

Identification of Modified Dagi Motif from Dutse Palace Suitable for Hausa Traditional Robe (*Babbar Riga*)

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Abstract

This study focusses on identification of modified Dagi motifs from the wall decorations of Dutse palace suitable for Hausa traditional robe (Babbar riga). rooted in the artistic and cultural heritage of Northern Nigeria, the research addresses the unexplored potential of the identified motifs in contemporary fashion design. A qualitative ethnographic approach was employed. Incorporating oral interviews as well as visual observations of 71 identified motifs for design layout. The findings reveal that the modified Dagi motifs, despite their modifications retain cultural integrity and aesthetic appeal suitable for garment embellishment. This research contributes to heritage preservation while fostering innovation in traditional Hausa textile arts.

Keyword: *Dagi Motif, Dutse palace and Traditional robe*

1.0 Introduction

Many cultures and symbolism embellish the lands of Northern Nigeria; however, one prominent symbol stands out as captivating embodiment of the region's rich heritage "the *Dagin Arewa*". Ikechukwu and Pilani (2024) noted that, *Dagin Arewa* emblem deeply into the fabric of Hausa identity, goes beyond its decorative purpose. It reveals a deep interplay between theology and spirituality, cultural expression, and philosophical depth. Similarly, Ibrahim (2011), "*Dagi* is a motif incorporated into almost all Northern Nigeria artistic expressions such as cultural, traditional embroidery, wall decorations, architectural design and durbar. It has equally evolved over a period of time into different shapes, designs and patterns". Furthermore, Ibrahim and Aondover (2024), argued that, the *Dagi* motif is subject to constant concrete adaptation to the ever-changing fields of its application and this has given rise to various stylizations, transformation but not beyond recognition. However, excessive modifications may dilute its traditional meaning, leading to a loss of authenticity over time. Despite this concern, these modifications also present an opportunity for innovation in Hausa textile traditions, particularly in enhancing the *Babbar Riga*.

The *Dagi* if seen as a whole, the experiences are in complete harmony with each other and if viewed evokes a strange visual tension which offers many interesting possibilities for Textile design. The earlier forms of wall decoration reflect many elements which included geometric shapes, zoomorphic, and items of daily usage (Chiranchi, 2021).

Aliyu (2020) asserted that, the incorporation of modified *Dagi* motifs into garment embellishment not only enhances the aesthetic appeal of the *Babbar Riga* but also ensures its relevance in contemporary fashion. However, there appears to be limited studies done on the adaptation of modified *Dagi* designs on Hausa traditional robe (*Babbar Riga*). Thus, this study tends to bridge this gap by exploring the potential of modified *Dagi* motifs in the production of Hausa traditional robes ensuring cultural continuity while embracing modernization.

1.1 Modified Dutse Palace Wall Motifs

The mural decorations of the *Dutse* Emirate are known for their intricate and vibrant designs that reflect the rich cultural heritage of the emirate. These murals can be found in various important buildings and structures within the emirate, such as palaces, mosques, and historical sites. “The modified wall motif consists of a repetitive pattern of geometric shapes and motifs carved into the surface of the buildings. These motifs typically feature intricate designs such as interlocking patterns zigzag lines and stylized floral motifs” (Aliyu, 2020).

However, Gidado (2019) “the *Dutse* Palace design motifs often consist of a combination of shapes such as squares triangles and diamonds arranged in repetitive patterns to create a visually striking design. The designs are usually symmetrical with the patterns mirroring each other on either side of a central axis”. These design motifs are typically painted directly on the walls of buildings adding a unique and aesthetically pleasing element to the architectural landscape of the surface. Similarly, Abubakar and Rabi (2018) “the *Dutse* wall decorated motif is an important cultural element in Jigawa State representing the artistic and creative heritage of the local community. It is often used to decorate public buildings houses and other structures serving as a form of artistic expression and a symbol of local identity”.

