



## Appliqué as a Traditional Art form on Afro-Design: Prospects for Contemporary Nigeria Textiles

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**Abstract:** Nigerian fashion has always been distinct, statement-making, and very defining. Now a forerunner in not just Africa but all over the world, the Nigerian fashion industry has undergone several changes over the years and decades, reinventing itself, taking parts of the old and mixing them with the new, yet retaining its distinctive appeal and flavour. Nigerians have always been fashionable people putting the enormity of our lifestyle and elegance mildly. But like a child that outgrows its diapers, the fashion sense of Nigerians has evolved over the years. It is the collection of different fabrics together that make those symbols that have been collected from various groups which are presented artistically through patterns of fabric decoration and design. Meanwhile, this study will examine Appliqué as a traditional art form in Afro-Design: Prospects in contemporary fashion design. Interviewed with fashion designers, cottage industries, and models will be conducted and asked about their journey so far in the industry.

**Key Words:** Appliqué, Traditional, Art Form, Afro-Design, Potentials, Prospects, and Contemporary.

### 1. INTRODUCTION :

In modern fashion, appliqué refers to using fabric shapes or designs usually on the trim of a garment. This can be sewn or glued. Many appliqué are more often imported from China. Since many designers use appliqué that are mass produced, one can easily find matching accessories and such from competitive stores. Each may carry various items with the same appliqué. Perani (1999), sees appliqué design as a production, and the use of this technique in the Nigerian textile design and fashion industry is poorly researched and documented hence the need for this study. Cloth is a marketable commodity and has been the subject of extensive trade within and beyond the continent of Africa. In some places one range of cloths is knotting, netting, braiding, plaiting, etc.; and secondly, the interworking of one set of parallel elements by another set crossing them more or less at right angles. These two sets are essential to the structure of a woven fabric, or textile; and it is, of course, with the woven fabrics of Africa that we are here concerned.

However, there are subtle differences in these terms in specialized usage. Textile refers to any material made by interlacing fibers. Abamowicz, (1998) described Fabric as any material made through weaving, knitting, spreading, crocheting, or bonding that may be used in the production of further goods (garments, etc.). Cloth may be used synonymously with fabric but often refers to a finished piece of fabric used for a specific purpose (e.g., table cloth). Bethany(2008), described, that the word textile is from Latin, from neuter of textilis, woven, from textus, past participle of texere, to weave. The discovery of dyed flax fibers in a cave in the Republic of Georgia dated 34,000BC suggests textile-like materials were made even in prehistoric times. Scheman, (2002), Also defined the production of textiles as a craft whose speed and scale of production have been altered almost beyond recognition by industrialization and the introduction of modern manufacturing techniques.

One of the most obvious features of the material culture of Africa is cloth. Woven textiles, and other fabrics, are available in almost every part of the continent, and more often than not in substantial quantity. This is,



of course, particularly apparent in any market in West or North Africa; but it is surely hardly less true of other regions. As far as the textiles are concerned, some of these fabrics will be imported from Europe and India, though by the present time the greater part is likely to be locally manufactured. Of this, much will be the product of industrial equipment and processes in the factories of post-colonial Africa; and yet much will have come from the hands of spinners, weavers, and dyers still working, and very often flourishing, within the traditions of pre-colonial origin that continue to be of cultural and social relevance, with secure indigenous patronage. These provide the subject matter of this book.

### **1.1 APPLIQUE AS A TRADITIONAL ART FORM :**

The word "appliqué" is derived from the French verb "Appliquer," meaning "to put on." It is ornamental needlework in which pieces of fabric are sewn or stuck onto a larger piece to form a picture or pattern. Cultures have used the techniques of appliqué to make clothing, tents, and ornamentation. Traditional appliqué often includes elements of daily life and nature but can also be used to express complex ideas and metaphors and culturally significant events. In ancient times in the West African kingdom of Dahomey, appliqué clothes were made on commission by family guilds for people of prestige and power. Designs often included animals, plants, ships, and insignia. The designs were connected to proverbs to relate stories of power, conquest, and status.

