

The Myth About Crocodiles In Sisala Tradition (An Inspiration For Textile Design)

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Abstract: *This paper seeks to develop motifs and textures for textile design by taking inspiration from the popular myth surrounding the crocodile in the Sisala tradition of the Upper West Region. A myth is a traditional story, especially one concerning the early history of a people, or explaining a natural or social phenomenon, and typically involving supernatural beings or events. In this context the popular concept of the myth and its taboo surrounding the crocodile among the Sisala's, translated in motifs for fabric design was the focus.*

Nevertheless, textile design is a highly creative branch of art that involves the process of creating designs that are printed on woven, knitted or other types of fabrics. Hence the study, therefore, employed both the description and the narrative research methods and informal interview was organised to validate the facts gathered.

Five motifs were developed during the idea development processes, the crocodile was the focused element used to develop the motifs. The study explored the use of mercerized cotton, khaki, reactive dyes and vat dyes to design and produce fashionable fabrics via the screen printing and batik techniques. Discussions were based on historical, cultural and artistic context.

The fabrics produced can be adopted as an educational tool to educate and encourage incoming textile designers from all parts of the country specifically from the upper west region to breath out a new way of activating their artistic skills and talents. More importantly, the paper proved that oral tradition translated into motifs has enormous impact on textile design and Ghanaian traditional textile.

Keywords: *Batik, Motif, Screen printing, Sisala crocodile myth, Tradition, Textile design.*

I. INTRODUCTION

According to Delacruz, 1995, there is an emergence of interest in expanding the content in art curricula to include diverse aesthetic and artistic perspectives. This has gained some acceptance among teachers' and academics, and a variety of educational approaches have been developed. The purpose of this paper is to translate and interpret a myth into a visual aesthetic and artistic design form to reinforce its possibility of being used as a source to generate fabric design concept to enhance design development for fashionable products. To reform the concept of fabric design, development, the thinking and the traditional practise of developing designs for garment manufacturing must go

beyond identifying and examining visual elements to the imaginative concept of interpreting heroic stories and myths in order to bring to life its relevance to society through the expression of art. The contribution of myths of social education cannot be overemphasised in that through myths the language of symbolisms have been realised in many African cultures like the Adinkra symbols and its diverse perspectives and contributions to social education in Ghana and beyond.

African myths act as a verbal vehicle that attempt to illustrate its inherent wisdom of the past for effective intergenerational communication, in traditional education. Traditional values in Ghana continue to hold varying degrees of importance in many parts of the country and has become inseparable from other segments of life. The intent of myths is

to preserve and transmit the traditional values and of a society from one generation to the other. Aimed at creating an understanding between the generations of the proper roles of each individual in the society. Myths continue to play an active part in everyday life and they are still a vital social educational force. Segy, (1975) buttress this accretion by indicating that myths and legends of traditional African societies not only supplied accounts of the group's origin, but relates to consequential examples of contemporary beliefs, actions, and codes of behaviour. Myths, in Ghana are therefore an important aspect of traditional education, a collection of sacred stories that relates to the formation, deific or supernatural beings, and family ancestry and activities.

The preservation of cultural heritage or traditions is a duty not only for the artist but to all sundry. A tradition is a belief or behavioural pattern embedded with symbolic meaning that transmits the ideology of a group of people that traces their roots from the past which significantly identify them. The English word "tradition" comes from the Latin word "traditio", the noun from the verb "tradere" or "trader" literally means to transmit, to hand over, to give for safe keeping. It was originally used in Roman law to refer to the concept of legal transfer and inheritance. Tradition can also refer to beliefs or customs that are prehistoric.

The practicing artist is usually informed by his or her diversity of customs, artistic practices, aesthetic design systems, social functions and beliefs, deified and secular that is embodied in the symbolic and artistic expressions of its citizens (Bersson, 1987). The basic notion of creating designs should not only be built on a nature or what we see, but must go beyond the visual to a more conceptual realm established over the years by great minds who have contributed their quota to the development of mankind through ideas shared over the centuries. Thus, everyone needs to know the reconstructed histories of his or her community in order to have a more realistic picture of how the community developed. It is within this context that fabric designers must seek to broaden their design concepts to include more diverse aesthetic and artistic traditions and conventions.

