

Indigenous Aesthetic Qualities Inherent in the Dagomba *Bim'mayli* (Smock) in Northern Region of Ghana

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Abstract---The Dagomba, who remains the biggest ethnic society noted for the use of the *Bim'mayli* as their traditional wear, have also exhibited lack of knowledge on the indigenous aesthetics. The aim of this article is to identify the indigenous aesthetic qualities inherent in the *Bim'maya* among the Dagomba in Northern Region of Ghana. It also sought to examine how the indigenous aesthetic qualities characterize the various types of *Bim'maya* among the Dagomba ethnic society. This will go a long way to provide sanity in the Dagomba *Bim'mayli* art and culture thereby helping to promote the cultural heritage of Ghana's indigenous dresses as a whole. A population of *Bim'mayli* weavers, sewers and traditional folk historians from five *Bim'mayli* production communities among the Dagomba were used. Data was taken from a sample of 60 respondents comprising weavers, sewers and traditional folk historians. Through face to face interview and observations, the study gathered, simplified, scrutinized, edited, discussed and analyzed the data with the aid of narratives, descriptions, tables and figures. The study found out that the indigenous aesthetic qualities of any type of *Bim'mayli* makes it useful or functional in the context of the Dagomba culture. Also, *Bim'mayli* meant for prominent people such as chiefs and other traditional rulers have unique indigenous aesthetic qualities which differentiate them from the commoners' *Bim'mayli*. Conclusions drawn from the findings indicated that to purchase and wear a *Bim'mayli*, it becomes necessary to consider the indigenous aesthetic qualities of the *Bim'mayli*. This will help the users to choose *Bim'maya* that match their personalities as well as adding beauty to the wearer's physical qualities.

Keywords: Aesthetics, *Bim'mayli*, *Bim'maya*, Dagombas, Indigenous

I. INTRODUCTION

Bim'mayli in Dagbani is what is commonly known in Ghana as smock. *Bim'mayli* literally means a 'real material or cloth'. The singular form is *Bim'mayli* and the plural form is *Bim'maya*. Both the cloth and the dress are referred to in Dagbani as *Bim'mayli*, therefore, for the purpose of this article, the smock will be referred to as *Bim'mayli* and will be used interchangeably in certain contexts. The *Bim'mayli* remains the greatest indigenous dress

for the Dagomba in Northern Region of Ghana. The Dagomba weave the *Bim'mayli* cloth on the traditional looms before the cloths are cut and sewn into *Bim'mayli* dress for both men and women [1].

The indigenous knowledge of the *Bim'mayli* art and culture among Dagombas seems to lose its virtue in modern days. The indigenous aesthetic qualities in the types of the *Bim'maya* remain debatable today due to the society's negligence in maintaining the beauty and value of its culture. One of the causes of the degradation of traditional dress of the *Bim'mayli* is as the result of researchers' low interest to research and publish in the field of Ghanaian indigenous textile fabrics [2], and the youth in particular has no interest in wearing the *Bim'mayli*.

The *Bim'mayli* has a lot of aesthetic connotations regarding what makes a particular *Bim'mayli* indigenously beautiful. Aesthetics as used for this paper is defined in the context of African aesthetics which is drawn from environmental, cultural, historical, and religious experiences [3]. In the African context of beauty, it is dependent on each ethnic society's conception of beauty [3], hence the Dagomba ethnic society has formulated aesthetic qualities through aesthetic experiences about the *Bim'mayli*.

Indigenous aesthetic qualities are terms that are required to describe taste/discernment/perceptiveness in the *Bim'mayli*. These indigenous aesthetic qualities speak volumes about the philosophical, metaphysical, political, chieftaincy, economic, social and psychological realities as a total way of life of the Dagombas. The indigenous aesthetic concepts or qualities of the *Bim'mayli* among the Dagomba ethnic society include "coolness", "depth", "smoothness", "coarseness", "free flare", "sleeveless", "sleeves", "weight", "length", "levelness", "shape", "size", "form", "shabbiness", and so on. These aesthetic qualities characterize the indigenous character of the various types of the *Bim'maya*.

The *Bim'mayli* among the Dagombas is categorical by the size, colour, and style of sewing. By size, the

Bim'manli ranges from the smallest to the biggest which all have their corresponding names, and by colour it has names based on the number of colours that are used to create the warp and the weft yarns during the waving process. Though there are great resemblances between some *Bim'manja* of the Dagomba yet they have different names [4], and their sizes, styles of sewing or embroidery and among others bring the difference.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A Elements of African Aesthetics.