In the past, men were the producers of appliqué, creating state umbrellas, rulers' hats, association banners and hammocks, pillow tops, and wall hangings. More recently, wall hangings have become popular tourist items, and this fuels the production of new appliqué cloth to fulfill market demand.

The word "appliqué" is derived from the French verb "appliquer," meaning "to put on." It refers to a textile craft in which one piece of fabric is sewn over another for a decorative effect. Appliqué is found in many forms of folk art, from Gujarati Indian tent fabrics to American colonial quilts. Appliqués range from purely decorative to symbolic, as in African funereal cloth.

#### **Origins**

Humans began knitting and weaving fabrics as long ago as the late Stone Age, about 100,000 years ago. The domestication of sheep, goats, and other animals gave people much easier access to wool and other raw materials needed to make yarn and weave cloth. Fabrics worn by the ancient inhabitants of India, China, and Egypt include cotton, linen, and silk; this date back as far as 5,000 B.C. Once these enterprising civilizations standardized methods of manufacturing these fabrics, artisans could turn their attention to decorating them with appliqués.

Appliqué is an essential component of many types of ancient Indian folk art. Fabrics used for ceremonial tents and religious rituals bore appliqués of elephants, peacocks, flowers, and mythical characters. Appliqué became a skilled trade, performed by a caste called Darjis. In addition to being used to decorate the fabrics and clothing of royalty, appliqué was used to decorate a temple's ceremonial umbrellas and tents. Different areas developed unique styles of appliqué. Gujarati style, for example, consists mainly of patchwork in which small, intricately cut pieces of fabric are sewn over a solid colored base to create a larger image. Bihari style focuses more on a single large piece of appliqué, folded and tucked to create the desired shape, then sewn over the base fabric.

#### **A Diverse Continent with Diverse Fabrics**

For some African cultures, appliqué fabrics became historic documents, used to describe historical events and note the reigns of particular kings. African artists in Benin used pictures the way Egyptians used hieroglyphs--each picture represented a sound or word that, when viewed together, represented a name or an event. Appliqué artists also made army pennants and clothing marked with a seal of office. In terms of everyday life, a tradition among the Fon of Benin dictated that friends gather at a loved one's funeral to appliqué a piece of fabric symbolizing the deceased's life and achievements.

In the sixth, Most Nigerian women wore long dresses and hats. The women dressed in both fitted and oversized outfits depending on their preference and complemented with premed, well-sprayed Afros. The uneducated people simply wore their native clothes and did simple, local hairstyles. Another trend that took the fashion industry by storm was mini skirts and dresses. This trend was allegedly invented by Mary Quant and aimed at seductively showing off women's legs. During this time, platform and wooden shoes were very fashionable, although they weren't as tall as they are today. In addition, the stiletto heels were very popular at this time. Men rocked boot-legged pants, tightly fitted shirts with loud prints, and the first two buttons open-topped by a killer afro.



The trend for women was what we now call *Oleku*, thanks to a film of the same name; a baggy-sleeved *Buba* worn over an *iro* that stopped anywhere from a little above the knees to mid-thigh. Men wore *Agbadas* and *danshikis*, trends that have made a stunning comeback. For a more western look, it was all about the colours.

The most obvious use of various fabrics is as articles of clothing. One or more lengths of cloth may be draped around the body, or tailored to make *gowns, trousers; T-Shirt, 3-quarter, and kaftans* so on are Modesty, not for only purposes of clothing, particularly for decorative embellishments of the garment. It may have cultural value such that the wearer is immediately associated with the possession of great wealth or status. Alternatively, an otherwise relatively poor man may possess one costly gown which he will wear only on important occasions.