Originally, traditions were passed orally without the need for a written system, a tool to aid this process which included poetic devices such as rhyme and alliteration. It is presumed that at least two transmissions over three generations are required to practice a belief or object to be seen as traditional. Some traditions were deliberately invented for one reason or another, often to highlight or enhance the importance of certain institutions. (Retrieved From: <https://en.wikipedia.org>)

However, tradition varies from one traditional setting to the other where Ghana is no exception. It is a country with different traditions that has been handed over from one generation to the other. The *Sisala* tribe of the Upper West Region specifically from the *Sisala* East and West are noted for their rich tradition.

The *Sisala* East and West District are one of such among the 216 Districts in Ghana. It is located geographically in the North-East part of the Upper West Region of Ghana. It falls between Longitudes 1.30w and Latitude 10.00N and 11.00 N. It shares boundary on the north with Burkina Faso. In the East with *Kassena Nankana* West and *Bulsa* District, South West

to *Wa* East and *Daffiami-Bussie- Issa* Districts and to the West by *Sisala* West District. The district has total land sizes of 5.09z.8 square kilometres representing 26.7 percent of the total landmass of the region. The *Sisala* East District Assembly was created in the year 2004 by legislative instrument (LI) 1766 with *Tumu* as its District capital, the *Sisala* East District is located in the Guinea Savannah Vegetation belt. It has a single rainy season from April to September. (www.ghanadistricts.com and <https://www.businessghana.com>)

Sisala traditions vary from oral to visual tradition. The popular myth surrounding the crocodiles in the *Sisala* tradition and its taboo is the main mythical subject of this research. In view of the fact that, textile design is the art of manipulating the appearance of fabrics and other materials through traditional stylized, digital and illusory techniques to make a fashionable product. The researcher seeks to develop textures and motifs from the above mentioned myth to design and produce a fabric using the screen printing method and the batik method (resist dyeing). This project attempts to specifically address the pertinent problem associated with idea development in textile designing, the question now is how can motifs and textures be developed from the myth surrounding the crocodile in *Sisala* tradition? To start with, the various design elements within the context of the myth were identified and translate into visual forms. The focal element identified was the crocodile, possessing the mercy and grace beyond human understanding towards humans. An indication of its wisdom to identify human needs and its readiness to help. Hence the researchers focus on the head section of the crocodile. Particularly, the head and the jaw. Secondly, the resultant skin rash effect of the ungrateful people who went ahead to kill and consume the crocodile meat. Thirdly, the colour of the vegetation, the clothing and the seasonal colour of the landscape during the time of their escape. Five (5) motifs were developed for screen printing and batik techniques respectively, this is an addition to the existing motifs and textures used for resist dyeing methods (batik) and screen printing techniques.

II. METHODOLOGY

The descriptive and narrative research methods were adopted for the study. This involved semi structured interviews to provide accurate information surrounding the myth, and to provide information that answer the research questions. The choice of narrative research method was expedient because the *Sisalas* of Upper West Region was the focus of the study, since there are no written records of events surrounding the myth, no one else tells the story better than them.

MATERIALS

The tools and materials used in the project are as follows;
(Tools and Materials used in screen printing)

- ✓ Khaki, this was the main fabric that was designed.
- ✓ The Stapler was used for securing the mesh on the wooden frame.

- ✓ White glue and ammonium dichromate chemical used for coating the screen.
- ✓ Light box was used to develop the design onto the screen.
- ✓ Squeegee was used to spread the paste through the mesh onto the surface of the fabric (mercerized cotton) to print.
- ✓ Developed screen was used for printing
- ✓ Printing table, it was the surface on which printing was done.
- ✓ A Computer program was used for arranging the designs
- ✓ Plastic spoons were used to scoop a paste onto the reservoir
- ✓ Tough was used for coating the screen.
- ✓ Pencil (5B and 6B) was used to make preliminary sketches during the idea development process.
- ✓ Eraser was used to clean unwanted pencil marks.