One of the prominent modified motifs seen in *Dutse* palace is the geometric pattern. “These patterns are meticulously crafted with precision showcasing symmetrical and intricate designs. The repetition of geometric shapes like squares circles and diamonds create a mesmerizing visual effect that is both aesthetically pleasing and symbolic” (Gidado, 2019). These geometric motifs represent the order and balance found in nature and reflect the mathematical precision cherished by the emirate's craftsmen. Another significant motif seen in *Dutse* Emirate's decoration is the floral pattern. Gidado (Ibid) “delicate and vibrant these motifs are often inspired by the diverse flora and fauna found in the region. Flowers like hibiscus jasmine and roses are commonly depicted each holding symbolic meanings. These floral motifs not only enhance the beauty of the decoration but also serve as a representation of fertility growth and abundance”.



Plate 1: Entrance of Dutse Palace
source: Mustapha H. (2023)



Plate 2: Wall Designs of Dutse Palace.
source: Mustapha H. (2023)

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Traditional Hausa Motifs such as *Dagi Mai Gidan Tara*, *Dagi Mai Kujen Nufe*, *Dagi Mai Kusurwa Hu'du*, *Barawon Dagi*, *Dagi Mai Cibi* have long been integral to the decoration of palaces, mosques, and other surfaces in the northern Nigeria. The consistent presence of the *Dagi* on traditional clothing, embroidery and architectural designs among the Hausa reflects how much of their cultural identity it manifests. However, modernization have altered with its original form, introducing modified versions influenced by foreign elements or hybrid designs.

Chiranchi (2022) reported that these modifications, are characterized by increased intricacies, interlocking and distortions, have become dominant in palace facades and wall decorations across northern Nigeria, leading to gradual loss of the motif's original identity. If this trend continues, the traditional Dagi motif may face cultural dilution or extinction.

Although, *Dagi* Motifs have been extensively studied in architectural decorations, textiles and paintings. Most researches have focused *Dagi* historical and symbolic importance rather than their adaptation for modern textile production. Dunny (2015), Ishaya (2022) examined *Dagi* aesthetic and symbolic significance in palaces. While Renne (2013) explored *Dagi* motifs in textiles and architecture as markers of status and spiritual protection. However, little attention has been given on how these motifs can be modified and applied to contemporary fashion and textile design.

Despite the historical and cultural significance of *Dagi* motif, it is essential to explore their adaptation for modern Hausa traditional robes (*Babbar riga*). This study therefore, aims to examine the potential of modified *dagi* motifs in contemporary Hausa fashion, ensuring the preservation and cultural heritage while accommodating modern design advancement.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodology adopted for this research was the qualitative method using the ethnography design. This approach will aid the study towards investigating and examining the beliefs, cultural identity, modification, and innovation concerning the *Dutse* Palace wall decoration.

Population of Study

The population of the study was divided into two- People and motifs. The total population of people for the study is fifteen (15). which comprises of eleven (11) courtiers of *Dutse* Palace (*shamaki, dan rimi, kilishi, majasirdi, sarkin hatsi, sarkin baki, santali, sarkin zagi, sarkin dogarai, sarkin kagiri and sarkin laima*). Four (4) wall designers who were actively involved in the palace's mural decorations.

The motifs as part of the population were to be selected for the design production. A total of seventy-one (71) motifs and design patterns were revealed during this study. The motifs were classified into two (2) categories- Interior designs 54 motifs, and Exterior design 17 motifs.

Sample Size

Out of the total population of 15 individuals, eight (8) people were purposively selected among the courtiers and designers. Creswell and Poth (2018) suggest that for qualitative studies, a sample size of 5 to 25 participants is generally sufficient to reach data saturation. From the 71 *Dagi* motifs identified, twenty (20) motifs were purposively selected to create six (6) embroidery simulation designs for Hausa traditional robe. Creswell and Poth (2018) emphasize that, "in qualitative research, sample size is determined by the need for rich and meaningful data rather than statistical representativeness". Justifying the selection of 20 motifs was based on relevance and thematic significance.

Sampling Procedure

purposive sampling technique was employed for both the selection of respondents and motifs. The oral interview participants were chosen based on their historical knowledge of the *Dutse* Palace and their active participation in mural decorations. This approach ensured that the study captured information from individuals with firsthand experience and deep understanding of the palace's artistic traditions.

The motifs were selected based on their artistic integrity and adaptability for embroidery simulation designs. Those that had been excessively modified beyond recognition were excluded, while motifs that maintained their identity and repeatability were prioritized.