As Nigerian fashion evolves more expose every day with fashion designers and fashion and also showcasing talents about Nigerian fashion to the world, Nigerian fashion is a global force that is here to stay. The Nigerian textile and garments industry, which was once a vibrant sector of the Nigerian economy, is gradually grinding to a halt. Despite government promises to revitalize the sector that holds numerous potentials for the economy, not much has happened. Nigerians who are not aware of the forces that have brought the once flourishing industry to its knees are wondering what might have struck the sector.



Plate 1: Yoruba Egungun Costume with Applique Design

Source: Google Picture/ 2022



Plate 2: Lagbaja Costume with Applique design

Source: Google Picture/ 2022



Plate 3: Applique Design on Wall Hanging

Source: Google Picture/ 2022



Plate 4: Set of gown with Applique Design

Source: Ayodeji Olatunbosun/2022



Plate 5: A female Kaftan with Applique design

Source: Ayodeji Olatunbosun/2022



Plate 6: A male Buba with Applique Design

Source: Ayodeji Olatunbosun/ 2022

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW :

Appliqué is a simple and effective method of decorating fabric, whether done by hand or by machine. Perani and Wolf, (1999), believe that Appliqué does not just use fabric; it can be used with other materials such as beads and



cowries and combined with other types of needlework such as embroidery to create the desired effect. It is also recognized that appliqué is suitable for small and large works. However, not every material is appropriate for the technical process of appliqué. Available literature also reveals a lot about the richness of appliqué.

The technical skills of appliqué offer bright prospects for creative textile explorations, given the rich fabric and appliqué cloth/costume traditions in Nigeria, Schneider (1986), in either case, colours and design can be combined in rich and rewarding artistic ways. Both essentially, offer unique creative skills in the hands of a contemporary textile designer and artist.

There are two approaches to designing with appliqué. The first involves working directly with materials; cutting shapes, arranging and rearranging the shapes, and sticking them to a background, either by hand or machine without any planning. The second approach is to plan a design on paper using cut paper, tracing shapes out of books, or drawing simple forms such as leaves, butterflies, fish, and so on. Another method is bonding, which is said to be a much faster and easier method of stitching.

In Nigeria today, dress and costume traditions, appliqué has offered technical skills that bring out the beautiful qualities of appliquéd fabric worn or used as masked spirit costumes. "Among the Yoruba, maiden spirit costume outfits are hand sewn to be tight-fitting, to reveal the elegant beauty of these spirit maidens" Drewal and Drewal, (1983), opined that Yoruba Egungun and Gelede mask costumes provide good examples of the creative skill in appliqué mask costumes among the Yoruba. There are other examples of appliqué clothing traditions from both Nigeria and elsewhere in Africa. The appliqué cloth banner from the Fon of Benin Republic has become world-famous for its large appliqué composition of human and un-human symbols. Encyclopedia Britannica's Guide to Black History"

Appliqué means applying one piece of fabric to another. Usually, this is a fabric background with shapes of some sort applied on top. The aesthetic of appliqué is often developed further by using a variety of colours to contrast, for example, a red shape placed on a green background. It can then be finished beautifully, with special threads to add extra stitching, beading to embellish the shapes, and so on. You can find out more about the different appliqué stitches in my dedicated post. Appliqué can be used on many surfaces and can be a decorative way to finish off many objects such as cushions, scarves, bags, and clothing. Most surfaces will be able to take appliqué in some form.

### Methods of Appliqué

There are three main methods of applying appliqué, they are:

- i. **Machine Appliqué:** A sewing machine is used to create the appliqué technique of stitching a piece of fabric to a background. You may choose to use one of the stitch variations possible on your particular model of machine to apply your top piece of fabric to the bottom layer. Popular stitches are zig-zag stitch or a satin stitch.
- ii. **Hand Appliqué:** It is often chosen for quilting projects. Hand appliqué is when a shape is sewn onto a background layer with a needle and thread. It can be done in a basic or more decorative way, depending on your experience. One of the more traditional methods of hand sewn applique is the needle-turn method, which is where a needle is used to turn under the seam allowance while you sew the pieces to the fabric background. This creates a neat edge rather than a raw one. Using hand appliqué allows you to add a decorative finish to your projects and add a variety of patterns and shapes depending on the project being worked on.
- iii. **Fused Appliqué:** If you are short on time or are less experienced, an iron-on adhesive such as a fusible web can be used. The fabric shapes you create can be fused to the background fabric using this medium and then if desired finishing stitches by hand or machine can be added.

