

# Harnessing the Hausa Socio-Cultural Values to Enhance Privacy in the Design of Residential Housing

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## Abstract

*The Hausa traditional housing pattern is informed and shaped by the culture and the religious beliefs of the people. Islam places a lot of premium on the privacy of women and prescribes in practical terms varying degrees of seclusion for them. 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 research seeks to study this traditional and religious system of privacy and its application in the contemporary residential housing scheme. The research adopted a mixed method (qualitative and quantitative approach) to examine the reflection of housing privacy execution and spatial configuration in the design of housing. A proportionate stratified random sampling technique was employed to select three estates as case study where questionnaire and visual survey were used as instrument of data collection. 250 questionnaires were distributed and 234 retrieved and the element of Hausa socio-cultural values were ranked according to their importance. Findings revealed that most of the occupants in residential estates studied are dissatisfied with the privacy level of their houses as most go out of their way to modify their houses to fit their various privacy requirements. It also revealed the ranking of privacy variables and elements in residential housing design. Therefore, the research recommended that building codes and regulations should be revised to incorporate lessons from the cultural needs and demands of all regions in Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** Hausa Tradition, Socio-cultural Values, Privacy, Residential Housing, and Religious Systems

## Introduction

Housing comprises of the environment in which man lives and grows in response to both biological material as well as physical needs (Olotuah, 1998). To support this assertion, Massoudi and Simonian (1978), further asserted that for a house to perform its ideal end, it must possess the minimum facilities needed for human health, body and spirit. Housing is a process of creating conditions in which higher portion of man's life activities occurs therein. In a related development, the fundamental purposes of housing according to Mabogunje, Hardoy and Misra (1987), are the provision of shelter for the performances of social activities, safety, security, space, privacy, and other purposes that promote good health and dignified living. Nigeria is a country that parades numerous traditional building design concepts at different regions of climatic conditions, socio-economic and

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cultural background. Rikko & Gwatau (2011), referred to traditional as a cultural heritage gained from generation to generation accepted and practiced by the people. Therefore, designs in traditional architecture reflect the cultural lifestyle of the people and represent the symbols of the heritage of the residents. In view of all the above, this research focuses on the Hausa housing characters with emphasis on privacy.

Agboola and Zango (2014) stated that 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. The degree to which spatial partitioning occurs varies from culture to culture. In Hausa traditional culture, spatial boundaries are of prime importance in planning the use of space. The Hausas create physical boundaries using walls, curtains and other partitions these boundaries play a major role in privacy (Osasona, 2007).

Some scholars (Hamza & Sani-Kastina, 2018; Hamza, 2010; Abdul-Rahim, 2006; Hakim & Zubair, 2006) over the years have works on Hausa Traditional Architecture but did not indicate how privacy should be in the contemporary design. 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 research seeks to study this traditional and religious system of privacy and its application in the contemporary residential design.

Therefore, this study is aimed at enhancing privacy in the design of contemporary residential houses by way of drawing inspiration from the Hausa socio-cultural values through identification of the Hausa socio-cultural values and how they manifest in residential house and/or relates to provision of privacy to the Hausa traditional house.

### **Traditional Hausa Settlements in Nigeria**

The indigenous traditional system in (Nigeria) can also be described as, the traditional way of living based on family organization, historically developed building typologies and methods, using available local materials, climatic conditions and religious convictions of the inhabitants (Adeyemi, 2008).

The 'core' of a compound is in fact an open courtyard; the family spends greater part of its life. This is the place where children may quietly crawl or play undisturbed by-passing vehicles (Dmochowski, 1990). There one may chat with the other members of the family, there in attached space the food is prepared and eaten, and there one may sleep during hot nights. The division between external and internal spaces is definitely accentuated in Hausa Islamic architecture influenced by Purdah - the seclusion of women. In the other parts of the country although religion does not impose such strict division that even there the function of the compound and its internal courtyard is well accentuated in the layout. The other characteristic features of Nigerian compound are that it grows together with the family. It may start as one or two rooms or huts and as the family size and fortunes increase the other spaces are successfully added. There is even an old saying that "the day you stop building your house you will die" Popoola (1984).

The living tradition of the Hausa-man is influenced by three main factors: -

- a. Environmental Factors
- b. Religious Factors
- c. Cultural Factors

### **Settlement Patterns in Hausa land**

In considering an analysis of the spatial formation of the Hausa Housing Environment as well as its transformation, one requires an understanding of the settlement pattern in Hausa land. Aduwo (2011) notes that the variations in settlement pattern tend to coincide with ethnic differences, thus ethnicity appears to provide a convenient framework. Hausa land in Nigeria is broadly within the region of nuclear settlements, with some major urban centres and few dispersed rural settlements.

The differentiation between urban and rural settlements in Hausa land is not decided matter. Since the people normally view the urban settlement as part and parcel of the surrounding rural areas and rural lifestyle, called Anguwani much like the rural communities.

