

**BARKCLOTH AS A MATERIAL FOR GARMENT PRODUCTION FOR GROOM  
IDENTIFICATION AT BAGANDA KWANJULA CEREMONIES**

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**23/U/GMAID/0553/PE**

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REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF A DEGREE  
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**NOVEMBER, 2025**

**DECLARATION**

I, **BIGIRWA RINAH BLESSING**, declare that this is my original work and it has never been submitted to any University or Institute of Higher Learning for any academic award.

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**APPROVAL**

This is to certify that this dissertation of BIGIRWA RINAH BLESSING, entitled “**Barkcloth as a material for garment production for groom identification at Baganda Kwanjula ceremonies**” was carried out under our supervision.

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Date

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**(2<sup>nd</sup> supervisor)**

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this dissertation to my beloved mother, Mrs. MURUNGI Florence Lynes, and my siblings, NSIMIRE Comfort, AINEMBABAZI Desire, and TUKUNDANE Stuart, for their tireless financial, emotional, and physical support towards the success of this research. God continually bless them.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION .....	ii
APPROVAL .....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.....	v
ABSTRACT .....	xiii
CHAPTER ONE.....	1
INTRODUCTION .....	1
1.1 Overview.....	1
1.2 Background of the Study .....	1
1.3 Statement of the Problem.....	5
1.4 Purpose of the Study.....	5
1.5 Objectives of the Study .....	5
1.6 Studio Guiding Questions.....	6
1.7 Scope of the study .....	6
1.7.1 Geographical Scope .....	6
1.7.2 Content Scope.....	6
1.7.3 Time scope .....	6
1.8 Significance of the study .....	7
1.9 Theoretical Framework.....	7
1.10 Definition of working terms.....	9
CHAPTER TWO .....	11
LITERATURE REVIEW .....	11
2.1 Overview.....	11
2.2 Types of barkcloth in the cultural and historical context of the Baganda. ....	11
2.2.1 The planting process of the mutuba tree .....	11
2.2.2 The harvesting process of the mutuba tree for barkcloth production. ....	12
2.2.3 Barkcloth tree species and their characteristics. ....	12
2.3 Exploring surface decoration techniques to elevate the aesthetic value of barkcloth. ....	13
2.4 Barkcloth’s potential to design wearable garments and products.....	15
2.4.1 Barkcloth fabric for fashion and product production.....	15
2.5 Barkcloth’s significance in the Baganda’s traditional ceremonies. ....	16
2.5.1 Chiefs and Kabaka's Coronation Ceremonies .....	16
2.5.2 Funeral Rites ceremonies .....	17
2.5.3 Marriage Ceremonies.....	18
3.1 Overview.....	20

3.2 Research design.....	20
3.3 Study Area .....	20
3.4 Study Population. ....	21
3.5 Population sample .....	21
3.6 Sampling technique .....	21
3.7 Methods and tools of data collection.....	22
3.7.1 Semi-structured interviews.....	22
3.7.2 Participant observation.....	22
3.7.3 Photography.....	22
3.7.4 Library Archival .....	23
3.8 Data collection procedure.....	23
3.9 Data analysis .....	23
3.9.1 Data coding.....	23
3.9.2 Narrative data analysis .....	24
3.10 Studio experimentation.....	24
3.10.1 Studio technology .....	24
3.10.1.1 Source of Inspiration .....	24
3.10.1.2 Justification for using a spear as a source of inspiration. ....	25
3.10.1.3 Collection and Identification of Techniques, Tools, and Materials .....	25
3.10.1.4 Justification for selection of the above-mentioned tools, materials, and techniques .....	26
3.11 Validity and reliability.....	27
3.12 Ethical consideration .....	27
CHAPTER FOUR.....	28
PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS .....	28
4.1 Overview.....	28
4.2 Types of barkcloth among the Baganda in relation to quality and material characteristics. ....	28
4.2.1 Classification by Texture and Thickness .....	28
4.2.2 Traditional and Contemporary Uses .....	31
4.2.3 Perceptions of authenticity and quality .....	32
4.2.4 Sources and production knowledge .....	33
4.3 Surface decoration techniques for enhancing barkcloth garments for the groom’s identification at <i>Kwanjula</i> ceremonies.....	35
4.3.1 Awareness and Knowledge of Surface Decoration Techniques.....	35
4.3.2 Preferred Decoration Techniques for Groom’s Garments .....	36

4.3.3 Challenges Faced in Decorating Barkcloth.....	38
4.3.4 Innovations and Trends in Barkcloth Decoration.....	40
4.4 To produce suitable wearable garments that identify the groom at Kwanjula ceremonies. .....	42
4.4.1 Selection Criteria for Barkcloth Garments Used to Identify the Groom. ....	43
4.4.2 Design Adaptations to Fit Groom’s Formal Wear Without Undressing.....	44
4.4.3 Practical Considerations: Comfort, Mobility, and Climate.....	46
4.4.4 Enhancing the groom's visibility and status during the Kwanjula ceremony .....	47
4.5 Concept note for studio exploration:.....	50
4.6 Visual findings .....	51
4.6.1 Studio experimentation .....	52
4.6.2 Source of Inspiration.....	52
4.6.2.1 Motifs from the source of inspiration.....	54
4.6.3 Examining different types of barkcloth of the Baganda .....	55
4.6.3.1 <i>Entakire</i> .....	55
4.6.3.2 <i>Ensika</i> .....	56
4.6.3.3 <i>Kilungi</i> .....	56
4.6.3.4 <i>Kampindi</i> .....	56
4.6.3.5 <i>Butanwa</i> .....	57
4.6.3.6 <i>Dundu</i> .....	58
4.6.3.7 <i>Enjeruka</i> .....	58
4.6.3.8 <i>Enserere</i> .....	59
4.6.4 Exploring surface decoration techniques to elevate the aesthetic value of barkcloth. 60	
4.6.4.1 Reverse appliqué technique .....	61
4.6.4.2 Embroidery .....	65
4.6.4.3 Pleating technique. ....	68
4.5.4.4 Slashing technique.....	68
4.5.4.5 Patchwork technique.....	69
4.6.4.6 Tie-and-dye technique .....	70
4.6.5 Producing suitable wearable garments that identify the groom at Kwanjula ceremonies. .....	76
4.7 Challenges faced during studio exploration with barkcloth and how they were overcome .....	92
5.1 Overview.....	95
5.2 Discussion.....	95

5.2.1 Types of barkcloth among the Baganda in relation to quality and material characteristics.....	95
5.2.2 Surface decoration techniques that enhance barkcloth garments for the groom’s identification at <i>Kwanjula</i> ceremonies. ....	97
5.2.3 Design suitable wearable garments that identify the groom at <i>kwanjula</i> ceremonies. ....	100
5.3 Conclusion .....	102
5.4 Recommendations .....	104
References .....	107
APPENDIX 1: INFORMED CONSENT FORM.....	110
APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEW GUIDE .....	113

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Shoes designed by Markus Werner using barkcloth.....	4
Figure 2: Kabaka Muwenda Mutebi II and Nnaabagereka Sylvia Nagginda .....	17
Figure 3: Jjajja Jjumba presiding over the wedding of two spiritualists.....	18
Figure 4: Different shapes of the traditional spears of the Baganda (hand-drawn).....	53
Figure 5a,b,c, and d: Hand-drawn motifs of the spear. ....	54
Figure 6: Barkcloth fabric from Entakire tree .....	55
Figure 7: Barkcloth fabric from Kilungi tree.....	56
Figure 8: Barkcloth fabric from Kampindi tree .....	57
Figure 9: Barkcloth fabric from Butanwa tree.....	57
Figure 10: Barkcloth fabric from Dundu tree.....	58
Figure 11: Barkcloth fabric from Enjeruka tree .....	59
Figure 12: Barkcloth fabric from Enserere tree .....	60
Figure 13: Initial stages before actual appliqué. ....	62
Figure 14: Traditional appliqué .....	62
Figure 15: Before cutting out the motifs. ....	63
Figure 16: The process of cutting out the motifs from the barkcloth .....	63
Figure 17: Samples of reverse appliqué tried in the studio. ....	64
Figure 18: A black cotton fabric was bleached using Jik (detergent) .....	64
Figure 19: Final reverse appliqué technique product.....	66
Figure 20a, band c: Samples of the researcher making hand embroidery stitches .....	66
Figure 21a: A sample of barkcloth fabric with running stitch in different colour threads.....	67
Figure 21b: Researcher making hand embroidery stitches on barkcloth. ....	67
Figure 22: Machine embroidery with traditional spear motifs. ....	67
Figure 23a: Butanwa pleated barkcloth.....	68
Figure 23c: Pleated enjeruka barkcloth.....	68
Figure 24: Samples of the slashing technique on barkcloth.....	69
Figure 25: Barkcloth off-cuts with different shades. ....	69
Figure 26: Different shades of barkcloth offcuts joined using the patchwork technique. ....	70
Figure 27: The different shades of barkcloth offcuts were joined using the patchwork.....	72
Figure 28: Clay water that is used for naturally dyeing barkcloth.....	71
Figure 29: How I tied the barkcloth fabric and the dyeing process using clay water.....	71
Figure 30: Washing the barkcloth using Omo (detergent) and tap water after it has been dyed in clay water. ....	72

Figure 31: The researcher washing the barkcloth in plain water. ....	72
Figure 32: Various sample shades of barkcloth after dying it in clay water. ....	73
Figure 33: Tying the barkcloth fabric before dying. ....	75
Figure 34: Image showing what the barkcloth fabric looks like after having been dyed in clay water for 2 minutes. ....	76
Figure 35: The researcher dyed this barkcloth fabric in clay water for 2 days. ....	74
Figure 36: Barkcloth offcuts dyed using different colours. ....	75
Figure 37: Handmade flower accessories. ....	77
Figure 38: A draft of a scarf with hand embroidery running stitches. ....	78
Figure 39: Barkcloth scarf with side pockets ....	78
Figure 40a: A draft of a scarf with measurements. ....	79
Figure 40b: A barkcloth cap designed using the pleating technique. ....	79
Figure 41: A scarf with side pockets. ....	80
Figure 42: Barkcloth neck scarf. ....	81
Figure 43: Shoulder throw. ....	82
Figure 44: A draft of a barkcloth sash. ....	83
Figure 45: A barkcloth sash and cap. ....	83
Figure 46: Image showing a scarf. ....	84
Figure 47: Draft showing a scarf ....	85
Figure 48: Barkcloth scarf. ....	85
Figure 49: A shoulder throw with a pin mechanism to make it easy to attach to the coat. ....	86
Figure 50: Front and back view of a barkcloth waistcoat and cap ....	87
Figure 51: A front and back view of a throw-on with side pockets. ....	89

## **LIST OF TABLES**

Table 1: Barkcloth tree species and their characteristics. ....	13
Table 2: Techniques, tools, and materials used in studio work.....	26
Table 3: Participants, pseudo names and their gender. ....	28

## ABSTRACT

This study explored the possibilities of using barkcloth (*olubugo*) as a material for creating wearable garments that identify the groom during Baganda Kwanjula (introduction) ceremonies. Barkcloth holds significant cultural and spiritual importance among the Baganda. Still, its role in the production of contemporary attire, especially garments used by Senga to identify the groom, has been minimally explored. Today, grooms are often adorned with artificial flowers and makers, which lack cultural symbolism and visual clarity. The purpose of this study was to explore and design culturally meaningful wearable garments using barkcloth that distinctly identify the groom during kwanjula ceremonies. The study was led by three specific objectives: to examine the different types of barkcloth used by the Baganda, to explore surface decoration techniques that enhance the aesthetic appeal of barkcloth, and to design suitable garments that reflect the groom's status and identity during the ceremony. The research is grounded in material culture theory, which emphasizes the symbolic and functional meanings of traditional materials in contemporary society. A qualitative approach was selected as a research design because the data collected were non-numeric, including text, video, and audio. Semi-structured interviews, participant observation, library research, studio experimentation, and photography were employed during the data collection process, contributing significantly to data triangulation. A sample of fifteen participants, including barkcloth makers, barkcloth dealers, cultural masters of ceremonies, and tailors specializing in men's ceremonial wear, were selected from the Bulange, Mengo, Kampala district. These participants were selected purposely to provide stimulating and insightful experiences with the phenomena under study. The study findings revealed that barkcloth varies in texture, thickness, and quality, which influences its suitability for garments. In studio work, the researcher experimented with surface decoration techniques such as reverse appliqué, embroidery, patchwork, pleating, slashing, and tie-dye, using motifs from the traditional spear to symbolize leadership and identity. The final garments included wearable accessories such as scarves, sashes, throws, waistcoats, and caps made from barkcloth, designed to identify the groom while ensuring comfort, durability, and cultural authenticity. This study concludes that barkcloth can be transformed through contemporary design methods without losing its traditional essence, contributing to sustainable fashion, cultural preservation, and the renewed use of indigenous materials in Ugandan ceremonies.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Overview

The study intended to use barkcloth to design ceremonial garments that solidify cultural identity and respect for tradition; hence, it signifies the groom's preparation to be formally introduced to the bride's family. Therefore, this chapter presents the background of the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, objectives of the study, study guiding questions, scope of the study, significance of the study, and theoretical framework of the study.

#### 1.2 Background of the Study

The Kwanjula (introduction) ceremony is a customary event among the Baganda community, organized by the girl's parents to meet the groom's family. His introduction to the bride's parents and community is officiated by the *Senga*, the bride's paternal aunt. In various cultures, the groom is given special attention during this occasion, distinguishing him from the other attendees (Williams, 2013). The *Senga* usually introduces the groom to the bride's family. After this, the dowry (*omutwalo*) is paid, and the bride is handed over to the groom. There are usually large gatherings with food, drinks, and dancing at the ceremony. During the Kwanjula, the couple exchanges engagement rings and officially becomes husband and wife (Otieno, 2011).

Celebratory introduction ceremonies are observed worldwide, and each culture demonstrates its customs. In North India, the Roka ceremony holds special significance for Punjabis, Hindus, and Jains (DiGiovanna, 2025). The groom is accompanied by family members and is greeted by the bride's family with a traditional *aarti*, which signifies respect and honor. The groom, dressed in special clothing such as a kurta or *sherwani*, is marked with tilak by an elder from the bride's family. This act shows that they accept him as a part of their family.

Mbilinyi (2019) observes that in Tanzania, among the Chaga people, the introduction ceremony is called Kileo. The bride's family welcomes the groom, and the bride's father dresses the groom in special attire that identifies him from the rest of the men at the function. The bride's father usually gives the groom the *shuka* unless he is absent. In his absence, the bride's uncle or mother officiates this act. This act confirms that the groom has been fully accepted by the bride's people.

In Uganda, introduction ceremonies differ from one ethnic group to another, with each having its particular traditions and ways of distinguishing the groom from his mates. In the Acholi community, the introduction/ Nyom is a two-day event. An informal visitation that happens before this visit is called Lapogo. At the Nyom ceremony, the groom, his father, and a spokesperson make their way to the bride's place. The groom is given several presents from different Acholi clans presented by the bride's elders as a sign of appreciation and esteem. These presents usually include a hen, livestock, and in some cultures, a native dress or beads (Lamun, 2023)

According to the customs of the Banyakole people, the *okweyajura* is a significant introduction rite during which the groom's team, accompanied by some relatives, visits the bride's home. A ceremonial figure, known as a *katerarume*, is tasked with leading and presenting the groom to the bride's parents. Mwesigwe (2020) asserts that when the time arrives for the bride to step outside, she introduces the groom to her relatives and offers him a token such as a basket or a cup of milk, which indicates that she is ready to become his wife.

In Buganda, the next ceremony to be conducted after *kukyala* is Kwanjula. During the *kukyala*, the bride selects her paternal aunt and shares with her the plans she has with the groom (Williams, 2013). The *Senga* will then inform the bride's father, and thereafter, the bride's parents set the date for a visit for both families (Gideon & Kitooke 2022). This serves to publicly introduce the groom to the bride's family and the community. The groom remains largely silent in the background until identified by the *Senga* with a flower, who then declares him a guest of honor (Mirembe, 2015; Otieno, 2011).

Nakawooya (2023) argues that since *kwanjula* is a traditional ceremony, the symbolic markers used to identify the groom should have cultural significance. Barkcloth (*olubugo*) holds great cultural value for the Baganda people. It was traditionally worn at *kwanjula* ceremonies and given as gifts by the groom to the bride's family. Sometimes it was used for wrapping gifts during visits.

In the New Vision (2007), Matovu contends that barkcloth is a traditional fabric made from the inner bark of the *mutuba* tree, produced by various cultures, including the Baganda of Uganda. Historically, it has been significant for coronations and funerals, and the Baganda continue to use it in burial rites because they believe it offers spiritual protection for the deceased on their journey to the afterlife.

In Uganda, the use of barkcloth (*olubugo*) originated in Buganda, located in the central-southern region (UNESCO, 2005). It further notes that most origins of barkcloth are acutely rooted in oral history. It is believed that Wamala, a hunter from the Ngonge clan, discovered the process of barkcloth making in the reign of Kabaka Kimera between 1374 to 1404 (Nakazibwe, 2005). During that time, barkcloth was seen as a sacred fabric and was reserved for the royal family and spiritual leaders in Buganda. Because it was spiritual, it was an essential in royal ceremonies and burials (Walusimbi, 2015). Kabaka Ssemakookiro's changes widened the barkcloth production in the 18th century. He suggested that every family must plant a mutuba tree and participate in barkcloth production. Through this practice, barkcloth was transformed from making royal family garments to being a widely used and valuable fabric, hence boosting Buganda's economy (UNESCO, 2008).

In the 19th century, the introduction of imported textiles by the Arabs and European colonialists significantly reduced the use of barkcloth. The decline came through British colonialism as cotton was emphasized, while missionaries condemned its use, claiming it was satanic. The colonial authorities discouraged barkcloth production and instead encouraged cotton growing. The use of barkcloth as a primary textile declined then in the Baganda communities (UNESCO, 2008).

In 1953, barkcloth became a powerful symbol of cultural resistance. Kabaka Muteesa was exiled, and his supporters protested while wearing barkcloth. Upon his return, his subjects decorated garments made out of barkcloth, asserting cultural identity and resisting colonial suppression. This reinforced the importance of barkcloth. (Kyewalyanga, 2019)

Knowingly, UNESCO (2005) recognized the cultural value of barkcloth by including it in the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (Walusimbi, 2015). Recently, barkcloth has regained popularity in the fashion and design industries in Uganda.

Barkcloth Europe promotes the use of barkcloth as a leather alternative for various applications, while Markus Werner's Vimagana project aims to replace conventional materials with sustainable barkcloth in shoe production (Robertson, 2015).



**Figure 1: Shoes designed by Markus Werner using barkcloth.**

Source: <https://barkcloth.blogspot.com/2011/04/exhibition-material-evolution-ugandan.html>

The term barkcloth in East Africa is also known by different indigenous languages, such as *olubugo* in Buganda, *ekitoma* in Ankore, and *impusu* in Rwanda. In Malawi, the *Nyanja* community calls it *chiwondo* (Burt 2013). In Uganda, barkcloth is used for several purposes; for example, Fred Mutebi, a printmaker and activist, uses it as a surface for printing. Sanaa Gateja, however, uses barkcloth differently by incorporating it into art and design, creating wearables, mixed media collages, and even commissioned interior design pieces.

Barkcloth is considered a unique material used to create both functional and decorative items, and it is utilized by artists and designers such as Stella Atal, Sarah Nakisanze, Santa Anzo, and Jose Hendo (UNESCO 2019). Therefore, we can argue that it has gained acceptance in the international market. However, the fact remains that Ugandan fashion designers have not squarely incorporated barkcloth fabric into designing attire that identifies the groom at the Kwanjula ceremony. Instead, they often use artificial makers, which are not culturally well-received because, although barkcloth is important to the Baganda people, it plays little to no role in designing garments worn at kwanjula ceremonies. These observations regarding the limited use of barkcloth for designing garments for these occasions in the contemporary world inspired the researcher. Thus, this study aimed to explore the potential of using barkcloth to design garments for groom identification at Kwanjula ceremonies, considering both traditional methods and contemporary trends to enhance the significance of these garments at Kwanjula.

### **1.3 Statement of the Problem.**

Globally, barkcloth has been used in the manufacture of textiles, garments for different functions and ceremonies. Barkcloth (*olubugo*), is a traditional textile from the *mutuba* tree's inside bark (*ficus natalensis*). It is culturally significant to the Baganda and other cultures worldwide. In Uganda, among the Baganda, it has not been widely adopted and embraced by fashion designers for the production of Kwanjula attire. During the Kwanjula ceremony, the *Senga* is expected to single out the groom from all the other men present. However, modern identification practices, for instance, one of the grooms being identified by tagging him with artificial markers to replace cultural symbols, lead to a gradual loss of cultural practices of using traditional symbolic markers. Incorporating barkcloth in the garments worn by the groom can enhance the groom's appearance and provide an opportunity to revive cultural representation at the Kwanjula ceremony. At present, barkcloth is not frequently used as a distinctive element in grooms' outfits during kwanjula ceremonies. This trend has distanced the majority of the young generation from being involved with traditional materials and skills of barkcloth production, design, and cultural symbolism, leaving many with a limited understanding of its value in Buganda society. The limited availability of innovative designs and a shift towards contemporary fashion have contributed to its dismal and diminished presence in traditional ceremonial attire. If the above problem is not handled immediately, the cultural fabric of the Baganda will be eroded. Therefore, this study aims to investigate and experiment on how barkcloth can be utilized in designing garments that identify the groom from other male attendees during Baganda kwanjula ceremonies, hence promoting and strengthening cultural continuity and enriching both the visual and symbolic elements of the kwanjula.

### **1.4 Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore and design culturally meaningful wearable garments using barkcloth that distinctly identify the groom during kwanjula ceremonies.

### **1.5 Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of the study were;

1. To examine different types of barkcloth of the Baganda for purposes of quality and choice of material.
2. To explore surface decoration techniques that enhance the aesthetic appearance of barkcloth to design garments for the groom's identification at kwanjula ceremonies.
3. To design suitable wearable garments that identify the groom at kwanjula ceremonies among the Baganda communities.

## **1.6 Studio Guiding Questions.**

1. What are the different types of barkcloth of the Baganda that can be used for quality and their material?
2. What innovative textile surface decoration techniques can be explored to enhance the aesthetic appearance of barkcloth used to design garments for the groom's identification at kwanjula ceremonies?
3. How can fashion designers design suitable wearable cultural garments for identifying the grooms at kwanjula ceremonies among the Baganda communities?

## **1.7 Scope of the study**

The scope of this study included geographical, content, time, and material. The scope also illuminates the unit of analysis of the current study.

### **1.7.1 Geographical Scope**

The research was carried out in Bulange, Mengo, Kampala District, Uganda. This was a conducive and rich environment to obtain authentic information related to kwanjula and the use of barkcloth among the Baganda.

### **1.7.2 Content Scope**

This study focused on revitalizing Baganda barkcloth so that it could be visually appealing for the production of wearable garments that identify the groom during Kwanjula ceremonies. Examining the various types of barkcloth used by the Baganda, investigating surface decoration techniques that enhance the aesthetic appeal and symbolic significance of barkcloth, and producing wearable garments that meaningfully distinguish the groom from other attendees in a culturally respectful manner were the objectives that guided the study. The study employed material culture theory and qualitative research design, aiming to contribute to cultural preservation and the development of contemporary designs. Data collection involved literature review, field interviews with barkcloth dealers, makers, tailors, and cultural masters of ceremonies, as well as studio-based experimentation and garment production. The studio work was inspired by the traditional spear, which reflects authority and identity. The garments were evaluated through studio observations and feedback from participants.

### **1.7.3 Time scope**

This study was conducted between August 2023 and July 2025. The selected period allowed sufficient time for literature review, data collection, data analysis, and the practical design of barkcloth garments for groom identification at Baganda Kwanjula ceremonies. The data were

collected during the first half of 2024, while garment production and evaluation were carried out between late 2024 and early 2025.

The time scope was chosen to coincide with the active period of barkcloth harvesting and production in central Uganda, ensuring the availability of authentic materials and experienced tailors.

### **1.8 Significance of the study**

The research will be significant to several parties, including:

To the academic community and art educators, the study offers insights into existing bodies of knowledge, provides guidelines for educators on incorporating barkcloth into their practices, and encourages the exploration of complementary materials.