TOOLS AND MATERIALS USED IN BATIK, TIE-DYE

- ✓ Sodium hydrosulphite (Caustic Soda) and Sodium hydroxide (hydros) were the supporting chemicals used with vat dye to increase the affinity and bond of the dye into the fabric.
- ✓ Vat dye: was used as the colourant colour for the fabric.
- ✓ Scissors for cutting of fabric and threads.
- ✓ Soda ash and Salt were supporting chemicals for reactive dyes used to increase the affinity of dyes to the fabric.
- ✓ Latex foam for transferring designs onto fabrics.
- ✓ Apron for protecting the body and cloth from stains
- ✓ Stamps used to create designs on the fabric
- ✓ Broom and brush is used to create textures on the fabric
- ✓ Gloves are used for protecting the hands from corrosive chemicals
- ✓ Nose mask was used to protect the nostrils from inhaling poisonous gas.
- ✓ Plastic spoons were used to measure chemicals and stirring the dye solution when mixing the dyes
- ✓ Plastic Basin was used for dyeing, washing and rinsing of dyed fabrics.
- ✓ A Metal pot was used for dewaxing fabrics.
- ✓ Aluminium pot was used for melting wax.
- ✓ Box iron for pressing finished fabrics.
- ✓ Waxing table it was the surface on which waxing was done.
- ✓ Paraffin wax it is a bi-petrol chemical product used as a resist agent

METHODS

The narrative research method was used to collect the relevant data about the myth of the designs and the descriptive research method was used to describe the idea development process and working procedure for batik and screen printing techniques.

THE NARRATION OF THE CROCODILE STORY AS A MYTH AND A TABOO IN SISALA TRADITION

The narration reveals that, the ancestors of *Sisalas* were attacked by some strangers. During that period of attack, they had to run to a place called "*Takrobelle*" it is a village found

in the *Sisala* community now part of Burkina Faso. In that village, there existed a big hole with so many different paths inside it, they sort for refuge in it. The hole was believed to be the habitat for crocodiles, when they entered the hole, the crocodiles did not attack them, but rather lay flat to protect them by carrying them on their backs and moved with them through different routes that led to different places namely, *Wulabala, Muabala, Gbolu* and *Nabugubelle*. However, it is believed by the *Sisala's* that, their ancestors were saved by these crocodiles this account for the reason why *Sisala's* from *Sisala East and West of Upper West Region* do not eat crocodile meat. The ancestors of *Sisala's* worshipped crocodiles after they were rescued from their enemies, this practice still continued till present days. This is why some *Sisala's* perceive eating crocodile meat as a taboo, anyone who ate it in those days developed skin rashes as a form of punishment from the ancestors. (Oral conversation with *Luki* on 20th March, 2017).

IDEA DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

PLATE 1 represents the mood board, the researchers collected different kinds of crocodile images which served as a source of inspiration for the researcher. The mood board also included images related to *Sisala* tradition and custom as spelt out in the narration above. These images were used as a guide to developmental and selects colours, motifs and textures.



(Source Researcher)

Plate 1: Mood board



(Source Researcher)

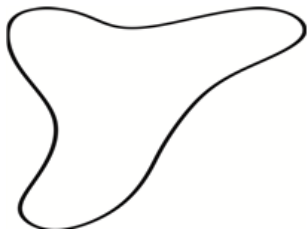
Plate 2: Crocodile



(Source Researcher)

Plate 3: The mouth of a crocodile

Idea Development for Motif One



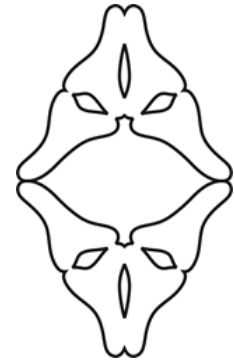
(Source Researcher)
 Figure 1: Idea developed from the mouth of the Crocodile to be mirrored



(Source Researcher)
 Figure 2: mirroring process



(Source Researcher)
 Figure 9: Unit joined with mirroring line

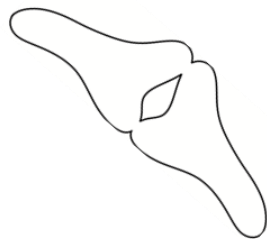


(Source Researcher)
 Figure 10: Final motif (motif one)

Idea Development For Motif Two



(Source Researcher)
 Figure 3: Mirrored crocodile mouth with Mirroring line



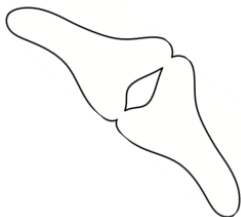
(Source Researcher)
 Figure 4: Unit derived from fig 3 After mirroring line was erased