### Types of Appliqué

Then there are the different styles or types of appliqué, some can be done by hand and some on a sewing machine they are:

- i. **Smooth edge Appliqué:** Using a sewing machine, the raw edges of the fabric which is being applied to the background can be tidied by stitching around the shape with a stitch chosen to leave a tidy finish that is smooth and neat to the observer. A zig-zag stitch stitched closely together works well.
- ii. **Raw Edge Appliqué:** This style works well for projects which will not be in constant use, as the raw edges are attached to the background fabric but not sewn over to create a seamless edge. The edges are left to fray. Smaller projects are ideal, such as greeting cards or wall-mounted pieces. Items such as cushions or clothing need to



have stronger more durable stitching, so this method is less successful. It can be done by hand or machine, so it is a variable method and can be moulded to the desired project.

- iii. **Multi-needle hoop Appliqué:** This method is more specialized and not as commonly used. It is a machine stitching technique and requires a multi-needle sewing machine as well as an embroidery hoop. The machine used can be set up with different colour threads for each needed. Usually, there are six needles used in a multi-needle machine. Each section of your design will be accurately stitched and it creates beautiful results. It works well for quilting projects. This type of appliqué is of more interest to those who are advanced in their embroidery knowledge.
- iv. **Reverse Appliqué:** these lives up to its name. Instead of sewing fabric shapes onto the top of a background layer, with this style you layer fabrics together and then stitch a pattern on top. Then you cut away parts of the fabric to reveal the shape and colour of the fabric below.
- v. **Decorative Appliqué:** This method is open to many variations and interpretations. It can be achieved using a machine or by hand. If you are using a sewing machine, you may use the different styles of stitching available on your model to make your piece aesthetically pleasing. Using hand embroidery, you can choose to experiment with the many different embroidery stitches available to learn – it depends on the project you are working on.

### 3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS :

- Does Appliqué design affect the production of textile materials in the fashion industries?
- Does textile designs and compositions are possible with appliqué among textile designers in the society?

### 4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY :

This study employed a survey research design. The study was carried out in a selected fashion home in Lagos state. A-6 items questionnaire split into two sections to cover the two research questions titled Appliqué as a traditional art form on Afro-Design; Prospects for Contemporary Nigeria Textiles was used for the study and it was examined by the experts in fashion institutes before administration. Subsequently, the questionnaire was administered to 25 apprentices who are not part of the sample to test the reliability of the instrument and a Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient of 0.79 was obtained. It was then administered to the sample of randomly selected 100 fashion workers across the sampled fashion institutes in Lagos State which include both males and females. The data collected was analyzed using descriptive statistics.

### 5. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS :

Data generated in the course of this research was presented in frequency distribution tables with raw figures and simple percentage analysis. The research used descriptive techniques which are based on quantitative analyses, taking into account the numerical values or the frequencies with which the various delineated items of the content analysis occurred.

