

Architectural Revivalism: The Progressive Design Approach in Hausa Communities

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Abstract: Generally, all architecture can be attractive with pleasant outlook, it is exciting when inspired grandeur, and logically defined when form and details are organized. Some architecture politely invites sense of place as well intellectually reflecting its historical origin. However, revivalism in contemporary architecture evolved as reaction against the ill actions of modernism. Revivalism has a special value and cultural significances in the fields of architectural aesthetic. Subsequently, it is acknowledged in the architectural theory that revivalist style recounts about the previous culture and in its unique architectural style among the multiple design models expresses social, natural and cultural phenomena. The style has the power to regenerate the folks-belief, local physical value, cultural significances, as well as regional and national identity. This research aims to discuss traditional architectural revivalism as an approach to regional progressive architectural design concept. The study based its scope within Hausa communities of Northern Nigeria, and will describe several of revivalist architectural models as progressive design approach. The paper will further explore the significances of architectural revivalism within the realm of Hausa traditional architecture. As such, the research suggested that the revivalist design approach creates a suitable base for regional architectural symbol as well as cultural identity and design continuity. The design models create no constraint to the architectural settings of the northern region in Nigeria.

Keywords: Hausa, Revival Design, Traditional Architecture, Cultural Value

1. Introduction

Nature and time, as the starting point for all architectural developments, have recognizable characteristic features in all the tendencies, and are generally stronger in all creative activities. However, Hausa people in northern Nigeria have developed a system of architecture different than the other regional settlements. Their system of architectural style defined the folk nature and embraces both cultural and religious beliefs. Consequently, Hausa traditional approach in architecture has made them to stand unique among the other tribes in Nigeria. But with advent of modern social changes in design characters, in line with imported foreign cultures which produced many aesthetic elements of the western culture, have influenced the known Hausa architectural style into a system of architecture with demised cultural and traditional values.

Architecture is no longer just 'commodity', 'firmness' and 'delight' it has become instrumental and has a clear cultural and traditional purposes [15]. It most therefore, satisfy the

spiritual needs of the people for it to stand as products of societies. Today almost all designers are in the large and spacious sense of modernist approach, the process of seeking for identity is no longer the priority. Whereas, regeneration and redefinition of cultural values in designs is therefore of the greatest significance in contemporary practices, because is through the architecture that one will clearly notice his historical posture as well have a good 'sense of place'.

However, in Hausa communities of northern Nigeria, prior before the independence the balance in design characters had been partially maintained, some of the designed buildings revived the features of Hausa traditional architecture, and some colonial designs embraced artistic elements of the past with historic symbols which represent the real Hausa buildings. Suddenly, with the onset of the oil boom in 1970s (decade after independence) which also coincided with the free display of classical designs in buildings, resulted in a new system of architecture with undefined faces. As a result of this conspicuous effects, the large size of the Hausa

communities certainly noticed that there was a significant regional change in physical appearances of the built environment [2]. Many buildings wore universal identifiable architectural fashions with clear expressions of freedom of designs. However, despite the prevailing practice of the modernist design approach and the introductions of the western classical elements in buildings, towards the late 90s, some of the designers introduced the ideas of the revivalism in designs with focus on traditional and cultural built elements that were historically established. Suddenly, contemporary buildings were crowned with prominent elements of Hausa traditional architecture. As such, in spite of the economic changes, climatic, social, and technological effects still professional designers embraced culture so positively in a way that aesthetic integrities of Hausa people were kept in a dialogue with the contemporary approach.

Therefore, using the theoretical survey as a means of generating data for researches, this paper, will therefore, seeks to discuss the evolution and the impacts of architectural revivalism in Hausa communities of northern Nigeria. The research will discuss the significances of traditional revivalist approach as a means of redefining the importance of cultural sustainability within the framework of Hausa traditional architecture. Furthermore, the paper will properly follow a descriptive approach to explore revivalism as a technique for progressive design approach in contemporary architectural practice. As such, the paper agreed that architectural revivalist approach should be viewed as a physical factor in regenerating the cultural and traditional values of the built contexts.