The findings from this study demonstrate to policymakers that barkcloth tree planting and maintenance are important means to manage the environment. This practice also helps to increase access to barkcloth fabric on the market.

The research supports SDG 12, Responsible Consumption and Production, by promoting the use of barkcloth, a natural, biodegradable, and renewable material, to encourage environmentally responsible garment production, reduce waste and pollution from synthetic fabrics, and advance eco-friendly design practices within both traditional and contemporary contexts.

The research advances the African Union Agenda 2063 by promoting environmental sustainability, cultural identity, and creative industry growth, thus promoting barkcloth, a renewable, biodegradable material in garment design, preserving cultural heritage, and sustainable, innovative production.

This research also contributes to the East African Community (EAC) Vision 2050 through the commercialization of cultural and creative industries, hence demonstrating how barkcloth can promote sustainable textile innovation and value addition.

It also aligns with Uganda's National Development Plan IV (2025–2030) focuses on value addition and the use of local raw materials for inclusive growth, engaging barkcloth producers, tailors, and designers in promoting local materials, and supporting sustainable livelihoods.

### **1.9 Theoretical Framework.**

The study's subject was rooted in the material culture theory. Woodward (2007) states that how artifacts and garments are handled bears an impact on the sentiment that individuals develop

towards them. Prown (1982) contends that the materials in question field of study principally explore people and how they relate to objects in terms of production and meaning.

The theory emphasizes that an object should be deeply embedded within the cultural systems. Prown (1982) discusses how objects cannot be maximally understood without their social and historical contexts. Material objects represent various values, beliefs, and identities, which are articulated through design, production, and use. In addition, the production process, that is, the very choice of materials, techniques, and social organization of labor, is critical for an object's definition of meaning. Most importantly, objects are not imbued with static or permanent meanings; rather, these meanings may never be fully established as objects serve to meet ever-changing contemporary needs through processes of reinterpretation (Woodward, 2007). These principles suggest that cultural artifacts such as barkcloth are very much alive traditions and can accommodate modern uses while still holding onto the symbolic value of the craft, making the theory particularly useful to studies that aim to both conserve and modernize the traditional folk craft.

Some of the theorists who supported material culture theory were (Miller,1997) and (Douglas, 1989). These theorists believe people have a relationship with their objects/ artifacts, and these artifacts are valuable and prestigious to them. The same theory was also critiqued by Miller (1997), who claimed that this theory reduced materials and objects to only culture, ignoring human lived experiences of the people who have been using the materials.

In Uganda, Sanaa Gateja, a king of bead, incorporates barkcloth into his art and design projects. He applies material culture theory to demonstrate how traditional materials, such as barkcloth, carry heritage while being reinvented into the domains of contemporary art and fashion (Gateja, 2018). This theoretical standpoint confirms that material objects play an undeniable role in marking and communicating cultural identity; hence, it creates a vital lens in how the barkcloth is viewed in *kwanjula* ceremonies.

The application of this hypothesis disclosed that to the Baganda, barkcloth is not just a type of fabric, but a traditional and historical artifact. For instance, during *kwanjula* ceremonies, when the groom dresses up in a barkcloth attire, it symbolizes the high regard the Baganda have for barkcloth and its integration into the traditional way of dressing, setting him apart from the rest. Moreover, the incorporation of the barkcloth is indispensable in observing the cultural practices during the *kwanjula* ceremony.

Being a product of the *mutuba* tree, its cultural and spiritual implications reach far beyond its historical uses as a pure organic traditional material in ceremonies, rituals, and everyday performances. The theory states that this material should be seen as a link to Buganda's cultural heritage, representing identity, esteem, and continuity during Buganda's cultural ceremonies, like *kwanjula*. Therefore, this study applied material culture theory to examine how barkcloth interacts with grooms, families, and communities in the context of *kwanjula* ceremonies. Furthermore, material culture theory was good for exploring the revitalization and re-adaptation of barkcloth to contemporary needs without compromising its cultural authenticity. Incorporating novel surface decoration techniques as well as contemporary design practices, it aligned the traditional fabric with contemporary aesthetics while ensuring the relevance of the barkcloth and, at the same time, preserving its symbolic meanings.

### **1.10 Definition of working terms.**

This included a description of keywords, as understood in the context of this research:

**Artisans:** People who do skilled work, usually creating artworks with their hands.

**Barkcloth:** A non-woven textile produced from the *mutuba* tree's inner bark.

**Ceremony:** A formal public occasion, especially one celebrating a particular event or achievement.

**Contemporary:** High-quality modern clothing and accessories that are currently on-trend, and are easily accessible and attainable.

**Cultural identity:** The representation of the groom's belonging, status, and readiness to lead a family through the design, symbolism, and presentation of barkcloth garments.

**Fabric:** This is cloth or material that is woven together using threads.

**Garment:** Is fabric that has been tailored.

**Groom identification:** The visual and symbolic distinction of the groom from other men at the *kwanjula* ceremony through specially designed garments.

**Kwanjula:** The traditional marriage introduction ceremony among the Baganda, where the groom is officially introduced to the bride's family.

**Modern:** The present or recent times as opposed to the remote past.

***Mutuba:*** The tree (*Ficus natalensis*) whose inner bark is harvested and beaten to produce barkcloth

**Studio work:** The practical design and garment production process undertaken by the researcher using barkcloth and surface decoration techniques.

**Studio:** This will be used in this study to describe a space/ room where an artist works on their practical work.

**Wearable:** Wearable Clothes are easy to wear and suitable for wearing.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Overview

This chapter presents a review of related literature. Information from other research was consulted in this chapter to inform this research. It illustrated the theoretical and practical exploration into possibilities of using barkcloth to design wearable garments for grooms' identification in Baganda *kwanjula* ceremonies to foster cultural identity, as well as ensuring the objectives of the study are apprehended. Literature was obtained from research theses, journal articles, newspapers, videos, photographs, and academic books.

#### 2.2 Types of barkcloth in the cultural and historical context of the Baganda.

##### 2.2.1 The planting process of the mutuba tree

The mutuba tree's scientific name is *Ficus natalensis*. Nakazibwe (2005) contends that irrespective of the barkcloth species, they are propagated through stem cuttings, not seeds. He adds that before planting, the land should be prepared by clearing weeds, then digging a hole one foot deep where the cuttings will be placed. Reliable cuttings are attained from mature parent trees. For the cuttings to be considered strong and able to endure the weather conditions, they should at least measure two to three feet in length and one inch in thickness. Peter, a tree surgeon, suggests that these cuttings should be planted vertically and one-third of them buried in the soil. For sufficient shelter and future barkcloth development, trees are spaced approximately five to six meters apart.

After planting, regular watering and weeding are essential to reduce the competition for nutrients, mainly during the dry season. Nakazibwe (2005) mentions that the mutuba tree thrives well in drained loam soils, partial sunlight, and moderate rainfall. He adds that these conditions make it ideal to plant the mutuba in compounds at home and open fields.

She further mentions that young mutuba trees should be protected from pests and animals that may damage them. The tree can live and yield high-quality bark for over 40 to 60 years if well managed. With proper care, the mutuba tree's first harvest can occur after three years, and it can then be harvested annually for barkcloth production.

Nakirulu (2013) mentions that all barkcloth species are planted using the stem cuttings, apart from the ensika. The mutuba tree develops a unique system of aerial roots hanging from the base of its main branches, with smooth, grey trunks about ten feet long. They grow downwards from the large branches of the tree towards the ground. When they eventually reach the ground,

they provide additional support to the trunk since they are stuck in the ground. When they are in the ground, they become an independent tree but remain attached to the main *mutuba* tree. Traditionally, barkcloth from *ensika* roots is culturally significant to the Buganda kingdom. Its fabric is reserved for the Kabaka's clothes and high-ranking clan leaders during coronations and important rituals. Therefore, barkcloth from *ensika* was meant for ceremonial purposes because it was believed to symbolize strength, maturity, and spiritual depth.

### **2.2.2 The harvesting process of the *mutuba* tree for barkcloth production.**

The *mutuba* tree is harvested using a sustainable technique that respects culture and also preserves the life of the tree as one extracts its inner bark (Nakirulu, 2013). The process is mainly carried out once a year during the rainy season. Then the tree is more flexible, and the bark can be removed without cracking. Harvesting usually begins when the tree is three to five years depending on the conditions it is subjected to as it grows.

When the tree is ready for harvesting, a curved knife, traditionally made, a banana stem, or a sharp metallic blade is used to scrape away the outer bark, exposing the inner bark, which is called *olubugo* (Nakirulu, 2013). She further mentions that the bark is then vertically cut along the trunk with circular cuts at the top and bottom of the tree. The inner bark is peeled off as one piece while being mindful of the tree to avoid damaging the trunk, hence allowing another bark to regenerate. The tree is then wrapped with dry banana leaves or any other natural fibers to protect the exposed trunk and stimulate the growth of another bark. The harvested bark is then boiled in water to soften and also remove sap from the fabric. It is then pounded with wooden mallets to stretch it and dried thereafter. Bark harvesting encourages environmental sustainability.

### **2.2.3 Barkcloth tree species and their characteristics.**

Nakazibwe (2005) has mentioned that barkcloth in Buganda can be harvested from various types of trees, like Enserere, Dundu, and Entakire, among others. She further explained that these trees have aerial roots hanging from the base of their main branches, with smooth, grey trunks about ten feet long. These roots are called *ensika*. In Buganda, barkcloth from *ensika* is only used to make the kabaka's garments. Peter Katamiira, a tree surgeon, argued that there are over thirty varieties of *mutuba* species, with *Ficus* being the most common, making it the historical primary source of barkcloth in Buganda. Among the Baganda, *Ficus natalensis* has several names, with differences in the physical traits of its subspecies, including leaf width, the time it takes to mature, and the softness or hardness of the bark when processed into barkcloth. The family characteristics of *Mutuba* trees vary across regions. Nakazibwe (2005) also mentions some of the culturally common names of *Ficus natalensis*.

**Table 1: Barkcloth tree species and their characteristics.**

Source: Nakazibwe (2005)

<b>Tree species</b>	<b>Characteristics of its cloth</b>	<b>Common uses</b>
<i>Entakire</i>	Fine texture, light brown to white shades.	Making garments, accessories, and wrapping gifts.
<i>Ensika</i>	Smooth, cream to brown shades	For royal garments (Kabaka) and sacred rituals.
<i>Kilungi</i>	Rough, thick, heavy. Light brown to dark brown tones.	Ritual wrapping, chair backs, and art canvas.
<i>Kampindi</i>	Thin, fine, light brown to pale orange	Draping, interior decorative purposes, and curtains.
<i>Butanwa</i>	Smooth, soft, and refined Deep orange and brown tones.	Ceremonial attire, gifts
<i>Dundu</i>	Thick, coarse, and durable White (it doesn't change colour even when it is overexposed to sunshine)	Burial rituals, floor mats
<i>Enjeruka</i>	Smooth and soft White and cream tones	High-quality garments, and children's wear
<i>Enserere</i>	Rough and thick texture Dark or earthy brown tone	Utility wrapping, symbolic use in ceremonies

**2.3 Exploring surface decoration techniques to elevate the aesthetic value of barkcloth.**

Shah (2023) mentions that a variety of surface techniques can be used on fabric to enhance their appearance, acceptability in the community, and financial value. Numerous fashion designers have explored these surface techniques using different machinery and materials. She further suggests that embellishment is the addition of decorative elements, such as surface patterning

techniques, to decorate the cloth, with decorative materials like fringe, ribbons, beads, and buttons in the visual arts (Shah, 2023)

Adding patterns and design to a plain fabric is known as fabric arts. Several designers, Jose Hendo, Fred Mutebi, and Stella Atal, have embraced using fabric decoration techniques to transform barkcloth into something significant and purposefully functional. Alnassaj (2023) notes that countless techniques have been used to embellish fabric, including appliqué, painting, smoking, dyeing, and patchwork. He agrees with Shah (2023) that decorated fabrics uplift their design and enable one to express their individuality.

Originally, needlework was an art used to patch, fix, and practically repair cloth. Barkcloth makers still use this art. In harvesting or even beating the barkcloth, it tears, and they have to patch it or mend it with raffia threads, creating a design at that spot (Walusimbi, 2015)

Embellished textile is honored and worn by men, women, and children throughout the world (Shah, 2023). Traditionally, creating clothing and textile products at home was seen as a woman's domestic role across numerous cultures and historical periods. Girls in most European and North American cultures were taught the alphabet and stitches, which they used daily to design garments for their family members. Whereas with barkcloth, the harvesting and making of the fabric was entirely men's work. Because of the nature of how it was done, women were not allowed to do that work because it required physical labor and skill to remove the bark without damaging the tree, and cultural roles of each gender were defined, and it was the men's role to harvest the bark off the tree.

Fabric's value and appreciation can be recognized in several ways, apart from the usual construction and finishing methods to manipulate or ornament its surface. Embroidery, quilting, appliqué, and beadwork are the oldest surface embellishment techniques used to decorate fabric and are still mostly done by hand. Some branch industries have emerged to use new technology to recreate the effects of handwork on the surface (Verma, 2022)

Batik is a surface embellishment technique where wax resists dye from being absorbed into the fabric. It originated in Egypt and has now spread to several countries. The processes include different techniques like soaking, illustrating patterns, and then application of wax. Wax-resist dyeing technique is used on the barkcloth as an embellishment technique to enhance its visual appearance (Verma, 2022)

Patchwork is another embellishment technique where small pieces of fabric are stitched together with pieces of contrasting patterns to make a bigger fabric with a new look. Since barkcloth has different shades, it can be patched against another barkcloth shade or patched with other fabrics (Mmerch, 2024)

With appliqué, the shapes of one fabric are applied to the surface or background of another fabric. Appliqué work employs several stitches to attach the applied pieces to the base material. Stitches usually applied in appliqué include straight and running stitches. (Verma, 2022)

Stella Atal and Jose Hendo use both natural and synthetic dyes in the tie-dye technique. Sarah Nakisanze explores embroidery. Fred Mutebi and Sanaa Gateja use barkcloth as a canvas for printing, while many other designers use it in different avenues. This emphasizes the importance of surface embellishment techniques in enhancing the barkcloth's aesthetic appearance and functionality. The new appearance of the barkcloth enables the creation of unique, customized garments to identify the groom. It also makes barkcloth more comfortable and appealing for people to adopt its use in the production of garments for various ceremonies.

## **2.4 Barkcloth's potential to design wearable garments and products.**

### **2.4.1 Barkcloth fabric for fashion and product production.**

It is essential to mention that the existing literature indicates how the clothing industry has favored the promotion of barkcloth as an environmentally sustainable and tradition-based material with much promise for further industrial development (Fornal, 2018). José Hendo, a fashion designer, produces aesthetic garments out of barkcloth. José Hendo uses the dyeing technique as her way of making barkcloth more suitable for the requirements of present fashion design.

Similarly, Stella Atal, a fashion designer, incorporates barkcloth in her design process to produce garments for fashion shows. She uses various embellishment techniques like tie-and-dye, beading, and appliqué in her work. Some of her work was showcased in New York at a fashion show in 2011 (YouTube, 2011)

In Africa, the appreciation and incorporation of traditional materials like barkcloth in garment construction and fashion design has greatly increased. The impact can be noticed in home decoration accessories and contemporary fashion clothes on the market. The approach with which the designers have created garments and accessories from barkcloth has led to the growing interest among their fellow designers to incorporate barkcloth in contemporary styles (Forkin,2016)

Entrepreneur Sarah Nakisanze of Easy Afric Design uses barkcloth to make some of her artworks. She is into surface embellishment on barkcloth while using raffia, threads, and many others to make different surface designs on her barkcloth products (Forkin,2016)

## **2.5 Barkcloth's significance in the Baganda's traditional ceremonies.**

Barkcloth *olubugo* in the Baganda tradition relates closely to culture. While at these traditional ceremonies, barkcloth is not referred to as clothing, as it is consecrated fabric for the Baganda to represent the Baganda's cultural heritage, spirituality, and connection to nature (Kyewalyanga, 2019)

### **2.5.1 Chiefs and Kabaka's Coronation Ceremonies**

Buganda events associated with the installation of chiefs (*abataka*) as well as the Kabaka (king) for chieftaincy and coronation. The ceremonies usually include prayers and ancestral offerings to culminate in the new leader being dressed in traditional attire, often made from barkcloth, symbolizing the heritage of the clan (Kagoro, 2024).

Barkcloth symbolizes authority and continuity through past rulers and is a vital part of Kabaka's regalia (Kyewalyanga, 2019). It signifies a tie with the ancestors and spiritual traditions of the new king (Mukama, 2020). They are wrapped in barkcloth during the installation of clan leaders to signify responsibilities and kinship to their ancestors (Kyewalyanga, 2019).

Traditionally, barkcloth is associated with purity and humility, yet it is also regarded as giving authority, a recourse by revered ancestors. Therefore, it brings respect for traditions that burn prophets who led ancestors as guides (Kyewalyanga, 2019). Elders play an important role by giving blessings and also offering, along with a spear, a shield, and barkcloth, other symbols of leadership, which reinforce the ancestral shielding conferred upon the Kabaka. (Muhairwe, 2024)



**Figure 2: Kabaka Muwenda Mutebi II and Nnaabagereka Sylvia Nagginda on his 23  
colonization, 31 July 2016**

Photography: Ssemmanda Will

Source:

[https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Kabaka\\_Muwenda\\_Mutebi\\_II\\_ne\\_Nnaabagereka\\_Sylvia\\_Nagginda.jpg](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Kabaka_Muwenda_Mutebi_II_ne_Nnaabagereka_Sylvia_Nagginda.jpg)

### **2.5.2 Funeral Rites ceremonies**

Using barkcloth was a main ritual in funerals for the Baganda people. It signified the beliefs and traditions of the culture in death and mourning, as well as respect for the deceased (Ssewanyana, 2019). He mentions that one of the functions of barkcloth is to wrap around the body before burial as a sign of respect and protection while transitioning into the afterlife. The Baganda connect to nature and their ancestors through the use of this barkcloth. Mourners wear garments made of barkcloth to show their grief and bring the community together in shared sorrow (Ssewanyana, 2019)

On the whole, cultural identity and spiritual beliefs regarding the use of barkcloth in burial ceremonies in Buganda reflect that death is not the end; it is only a transition. It is through rituals such as these that elders guide and mold families to ensure that proper customs are followed when the need arises (Ssewanyana, 2019)

### 2.5.3 Marriage Ceremonies

Kaggwa (2015) contends that in traditional Baganda marriage ceremonies, barkcloth held significant symbolism. Though its use has declined in contemporary ceremonies, it historically represented respect, continuity, and cultural connection. Mukama (2020) adds that the groom presented barkcloth as part of the dowry, demonstrating his readiness to join the bride's family lineage and honor their ancestors.

Barkcloth was also worn by the bride, groom, and close family members during important rituals, such as the Kwanjula ceremony. It was often bundled and given to the bride's family or used to wrap gifts like food and livestock, enhancing their symbolic value and reflecting hopes for a strong marriage (Kyewalyanga, 2019)

Today, despite the influence of Western culture, barkcloth still appears in some rural settings, at parties, or among families deeply connected to their traditions.



**Figure 3: Jjajja Jjumba presiding over the wedding of two spiritualists**

Source: <https://peterhoesing.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/03/dscn2842.jpg>

## 2.6 Literature gaps

Scholars have examined the use of barkcloth for the production of wearables and accessories, offering a variety of barkcloth designs in the fashion and design industry. However, the literature is filled with some gaps that call for immediate action, which were addressed in this study.

Some Ugandan studies mention the applications of barkcloth in pillow covers, rocking chairs, woodcuts, canvas experiments, gear levers, and steering wheel covers used in cars. Venkatraman (2020) mentions that industries like Mercedes-Benz and Nike are continuously using barkcloth in their designs. If this is the case, one should appreciate the role-playing for Ugandan fashion designers regarding barkcloth as such a source of influence that is accessible domestically and with cultural significance.

However, no study in Uganda exposes fashion designers to designing contemporary wearable garments for identifying the groom by the Senga at *Kwanjula* ceremonies. One of the symbolic markers that are used to identify the groom at the *Kwanjula* is artificial flowers. After the function, these flowers are useless in the traditional ceremony; they misrepresent the function. The flower is not visually clear since it is difficult for one to identify the groom from a distance, with a flower on the coat. The Baganda have barkcloth, a biodegradable material that can produce long-lasting and authentic garments, revitalizing the barkcloth and maintaining the cultural identity of the groom at the *Kwanjula* ceremony.

The majority of fashion designers in Uganda seem to be comfortable with the materials on the market, irrespective of their shortcomings, and are not interested in exploring new materials. As a result, we are missing the advantages and beauty embedded in using barkcloth as a fabric for garment construction.

Considering the existing literature, this study expands upon it by utilizing material culture theory to fill the identified gaps. It conducts a studio-based investigation into the application of barkcloth in creating wearable garments specifically designed for Baganda men's gowns for their *Kwanjula* ceremonies.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Overview

This chapter presented the overall strategy employed in conducting the study. It discussed the research design, study population, sample population, sampling techniques, methods, and tools for data collection, data analysis, validity and reliability, as well as ethical considerations.

#### 3.2 Research design

Yin (2014) suggests that a research design enables one to move from one step to another. He further states that it's a blueprint that addresses three matters: what question to investigate, what data to collect, and how to analyse the results best. Qualitative research was conducted using an exploratory research approach. While utilizing information from the experiences of the selected study population, the focus was to gather detailed information and understand the cultural and practical applications of barkcloth in the production of grooms' identification garments for Kwanjula ceremonies. Open-ended inquiry enabled me to explore different dimensions throughout the study, such as discovering the attitudes of Kwanjula organizers, tailors, and grooms have towards using barkcloth in the *kwanjula* ceremony for the groom's identification. I learnt from the tailors the advantages and challenges of using barkcloth while designing wearable garments compared to using other materials.

#### 3.3 Study Area

The study was conducted at Bulange, Mengo, located in Kampala District, Central Uganda. Bulange serves as the administrative and cultural headquarters of the Buganda Kingdom, the largest and most influential traditional kingdom in Uganda. The area holds great historical and cultural significance as it houses the *Lukiiko* (Buganda Parliament) and other cultural offices responsible for overseeing the traditional and heritage affairs of the Baganda people. Bulange, Mengo, was purposively selected because it represents the cultural heart of Buganda, where traditional practices such as the Kwanjula ceremony are preserved, promoted, and documented. The location provided access to knowledgeable cultural leaders, heritage custodians, and designers who play key roles in maintaining the authenticity of Buganda's cultural expressions, including barkcloth attire. In addition, the area's proximity to barkcloth producers and tailors operating within Kampala and surrounding districts made it a practical and strategic choice for data collection. The accessibility of Mengo to major transport routes and research resources also facilitated effective coordination of interviews and field observations.

### **3.4 Study Population.**

Villegas (2025) recommends that the study population should always be selected from a subsection of the target population. The researcher considered cultural masters of ceremonies (*Abalungamya b'emikolo*), tailors, barkcloth dealers, and barkcloth makers. This population was chosen because of their direct involvement in kwanjula ceremonies and with barkcloth through lived experiences, as well as the practical realities of both barkcloth production and enhancement, and its use in ceremonial applications, which align with the objectives of this study.

### **3.5 Population sample**

The population of an area consists of all individuals within that area; however, for this research, I considered a sample of fifteen participants. Greg (2006) mentions that research is effective within the first twelve interviews. The 15 participants enabled me to achieve data saturation and maintain a manageable scope for in-depth analysis of the information, which fit within the study's time frame.

This population included 4 tailors who specialize in the production of men's bridal and traditional wear. 6 cultural masters of ceremonies (*Abalungamya b'emikolo*), 4 from registered and 2 from non-registered organizations. 3 barkcloth dealers and 2 barkcloth makers. The researcher considered a sample size of fifteen based on the principles of qualitative research, which emphasize depth of insight over quantity.

### **3.6 Sampling technique**

I used purposive sampling to select participants. According to (Rai & Thapa, 2015), purposive sampling technique requires selecting participants strategically to ensure that they are relevant to the research questions being asked. The selection was based on the level of involvement in the Kwanjula ceremonies and how one uses barkcloth. I selected cultural masters of ceremonies who have officiated at five or more ceremonies. I was guaranteed they had sufficient knowledge to inform my research. I was confident that tailors who had designed traditional garments for over two years had experience working with several fabrics, including barkcloth, and were therefore capable of informing my study. At bridal/ craft shops, I got firsthand information through meetings with brides and grooms who provided feedback about market preferences and acceptance of barkcloth for the production of ceremonial attire. The barkcloth dealers and makers had information about different species, which enriched my studio work.

