

ABSTRACT

Hausa traditional housing is informed and shaped by the culture of the people and their religious belief. The savannah region in northern Nigeria is the home of the Hausa people. The Hausas form the majority of the people inhabiting the middle belt and northern states of Nigeria. Across the Nigerian borders the Hausas are natives of the northern parts of many West African countries. This paper examines the spatial planning of the Hausa traditional housing with data obtained from randomly selected homesteads in Kano, Kaduna, and Niger states. The paper examines the relationship between the spatial planning of the compounds and the cultural development of women with regard to the circulation restrictions in the compounds. The Hausa traditional compound has sleeping and living quarters for household members, spaces for rearing of domestic animals, and spaces for the practice of the occupation of the family head. Courtyards are enclosed within the compound, which also serve as a playground for children. Islam places a lot of premium on the privacy of women and prescribes in practical terms varying degrees of seclusion for them. Seclusion of women places severe restrictions on the movement of women, limiting them to a part of the compound designated for them. It also checks the movement of male visitors, and grown-up children in the compound from reaching the inner women restricted area. The typical Hausa home is thus virtually two houses in one; the outer male visitors' reception area and the restricted area for the women. The paper notes that the Hausa traditional housing is an excellent reference of traditional architecture in Nigeria. It further asserts that Hausa traditional housing places restrictions on circulation of occupants especially women which could hamper their development socially and economically, and thus be an obstacle to the optimum realization of their inherent capabilities.

KEYWORDS: Circulation, Hausa, Housing, Restrictions, Traditional, and Women.

INTRODUCTION

Housing transcends shelter as it encompasses the total environment in which people live and grow. It is an integral part of the material culture of humans and is thus indigenous to every human society. It has been aptly described as a *sine qua non* of the existence of humans since it is practically inconceivable for people to live without it. However, a large number of people, the vast majority in urban centres in Less Developed Countries (LDCs) live in poor quality housing that is clearly an affront to human dignity (Abrams, 1964; Mabogunje, 1975; Olotuah, 2001,2002; Olotuah & Aiyetan 2006).

As a cultural phenomenon housing is a reflection of the lifestyle of a people, and as Gardi (1973) argues it is shaped by it. Because of the social significance of housing its forms offer a direct entrance to the study of the culture of a people. Housing in all human societies embodies and reflects the symbolism pervading the culture of the people who construct and inhabit them.

Culture is the sum total of the way of life of a people, their material and non-material expressions, and their capability to adjust to their environment. Culture encapsulates the entire social, economic, anthropological, ecological, political and spiritual make up of a people. It is the patterned ways of thinking, feeling, and reacting, acquired and transmitted mainly through symbols (Roger & Fleck, 2012). Culture is the distinctive achievements of people including their embodiments in artifacts (Olotuah, 2016). Brett (2000) asserts that it is the personality of a social group which encompasses both the norms and values shared by the members of that group. Culture is influenced by a large number of factors such as religion, education, nationality, social class, gender, family, ethnicity, language, legal and political system (Usunier & Lee, 2009). The socio-cultural heritage of a people is

symbolized by the houses they build and live in (Olotuah, 1997). Housing traditions are components of the culture of the people and house forms have evolved in various cultures as a set of beliefs that are bundled up into a given understanding of what a house ought to be. In traditional architecture therefore every house is built like every other one in the community, and the rules of construction are not particularly created for each house (Uji, 1992). The rules have been empirically derived through the building experience of the people over the ages, and are transmitted through successive generations. Such rules are uniform and are subject to change as culture is dynamic. Traditional architecture is thus firmly rooted in the socio-cultural, climatic and politico-economic environment of the society.

The savannah region in northern Nigeria is the home of the Hausa people. The Hausa people are a large ethnic group who share close historical and cultural ties with other related tribes especially the Fulani. They form the majority of the people inhabiting Kano, Katsina, Sokoto, Kebbi, Jigawa, Kaduna and Bauchi states of Nigeria. They are also indigenes of Nasarawa, Niger, Plateau and Yobe States. Across the Nigerian borders the Hausas are natives of the northern parts of many West African countries. The Hausa language is thus one of the most widely spoken languages in West Africa and Africa.