The elements of African aesthetics differ across the cultures, but the universal ones would include togetherness, craftsmanship, symbolism, self-composure, luminosity and youthfulness [12].

1 Togetherness: In most societies, there is a tradition of teamwork, be it in professional pursuits or family errands. This creates a feeling of ownership and pride in the products made. Even craftsmen working on their own would have closely worked with a master or in a team, whilst an apprentice, sharing experiences and amassing knowledge and skills. The richness of the people is more spiritual than material and their joy and affluence as a people is based more on their belief system and sense of communal unity and trueness to their natural environment [12].

In the same vein, the *Bim'manli* production was in the past not done on individual basis. Weavers and sewers would sit together under the headship of either the family head or an elderly to create a sense of unity, control and the promotion of the cultural heritage of the people. This according to [11] is still practiced among modern weavers and sewers of the *Bim'manli* in Northern Ghana. Weavers and sewers are still gathered under a common weaving shed and are guided by one or more master weavers and designers.

2 Craftsmanship: The creative skills of *Bim'manli* producers among Dagombas promote them higher than others and their products are highly recognized and purchased by members in the society. Most African objects/products such as the kente and the *Bim'manli* are handmade [13]. They are produced by an individual craftsman, group, society or family with long tradition of craftsmanship [12]. The objects or artifacts are usually made intricately, with wonderful details, and give very excellent finish by the use of the hands and simple tools [14]. Typical items would include baskets, cloths, crockery, sculptural figures, paintings, and cutlery.

In general, as the artists create the objects for friends or the local community, these objects have a personal touch of craftsmanship which tie the users to the makers [12]. Because the objects are hand-crafted, they are likely to be given detailed personal attention that would guarantee quality construction and finish. According to [14], prominence is attached to fine workmanship and mastery of the medium (of the material as well as of construction). Similarly, [13] asserts that the *Bim'manli* is an indigenous craft practiced among

people in the northern part of Ghana and it was purely hand-spun, and woven [15] which made the *Bim'manli* coarser than modern machine-spun yarns. Even today, majority of the weavers use the hand than machine in the production of the *Bim'manli* and finishing techniques of stitching or embroidery are used to make the *Bim'manli* more attractive and durable.

3 Symbolism: The *Bim'manli* is symbolic. There is a lot of symbolism that is embedded into traditionally African made artefacts. The symbolical connotations of the design of most of the artefacts resulted through myths, stories and beliefs, religious or otherwise. The colour and shape design details of African dress and other artefacts differ widely, depending on the cultural setting, the knowledge and experience of the artists, the role the artifact plays in the culture, the personality for whom the craft is made and the market [16].

Various shapes and colours are used for example, in Kente cloth among the Asantes in Ghana during their traditional ceremonies such as funerals, marriages and festivals. White, black, brown and red kente cloths are associated with funerals for mourning the dead among the Asantes and a very white *Bim'manli* is used by a newly enskinned chief to express happiness, power, and newness (SabariNaa, personal communication, November 4, 2017).

4 Resemblance to a human being: To African artists and art lovers, a carved figure that looks like a human being has a higher aesthetic value. Artists do not usually portray particular people, actual animals, or the actual form of invisible spirits. Instead, they aim to portray ideas about reality, spiritual or human, and express these ideas through human or animal images. In this way, the style of wearing the *Bim'manli* caps, the trousers (pantaloons) and the visual features of the *Bim'manli* such as colour, explains the wearer's personality and attitude in a non-verbal manner to the surrounding world. This means that some *Bim'manja* with their accessories represent a person's personality (A. Bawah, personal communication, July 28, 2016).

5 Self-composure: Most African art pieces—sculptures, textiles and paintings carry within them, the spirits and traits of the creator or owner. This may be depicted through the design elements, the form and the finished style of the object to indicate something of the creator or the owner of such work-piece. The art piece would be well-organized and logical, and could be related to a composed person, that is, very disciplined and rational; he or she would be controlled, proud, distinguished and graceful [10].

In this regard, the *Bim'manli* is woven and sewn in different styles depicting the traits of individuals, lineage and ethnic societies. In other words, there are *Bim'manja* for chiefs, ordinary persons, warriors [4] and twins as indicated by Alhassan Fusheitu (personal communication, March 17, 2018). The style of sewing the *Bim'manli* for the *dondo* drummers among Dagombas is very common and popular and

this made people in the past and present identified them as a lineage.