### **3.7 Methods and tools of data collection**

In Canals' (2017) view, when collecting data, it's essential to establish activities that involve participants engaging in the study to ensure proper communication between the two parties. Methodologies for data collection are influenced by the objectives and research questions. These are normally answered during the data collection process in qualitative research.

During this study, I ensured that the study was highly independent and interactive, with responses based on each person's experience. This allowed for the collection of first-hand information. The tools and methods of collecting data included semi-structured interviews, participant observation, photography, library research, and studio experiments, as explained below.

#### **3.7.1 Semi-structured interviews**

I carried out qualitative research using semi-structured interviews. An interview guide set the context of these interviews. I used semi-structured interviews to enable me to ask open-ended questions (UpMetrics, 2022) As such, interviewees shared a lot of information by disclosing their thoughts and experiences in depth rather than limiting them to yes-or-no. Such an approach helped me uncover insights that I would not have anticipated. (Tenny,2022)

The interview guide included structured and unstructured questions. I maintained the principal topic while exploring new aspects that came up within the conversations. This arrangement of allowing participants to shape the content of my research brought forth new information. (Tenny, 2022)

#### **3.7.2 Participant observation.**

With this method of data collection, I used a checklist that consisted of open-ended questions, allowing me to explore several observations about what the participants were answering in the interviews. Observations included the participants' body language as we interacted and the handling and storage of the artifacts/ barkcloth. This greatly informed me how much they treasured these artifacts. The checklist enabled me to record whether a trait or behavior was present or not through a simple yes or no judgment (Musante & DeWalt, 2010)

#### **3.7.3 Photography**

This data collection method enabled me to have detailed information and solve the issue of missing out on some information. This was possible because I could always access the information from the audio and videos for clarification while compiling and analyzing the data.

Using this data collection method, I was able to visually capture some of the ideas seen within the images without necessarily asking. Photography enabled me to supplement the textual findings and make the study more practical. A camera and phone were the tools used to capture the works seen in the field while collecting data, as well as to capture the images of my studio experimentation and final garments.

#### **3.7.4 Library Archival**

Library research was used for collecting secondary data that complemented the primary data collected. Through visiting the library, I was able to review scholarly work, including published reports, books, journals, theses, newspapers, and reports related to my research area about barkcloth and *Kwanjula* ceremonies. This helped me identify gaps in the trends in the textile field. Information from the library was compiled in a logbook and was useful because it helped to complement the primary data collected in the field.

#### **3.8 Data collection procedure**

Before beginning the data collection process, I obtained an introductory letter from the Kyambogo University Graduate School. This letter served as official authorization to engage with the participants. It was presented to each participant to explain the purpose of the study and to obtain their informed consent before starting data collection. The fieldwork was conducted within two weeks (April 3rd to April 17th). Then the data was analysed and transformed into wearable garments in the studio.

#### **3.9 Data analysis**

Patton (2009) states that during analysis, data are organized, summarized, and categorized, and patterns and themes are identified and connected. Similarly, in this study, I was able to gather data from the field, where the initial analysis was carried out through inscription, description, and transcription. I recorded some of the findings from interviews, documentary evidence, and observations. This was complemented by a few recordings, both audio and video, designed to capture every detail shared by participants, for future use and reference during the second phase of data analysis, after collecting data from the participants.

##### **3.9.1 Data coding**

Thereafter, this information was taken to the studio. Using the coding method, I was able to arrange the collected data, channeling it towards themes for effective data analysis.

For coding, this study employed inductive coding. This is a qualitative research approach where codes and themes are derived directly from the data itself, rather than being imposed from

pre-existing theories or categories. This type of coding was chosen because it proved to be less prone to bias compared to deductive coding.

### **3.9.2 Narrative data analysis**

I used narrative data analysis as my primary source of theoretical data. The data shared by my participants during semi-structured interviews, recordings, and audio data, including information from the library, informed my studio exploration work. This was because I aimed to document the participants' experiences, memories, and interpretations in detail. This helped me understand how to incorporate barkcloth fabric into my design process during studio experimentation, as I gained insights into how much people were willing to be involved with the use of barkcloth in their *Kwanjula* cultural ceremonies.

### **3.10 Studio experimentation**

After analyzing the collected data, the researcher used the coded data under its respective themes to produce grooms' wearable garments for identification at *Kwanjula* ceremonies. This took place within my studio, where I used both structural and surface decoration techniques on different types of Baganda barkcloth fabric to design and enhance wearable garments for grooms. I was able to discover the possibilities of what barkcloth can or cannot do, hands-on in the studio.

In the studio, I used both traditional and contemporary tools to manipulate barkcloth for the making of garments used in groom identification. Barkcloth from mature *mutuba* trees was selected because of its flexibility, texture, and connotative authenticity. It was then combined with other materials such as cotton, kitenge, and American satin to give further structure and comfort. Construction instruments such as needles and thread, hand sewing, embroidery hoops, sewing machines, and appliqué scissors were used in experimenting with construction methods. For further surface decoration, I used spear motifs on embroidery, as well as appliqué and tie-and-dye, to enrich the artistic expression of the garments.

#### **3.10.1 Studio technology**

Based on the collected data from the field, that is, the production ideas of how the grooms 'garments should look, as mentioned by the tailors, barkcloth makers, and dealers, the researcher embarked on the design process in the studio. Putting theory data into practice.

##### **3.10.1.1 Source of Inspiration**

Studio exploration in this research was based on cultural symbolism and material experimentation. The spear, a powerful cultural symbol among the Baganda, served as my starting point for inspiration. It is said that the spear represents strength, leadership, protection, and

readiness in traditional terms-the groom's traits at the Kwanjula ceremony. Therefore, I translated these attributes into costumes through form and surface treatment.

### **3.10.1.2 Justification for using a spear as a source of inspiration.**

The choice of the spear was very intentional and meaningful. Traditionally, the spear was carried by clan chiefs and warriors as a weapon showing authority and readiness to protect. In marriage traditions, especially within Baganda, the groom must demonstrate that he is ready to lead, protect, and hold responsibility for his new family. This set of ideas created a powerful yet subtle visual language captured through the garments by using the spear as inspiration. Further, this served as the cultural motif that informed aspects of the design, literally form-wise; sharp silhouettes, vertical lines, or pointed motifs align with the idea of the spear. Decoration-wise, embroidery patterns echo the texture or minimal, linear strength of the spear. The spear also lends itself well to the qualities of the barkcloth: it is strong, raw, and connected to tradition. Spear-derived design elements would give the garments an identity of pride and continuity, the very self-worth central to the Kwanjula. Hence, the spear drove the aesthetic while also serving as the conceptual basis for all work done in the studio.

### **3.10.1.3 Collection and Identification of Techniques, Tools, and Materials**

While working with barkcloth, I considered the practical demands as I used the material without ignoring the cultural expectations at a Kwanjula ceremony. After interacting with tailors, barkcloth makers, dealers, and cultural experts during data collection, I got insights on which tools and materials to use, the techniques that work best for different barkcloth grades, and what materials and garments are acceptable within a ceremonial context.

Barkcloth fabric was the main material for garment production in this project. I sourced it from Mpigi and Masaka, Bukomasimbi district, among skilled barkcloth makers. These makers are known for producing well-beaten, softened barkcloth due to the experiences they have incurred over the years they have spent harvesting and processing barkcloth. Other materials, including cotton, American satin, and kitengi, were used to supplement the barkcloth. I used these materials to line and support the structure of barkcloth.

The choice of which surface technique to use on barkcloth was based on its ability to enhance the surface appearance of the barkcloth while preserving its cultural integrity. Reverse appliqué, slashing, patchwork, and pleating techniques were identified as the most applicable surface decoration techniques. These techniques are applied to barkcloth, a non-woven fibrous texture. Tools like drafting chalk, hand needles, scissors, seam rippers, and sewing machines were used in the production process. The choice of the tool major for the sewing machines depended on

the thickness and delicacy of the barkcloth. In most cases, I had to use manual stitching to avoid damaging the barkcloth fabric with machine pressure.

All the tools and materials were pre-tested before use in the production of final garments. This allowed me to adjust my technique where necessary and ensure the garments were not only wearable but also meaningful and durable. This deliberate approach helped maintain a balance between traditional values and contemporary design principles in the production of groom identification garments.

### 3.10.1.4 Justification for selection of the above-mentioned tools, materials, and techniques

**Table 2: Techniques, tools, and materials used in studio work**

Source: Researcher

Item	Type	Purpose	Justification
Barkcloth	Material	Main fabric for constructing groom garments	Traditional, biodegradable, and culturally significant for <i>Kwanjula</i> ceremonies
Cotton	Material	Used as inner lining or reinforcement for barkcloth	Adds softness, prevents tearing, and improves comfort and structure
Kitengi	Material	Decorative accents and layering	Symbolic and commonly used in traditional attire; blends tradition and colour
American satin	Material	For contrasting sheen and lining	Adds a luxurious touch and improves visual appeal
Embroidery threads	Material	Used to stitch decorative motifs inspired by the spear	Adds cultural symbolism and helps distinguish the groom's outfit
Needles (hand and machine)	Tools	Sewing, embroidery, and appliqué	Manual needles for delicate areas; machine needles for strong seams
Tailor's chalk	Tools	Marking garment lines and motif placements	Temporary and non-damaging to the surface of barkcloth
Sewing machines	Tools	Stitching garment parts and securing structural seams	Used selectively depending on the strength of the barkcloth fabric
Reverse appliqué	Technique	Layering and cutting through barkcloth to reveal patterns in fabric beneath	Creates bold, graphic patterns; symbolizes hidden strength, and allows motifs (like spears) to stand out
Embroidery	Technique	Adding stitched motifs and decorative lines	Culturally expressive; allows symbolic storytelling through thread and form
Patchwork	Technique	Combining different shades/textures of barkcloth or other fabrics	Adds texture, variation, and visual appeal; repurposes offcuts and promotes sustainability
Slashing/ Chenille	Technique	Cutting through the top fabric layers to reveal the contrasting fabric beneath	Introduces texture, movement, and layered meaning; visually echoes the sharpness and form of a spear
Pleating	Technique	Folding the fabric in regular or decorative patterns	

			Adds volume, movement, and formal elegance to the garment; can symbolize structure, pride, and discipline
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### **3.11 Validity and reliability.**

Validity and reliability in this research thesis were achieved by comparing information from various data collection methods. Even when I used different data collection approaches, I aimed to gather related and consistent data about the research. The researcher employed open-ended questions in semi-structured interviews to allow participants the freedom to clarify questions or elaborate on their ideas without the restriction of yes or no answers. Since this interview method was comfortable and created a conversational atmosphere between both parties, participants felt more willing to open up because they felt listened to and were not constrained by a rigid questionnaire. In document analysis, the authenticity and relevance of the documents involved cross-referencing with other sources and using documents from recognized and credible sources, such as scholars' literature and research theses.

### **3.12 Ethical consideration**

For identification as a master's student collecting data to inform my study, I used a letter from the Directorate of Research and Graduate Training, Kyambogo University. This letter allowed me to apply for permission to work with the population sample I had chosen.

I scheduled all data collection activities according to the participants' convenience to avoid disrupting their daily routines. Informed consent was obtained from every participant after clearly explaining the purpose of the research, its procedures, and how the information would be used, allowing them to voluntarily decide whether to participate or not.

The first phase of data collection focused on establishing a relationship with the participants before conducting interviews. The time, locations, and privacy of the participants were kept confidential.

Data collection was in English, where appropriate, Luganda, or any other language understood and convenient for the study participants.

All authors who participated in the study and whose information was used in the study were honored by citing them as sources of information.

Participants were given consent forms to sign at their free will, with a choice of withdrawing from the exercise whenever they wanted to.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

#### 4.1 Overview

The purpose of the study was to explore and design culturally meaningful wearable garments using barkcloth that distinctly identify the groom during *kwanjula* ceremonies. Based on the three objectives in this study, the researcher presents and interprets findings in this chapter. Findings from this chapter were presented using both text and pictures. The translated visual and audio data from the participants is also included in this chapter. I used pseudonyms, that is, participants 1 to 15, to conceal the true identity of my participants and respect their privacy, as shown in Table 3.

**Table 3: Participants, pseudonyms names and their gender.**

Source: Researcher

Participants	Pseudo Names	Gender
Tailors of grooms' bridal and traditional wear	T1, T2, T3, T4	T1 and T3 (Female)
Cultural masters of ceremony	CM 5, CM 6, CM 7, CM 8, CM 9, CM 10	All male
Barkcloth dealers	BS 11, BS 12, BS 13	BS 13 (Female)
Barkcloth makers	BM 14, BM 15	Both male

#### 4.2 Types of barkcloth among the Baganda in relation to quality and material characteristics.

This section examined the different types of barkcloth used by the Baganda community. To achieve objective 1, the researcher employed interviews, photography, and participant observation to examine the different types of Baganda's barkcloth. The data collected from tailors, cultural masters of ceremonies, barkcloth makers, and dealers revealed varied insights into the classification, quality, texture, and traditional uses of the barkcloth.

Collected data from the field concerning objective one was analysed using thematic analysis to draw out themes from all the participants' responses.

##### 4.2.1 Classification by Texture and Thickness

The different textures and thicknesses of the barkcloth fabric are justified by the fact that the barkcloth fabric is obtained from different *mituba* trees. One of the observations I made while

interacting with BS 13 was that barkcloth is not a uniform fabric but exists in several types distinguished by texture, thickness, colour, and quality. I later confirmed this difference when I got a similar observation and comment about the barkcloth's classifications from BM 14 during the semi-structured interview. We had a lengthy conversation about the possible causes of different colours and grades in terms of thickness and fineness of the material. He mentioned that the colour of the barkcloth fabric is determined by various factors, including how long it is exposed to the sun, the harvesting process, and the age at which the tree is harvested. In addition to BM 14's view, BM 15 pointed out that the fineness and thickness of the barkcloth are determined in the beating process after harvesting. When the bark has been harvested, it is boiled in hot water to remove sap, then beaten until it expands to the thickness or grade required by the final use.

T2, a tailor at Kiyembe market making men's traditional garments, said, "Barkcloth has both a soft type, which is finer and smoother, often used to make garments, and the rough type, which is usually used for wrapping or decoration." T1 described the categories: "The first-grade barkcloth is smoother and darker. That one is strong and is easily stitched. Grade two is slightly rough, and we always use it to line other garments or wrap items." T4 elaborated on the same saying, "We call the softer one '*ekikadde ekitongofu*'; it should be the one used on the groom's identification garments, because it doesn't tear when draped or styled." (Interviewed on 12<sup>th</sup> April, 2025)

Interestingly, T3's method of identifying barkcloth fabric involved the use of color and thickness. She said,

Relatively old barkcloth is reddish-brown and thick, and it is rarely used nowadays. I prefer the blackened, beaten barkcloth fabric when making contemporary designs. She further mentioned that sometimes I have to oil my barkcloth to make it softer, especially when I am going to use it to design garments. (T3 interviewed on 9<sup>th</sup> April. 2025)

In agreement, CM 7, CM 8, and CM 9, *kwanjula* organisers, confirmed this classification by stating that the hard and thick barkcloth is used for symbolic wrapping, while the soft and flexible ones are for making garments. In line with this, CM 5 mentioned that he always advises people to buy barkcloth that doesn't crumble easily. He adds that it should be bendable. He further notes that some barkcloth fabrics break when folded, and such a type is not good for designing wearable garments. CM 10 said,

The barkcloth fabric we use for wrapping gifts should be different from the one used to make grooms' wear. Garments require soft fabrics for comfort, so the groom's garments

should be sewn in a soft barkcloth fabric that looks elegant, not the other type, like for packaging. (CM 10 interviewed on 9<sup>th</sup> April. 2025)

Contrary to the definition made by tailors and cultural masters of ceremony on the use and visual appearance of barkcloth, (*omukomazi*) barkcloth maker, understood the variation based on the texture and level of production of the barkcloth. Effects caused by processing, tree source, beating technique, and curing influenced the harvested texture and thickness of the barkcloth and thus their eventual purpose. While interacting with BM 15 in an interview, he mentioned that different trees have different bark. He further elaborated that a mature tree, 7 to 10 years produces thicker bark, and when beaten correctly, it becomes soft yet remains strong. That barkcloth fabric is good for making garments. BM 14 distinguished the barkcloth's grades in terms of the tree's age and health. He said,

The tree's health contributes a lot to the type of barkcloth the tree will produce. Irrespective of the tree, for one to get quality barkcloth, the tree's health should be good. Bark from younger trees is light, and we always make it purposely for clients with rituals or temporary uses. But when one asks for material for making garments, we choose the old trees because their bark spreads well during beating and becomes more flexible. (BM 14 interviewed on 9<sup>th</sup> April. 2025)

During an interview with BM 14 and BM 15, both emphasized the impact of the beating technique on the bark's texture. They mentioned that when the bark is beaten gently, it remains thick and stiff, but when beaten for longer using the right mallet, it becomes soft and smooth. That's what people prefer to use for clothing or gift wrapping at Kwanjula ceremonies.

Furthermore, BM 15 elaborated on the drying and smoke-curing process. He mentioned that it affects the quality of barkcloth. He said,

The barkcloth should be dried over low heat. Too much smoke makes the barkcloth brittle. When smoking is done slowly, it stays elastic. That's how we know it will not crack when folded or stitched. Similarly, when the barkcloth is to be dried in the sun, the sun should not be too strong; under the shade of a tree is better. This is because the sun makes the cloth brittle and gives it a darker colour. (BM 15 interviewed on 15<sup>th</sup> April. 2025)

From the participants' perspectives, grading barkcloth is intentionally done during production, not just by end-users. I understood that barkcloth varies not only in its physical and structural appearance but also in its functionality, thus influencing its suitability for particular uses. These participants have evaluated barkcloth visually and by touch; hence, their expertise in

classifying it is from experience. They have observed its workability, relevance in ceremonies, suitability, and beauty.

#### **4.2.2 Traditional and Contemporary Uses**

This sub-theme informed the study about different ceremonial uses of barkcloth concerning Kwanjula ceremonies. Barkcloth is used in ceremonial functions like funerals, cultural gatherings, coronations, healing, and Kwanjula ceremonies. At each of these ceremonies, barkcloth fabric symbolizes something different.

During an interview with T4, he contended that traditionally, the trend of wearing barkcloth involved tying or draping; however, nowadays, clients prefer making customized garments from the fabric. T4 further mentioned that his clients desire neat garments made from barkcloth rather than just wrapping it on top of other clothes. In line with this tailor's input, BS 13 stated that she gets customers who want to buy barkcloth for wearing, not just to wrap it around themselves. She mentioned that customers want it soft enough to be stitched, and some want it dyed to get different colour variations. In addition to T4 and BS 13's input, T1 contended that they now sew barkcloth as any other materials like cotton, leather, and silk. He further added that barkcloth is fragile, so they use a lining underneath it to make it stronger.

In an interview with CM 5, CM 9, and CM 10 during one of our interview sessions, it became evident that barkcloth is symbolically important within *Kwanjula* ceremonies. CM 10, for example, mentioned that they use barkcloth to wrap gifts that are delivered to the bride's family from the groom, and he further mentions that special types of barkcloth adorn certain clan elders.

Both CM 5 and CM 9 mentioned that in every *Kwanjula* ceremony they have participated in, barkcloth was involved in one way or another. They report that some use it to wrap gifts, and others use it to cover the elders' seats. He added that if the groom came without barkcloth at a *Kwanjula* ceremony, some elders regard that as disrespect to the bride's family.

From BS 12's perspective, barkcloth is purchased for distinct purposes. He explained that people buying barkcloth for burials ask for a thick and plain barkcloth, while those who want to use it for making garments ask for something neat, soft, and not very rough. He added that customers ask for a grade that is as soft as a cloth since they want it to be pre-folded and pressed.

BM 15 elaborated that the evolving uses of barkcloth have encouraged changes in production techniques. The production techniques are custom-made to suit both traditional and contemporary uses of barkcloth. During the interview, he said,

Years ago, we were only making barkcloth for cultural rituals like funerals or ancestral shrines. But lately, I have orders from clients who want soft, smooth, and strong barkcloth to design garments for their weddings and Kwanjula functions. They ask me to beat it well to avoid getting cracks, and I also have to oil it. He added that some clients want the edges of the barkcloth to be clean and even in shape. This was not the case in the past. (BM 15 interviewed on 12<sup>th</sup> April. 2025)

Ultimately, the views of all the participants collectively show the relationship between tradition and innovativeness in the contemporary use of barkcloth among the Baganda. Barkcloth retains its cultural significance, particularly in funerals and Kwanjula ceremonies, where it symbolizes respect, as mentioned by CM 5 and CM 9, identity, and continuity of ancestral practices as stated by BM 14. Nonetheless, barkcloth's traditional functions have been expanded through up-to-date tailoring of aesthetic garments and commercial adoption.

Lastly, I can testify that the tailor's innovative design ideas using barkcloth, the good market responsiveness from the dealers, the careful selection of the cultural masters of ceremonies, and the refined production techniques used by the barkcloth makers, barkcloth's resilience and adoption should not be perceived as a loss of cultural authenticity; rather seen as a way to ensure relevance and continued celebration of barkcloth in Buganda.

#### **4.2.3 Perceptions of authenticity and quality**

Analyzing the discussion with the participants, it was clear in all their responses that the authenticity and quality of barkcloth guide the choice and usage of the different types of barkcloth. All the tailors, namely, T1, T2, T3, and T4, consistently linked the barkcloth's quality to its texture, flexibility, and strength. T2 and T4 reported that for barkcloth to be called good quality, it should be smooth and firm enough to resist tearing when being sewn. T1 noted that low-quality barkcloth cracks when stitched or pleated, making it inappropriate for garment production. They all mentioned that qualities of good barkcloth include its surface texture, earthy smell, softness, and rich reddish-brown color. T3 mentioned that when selecting barkcloth for wearable garments, she particularly looks for pieces with uniform thickness and minimal surface defects.

All the cultural masters of ceremonies I interviewed agreed that using authentic and high-quality barkcloth at Kwanjula ceremonies shows that the groom respects the bride's family. CM 9 mentioned that during a Kwanjula ceremony, family members, elders, and guests closely inspect the barkcloth offered. Wrapping gifts in cracked or faded barkcloth sparks criticism. He further revealed that barkcloth of poor quality (very thin, rough, and faded) could be interpreted as

disrespectful or being careless. CM 6 noted that most times, the families that treasure their name source for prestigious barkcloth to uphold their family honor and tradition.

According to BS 12, customers, especially those who buy barkcloth for ceremonies, are increasingly knowledgeable and selective. He reported that buyers often requested properly beaten and well-smoked barkcloth, emphasizing that these attributes were associated with authenticity and longevity of the fabric. BS 11 said that,

The authenticity of barkcloth fabric should be determined by its ability to stretch slightly, its uniform colour, and a strong texture that does not easily crack or break when folded. The price of the barkcloth is also another determinant of its authenticity. Barkcloth of good quality commands a higher price in the market, especially if the fabric will be used at a ceremony.

In addition, BM 15 reported that for barkcloth to be authentic and of good quality, the season for harvesting the bark should be appropriate, the beating should be skilful, and finally, the bark should be dried carefully. He added that barkcloth that is made using shortcuts often results in the production of a weak and brittle material. BM 14 emphasizes that the strength, uniform texture, and rich colour are key indicators in determining the bark's quality. BM 15 mentioned that the barkcloth intended for functions is treated differently, including additional rounds of beating and oiling it more to improve its flexibility and softness.

In light of these findings, I discovered and appreciated that authenticity and quality of the barkcloth are equally essential. The participants all agreed that barkcloth of good quality should be strong, smooth, flexible, and well finished. Authentic barkcloth fabric can be evaluated through touching, seeing, and even smelling, whereas barkcloth of poor quality is not accepted in most ceremonies. When it's presented, it negatively impacts the family's reputation. Furthermore, the authenticity and quality of the material are not only affected by the selection of the material but also reflect certain cultural values such as respect, identity, and continuity in Baganda. Barkcloth remains a powerful visual and symbolic medium through which tradition is preserved, expressed, and honoured during the Kwanjula.