2. Hausa Traditional Architecture

Hausa people in the northern part of Nigeria have



Figure 1. Shows Hausa traditional buildings Source: [1].

Traditional architecture has always been an integral part of Hausa communities and is symbolized with different varieties of buildings that portrayed Hausa cultural designs [3]. Consequently, both residential and nonresidential buildings were characterized by traditional and cultural expressions, such as domical flat roofs with ribbed vaulting (Bakan-gizo). Usually rectangular or circular in plan scheme with mud brick walls also arranged within walled courtyards

dominates the region which lies “between latitude 3.50 east to latitude 11.0 east, and from longitude 10.50 north to longitude 14.00 north” [18]. However, the term Hausa referred to the people of Northern Nigeria who speak the Hausa language and shared significant cultural and social system. Accordingly, Hausa people are largely Muslim and their culture and tradition have led them to a higher level of specialization in all creative activities. Consequently, Hausa culture and tradition have gradually extended to covered all the ethnics that have been assimilated into the language. As such, this single collective designation is perhaps a fairly recent phenomenon and now it has come to be accepted by the public as a term of shared identity for the whole Northern people in Nigeria [21, 1].

Regarding the settlement and the traditional practices in the northern communities, Hausa architecture was organized and decorated within the scope of the available local building materials as well reflects the creative work of the previous era with religious posture [1, 3]. Hausa traditional architecture was known of its creative work, sincere in physical appearance, with distinctive compositional qualities. Aliyu [1] says Hausa traditional architecture should be looked at as interpretation as well as expressions of cultural values and traditional manners of the people leaving within the region. He further noted that the traditional approach and the symbolized built elements (Figure 1) were culturally thoughts, or “even ideas formed by generalization from particular examples, which also transmitted in form of attitudes, beliefs, principles and conventions of behavior driving from past and helping to shape the contexts” [1]. Subsequently, the built features and the general physical appearances of the buildings are direct expressions of the people from where they sprung from [8].

[6]. The walls were also finished with decorations adorned with pointed pinnacles (Rawani) on parapets [7]. The external wall surfaces (Figures 1&2) sometimes embellished with cultural geometric patterns (Makuba plater) as well beautified with Hausa creative art motifs and symbols that represent its origin [19]. The interior spaces were “characterized with vaults and piers decoration on walls, slits, punctures, archways and motifs in various sizes and

proportions to attract and impress on the beholder to the awesome quality of the interior unit” [12]. This set of collective principles are clear attitude of expressions that

actually valued culture and tradition that is inherited in climatic, socio-economic as well as local ways of signaling the social systems [22, 2].



Figure 2. Shows Hausa traditional façade decoration, engraved surface with pinnacles (Zankwaye). Source [12].

Accordingly, in Hausa communities, traditional domestic architecture is more instrumental than the public buildings and is clearly attached with the attitude of culture and religion. Therefore, domestic buildings serve as one of the basic symbols of culture and tradition, they usually expressed the cultural relations between Hausa people and the traditional characters of the settlement. The cultural values attached to the formations of the inner spaces of the compound has been a factor of architectural identity that placed spiritual and material needs in balance. Traditional domestic buildings (Figure 2) were organized base on the users’ needs, traditional fashions, cultural beliefs, as well as the family desires and capacity at large [6]. Consequently, the later cultural settings expressed in Hausa architecture is rooted in historical traditional practices inherited in religious beliefs.

3. Hausa Revival Architecture

Revival styles in architecture gradually developed from European thoughts and the formally existing models are the significant measures of the social, traditional, cultural and

physical prestige of the early 20th century [14]. The models symbolized the dominance of previous culture as well as the old technological design approaches [9]. “Although the popularity and indeed, many qualitative meanings attached to it varies from one particular period to another and differed from one kind of region to another” [1]. Therefore, the movement “architectural revivalism” has no general supported theory of codes, the revivalist designers built-up base on the characters of the old built context and the accepted practice. The attitudes create differences due to initial class and the usual general characteristics [14, 9]. However, as in Hausa communities of northern Nigeria the approach termed, “architectural revivalist style” ordinarily means contemporary designs that consciously displayed historical built elements as well have some gestures towards the old designed characters [13, 14]. As such, the approach is one of the sources of knowledge in the current returns of memorial design concept, and it is important to both public and residential buildings that created continuity in built form and structure, as well as to the recalls of the preexisting perceived designs [1].



