



Female Genital Mutilation: Design And Fabrication Of A Wall Plaque For Awareness Creation

I. K. Agyei

Department of Industrial Art
Faculty of Art, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology
Kumasi, Ghana

J. Adu-Agyem

Department of General Art Studies
Faculty of Art, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology
Kumasi, Ghana

P. Amponsem

Department of Industrial Art
Faculty of Art, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology
Kumasi, Ghana

Abstract:

This research designs and fabricates a metal mosaic wall plaque which is aesthetically pleasing and durable to complement other means of awareness creation of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). Metal Scraps such as milk tins, canned mineral tins, pieces of aluminum, copper and brass sheets etc. were used for the plaque depending on the colour to be depicted in the scene using Metal Mosaic Technique. The Experimental and Descriptive research methods based on quantitative and qualitative approaches were employed in the study. The plaque as was hypothesized thus, from the designing stage, fabrication stage and the finishing stage proved to be what it was intended for with respect to helping to educate people, especially rural folks who are custodians and champions of customs and opinion leaders of the heinous practice of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). Materials for the project were locally available but the technique was painstaking, time consuming and tedious. It is recommended that other cooperate bodies such as WHO and others who preach total annihilation of this form of practice must bring on board metal artists to produce aesthetically pleasing and intriguing scenes in the form of wall plaques to complement the campaign.

Keywords: genital mutilation, fabrication, mosaic technique, plaque, tesserae.

Introduction

According to a Joint WHO/UNICEF/UNFPA (1997) and Garry (2004), Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is the term used to refer to the removal of part, or all, of the female genitalia. The procedure consists of a clitoridectomy in which all, or part, of the clitoris is removed, excision which involves the removal of all, or part, of the labia minora, and the cutting of the labia majora to create raw surfaces, which are then stitched or held together in order to form a cover over the vagina when they heal. A small hole is left to allow urine and menstrual blood to escape. According to Wright (1996), Young Gishri girls in Hausa country, barely pubescent, are sold at a very high price once they have been made ready for penetration by this procedure, which involves cutting their vaginas. Annas (1996) and Wright (1996) indicate that "Some of the justifications of FGM include tradition, religion, the sexual control of women, and social acceptance. They say these justifications are faulty and should not be used to support this brutal practice. Unfortunately Annas (1996) explains that the Muslims believe that it is a religious necessity to subject women to genital mutilation. However, the author points out that it is not mentioned anywhere in the Koran or any other theological text of Islam. The practice is believed to be effective in controlling sexual behavior of women because the removal of the clitoris makes it virtually impossible to experience orgasm."

Gifford (1994) explains that, "she explored the justifications given for the procedure to better understand why women sometimes consent. The reasons traditionally advanced are religion, hygiene, and sexual control of women. A study by Abusharaf (2001) found that, "circumcision is seen as 'the machinery which liberates the female body from its masculine properties'". Dorkenoo (1994) states that, "FGM can be performed on adult women in the following ways: with the consent when marrying into different ethnic groups. In societies where a man is allowed to have a number of wives, it is said that, it is physically impossible for the man to satisfy all his wives. Genital mutilation then helps by preventing the women from being too demanding" (WHO, 1994; Pioneer, 2008). This hardship had brought about a number of untold hardships on the culprits. As Dr. Mark Belsey of the Division of Family health, World Health Organization, Geneva, remarked in a 1993 documentary interview that, "there is no single practice which has such a dramatic negative effect on health in the broadest sense as FGM". No wonder, the Inter-African Committee on traditional practices (IAC) adopted February 6 as a day to draw attention worldwide to the menace of FGM.

The Practice Of “Female Genital Mutilation” In Ghana

According to Kadri (1986), FGM is practised in two secluded regions of Ghana in the Upper East region by the Bussansi, Frafra, Kantonsi, Kassena, Kussasi, Mamprushie, Moshie and Nankanne ethnic groups and in the Upper West region by the Dargarti, Grushie, Kantonsi, Lobi, Sissala and Walas ethnic groups. Adherence to the practice in these regions ranges from 75% to 100%.

