

ROOTED IN CULTURE, MANIFESTED IN CONTEMPORARY DESIGNS: DEVELOPING BRIDAL ADORNMENTS INSPIRED BY SELECTED ANKOLE MOTIFS

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Abstract

Creating body adornments rooted in the individual and specific cultures, and integrating them in contemporary designs that come with global fashion of attires and body adornments which are influenced by the Western designers - is the greatest design challenge of African artists. Whereas the indigenous motifs are embedded with meaning intended for that particular community, are colourful and can be a symbol of identity, Africans are torn between the local (usually considered as for the poor) and the imported- “already made” (usually considered high quality and trendy for the rich) yet, Western visitors who come to Africa look for African items such as beads, baskets, mats, pots and carvings. The study developed bridal adornments inspired by traditional exterior decoration motifs of Banyankole in South Western Uganda. The trajectory of this study was that the Banyankole have kept *okuhingira*(the giveaway ceremony) as an important function yet, body adornments used during *okuhingira*, do not clearly depict the Kinyankole culture. The study analyzed five Ankole motifs, developed designs of bridal adornments from two selected motifs which were tested for appropriateness with five brides and one salon. Finally, three sets of bridal adornments were produced and put on market.

Key words: contemporary designs, bridal adornments, Ankole

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Ankole is a sub-region in Western Uganda composed of ten districts (Mbarara, Buhweju, Bushenyi, Ibanda, Isingiro, Kirihura, Mitooma, Ntungamo, Rubirizi and Sheema), whose inhabitants are called the Banyankole, speaking a Bantu language – Runyankole. The Banyankole are divided into two sub groups; the pastoral Hima (Bahima) and the agricultural Iru (Bairu) though today both tribes do rear cattle and grow crops (Igongo Cultural Centre Museum).

Traditionally, the Banyankole were very skilled craftsmen creating lots of artifacts such as huts, baskets, mats gourds and pots which were in most cases designed with motifs; a motif refers to a decorative design or pattern which can be seen as an image, sound, action or other figures that have symbolic significance and contributes toward the development of theme. Bureman (2016) defines a motif as something symbolic that shows up in a work to reinforce the work’s main theme and is usually a physical object, but sometimes takes on a different form.

Nevertheless, though the Banyankole decorate(d) most of their artifacts with motifs, none of these motifs have been seen in adornments particularly the bridal adornments. Adornments generally refer to accessories or ornaments worn to enhance the beauty or status of the wearer. Adornments are often worn to embellish, enhance, or distinguish the wearer, and to define cultural, social, or religious status within a specific community. This has not been manifested in the Ankole bridal adornments.

Although the Ankole marriage ceremony of the Banyankole has been one of the surviving and most respected indigenous practices in the region and believed to be culturally sensitive, where tradition should be showcased, the present literature reveals that most bridal adornments used nowadays are imported. Traditionally, the Banyankole, like any other tribe in different parts of the world, valued culture in their traditional marriage ceremonies. The marriage ceremony would take place in the ancestral home of the bride, who would be dressed in the traditional attire and adornments such as necklaces, earrings, bracelets and anklets which were highly symbolic and communicated important elements about the social identity and culture of Banyankole. However, literature reveals that nowadays, the bride and her entourage are adorned with ornaments with foreign designs which do not reflect the Ankole tradition and without a visual story to tell about the Banyankole Culture. Hence, the present study explored the use of Ankole motifs in the creation of culturally based bridal adornments.