Method of Data Analysis

Primary data include in-depth oral interviews with individuals who have expertise and visual observation inform of photographs.

Research Instrument

The study employs oral interviews, and observation as research instruments to collect data on the historical and artistic significance of *Dagi* motifs and their application in Hausa traditional robe embroidery simulation.

Oral Interviews: Semi-structured interviews with open ending were conducted to eight (8) selected respondents (comprising courtiers and wall designers). The interview questions focus on the historical of wall decorations, design names and patterns, modification and innovations of *Dagi* designs over time.

Observation: The study involves on-site observation of the existing *Dagi* motifs at *Dutse* Palace to analyze their design structures, modifications, and artistic qualities through photographs. Observations focus on how motifs are arranged, their stylistic variations, and the extent of modifications that still retain their traditional identity.

Method of Data Analysis

The study employs thematic analysis as the primary method for analyzing qualitative data collected through oral interviews and observations. The analysis process focusses on identifying key themes related to the historical significance, modification, and suitability of *Dagi* motifs for embroidery adaptation.

Presentation of Result

Identification the modified *Dagi* patterns suitable for garment embellishments

Result from the oral interview








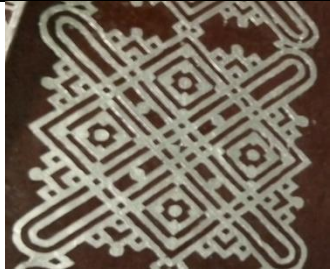


Table 1: The oral interview results through the themes

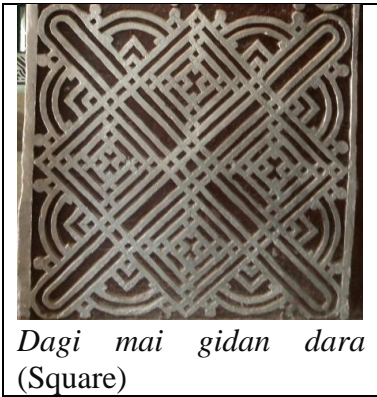
S/N	Themes	Codes
1.	Historical of context of wall design	-Builders and Designers from Kano -spread from Egypt
2.	Cultural transmission and adaptation	-Adopted by royal families -Spread across Northern Nigeria
3.	Design names and patterns	-Names like- <i>Dagi mai sarauniya</i> , <i>tauraruwa</i> , etc -Many nameless designs
4.	Innovation and modernization	-computer aided designs -Workshop on surface design

Oral result of the interviews Source: Mustapha, (2024)

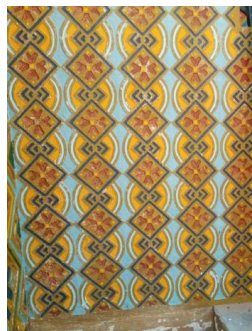
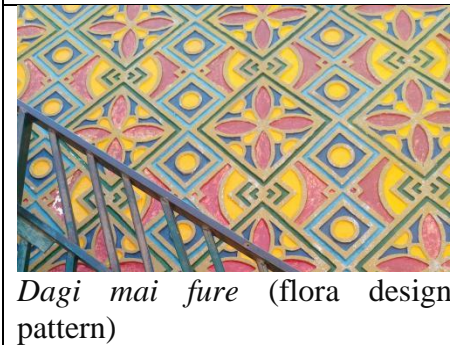
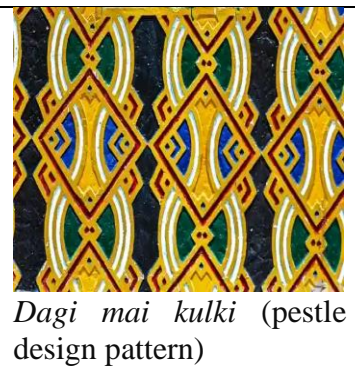
Result from visual Observation