Also, a study by Twumasi (1987) in Accra and Nsawam in the southern part of Ghana found female genital mutilation only among migrant communities from the northern part and from neighboring countries. Dorkenoo (1994) also explains that, the container or bag in which ‘surgeons’ have their instruments contain three different kinds of locally made cutting blades. The first is for shaving the vulva, the second to outline or mark out the area to be cut and the third for the actual cutting. If the victims are more than the number of knives, the knives are reused without proper washing and cleaning. Even if they are washed, they are cleansed with kenaf leaves, which they believe have antiseptic qualities. She further states that, “In the olden days, the cost of the mutilation or cutting was a basket of millet and a guinea fowl to thank the circumcisor. But these days, it is converted into monetary terms ranging from one Ghana cedi to five Ghana cedis.”

Metal Working Techniques: Wall Plaques (Mosaic)

Osborne (1989) explains wall plaque as, small decorative relief in metal usually Bronze or Lead. Also, the World Book Dictionary vol.II, (1983) describes wall plaque as an ornamental tablet of metal, porcelain, plastic, wood intended to be hanged up as a wall decoration or to be fixed to something such as a piece of furniture. Plaques come in different types, which include metal, wood, ceramic, plastic, porcelain, enamel, wax, mosaic, ivory, collage etc. Plaques have been used since time immemorial for many functions such as decoration, to show appreciation, for gift and the rest ([http://www.Justtexas.com/crafts/crafts 23.ntm](http://www.Justtexas.com/crafts/crafts%20.htm), accessed 7th April 2003). It reveals that plaques were applied as decoration to auditoriums in the early 12th century. Osei – Pokuaa (2002) also contends that plaques have been in use since the 12th century. Metalworking is the process of working with metals to create individual parts, assemblies, or large scale structures. The term covers a wide range of work from large ships and bridges to precise engine parts and delicate jewellery. It therefore includes a correspondingly wide range of skills, processes, and tools. Any time that one form of metal is manipulated or changed into another form; it is called "fabrication." Metal

fabrication is primarily used in industry, jewelry arts and crafts, and technological areas. It is a generally accepted belief that metal was discovered before people began to write and was first used to make tools and weapons such as arrowheads. Metal fabrication processes and techniques are also scientifically referred to as metallurgy. Metal working techniques employed in the fabrication of wall plaque are embossing, chasing, raising, etching, enameling and mosaic. Mosaic which is the main metal working technique employed in the fabrication of the plaque is known as a design made of small pieces of coloured stones or glass set in concrete or plaster. When metal is used as the main material for the mosaic work, it is known as metal mosaic (Osei –Pokuaa, 2002).

Though, efforts by other artists are made to educate people on the practice of Female Genital Mutilation, as barbaric and uncalled for, other forms of awareness creation like a metal pictorial scene like mosaic could go a long way to help curb this menace. It is therefore imperative that, this study is embarked upon to augment other efforts in eradicating this heinous or abominable act.

Materials And Methods

There are various materials and tools used in executing the wall plaque in metal mosaic. Some of the tools used for this technique include; brush for cleaning off the excess glue on the mosaic after scraping; tweezers for picking the cut pieces of metal (tesserae) unto the glued part of the metal about to be worked and also scraping off the excess glue on the mosaic; ruler for measuring dimensions of the sheet metal, saw frame and blade for cutting out the inscriptions on the work, a pair of scissors for cutting out the empty tins into smaller units (tesserae) as well as flat nose pliers for opening up the empty cans to make it easier for cutting. Some of the materials used in the execution of the wall plaque with the technique of metal mosaic were aluminum sheet which was used for the main work and the inscriptions on the work, copper wire which was also used as tesserae for the outline of the drawing and some other intricate part of the work, carbon paper for transferring the drawing onto the aluminum sheet by placing it between the drawing and the aluminum sheet. Other materials were silicon which served as adhesive for fixing the tesserae, empty cans cut out as tesserae for the mosaic work, spray for spraying the metal of the inscription “Stop! Female Genital Mutilation is against Feminism” and emery paper for polishing the surface of the metal.

Design And Production Processes / Technique*Design Processes*

With the idea of executing a wall plaque to depict the trauma girls go through in genital mutilation, sketches that effectively communicate the atrocities were made. Based on the information gathered during the review of related literature concerning the topic, it was realized that, girls between a day old to ten years in some ethnic groups are subjected to mutilation. Since it is very painful, no matter the type of F.G.M. the girls are held tight by strong women or men to make them unmovable. The victims will have their attire removed and sometimes pushed up for the lower part around the genital area to show well. The victim's two legs are widely opened apart for the genital part to be clearly seen. After taking into consideration the data collected, five preliminary sketches as shown in Figs. 1- 5 were made. After a critical analysis, observation and general consensus of the people who indulge in this practice, fig. 3 was chosen as the best.