*Table: 1 Effect of Appliqué on Afro design and how has it been used as relevant artistic and textile resources?*

S/N	ITEM	SD	D	A	AS	MEAN	STD.D
1.	<i>Appliqué design affects the production of contemporary design.</i>	51(51%)	20(20%)	15(15)	10(10%)	25.00	19.54
2.	<i>How does it have an impact on fashion/ cottage workers in terms of sewing?</i>	21(21%)	18(18%)	37(37%)	23(23%)	25.00	19.18
3.	<i>The technical and production techniques can be adapted from them using conventional and unconventional materials?</i>	21(21%)	30(30%)	31(31%)	18(8%)	25.00	13.78
<b>Weighted Average</b>		<b>25.00</b>					

On item 1 in table 1, 51% of the respondents strongly agreed, 15% answered to agree, 20% responded to disagree and 10% of the respondents disagreed with the item. 23% and 37% of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed respectively with item 2, while 18% and 21% of the respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed with the item. Verifying if the fashion industries do take Appliqué design has an effect on the production of contemporary design in



item 3, only 18% of the respondents strongly agreed, 31% agreed, 31% disagreed and 21% strongly disagreed with the item. With the weighted average of 25.00, it was observed that the effect of Appliqué on Afro design and how has it been used as relevant artistic and textile resources.

**Table: 2 Effectiveness and the possibility of appliqué techniques on Afro design concerning any chosen creative production techniques?**

S/N	ITEM	SD	D	A	AS	MEAN	STD.D
4.	<i>The effective use of Appliqué techniques among the textile industries.</i>	14(14%)	41(41%)	15(15%)	30(30%)	25.00	16.39
5.	<i>The fashion industry has improved its production using Appliqué Technique on casual wear as wearable dresses.</i>	30(30%)	24(24%)	29(29%)	16(16%)	25.00	12.99
6.	<i>The effect of Appliqué on Afro design and how has it been used as a relevant artistic approach and textile resources?</i>	45(45%)	20(20%)	18(18%)	17(17%)	25.00	10.10
<b>Weighted Average</b>		<b>25.00</b>					

Item 4 from table 4 shows that 30% of the respondents indicated strongly agreed, 15% answered to agreed, disagreed had 41% while strongly disagreed had 14% and effectively used of appliqué techniques in the textile industries affects both living and non-living things in the area.. 16% and 29% of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed respectively to item 2, while 24% and 30% of the respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed to the item. On examining the fashion industry has improved its production using appliqué technique on casual wear as a wearable dress. in item 6, 17% of the respondents strongly agreed, 18% answered to agree, 20% responded to disagree and 45% of the respondents disagreed with the item. Based on the percentages in table 2 and the weighted average of 25.00, it was discovered that the effect of appliqué on Afro design and how has it been used as a relevant artistic approach and textile resources.

## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS:

This paper involves an investigation on Appliqué as a traditional Art form on Afro-Design: Prospects for Contemporary Nigeria textiles. It will also put forward the following recommendations as to measures about the increase and its usefulness among the people in fashion industries in Lagos state. Information gathered from the literature has helped in this researcher tremendously about fashion design and the trends among the 21<sup>st</sup> century Artists.

- i. Government should help to improve small and medium enterprises on textile artistic proficiency as introduced to all acquisition centers on the need to change their concepts in fashion work.
- ii. Elaborate seminars and conferences should be organized to cover virtually all aspects of textiles, including a variety of appliqué techniques.

## 7. CONCLUSION :

In Nigeria's dress and costume traditions, appliqué has offered technical skills that bring out the beautiful qualities of appliquéed fabric worn or used as masked spirit costumes.

Africa is a large continent with rich history and a diverse population. People from many cultures make this land their home, and they create colorful, fascinating textiles. Archaeologists have found African textiles dating back thousands of years! Throughout Africa, people make textiles using the materials available to them. Depending on where they live, they might use tree bark, palm tree leaves, cotton, linen, or even wool. How they decorate these fabrics are just as diverse.

Designs and patterns can be added to fabric in several different ways. They may be woven into the textile using colored threads, or fabric can be dyed through many methods to create designs on the surface. People can also embroider decorations by sewing them into the fabric or create patterns by appliqué, a process in which pieces of cloth are sewn



onto a background. You'll notice one thing these fabrics have in common: the designs tend to be stylized. They don't look realistic and often are created by flat bold areas of color or pattern.

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