#### **4.2.4 Sources and production knowledge**

The participants were well-informed about where to source barkcloth, how it is produced, and how these factors influence one's choice and appreciation of the material, especially when choosing a barkcloth fabric for a Kwanjula ceremony. BM 14 and BM 15 described the traditional knowledge involved in the production of barkcloth. They explained that the Mutuba tree must be at least 3 to 5 years old before it's harvested. The process should be done carefully without harming

the tree. The barkcloth makers mentioned that the harvesting procedure requires peeling off the bark from the tree, steaming it to soften it, and then beating it with mallets for hours to increase the surface area and smoothness required. BM 15 emphasized that if the tree is carefully treated, it could yield bark every year for many years. BM 14 added that the seasonal timing of harvesting barkcloth is important. Bark harvested in the rainy season is often soft and flexible, while the bark from the dry season is brittle.

T2 reported that for the number of times he has used barkcloth in his garment production, he has realized that not all barkcloth is the same. He says that barkcloth's difference varies from the area it is sourced from, how the craftsman processed it, and in what season the tree was harvested. T3 said that,

I prefer using barkcloth from Bukomasimbi in Masaka and Mpigi because it is more resourceful. The barkcloth makers there are known for their expertise in beating the barkcloth, hence producing fine and more flexible fabric that can easily drape when tailored. He added that barkcloth produced by experienced makers is soft and easy to sew and wash. (T3 interviewed on 10<sup>th</sup> April, 2025)

BS 12 had some detailed information about the supply chain. He explained that authentic barkcloth is sourced from central districts: Masaka, Mpigi, and Butambala. This is because most people from these families specialize in barkcloth making as a heritage craft. He added that barkcloth from skilled makers is priced highly because of the labor-intensive processes involved.

Knowing the source and production methods of barkcloth is a key component possessed by all the participants. This is because it determines the quality of the barkcloth fabric. Tailors and barkcloth dealers valued barkcloth from trusted regions and skilled artisans because they understood the link between craftsmanship and the material's excellence. Dealers always advise buyers on how to distinguish between barkcloth of good or poor quality. Barkcloth makers demonstrated that barkcloth involves different harvesting practices and inherited production skills.

Objective one reveals that the Baganda categorize barkcloth using textural, thickness, and production technique parameters, each category bearing a different cultural meaning. Thicker barkcloth with finer texture, according to tailors, cultural masters, barkcloth dealers, and makers, is specifically chosen for garments used in the identification of the groom during Kwanjula ceremonies as an expression of respect, dignity, and maturity. Traditional and contemporary uses of barkcloth emphasize that while barkcloth continues to evolve in design and application, its meaning in ceremonies is well defined. Furthermore, participants were widely conscious of

authenticity and quality indicators, favoring traditionally made barkcloth over the machine-processed.

The study concluded that knowledge of the source and process of barkcloth production influences selection for Kwanjula ceremonies. The focus was on barkcloth that had been sustainably harvested, crafted with expertise through beating, and processed by traditional cultural practices.

### **4.3 Surface decoration techniques for enhancing barkcloth garments for the groom's identification at *Kwanjula* ceremonies.**

The section presents the findings and discussion based on the second objective, which was to explore surface decoration techniques that enhance the aesthetic appearance of barkcloth to design groom's identification garments for Kwanjula ceremonies. The data used is from interviews, observation, and photography with tailors, cultural masters of ceremonies, barkcloth makers, and dealers. The findings are organized under thematic subheadings that reflect key areas identified during qualitative analysis.

#### **4.3.1 Awareness and Knowledge of Surface Decoration Techniques.**

Smoking, bleaching, and screen printing are some of the surface decoration techniques applied to enhance a surface's appearance, adding visual interest, texture, and pattern. Appreciatively, all the participants had an idea of surface decoration techniques that can be applied to barkcloth to enhance its look. T3 emphasized that surface decoration helps transform the ordinary barkcloth fabric into a ceremonial garment worth being worn by the groom. T1 added that when barkcloth is left in its raw form, that humble appearance does not effectively elevate the groom's status. She mentioned that surface decoration techniques: embroidery, beading, screen printing, and hand printing help to achieve the desired aesthetic of the barkcloth fabric.

The tailors revealed that they use both hand and machine techniques of decorating barkcloth. They mentioned embroidery, patchwork, appliqué, slashing, and beading. T2 shared that he usually adds embroidery motifs inspired by traditional drums, spears, or clan symbols to make the barkcloth have more meaning at a Kwanjula ceremony.

T4 in Nakasero market remarked that as much as barkcloth is beautiful on its own; to make it stand out for the groom, she usually adds embroidery with gold or silver threads to add elegance and show status. CM 8 stated that the importance of surface decoration on a groom's garment is to enrich the groom's garment. He expanded his view, mentioning that decorated barkcloth garments enable immediate distinction between the groom and everyone else at the function.

CM 9 acknowledged that he is not certain about surface decoration techniques. He commented that a groom wearing a garment designed with any surface decoration techniques looks better than one in a garment made using plain barkcloth. CM 10 added that, in a traditional setting, decorating men's garments is minimal. However, he acknowledged that today's Kwanjula ceremony garments require more elaborate surface designs to meet family expectations and contemporary tastes.

During a visit to BS 12's craft shop, he shared that he often stocks two types of barkcloth: untreated for general use and the smooth processed barkcloth intended for tailors and designers who later apply surface decoration techniques. Barkcloth dealers reported that customers buying barkcloth for groom's garments always request a high grade. This is to facilitate the easy application of surface decorative techniques. He further mentioned that he has observed that younger customers are more attracted to decorated barkcloth. They want to blend tradition and fashion. On the other hand, he reported that traditionalists preferred less or not undecorated barkcloth. This is because their focus is on the purity and authenticity of the barkcloth itself.

BM 15, on the other hand, shared that he and his team are labouring to modify their production methods to create softer, thinner barkcloth that is easier for tailors to stitch without the risk of tearing. In BM 14's view, he explained that,

Traditionally, barkcloth was supposed to be used in its plain state; however, due to changes in contemporary trends, barkcloth producers and designers have collaborated to meet contemporary demands. Although excessive decoration might weaken the natural beauty of the barkcloth, careful and culturally respectful surface decoration techniques, on the other hand, enhance the barkcloth's ceremonial importance. (BM 14 interviewed on 15<sup>th</sup> April, 2025)

From the above discussions, I was convinced that surface decoration techniques indeed enhance the quality of plain fabrics, especially for garments meant for dressing the groom at Kwanjula ceremonies. The findings further show that most participants have an idea of the various surface decoration techniques used on garments involved in Kwanjula ceremonies. Surface decoration elevates the barkcloth's appearance, and the participants recognize its role in distinguishing the groom and honoring cultural expectations.

#### **4.3.2 Preferred Decoration Techniques for Groom's Garments**

Having established participants' ideas on surface decoration techniques, I asked them what surface decoration techniques they preferred for designing groom's identification garments.

Participants overwhelmingly identified embroidery as the most preferred technique. T1, T2, T3, and T4 explained that embroidery uniquely uplifts plain barkcloth when rich and meaningful motifs are applied. They mentioned that they always use hand stitching for delicate designs and machine embroidery for large-scale work. T1 shared that gold, silver, or bronze colours threads are used because they symbolize royalty, wealth, and success, the same qualities the bride's family expects from their groom. In an interview, T2 said,

When choosing a motif inspired by traditional artworks, I consider the motif's meaning to a particular clan. For example, spears represent strength, ants represent hard work, and drums represent power. I usually work closely with the grooms' and brides' families to ensure that embroidery designs reflect clan identity and respect, without just focusing on the beauty of the garment. (T2 interviewed on 11<sup>th</sup> April, 2025)

Appliqué was another preferred technique for surface decoration. T4 reported that he usually applies appliqué if the client wants a bold highlight on their garment. He explained that by stitching velvet, cotton, or kitenge patches onto the barkcloth, he creates contrasting textures and colours that add richness to the garment. He further explained that some tailors use different layers of barkcloth over each other in diverse shades of brown, cream, and white to achieve a three-dimensional textured effect. T1 mentioned that appliqué also allowed them to use symbols such as shields, spears, gourds, and other cultural icons as sources of inspiration, giving the garment a strong visual narrative.

Interestingly, BS 12 reported that some clients in the market request ready-decorated barkcloth. Tailors assemble the decorated barkcloth to produce customized garments. Decorated barkcloth allows maximum creative freedom and reduces the work required at the tailoring stage.

CM 9 emphasized it's important to be careful when customizing decorations to design grooms' garments. He explained that some clans prohibit the use of certain symbols or colours, while other clans have specific motifs, they demand to be included in the design process. CM 6 recounted several instances where misunderstandings in garment decoration had led to embarrassment during ceremonies. Therefore, like T4, CM 6 advised families to work closely with experienced tailors to limit these misunderstandings. CM 10 mentioned that the leopard (*Ngo*) clan demands that the symbol of the leopard be visible during their marriage ceremonies. The embroidery design can be hidden in the garment's hem, but it must be there to honour the ancestors.

BM 15 also confirmed that embroidery and appliqué techniques were the most preferred. He justified this by mentioning that his production techniques had to adapt to the tailors' requests.

He explained that he preferred younger fig trees because their barkcloth is finer, more flexible, and easier to work with. He added that to make the barkcloth as fine as possible, natural plant oils are always added to smooth the barkcloth surface and prevent cracking during embroidery or appliqué.

As I analysed the findings from the participants, I noted that all these surface decoration techniques shared a common objective: to amplify the groom's visibility, respect, cultural pride, and prestige during the Kwanjula ceremony. The preference for embroidery and appliqué among participants indicates a strong desire for surface decoration methods that blend beauty, personalization, and cultural symbolism. Even when some participants like CM 9 had issues with using surface decoration techniques, they later acknowledged that embroidered and appliqué garments enhance the ceremony.

#### **4.3.3 Challenges Faced in Decorating Barkcloth**

Despite the enthusiasm barkcloth users have towards surface decoration techniques, participants identified several persistent challenges associated with this process. T3 explained that barkcloth's fragile nature poses as the first major challenge. She explained that thick embroidery stitches and heavy decoration techniques like beadwork could easily tear if the barkcloth is not properly lined or when poorly processed. She added that the fabric must be reinforced before surface decoration. T1 explained that,

Unlike velvet or other synthetic fabrics, barkcloth does not have a consistent weave structure, meaning that a single needle hole can easily tear the material. As a result, I always first reinforce the barkcloth by adding a lining using softer fabric like cotton or nylon before embroidery. This extra process increases the cost of production and time. (T1 interviewed on 12<sup>th</sup> April, 2025)

Another major difficulty cited by T2 is that barkcloth is inconsistent. He explained that barkcloth fabrics vary depending on the age of the tree, the beating process, and the region from which the barkcloth was harvested. He added that some barkcloth fabrics are too rough, too brittle, and have an uneven texture, making it difficult to embroider them smoothly. He mentioned that some barkcloth materials are as thick as cardboard, and can't be decorated without damaging them.

The risk of cultural misrepresentation was another challenge, according to CM 9. He explained that embellishment that is not properly aligned with the groom's clan symbols and colours leads to serious embarrassment or conflicts during the Kwanjula ceremony. CM 7 mentioned that he witnessed a ceremony where the bride's family questioned the embroidered symbols on the groom's garments. The ceremony was nearly cancelled because of a

misunderstanding that would have been settled by the tailor and the groom's family during the garment production process.

BS 11 shared that getting high-quality barkcloth fabric suitable for surface decoration techniques is increasingly becoming difficult. He noted that Mutuba trees, traditionally used to produce barkcloth, were becoming scarce in some areas because of increased deforestation in urban. He added that because of this scarcity, at times, they get weak barkcloth that can not hold any form of embroidery. This drives up the prices of high-quality barkcloth, making the affordability of the quality-decorated garments difficult.

BM 15 said,

Some limitations in barkcloth production mostly occur naturally. Therefore, even when we put in our best effort to produce good and well-textured barkcloth, some of the defects that occur cannot be avoided, such as uneven fiber density, holes, or rough usage by insects (namuginga), and variations in tree bark. Barkcloth, as a living material, will never provide us with a perfect piece from every tree. Such natural defects are a blessing in disguise. However, they can be a concern to designers. (BM 15 interviewed on 11<sup>th</sup> April. 2025)

T2, T4, BS 11, and BS 13 mentioned time as a challenge while using barkcloth. T4 explained that creating a complex hand design on delicate barkcloth is extremely time-consuming. He added that tailors normally face pressure from clients demanding their garments in a short time, while rushing the process leads to poorly stitched embroidery designs that could unravel during the ceremony, embarrassing both the groom and tailor.

CM 9 highlighted that to avoid embarrassment at the *Kwanjula* ceremonies, tailors should use high-quality barkcloth. This prevents stitches from loosening or decorations from falling off during the event. BS 12 explained the difficulties faced while convincing clients to buy high-quality barkcloth suitable for embroidery and appliqué designs. He added that many clients seek cheaper options, yet they want to use them for heavy work.

Considering the interviews conducted with participants, I noted that limited capital was another challenge affecting the tailors and barkcloth dealers. Because there is a need to purchase high-quality barkcloth grade, investing a lot of time, and the need for reinforcement, the cost of a decorated barkcloth garment is significantly high. T1 expressed frustration that several clients always want to cut the prices in half of what they are told to pay for the craftsmanship. This economic pressure sometimes forced the tailors to compromise the final quality.

In a nut shell, decorating barkcloth for groom identification garments at *Kwanjula* ceremonies is not without significant challenges. For every challenge mentioned, a plan to solve the challenge was stated by the different groups of participants.

Tailors reported that fragile barkcloth easily tears when subjected to heavy stitching or beadwork. They mentioned that this problem was addressed by layering thin barkcloth fabric with lining for strength, applying light embroidery techniques, and limiting excessively heavy beadwork. In addition, tailors and dealers suggested they would be careful in selecting the barkcloth grades to solve the issue of inconsistency in the quality of barkcloth.

Cultural misrepresentation through the use of the wrong clan symbols and colour, causing embarrassment or offense during ceremonies. Cultural masters of ceremonies recommended that clients and tailors consult clan elders and advisers during the design process.

Barkcloth dealers raised an issue of scarcity of high-quality barkcloth due to deforestation in urban centers. In response, the participants were asked to promote *Mutuba* tree planting and train barkcloth makers in quality production techniques.

Limited time for decorating barkcloth challenges tailors. They mentioned that decorating barkcloth takes time, yet clients always want their work urgently. They proposed getting the clients involved in the designing process so they can learn to give realistic timelines, and encouraging them to make early payments for garment planning to ease workplace pressure. While decorating the barkcloth for the groom's identification garments has many barriers, interventions targeting tailors, barkcloth-makers, dealers, and cultural masters of ceremonies can provide sustainable solutions. Above all, this collaboration will ensure that the aesthetic, cultural, and symbolic meaning of barkcloth is sustained in *Kwanjula* ceremonies.

#### **4.3.4 Innovations and Trends in Barkcloth Decoration**

Barkcloth's traditional significance in *Kwanjula* ceremonies has been expressed by all participants. Current trends make contemporary barkcloth adaptable to more elegant, progressive, and culturally communicative forms. The increased client expectations, as well as the realities of using traditional techniques to decorate barkcloth fabric, are responsible for innovative ideas bringing about new trends.

T3, a tailor in Kiyembe market, mentioned that combining barkcloth with light synthetic fabrics such as nylon, cotton, or chiffon when embellishing garments is a trend used in her work. She added that the blending not only strengthens the garment but also enhances its beauty. T4

agreed that grooms nowadays want to look stylish and comfortable, so their garments should be lined with softer material, either put inside or at the lapel of the garment.

Another noteworthy aspect mentioned indicates that contemporary embroidery machines are extensively used to attain fine and intricate patterns on barkcloth. In the past, hand embroidery was the sole option available; thus, large and heavy stitches became inevitable. However, the participants indicated that lightweight machine embroidery enables the application of detailed clan totems, personalized symbols, and even miniature traditional motifs without compromising the delicate surface of the barkcloth. According to T4, many grooms have begun requesting that their outfits be embellished with personalized designs, such as their initials, clan sayings, or religious symbols.

Another breakthrough discussed by BS 11 concerns pre-treatment processes. He reported that barkcloth producers now treat barkcloth with natural oils and softeners, making it more pliable and receptive to decoration. BM 15 proudly explains that barkcloth is beaten longer, stretched much better, and rubbed with natural oil for a smooth texture. Such inventions give tailors comfortable working conditions when applying embroidery, appliqué, or even beadwork without tearing.

In terms of surface decoration techniques, T3 and T4 highlighted this wave of recent interest garnered towards mixed-media techniques. It is increasingly common to see barkcloth garments decorated with a combination of embroidery, beadwork, appliqué, sequins, and even cowrie shells. Indeed, barkcloth garments are now commonly sewn using combinations of embroidery, beadwork, appliqué techniques, sequins, and even cowrie shells. CM 9 noted that these new garments shine under Kwanjula tent lights; they pronounce the groom even before he speaks. Such techniques not only beautify the garment, but also signify the groom's status and pride from the family.

Colour innovations were also reported. While traditional barkcloth comes in natural brown shades, contemporary grooms sometimes request dyed barkcloth in darker tones like black, maroon, or deep ochre to create a more distinguished, formal look. Barkcloth dealers admitted that traditionalists still prefer the natural colour, but the younger generation embraces these colour shifts. BS 13 mentioned that she now has special dyes that don't destroy the fiber; the darker shade is to give it a royal appearance.

Furthermore, modular barkcloth garment designs have been introduced. T3 notes that instead of a one-piece garment, they now design separable barkcloth coats, capes, stoles, and

sashes that can be layered over traditional kanzus or suits. This modular approach provides flexibility, allowing the groom to adjust his look between formal and semi-formal stages of the ceremony without removing the cultural element.

CM 6, CM 7, and CM 10 emphasized that telling stories using symbols through garment decoration is becoming increasingly popular. Grooms and their families now want their garments to narrate aspects of their clan heritage, family achievements, or even personal values. Through embroidery and appliqué, some garments display a visual journey of the groom's ancestry, leadership lineage, or milestones.

It is a trend that is slowly but surely entering the world of barkcloth decoration practice. T1 reported that she uses appliqué and digital embroidery machines to make quick and neat work. While this remains an emerging trend, participants believe that innovation keeps barkcloth relevant in modern society without losing its deep cultural significance embedded in tradition.

By looking back, one would see that barkcloth decoration innovations and trends indicate that the traditional medium is not merely relevant but also being imaginatively transformed to suit a new generation while retaining an appreciation for its cultural roots. Incorporating barkcloth with lighter fabrics to introduce new surface modification techniques and personalized storytelling elements, artisans are working out how to make iconic barkcloth more durable, meaningful, and visually striking. These changes are not merely a quest for visual appeal; they mark respect for heritage, a means of saying that for a tradition to be kept alive, it doesn't need to remain static. Just as CM 10 stated, they have not abandoned their ways but have revived them. This spirit of innovation guarantees barkcloth's continued and celebrated role in Kwanjula ceremonies for generations.

#### **4.4 To produce suitable wearable garments that identify the groom at Kwanjula ceremonies.**

The findings from the data collected from cultural masters of ceremonies, tailors, barkcloth makers, and barkcloth dealers are given below. The information was analysed qualitatively through thematic sub-coding. To ensure that the responses maintain their richness and authenticity, direct quotations are included. This section is about Objective Three: To produce suitable wearable garments that identify the groom at Kwanjula ceremonies. The findings below are organized into sub-themes that emerged in data analysis: Garment Design Choices, Functionality and Identity, and Cultural Symbolism.

#### **4.4.1 Selection Criteria for Barkcloth Garments Used to Identify the Groom.**

The choices for barkcloth attire worn by grooms in Kwanjula ceremonies are deliberate and culturally conscious. In this context, the participants mentioned that every barkcloth used for clothing purposes does not necessarily project the status it carried in the ceremony. Tailors, barkcloth dealers, and cultural masters of ceremony selected barkcloth mindfully, looking into its texture, pliability, thickness, and outer appearance. T3 said,

You cannot just pick any barkcloth for the groom. Our first concern is about the quality and uniformity of the barkcloth. The barkcloth fabric for the groom must be soft, smooth, and fine like a royal robe. It should show that this is not an ordinary man but a groom, someone of respect. If the barkcloth is rough or has too many holes, it is rejected without questioning. (T3 interviewed on April 7<sup>th</sup>, 2025)

Similarly, BS 13 described how she intentionally preserves the highest-quality barkcloth fabric for customers who intend to design garments for grooms. BS 11 remarked that he knows that Kwanjula people are always looking for elegant materials and they do not want anything average, so he put aside the premium barkcloth, the one without scars, very even in colour, and flexible for it to fall nicely on the body.

CM 7 emphasized that the garment must visually communicate honour and importance. He added that when the groom walks into the compound, even from a distance, you should feel that something special is happening. If the barkcloth looks cheap or poorly selected, it reflects badly on the family.

CM 6, CM 7, and CM 10 stressed the need for the barkcloth to be visually appealing from a distance, since the groom is typically seated among many men before being revealed. CM 7 mentions that seeing the barkcloth garment worn by the groom, people should be able to tell that he is the one even before he speaks. Dull and ordinally barkcloth garments lose the meaning of respect.

BM 14 from Mpigi district added that the age and treatment of the fig tree used in barkcloth production greatly influence the final quality. A young fig tree that is harvested in the dry season is always thin and weak. The barkcloth for the grooms should be soaked twice to soften it before beating.

Participants also mentioned that dark brown or reddish-brown barkcloth was preferred, as it appeared richer under sunlight and photography lighting, enhancing the groom's presentation.

Lighter or faded barkcloth fabrics were considered inappropriate unless special surface decorations were added to mask their plainness.

In addition to aesthetic standards, durability was a key criterion. T3 stated that barkcloth must be strong enough to survive the whole ceremony. It must not tear when the groom moves or if there is too much hugging and pulling during the ceremony. That is why every piece is first tested.

Selecting barkcloth fabric for making grooms' identification garments for a Kwanjula ceremony requires much more attention than just selecting fabrics for casual wear. Groom's garments must meet particular standards since they represent culture and symbolism. The barkcloth should be smooth and strong to avoid tearing during movement. It should also be soft and rich in colour, to make the groom look elegant. These qualities are meaningful to the cloth; it's not just about appearance.

From the views shared by tailors, barkcloth dealers, makers, and cultural MCs, it is evident that barkcloth highlights the groom's status. It sets him apart, giving him a visible presence that commands attention and respect. For that one day, he becomes the ceremony's focus with the help of barkcloth.

As I interviewed tailors, barkcloth makers, and cultural MCs, I learned that it's not just about wearing cultural attire, but how well you wear it. The focus on choosing the right barkcloth fabric emphasizes that tradition is linked to good presentation: the quality of the barkcloth reflects family pride, the craftsmanship of the barkcloth makers, and the skill of the tailor who turned it into a garment. The outfit connects nature, tradition, and celebration into one piece. In Baganda culture, clothing is never just for covering the body. It even speaks louder than words about a person's identity and the importance of the event. For the groom, the barkcloth he wears expresses identity, honor, and respect for tradition as much as he does himself.

#### **4.4.2 Design Adaptations to Fit Groom's Formal Wear Without Undressing**

During the Kwanjula ceremonies, the groom does not need to undress to dress in these wearable garments. Thus, the barkcloth garment must be tailored to fit comfortably over the groom's formal wear, which can be a Kanza and jacket or a Western-style suit. In a discussion with T1, she pointed out ideas she can use to meet this need. She said,

I can design barkcloth garments, such as a waistcoat or a throw-on. It can have an open front, sometimes with two small strings inside to tie loosely. That way, the groom can slip it over his suit without first undressing in public, since it is not culturally proper. Another

design idea is a barkcloth sash diagonally across the chest, tying it under the arm. This style is comfortable because we get to see the groom's suit while still carrying the barkcloth honor. (T1 interviewed on April 7<sup>th</sup>, 2025)

T4 added that he can design a garment that resembles the bishop's shoulder throw with barkcloth and a soft white line inside. He commented that it would make the groom look noble.