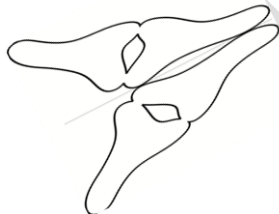
(Source: Researcher)
 Figure 11: Using motif one to develop motif two by mirroring



(Source: Researcher)
 Figure 12: Motifs joined



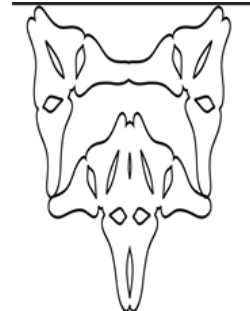
(Source Researcher)
 Figure 5: mirroring continued



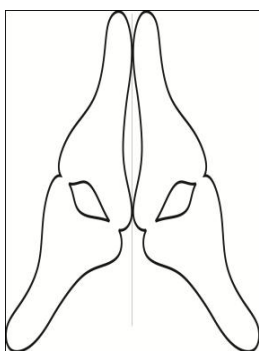
(Source Researcher)
 Figure 6: Motif merged with mirroring line



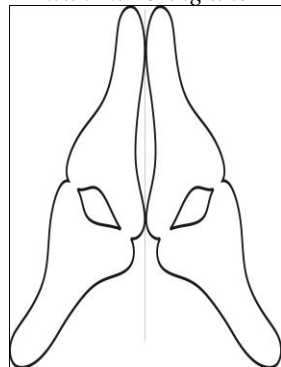
(Source Researcher)
 Figure 13: A unit derived from, After mirroring line was erased



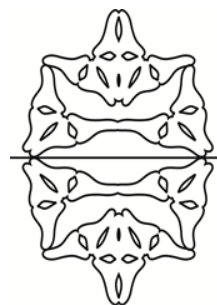
(Source Researcher)
 Figure 14: Mirroring process



(Source Researcher)
 Figure 7: Unit derived from Fig 6 after



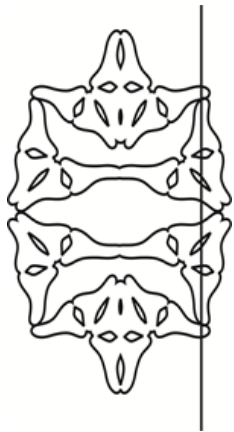
(Source Researcher)
 Figure 8: Motif to be mirrored



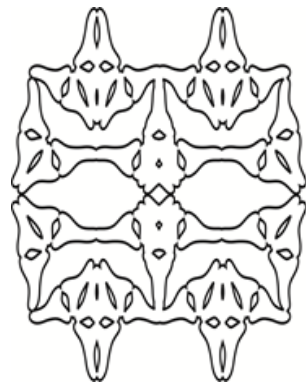
(Source Researcher)
 Figure 15: Motif merged by mirroring



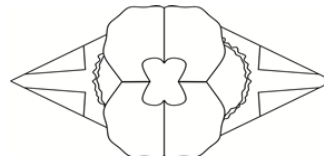
(Source Researcher)
 Figure 16: Unit derived from fig 15 after mirroring line erased



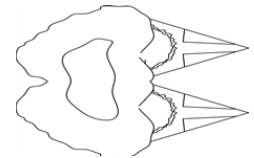
(Source Researcher)
Figure 17: Mirroring process



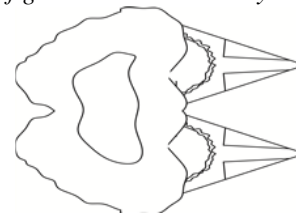
(Source Researcher)
Figure 18: Final motif derived (motif two)



(Source Researcher)
Figure 25: Unit derived from fig 24

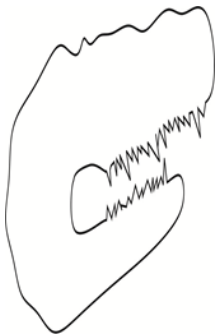


(Source Researcher)
Figure 26: Unit joined by mirroring

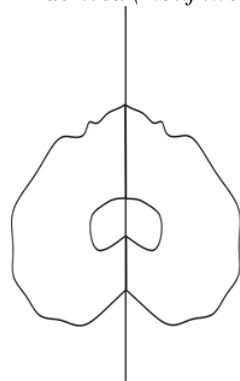


(Source Researcher)
Figure 27: Final motif derived (motif three)