Table 2: Identified Motifs

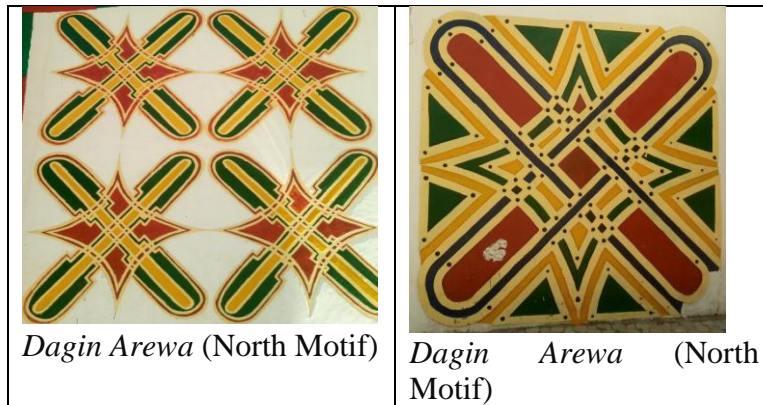
		
<i>Dagi mai taro</i> (three pence)	<i>Dagi mai idon bazawara</i> (divorcee eye)	<i>Dagi</i> (Abstracted with circular shapes)
		
<i>Dagi</i> (Abstracted with dagi triangular shapes)	<i>Dagi mai square</i> (Abstracted with dagi square shapes)	<i>Dagi mai kadangare</i> (Lizard motif)
		
<i>Dagi</i> (Abstracted with dagi geometric shapes)	<i>Dagi mai Kifi</i> (fish motif)	Abstracted Dagi (square design pattern)
		
<i>Dagi mai taro hudu</i> (three pence in four places)	<i>Dagi mai sisi</i> (six pence)	<i>Dagi mai anini</i> (1/10 penny)



Dagi Motifs from the Dutse palace's interior.
Source: Mustapha, (2023)



Dagi Motifs from the Dutse palace's exterior.
Source: Mustapha, (2023)



Dagi Motifs from the Dutse palace's fence.

Source: Mustapha, (2023)

Discussion of Result

Historical Context of Wall Designs

As indicated by Sadiq (2016) the traditional architectural designs in Northern Nigeria were a resultant of two major factors, the first was the influence of Islam and the Islamic forms of architecture which were inherited through North African trend of Architecture. He further stated that secondly, the trade routes of the Northern Empires of Nigeria which facilitated the introduction of the architectural trend through the influence of trading with people from the Northern parts of Africa and within the Empires of the region. However, the interviews reveal that modified *Dagi* wall decoration in *Dutse* Palace began under the late Alhaji Nuhu Muhammadu Sunusi in the early 90's. Skilled craftsmen were brought from Kano to initiate the work, which was later completed by local youth. As stated by the two respondents:

"Dutse wall decoration started during the late emir... builders and wall designers from Kano did the work, but later young and energetic youths from Dutse completed the work."

Similarly, another respondent mentioned:

"Hausa wall decoration can be traced to Cairo (Egypt). It was a result of business transactions and knowledge."

Cultural Transmission and Adaptation

The cultural adoption of wall designs started with the elite and gradually spread to commoners. According to one respondent:

"In Kano, the royal families and the well-to-do individuals adopted the designs in their palaces and homes. Later, the commoners adopted it".

Design Names and Patterns

Majority of the single motifs on the *Dutse* wall surface do not have names due to the modifications made except for the design patterns in the compound of the palace which are more of simple repeat and mirror design arrangement. The respondent who happens to be one of the curators of the palace museum was able to identified the names given to few motifs. However, a wall decorator as a respondent stated that,

"The Dutse palace wall decorations are referred to as Dagi. The reason is because all the designs done on the Dutse wall surface started with the concept/idea of a conventional Dagin Arewa design"

Innovation and Modernization

However, based on the visual observations from the study indicated that, most of the wall designs within *Dutse* palace have been modernized, having accurate design repeat patterns and

also have some element of western influence. The above statement was confirmed during an in-depth interview with one of the respondents, a wall designer and calligrapher:

“In the year 2006, there was a workshop in Kano for surface designers that was organized by the Prince Charles Foundation in collaboration with Institute of Islamic calligraphy and geometric, London. The workshop reshaped the design focus of the wall designers in the northern Nigeria. The use of elements and principles of design was adopted into wall decorations and probably the designs on Dutse wall decorations may have foreign influence”

Another respondent during a separate interview on issue the modernization of *Dutse* wall Motif also affirmed that:

“Most of the wall designers now used computer aided process in designing motifs and design patterns. This made it possible for achieving accurate motifs and design patterns. Therefore, these was the reasons why kano and Dutse palace wall designs are more of repeat patterns while only Zaria palace has the original and conventional wall designs in Northern Nigeria”.