*Figure 1**Figure 2**Figure 3**Figure 4*



Figure 5

Preliminary Sketches Of Female Genital Mutilation

Having in mind of executing a mosaic work, a colour scheme was needed to befit the intended work, so computer aided software called photoshop was used to depict the colours for the work (Fig. 6).



Figure 6: Prototype of the finished work in photoshop

Working Procedure/Processes

Blowing up the design

The chosen sketch was blown up into the desired size of 30 inches by 22 inches which was printed on an A1 paper as in Fig. 7



Figure 7: The blown-up sketch

Tracing unto the Aluminum plate

Since the mosaic work would be on a metal plate, it became necessary to transfer the sketch unto the metal plate. Carbon papers were arranged to cover the whole surface of the plate and blown-up sketch was placed on it to be transferred onto the metal sheet. With the aid of a pencil or pen, the drawing was transferred unto the metal plate (Fig. 8).



Figure 8: Transferred drawing on the Aluminum plate

Executing the actual work

The plaque was started by cutting out empty cans with the desired colours into smaller units with a pair of scissors (Fig 9). The pieces were further grouped into varying tones of the same colour and applied silicon adhesive at the area where the tesserae were to be fixed. Tweezer was therefore used to pick the tesserae one by one unto the plate arranging them according to the tones.



Figure 9: Cutting out the tesserae from empty cans

All the figures in the mosaic had to be handled one after the other. The cloth of one of the women holding the girl was tackled first (Fig 10). Since the cloth is blue, cans of blue colour which had all the three tones on them were carefully selected in order to make it look realistic. For outline, copper wire was also used to treat all the outlines in the work.



Figure 10: Treating the cloth of one of the women holding the girl

Treating The Attire Of The Other Two Women

Cut-out tesserae of violet and green colours for the two women respectively were used as in Fig.11. For each of the colours, three tones were used, namely: dark, medium and light. Painstakingly, the tesserae were arranged to depict the contour of the shape.



Figure 11: Fixing tesserae to depict the other two women's cloth and headgear

Treating the attire of the old man and the skin of the human figures

The drapery of the attire of the man, which was a long flowing smock had a mixture of two colours thus, green and yellow were carefully handled. The lines running through the smock were meticulously treated with a thin copper wire in order to make them visible.

Since the composition had five figures, it was necessary to vary the shade of their bodies in order to create contrast, balance as well as uniformity in the work. Cut out of cans of different shades of brown were used to treat the human figures in the scene. Again, for

the beard of the old man and the braided hair of the little girl, twisted copper wire was used to treat them (See Fig. 12).



Figure 12: Treating the attire and using copper wire for the man's beard and the girl's braided hair.

Treating the skin of the other figures, the mat, the bowl and the tool bag

With the aid of the prototype design, it was decided to vary the colour of the skin of the human figures. Some were made to have a darker grayish-brown skin and others a lighter brown skin. With the mat, cut strips of canned drinks of wine, brown and white colours were used to treat the mat to make it look real. Black strips of metal were used to bring out the outline of the mat and to treat the mat also. Bowls containing the concoctions were treated with brown metals with yellow and red metal and to represent yellowish mixture and reddish mixture respectively. For the tool bag containing different kinds of knives for the cutting, it was realized that, it had to be treated with gray and brown metal to bring out the folds on the bag well and also black stripes of metal to treat the outline. With the blades on the mat and the ground floor, a grayish metal according to the contour and shape of a blade and black tool for the inside of the blade considering the shape also were cut. The genital area where more emphasis was placed was treated with red metal to demonstrate blood after cutting at the vaginal area and the tip of the knife used. Red metal too was used to highlight the blood on the mat (See Fig. 13).



Figure 13: Treating the skin of the rest of the figures, bowl and the mat.

Treatment of the background

With the prototype picture as a guide, the background was treated as such with little changes. For the two hats, teserrae of orange colours were used on the main buildings and dark and light brown for the roofs. The teserrae were carefully arranged to conform to the contour of the hats. Also, tones of blue teserrae were used for the treatment of the sky, the foreground together with the small forest behind too. Tones of colours that suit them were used.

The tree was also treated similarly with green metal teserrae for the leaves and also tones of brown for the trunk of the tree. With the prototype as a reference point, the ground and the stool were also treated as such (Fig.14).