The Hausas are largely an agrarian people. They engage in other occupations too, such as fishing, hunting, leather works, pottery, textiles, blacksmithing and weaving. The natural domestic architecture of the Hausa people is a vivid element of their physical and spiritual culture. Their house forms express the collective aims and desires of their communities for an environment ideally suited for their lifestyle rather than individual goals. The culture of the Hausas is greatly influenced by Islam, which is the dominant religion practiced by the majority of them. Islam, as professed by adherents, is a way of life, and its norms and principles influence the behavioural pattern of the people. The influence of Islam on the traditional architecture of the Hausas is pre-eminent and has reinforced other cultural traits, which nonetheless dictate the organization and use of space in their dwellings. There are other socio-cultural factors, aside from religion, which are determinants of the house form of the Hausa people. These include family organization and kinship relationships, the social relations between individuals, the community life of the people, security and safety, and ways of gaining livelihood.

This paper examines the spatial planning of the traditional Hausa housing as exemplified in homesteads across many states in northern Nigeria. It focuses attention on the layout of the compounds, and circulation within and into the compounds particularly along sex divide. Data was obtained from participant observation of traditional family compounds randomly selected from three states in northern Nigeria namely Kano, Kaduna, and Niger states. The paper examines the relationship between the spatial planning of the compounds and the cultural development of women with regard to the circulation restrictions in the compounds. This is done to ascertain the effect on the socio-economic development of women particularly in view of their inherent potentials to the overall development of the society. The Hausa traditional housing is an excellent reference of traditional architecture in Nigeria and is thus an important socio-economic variable in the development of the nation.

ORGANIZATION AND USE OF SPACE

Spatial planning is a function of the use to which a building is put. It is also dependent on the users' needs and aspirations, and their socio-cultural background on the one hand and that of the designer on the other. In Hausa land, building is a community affair with the socio-cultural background of every one being perhaps the same. Such sameness pervades their needs and aspirations with variations occurring in dependence of the economic status of different individuals. Thus, spatial planning in Hausa traditional housing is generally of the same pattern. The traditional house is rather a homestead comprising several huts in a walled compound. The compound usually has sleeping and living quarters for household members (and extended family members in some cases), space for rearing of domestic animals, and spaces for the practice of the occupation of the family head, which could be carpentry, retail trading or clothe-dyeing. Courtyards are enclosed within the compounds, which also serve as playground for children. Thus, the compound is a complete environment for the physical and biological needs of the household.

The need for domestic privacy and safety for the inhabitants is a cogent factor informing the spatial planning of the traditional Hausa house. As in city walls found in Hausa cities, compound walls serve for protection against invaders and prevent uncontrolled movement in and out of the compounds. The walls are an index of the social status and prestige of the household head. The Hausas have mastery in, and fondness for ornamentation, which is usually highly sophisticatedly done on elevations of their buildings.

Islam places a lot of premium on the privacy of women and prescribes in practical terms varying degrees of seclusion for them. Muslim Hausas thus practice this in line with the various modes of marriage in Islam. At one extreme is complete seclusion (known as *auren kulle* in Hausa language); there is partial seclusion of women (*auren tsare*) and little or no seclusion at the other end (*auren jahilai*, marriage of the ignorant). The latter is a rare occurrence in traditional Hausa societies. Seclusion of women places severe restrictions on the movement of women, limiting them to a part of the compound designated for them. It also checks the movement of male visitors, and grown-up children in the compound from reaching the inner women restricted area. The typical Hausa home is thus virtually two houses in one, the outer male visitors' reception area and the restricted area for the women. This clearly defines the public and private areas of the house, which is highly respected by the public (Schwerdtfeger, 1982).

In a typical Hausa compound there are two courtyards, a forecourt (*kofar gida*) and the central courtyard (*cikin gida*), which incisively separate it into two zones. The forecourt is an intermediate zone between the centre of the compound and the public domain. Before reaching the forecourt one has to go through complicated entranceways, which block access and views into the interior of the compound. In the forecourt are huts in which visitors are received. The main entrance feature (*dakali*) is the first reception room for male guests. One has to go through another reception room (*zaure*) to reach the interior of the compound. Male visitors of the head of the compound do not go beyond the *zaure*. The rooms of the head of the compound called *turuka* (bedroom only or bedroom and living room) are sometimes situated strategically at the entrance. This is supposedly to enhance his supervisory role in the house.