BS 11 narrated that one of his customers' requests, which inspired another functional design for the grooms. He mentioned that the customer did not want to cover his whole body with the garment since it was hot. So, he advised the tailor to cut a V-shaped neck at the back of the throw-on. He adds that the result looked contemporary but traditional at the same time.

CM 9 emphasized that at the Kwanjula ceremony, dressing should be quick and honourable. He explained,

All the attention is on the groom the moment Senga reveals him. He must step forward neatly and gracefully without fumbling with his garments. This explains why the barkcloth garment should be easy to wear, avoiding complicated dressing or the need to remove anything. Just slip it on, and the ceremony continues. (CM 9 interviewed on 15<sup>th</sup> April, 2025)

Tailors discussed complementary features added to the barkcloth garments for practicality. T3 mentioned that inside barkcloth, she adds a smooth lining, which makes it slide easily over the groom's suit without scratching it. Sometimes she adds secret buttons at the shoulder for a perfect fit without the use of pins.

From the barkcloth dealers' perspective, they observed that buyers for groom garments are meticulous about asking if the barkcloth can be adapted without permanent sewing that might damage the fabric or make it bulky. BS 12 mentioned that barkcloth buyers always tell him that their clients must look clean and smart. The seller then takes the initiative to explain to the buyers whether to fold, wrap, or stitch the barkcloth temporarily to fit over clothes.

From what participants shared in the interviews, it's clear that everyone involved in the production process think about how to make the groom's barkcloth fabric both meaningful and easy to wear. They all seem to agree that while it must reflect tradition, it shouldn't make the groom uncomfortable or require him to remove his formal clothes. People suggested practical designs such as barkcloth caps, shoulder wraps, and simple fastenings that slipped on and off easily. Some also spoke of lining to protect the clothing underneath. These ideas suggest that modern communities put essential cultural meaning to barkcloth during contemporary ceremonies.

What caught my attention is how much effort is put into making the groom's appearance as calm and composed as that moment of his first appearance; it's not just about looking good, but perfecting the moment to make it feel special and run smoothly.

#### **4.4.3 Practical Considerations: Comfort, Mobility, and Climate**

If the garments are to be genuinely usable and dignified, factors of comfort, ease of movement, and adaptation to prevailing weather conditions should not be lightly brushed aside. These suggestions would contrast with their initial emphasis on the underlying cultural values and aesthetic considerations behind the barkcloth garments for grooms at Kwanjula ceremonies. Many tailors and organizers spoke about the issue of heat. Since most Kwanjula ceremonies take place outdoors or under tents, often in the hot afternoon hours, the thickness and insulation properties of barkcloth can pose a real challenge. T4 mentioned that barkcloth is naturally warm, so if the groom wears it over a kanzu and suit, he sweats a lot. That's why he always asks about the venue and the weather season before advising the design for the groom.

Another strategy of dealing with heat, T1 mentioned that she uses thinner barkcloth fabrics mostly in hot seasons, but pays attention to the surface decoration, making it look rich but light. Barkcloth dealers confirmed that customers increasingly ask about the weight and texture of the cloth in terms of comfort. BS 13 narrated that a client visited her shop, and looking at one of the garments displayed, he commented: “Doesn't one faint when they put on this garment in the sun?” This revealed how seriously people take comfort.

Mobility is another major concern, especially because the groom is expected to walk, kneel, and sometimes bow or turn during specific parts of the ceremony. Stiff, tight, or heavy garments interfere with these movements and risk causing embarrassment or discomfort.

CM 9 shared an incident where a groom's wrap kept sliding off as he moved during the function. He adds that the best man had to keep adjusting it. With that experience, he advised that the groom should put on fitting garments to allow him to sit or kneel comfortably.

Tailors explained how they adjust their cuts to allow for ease of movement. Some create side slits, others prefer shoulder-fastened capes, and some use elastic bands or hidden belts to allow secure yet flexible fit. They added that they measure the groom in sitting and kneeling positions, not just standing, since that's what the ceremony demands.

The lining material also contributes to mobility and comfort. T3 revealed that when barkcloth fabric rubs directly on a suit, it feels rough, so I use soft cotton inside to allow movement without friction. It also protects the suit from getting stained.

Barkcloth makers are aware of how climate affects comfort. They mentioned that they are now producing lightweight barkcloth specifically for ceremonial garments. BM 14 explained that if he beats the barkcloth a bit longer and keeps it moist, it becomes softer and thinner. This barkcloth is good for wearing, not for burial or floor covering.

From the interviews with all the participants, it became clear that people think about how practical the barkcloth garment should be for the groom. Comfort, movement, and even how the barkcloth reacts to heat matter, especially since many Kwanjula ceremonies happen outside in the sun or under tents packed with people. Tailors, dealers, and even cultural MCs said they are now more careful about how the garment feels on the body and whether it allows the groom to sit, kneel, or walk without struggling.

What stood out is that while tradition still holds strong, there's now a more open attitude toward making small adjustments for the sake of comfort. T4 mentioned that it doesn't help if the groom looks good but feels trapped. Efforts should be harmonized as we maintain the barkcloth's cultural meaning while ensuring the groom still enjoys and participates fully in his ceremony.

In the end, a good barkcloth garment not only looks traditional but also fits well, feels right, and allows the groom to move freely. What people are doing now shows that tradition doesn't have to mean discomfort. The garment connects heritage with the real needs of the moment.

#### **4.4.4 Enhancing the groom's visibility and status during the Kwanjula ceremony**

One of the strongest patterns that emerged from the conversations with tailors, barkcloth dealers, barkcloth makers, and cultural MCs was the intentional effort to make the groom stand out visually and symbolically during the ceremony. Participants emphasized that the barkcloth fabric used for the groom is more than just an outfit; it is a powerful marker of status, helping him be recognized, respected, and set apart from the rest of the entourage.

CM 6 emphasized that when the groom enters, everyone should be able to see him even before he is introduced. This is possible with the help of the garment's colour, the way he is wearing the garments, and how he carries himself. These qualities identify him as the man of the day.

Visibility, in this case, is both physical and ceremonial. The groom is sometimes surrounded by brothers, cousins, and friends all dressed in kanzus, making it difficult to tell who he is among them. T2 explained that this is why he designs slightly different garments for the groom. He said he designs sashes, throw-ons, and shoulder wraps using barkcloth.

BS 11 noted that some customers ask for barkcloth in a deeper tone, one that looks rich and refined. He added that he keeps aside barkcloth with a darker brown finish because it is

smoother, has a shine, and is always chosen for making grooms' wear since it is more visible when light hits it.

According to T3, small details help elevate the groom's presence. She emphasized that even if it is a simple wrap, stitching a narrow silver or yellow embroidery, not too much is enough to show that the groom is not an ordinary guest.

CM 5, a master of ceremonies and Kwanjula organizer, said.

When officiating the Kwanjula ceremony, even when it is my role to guide the groom and his family, at times, I do not know the groom either. When the senga has identified him from the rest, it is easy for me because I don't want confusion. After the groom has been identified and dressed in the barkcloth garment by the Senga, I can easily identify him, protect him from sitting in the wrong place, and locate him easily when I have to call him forward for blessings. (CM 5 interviewed on 11<sup>th</sup> April. 2025)

BM 15 narrated an interesting story about the groom's status. He said a certain family asked him to prepare barkcloth from a specific tree. The family believed the tree had blessings. They believed barkcloth fabric from that tree added power to the groom's steps.

The sub-theme focuses on a core truth that cuts across almost all participants in Kwanjula ceremonies. The groom does not randomly select or negligently put on barkcloth for the ceremony. It is carefully and deliberately designed to serve as a clear and respectful symbolic sign of who he is, the groom, the honoured guest, and the bridge tying together two families.

The voices of the tailors, barkcloth dealers, makers, and the cultural MCs show that visibility and status are not achieved through loud clothing or extravagance, but through culturally intentional design choices. A minor difference in shade, shoulder-draped barkcloth, finely stitched borders - these are not cosmetic. They come with social weight.

Participants agree that the groom must be easily identifiable to the elders, cultural MCs, and the bride's family. This is not just for the sake of ceremony order; it's about honouring his role as the man seeking to join another family. The garment gives him presence before he even speaks. One cultural MC explained that the barkcloth allows the groom to enter with humility but be seen with authority. That paradox captures the deep thought that goes into the design.

During the interview section, T2 was of a view that one of the ways to improve the groom's visibility during the Kwanjula ceremony was to design small-scale wearable flower accessories using barkcloth with a pin mechanism behind to make it easy for the Senga to place it on the

groom's coat as she identifies him from the rest of the men at the *Kwanjula* ceremony. She further explained that these flower accessories would be inspired by the artificial flowers normally placed on the lapel of a groom's coat during *Kwanjula* ceremonies. These barkcloth flower accessories were to be created in various designs, including hand-stitched, layered color variations, and decorative embellishments at the center, such as beads and buttons. T3 mentioned that, instead of using bright plastic flowers, traditional materials like barkcloth can be used; the groom will stand out in a more respected way. CM 6 suggested that the flower should be visible but not very bright, and the Senga should be the one to place the barkcloth flower on the groom, because that's a meaningful moment. These flower accessories contributed to the objective of producing garments that identify the groom, without overwhelming the cultural essence of the ceremony, but maintaining the dignity and symbolism of the function.

The materials chosen are often of higher visual quality, richer browns, finer textures, and cleaner edges, because they reflect the family's respect for the ceremony and the occasion. A seller's comment about "saving the best pieces for the groom" shows that this status is not only visual but deeply tied to community expectations.

The tailors also highlighted how designs are adapted to each groom's situation, whether in a rural home or a Kampala hotel, seated among brothers or leading a small entourage. The barkcloth is adapted to keep him visible, dignified, and comfortable, without losing cultural respect.

Lastly, what stood out from the barkcloth makers was the spiritual element. A few participants shared that families sometimes request barkcloth from particular trees or sacred groves, believing that barkcloth carries ancestral blessings. These acts are often quiet and unspoken, yet show that status is linked to heritage and meaning.

The groom's garments, designed under objective three, addressed the need to visually and culturally distinguish the groom during the *Kwanjula* ceremony. Combining the sensibility of field participants with the dynamics of studio experimentation, each piece was consciously designed to communicate the values of honour, masculinity, recognition, and cultural pride. Barkcloth as the principal material contributed to the value attached to tradition, symbolizing authenticity and ancestral continuity. Surface decoration techniques: reverse appliqué, embroidery, pleating, and slashing were selectively applied to enrich the garments without detracting from their cultural values. The spear's influence was reflected in form and posture, as well as in the symbolism of each garment. Depending on the occasion, they could be worn over the kanzu or in combination with a coat to serve as a ceremonial identifier, ensuring the groom stood out both visually and

symbolically. With due care and creative consideration, barkcloth could become a practical contemporary choice for ceremonial dresses. As such, the design outcomes became a reflection of that meaningful compromise between tradition and contemporary, thereby fulfilling the third objective aimed at producing aesthetic garments for groom identification at Kwanjula ceremonies.

#### **4.5 Concept note for studio exploration:**

Designing Groom Identification Garments from Barkcloth for the *Kwanjula* Ceremony.

This studio project is a direct result of all insights collected from the tailor, the barkcloth dealers, the barkcloth makers, and the cultural masters of ceremonies during the fieldwork study. The brief was to design and produce garments from barkcloth that would particularly serve to identify the groom during the Baganda *Kwanjula* ceremony. These clothes are not simply pieces of clothing but a combination of culture, visual communication, and utility acquired from the lived experiences of the people organizing, attending, selling, and crafting for these events.

From the field, it was clear that barkcloth for the groom's garment should measure pretty high. It should be soft to the touch, look pleasing, worn over the coat and kanzu, and very rich in symbolic meaning. Tailors cited a need for designs that do not throw off the groom's formal wear. The barkcloth dealers suggested fine-textured and cleanly finished barkcloth fabrics. Cultural MCs noted that the groom's silhouette should clearly define him through subtle yet distinctive styling that holds traditional expectations. Such insights are central to this studio work.

The studio process started with getting a source of inspiration, sketching garment ideas inspired by the source of inspiration, and based on the recurring themes from the participants: visibility, comfort, dignity, and symbolic presence. These designs showed that barkcloth can be adapted into throw-ons, caps, sashes, and pocket squares meant for traditional and practical wear. The focus was on simplicity, clarity, and elegance, not to outshine the ceremony, but rather to honor the groom's status.

During an interview with cultural masters of ceremonies, they emphasized that the barkcloth caps designed should not resemble those of the Kabaka. For clarity, the barkcloth caps that the researcher crafted for groom's identification were made from barkcloth similar to the ones for the Kabaka. But these caps carried different symbolic meanings, shapes, and ceremonial functions. The purpose of this cap is not to enthrone the groom or replicate royal authority but to visually affirm his emerging role as the head of his new household within the framework of the Kwanjula ceremony.

The difference between the groom's cap and that of the Kabaka is that this one represents the groom's family responsibility, not political, spiritual, or royal leadership. The barkcloth cap of the groom in the Kwanjula ceremony signifies respect, dignity, and that a man has transitioned from being just any man to a married man. This helps to formally affirm the groom's position within the bride's extended family.

The groom's cap symbolizes personal growth, respect, and responsibility, whereas the Kabaka's cap signifies kingship, ancestral leadership, and authority. During an interview with one of the participants, she mentioned that the groom should wear something that shows he's now the man, the leader of a new family, not a king, but someone taking on responsibility. This cap is not decorated with royal emblems or styled like the Kabaka's. The researcher chose barkcloth to stay connected to Buganda's cultural identity without imitating royal symbols.

The material selection was largely based on what participants described as high-quality barkcloth, smooth, and rich in natural colour. Material selection involved considering the barkcloth's texture and thickness, suitable for garment construction. Each selected piece was documented with notes on its feel, weight, and visual presence.

The cutting and shaping phase included testing garment patterns that are easy to put on and remove, especially during very high-pressure moments in a ceremony. Participants emphasized the need for easy movement and breathing since some Kwanjula venues are hot and crowded. Comfort was considered especially around the neckline, arms, and shoulders.

Surface decoration was simple and meaningful, inspired by Baganda heritage motifs. Stitching, trimming, or light embroidery was used to mark edges and provide some light visual distinction, so that the groom stands out quietly with dignity rather than by impression. Each piece designed was photographed and evaluated on its ceremonial, symbolic, and practical expectations raised during fieldwork. Studio work was not just about garment production, but addressed concerns to respect cultural values and provide designs that mediate between tradition and contemporary expectations. Thus, this chapter's results directly contributed towards producing suitable wearable garments that would identify the groom at a Kwanjula ceremony.

#### **4.6 Visual findings**

In the visual findings, I presented and interpreted studio findings based on objectives two and three: to explore surface decoration techniques that enhance the aesthetic appearance of barkcloth for designing garments to identify the groom at Kwanjula ceremonies, and to produce suitable wearable garments that identify the groom at Kwanjula ceremonies.

Regarding the presentation, interpretation, and analysis of the textual findings above, a variety of wearable garments: scarves, throw-ons, shoulder throws, waistcoats, and caps were designed using different surface decoration techniques. These garments were both visually aesthetic and functional while maintaining the practical discipline showcased in a Kwanjula ceremony.

#### **4.6.1 Studio experimentation**

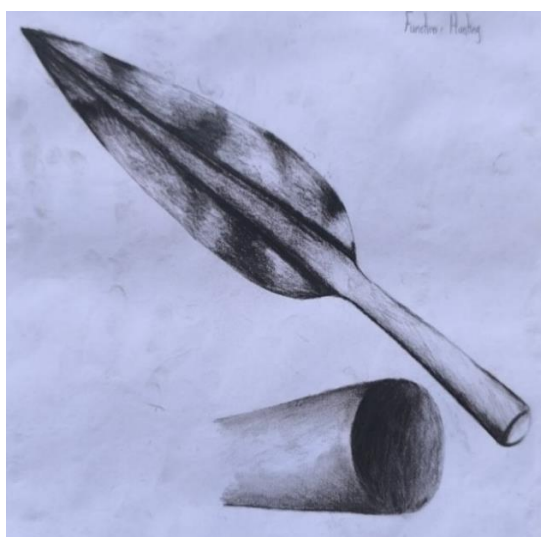
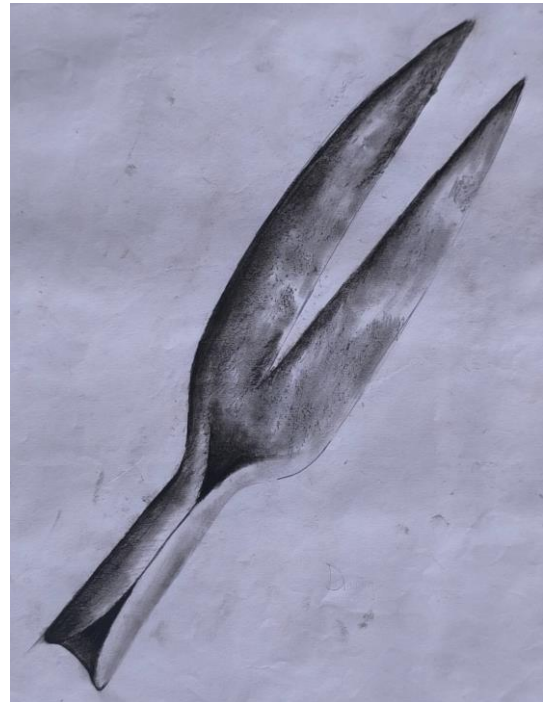
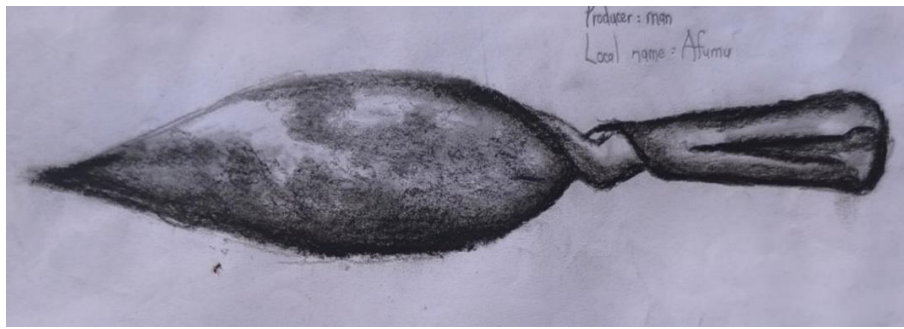
This method was mainly used to accomplish objectives two and three of this study, as I worked from the studio in Ntinda. The studio was favorable since it was easily accessible, even at night, and was equipped with all the necessary materials and machines for garment production. The production processes in the studio involved sketching and drawing, drafting, sewing, and using fabric glue to join various fabrics. This was guided by the narratives shared by the participants in the field.

#### **4.6.2 Source of Inspiration**

The traditional spear of the Baganda figure 4 served as the inspiration for the visual and conceptual direction of my studio work. The inspiration was not only based on the shape of the spear but also its symbolism of protection, leadership, strength, and readiness. These are the same qualities expected of the groom during and after the Kwanjula ceremony. Accordingly, the groom in Buganda must be presented in a dignified manner, with clarity and cultural pride. The same attitude warriors and clan leaders carry the spear to symbolize readiness and status.

The visual impression of the spear also influenced many details in the design process. For example, sharp lines and geometric shapes refer to the spear's pointed tip, while pleating and slashing techniques add movement and a structure that relates to the act of carrying, moving, or raising a spear. The surface decoration methods, such as reverse appliqué and embroidery, feature the same symmetrical linearity found in a spear shaft. The way these elements are arranged creates a sense of direction, power, and identity. The spear is not just a source of inspiration but also serves as a design language, as seen in each of the garments created.





**Figure 4: Different shapes of the traditional spears of the Baganda (hand-drawn).**

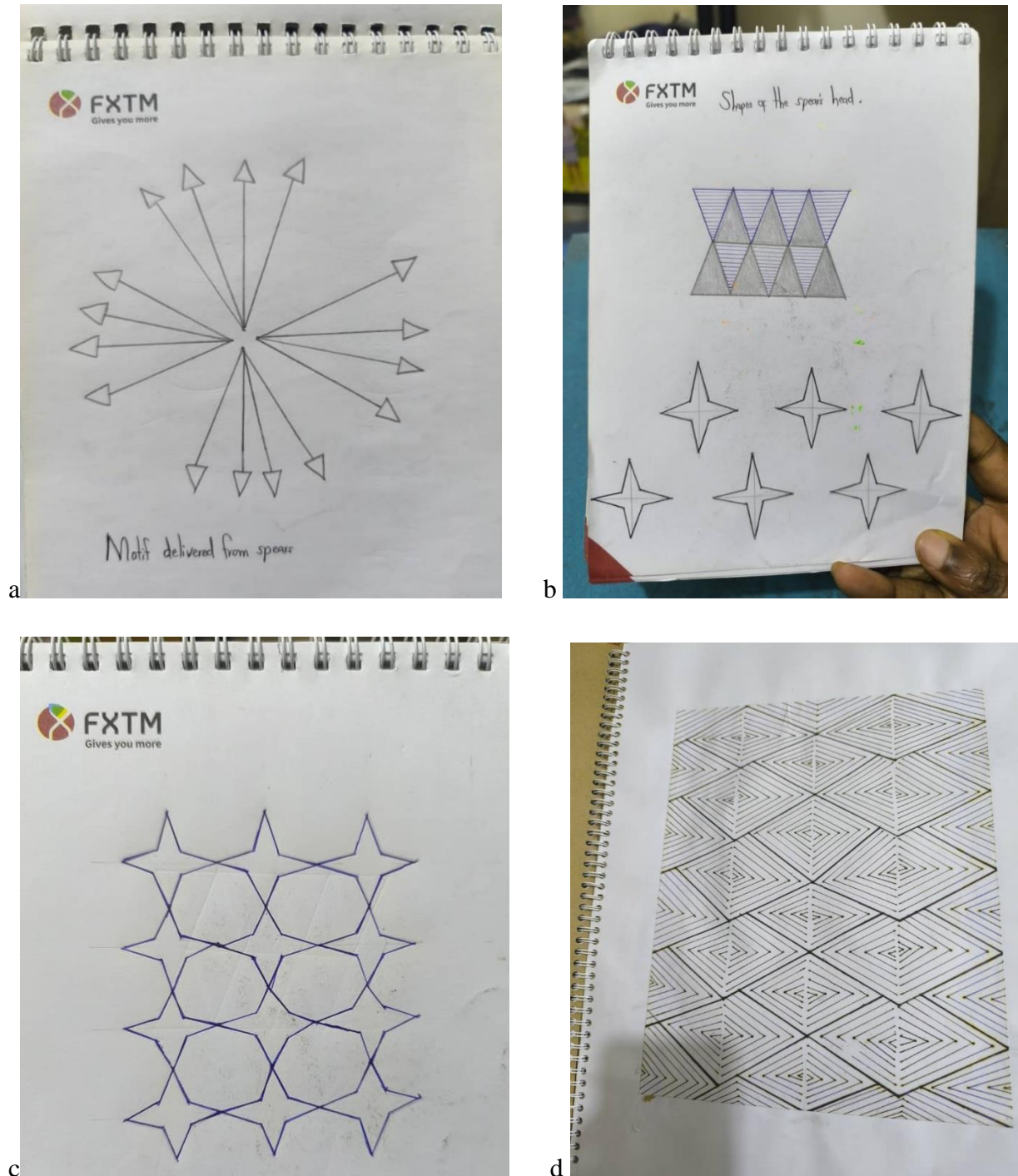
Materials: Charcoal pencil and paper

Source: Photograph taken by researcher, 2025.

**Description.**

The various images of the spears of the Baganda in figure 4 inspired the structural form of the garments, and the overlapping spears inspired some motifs that were incorporated into the garments. As seen in figures 5a to 5d.

**4.6.2.1 Motifs from the source of inspiration.**



**Figure 5a,b,c, and d: Hand-drawn motifs of the spear.**

Source: Photograph taken by researcher, 2025.

### 4.6.3 Examining different types of barkcloth of the Baganda

The study's first objective was to examine the different types of barkcloth used by the Baganda, particularly in the context of traditional ceremonies such as the *Kwanjula*. Barkcloth varies in colour, texture, thickness, and flexibility depending on how and where it is produced. These variations influence the functionality, the visibility, and how it is used for decoration and wear. During fieldwork, I handled, observed, and interacted with barkcloth from multiple producers. The difference in its qualities was discussed with tailors, dealers, makers, and cultural practitioners. The selection of a suitable barkcloth type for the groom's identification garments was guided by the participants: comfort, durability, and symbolism.