The purpose of the study therefore was to create culturally based bridal adornments from selected Ankole motifs. This was achieved through three objectives which were; to analyze the Ankole motifs for creating bridal adornments, to develop designs from selected Ankole motifs for bridal adornments and finally to produce culturally based bridal adornments from selected Ankole motifs. Throughout the world, motifs have been used in different forms of art such as jewelry, architecture, basketry, ceramics, and textiles. Bernstein (2016) observes that modern adornments such as jewelry can be traced back to prehistoric times since the Renaissance (1300-1600) when jewelry was mainly designed with religious pictorial motifs. Bernstein (2016) continues to say that during the Georgian period (1714-1830), jewelries were characterized by the Rococo style with flourishes of bow, foliate and organic motifs, while in the Victorian era (1837-1901) sentimental motifs continued to dominate such as hearts, lover's knots, flowers, bows, crescent moons and serpents. Furthermore, Bernstein (2016) argues that, the Art Nouveau period (1880-1910) represented a rebellion against the industrial age in pure artistic expression, with the rebellious use of precious and non-precious metals, combined with unusual colored gemstones in depictions of nature – primarily insects, birds and floral motifs, with Jewelry pioneers of the era being Rene Lalique, Falize, Maison Vever, Georges Fouquet, and Tiffany & Co. Hence, this brief account reveals that the use of motifs on adornments such as jewelry is not something new but has been in existence since time immemorial.

According to Whiteley (2016), in the United States, during the 1950s, women frequently adorned themselves with ornaments made out of diamond - a precious jewel (attractive, reflecting sparkling light) that were continuously associated with images of love and devotion by the advertising industry. Whiteley (2016) explains that in the later years, advertisements produced images of diamonds as rare, pure, and precious, again molding a new generation of diamond jewelry consumers. Today, a diamond ring is seen as an important status symbol of eternal love. Whiteley (2016) affirms that the power of such messaging is reflected in the fact that 80% of married women own diamonds gifted by their husbands for the symbolic relationship between diamonds and marriage - as an expression of devotion, commitment, and everlasting love.

Globally, motifs have been part of the people's culture and this is supported by Jagannathan (1978) who posted that Indian tribal heritage is seen in the flower motif commonly used in Indian jewelry

even in the present day. Jagannathan (1978) explains that during the ancient times, jewelry was seen as a symbolic adornment in which each stone was designed with mythical quality and used as a protection against evil forces. More so, Kaur(2012) reveals that in India, jewelry is not only for beautification but that it also symbolizes status, wealth and assets, provides aesthetic satisfaction, all of which are displayed through the designs, materials and the craftsmanship that go into their creation.

Jewelry designers of the 1990s were motivated by a market that was in high demand for fancy – color diamonds, colored stones in dramatic combinations and large and multicolored cultured pearls that they had to create innovative cuts, distinctive setting styles, textures, and motifs. (Misiorowski, 2000).For example, Turkmen jewelry is designed considering the most important features of balance, symmetry and repetition of motifs and this is actually demonstrated in all works of art (Khatminia, 2008).

In addition, Noruzi and Kermani (2015), states that Turkmen women jewelry is the most significant component of the arts among a variety of ethnic groups' jewelries. The visual striking feature of Turkmen jewelry is their big size and dimension for the user, weighing about 6 to 8 kg and that for girls and young women adorn themselves with much jewels and ornaments that can weigh up to 17kg which makes them hardly able to walk. Noruzi and Kermani (2015) mentions that Turkmen artists have amazingly considered an appropriate ornament for all parts of the body in combination with women clothing in this tribe. Adornments are so important to several communities as Peggy (1984) posted that in West Sumatra, the bridegroom, the bride and her attendants, dress themselves with traditional costumes that are highly adorned. That the adornment is not only for the bridal entourage but that even the bridal throne where the bride and the bridegroom sit is elaborately adorned with traditional textiles and embroidered cloth with symbolic meaning, also decorated with elegant designs is the bride's bed.

Additionally, Moupee (2014) affirms that the state of West Bengal has always taken pride in its culture as is demonstrated in the art and craft, music and lifestyle of people living here and the attires together with the jewelry items with designs which reflect the tradition of Bengal especially with those seen during weddings and other occasions. Lucas, Chapin, Lin, and Jia (2015), design is the element that distinguishes one piece of Chinese jewelry from the other, that the jewelry designers have benefited from the available gem materials and the rapidly growing consumer market hence now have the freedom to develop their design concepts and craftsmanship skills. Lucas et al. (2015) quotes Dickson Yewen - a Hong Kong jewelry designer who stated that:

“Jewelry is a new way to interpret a culture that has been suppressed for decades.” Lucas et al. (2015) reveals that this jewelry designer - Yewen is devoted to creating jewelry inspired by Chinese traditions for he digs deeply into native traditions and fuses them with contemporary luxury and that his common themes include lattice patterns, paper cutting, Manchurian motifs, and peonies—the Chinese national flower.