Access to the central courtyard of the compound, which is the inner women' restricted area, is through a second entrance hut (*shigifa*). The hut is sometimes divided into an additional sitting room for male children and their visitors, and a smaller interior store room. The quarters of the women are located in the central courtyard. This is the major part of the compound where the women spend most of their married lives, especially when they are in *pardah*. Bedrooms for the wives as well as utility spaces such as kitchens and stores are contained in this part of the compound. Children play area and space for rearing domestic animals and toilet facilities are also located in the central courtyard. Since women are restricted within this zone, a well and sometimes a tap for water are features of the central courtyard. A common living room for all the wives, which serves as a reception room for female visitors to the house, is also usually located in the central courtyard (see Fig. 1 and Fig. 2)

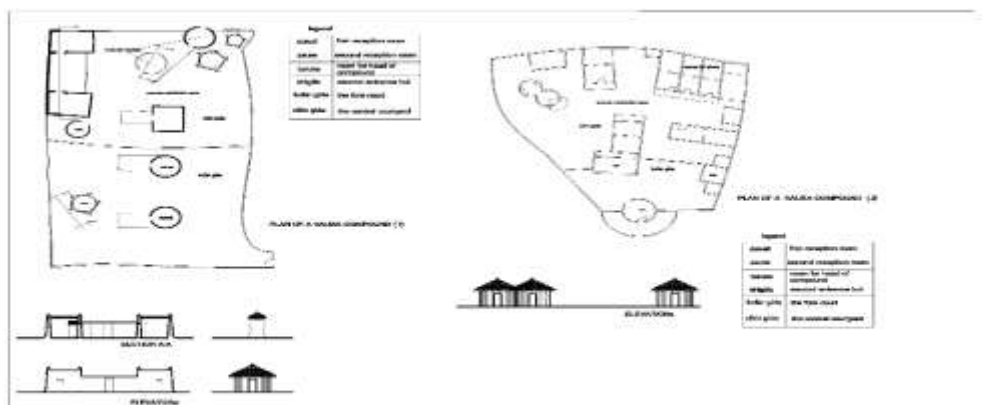


Fig. 1: Hausa Traditional Compound
 Source : Author's Field Work 2015

HOUSING IN THE CONTINUITY OF CULTURE

In all societies housing traditions have long been established alongside other community traditions. These traditions, which are well understood among the inhabitants, inform settlement planning which is symptomatic of the attitudes and values of such communities. Housing is, thus, a cultural phenomenon since it is a reflection of what is acceptable to the community and is built within the context of the community.

The form of housing evolved by a people is an outgrowth of its function, environment and various socio-economic factors. In this regard housing is subject to influencing factors such as socials, structure, climate and economics but its determining factor is culture which is the totality of the way of life of the people (Uji, 1992). Culture is the

sum total of the material and intellectual equipment of a people by which their biological and social needs are satisfied, and through which they adapt themselves to their environment. Culture is essentially an adaptive mechanism which makes the satisfaction of human needs possible.

The forms and functions of housing are strongly related to customs and cultures since what people consider important in their housing is intimately related to the entire system of values and customs accepted by their cultural group.