These findings directly informed decisions made during the studio experimentation process. The analysis below presents the common types of barkcloth identified, supported by visual documentation, and explains their characteristics, cultural relevance, and practical suitability for garment-making. Even when these types of barkcloth have specific color shades, environmental conditions such as excessive sun exposure can influence their color.

#### 4.6.3.1 *Entakire*

*Entakire* (figure 6) is a fine-textured and soft barkcloth, with light colours ranging from cream to pale brown. It is used for delicate work or symbolic purposes, such as spiritual ceremonies like funerals and designing garments for clan heads, since it is soft. *Entakire* is also easier to fold and shape, making it ideal for garments that require gentle draping.



**Figure 6: Barkcloth fabric from *Entakire* tree**

Source: Photograph taken by researcher, 2025.

#### 4.6.3.2 *Ensika*

Mutuba trees (*Ficus natalensis*) exhibited small aerial roots or adventitious root-like growths emerging from their lower stems or trunks; these roots are called *ensika*. They are also used for barkcloth production, but their fabric is only used for making the kabaka's garments in Buganda. Barkcloth makers trim off these roots from the stem and trunk since they obstruct the smooth removal of the bark. However, others maintain them for the tree's natural state, particularly in culturally significant or sacred locations. Since every type of Mutuba tree has these roots, barkcloth from *ensika* has no specific colour or qualities. It takes on the qualities of the tree on which those roots grow.

#### 4.6.3.3 *Kilungi*

*Kilungi* (figure 7) barkcloth has a rich reddish-brown shade with a thick and heavy texture. Being thick, it is challenging to sew or layer, although it is valued for its strength and durability. Because of this, it is best used for garments or pieces that need structural strength or for outer garments that must command visual presence.



**Figure 7: Barkcloth fabric from *Kilungi* tree**

Source: Photograph taken by researcher, 2025.

#### 4.6.3.4 *Kampindi*

Being thin and light, often in a soft orange to pale brown colour, *kampindi* is not ideal for garment construction due to its delicacy. It works well as a base for more decorative work, such as pleating and reverse appliqué, or used for layering like quilting. In some cases, it is used in burials to wrap the dead since it has a thin texture and is easy to fold. The many stitches in the fabric below explain why it is considered delicate, as it easily tears.



**Figure 8: Barkcloth fabric from *Kampindi* tree**

Source: Photograph taken by researcher, 2025.

#### **4.6.3.5 *Butanwa***

The barkcloth fabric (figure 9) from this Mutuba tree is acknowledged for its softness and warmth. It is in a deep orange or brown tone. Its smoothness makes it perfect for designing garments aiming to achieve both comfort and aesthetics. Fabric from butanwa responds well to both hand and machine stitching.



**Figure 9: Barkcloth fabric from *Butanwa* tree**

Source: Photograph taken by researcher, 2025.

#### 4.6.3.6 *Dundu*

*Dundu* (figure 10) is one of the strongest and most durable types of barkcloth produced from the Mutuba tree. It is thick and has a coarse texture. When handled, it feels dense and fibrous, with a slightly stiff quality that distinguishes it from softer varieties such as *Entakire* or *Butanwa*. Its strength and toughness make it suitable for uses where tearing must be avoided, although this same quality limits its flexibility and makes it more difficult to drape or fold into soft garment forms. *Dundu* is white and does not lose its colour even when exposed to the sun. Due to its coarse surface, it is rarely used for delicate surface decoration such as embroidery. I first softened it before use, as sewing through was going to be challenging, particularly with a machine. Culturally, *Dundu*'s roughness and strength are symbolically associated with masculinity, endurance, and protection, visually and conceptually linked to the role of the groom in traditional ceremonies such as the Kwanjula.



**Figure 10: Barkcloth fabric from *Dundu* tree**

Source: Photograph taken by researcher, 2025.

#### 4.6.3.7 *Enjeruka*

*Enjeruka* barkcloth (figure 11) has a soft texture, pale, and creamy colour, making it one of the most sophisticated and wearable types of barkcloth from the *Mutuba* tree. The gentle surface is convenient for clothing worn close to the body, such as that worn by the groom in traditional ceremonies. The flexibility of *enjeruka* makes it easy to pleat, layer, or drape softly in garment form. Unlike the heavier, more rigid barkcloth, it responds well to surface decoration techniques, such as embroidery and reverse appliqué, as it holds the stitches securely without tearing or fraying. Its pale colour and clean surface give an appearance of purity, clarity, or honor;

associatively, some of the groom's qualities. During the studio process, enjeruka was used in parts of the garment where comfort and visual softness were paramount.



**Figure 11: Barkcloth fabric from *Enjeruka* tree**

Source: Photograph taken by researcher, 2025.

#### **4.6.3.8 *Enserere***

*Enserere* barkcloth (figure 12) has a heavy texture with earthy tones, usually from dark brown to reddish brown. It is considered one of the course barkcloths from the *mutuba* tree, with a visual weight and charm. When touched, *enserere* gives off the sensation of being firm and textured, so it does not drape softly but is suitable for creating structure or contrast inside a garment.

Its material takes shape because of its strength. *Enserere* is associated with masculinity, status, and tradition, which makes it appropriate for elements of the groom's attire meant to convey strength or ancestral grounding. In the studio process, *Enserere* was used in areas of the garment where texture and symbolic visual weight were needed, such as shoulder panels or back pieces, to echo the protective and dignified nature of the spear, which inspired the designs of the garments.



**Figure 12: Barkcloth fabric from *Enserere* tree**

Source: Photograph taken by researcher, 2025.

The researcher's observation and analysis of the different types of barkcloth revealed that all types of barkcloth from the *mutuba* tree are important to the Baganda. The fabric is not only used for garment production but also in different cultural ceremonies in Buganda. Each type, whether soft and smooth like *Enjeruka* or thick and coarse like *Dundu*, serves a specific purpose depending on its physical qualities and cultural associations. These differences influence how barkcloth is selected, handled, and incorporated into ceremonial garments, especially for Kwanjula ceremonies.

The consultation with barkcloth makers, tailors, and local consumers further confirmed that choice is guided by practicality (comfort and ability to stitch) alongside cultural expectations (manhood, respect, and tradition). This information framed the studio process, and materials were not selected for their workable properties, but to preserve cultural meaning and be expressed in the design of the garments.

#### **4.6.4 Exploring surface decoration techniques to elevate the aesthetic value of barkcloth.**

This section presents the findings related to the second research objective, which focused on identifying and applying surface decoration techniques that could enhance the appearance of barkcloth in a culturally appropriate and visually appealing way to help recognize the groom at the Kwanjula ceremony. Using a mix of field observations, participant feedback, and studio experiments, various techniques were tested for their suitability on barkcloth. The aim was to enhance the aesthetic appeal of barkcloth and maintain its cultural authenticity and symbolic importance. Tailors and cultural MCs highlighted the importance of enhancements that preserve dignity, modesty, and symbolism, while still enabling the groom to stand out during the ceremony.

The techniques chosen were based on how well they complemented the texture of barkcloth and their ability to express identity, prestige, and pride visually.

While exploring to enhance the aesthetic appeal of barkcloth for groom identification garments, several surface decoration techniques were sampled on barkcloth fabric to select those relevant to the project. Techniques were chosen considering cultural ideals, participants' reactions, and the physical nature of barkcloth. Since barkcloth is fibrous and non-woven, some decoration techniques did not respond well to the fabric, yet the aim was to enhance its aesthetic appeal without distorting its look. The chosen techniques: reverse appliqué, embroidery, pleating, slashing, patchwork, and tie-and-dye, were visually bright and carried symbolic meaning when applied appropriately. Each of these techniques has preliminary stages.

#### **4.6.4.1 Reverse appliqué technique**

Reverse appliqué was among the various surface decoration techniques the researcher explored during this study to decorate the groom's identification garments used at the Kwanjula ceremony. Whereas the traditional method of appliqué involves stitching the fabric on top of the other, as seen in figure 13, reverse appliqué involves layering fabrics and then cutting through the top layer to reveal the fabric beneath, as seen in figure 18.

In Baganda culture, the leopard (Nko) symbolizes royalty, strength, fearlessness, and authority. Leopard skins were worn by kings, clan leaders, and warriors during important ceremonies in ancient times, either draped over the shoulder or used as regalia. Associating with power and noble status, this animal served as a fitting symbol in the design of the groom's garments, as the groom is culturally expected to present himself with pride, readiness, and respect. The researcher used a reverse appliqué technique with barkcloth and bleached fabric to create intentional patterns resembling leopard skin. The contrast between the cut barkcloth surface and the lighter fabric underneath formed irregular shapes and a spotted effect similar to a leopard's skin, as seen in figure 17 below. This visual reference served both aesthetic and symbolic purposes, enhancing the groom's visibility and status during the ceremony. By incorporating the leopard's historic power into the garment's visual language, the design conveyed the groom's cultural strength, pride, and leadership role within his new family. This technique was used not only to honor traditional values but also to adapt them into a contemporary.

The intention of using this technique was to maintain the natural look of barkcloth while adding value to its surface appearance. Through studio trials, I discovered that enjeruka barkcloth responded best to this technique due to its soft texture and fine surface, which allowed for neat cutting and clear visibility of the underlayer. The smoothness of Enjeruka kept the stitches intact

without tearing, thus helping to do pattern work with precision. When combined with contrast fabrics: cotton beneath the cut-out areas, reverse appliqué created a rich interplay of colour, depth, and meaning, visually setting the groom apart while honoring traditional aesthetics.



**Figure 13: Initial stages before actual appliqué.**

Materials: Glue gun, stiff cloth, and flat iron



**Figure 14: Traditional appliqué.**

Materials: Barkcloth, American satin, stiff paper, tape measure, flat iron, and glue gun.

Source: Photograph taken by the researcher, 2025.



**Figure 15: Before cutting out the motifs, their images are drafted on the barkcloth.**

Materials: Barkcloth and tailor's chalk

Source: Photograph taken by the researcher, 2025.



**Figure 16: Process of cutting out the motifs from the barkcloth and its final look.**

Tools: Scissors and seam ripper

Source: Photograph taken by the researcher, 2025.



**Figure 17: Samples of reverse appliqué tried in the studio.**

Materials: Different shades of barkcloth fabrics. The colour variations in the barkcloth were obtained using a dyeing technique.

Source: Photograph taken by the researcher, 2025.



**Figure 18: A black cotton fabric was bleached using Jik (detergent)**

Technique: Bleaching

Source: Photograph taken by the researcher, 2025.



**Figure 19: Final reverse appliqué technique product with a fabric from figure 18**  
Materials: Imported cotton, cotton lining, stiff, and barkcloth.

Source: Photograph taken by the researcher, 2025.

#### **4.6.4.2 Embroidery**

Hand and machine embroidery decorative techniques were explored to add symbolic detail and improve the surface look of the barkcloth garments. For machine embroidery, I used simple linear stitches to outline motifs drawn from the spear as seen in Figure 5a. Hand embroidery served a dual purpose: that is, providing a neat and secure finish to the raw edges of the barkcloth, which is prone to fraying if left untreated. The other was to enhance the artistic expression on the barkcloth itself. Decorative hand embroidery along the hems gave a polished feel and look to the garments, much beyond the scope of mere ordinary machine stitching. The visibility of neat running stitches, designed with care, meant that finishing lines were an integral part of the design. I also had the freedom to choose thread colors and stitch types that either matched or contrasted with the barkcloth.

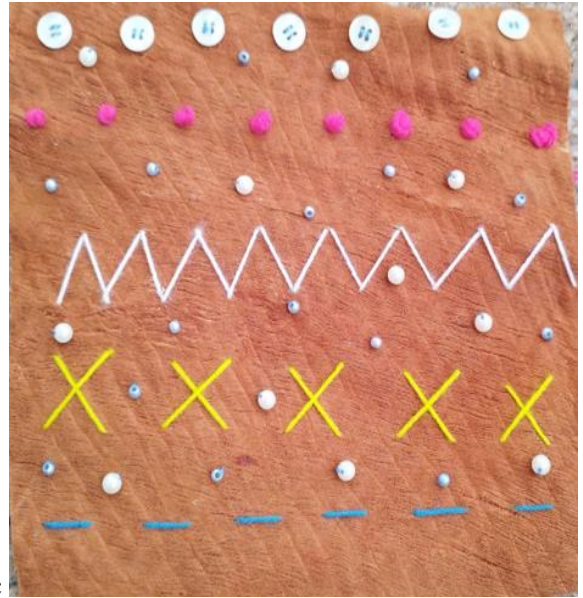
Machine embroidery techniques found barkcloth from Entakire, Kampindi, and dundu to be most yielding. Being smooth and soft in texture, it allowed the needle to slide through with relative ease. Stiff cloth is usually ironed at the back of the fabric to enable the embroidery machine to move smoothly. Barkcloth types that are too coarse or fibrous, such as Kilungi, tend to resist the needle or wear away at the thread and thus are less ideal for this technique.



a



b



c

**Figure 20a, b and c: Samples of hand embroidery.**

Source: Photograph taken by the researcher, 2025.



a



b

**Figure 21a: Barkcloth fabric with running stitch in different colour threads.**

**Figure 21b: Researcher making hand embroidery stitches on barkcloth.**

Materials: Hand needle, nylon threads, and barkcloth.

Source: Photograph taken by the researcher, 2025.



**Figure 22: Machine embroidery with traditional spear motifs as seen in Figure 5a.**

Technique: Embroidery and beading.

Source: Photograph taken by the researcher, 2025.

#### 4.6.4.3 Pleating technique.

In this study, I used the pleating surface manipulation technique to achieve the structure and movement of the lines in barkcloth fabric. The process involved folding the fabric into deliberate, repeated lines that not only created interest but also imbued the fabric with formality and elegance. In terms of material selection, I used butanwa and enjeruka barkcloth because they are soft and pliable. With the right amount of iron treatment, the folds could be shaped and held without cracking or tearing, yet still became somewhat self-supporting. Thicker types of barkcloth weighed down the manipulation and did not allow the pleated form to keep itself very well.



**Figure 23a: *Butanwa* pleated barkcloth**

**Figure 23b: Pleated *enjeruka* barkcloth.**

Materials: Flat iron and barkcloth.

Source: Photograph taken by the researcher, 2025.

#### 4.5.4.4 Slashing technique.

The researcher creatively applied the slashing technique to introduce texture and contrast to the barkcloth fabric. It involved making deliberate, controlled cuts through the top layer of fabric to expose a second fabric underneath. This method allowed the hidden colors and patterns of the underneath fabric to emerge through the slits, creating a layered effect that was expressive. I used enjeruka and dundu barkcloth while crafting this slashing technique. I tried to use barkcloth that was too fragile; it did not respond as well, because it was tearing unpredictably.



**Figure 24: Slashing technique on barkcloth.**  
 Materials: Bleached cotton, jik, threads, and barkcloth.

Source: Photograph taken by the researcher, 2025.

#### 4.5.4.5 Patchwork technique.

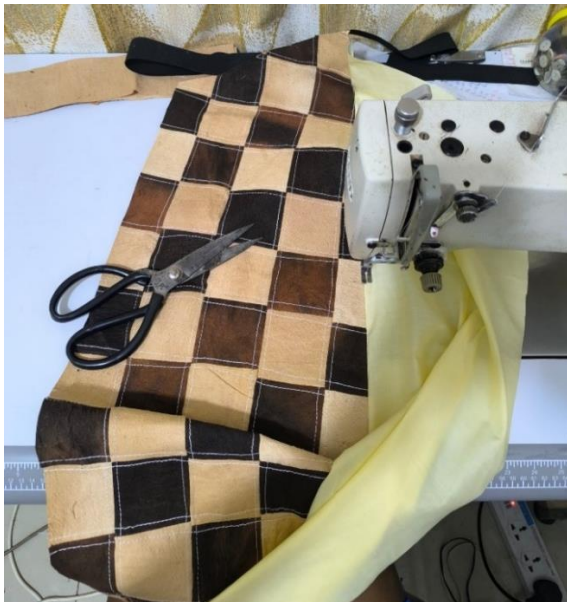
Using the patchwork technique, I joined various fabric pieces to create a textured and visually appealing surface. The researcher used natural and synthetic dyeing decoration techniques to enhance the barkcloth offcuts used in patchwork. I was able to repurpose small barkcloth offcuts that would have otherwise been thrown away by using the patchwork technique. Instead, I used them creatively to create a larger fabric that was subsequently turned into the groom's overcoat. I used Enserere and Kilungi because they were robust and thick, which allowed the seams to hold securely and gave a strong foundation for joining several pieces of fabric.



**Figure 25: Barkcloth off-cuts with different shades.**  
 Source: Photograph taken by the researcher, 2025.



**Figure 26: Different barkcloth shades joined together using the patchwork technique.**  
Source: Photograph taken by the researcher, 2025.



**Figure 27: Different shades of barkcloth offcut joined together using the patchwork technique.**

Materials: Threads, barkcloth, cotton lining, sewing machine, and scissors.

Source: Photograph taken by the researcher, 2025.

#### 4.6.4.6 Tie-and-dye technique

Tie-and-dye surface decoration technique was explored to introduce colour variation and texture onto the barkcloth fabric. Natural and artificial dyes were applied to the barkcloth fabric. With natural dyeing, the barkcloth was soaked in clay water for a few minutes to obtain a darker shade of barkcloth. The longer the barkcloth was soaked in the clay water, the darker it became. With artificial/synthetic dyes, I put the dyes in hot water and soaked the barkcloth in the mixture

for a few seconds, and then removed it. It was then washed and dried in the shade. The processes involved soaking, folding, gathering, or tying with a rubber band or threads some parts of the barkcloth before applying the dyes. In my studio explorations, I discovered that entakire barkcloth responded best to the tie-and-dye technique due to its fine texture and light base colour. It absorbed the dye evenly and displayed clearly. Thicker or darker barkcloth types, such as enserere and dundu, absorbed less colour, hence creating an uneven pattern on the barkcloth fabric.



**Figure 28: Clay water used for naturally dyeing barkcloth.**

Source: Photograph taken by researcher, 2025.



**Figure 29: Tying the barkcloth fabric and dyeing using clay water.**

Source: Photograph taken by the researcher, 2025.



**Figure 30: Washing the barkcloth using Omo (detergent) and tap water after dyeing in clay water.**

Source: Photograph taken by the researcher, 2025.



**Figure 31: The researcher washing the barkcloth in plain water.**

Source: Photograph taken by the researcher, 2025.



**Figure 32: Sample shades of barkcloth after dying in clay water for different minutes. The darkest was dyed for longer than the rest.**

Source: Photograph taken by the researcher, 2025.



**Figure 33: Tying the barkcloth fabric before dying.**

Source: Photograph taken by the researcher, 2025.



**Figure 34: Image showing what the barkcloth fabric looks like after having been dyed in clay water for 2 minutes.**

Source: Photograph taken by the researcher, 2025.



**Figure 35: The researcher dyed this barkcloth fabric in clay water for 2 days.**

Source: Photograph taken by the researcher, 2025.

The researcher tried to use artificial dyes to dye the barkcloth, but it was not entirely successful. The chemicals with the artificial dyes to help stick the dye in the fabric, that is, caustic potash and sodium carbonate, reacted negatively with the barkcloth. The dyes burnt the barkcloth, and it almost tore. The fibers became loose; some holes were observed in the barkcloth. This was after the barkcloth was dipped in the artificial dye for one minute.

The researcher decided to use cold dyes, which did not require chemicals. I only added soda ash to raise the PH of the dye, enabling the dye molecules to bind with the barkcloth



**Figure 36: Barkcloth offcuts dyed using different colours.**

Source: Photograph by the researcher, 2025.

The researcher's experience, as I explored surface decoration techniques, confirmed that there is potential for barkcloth to serve not only as a traditional material but also as a fabric for culturally meaningful design for Kwanjula ceremonies. All the techniques: reverse appliqué, embroidery, pleating, slashing, patchwork, and dyeing, brought out unique visual and symbolic qualities that enhanced the appearance of the groom's garments. Mastering the texture, thickness, and cultural relevance of the material successfully realized these techniques. Participant feedback

went on to affirm the importance of maintaining dignity and identity in designing the groom's garments. These surface decorative techniques made it possible to artistically and symbolically enrich barkcloth and give the groom a unique and honored presence during the Kwanjula ceremony.

#### **4.6.5 Producing suitable wearable garments that identify the groom at Kwanjula ceremonies.**

Building on the findings from the literature, a series of wearable garments were designed and produced to visually and symbolically identify the groom during the *Kwanjula* ceremony. Throw-ons, waistcoats, scarves, caps, and shoulder throws were the garments designed, each developed with consideration of cultural meaning, studio experimentation, and direct insights from participants. The spear was the source of inspiration, and its motifs and physical structure were adopted to design the structural elements of the garments. This influence is reflected in the pointed shapes, vertical lines, strong silhouettes, and careful placement of surface decorations. All the garments were made using barkcloth as the main material, complemented by other materials such as American satin, cotton, and kitengi. Reverse appliqué, hand embroidery, slashing, pleating, patchworking, and tie-and-dye techniques were used where applicable. The dimensioning, pattern-making, and construction processes were recorded and guided by trial and error executed in the studio, while also considering participant preferences. This approach ensured the final designs were symbolic, wearable, and suitable for the Kwanjula ceremony.

In addition to the groom's identification garments mentioned above, barkcloth fabric was also used to create small decorative flowers with a functional pin mechanism at the back of each flower for easy placement on the groom's coat. This flower is one of the accessories the Senga uses to identify the groom from the other men at the ceremony. The floral accessories were handmade from different shades of barkcloth and served as an alternative to artificial boutonnieres or plastic flowers.

The Senga placing the barkcloth flower accessories on the groom's coat is a culturally significant act, and is a visual mark of status among his entourage. Using crafted traditional materials to craft these flower accessories responds to the participants' request for the researcher to be original and maintain cultural authenticity. Furthermore, replacing plastic flowers with sustainable barkcloth flower accessories conserves culture and the environment. Below is a variety of garments and flower accessories with the names, techniques used, and technical drawings.

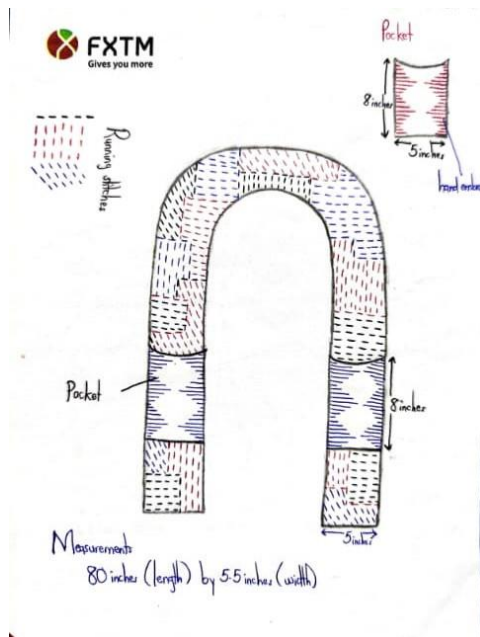


**Figure 37a to f: Handmade flower accessories.**

Materials and tools: Barkcloth, beads, buttons, and embroidery threads

Source: Photograph by researcher, 2025.

Each of these handmade barkcloth flowers above was designed using a different technique. These barkcloth flowers designed in this study are meant to substitute the artificial flowers used by the senga at the kwanjula ceremony to identify the groom. They have a pin mechanism behind for easy placement on the coat. Figure 37a is tie-and-dyed plus beading technique, figure 37b and c are dyeing and beading, figure 37d is dyeing and hand embroidery, and figure 37e and f have dyeing and applique technique.



**Figure 38: A draft of a scarf with hand embroidery running stitches.**

Materials and tools: Pens, paper, and a pencil.

Source: Photograph by researcher, 2025.



