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**A STUDY OF NATURAL DYES THAT CAN BE USED IN TRADITIONAL
AFRICAN TEXTILE DESIGN IN ZIMBABWE**

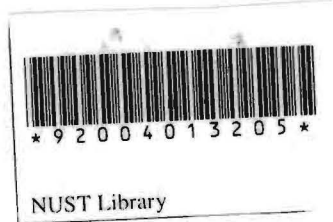
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Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Textile design and decoration started long time back with the San Herders who used to process their animal's hides with roots and blood to decorate them for different occasions. This practice is the one which has been developed over the years and has been cascaded from one generation to another. Traditional textile design has been predominantly and is still, a domain of women. Very few men are found in this art. These women have practically found it to be exciting, absorbing and profoundly satisfying. This chapter will look at literature existing on textile decoration with natural dyes. The researcher will analyse and acknowledge the sources used.

2.2 Origins of textile decoration

Textiles, particularly cloth, have become the most valuable feature of material culture in Africa. Paula Ben Amos (1984) claims that, this is most apparent in the North West, a bit of central, South and South East Africa. Picton and Picton (1994) state that "particular colours and decorative embellishments or shapes of garments may have a cultural value e.g. wealth, status." They cite the chiefs or Oga in Nigeria who wear the long robes of expensive cotton, lace materials, woven blue and red striped, locally woven and decorated fabrics to protect themselves from witchcraft. They go on to say,

“Textiles were and are still decorated specifically for the dead and the houses where the dead were laid, the Ebira in Nigeria and Malagasy in Madagascar, they would use red or ‘mena’ to signal death.” In Zimbabwe red colour is sacred to be used for the dead but to signal death; instead white and other light colours are used for dressing and shrouding the dead. All these textiles are specially treated and decorated by artists with natural dyes.

The Textile Institute journal claims that different textiles originated from different places. It says, “---different textiles have particular origins such as flax discovered at least 7000 years ago, Indians spun cotton, Chinese spun hemp, Babylon and Assyria spun wool and Africans processed bark and hide.”

2.3 The importance of colour in textile decoration

The concept of textile decoration currently to both western and African Textile Designers has the same motive. As Fould (1988) puts it, “The motivation behind initiation of the design process arises from the pressure / competition to have a product with appeal relative to other materials on the market”. Howard as cited in Paine (1995) also agrees when he says, “----- addition of colour to the fibre through dyeing is necessary to meet demand of consumer for wide spectrum of colours and patterns in textile products.”

The Batik Guild comments on the availability of, ‘----the most powerful and magical natural dye in Africa’. It says “----the traditional dye is indigo from a plant which grows throughout Africa. In many places these are now cultivated and different varieties produce a variation of the dark blue colour.” It goes on to say, “-----although this is so,