnic group?
9. Can you provide some of the reasons and meanings of the aforementioned body marks?
10. Are there specific roles these marks play?
11. Is it necessary for a member of your ethnic group to have body marks?
12. Do you know if body marking in your ethnic group symbolizes the same thing as a similar one from another Dangme ethnic group?
13. Is it appropriate for a traditional leader or a royal in your ethnic group to have body marks?
14. Does bearing a body mark have any spiritual inclination?

15. Are there common educational teachings about the meanings of body marks that are taught?
16. Do you feel you are treated differently because of the body marks you bear?
17. What percentage of people you meet show genuine interest in your body marks?
18. Do the thoughts of other people about your body marks influence your behaviour in any way?
19. What role do body marks play in the traditional politics of your ethnic group?
20. What is your religious preference?
21. Are there any marks that are based on religion on your body?
22. When was your mark inscribed on your body?
23. Are you educated on the implications of the marks as you grow up?
24. As part of traditional education are you thought the meanings of specific body marks in general? (Whether or not you have body marks).
25. Are there body marks done for medical reasons in your ethnic group? If so what is the interpretation given to such marks?
26. Are you taught the art of body marking or is it based on individual interest?

#### **APPENDIX „B“ – LETTER OF CONSENT**

Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology

College of Art and the Built Environment

**Consent letter for photograph of respondent to be signed by the respondent**

I ..... consent to  
.....taking a photograph of  
me in pursuit of seeking information for the thesis “The Cultural Interpretation of  
Body Marks Among Selected Dangme Groups in Ghana”

I consent to this photograph and any information I provide being used for research  
purposes and in any other articles that may be written and published from the thesis.

Signature of respondent .....

Signature of interviewer/ photographer .....

Date .....