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Hand Embroidery Design as Heritage: A Study of Hausa Babbar Riga Design History in Hausa Land Nigeria

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ABSTRACT: Babbar Riga holds deep cultural significance within Hausa society, serving as a vital expression of identity, tradition, and social values. This traditional garment is often decorated with intricate hand needlework, which carries rich meanings and reflects the community's history and beliefs. The Babbar Riga, known for its elaborate and vibrant embroidery, is more than just traditional attire; it embodies the social, historical, and cultural narratives of the Hausa people. This study examines hand embroidery design as a vital aspect of cultural heritage, focusing on the Hausa Babbar Riga in Hausa land, situated mostly in the northern part of Nigeria. This research traces the evolution of Babbar Riga, highlighting its significance in design history and its role in expressing identity and community values. This study contributes to the fields of design history and cultural studies, advocating for the recognition and preservation of hand embroidery as a significant cultural heritage. It underscores the importance of Hausa Babbar Riga not only as a garment but also as a dynamic expression of identity and continuity within the rich tapestry of Nigerian culture. The research also highlights the role of artisans primarily women who play a crucial part in preserving and transmitting these traditional practices. Through interviews and field observations, the study captures the challenges they face in a rapidly changing world and the ways they adapt while maintaining cultural authenticity.

KEYWORDS: Babbar Riga, Hausa society, Cultural significance, social values, Hand embroidery, Identity, Tradition

I. INTRODUCTION

Hand embroidery, a timeless form of artistic expression, serves not only as a method of embellishing fabric but also as a vital conduit for cultural heritage. In the context of Hausa society in northern Nigeria, the Babbar Riga a traditional costume stands out as a significant symbol of identity, tradition, and social values. Richly adorned with intricate hand-stitched designs, the Babbar Riga transcends mere clothing; it is a canvas that narrates the history and beliefs of the Hausa people, encapsulating their cultural narratives and collective memory.

Hand embroidery is a multifaceted art form that encapsulates cultural, tradition identity, and social values. Among the Hausa people of northern Nigeria, the Babbar Riga a traditional garment serves as a vital expression of these elements, intricately woven into the fabric of community life (Afolabi, 2015). This study seeks to discover the significance of the Babbar Riga, not just as an item of clothing but as a repository of cultural heritage, symbolizing the history, beliefs, and artistic practices of the Hausa society.

II. THE BABBAR RIGA (FLOWN GOWN)

The Babbar Riga is characterized by its elaborate hand-stitched designs, which often convey profound meanings rooted in the community's collective identity. These designs are not only aesthetic but also serve as a medium for storytelling, reflecting the social dynamics and historical narratives of the Hausa people. This research will examine the evolution of the Babbar Riga's design history, tracing its transformation over time and highlighting its enduring relevance in contemporary society.

In addition to the costume's cultural significance, this study will focus on the role of artisans primarily women who are pivotal in the production and preservation of this traditional practice. As custodians of this craft, these artisans face

numerous challenges in a rapidly changing socio-economic landscape, prompting an exploration of their adaptive strategies to maintain cultural authenticity while navigating modern influences.

III. HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF BABBAR RIGA

The Babbar Riga, a traditional garment worn by the Hausa people of northern Nigeria, has a rich historical background that reflects the socio-cultural dynamics of the region. Historically, the Babbar Riga emerged as a distinct garment within the Hausa dress code, gaining prominence as a symbol of identity and status. Its origins can be traced back to the medieval period when the Hausa city-states flourished as centers of trade and culture (Hillel, 2018). Throughout this time, textiles became a significant aspect of Hausa identity, influenced by interactions with various cultures through trade routes that connected West Africa to North Africa and beyond (Afolabi, 2015).



Figure: Front and Back of Hand Embroidered Babbar Riga. (Source: <https://kasuwarkano.com>)

The design and embellishment of the Babbar Riga are deeply rooted in local traditions and craftsmanship. The elaborate hand embroidery that characterizes the garment serves not only as decoration but also as a means of conveying social status and community affiliation. Different motifs and patterns often reflect specific cultural narratives, drawing upon symbols that are meaningful within the Hausa worldview (Ibrahim, 2021). The development of these designs has been shaped by various historical influences, including Islamic traditions, which introduced new artistic forms and techniques into the region (Okafor, 2019).

During the colonial and post-colonial periods, the Babbar Riga has continued to develop while retaining its cultural significance. The garment has adapted to changes in social structure and fashion trends, yet it remains a vital expression of Hausa identity and tradition (Bello, 2020). In contemporary society, the Babbar Riga is often worn during significant cultural events and ceremonies, underscoring its role as a symbol of continuity in a rapidly changing world (National Commission for Museums and Monuments, 2021).

IV. RECENT DEVELOPMENTAL DESIGNS

1. Revitalization of Traditional Skills: Recent development efforts have prioritized the teaching and revitalization of traditional embroidery techniques, including monogram designs. Workshops and training programs have been established to ensure that younger artisans learn these skills, fostering intergenerational knowledge transfer and encouraging pride in cultural heritage (Oduwole, 2021).



Figure: Modern Monogram Design

Image source: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/784963410082771559/>

2. Market Integration: Through the rise of e-commerce and social media platforms, artisans are now able to showcase their monogrammed creations to a broader audience. This market integration allows for greater visibility of Babbar Riga designs, enabling artisans to reach potential customers beyond their local communities (Abdulazeez & Musa, 2022). Many artisans are using online platforms to offer personalized monogram services, catering to individual preferences and enhancing the appeal of their products (Aliyu, 2023).

3. Cultural Branding: Monogram designs have also been embraced as a means of cultural branding. Artisans and cooperatives are promoting Babbar Riga embroidery as a unique cultural product, highlighting the significance of personalized designs that reflect both individual identity and community heritage. This branding not only helps preserve traditional art forms but also contributes to cultural tourism and economic growth (Zainab, 2022).