**Figure 39: Barkcloth scarf with side pockets**

Technique: Hand embroidery (running stitches)

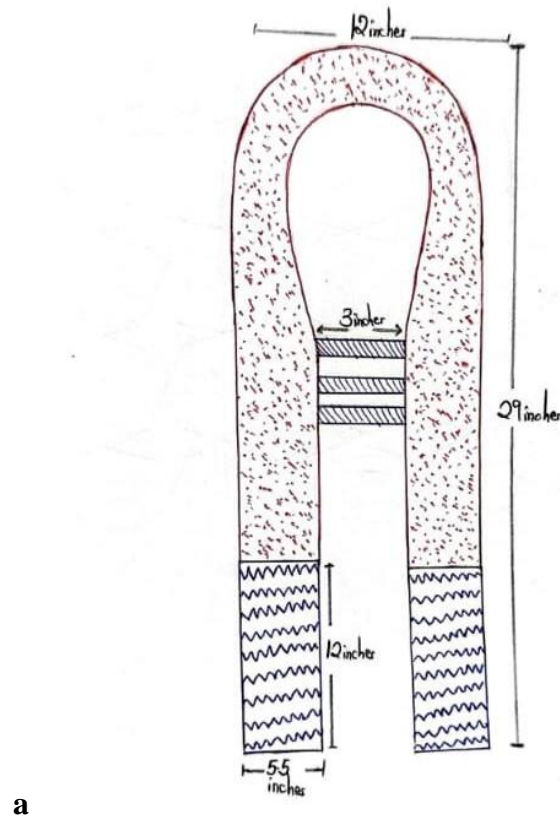
Measurements: 80 inches (length) by 5.5 inches (width)

Materials and tools: Barkcloth, cotton lining, sewing machine, and threads

Source: Photograph by researcher, 2025.

## Description

A scarf designed for the groom with hand-embroidered running stitches in different nylon thread colours. I was designed using Enjeruka barkcloth with two side pockets, which are both functional and add beauty to the scarf.



**Figure 40a: A draft of a scarf with measurements.**

**Figure 40b: A barkcloth cap designed using the pleating technique.**

Source: Photograph by researcher, 2025.



**Figure 41: A scarf with side pockets.**

Technique: Pleating.

Measurements: Scarf 70 inches (length) by 5.5 inches (width)

Materials: Barkcloth, cotton lining, and kitengi

Source: Photograph by researcher, 2025.

A front throw for a groom with side pockets, designed using kitengi and barkcloth using the pleating technique.



**Figure 42: Barkcloth neck scarf**  
Technique: Slashing

Measurements: 80 inches (length) by 5.5 inches (width)

Materials: Barkcloth, cotton lining, and bleached imported cotton

Source: Photograph by researcher, 2025.

Scarf designed using the slashing technique using barkcloth and cotton bleached fabric. It is to be worn over the kanzu and coat, like in figure 42 above



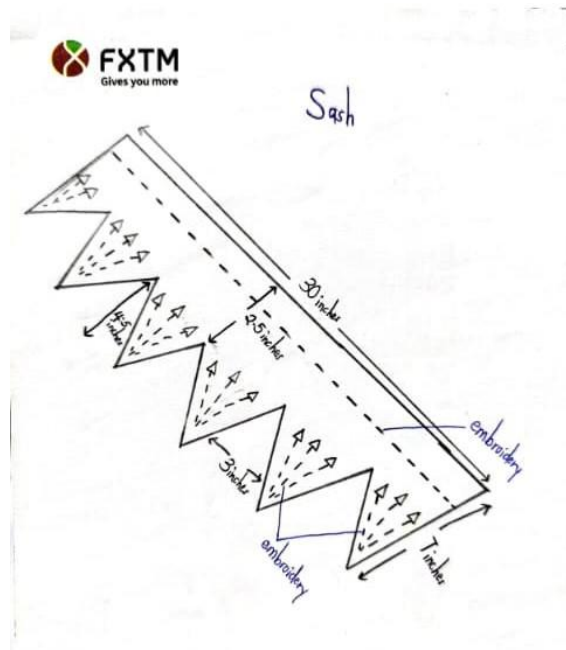
**Figure 43: Shoulder throw**  
Technique: Appliqué

Measurements: 40 inches (length) by 5.5 inches (width)

Materials: Barkcloth, cotton lining, and American satin

Source: Photograph by researcher, 2025.

This shoulder throw was designed using American satin with barkcloth flowers applied using the appliqué technique. It has pins on the other side of the fabric to enable the groom to attach it comfortably to their coat. The sharp, pointed end of the garment was inspired by the head of the spear.



**Figure 44: A draft of a barkcloth sash**

Materials: Pen, pencil, ruler, and paper.

Source: Photograph by researcher, 2025.



**Figure 45: A barkcloth sash and cap**

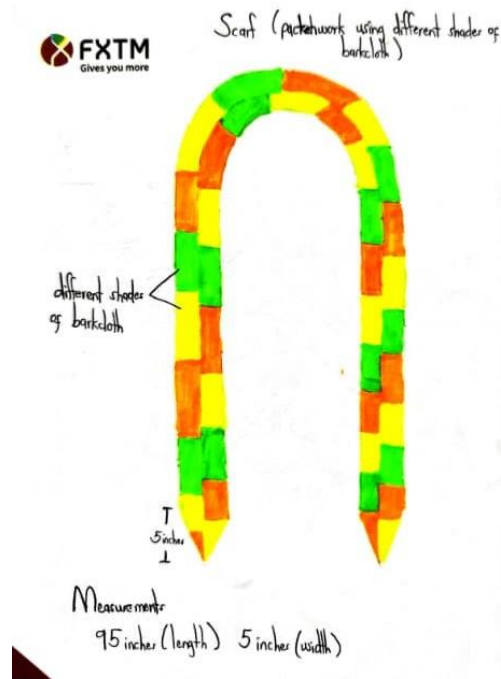
Technique: Embroidery and beading

Source: Photograph by researcher, 2025.

The barkcloth sash and cap were designed using machine embroidery. Their structure design was inspired by the motifs of the spear as seen in Figure 5d above. They were decorated with black beads and buttons to enhance their look.



**Figure 46: Image showing a scarf**  
Technique: Hand embroidery and pleating  
Measurements: 80 inches in length  
Materials: Barkcloth and nylon threads  
Source: Photograph by researcher, 2025.



**Figure 47: Draft showing a scarf**  
 Materials: Highlighters, paper, and a pen.

Source: Photograph by researcher, 2025



**Figure 48: Barkcloth scarf**  
 Materials: Tie-and-dyed barkcloth offcuts and cotton lining

Source: Photograph by researcher, 2025.

Three shades of barkcloth were patched together to achieve the above design and later joined together to make a scarf. The ends of the scarf are shaped like the head of a spear (figure 4).



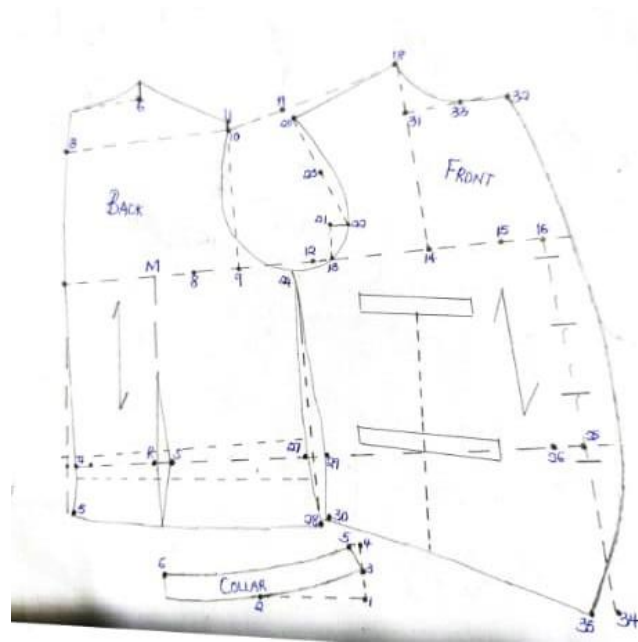
**Figure 49: A shoulder throw with a pin mechanism to make it easy to attach to the coat.**

Techniques: Pleating, beading, and reverse appliqué

Measurements: 40 inches in length

Materials: Barkcloth, kitengi, beads, and cotton lining

Source: Photograph by researcher, 2025.



**Figure 50: A technical drawing of a waistcoat showing front and back views.**

Materials: Pen, paper, and pencil.

Source: Photograph by researcher, 2025.



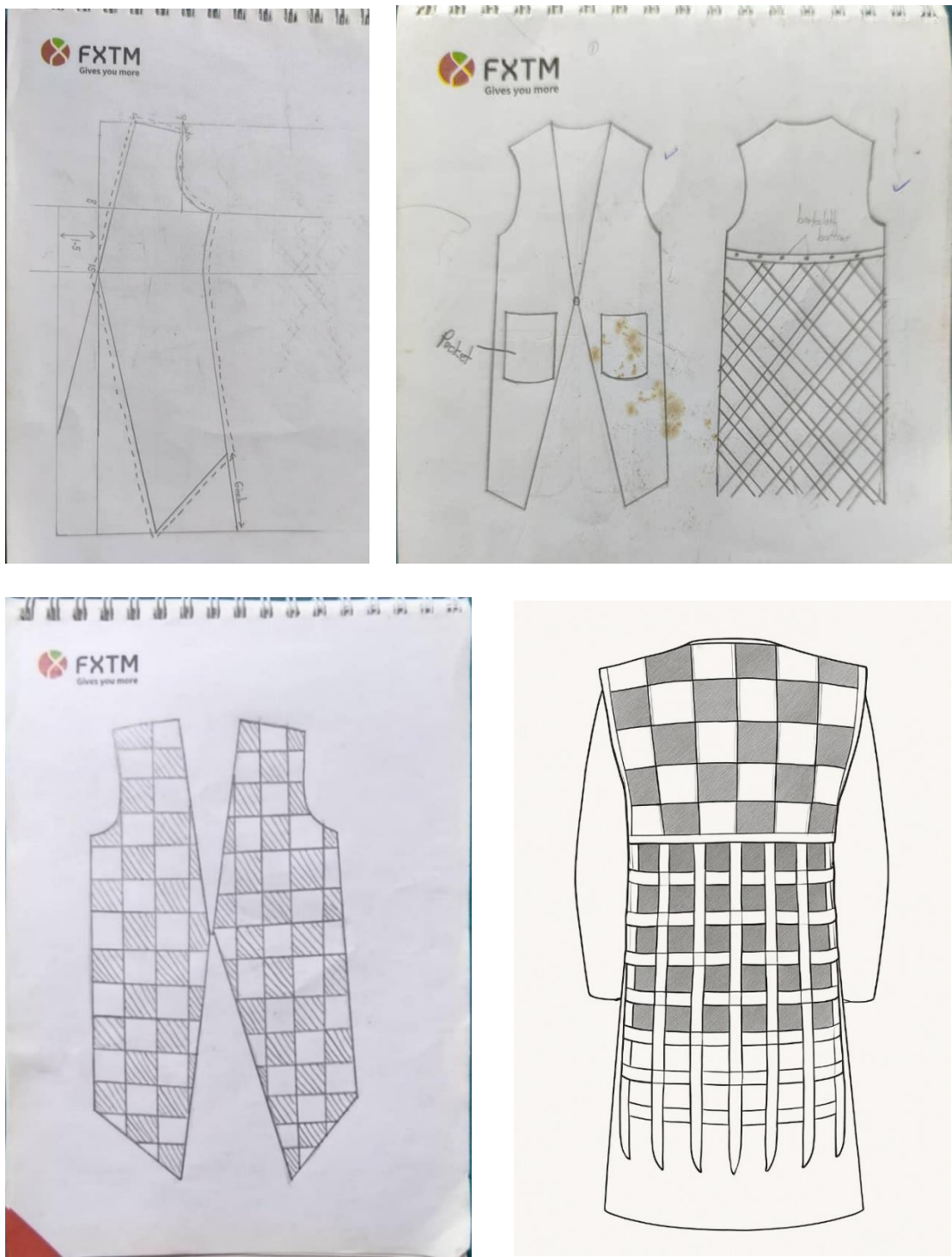
**Figure 51: Front and back view of a barkcloth waistcoat and cap**

Technique: Reverse appliqué.

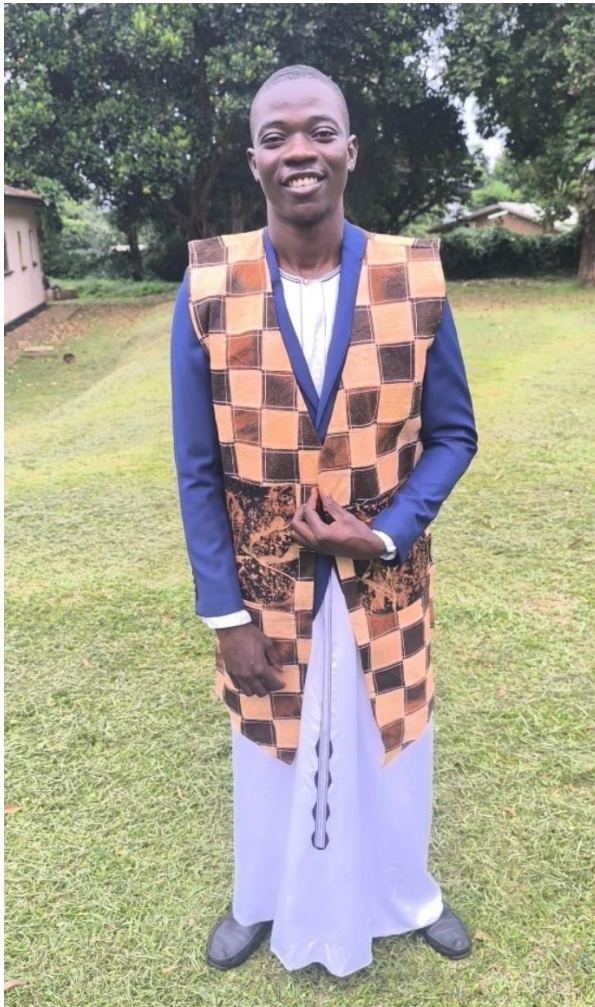
Materials: Barkcloth, cotton lining, and bleached cotton fabric.

Source: Photograph by researcher, 2025.

The above waistcoat was designed using a bleached cotton fabric in figure 18 and enserere barkcloth in figure 12. The intended pattern resembles the skin of a leopard. In Buganda, the leopard symbolizes royalty, strength, fearlessness, and authority. The cap was made using the same technique, reverse appliqué. The back of the waistcoat is open for both visual appeal and to enable the groom to put it on and off easily.



**Figure 52: Hand drafts of the throw-on**  
Source: Photograph by researcher, 2025.



**Figure 53: A front and back view of a throw-on with side pockets.**

Technique: Patchwork, tie-and-dye, and bleaching

Materials: Barkcloth, cotton lining, and bleached cotton fabric.

Source: Photograph by researcher, 2025.

The figure above shows a sleeveless throw-on with front pockets and a striped back. Its structure design was inspired by the shape of a traditional spear of the Baganda, which is represented in Figure 4. The cream barkcloth in the garment is enjeruka, and the tie-and-dyed barkcloth is entakire. Kilungi was dyed and used to make the strips in the bark part of the garment. The choice of the types of barkcloth was determined by their texture and where pretested in the studio to make sure they are the perfect fit for the garment. The pockets of the throw-on were made using a bleached cotton cloth, as seen in Figure 18.





**Figure 55: Throw-on**

Technique: Slashing and patchwork

Materials: American satin and barkcloth.

Source: Photograph by researcher, 2025.

Figure 55 is a throw on designed for the groom using American satin and barkcloth. The measurements are in inches: bust 42, cross back 18, full length 42, and 15 natural waist. The motifs used in the slashing technique are delivered from the spear as seen in Figure 5c.

All the final garments made from each technique, as shown in Figures 13 to 36, were considered potential clothing options for the groom to wear and be recognized at a kwanjula ceremony. The idea of having a variety of final products, as seen in Figures 37 to 55, was suggested by the tailors during data collection. They explained that it is difficult to decide which garment can be used by all the Sengas, so they proposed creating a range of garments, allowing the Sengas to choose which is most suitable for their groom, since not all garments can be worn on the same day.

T3 mentioned that since kwanjula occurs, the groom, senga, and bride should select garments they feel comfortable with, including choosing the colours, height, and barkcloth

material or type. Therefore, the researcher left the decision-making to the involved individuals to select which garment to wear at their kwanjula, resulting in a variety of garments.

Chapter four presented fieldwork, participant engagement, and studio findings of the study based on the three research objectives. It demonstrated that barkcloth can be reimagined as a material for groom's identification garments worn in Kwanjula ceremonies.

The first objective was to examine the different types of barkcloth used by the Baganda. Eight types of barkcloth: *Entakire*, *Ensika*, *Kilungi*, *Butanwa*, *Enjeruka*, *Enserere*, *Kampindi*, and *Dundu*. Each with varying qualities such as smoothness, color, thickness, and cultural functions, was identified through interviews and observations. The researcher found that each barkcloth type was suitable for making garments as long as the correct surface decoration technique was used. Images from studio work explorations were included to illustrate their characteristics.

The second objective explored surface decoration techniques that could enhance the visual appearance of barkcloth garments. Techniques such as reverse appliqué, hand embroidery, pleating, slashing, patchwork, and tie-and-dye were applied during the studio process. All the decoration techniques were tested on different types of barkcloth to identify which technique works with which type of barkcloth. The researcher's observation revealed that these surface decoration techniques not only enhance the surface appearance of the barkcloth but also add symbolic meaning (embroidery and appliqué) that adds value to a Kwanjula ceremony.

Objective three focused on creating wearable garments for the groom's identification at the Kwanjula ceremony, drawing inspiration from the spear, a symbol of strength, leadership, and protection. Garments such as throw-ons, waistcoats, scarves, caps, and shoulder wraps were designed and constructed. These designs were guided by feedback from participants and reflected traditional expectations while allowing room for innovation. The garments were carefully crafted using the surface techniques identified earlier, and their structure, symbolism, and presentation successfully achieved the goal of producing culturally meaningful and visually appealing ceremonial wear.

In conclusion, chapter four presented how barkcloth, an indigenous and culturally significant material, can be thoughtfully transformed through design and studio practice to meet contemporary ceremonial needs while preserving traditional meaning.

#### **4.7 Challenges faced during studio exploration with barkcloth and how they were overcome**

The researcher used barkcloth as the main material for designing and creating the groom's identification garments worn at the Kwanjula ceremony. I was eager to work with barkcloth, but

it presented practical challenges along the way. The fabric required a lot of patience, reworking, and problem-solving, especially when trying to come up with a new idea, and it still fails to come out as expected.

The stiffness and uneven thickness of Kilungi and Dundu were one of the challenges I faced. These varieties were hard to fold, stitch, and shape, particularly for surface decoration techniques, pleating, and embroidery.

The inconsistency of the material caused the sewing machine needle to break or skip stitches. To fix this, I softened the fabric by gently moistening it and used hand stitching in areas where the machine struggled. I also switched to softer varieties like Enjeruka and Butanwa for sections of the garment that required fine manipulation, such as hems and decorative panels.

Fraying and tearing, especially along the cut edges of the barkcloth, as I tried reverse appliqué or slashing, was another challenge. Barkcloth is a beaten fibrous material and easily tears when overstretched. I managed this challenge by layering the barkcloth fabric with drafting papers before cutting to support the edges and reduce damage. In addition, I adjusted my stitching technique and used hand stitches in most cases to secure seams, hence preventing tearing.

While using tie-and-dye, some barkcloth types absorbed colour unevenly, while others became brittle after drying, especially when they were exposed to harsh sunlight. Through testing, I realized that Entakire, being naturally lighter in tone and softer in texture, responded best to dyeing. I also switched to natural dyes and low-heat drying, which preserved the softness of the barkcloth while still allowing for rich, organic colour patterns to emerge.

Handling embroidery was another delicate process. Certain coarse types of barkcloth, such as Enserere, resisted the embroidery needle or shredded the thread. I overcame this by limiting embroidery to areas made from smoother barkcloth, using Enjeruka, and carefully selecting thread types that would pass through the material more easily.

Last but not least, the most delicate and sensitive was maintaining respect for culture while practicing creative expression. As a designer, I was excited to check out all the possibilities of designing groom's garments using barkcloth. I constantly cross-checked my designs with cultural norms and field advice, to ensure nothing is misinterpreted as emulating royal dress (such as using Ensika to design clothes for the groom) or in any way lacking in dignity for the groom. Balancing this delicate mix meant I always kept returning to participant input and allowed cultural direction to inform each creative choice.

Such challenges prepared me to design barkcloth with sensitivity, adaptability, and a deep respect for traditions. Each hurdle became part of the process rather than a limitation. The final groom's garments carry lessons that are stitched into every fold and seam

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.1 Overview

The purpose of this study was to explore and design culturally meaningful wearable garments using barkcloth that distinctly identify the groom during kwanjula ceremonies. Chapter five presents a summary of research findings, concludes, and provides recommendations based on the set objectives. It also outlines areas that need further research into the use of barkcloth in ceremonial contexts.

#### 5.2 Discussion

This included a comparison between this study's field findings, studio exploration, and other scholarly literature presented in chapter two, which guided the discussion below:

##### **5.2.1 Types of barkcloth among the Baganda in relation to quality and material characteristics.**

The findings revealed that the barkcloth (*olubugo*) of the Baganda does not have a consistent texture or smoothness, being from various barkcloth trees with different properties. This study supports and, in some cases, expands on the literature reviewed regarding the types of barkcloth and their cultural significance. Nakirulu (2015) noted that barkcloth comes from different *mutuba* trees (*Ficus natalensis*), with its fabric varying in texture, color, and smoothness depending on the species and processing methods. Field participants, especially barkcloth dealers and makers, confirmed this and even identified eight distinct types: Entakire, Ensika, Kilungi, Kampindi, Butanwa, Enjeruka, Enserere, and Dundu. They stated that each type of barkcloth holds a different cultural meaning and serves a specific purpose during Kwanjula ceremonies. Supporting both the literature review and field data, it's clear that barkcloth is more than just a material; it is a cultural artifact associated with status, gender roles, and tradition. Nakazibwe (2005) highlighted that Ensika, a type of barkcloth harvested from the aerial roots of the Mutuba tree, has a sacred status and should be used exclusively for designing the Kabaka's garments.

Cultural masters of ceremonies confirmed this, asserting that garments made from Ensika are reserved for royalty, and care must be taken not to imitate royal attire when designing for the groom. All participants who mentioned Ensika barkcloth emphasized that the groom's outfit should avoid any resemblance to the Kabaka's garments, especially those linked to spiritual or political authority. As a researcher, I respected this restriction and only documented the characteristics and

properties of Ensika, but I did not incorporate it into my studio experiments since the garments I am designing are for the groom, not the Kabaka of Buganda.

The reddish-brown color of Kilungi was admired for its contrast with enjeruka, especially when used together in patchwork or appliqué. Its thickness added visual richness but presented challenges in sewing. Butanwa and Enjeruka, being flexible and smooth, were highly suitable for surface decoration techniques like pleating and slashing. Particularly, Enjeruka was favored during studio trials for its ability to hold stitches without fraying, while also symbolizing visual softness, aligning with qualities expected of a dignified groom. Kampindi, though very delicate, was still valued for inner layering or aesthetic enhancement through techniques such as reverse appliqué, because of its ability to produce soft visual contrast.

Furthermore, the field findings supported Kaggwa's (2015) contention that barkcloth has cultural value and is used in marriage rituals to reflect continuity, dignity, and respect. Tailors and barkcloth dealers mentioned that thicker varieties, such as Dundu and Enserere, were considered masculine and authoritative, suitable for coat-like garments; softer types, such as Butanwa and Enjeruka, were prized for comfort and garment production since they drape easily. The practical use of barkcloth, based on its physical qualities, extends beyond what was documented in literature, adding nuance to existing scholarly understanding.

However, the findings challenge certain assumptions in the literature. While most literature classifies barkcloth by tree species and spiritual functions, the field study showed that barkcloth dealers, users, and tailors classify barkcloth based on its smoothness, durability, and texture, especially regarding the symbolic role of the groom. Limited literature mentions Kilungi barkcloth, but most tailors and barkcloth dealers appreciated its rich reddish tone, noting that it blends perfectly with the deep brown shade when patched together, though its stiff nature makes it difficult to sew when overlaid.

This focus on material performance, not just cultural meaning, reflects a contemporary emphasis on wearability alongside tradition. Additionally, the literature review highlights the spiritual and funerary uses of barkcloth (Kyewalyanga, 2019; Ssewanyana, 2019), but in practice, field participants paid more attention to how barkcloth enhances the groom's identity, visibility, and status in the contemporary Kwanjula setting. This indicates a shift from purely ritual use to ceremonial fashion, supporting Gateja's (2018) argument that barkcloth can be revitalized through design to serve contemporary purposes while still holding symbolic meaning.