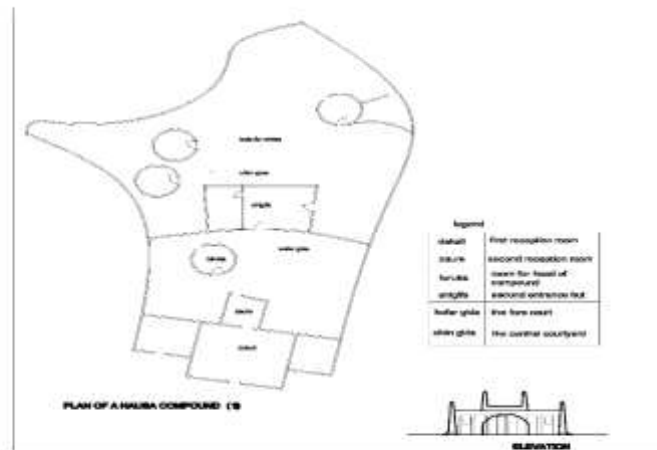


Fig. 2 : Hausa Traditional Compound
 Source : Author's Field Work 2015

Housing, as a cultural phenomenon, has a major part to play in ensuring the continuity of community life. This is in view of the fact that the type of housing evolved by a people has always corresponded to the organization of the family which it has sustained and reinforced. The social structure and the kinship organisation of the Yoruba people of south-western Nigeria and the southern part of north-central Nigeria, for instance, play a determining role in the evolution of their house forms. Their traditional compounds usually house several patrilineally related families which encourages close personal contacts. This, over the generations, has served to strengthen the unity of their traditional social structure. In parts of Igbo land of south-east Nigeria, the polygamous family structure requires a complex of huts, one for the husband and one for each wife and her children, arranged in order of rank.

Housing traditions, a component part of traditional architecture, have long existed in Nigeria. In traditional architecture the social patterns of societies require of their houses particular forms in consonance with their material and spiritual needs. Thus, dwellings are built from within the community as essential to its life and as a direct expression of it. The customs as well as the ideas and products of a people constitute culture which refers to the life of a people as manifested in their art, architecture and even music, dance and literature.

CULTURAL RESTRICTION AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF WOMEN

The restriction in movement into and out of the traditional Hausa compounds, normally along sex divide, underlines the hierarchy of spatial privacy displayed in them. Though traceable to Islam, Barth (1990) observed this pattern in Hausa compounds in pre-Muslim times, which seemed to hint at some other cultural factors such as the need for the safety of the inhabitants. In sharp contradistinction, the traditional house of the Yoruba people (another Nigerian ethnic group), in places where Islam is also predominant, has little privacy with no surrounding walls or entrance rooms. Spatial arrangements to ensure domestic privacy in a Yoruba traditional house are virtually non-existent. Women have a high degree of unrestricted movement, not only within the building, but also within towns. They play a very important part in the economic life of their towns. This is a pointer to the fact that aside religion, some other cultural factors also play a role in spatial organization in traditional housing.

Oganwu (1996) has argued that the general thought that pervades African societies is that a woman is supposed to consider motherhood as the principal purpose of her existence. Procreation is her major preoccupation, while she also tends to domestic activities. Marriage is thus generally accepted to be at the centre of any social

community. Oppong & Abu (1997) identified seven major roles, which women play in the society. These are maternal, conjugal, domestic, individual, kin, community and occupational roles. In Hausa traditional architecture the first four are the most evident in view of the strict restriction on movement imposed by the marriage institution.

Modo (1996) asserts that the purdah practice (in Sokoto in Hausa land), which secludes muslim housewives restricting and constraining them, is a devaluation of the women. The women are denied freedom of movement and to a good extent freedom of association. The denial of such rights is tantamount to dehumanizing or devaluation. The restriction of women inside the building and within a portion of it is a severe handicap to the development of women folk and their lot in life. They are conscripted into early marriage and are effectively denied the benefit of education. They depend solely on their husbands for their livelihood, which is pitiable in most circumstances.

CONCLUSION

The housing evolved by a people is a true reflection of their lifestyle. It mirrors the society and provides a strong basis for understanding the culture of the people. The cultural practices in Hausa land especially as they relate to their women folk have been shown to have serious implications on the spatial planning of their dwellings. The cultural status of women is a decision variable in the design of residences in traditional Hausa architecture.

The Hausas have a domineering influence on their wives whom they seclude from the gaze of the society and restrict to a private part of the building. In view of the fact that the women, more often than not, have limited formal (western) education, and are kept indoors, they cannot contribute to the economic well-being of the family. Their capabilities lie largely dormant, unused and untapped. The Hausa traditional housing thus inhibits the adaptation and development of the society at large. This is because the capabilities of women are a veritable resource for the overall development of the society. Women constitute over half of the Nigerian population and their contribution therefore will stand the country in good stead in its march towards economic emancipation. This is indeed realizable if the attitudes, beliefs and customs, which are discriminatory against women, change.

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