Figure 14: Treatment of the background and foreground

The Inscriptions On The Project

Although the work talks about itself, it still became necessary to put or paste some inscription on the work to buttress the awareness of female genital mutilation. The caption was, "STOP! FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION IS AGAINST FEMINISM". Corel Draw software was used to design the inscription on the work. The inscription which was pasted on an aluminum sheet was pierced with the saw frame. After piercing, every letter was filed and then sprayed with a black spray. Black spray was used to make the inscription legible because the same metal was used for both the main work and the inscriptions. The letters were then pasted on the work with the aid of an adhesive (Fig. 15).



Figure 15: Pasting of the inscription.

The Framing Of The Work

Framing is very essential in mosaic wall plaques like this. The frame makes the work aesthetically pleasing and intriguing and also protects the work piece. An imported wooden frame was bought for the framing. The size of the work was taken into consideration when the frame was purchased. The work piece was fixed inside the frame and was made very firm with small nails at the corners of the work (Fig.16)

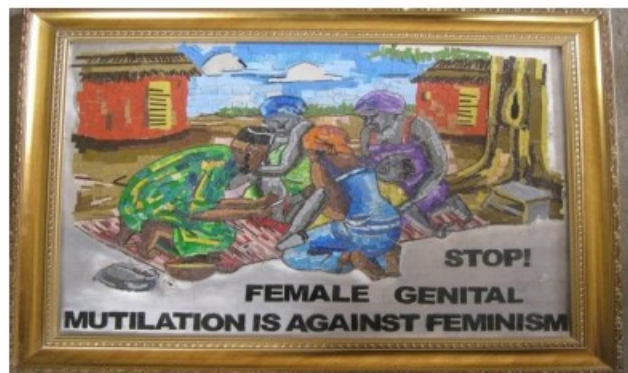


Figure 16: The finished framed wall plaque

Results And Discussion

Sanderson (1981) argues against the mutilation of women; the struggle against unnecessary suffering that, “women who are infibulated are meant to remain ‘closed’ until their marriage when one of their husband’s roles is to ‘open’ them. She states how Lantier described his witness of the wedding in Somalia when the husband uses a dagger to open the woman.” This is really a sheer wickedness all in the name of preserving tradition. She reiterates that, according to tradition, the husband should have prolonged

and repeated intercourse with her during eight days. During these eight days, the woman remains lying and moves as little as possible in order to keep the wound open.

Toubia (1994) reiterates that female genital mutilation is often done with no anesthesia and non-sterile instruments and produces emotional and physical wounds that may never heal and most importantly, the physical complications associated with this practice.

Sanderson (1981) also writes that, The operations of FGM are performed by traditional birth attendants called the **Daya** in Egypt and the Sudan. In Somalia, excisors are from the **midgan** clan. In northern and southern Nigeria and Egypt, male barbers also carry out the task but usually it is done by a woman; rarely by the mother. In Senegal, Mali and the Gambia, it is traditionally carried out by a woman of the blacksmith's caste gifted with knowledge of the occult, and in Gambia, they are called the **ngansingbas**.

Wright (1996) attests to the fact that "Approximately 95% of circumcisions are performed on children younger than 17 years old, with some as young as a day old. In some countries, large groups of girls are circumcised at once, while in other countries, the ritual is treated as a more personal, family matter, and each girl is circumcised individually. Women perform the circumcisions in most areas, but male barbers carry out the task in Egypt. To begin, a girl is stripped naked and either laid down or seated. During the procedure, she is restrained by other women, usually female relatives, and her legs may be tied together to reduce movement and promote healing. In urban areas of Africa, midwives sometimes use local anesthetic, but FGM is often an extremely crude operation performed without any form of analgesic. There are even cases in which the implement used is a piece of glass or a sharp stone.

More recently, concern has been raised about possible transmission of the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) due to the use of one instrument in multiple operations, but this has not been the subject of detailed research. In some cases where infibulations prevent or impede vaginal intercourse, anal intercourse may be used as an alternative. The resulting damage to tissue is also a possible route of infection by HIV (WHO, 1994).