Figure 3. Shows Hausa revival architecture Source: [1].

The design in figure 3a is located in Kano state, one of the strong hold of Hausa settlement. The designer understands

the significances of revival style, he quickly grasped the essential connections between the traditional approach and contemporary practices. The concept creates some sort of continuity in 'architectural style', regardless of time and usage [5]. Accordingly, as acknowledged by the prominent scholar that the modernist often intensity to nuances of time and built context [14], but the design (figure 3a) kept the context ineluctably unchanged and the long-established traditional features were regenerated as well unbroken. Indeed, the design used several important features of Hausa traditional built elements to displayed its origin, such as the pointed pinnacles (Zankwaye) and the projected design on parapet to imitate the Hausa traditional beam fashion. That is to say the traditional style never died, designers are more sensitive of time and context.

Accurate use of revival architecture is needed so that there will be conventional relations between the old and the new designs. The design in figure 3b is a residential building located in Kaduna state, which is also a major Hausa

community in northern Nigeria. The building is neither a creative social extension to tradition nor clear expression of semiotic balance for its place within a system of meaning [14]. The variety of codes used in the design seems appropriate for aesthetic revival. The built features, such as the entrance porch that is crowned with a dome and the pointed pinnacles (Zankwaye) on the parapets which signified a real Hausa building that fits to its context in both language and scale. The design not only went back to the traditional fashion, but also adopted the manner of regional social balance. Accordingly, reasonable architecture must have a signifying reference, the contemporary designs in figure 3 are more of traditional designs in their physical appearances, the imitations of the traditional beams (Azara), the arches, parapets, and the whole compositional features are purely Hausa in their architectural suggestion. These indefinable built elements are convincingly adopted from historical sources which also represent a symbolic connection between the old and the new Hausa design systems.



Figure 4. Shows Hausa revival architecture Source: [1].

Another notable feature of Hausa traditional architecture that is frequently reflecting in most contemporary designs is the use of flat roofs that is traditionally and culturally adopted from East Africa. The approach is lavishly achieved in contemporary designs regardless of the size and scale of the buildings. The design in figure 4a is located in Yola Adamawa state, one of the known Hausa/Fulani settlement in northern part of Nigeria. As such, the designer realistically sees flat roof as an element of Hausa traditional style and managed to accentuate, rather than destroyed the real qualities. The designer placed great emphasis on traditional concept, he conventionally revived flat roof system with the pinnacles (Zankwaye) and portrayed the building as expression of historical present. Effectively, the design is a single coded approach free of contradiction and more of a direct Hausa traditional revival style. Similarly, the design in figure 4b utilized the single coded approach too, though with austere appearance. However, the emphasis is to create a dialogue between the contemporary design and old values with essential connections. Indeed, the very notion of this creative thinking is to give back the built context its original meaning through revivalism. More effectively, these noble

designs in figure 4 appeared to be ideal image of Hausa traditional buildings in contemporary appearances.

4. Architectural Identity

Kheng [15] says way of seeking for identity in architecture is no less than the process by which man understands his historical heritage, as well states its actions and the products that kept the spiritual, cultural and traditional needs in harmony with one another. He further noted that a redefinition of identity in architecture is therefore, of the greatest importance in today's practice, as only through architecture, people can be able to understand with maximum assurance on their historical levels and also have a sense of clarity regarding the built context [15]. Therefore, "physical characteristics of designs, together with social aspects of places are intermediary milieus for the construct of identity" [10]. However, from the onset of the ancient creative work Hausa as a cultural entity has a particular cultural symbol (shaped like a star mostly used in traditional buildings-figure 5) that identify their products in both architecture and other traditional embroidery programs. This symbol (Dagin Arewa-