6 Luminosity: According to [14], the smooth surface of most African figure sculpture and other arts, have splendid polished smooth surfaces on some parts, as well as detailed decoration on some other parts. This has connotations of good health, well-being, wealth and purity [12]. In contrast, indigenous *Bim'manja* were coarser due to the use of hand-spun yarns and up to now, the indigenes of the Dagombas still prefer *Bim'manja* woven with hand-spun yarns to modern *Bim'manja* woven with synthetic yarns.

In the past and up to date, *Bim'manja* have been given luminosity by beating them using a big wooden wallet. This treatment ironed the *Bim'manjli* and it becomes smooth and soft. Likewise, dyeing the *Bim'manjli* with natural dyes was intended to make it luminous, however, the beaten action is still practiced but dyeing of the *Bim'manjli* among Dagombas is not commonly practiced again.

7 Youthfulness: These are aspects that may be related to being young: vibrant, healthy, positive and a source of strength. Negative aspects such as dullness or unhealthy looks are generally not depicted in the design of objects. Similarly, one of the aesthetic values of the *Bim'manjli* is its being young looking. This quality is achieved each time a particular *Bim'manjli* cloth or dress is beaten by the traditional method of smoothening it and gives it a new and vibrant looking. Besides, SabariNaa (personal communication, November 4, 2017) posits that the *Bim'manjli* dress does not become old and the older people among Dagombas still wear shabby *Bim'manja* to occasions. The youthfulness of the *Bim'manjli* is attributed to its high material value as compared to other fabrics in the culture of Dagombas.

B Traditional Ghanaian Dresses

In Ghanaian culture, textiles are part of everyday life and have played a vibrant role in the everyday life of the Ghanaian people based on their wide use of symbolic imagery from the Ghanaian culture [17]. The wax print, adinkra and kente fabrics are usually stitched into 'kaba and slit' (long skirt and top) which is the traditional ensemble worn by Ghanaian women [18]. Today, the fabrics are used in the production of other modern garment designs which solely reflect western styles ([5; 18]). They sometime combine the fabrics with plain matching colours or made only from the kente, adinkra, the *Bim'manjli*, and the wax print. The kente, *Bim'manjli* and wax prints are of beautiful bright colours worn to church services, mosques for prayers, parties, festivals, graduation ceremonies and other joyous festivities. The adinkra cloth of Asantes, on the other hand, is worn solely to funerals.

The traditional Ghanaian dresses as outlined by the authors comprise wax prints, adinkra and kente. This is an oversight for not mentioning the *Bim'manjli* as a traditional Ghanaian dress. The *Bim'manjli* is one of the indigenous Ghanaian traditional dresses and its origin is older than

Ghana's independence. It existed long before the freedom fighters of the country portrayed themselves in *Bim'manja* on the declaration parade for Ghana's success for its own independence [15; 9].

C Names of Dagombas indigenous Bim'manja

The Dagomba *Bim'manjli* has indigenous names which were used to identify them. Therefore, literature regarding the indigenous names of the *Bim'manjli* was purely gathered from the fieldwork through interviews. According to [15], [4], [20], [9] and [19], the *Bim'manjli* was put into different categories and were named based on how it originated or its association in nature. Some of the names included the following as described by these authors:

1. *Yanshichi/Dansichi* [pronounced Yansichi/Dansichi] (sleeveless *Bim'manjli*)
2. *Benjmaaa Bari* [pronounced BenjmaaaBɔrɛ] (*Bim'manjli* with sleeves)
3. *Kpankuto* (*Bim'manjli* with wide and large sleeves)
4. *SondanYibu* (meaning 'leaving early morning')
5. *Yebli* [pronounced Yɛbili] (for title holders)
6. *Nam-Kparigu* (chiefdom *Bim'manjli* for enskinment)
7. *Boonga* (*Bim'manjli* in multi-colored stripes)

III. METHODOLOGY

The descriptive research methodology was employed in this study. The study therefore surveyed *Bim'manjli* producers, merchants, traditional folk historians among Dagombas in Northern Region of Ghana. The descriptive research method allowed for detailed description, exploration and analysis that gave better in-depth understanding of the *Bim'manjli*.

Observation and interview were used as data collection instruments for the study. Structured interview with the general interview guide approach was adopted for the research. This was intended to ensure that the same information was collected from each interviewee. Though it paved way for being focused, it still permitted some value of freedom and adaptability in getting the information from the interviewee. The researchers observed details of the various types of *Bim'manja*, which also helped to confirm the verbal descriptions given by the respondents about the indigenous aesthetic qualities of the various types of *Bim'manja* (smocks).