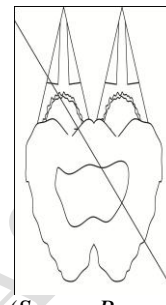
Idea Development For Motif Four



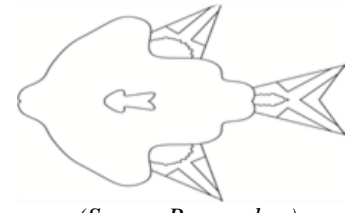
(Source Researcher)
Figure 19: Idea developed from crocodile mouth to be mirrored



(Source Researcher)
Figure 20: Unit derived from fig 19 with mirroring line



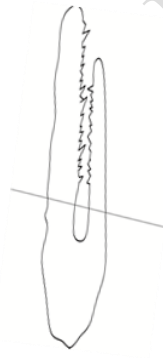
(Source Researcher)
Figure 28: Developing motif 4 from motif 3



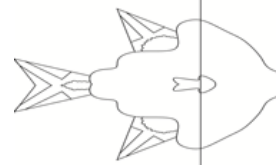
(Source Researcher)
Figure 29: Mirroring Process



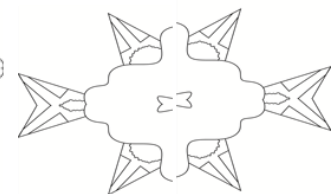
(Source Researcher)
Figure 21: Idea from crocodile head to be mirrored



(Source Researcher)
Figure 22: Unit derived from fig 21

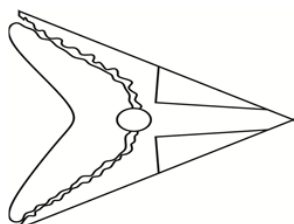


(Source Researcher)
Figure 30: Mirroring process

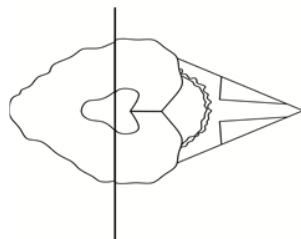


(Source Researcher)
Figure 31: Final motif derived (motif 4)

Idea Development For Motif Five



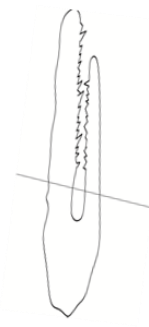
(Source Researcher)
Figure 23: Unit derived from fig 21 after Mirroring



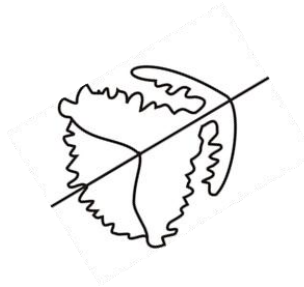
(Source Researcher)
Figure 24: Merging fig 20 and 23



(Source Researcher)
Figure 32: A Unit development of crocodile head



(Source Researcher)
Figure 33: Mirroring process



(Source Researcher)
Figure 34: Unit derived from fig 2 with mirroring line



(Source Researcher)
Figure 35: Final motif derived (motif 5)

PHILOSOPHICAL MEANING OF COLOURS



(Source: Researcher)
Plate 4: Blue



(Source: Researcher)
Plate 5: Brown



(Source: Researcher)
Plate 6: Green



(Source: Researcher)
Plate 7: Orange



(Source: Researcher)
Plate 8: Red



(Source: Researcher)
Plate 9: Yellow

Plate 4: Blue means; loyalty, trust, peace, professionalism.

Plate 5: Brown means; earthy, solid, confidence.

Plate 6: Green means, nature, safety, environmental, durability.

Plate 7: Orange means; cheerfulness, affordability, creativity, food

Plate 8: Red means; love, danger, courage, strength, warmth, determination.

Plate 9: Yellow means; summer, comfort, happiness.