Saca (2006) states that in Palestine, handmade and richly embroidered women's garments expressed regional identity and also describe the age and status of the wearer in that before the

middle of the twentieth century, women in each local region created garments with distinctive types of embroidery and decoration that immediately established the wearer's origin. To those who knew the regional variations in style, patterns, and colors of embroidery, a quick look at a dress was enough to determine the wearer's region and even village. Marital status was also expressed through specific styles of garments that distinguished unmarried girls, married women, widows, and women who wished to remarry. Saca (2006) reveals that Palestinian girls began learning embroidery and dressmaking skills from their grandmothers at about the age of seven when a girl, from this early age, would begin creating items for her wedding trousseau and by the time she married, the bride's trousseau included many lavishly embroidered items.

By this, Saca (2006) affirms that people strongly believed that the personality of the future bride was revealed in the workmanship, color, and design of her dresses. It is also revealed by Saca (2006) that specific motifs were of utmost importance (with names and meanings) and were normally repeated in realistic or stylized patterns in a variety of colors and through the use of geometric shapes such as circles, rectangles, or squares, and various floral and foliage patterns which were favored in the late nineteenth–early twentieth century. Saca (2006) reveals that however, today, distinctive regional garments have been largely replaced by modern Western clothing that reveal nothing about the wearer's origins.

Clarke (2006) confirms that culturally, Africans define themselves in many different ways: by occupational caste, village, kinship group, regional origin, and nationality through artworks that have different meanings for different individuals or groups for example the painted designs on an Ejagham headdress in the South East of Nigeria, represent an indigenous form of writing, the meanings of which are restricted to individuals of the highest status and rank. Clarke (2006) observes that for Africans, personal adornment and dress are important forms of aesthetic expression and that scarification and hairstyle, in particular, are viewed as means by which the body is refined and civilized. More so, Sirico (2014), posted that the Tuareg - pastoralists who reside in areas in Libya, Algeria, Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso dress themselves with adornments particularly bracelets that appear to be extremely heavy, made from solid metal and designed with delicate geometric motifs among which are pointed stars.

Koutonin (2014) reveals that a bride from the Ngwane tribe in Swaziland - Southern Africa adorns herself with a cape of colored cloth, designed with fine beadwork strip that include both old and new beads with motifs that consist of traditional geometric patterns as well as representations of crosses, telephone poles, automobiles, and houses.

In Algeria, adornments such as jewelries are designed with filigreed geometric forms which reflect the patterns found in Berber tapestries and the ceramics in the country. These jewelries are not only for decoration but also portray messages for example about the geography of Algeria such as rivers and mountains (Ouksel 2016). In addition, Anaheeta (2011), observes that jewelry is embedded with untold stories of people who through tenacity and modest, have survived the trials of history. Anaheeta (2011) demonstrates this by stating that the design of Berber jewelry in Morocco is strongly influenced by the ancient Berber script, Tifinagh, where by the characters in the Tifinagh reflect a simple geometry of corners, circles, triangles and dots and these motifs

distinguish every piece of Berber jewelry.

Dubin (1987), observes that adornments form an essential part of a multi-layered communication system among all Shona speaking people. Furthermore, Bvocho (2005) observes that among the Shona, adornment communicates cultural values in symbolic language that expresses rank, religion, age grade and marital status. Likewise, the practice of adornment among the Ndebele revealed the diverse life stages in their culture for the beads are used to decorate or even to form clothing (Mahlangu, 2003).