The population of the study constituted the traditional folk historians, rulers, weavers and sewers of the Dagombas *Bim'manjli* in the Northern Region of Ghana. In conducting the interviews, the purposive random sampling technique was employed. This was supported by snowball sampling where interviewees helped the researchers to locate other people who had in-depth knowledge in the Dagomba *Bim'manjli* culture. The various groups of people interviewed and traditional weaving centers and shops visited were all selected from the Northern Region of Ghana. The places resorted for interviews were Yendi, Tamale, Zabzugu,

Karaga, Gusheigu, Kpatinga, Kuga, Kpatuya, and Banvum. The population was divided into three strata of respondents; traditional folk historians, weavers and sewers of the Dagombas *Bim'mayli*. In all, a sample of 60 respondents were selected from the population of 500. The sample size made up of 30 weavers, 18 sewers and 12 traditional folk historians.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Indigenous Aesthetic Qualities of *Bim'manja*

Qualities here stand for the indigenous characteristics that make each particular *Bim'mayli* identifiable, acceptable, appropriate, useful and functional. According to 15(83.3%) respondents of sewers and 28(93.3%) respondents of weavers, the indigenous features of each particular type of *Bim'mayli* makes it beautiful in the context of the Dagomba culture. This is because, the *Bim'mayli* remains a powerful material culture of the Dagomba and the people used them for their various

occasions. Similarly, Adikorley [21] and Dzramedo [22] opined that the *Bim'mayli* is a cultural dress among ethnic societies in the Northern part of the country and it forms part of their lives.

The general indigenous aesthetic qualities of the *Bim'mayli* of Dagombas identified by the respondents are discussed below:

1 Size: Every type of *Bim'mayli* dress is characterized by a visual aesthetic quality of size. The size in most cases determines the name of a particular cloth. The size of the *Bim'mayli* also determine its purpose and function. In Plate 1, the *Bim'mayli Yansichi* remains the smallest and this suggests its name which literally means singlet or under shirt in Hausa origin. According to 10(83.3%) traditional folk historians in the *Bim'mayli* culture among Dagombas, this type of *Bim'mayli* is referred to as *Toro*, *Putahirigu*, *Benymaatawu*, all literally meaning 'stomach cover in Dagbani'.



Plate 1: *Bim'mayli Yansichi*



Plate 2: *uujh Bim'mayli Yabli Bim'mayli*

This brings the different between *Yansichi* and the other bigger sizes such as *Yabli* in Plate 2. *Yabli* is the biggest [4], and according to Banvum Lun-Naa Ibrahim (personal communication, July 4, 2017) the name *Yabli* is derived from the Dagbani word "*Zahayabinli*" meaning very big.

2 Form: Form or shape is a visual aesthetic quality that designers seriously take into consideration. It also suggests the name, use or purpose of the *Bim'mayli*. The form of *Yansichi* is conical while the form of Chieftom *Bim'mayli* (Kparigu) is pentagonal when either of them is stretched as shown in Plate 3 and Plate 4.



Plate 3: Ordinary *Bim'mayli Kparigu*



Plate 4: *Bim'mayli Yansichi Bim'mayli dress*



Plate 5: *Bim'mayli Banimaansu*

The other types of *Bim'manja* have their form which include conical shape for *Benjmaabahri* (short *Bim'manjli* with sleeves) as seen in Plate 14, *Kpaankuto* is like a flying bird as seen in Plate 14, *Banimaansu* is sometimes rectangular or squared as seen in Plate 5, and *Dagombas War Bim'manjli (Gbagno)*, the vest type, is cylindrical as seen in Plate 28. The respondents explained that the shape of a *Bim'manjli* is paramount for its identification especially when different types of *Bim'manja* are being displayed.

A typical example is *Yabli* and the Ordinary *Kparigu Bim'manja* where both have been given detailed embroidery or stitches (Y. Mutaru, personal communication, May 5, 2017).

3 *Coarseness*: This visual aesthetic quality has remained one of the significant indigenous qualities of the *Bim'manjli*. In the past, due to the rough twisting of the yarn, the woven cloth was coarser, hence when sewn into a *Bim'manjli* it gives the dress a porous texture.