III. SCREEN PREPARATION

The screen development and printing was done in the printing studio of the department of Fashion Design and Textiles Studies, School of Applied Arts, Tamale Technical University. The researcher made a wooden frame in a form of a square from the Wawa board to suit the size of the design and then stretched organdie mesh on it and secured it with a stapler.

IV. COATING OF THE SCREEN

Two (2) table spoons full of sensitiser were mixed with white glue, one (1) teaspoon of ammonium dichromate was

mixed together with the photo-emulsion and used to coat the screen. All this was done in the dark room.

V. SCREEN DEVELOPMENT PROCESS (SHOOTING)

The red bulb was switched on for easy viewing and oil (frytol) was applied to an ordinary used for the design to make it transparent.

The positive side of the design was then placed on the glass on the developing table with the hollow side facing upward. A bag of sand was then placed on the hollow side to act as a support to provide firm contact between the design and the frame the screen was covered with a blanket, afterwards the red light was switched off and the fluorescent light was switched on to start the development process.

After the development process the screen was washed gently with foam by using both hands and enough water in a reservoir to bring – out the design.

VI. CHECKING OF REPEAT

After coating and shooting, because blocking is needed on the screen the researcher used brush to scoop white glue to block the holes of the screen. Before printing began the researcher checked the repeat, prevented overlapping and gaps in the printed fabric by using a paper as a guide during the printing processes.

VII. PRINTING PROCESSES

Firstly, the fabric to be printed was well ironed and spread firmly on the printing table and secured with tack pins, then with the help of the research assistant the screen was firmly held in position, printing paste was scooped with spoon onto the screen to commence the printing process. After the first printing process the fabric was allowed to dry.

The same procedure was used to register the second colour. After printing all the colours the fabric was dried and ironed to get the desired effect. The same procedure was followed to print the second fabric this has been represented in the plates 10 and 11 below.



(Source Researcher)
Plate 10: Settings screen to print to Print



(Source Researcher)
Plate 11: Fetching printing paste into the screen

VIII. BATIK PROCESSES

All the processes involved in batik production in this paper were done in the dyeing studio of the department of Fashion Design and Textiles Studies, School of Applied Arts, Tamale Technical University.

Batik is a traditional textile technique that has been adopted worldwide. Batik design is created by applying wax on the cloth to create a resist. The wax area remains undyed, and the remaining areas absorb the dye colour. The process can then be repeated over and over for multiple colours, working from lightest to darkest.

First researcher, laid 4 yards of mercerized cotton on the waxing table. Next the wax was heated to the desired state and broom was used to sprinkle some of the molten wax on the fabric to create textures.

Three (3) pieces (4 yards each) were dyed in reactive dye solutions comprising sea blue, orange and lemon green colours respectively. One spoonful of reactive dye was mixed with a small amount of cold water, it was properly stirred, then added to a solution of salt water and Soda ash enough water was added to submerge fabric. The fabric was taken through wet-out process to remove impurities from the fabric, thereby ensure proper absorption of the dye. It was then immersed in the dye bath for the whole day (24 hours). After the fabric was well dyed, it was dried in the shade for oxidation to take place.

With the help of the designed stamps, the fabrics were stamped to create the resist. Afterwards four table spoonful's each of the second colours (vat dye) green, brown and red were dissolved separately in small quantity of warm water, one (1) table spoonful of sodium hydroxide (caustic Soda) and four (4) table spoonful of sodium hydrosulphite (hydros) was added to the mixture and stirred till it dissolved, the dye solutions were poured separately into bigger plastic basins, enough water was added to it submerge the waxed fabric. The waxed fabric was taken through wet-out process and immersed in the dye for 30-40 minutes, it was removed and dried for oxidation to take place. After the oxidation process, it was spread on the waxing table for waxing process. Certain parts of the fabric were blocked again and the same process above was followed to dye the last colour. After oxidation took place all the fabrics were de-waxed in a boiling water one after the other, it was rinsed in cold water, squeezed, dried and ironed to remove excess wax as well as to give it a good finish. The following plates below shows the batik processes, finished works and exhibition of works.