Among the Zulu, both young and old, adorn themselves lavishly and enjoy themselves to the fullest for it is in most cases through such ceremonies where the young and old meet their future spouses which makes weddings among the Zulu being regarded as the best social events (Zibani, 2002). The Zulu do not adorn only the body but also other objects especially the ones used during important ceremonies such as the beautiful sitting mat decorated using embroidery and that it is on this particular mat where the *labola* (bride price) negotiators place the necessary items put forward towards the same. Furthermore, Nettleton (as cited in Zibani, 2002) says that Zulu beadworks (adornments inclusive) are made distinct by the main color combinations that the different regions prefer, as well as decorative patterns.

According to Cherrington (2006), the elegant beadwork that the Masai herders adorn themselves with means a lot to them than to the outside world. Masai men and women wear beaded-string necklaces as everyday decoration, but that the engagement necklace is distinctive because the strings are intertwined and the plaiting on it signifies the interconnection between husband and wife which makes it very symbolic. Moreover, Lizhybarnes (2015) observes that the beaded jewelry among the Masai consists of many symbols and the beadwork which illustrate the whole of Masai culture representing tradition, beauty, strength, warrior hood, age group, marital status, social status and their deep love and devotion for their cattle.

In Uganda, as said earlier, indigenous traditional motifs have been used in other forms of art for example in textiles, ceramics, basketry, wood crafts, pottery and architecture. Nevertheless, these motifs have not been extensively used, and only a few (if any) can be seen in the jewelry section – particularly the contemporary Ankole bridal adornments yet these motifs can as well be applied on the bridal adornments to communicate to others about Ankole culture just like the Zulu in South Africa who use symbolic colors in their beadworks to represent their love for their cattle (Zibani 2002) or the Ndebele (South Africa) who make their bridal beadwork designs matched with the ones painted on their walls as revealed by Bell (2010).

Literature has also revealed that in Uganda, it is not only the Banyankole brides who adorn themselves with imported ornaments or with adornments made with imported materials but also other tribes such as the Baganda brides who do the same while dressed in their traditional dress locally known as the *Gomesias* shown in Bride & Groom, 2017. While explaining the importance of motifs among the Banyankole, Sekintu & Wachsann (1956) state that, it is in a decorated hut in the home of her parents that a daughter is given by her father to the clan of her bridegroom. More so, most of the used items during the Ankole traditional marriage ceremony were often decorated

with motifs, such items included serving baskets where the in-laws would eat from, mats on which the bride and her entourage would sit, gourds from which porridge would be served and milk pots that were given as gifts to the bride

Research carried out at Igongo Cultural Centre Museum located at Biharwe in Mbarara district revealed that the Banyankole women of ancient times used to adorn themselves using ornaments made out of indigenous materials such as the cowrie shells to decorate the hair, animal hair to make bracelets - *obwoshe* and anklets -*enyerere*, seeds and strings made out of plants all of which were both user and environmentally friendly. However, with the coming of the Arab traders during the Chwezi dynasty, the Banyankole were introduced to the small plastic beads which they have used since then to make body adornments comprising items such as the forehead adornments, necklaces, earrings, bracelets and the waist beads all of which have no particular designs that bring out a story which speaks of the Ankole culture.

More so, nowadays, the Ankole traditional marriage ceremonies seem to have taken the western trend with marriage celebrations taking place in hired venues where one can hardly find a basket, a gourd or a mat. Furthermore, the bride and the whole bridal entourage spend much time in salons where they are exposed to different kinds of adornments from other countries and embrace them. This has gradually led to the Ankole people forgetting their own culture and tradition yet, it is on such an occasion that cultures and traditions should be exclusively expressed. It is against this background therefore that motifs are justified as relevant sources of inspiration for bridal adornments hence the need for the study.