figure 5) stand as a mark of identity to all northern Hausa people with traditional and cultural meaning. Accordingly, in Hausa communities, identity in contemporary designs have played upward to some extent, as well became so significant in the creative abilities of the entire region and to express the long-established cultural techniques and tradition, rather than the ordinary designed artifacts. cultural sensitivity is evident in some of the Hausa revival designs and is meant to express their architectural identity and to blend with regional urban fabric in a manner that seemed inevitable to the Hausa style.

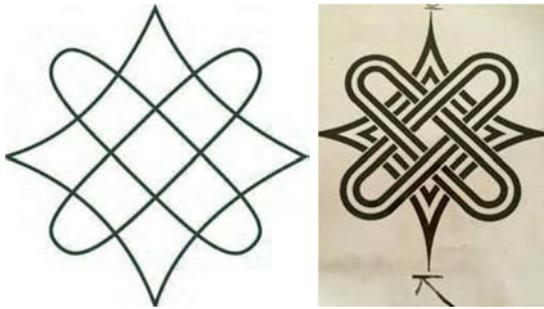


Figure 5. Shows Northern Knot or Arewa Symbol or Dagin Arewa.

However, in traditional settings, a house is not merely a dwelling unit, but a place where human beings rise as well get aware about their built environment, material culture and traditional identity. Subsequently, Hausa architectural identity have been identified in contemporary designs in many different ways. The most significant elements recognized in signaling Hausa identity in the revivalist design is through the parapet (Rawani) and the pinnacles (Zankwaye), sometimes with the use of cultural symbols popularly known as Northern knot 'Arewa symbol' or 'Dagin Arewa' (Figure 5). This approach is evident in figure 4a&6a. The design in figure 4a is located in Jimeta Adamawa state, the designer clearly understands that architecture is not just a 'commodity to get delighted' it most reflects a local cultural milieu and have its identity in picturesque. The designer quickly used Northern knot (Arewa symbol) to signaled the identity of the building. The design "represents a living iconic landscape with common cultural identity and sense of place that was produced by the community's accumulated efforts over time" [17]. As such, the design vocabulary provides a commentary on regional culture with identity at a glance.



Figure 6. Shows Hausa revival architecture Source: [1].

Similarly, Jencks [14] noted out that if time and usage are the crucial variables in architectural meaning, the case of straight revival becomes a problem. The design in figure 6b expresses an abstract reflections of Hausa architectural identity. As it stands, the building fits into the regional architectural character and represent a synthesis of dialogue between the new Hausa style and the previous traditional fashion with regional architectural identity at a glance. Indeed, it is a single coded design with cultural and traditional architectural meaning. The ideal nature of the design is obviously meant to relate the building to its local milieu. The used of the flat roof, the masonry work, and the pointed pinnacles (Zankwaye) gives the design a reflection of its real identity that was rooted in historical precedents.

5. Cultural Continuity

Architectural continuity is the transmission of shared systems of cultural values from one generation to another,

and is the act of spreading the cultural heritage in sequential manner. However, one among the significances of revivalist trend is regeneration of cultural values in designs with social constructs of a particular place. Culture is, and for sure "will always be a tangible and fixed asset" [2] therefore, it most reflects in the architectural programs with significant economic spheres. Firzal [11] gives a comprehensive definition that the concept of 'cultural sustainability', which is also known as the concept of 'cultural being', can never be infer from any greater principles and so also will never stand for any lower ethical principles. Since, "human betterments do not only lie in the matter of dwelling only or some sort of utility comfort, but also lies in an ideal cultural built environment" [16], therefore, culture must be sustained at all the design stages in the architectural practices. Because, down to the origin, every human sees culture as the immediate skills gained through 'sense of place'. However, in Hausa communities, culture in designs is viewed as important dimension in both social and physical form. It

represents several factors in promoting tradition and serves as a way of creating identity in contemporary practices [23].