Popoola (1984) reveals that the rural landscape is dominated by nuclear villages, with the possibility of some isolated compounds. The villages are usually old and some still have the remains of the old settlement walls. The isolated and dispersed compounds are associated with more recent settlements having strong link with some nuclear settlements not far from such dispersed settlements. There are basically three traditional settlement types in Hausa land. These settlement types form a hierarchy and will be discussed.

#### ***Kwauye :***

Kwauye (village) is only found in rural areas. An urban dweller will normally detest being referred to as from the kwauye (village) that is basically a collection of patrilineal family groups, in a nuclear hamlet, organized for agriculture. The farmland (gona) is contiguous and separated from that of other kwauyuka (villages) by waste (daji).

#### ***Gari:***

Gari is larger settlement, in the form of a township, consisting of distantly related family groups and some strangers. A gari will normally have a collection of anguwanni (wards) consisting of homogenous groups, based on family ties or common religious or occupational roles.

Perchonock (1976) notes that the introduction of the use of iron into Hausa land was probably a factor in the growth of such towns. Two other factors associated with the development of garuruwa (towns) are:

- i. The availability of extensive fertile farmlands for agriculture
- ii. Sites selected based on religious consideration. Some locations became centers associated with the cult of certain iskoki (spirits) and thus attracted larger number of immigrants who formed garuruwa (towns).
- iii. A gari (town) does not have wall fortification and it is likely, according to Smith, that the fortification of some garuruwa was associated with wars post-dating the foundation of the states in Hausa land.

#### ***Birni.:***

A Birni (City) is cosmopolitan with people migrating into the centre from diverse groups. It is always a walled city and its fortifications appear to have been an essential element in the emergence of such cities. The walls also encircled farmland, in case of protracted siege against the birni. Some of the birane (Cities) became centres of political power or capital cities of the Hausa city states.

A discussion on the birane (Cities) in Hausa land will involve a consideration of the political situation in Hausa land. Some traditional Hausa birane (cities) will be considered in relation to four periods of Hausa political history.

### **Methodology**

The methodology used for this research work was descriptive analysis and the primary source of information is through case study (this is done through a questionnaire survey). Case study selection criteria was purposive to help reflect the state of mind of Northern Nigerians and also depends on the function of the building, services, facilities available, size, location and relevance to the research.

**Questionnaire Survey:** A total 250 questionnaires were distributed at random based on the number of respondents available as at the time of visit to the estates. A total 234 questionnaires were retrieved. The questionnaire consists of three (3) sections: Demographic of respondents, likert scale question section of level of privacy and that of ranking of privacy elements.

### **Results and Discussion**

#### **Questionnaire Response Demographic Data**

Demographic data reveals that most respondents are male (90%) with mostly educational attainment level of SSCE to their second degree. About 4.1% of the sample has attained third degree (Table 1). This result also supports the assertion that the Hausa's tradition most times restricts the movement of their females. The age range of respondent together with their marital status are also evenly distributed.

Table 1: Demographic data of respondents

Variables	Categories	Number (197)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	123	51.7
	Female	115	48.3
Age Range	16 - 20	63	26.5
	20 - 25	44	18.5
	26 - 30	6	2.5
	31 - 36	82	34.5
	36 Above	43	18.1
Occupation	Student	111	46.6
	Employed	127	53.4
Geo-Political Zone	North Central	93	39.1
	North West	86	36.1
	North East	59	24.8
Marital Status	Single	123	51.7
	Married	115	48.3
House Ownership Status	Inherited	8	3.4
	Bought	33	13.9
	Gov't Allocation	70	29.4
	Donation	41	17.2
	Owner Occupier	19	8.0
	Rent	55	23.1
	Retired	6	2.5
	Missing	6	2.5
Income Rate	0 - 100,000	5	2.1
	100,000 - 300,000	50	21.0
	300,000 - 500,000	95	39.9
	500,000 - 1,000,000	88	37.0
Family Size	1 - 5	49	20.6
	6-10	56	23.5
	11-15	26	10.9
	16-20	48	20.2
	21-Above	58	24.8

### Section 'B' of the Questionnaire

Table 4.3 and figure 4.3 below indicated the level of satisfaction with the present residential building and the variables considered are ranked as follows: Visual and Acoustic Privacy (Mean, 3.44); Adult Male Members (Mean, 3.35); Unrelated Male visitors (Mean, 3.33); Parent and Adult daughters (Mean, 3.15); Male Servants (Mean, 3.10); Passer-by (Mean, 3.03); Male Children (Mean, 2.79); Female Members (Mean, 2.75); Related Female Visitors (Mean, 2.63); Neighbours (Mean, 1.69).