Figure 17: finished work

In every art work, there should be a purpose, a point of attraction and the need to communicate even to a layman. It was realized that the scene which was designed portrayed the practice which was intended for. The point of attraction (focal point and golden section) was the mutilation itself where the small girl was held down by three strong women with the circumciser who was well focused with the cutting with his knife while the girl was loudly screaming in pains. This according to Toubia (1994) was done without anesthesia and non-sterile instruments. The work was solely executed with the mosaic technique. The mosaic technique was chosen over the rest of the techniques because the researchers wanted to vividly portray the scene as in natural setting with colours as shown Fig 16. The concept of using waste metal items like empty tins of Milo, canned drinks was achieved since these were able to be recycled to portray the scene. It was realized that the mosaic technique was painstaking and needed a lot of patience. The empty tins had to be cut out into smaller units which were arranged according to the contour of the figures and also in tones to bring reality as well as aesthetically enhance the work. In the process of executing the work, it was seen that certain treatment were not good enough with this technique, especially the hair of the little girl and the beard of the old man, who was the circumciser. So, copper wire which was sprayed with black spray was used to treat those areas.

The materials used for the work as stated previously were very useful but some were also making it very difficult for proper execution of the work. The adhesive called silicon glue with a rubber-like nature dried very sticky like gum, so when more was applied, it

distorted the surface of the work which also left a thin layer of glue on it. Unfortunately too, tesserae cannot stick firmly to the aluminum sheet when enough adhesive was not applied. Getting the colours from the empty tins was very difficult so some of the metals were sprayed of colours that were very rare. For the outline of the human beings and the rest of the images in the background, it was realized that using black tesserae was not making the work stand out, so sprayed twisted copper wires were used to treat the outline.

It was found that, the pasting of the tesserae on the metal was very difficult especially the copper wire with the silicon adhesive. Also, the copper could not conform to the contour of the shape it was meant to treat. As a result, more of the glue was applied to the area intended to paste the tesserae, which also made the surface full of glue which ended up living a thin layer on the tesserae which took a longer time to dry. In order to get rid of the hardened glue, a towel with warm water was used to clean the surface.

One of the major findings was the difficulty in getting all the tones of every colour used in the execution of the work. For instance it was difficult getting cans with different shades of blue. One of the things observed were that some of the empty cans were very hard especially the Milo tin and cutting with a pair of scissors was very difficult and even pasting it on the metal sheet became uneasy since it did not stick well like the softer and thin tins. After experimenting with them, the researchers then preferred using the soft tesserae from canned drinks to the hard types. Again, after cutting the tesserae, it was straightened with a pair of flat nose pliers so that it would stick well on the surface of the metal. Care was taken since it was observed that the surfaces of the coloured tesserae were having scratches on them. When using the tweezer to scrape off the excess glue, care must be taken otherwise, the coloured tesserae would have scratches on them. For the treatment of the figures, it was realized that there was the need to bring contrast to their skin. But after executing them, the contrast was so sharp that the skin of the little girl and another two women were treated the same while the skin of the old man and the other woman was treated likewise. Again, the treatment of the background including the sky and the forest should have been of a very lighter tone since they were further than the foreground. For instance, the shades of blue which was used for the treatment of the attire of one of the women should not be the same as the shades of blue for the sky. The blue for the sky should have been tinted.

With the inscription on the work which reads, “**Stop! Female Genital Mutilation is against feminism**”, it was realized that the space left on the work was not sufficient to

cater for the inscription for moderate spacing because the inscription was also not small. It was then figured out that the problem happened because no allowance was left apart from the size of the work which was 32 inches by 24 inches. The frame really enhanced the beauty of the wall plaque and also made it highly presentable and aesthetically pleasing.

Conclusion

It is an undeniable fact that most organizations which are against fundamental human right are given adequate publicity to help create awareness and educate the public concerning the effects of practices like F.G.M. but less is done in the area of metal art to complement this noble cause of awareness.

Unique designs were made and one selected and produced using the metal mosaic technique to help join the voice championing the campaign to put a stop to FGM in Ghana. The motivation behind this concept was the creation of awareness of the practice of F.G.M. through the execution of a wall plaque for most especially those who cannot read and write to add to other means of campaign. This paper which portrays the scene of this practice will complement symposia, fora and articles on this practice. Again, as stated in the objective of the study earlier on, the wall plaque which was fabricated will go a long way to help create the needed awareness. Therefore the aim of producing the plaque in discarded metal with the metal mosaic technique using trash cans for the creation of awareness has been achieved.

It is recommended that all metal artists should join the campaign by coming out with artifacts that will educate more people to help put a stop to this disgusting practice.

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