4. Innovation and Modernization: Artisans are increasingly experimenting with monogram designs by integrating modern aesthetics and techniques. This includes the use of diverse materials, innovative color palettes, and contemporary applications in fashion designs (Nnamdi, 2023). Through adapting traditional designs to suit modern

tastes, artisans are making Babbar Riga embroidery more relevant in today's market while preserving its cultural significance.

V. SOCIAL VALUES

1. **Cultural Identity and Heritage:** The Babbar Riga embroidery serves as a symbol of Hausa identity, encapsulating the community's history, beliefs, and aesthetic values. The intricate designs often tell stories or convey messages about social status, life events, and cultural narratives, reinforcing a sense of belonging among community members.
2. **Community Cohesion:** The practice of hand embroidery fosters community ties, as women, in particular, often gather to work together, share skills, and support one another. This collective effort strengthens social bonds and creates a support network that transcends economic challenges.
3. **Economic Empowerment:** As a source of income, hand embroidery contributes significantly to the economic empowerment of artisans, particularly women. By engaging in this traditional craft, women gain financial independence and play a crucial role in their families' and communities' economies. This empowerment is essential for challenging gender norms and promoting equality within the Hausa society.

Agbada

The Agbada is a traditional attire worn by men in Nigeria. They are known as agbada in Yoruba, Babbar Riga in Hausa, gmajekura in Kanuri, and boubou in Wolof (a perversion of mbubb). Agbada is characterised by its voluminous robes and elaborate embroidery, the Agbada exudes elegance and sophistication.

Traditionally reserved for special occasions such as weddings, festivals, and ceremonies, the Agbada is a symbol of prestige and authority. The luxurious design reflects the wearer's social status and cultural heritage. Stay up to date on the newest in the world of Fashion, Arts, Beauty and Lifestyle

VI. GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES FOR THE SUSTAINABILITY OF BABBAR RIGA AS PART OF RECENT DEVELOPMENT

The sustainability of Babbar Riga, particularly in the setting of Hausa embroidery and cultural heritage, has gained attention from various government initiatives aimed at preserving traditional crafts while promoting economic development. Below are some key initiatives:

- **Funding for Artisans:** Governments often allocate funds to support artisans engaged in Babbar Riga embroidery, providing grants for training and materials. This ensures the preservation of traditional techniques while encouraging the production of high-quality, sustainable products.
- **Documentation and Archiving:** Initiatives to document and archive the history and techniques of Babbar Riga embroidery help preserve this cultural heritage for future generations. These projects may involve collaborations with cultural institutions.
- **Vocational Training Programs:** Government-supported vocational training centers may offer courses specifically focused on traditional embroidery techniques, including monogram designs. These programs aim to equip younger generations with the skills necessary to continue these traditions.
- **Workshops and Community Engagement:** Regular workshops that engage local artisans and the community help foster skill-sharing and encourage participation in the craft, thus ensuring its sustainability.
- **Support for Local Markets:** Governments may create platforms or events that promote local crafts, including Babbar Riga embroidery, through trade fairs and exhibitions. This not only boosts visibility but also helps artisans connect with potential buyers.
- **E-Commerce Initiatives:** Encouraging artisans to utilize online platforms for selling their products can significantly expand their market reach. Government initiatives that provide training in digital marketing and e-commerce can enhance the financial viability of these crafts.

Promotion of Sustainable Practices

- **Eco-Friendly Materials:** Initiatives encouraging the use of sustainable and eco-friendly materials in the production of Babbar Riga embroidery can help reduce environmental impacts. Governments may provide incentives for artisans who adopt such practices.
- **Certification Programs:** Developing certification for sustainably produced handicrafts can enhance consumer trust and promote the market for environmentally friendly products.

- **Heritage Tourism Initiatives:** Government efforts to promote cultural tourism can help increase interest in Babbar Riga embroidery. This includes establishing craft villages or cultural centers where visitors can learn about the craft and purchase authentic products.
- **Incentives for Tourism Infrastructure:** Providing incentives for the development of infrastructure that supports cultural tourism can benefit artisans by increasing foot traffic and sales.
- **Partnerships for Capacity Building:** Collaborations between government agencies, NGOs, and private sectors can enhance capacity-building initiatives for artisans, ensuring they have access to necessary resources and markets.
- **Sustainability Networks:** Establishing networks that connect artisans with sustainability experts can foster innovation in traditional practices, ensuring that Babbar Riga remains relevant in a changing market.

VII. CONCLUSION

The Babbar Riga is a cornerstone of cultural identity within Hausa society, intricately woven into the fabric of community values and traditions. This traditional garment, adorned with vibrant hand embroidery, serves not only as attire but as a powerful medium for expressing the rich historical narratives and beliefs of the Hausa people. Through this study, we have explored the evolution and significance of Babbar Riga in design history, emphasizing its role in articulating identity and continuity within Nigerian culture.

The research underscores the importance of recognizing and preserving hand embroidery as a vital aspect of cultural heritage. It highlights the contributions of artisans, particularly women, who are essential in sustaining these traditional practices despite facing challenges in a rapidly changing world. Their resilience and adaptability ensure that the artistry and meanings embedded in Babbar Riga endure, reinforcing the garment's status as a dynamic cultural symbol.

Ultimately, this study advocates for greater acknowledgment of the Babbar Riga not only as a garment but as a vital expression of identity and a testament to the enduring legacy of Hausa craftsmanship. By promoting awareness and support for these traditional practices, we can contribute to the preservation of this unique cultural heritage for future generations, enriching the global tapestry of cultural diversity.

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