Buildings as architectural products, always reflects the culture of its Inhabitants [20], and several design elements in most architectural models were influenced by the culture. Architectural models in Hausa communities are manifestation of certain traditional attitudes as well as expressions of long-inherited culture. The organization of the components usually accord to the economic factors and respond to the societal cultural values. The residential buildings in figures above are uniquely characterized by a

particular identity that originated from particular culture. The cultural symbolism attached to the designs defined the value system and the beliefs of Hausa people. It includes not only the intellectual art of the Hausa folks, but encompasses the shared societal cultural belief that house should have a flat roof with parapet (Rawani) and pinnacles (Zankwaye). They are exceptional outstanding architectural models copied from Hausa traditional domestic buildings with cultural manifest. The whole complex distinctive models displayed cultural symbol, progressive belief, and cultural identity.



Figure 7. Shows Hausa revival architecture Source: Author.

Sustainability in architectural practices have serious impacts on many levels of community development, such as the social, artistic, traditional, cultural, environmental and material factors. The expression of local cultural elements and traditional heritage in architecture involves the adoption of prominent native features incorporated into the design [4]. The manifestation of cultural elements in the architectural fashions of Hausa buildings signified flexibility and continuity. Every society has cultural belief, scripts and symbol that define the cultural ideals [20]. In contemporary Hausa buildings, the frequent design elements such as the domes, flat roofs, pinnacles (Zankwaye), and the northern knot (Arewa symbol) were originated from the “ancient typology” that is traditionally sound, climatically fit, and culturally appropriate to the so-called Hausa communities [1, 2]. All are “native of elements sourced directly from Hausa culture and building tradition of the northern region” [4]. However, the design figure 7 is a commercial building located in Kano the strongest Hausa community in Nigeria. The contemporary design is the interpretation of remarkable influence of cultural continuity on architecture. The physical appearances of the building portrayed the cultural origin as well marked as society’s shared sociocultural artifact with common value. Aliyu [4] pointed out that the design is in harmony with its built context as the scale and organizational features of the building in the facility reflects the cultural identity of the people of Kano. Accordingly, if architectural expression stands as a language that is frequently defining the cultural activities and materials in line to the characteristics of past styles, or building techniques and concepts [12], the commercial building in Kano expresses

cultural continuity in architectural appearance. The composition of the built elements (figure 7) reflects the ideal Hausa--cultural sustainability, cultural identity as well as cultural continuity in architectural model.

6. Conclusion

Architecture is always at a state of constant change in both the tangible and intangible material elements. The change is due to the blending of considerable number of different factors such as, the social, political, historical, economic and cultural issues in all facets of environmental programs.

Evidently, the research revealed that Hausa revival architecture is a contemporary interpretation of Hausa traditional buildings. And, in a real sense, it offers contextual sensitivity as well as environmental sustainability, and technically expresses the aesthetical language of time and place that embodies traditional and cultural values. The designers in the large Hausa communities enthusiastically embraced revival style and incorporated cultural activities to reveal practical understanding of Hausa people in architecture with ideal norms and value of a place at a glance. More evidently, the characters generated within the physical configurations of the Hausa revival models were determined by individual desire to achieve the so-called “place congruent continuity” as well as contextuality in the built environments.

Therefore, it appears likely that this Hausa revivalist design approach of cultural and traditional growth will significantly improve the widespread of Hausa architectural identity. Nonetheless, these contemporary initiatives seem likely to embody an increasingly widespread of Hausa

contemporary architectural style all over the northern communities in Nigeria. As such, this concept generates many numbers of social, cultural, and environmental impacts. The aforementioned models signified regional growth, cultural shift, and represent a long-established architectural orthodox. Therefore, under present architectural practice, however, contemporary design models in Hausa communities should incorporate the double coded practice of the postmodern movement to signal the cultural as well as the traditional concepts of the local milieu. Such progressive architecture should be in sharp connections to the existing Hausa models or must always be seen in the context of Hausa contemporary architecture.

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