The motif decoration of *Dutse* Palace showcases the immense talent and creativity of its artisans. The intricate geometric patterns floral motifs, calligraphy and vibrant colors come together to create a visually stunning and culturally significant artistic expression. It is a tangible manifestation of the emirate's rich heritage and serves as a reminder of the importance of preserving and celebrating traditional art forms.

Based on visual observations during the study, the mural designs on *Dutse* palace were classified into two (2) categories; *Dagin Tsakar Fada*, (interior Designs) and *Dagi mai Flower*, (Exterior designs).

Dagin Tsakar fada (Interior designs)

Dagin tsakar fada a mural decoration that were done on the interiors of the *Dutse* palace. *Dutse* palace has five Palaces, the modified motifs were repeated on the five walls of the palaces on a low relief level. The decorations are abstracts in nature making good use of different form of lines e.g zigzag, circular, horizontal, vertical etc. Similarly, geometric shapes i.e circles, squares, rectangles etc where also utilized.



Plate 1: Dutse Palace interior Design
Source: Katanga, (2023)



Plate 4.2: Dutse Palace interior Design
Source: Mustapha, (2023)

The use of calligraphy is also prevalent in *Dutse* Emirate's motif decoration. “Intricately written Arabic scripts adorn walls ceilings and architectural elements adding a touch of elegance and spirituality to the overall design. Arabic calligraphy holds a special place in Islamic art and its inclusion in the emirate's decoration reflects the strong religious beliefs and devotion of its people” (Gidado, 2019). The calligraphy writings are mostly Qur’anic verses which are

prohibited to print on clothes. Thus, based on the above statement calligraphic designs were eliminated.

Dagi mai Flower, (Exterior designs)

Dagi mai Flower are exterior wall decorations found within the compound of the Palace. The unit of the major designs are floral, which are design in a repeated manner either in sample repeat or mirror repeats formats. The designs are fully coloured with variety of red, blue, yellow, orange, and green. The decorations are in low relief form. *Dagi Arewa* designs can be found on the fence of the palace, which are executed in high relief. There some many *Dagi Arewa* on the fence but very few were modified.



Plate 4.3: Dutse Palace Exterior Design

Source: Mustapha (2023)

The level of *Dagi* modification of the interior designs of the *Dutse* palace was medium because it has a moderate influence of foreign elements and it can still be recognized as *Dagin Arewa*. While the level of *Dagi* modification of the exterior design of the *Dutse* palace was high due to high influence of foreign elements and it can still be recognized as *Dagin Arewa*. The level of *Dagi* modification on the fence was low because it has no influence of foreign elements and it can be easily recognized as *Dagin Arewa*.

As noted by Chiranchi (2022) noted that the modified *Dagi* motifs dominate palace facades in the northern Nigeria, often losing their originality due to modern influences. This study confirms this trend but demonstrates how these modified motifs can be adopted for textile applications while preserving their essence.

Summary

Identification and selection of modified *Dagi* on *Dutse* palace were done through photographs. The *Dagi* designs found were classified into two (2) categories- Interior designs -54 motifs, Exterior design -17 motifs. A total of seventy-one (71) motifs and design patterns were revealed during this study.

Conclusion

The results of the study have revealed the possibilities of using ideas from the environment for reproduction process on garment and fabrics embellishments. The study highlights creative development and use of skills and understanding of motif arrangements.

Recommendations

- i.** Stakeholders, including cultural institutions and local artisans, should collaborate to document and archive traditional motifs, ensuring they remain accessible to future generations.
- ii.** The researcher recommends that fashion students in our institutions should be encouraged to explore their immediate local environment and surroundings for sources of inspiration.
- iii.** Textile designers should produce designs that can help Nigerians understand their cultural values.

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