Plate 6: *Bim'manjli Nam Kparugu* or *Bulla* for enskinment

According to MusahIssah (personal communication, August 4, 2017) the coarseness of the *Bim'manjli* was much loved by the people and many indigenes today still prefer the coarser *Bim'manjli* to the modern ones [15]. The coarseness of a *Bim'manjli* also determines its name, origin and significance. For instance, the coarser yarns are still used to weave *Bim'manja* cloths for enskinment of chiefs from the royal gates. This type of *Bim'manjli* is known as *Nam Kparuguor Bulla* meaning the 'chiefdom *Bim'manjli*', as seen in Plate 6.

important people in society. Chiefs, family heads and other traditional rulers possess yards of this *Bim'manjli* as shroud to cover their bodies after death. Today, it is not only restricted to recognized personalities but for whosoever can afford it.

4 *Length*: The length of *Bim'manjli* is a major indigenous aesthetic quality which also helps to identify the *Bim'manjli*. It suggests the names, significance and uses for certain *Bim'manja* among Dagombas. For instance, long *Bim'manja* were in the past known to be 'Banimaasu' as depicted in Plate 5, which had a long slit from the waist down to the edges for easy opening of the legs of horse riders. Also, the length of Chiefdom *Bim'manjli* (Nam Kparugu) should be lengthy so that it sometimes touches the ground (See Plate. 6) no matter the height of the wearer. This is one of the reasons why the attendants of the newly enskinned chief hold up the *Bim'manjli* to allow the chief walk (W. Fusheina, personal communication, April 7, 2017).'

There is another type of *Bim'manjli* called *Motalo* which literally means 'the *Bim'manjli* of the Moshi ethnicity'. According to a majority response of 90% involving 27 respondents of weavers, the coarser yarn weaving of the *Bim'manjli* cloth is still greatly carried out among the Moshi people and only few Dagombas weavers weave the cloth upon clients' request.

The study also found out that the coarser *Bim'manjli* has an intricate traditional use for burying dead bodies of



Plate 7: *Bim'manjli Yansichi* (with correct length) just around the waist level



Plate 8: Man in *Bim'manjli BingmaBahri* (length around the knees)

Besides, length is a major indigenous aesthetic quality that also differentiates *Yansichi* from *Benɲmabahri* as shown in Plates 7 and 8. According to [4], the traditional length of *Yansichi* usually ends around the wearer's waist line and just drops on the buttocks (See Plate 7) whilst the *Benɲmabahri* extends up to the knee level as shown in Plate 8.

5 *Weight*: The weight of a *Bim'manɲli* is highly charitable [21], and the indigenes of Dagombas prefer

wearing *Bim'manɲa* that have weight than the lighter ones. The weight in *Bim'manɲli* is achieved through the technique of sewing. In this wise, all the respondents (100%) of sewers agreed that hand sewing technique is the most indigenous and also gives weight to the *Bim'manɲli* than machine sewing technique.



Plate 9: *Bim'manɲli* Yabli with its heavy embroidery decoration

Also, weights of some *Bim'manɲa* are achieved through the detailed hand or machine embroidery given to them such as *YabliBim'manɲli* (See Plate 9). The type of fabric used as a liner for the *Bim'manɲli* also affects the weight of the fabric. It was discovered that lighter fabrics give little weight to the *Bim'manɲli* but the use of another woven *Bim'manɲli* cloth as liner gives much weight to the *Bim'manɲli*. Another way that weight is achieved in the *Bim'manɲli*s by wearing more than one *Bim'manɲli* dress at a go (See Plate 9). As indicated by 10(83.3%) respondents of traditional folk historians,

sometimes, a person could wear up to six pieces of *Bim'manɲli* and this makes him look bulky or weightier (K. Amadu, personal communication, August 6, 2017).

The man in Plate 9 is bulky or weightier because of wearing more than one piece of *Bim'manɲli*.

6 *Shabbiness*: As an indigenous aesthetic quality which is still cherishable today, the value of a *Bim'manɲli* does not denounce its older state.



Plate 10: A royal in shabby *Bim'manɲli* over even a new one



Plate 11: A young boy in shabby *Bim'manɲli* at a funeral celebration in Yendi



Plate 12: Northern actor/comedian- Ayaana, in old *Bim'manɲli*

According to 10(83.3%) respondents of traditional folk historians, an indigenous Dagomba man feels proud in his shabby *Bim'manli* because it is worn to symbolize power, wisdom, spirituality and divination as seen in Plates 10 and 12. This view is supported by the chief of BanvumLunNaa Ibrahim in his statement that, 'in the past, chiefs and other spiritual leaders will wear old *Bim'manja* to exhibit power while the warriors wear them for their bravery and status' (personal communication, April 4, 2017). The value placed on the *Bim'manli* has even licensed the youth to wear shabby *Bim'manja* to occasions without any shyness as seen in Plate 11.