METHODOLOGY

The research was qualitative and employed ethnography design. The design provided the researchers a full understanding of the Banyankole culture and an in-depth description about the Ankole motifs that finally led to development of culturally based bridal adornment designs. The study was carried in two sites; one at Igongo Cultural Center Museum located at Biharwe in Mbarara district. This site was selected because it has got a collection of Ankole Cultural artifacts on display. Another site was at a bridal shop in Avemar Shopping Center - along Luwum Street, Kampala City for it is along this street that most of the bridal items which are believed to be up-to-date are sold. The study targeted the Banyankole brides with their bridal entourage since the study was mainly about producing bridal adornments designed specifically with Ankole motifs. Two guides at Igongo Cultural Center, one shop owner in Avemar Shopping Center, two shop attendants and five brides to be, were interviewed. Using in-depth interviews, participant observation, photography and studio technology data was collected and analyzed thematically and interpreted through studio experimentation.

FINDINGS

The field research revealed that the Banyankole have several motifs generally referred to as the white and black patterns which are believed to have originated from Abyssinia. Many of these patterns were used to decorate the Ankole artifacts such as baskets, gourds, mats, pots and also commonly used to decorate their huts. The traditional huts of the Banyankole were made of grass

but had a front facade made of mud and wattle where the motifs were designed as shown in Figure 1. Respondents from Igongo Cultural Centre Museum explained that motifs were designed on the traditional huts of the Banyankole by old women in the colors of white and black using limestone, cow dung and ash. Motifs had their meanings associated with beauty, astronomy, the environment, war and entertainment.



Figure1: Ankole motifs on exterior walls of the traditional hut of the Banyankole, photo by researchers – courtesy of Uganda Museum

The study found out that the Banyankole had different motifs which were used in decorating. Some of the motifs such as *ekisingoky'enshoni*, *embaziz'enju*, *enshunjuz'akakanga*, *enteekoy'abatabaazi*, and *engabowere* found relevant to the study and are therefore explained as follows;

EKISINGOKY'ENSHONI

The *ekisingoky'enshoni* motif (Figure 2) represents a veil of strands of beads which was a veil of shame meant to cover the face of a woman.



Figure 2: Ekisingoky'enshoni motif, photo by researchers – courtesy of Igongo Cultural Centre Museum

Traditionally, among the Banyankole of the ancient times, all women and girls about the

marriageable age were supposed to walk around with veiled faces as a sign of respect. Today, this practice is no longer in existence except for a few Banyankole brides who do veiling of the face or forehead during their traditional marriage ceremonies. Until the coming of beads (*obutiti*) that were introduced by Arabs, the veils were made out of special grass parts. Oral history asserts that the same veil was also put on to conceal a face of a woman who worshipped the Bachwezi and was possessed by a spirit because her eyes were not to be seen in such condition.

EMBAZIZ'ENJU

The *embaziz'enju* motif (Figure 3) represents the rings of a roof of a hut. The Banyankole built their huts using mud and wattle, wood and grass; Strong poles held the walls together and reinforced the mud. The huts had conical roofs that revealed circular forms when viewed from the inside as seen in Figure 3.