Barkcloth artisans explained in interviews that environmental and production factors influence the appearance and texture of barkcloth. The quality of the tree, age at harvest, sunlight exposure, and beating method during processing all impact the final texture. They stressed that making barkcloth traditionally is more culturally authentic than machine-processed barkcloth. One artisan mentioned that they performed rituals, such as singing, during harvesting and processing, which gave the activity more significance than machine methods. These observations highlighted how material knowledge is deeply rooted in the lived experiences of artisans and tailors in Buganda.

The decisions I made during studio experimentation were guided by participants' insights. The garments created were influenced not only by the barkcloth's texture but also by how those qualities reflect the groom's representation in Baganda tradition, leadership, respect, dignity, and the transition from being just a man to a husband. Matching the qualities of barkcloth to its cultural symbolism emphasized that the designed garments carry meaning beyond mere wearability.

Consequently, the study concluded that understanding the different types of barkcloth is essential for developing appropriate, respectful, and innovative ceremonial attire for grooms at Kwanjula. Ultimately, the studio works reinforced field findings and literature by aligning barkcloth types with specific garment functions. As both literature and studio practice suggest, softer varieties like Enjeruka are ideal for surface embellishments such as embroidery and reverse appliqué, while firmer types like Enserere suit structural panels. The studio became a space where theory and practice intersected, transforming cultural heritage into wearable design. While the study largely supports existing research on the diversity and cultural richness of barkcloth, it also documents how contemporary practitioners evaluate and use barkcloth, revealing practical criteria and symbolic meanings that earlier scholarship did not fully explore. This necessitates the current relevance and future potential of barkcloth in ceremonial clothing for identifying grooms at Kwanjula ceremonies.

### **5.2.2 Surface decoration techniques that enhance barkcloth garments for the groom's identification at *Kwanjula* ceremonies.**

The second objective focused on examining how surface decoration techniques could elevate the visual appearance of barkcloth fabric. The enhanced barkcloth fabric was used to design garments that the Senga uses as an identifier of the groom from the rest of the men during the Kwanjula ceremony. This objective considers the fact that barkcloth is deeply rooted in cultural history, but it requires thoughtful artistic enhancement to appeal to both contemporary aesthetics and ceremonial expectations.

Shah (2023) and Alnassaj (2023) highlighted that surface embellishment methods like appliqué, patchwork, slashing, tie-and-dye, and embroidery transform plain fabrics into expressive, high-value textiles. They also stated that these surface techniques not only boost visual attraction but also convey personal and cultural identity. Several tailors and barkcloth makers in field interviews confirmed this, emphasizing that clients preferred decorated barkcloth over plain ones, especially for wedding and Kwanjula outfits. They added that the groom should look outstanding but not overly decorated. Most participants believed that the more decorated the barkcloth was, the less it resembled the barkcloth used in burial or ritual ceremonies. The researcher agrees with these views since I also notice a significant difference between plain barkcloth and the decorated versions. It makes the fabric look brighter and more acceptable.

Studio experimentation was undertaken to test this theory directly. Various surface decoration techniques mentioned above were studied for their suitability with different types of barkcloth. The researcher discovered that barkcloth fabrics that are softer and more flexible, such as Enjeruka and Butanwa, were highly suitable for delicate techniques like embroidery and patchwork. The findings support Verma's (2022) observation that delicate, non-woven fabrics require gentle handling and often reinforcement during decoration or layering with other materials. Most of the garments I designed in the studio had lining to ensure their strength and prevent the barkcloth from directly getting into contact with the groom's coat and kanzu for convenience.

Reverse appliqué appeared particularly important in practice. This technique involved cutting out spear-inspired motifs and layering barkcloth over bleached cotton to create symbolic designs used in the studio. Chapter four stated that some of the reverse appliqué cuts surprisingly resulted in visual designs closely resembling animal skins, particularly that of a leopard. This unintended resemblance strengthened the symbolic association of the garments with traditional ideas of power, protection, and visibility, values historically associated with the leopard among the Baganda, as discussed by (Kyewalyanga 2019).

Participants in the field, mostly the cultural masters of ceremonies and barkcloth makers, eagerly embraced the use of surface decoration techniques. They wanted to see the progression of barkcloth from a plain fabric to a highly decorated fabric using diverse surface decoration techniques. BS 13 and BS14 consistently suggested that barkcloth used for the groom's attire should be decorated in a way that enhances its appearance and worth. Tailors, T1 and T3, highlighted that everyone's attention can be drawn to the groom even when he has not changed his costume during the ceremony, making the groom visually distinct. CM 6, T4, B12, and CM 9 supported the use of spear motifs and surface texture, stating that they communicate leadership,

preparedness, and cultural pride, essential qualities expected of a groom during Kwanjula. Drawing from this, I was able to design a variety of garments that serve different roles, such as waist coats, scarves, and throw-ons, to give the Senga a choice on what groom she can use while identifying her groom. Motifs inspired by the spear were also incorporated in my work, mostly in reverse appliqué and embroidery.

Both hand and machine embroidery had a practical and symbolic impact on the barkcloth fabric. In studio experimentation, embroidery was not only used to secure seams but also to draw spear motif patterns onto fabrics, which were later designed into garments, often in gold or brown threads to maintain the earthy tones of barkcloth. The idea of using hand embroidery was borrowed from literature from Walusimbi (2015), who explains that barkcloth mending traditionally, this was through the use of raffia and hand needle, created visible stitches that would in some cases have symbolic embellishment, creating both the functionality of mending the fabric but also and enhancing the fabrics appearance mostly when threads of bright colours are used.

Slashing technique creates visual depth and texture, produced by the layered fabrics and cut-outs on the top layer to reveal the inner layers. This brought out the concept of revealing strength beneath the surface, again reinforcing the sense of the groom's readiness to lead. Tie-and-dye was used to enhance the visual appearance of barkcloth without overwhelming the original status of the barkcloth. The fact that scholars like Stella Atal and Jose Hendo, mentioned in the literature, have combined barkcloth with contemporary aesthetics like beads, dyes, and synthetic materials like American satin using similar methods demonstrates that enhancing barkcloth's appearance does not lessen its cultural significance but rather enhances it.

Interestingly, T1, T3, CM 7, and CM 10 noted that grooms in this era are not willing to wear plain garments. This was the same case with wearing plain barkcloth garments. T3 mentioned that most of his clients' associates plain coats to funerals, and others say that is an outdated tradition. Decorating barkcloth with these surface decoration techniques helped redefine barkcloth as a presentable fabric that can be worn on festive occasions for celebration. This idea aligns with Gateja's (2018) philosophy that suggests that traditional materials gain new life when creatively reimagined without losing their core values.

Through this objective, it became clear that decoration is not just visual; it is cultural, functional, and symbolic. Studio results showed that even a minimalist touch (such as a spear-line embroidery or patched strip of contrasting barkcloth) carried visual weight, especially when paired with well-selected barkcloth types. The garments produced were received with appreciation by

participants, many of whom noted they would confidently recommend grooms to dress in such garments on their *Kwanjula* ceremonies.

In conclusion, through studio work, I learnt that thoughtfully choosing the right surface decoration techniques and applying them skillfully greatly enhances the barkcloth's visual appearance while reinforcing its cultural significance. Within the studio, I kept asking myself these questions: Can barkcloth look contemporary without being mistaken for being foreign? Can I freely express myself in the production of barkcloth garments without being disrespectful? These questions guided my creative decision in the studio, and the answer, as the garments revealed, was yes. These decorations do not distort the barkcloth's traditional identity but rather contribute to its evolution in a contemporary ceremonial context. The work bridges the gap between tradition and contemporary aesthetics, offering a sustainable and symbolic way of identifying the groom with pride and authenticity at *Kwanjula* ceremonies.

The surface decoration techniques used were not just technical tools, but languages through which visual meaning was conveyed. Field participants didn't just confirm the relevance of decoration; they reminded me, again and again, that in a *Kwanjula*, the groom must be noticed, not for his extravagancy, but rather his honour. These surface decoration techniques are aimed at designing garments that identify the groom as a man stepping into responsibility, one who is prepared, composed, and respectful of culture. Most of the participants suggested that the garment must identify the groom even before he speaks.

### **5.2.3 Design suitable wearable garments that identify the groom at *kwanjula* ceremonies.**

The third objective involved practically translating cultural understanding, requests, and suggestions from the field and studio experimentation into finished garments that could effectively and respectfully identify the groom during the *Kwanjula* ceremony. This process involved more than just making garments; these garments carried cultural significance. The garments had to reflect tradition, honour symbolism, and respond to participant expectations, while being visually distinctive.

Using Buganda's traditional spear as the source of my inspiration, throw-ons, waistcoats, scarves, caps, and shoulder throws were designed. Each garment's inspiration drew an idea from either the spear's pointed shape, its linear shape, or from the spear's cultural importance to the Baganda, which represents protection, leadership, and readiness. These qualities aligned perfectly with the expectations of a groom in the Baganda context: a man stepping into responsibility, marriage, and clan honour.

Materials used in the design process, both barkcloth and the other additional materials, were carefully selected with consideration of the findings of chapters one and two. Before I went to the field, I had an idea of using kikoyi as an additional material alongside barkcloth. T2 advised me to try other materials like American satin since I was designing for the groom, and those are the materials that bring out the bridal aspect of the groom's garments. T4 mentioned that kikoyi and barkcloth have been used interchangeably for a long time, so they will not design unique garments for the groom.

Soft types of barkcloth, such as Enjeruka and Butanwa, were used for techniques like pleating, appliqué, or draping since they were easy to manipulate. Thicker barkcloth types like Kilungi and Enserere were used to give the garments structure, like in waist coats and throw-ons. The surface decoration techniques the researcher used, that is, reverse appliqué and embroidery, brought the spear motifs to life; slashing and pleating added movement and texture; and tie-and-dye introduced visual softness and contrast without overwhelming the garment's traditional aesthetic. The researcher used the eight types of barkcloth on these surface decoration techniques, considering the strength of each barkcloth concerning the product I was going to design from it.

Basing the garment's design ideas on what the participants suggested in the field was what made these garments unique and relatable. Participant feedback, particularly from tailors and ceremonial experts, consistently highlighted the need for the groom's attire to be both culturally grounded and visually elevated. The garments produced in this research responded directly to that call. For instance, the throw-ons and shoulder throws, which are worn over the kanzu and coat, allowed the groom to stand out respectfully and symbolically, without imitating royal regalia or overstepping traditional dress codes.

T2, T4, CM 10, and CM7 were pleased with the use of barkcloth for mass production of garments for ceremonial functions, describing it as a new way of seeing ourselves without forgetting where we come from. Their words encouraged the researcher since they validated the purpose of the research project and assured me that I could work within the culture without changing its relevance.

In the studio exploration, I was challenged to think intentionally as I developed the ideas for the groom's garments. Creating garments that were seen but not loud, aesthetic, not excessive, or too much required a lot of thinking in terms of the design process, as I reflected on the cultural strains and participants' suggestions, not forgetting the potential of what the material can do and not do. Considering the above, the final garments achieved these goals.

While literature such as Nakazibwe (2005) and Nakirulu (2013) has previously explored barkcloth in fashion and art, much of the documented work leans toward contemporary or artistic exhibitions. This study bridged that gap by focusing specifically on ceremonial wear, restoring barkcloth to its place within a living cultural ritual. The garments produced were not designed for galleries, but for families, for elders, for brides, and grooms standing at the threshold of a new chapter.

In conclusion, the third objective was achieved after thoughtful design and production of garments that authentically represent the groom during the Kwanjula ceremony. These garments had both symbolic and functional meaning, designed to reflect the cultural values, social expectations, and personal dignity of a man stepping into marriage within the Baganda tradition. Selecting the right material in terms of texture, such as using Enjeruka and Butanwa in areas that required flexibility and comfort, like scarf ends and sleeve edges, while Kilundu and Enserere for shoulder throws to give strength and authority to the garment contributed highly to this objective's success. This combination allowed the garments to balance movement and formality, echoing the dual expectation of the groom to be both approachable and commanding in presence.

Through this objective, the researcher ultimately proved that when barkcloth is treated with respect and creativity, it ceases to be just a fabric of the past but a fabric that fits in the contemporary design world. The garments created in this study became statements of transformation, just as the groom appears after the Kwanjula. He transforms from bachelor to husband, from son to head of a family. The project took barkcloth from its raw to wearable art that honors the past while confidently dressing the present.

### **5.3 Conclusion**

Based on the discussion above, the following conclusions were made concerning each objective.

#### **In respect to objective one:**

The findings confirmed and expanded upon existing literature, such as that of Nakazibwe and Walusimbi, who noted barkcloth's sacred and practical roles in Buganda society. The research validated that certain types of barkcloth, such as Ensika, are culturally reserved for royalty, while others, like Dundu and Kilungi, are suitable for designing men's wear, such as coats and waist coats, because of their thickness and strength. Barkcloth with softer textures like Butanwa and Enjeruka were ideal for surface decoration because they are flexible and smooth.

Participants' responses enriched this research because the researcher was able to work with the guidance of participants' opinions. Barkcloth makers emphasized how environmental conditions, tree maturity, and beating methods affect the final appearance of the barkcloth fabric. Tailors advised on how to match barkcloth types with garments, an idea that informed design decisions in the studio. For example, Enjeruka was used in surface decoration techniques like reverse appliqué because of its soft nature, while Dundu was used in areas that required firmness, due to its thickness.

Essentially, objective one exhibited that all types of barkcloth fabric have a role and a place in the Baganda people's social and spiritual lives. For the researcher to produce garments that were both wearable and culturally significant, I was required to have an understanding of this diversity, particularly in a setting as important as the Kwanjula ceremony.

**In respect to objective two:**

The second objective examined surface decoration techniques to enhance the visual appeal and cultural significance of barkcloth garments designed to identify the groom during a Kwanjula ceremony in Buganda. This objective arose after realizing that plain (undecorated) barkcloth, while rich in cultural value, often connotes mourning or outdated traditions. The goal was not merely to decorate but to transform and elevate barkcloth into a fabric suitable for celebrations that also communicates meaning at a core cultural event.

To explore different surface decoration methods, tailors, cultural masters of ceremony, and barkcloth makers and dealers were involved. They agreed that adding surface decorations would boost the fabric's status. Many emphasized that a groom should be recognizable even from afar, not through extravagance but through refined details and aesthetic intent, achieved by visually enhancing the surface of barkcloth. This feedback informed all subsequent studio decisions.

This objective was key in addressing a point from the literature: while designers like Jose Hendo and Sanaa Gateja have experimented with barkcloth in global fashion scenes, less focus has been given to the groom's ceremonial attire made from barkcloth, specifically in Uganda. The study aims to bring barkcloth back into both the runway and the home for specific ceremonial rites and functions that give it significance. In conclusion, objective two demonstrated that surface decoration acts as a link connecting the past to the present, symbolism to aesthetics, and cultural honor to personal expression. The surface techniques used in this research didn't just beautify barkcloth but also offered an opportunity to reevaluate it. The surface details confirmed that beauty

can serve as a compelling cultural statement and that a groom's garment can convey visual connotations of readiness, honor, and pride.

### **In respect to objective three.**

The third objective involved the production of wearable barkcloth groom's garments that visibly and meaningfully identify him during the Kwanjula ceremony. Ideas from literature, feedback from the field, and hands-on experimentation in the studio were brought together to design garments that were not only functional and beautiful but also symbolic. In conclusion, objective three brought this research to life. It proved that barkcloth, when treated with cultural understanding and design sensitivity, can become more than a fabric; it can become a symbol of transition, identity, and pride. The garments designed do not just clothe the groom; they mark his moment, and honour his place in the long-standing tradition of the Kwanjula. Through form, fabric, and meaning, this objective affirmed that barkcloth still speaks, and through these garments, it was given a voice worth hearing again.

## **5.4 Recommendations**

The recommendations below are based on studio findings and insights from participants gathered throughout the research. They are aligned with the three research objectives and aim to guide future researchers, educators, and designers in continuing the conversation about using barkcloth in contemporary ceremonial wear. These proposals aim to support the revival and respectful use of barkcloth to honor tradition while also addressing the growing needs of contemporary cultural practices.

### **Recommendation for policy/ practice.**

Since Ensika is strictly used for the production of royal garments, it's critical to inform the community about which barkcloth is appropriate for general ceremonial attire. This enables designers to create garments using the right fabric, which prevents cultural blunders.

As long as designers remain sensitive to cultural boundaries, they should be supported to experiment creatively with surface decoration techniques. Innovative uses of tie-and-dye, or abstracted spear shapes, can offer contemporary appeal while still maintaining the garment's ceremonial dignity.

Since many participants associated plain barkcloth with mourning, decoration serves as an effective way to reposition it for joyful events like the Kwanjula. Encouraging designers to use vibrant but respectful decoration can help change public perception and open up more ceremonial uses for this traditional fabric.

The successful creation of throw-ons, shoulder throws, caps, and waistcoats demonstrated that barkcloth can be stylish, dignified, and suitable for contemporary ceremonies. Designers, cultural groups, and bridal service providers should be encouraged to adopt and promote barkcloth-based groom attire as a meaningful alternative to conventional imported garments.

Garments created through this research should not remain in isolation. Fashion exhibitions, cultural fairs, or community showcases could be used to present barkcloth garments to wider audiences, particularly those preparing for traditional ceremonies. These platforms would help normalize the use of barkcloth in celebratory rather than mournful contexts.

Participant responses showed that garment designs hold more value when they reflect personal and cultural identity. Designers working with barkcloth should involve grooms and their families in the process, from motif selection to fabric choice, to ensure garments align with individual heritage, clan symbolism, and personal taste.

In any case, designers must be sensitive not to cross cultural lines in the changed trend of clothing, especially where symbolism might be taken as royal garments. For reasons of authenticity and respect, such consultations will have to be continued with clan leaders and elders of the culture.

### **Recommendations for documentation and preservation.**

Urgent documentation and preservation of the knowledge about different types of barkcloth, including local names, sources of the trees, processing methods, and traditional uses. Currently, much of the knowledge about barkcloth exists only through oral transmission, which risks losing the information or misinterpretation during the narration. Cultural institutions, museums, and universities should collaborate with barkcloth artisans and elders to archive this information for future generations.

Some varieties of barkcloth, such as Butanwa and Kampindi, are less commonly used today because of changes in demand and harvesting practices. These types offer unique textures and qualities that are highly valuable for contemporary uses. Artisans and producers should be encouraged, through funding, workshops, or exhibitions, to bring these barkcloth types into contemporary ceremonial use.

A detailed study of barkcloth types and their cultural significance should be part of the curriculum at schools that teach fashion and textile design. Students should be interested in working with traditional materials respectfully and contextually.

It is essential to record the knowledge gained from this study into visual guides or manuals to encourage the dissemination of knowledge, depicting how different surface design techniques interact with various types of barkcloth so that other designers, students, and researchers can work after this.

The process of producing clothing—from testing the material to stitching and finishing, produces useful knowledge for students, artists, and cultural entrepreneurs. These procedures should be compiled in written or visual manuals to be disseminated in seminars, academic courses, or artisan training programs.

### **Recommendations for further research.**

Barkcloth designers should deliberately include symbolic motifs, like spears, animal skin patterns, or clan emblems, in their surface decoration, particularly when working with barkcloth in cultural or ceremonial contexts. These motifs carry cultural messages that communicate identity, strength, and heritage, enriching the visual language of the garment.

For Kwanjula ceremonies, future designers can experiment with designing barkcloth belts and barkcloth gift bags. These small additions can complement the groom's identity while expanding the creative use of barkcloth in formal settings.

Even when barkcloth looks beautiful, it has limitations regarding durability and finishing. Designers should continue to search for alternative liner materials that do not make barkcloth garments hot and uncomfortable. This is to improve the comfort and durability of barkcloth clothing, especially when worn for long, exhausting ceremonies.

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## **APPENDIX 1: INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

Informed Consent for Participation in the Study

Barkcloth as a material for garment production for groom identification at Baganda *Kwanjula* Ceremonies.

Date: .....

Researcher: Bigirwa Rinah Blessing                      Tel.: +256 706940795

Study Area: Bulange, Mengo, Kampala district.

Dear Participant, my name is Bigirwa Rinah Blessing, and I am conducting a study titled as above.

I am asking you to volunteer for the above-mentioned study. I will first explain why I am doing this study, the good and the bad about it, and what will be asked of you if you agree to participate in the study.

If you choose to participate in the research study, I will ask you to sign this consent form and then continue to ask you the questions I have for the study. A copy of this consent form will be given to you.

### **Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this study was to explore and design culturally meaningful wearable garments using barkcloth that distinctly identify the groom during *kwanjula* ceremonies.

### **Voluntary Participation**

Before you learn about the study procedures, it is good that you know these things;

- It is entirely voluntary to take part in this study
- You don't have to participate in this study if you consider it necessary, and that decision doesn't affect your health or life in any way.
- You may choose to stop being interviewed at any time.
- If you choose not to take part in the study, you can still join another research study later, if one is available and you qualify.

### **Study Procedures**

If you decide to take part in the study, you will be required to answer questions that I will be asking you. These include your involvement in *Kwanjula* and the use of barkcloth.

### **Possible risks of participation in the study**

I expect this study to have no risk at all.

### **Costs to you**

No monetary costs apart from your time.

### **Confidentiality**

Efforts will be made to keep your personal information confidential. Any study information about you will be identified only by code. Any publication of this study will not make use of your name or identify you personally.

### **Questions**

This study has been approved by the Directorate of Research and Graduate Training of Kyambogo University and will be carried out in accordance with the Uganda Guidelines for Research involving Human Participants. In the event of any problems/ concerns/questions about the study, please contact the director of Research and Graduate Training.

### **Participant's declaration**

By signing below, I .....agree to participate in the study titled **Barkcloth as a material for garment production for groom identification at Baganda *Kwanjula* ceremonies.**

I declare that:

- I have read or had read to me this information and consent form and it is written in a language with which I am fluent and comfortable.
- I have had a chance to ask questions and all my questions have been adequately answered.
- I understand that participating in this study is voluntary and I have not been pressurized in any way.
- I may decide to leave the study at any time and I will not be penalized or prejudiced in any way.

- I may be asked to leave the study before it has finished, if the researcher feels it is in my best interests, or if I do not follow the study plan, as agreed to.

Signature and/or fingerprint .....

Interviewer's Name .....

Interviewer's signature.....

Date .....

## **APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEW GUIDE**

**Title:** Barkcloth as a material for garment production for groom identification at Baganda *Kwanjula Ceremonies*.

**Researcher:** Bigirwa Rinah Blessing

**Contact:** 0706940795

**Purpose of Interview:** This interview intends to help collect and synthesize views of Kwanjula organizers, masters of ceremonies, and tailors concerning the importance of barkcloth in garment production for groom identification garments at Kwanjula ceremonies.

**Duration:** Approximately 15 to 25 minutes.

### **Introduction**

I am grateful you spared time to take part in this study. My research aims to promote the use of this traditional fabric, barkcloth, to produce garments for groom identification in Kwanjula ceremonies, focusing on contemporary design techniques and cultural heritage conservation.

### **Questions**

#### **Cultural Significance**

1. What does barkcloth mean in the different cultural ceremonies of Buganda?
2. How do you see its importance today in Kwanjula ceremonies?

#### **Garment Design and Identification**

3. How would you identify grooms at Kwanjula ceremonies?
4. How do you feel about making such different kinds of garments using barkcloth?
5. Which design features do you think would make a barkcloth garment suitable for Kwanjula ceremonies?

#### **Perceptions and Challenges**

6. What do you think are the challenges that may arise when reintroducing barkcloth to such previous uses?

7. In your opinion, how can you use barkcloth in the contemporary space while still retaining its cultural dimensions?

### **Sustainability and Future Potential**

8. Do you think barkcloth can stand a chance in future competitions against contemporary materials for purposes like fashion and design? Justify your view.
9. What will make more people embrace barkcloth in their traditional and contemporary environmental settings?

### **Further Input**

10. Any other message you would like to share about barkcloth culture or what it could mean in garment design?

Thank you for participating. Your insights are invaluable in this study. God bless you.