Film actors and comedians who perform the role of old men and spiritualists are often seen today dressed in shabby *Bim'manja* to signal their indigenous purposes and significance in the drama or play (See Plate 12). This is why [21] and [24] added that African clothing is part of life and it becomes the mirror through which stories are told about

African ideologies. It is therefore common to see the old, young, spiritualist and some traditional folk historians hanging a number of shabby *Bim'manja* on the walls of their rooms while others keep them in their trunks or bags for use.

7 Pocket: The pockets of a particular *Bim'manli* affect the naming, usage, functionality and significance of the *Bim'manli*. Pockets for *Bim'manja* differ in size, depth and position on the *Bim'manja* [4]. There are *Bim'manja* with shallow or deep, narrow or broad and straight or inclined posture pockets placed at the sideways or on the stomach. All these descriptions of pocket creations on the *Bim'manli* speak volumes about their uses, functions and significance. The position of pockets for the *Bim'manli Yansichi* remains at the sideways and should not be at the front (Plate 15). This, according to 17(94.4%) respondents of sewers makes the *Bim'manja* indigenous. Likewise, *Nam Kparigu, Benjmaabahri, Kpaankobu, and YabliBim'manja* have their pockets in front as seen in Plates 13,14 16 and 18.



Plate 13: Pocket of *Bim'manli Nam-Kparugu*



Plate 14: Pockets of *Bim'manli Benjmaabahri*



Plate 15: Pockets of *Bim'manli Yansichi*

However, it is traditional that the pockets for *Kpaankuto* and *Benjmaabahri* are double pockets positioned just beneath the stomach. Instead, Ordinary *Kparigu Bim'manli* has a single pocket which is usually very deep and wide placed at the front. As for *Benjmaabahri, Kpaankuto, Banimaasu, and Ordinary KpariguBim'manja*, designers cannot change the pockets to the side ways; the traditional way is to put the pockets in front so that the wearer can easily thrash the hand into them than to search for the pockets from the sideways where the huge sleeves might turn to hide the pockets.

8 Round/V Neck: The neck given to a particular *Bim'manli* also suggests its name, purpose, and function. These two prominent neck designs-round and V shapes-are peculiar among the Dagombas *Bim'manja*. It was realized that 14(77.8%) respondents of sewers indicate that the round neck with or without a slit is more profound with *Yansichi, Benjmaabahri, Kpaankuto* and *BanimaansuBim'manja* while the V neckline styles are designated with *Yabliand Kparigu* as shown in Plates 4, 14, 27, 5, 16 and 3 respectively.



Plate 16: Neck line of *Bim'manli Yabli*

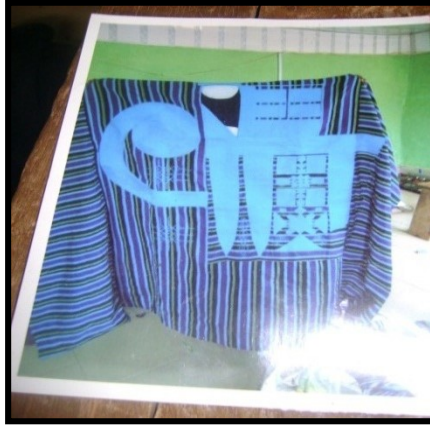


Plate 17: Neck line of Ordinary *Bim'manli Kparugu*



Plate 18: Neck line of *Bim'manli Kpaankoto*

In comparing the round neck with slit or without slit, 14(77.8%) respondents of sewers agreed that the round neck with slit is more popular than round necks without slits. Plates 16, 17, 18 and 19 show the various types of *Bim'manja* and the neck line designs. According to LunTahiru (personal communication, August 4, 2017), the bigger *Bim'manja* such as *Yabli* and *KpariguKparigu* are given V necklines because this neck line is wider and longer than the round ones.. Also, the V neckline permits the necks of the inner ones to expose, which dictate the richness in the mood of the wearer's dressing as seen in Plate 9.