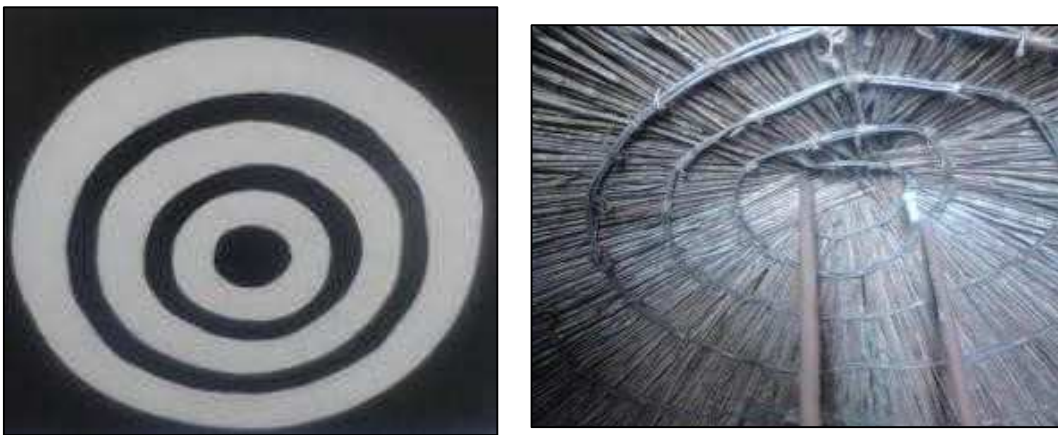


Figure 3: *Embaziz'enju* motif (left) and the the roof of the Banyankole traditional hut viewed from the inside (right) , photo by researchers – courtesy of Igongo Cultural Centre Museum

ENSHUNJUZ'AKAKANGA

Enshunjuz'akakanga motif (Figure 4) represents the hair styles of Hima women. The Hima women would plait their hair in a style that was locally referred to as *enshunjuz'akakanga* which was made in round forms Figure 4.



Figure 4: *Enshunjuz' akakanga motif, photo by researchers – courtesy of Igongo Cultural Centre Museum*

ENTECKOY'ABATABAZI

Enteekoy'abatabazi motif (Figure 5) represents a crowd of warriors. The patterns of this motif were normally placed on the upper arm of a man to represent the formation of men on a military expedition finding new homes.



Figure 5: *Enteekoy'abatabazi motif, photo by researchers – courtesy of Igongo Cultural Centre Museum*

ENGABO

The *engabo* motif in (Figure 6) represents the shield which the Banyankole men would use in wars to protect themselves from their enemies.



Figure 6: *Engabo motif, photo by researchers – courtesy of Igongo Cultural Centre Museum*

DESIGNING BRIDAL ADORNMENTS WITH SELECTED ANKOLE MOTIFS

The selected motifs were analyzed according to their relevance to the adornment designs and two of them were selected in developing the bridal adornments. The two were *embaziz'enju* and *ekisingoky'enshoni*. The *embaziz'enju* motif was selected because it represents the rings of a roof of a hut of the Banyankole, which was decorated and where the parents of the bride would give her away for marriage to her in-laws. *Ekisingoky'enshoni* was selected because it was the original veil that women used to put on and the one that brought out their beauty and character. During the development process, other existing bridal adornments on market were studied so as to understand their designs, and the materials used in order to come out with possible products that would be embraced by the brides. It was found that most of the adornments were made out of imported materials and reflected less of the Ankole culture for instance those in Figure 7.



Figure 7: *Bridal adornments made out of imported materials found on market now, photo by researchers – Jewelry shop, Kampala City*

The design process involved both hand drawing and computer aided designing. After conceptualizing the designs, handmade drawings were generated for example in Figure 8. The drawings were then rendered by computer to come up with definite shapes that were produced out

of cow horn material.