(Source Researcher)
Plate 14: Measuring dyes



(Source Researcher)
Plate 15: Researcher mixing dyes



(Source Researcher)
Plate 17: Researcher turning fabric in the dye bath



(Source Researcher)
Plate 16: Researcher immersing fabric into dye bath



(Source Researcher)
Plate 18: Dewaxing process



(Source Researcher)
Plate 19: Turning fabric during dewaxing



(Source Researcher)
Plate 20: Drying finished work (batik)



(Source Researcher)
Plate 21: Ironing of finished fabrics



(Source Researcher)
Plate 12: Stamping (waxing process)



(Source Researcher)
Plate 13: stamping (waxing process)



(Source Researcher)
Plate 22: Finished work (screen printing)



(Source Researcher)
Plate 23: Sewn printed fabric



(Source Researcher)
Plate 24: Finished work
(batik)



(Source Researcher)
Plate 25: Finished work
(batik)



(Source Researcher)
Plate 26: Sewn batik



(Source Researcher)
Plate 27: Sewn batik



(Source Researcher)
Plate 28: printed fabric sewn
into a dress with



(Source Researcher)
Plate 29: Batik fabric draped
on a male model



(Source Researcher)
Plate 36: Fabric sewn into garment on a female model

IX. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Traditionally, arts and culture are inseparable, thus culture is the total way of life of a group of people, and it can only be showcased or preserved through arts of which textiles is a branch. Most Ghanaian traditions are not known because they are not documented and there are no art forms that promotes or reminds people of such tradition.

This study sought to produce motifs and textures for textile design by taking inspiration from the popular myth about crocodiles and its taboo in the Sisala tradition. The need to promote our culture through art forms necessitated that it can only be done best by the branch of art that sells most, which is none other than textiles. Five motifs were developed

through the idea development process, these motifs were further developed on screens and wooden stamps which were subsequently used to design fabrics (mercerized cotton and khaki) using the batik and screen printing techniques. The idea development for this study differs from what exist, unlike the usual way of developing motifs for textile design from animate or inanimate objects. This study conceptualizes the myth and translates it into motifs which were subsequently used to design fabrics using the batik and screen printing method.

Artistically the researcher adopted the basic elements of art as tools to develop the motifs and to create the pattern. Principles of arts such as repetition, emphasis, movement and balance were used as guide for the researcher to convey an oral tradition into a visual piece. The motifs developed comes with curvy lines that depicts the crocodiles, the illusion of space, repetition and energetic marks making the viewer's eyes moves around and within the designed fabrics. Motifs created were repeated to create a pattern, this principle was used to indicate how intense the punishment is for people who violate the taboo.

The shapes of the motifs depicts parts of the crocodile, emphasis was laid much on the head and the jaw of the crocodile this was done to affirm the demonstration of wisdom by the crocodiles and the mercy shown to the ancestors of the Sisalas's. The emphasis on the jaw is to enforce the taboo among the Sisalas, the textures and arrangement of motif (all over) portray the punishment meted out on defaulters of the taboo. The arrangement of the motifs specifically the batiks gives it a texture that depicts the rough nature of the skin of the crocodile. Colours (dyes and pigments) used together with motifs developed have traditional connotations, most importantly, the fabrics produced are durable and fast to abrasions, wash and light.

There is balance (symmetrical) in the motifs developed because of the usage of the mirroring process in the idea development process. This principle was adopted to indicate how they ancestors felt stable and comfortable when they were hosted in the caves by the crocodiles. More so, motifs developed is an addition to the array of motifs used for batik and screen printing that have been over utilized. The projects also inform textile designers that oral traditions can serve as a source of inspiration for textile design.

Theoretically, this project when adopted or explored, will give designers a new avenue for self-expression and brings to the fore varied tactile and intangible tensile characteristics of potential design elements identified over the years of study for its amalgamated application.

X. CONCLUSION

The focus of the study was to translate the concept of the myth and its taboo surrounding the crocodile among the Sisala's of Upper West Region into motifs for fabric design which is subsequently supposed to be used for fashionable products. The outcome discussed in this study, reinforce the possibility of interpreting a myth into a visual aesthetic design.

It is how ever recommended that the motifs derived from study, should be employed in other art forms like fashion

designing, sculpture, graphic design, metal fabrication, leather works and ceramics. It is also recommended that taboos and beliefs of other cultures such as the Mamprusi's, Frafra's, Kasena's and Balsa's should be investigated for aesthetic and artistic purposes.

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