Sleeves

Sleeves are indigenous aesthetic qualities that are used to dictate the name, purpose and significance of the *Bim'manli*. The sleeves could be short or long [1] and some sleeves of the *DagombaBim'manja* extend to the ankles as the

longest sleeves. Also, the wideness of the sleeves depends on the type and purpose of the *Bim'manli*. Also, as answered by 13(72.2%) respondents of sewers, the only *Bim'manja* without sleeves are the *Yansichi* and the *Gbagno* vest. These particular *Bim'manja* in the past were sleeveless and the culture still goes on today. A sleeveless *Bim'manli* is used as a singlet because it looks more open at the sideways that allows more circulation of air into the wearer's body. In the past, sleeveless *Bim'manja* were worn by chiefs for resting times and when visiting farmers on his farms.

Men from the royal family used to wear *Benjmaabahri* (Plate 8)-*Bim'manja* with sleeves- and were recognized by the society. *Kpaankoto* is in the form of *Benjmaabahri* but with long and broad sleeves. Because of the large sleeves which sometimes reach the feet, the wearer mostly folds the sleeves over the shoulders as seen in Plate 20.



Plate 19: Sleeves of *Benjma Bahri*



Plate 20: Sleeves of *Bim'manli Kpaankoto*

These particular *Bim'maṅa* were worn by chiefs and other important personalities. *Yabli* (Plate 17) and *Kpaankuto* (Plate 20) have similarities in methods of sewing, gathers (sijje), sleeves size and length. *Yabli* has much bigger and wider sleeves than *Kpaankuto* in some cases and it was solely worn by chiefs in the past. Also, the main difference between *Yabli* and *Kpaankuto* is that *Yabli* has rectangular neck at the preliminary stages but when it is completed it has triangular neck line.

Another clear difference is the heavy and broad stitches or embroidering made both in front and at the back of *Yabli* (Plate 16). However, 17(94.4%) of the respondents indicate that *Kparugu* has the widest sleeves as compared with *Kpaankuto* and *Yabli*. Because of the size of sleeves, it was worn by chiefs and the lieutenants at both sides of the chief will help holding the sleeves up.

Colour/Stripe

According to the respondents, certain *Bim'maṅa* are named based on their colour pattern, which normally refer to the stripes. Indigenously, a pure one colour pattern has been known as *askoyini* *Bim'maṅli* (one colour *Bim'maṅli*) while multi-coloured stripes of *Bim'maṅa* are referred to as *Boonsi* (multicolour striped *Bim'maṅa*). The colour of a *Bim'maṅli* portrays the use, name and significance. For instance, purely one colour of grey bath pattern is known as *Binpienli* and this is used to sew a *Bim'maṅli* for enskinment and for burial services (Plate 8).

Also, the mixture of white and black colours is indigenously known as *Kpaankobgu* ('Guineafowl feathers') and this is the most cherished and valued *Bim'maṅli* cloth on the lands of Dagombas (Plate 22). It was posited by 11(91.7%) respondents of traditional folk historians that the *Kpaankobgu* is seemed to possess some spiritual powers and any indigene who has spiritual problems is directed to acquire this *Bim'maṅli* cloth.



Plate 21: *Bim'maṅli* *Binpienli* (White) *Bim'maṅli* dress)



Plate 22: *Bim'maṅli* *Kpaankobgu* *Yansichi* (Guineafowl feather)



Plate 23: *Bim'maṅli* *Boon Sabinli* (Black Striped *Bim'maṅli*)

Again, the combination of *Kpaankobgu* and pure white *Bim'maṅli* cloths to sew a *Bim'maṅli* is locally called *Jaajekum*, literally meaning "a twin does not want death". It is mostly known to be worn by twins or twin dolls (see Plates 24

& 25) and believe to possess the spirits of protecting the lives of twins (A. Fusheitu, personal communication, February 7, 2018).



Plate 24: *Bim'maṅli* *Jaajekum* *Bim'maṅli* (Twin's *Bim'maṅli*)



Plate 25: A twin doll clothed with twins' *Bim'maṅli* (*Bim'maṅli* *Jaajekum*)



Plate 26: *Bim'manli* Boonzie (Red-striped) *Bim'manli* dress



Plate 27 *Bim'manli* cloths used for sacrifice



Plate 28: *Dagombas* *Bim'manli* war *Bim'manli* (Vest type)

There are names of *Bim'manja* as *Boon zeei* (red-striped *Bim'manli*) because it has the combination of red and white warp stripes with red weft (Plate 26) and *Boon sabinli* (black-striped *Bim'manli*) because it

has black and white warp stripes combination with black weft (Plate 23). Since in the olden days, the *Boonsi* *Bim'manja* have been used for sacrifices to avert evil spirits and one commonly comes across these pieces of cloths with other ingredients placed in the middle of roads and streets as seen in Plate 27, as sacrifices to the ancestors.