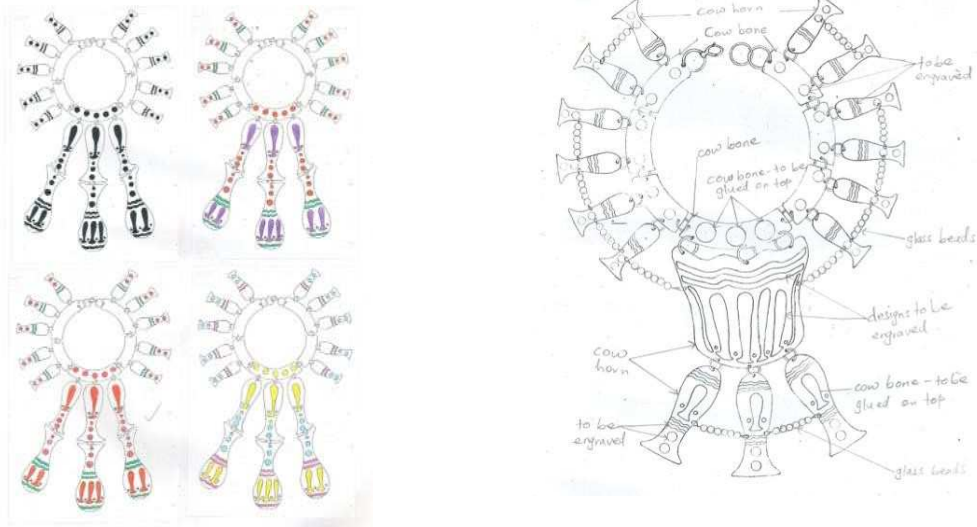
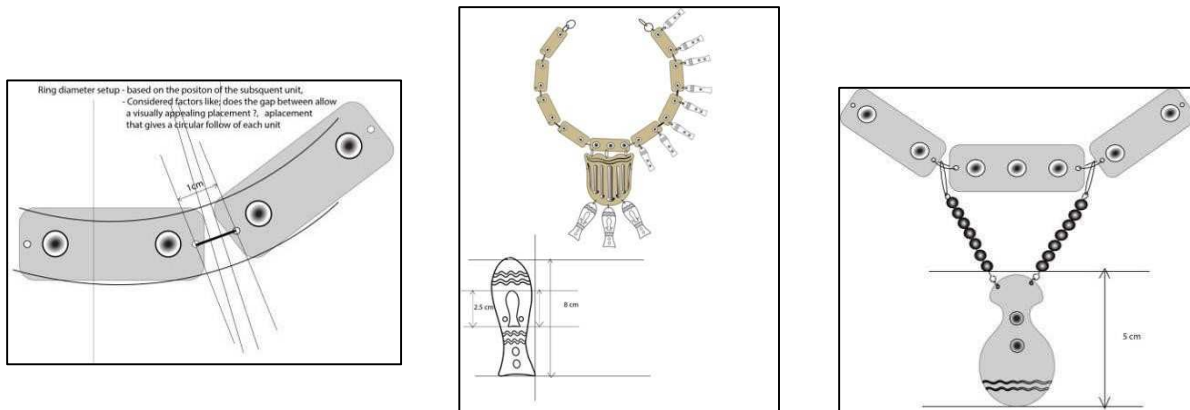


Figure 8: Hand drawn sketches of the dridal adornment soft pencil on paper

COMPUTER AIDED SKETCHES

After hand sketching, the drawings were further enhanced by using computer aided design (CAD) applications as Figure 9 reveals.