Gathers (Sijje)

The *Bim'manja* have gathers or folds which give them shape to whirl round when the wearer turns his body in a dancing mood. The degree and level of gathers or pleats of a *Bim'manli* depends on the type and use of the *Bim'manli*. However, 18(100%) respondents of sewers agreed that not all types of *Bim'manja* have gathers. *Yansichi*, *Benjmabahri*, *Kpaankoto*, *Yabli*, *Banimaansu* and funeral *Gbagnoh* have gathers and the gathers make them unique and traditional (Plates 29 and 5).



Bim'manli
Kpaankoto



Bim'manli
Yansichi



Bim'manli
Benjmabahri



Bim'manli *Yabli*

Plate 29: Gathers in *Bim'manli*

The indigenous character of chiefdom *Bim'manli* is made without gathers (Plate 6). It should also be noted that the level of gathers (where pleating is done on the *Bim'manli*) differ among *Bim'manja*. For instance, 17(94.4%) respondents of sewers indicated that the gathers of *Yansichi* and *Yabli* start from the chest while the gathers of *Benjmabahri* and *Kpaankoto* start from the waist (Plate 28). This makes the former to swing when the wearer starts walking but the latter turns to be more flexible to whirl heavenly when the wearer turns himself in a dancing mood.

Coolness

Coolness is an expressive indigenous aesthetic quality of the *Bim'manli* which encompasses appropriateness of size, gathers, length, shape and colour/stripe. According to 11(91.7%) respondents of traditional folk historians, a *Bim'manli* is said to be cool when its size, volume, length, shape, colour and the sewing style are appropriate.

Voluminous

Some *Bim'manja* are expected to have volume as an indigenous aesthetic quality which makes it traditionally

acceptable. The volume of the *Bim'manli* depends on the prestige of the wearer, the type and the purpose or function of the *Bim'manli*. Chiefs and other traditional leaders wear *Bim'maya* with deeper volumes such as *Yabli* (Plate 9), *Benjmabahri* (Plate 8), *Banimaasu* (Plate 5) and *Kparugu* (Plate 3). These *Bim'maya* have deeper volumes than *Yansichi* (Plate 1) and the vest type. It is therefore a common expression among Dagombas that when a *Bim'manli* is not voluminous and hangs up on the wearer, they normally say, "di bi sahisu" meaning, it does not match his size.



Plate 30: The *Bim'manli* *Yansichi* has unbalanced level at the base

Levelness

This is another indigenous aesthetic quality of the *Bim'manli*. All the respondents (100%) of sewers posited that levelness in the *Bim'manli* is achieved by the skill level of the sewer/designer.

When the joining or the creation of the gathers at the waist is not done well, it gives the *Bim'manli* imbalanced base and when the wearer puts it on, it looks unfit. When the base is not leveled, it affects the aesthetic quality of the *Bim'manli* in whirling appropriately when the wearer moves in a dancing mood (Plate 30). It also exposes the inner wear which is traditionally inappropriate [4].



Plate 31: The *Bim'manli* *Yansichi* has balanced level at the base

V. CONCLUSION

To purchase and wear a *Bim'manli*, it becomes appropriate to consider the indigenous aesthetic qualities of the *Bim'maya*. This will help the users to choose *Bim'maya* that match their personalities as well as adding beauty to the wearer's physical qualities. Modern users of the *Bim'manli* do not consider the indigenous aesthetic qualities of the *Bim'manli* when choosing them and thereby used these *Bim'maya* anyhow. This does not help to preserve the dignity of the *Bim'manli* of the Dagomba and the society needs to protect the value by making the necessary information on the *Bim'manli* available to the public. The aesthetic qualities of the *Bim'manli* provide the necessary features that differentiate one *Bim'manli* from another. The various *Bim'maya* worn have names, uses, purposes and functions and the indigenous aesthetic qualities play major roles in defining the use and significance of the *Bim'maya*.

Due to the little information available regarding the *Bim'manli* culture, producers in the modern society have disregarded the importance of the indigenous aesthetic qualities of the *Bim'maya* during production. It is often found that some particular *Bim'maya* bear the qualities of other *Bim'maya* which create confusion in the *Bim'manli* culture with regard to identification, uses and functions. This article

has provided some in-depth analysis of the indigenous aesthetic qualities of the *Bim'manli* which will help provide some fundamental guidelines on how to produce, purchase and use the *Bim'manli*.

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