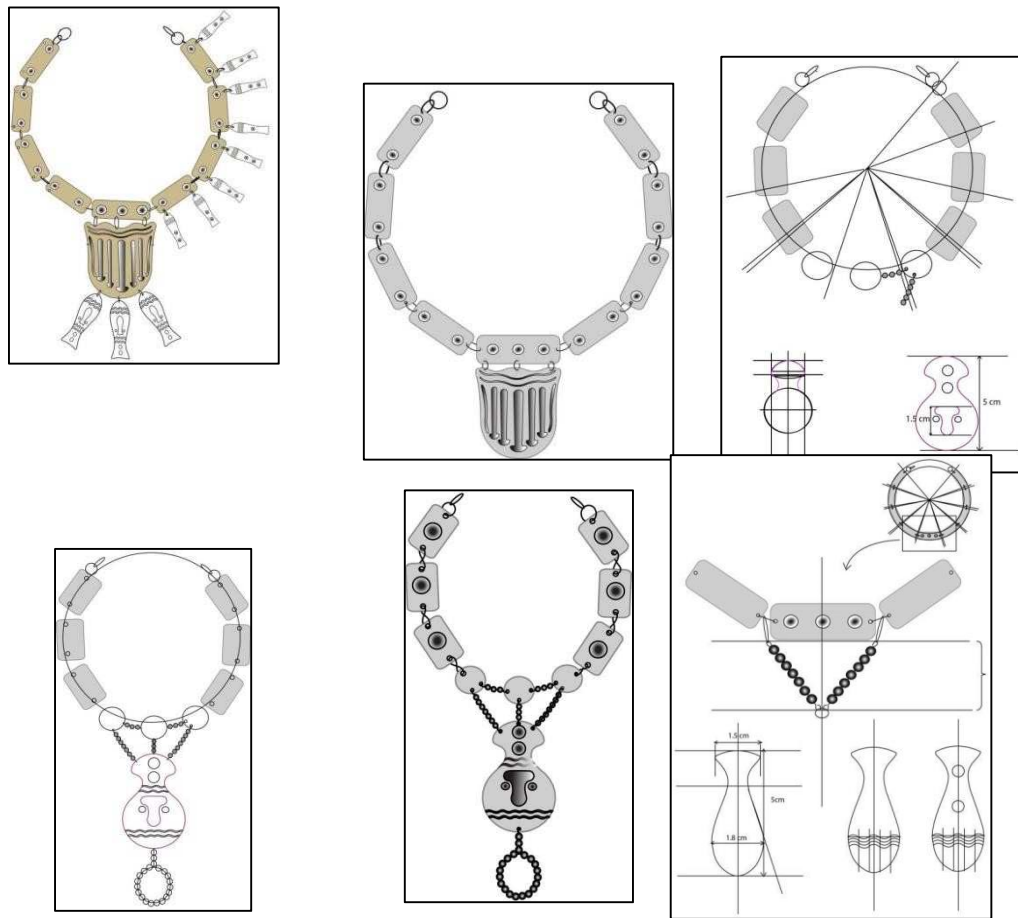


Figure 9: Computer drawings of different adornments

After sketching, the adornments were produced out of cow horn. The cow was preferred because of the history of long cowhorn kept by the Banyankole. The horns were treated by boiling them in a mixture of water, detergent and salt. They are boiled to remove the bad odor and then flattened with a compressor machine after heating in cooking oil. After cooling them in water, the pieces are sanded and polished and then designs are applied. The adornments produced were found original and appealing to the users. The produced pieces (Figure 10) were taken to the bridal shop in Kampala City and the shop owner and her clients were pleased with the products.



Figure 10: *Different adornments for the bride, the metron and the maids*

After production of the adornments, they were taken to the respondents in the market and tried on attire, put up for exhibition (Figure 11) and thereafter taken back to the market for sale.



Figure 11: *Bridal Adornments on attire, photo by researchers*

SUMMARY

Literature revealed that worldwide, creators of bridal adornments use designs that depict the user's culture, for instance Zibani (2002) reveals that, the Zulu in south Africa have symbolic motifs which they use as their source of inspiration. They produce adornments by arranging the beads of the necklaces to form geometrical forms such as the triangular patterns which are symbolic to them. They also use certain colours of beads to bring out some aspects in their culture such as green to represent the green pastures for their cattle and white for the milk. Producing adornments based on designs derived from the Ankole motifs which are very symbolic is a means to immortalize Banyankole culture and create ideas of identity and belonging among the Banyankole. It was found out that, the *embaziz'enju* motif is being commonly used in other kinds of art for instance in textiles, painting, ceramics and multimedia crafts. This showed the importance of the Ankole motifs and hence creating them on bridal adornments was important.

The study therefore aimed at analyzing the Ankole motifs for creating bridal adornments and thereafter developed designs from the selected motifs which finally led to the production of culturally based bridal adornments.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the Ankole motifs are very rich with symbolic meanings. Culturally based bridal adornments can be created from Ankole motifs - this brings people back home, keeps the motifs in posterity, helps the young people to understand their culture and also markets Uganda in the international community. Using the cow in the production of culturally based bridal adornments brings the original Ankole cattle back into the picture hence creating an attachment between the adornments and the wearer. Additionally, using the cow horn is a means of utilizing the local resources as well as conserving the environment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that despite modernity, producers of bridal adornments should not totally do away with the indigenous designs and materials. Their use immortalizes them and passes on traditional knowledge and history as well as providing a sense of identity. It is therefore important to always consider a blend of traditional methods of indigenous designs and technology and contemporary designs in any new innovations such that the old is not lost.

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