Table 2: Level of satisfaction with the present residential building

Variables	Number	Sum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Visual and Acoustic Privacy	206	709	3.44	.970
Adult Male Members	226	757	3.35	1.106
Unrelated Male Visitors	207	689	3.33	1.060
Parent and Adult Daughters	226	711	3.15	1.029
Male Servants	212	658	3.10	1.092
Passer-by	224	679	3.03	1.048
Male Children	226	630	2.79	1.066
Female Members	227	625	2.75	1.241
Related Female Visitors	220	579	2.63	1.219
Neighbours	207	349	1.69	.844

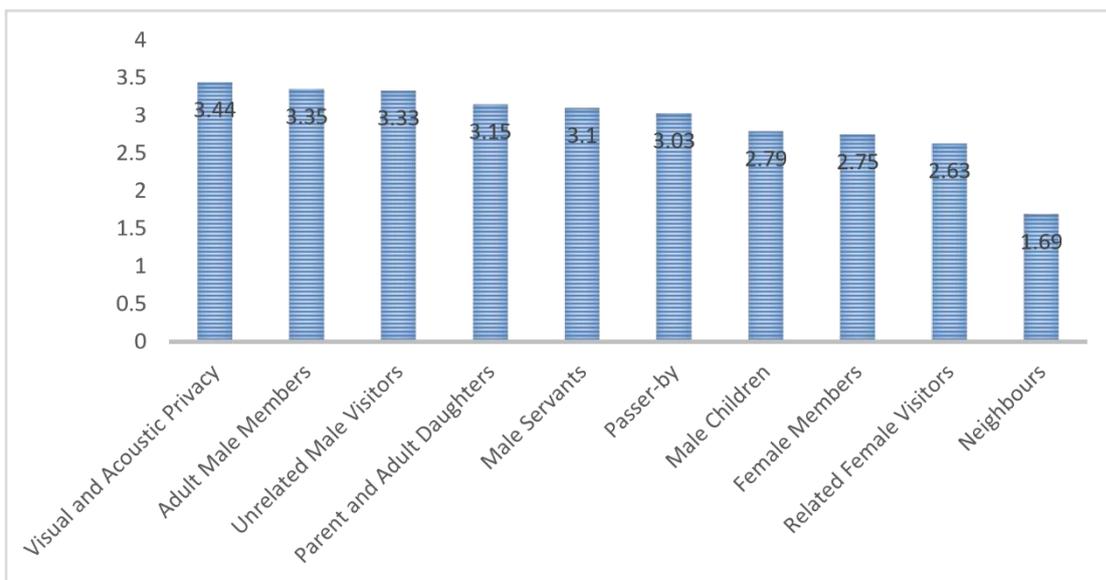


Figure 1: level of satisfaction with the present residential building

**Section ‘C’ of the Questionnaire**

The figure 4.4 and table 4.4 below indicated the building element that perform best in term of privacy provision is the Anti-room (Mean, 4.53), followed by the courtyard (Mean, 4.29) and the entrance porch (Mean, 3.93) while the other variable also shows high level of privacy and they include: Private Quarters (Mean, 3.65); Surrounding Fence (Mean, 2.75); Partition walls (Mean, 2.21); Male Adolescent room (Mean, 1.99) and lastly the reading room (Mean, 1.84).

Table 3: Ranking of performance of building elements according to their privacy provision

Variables	Number	Sum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Anti-room	225	1020	4.53	.791
Courtyard	226	985	4.29	.802
Entrance Porch	222	845	3.93	1.004
Private Quarters	225	854	3.65	.912
Surrounding Fence	205	564	2.75	1.085
Partition Walls	214	473	2.21	.997
Male Adolescent Room	215	427	1.99	.823
Reading Room	225	414	1.84	.892

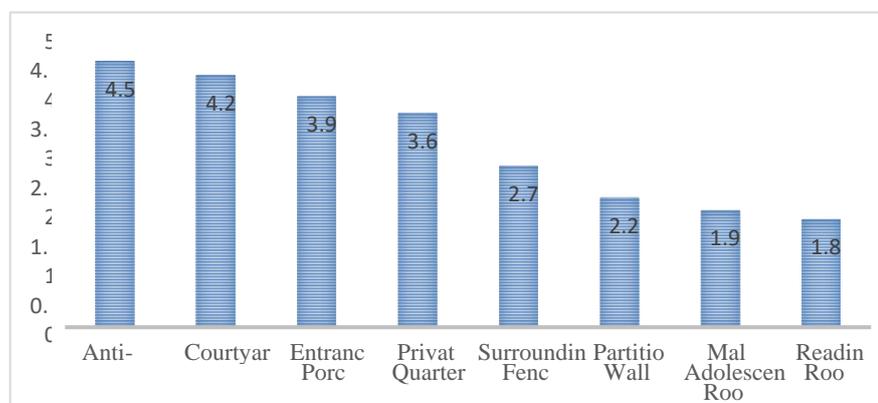


Figure 2: level of satisfaction with the present residential building

### Conclusion

This paper concludes with a suggestion for the redefinition and diversification of current research and design practice in the cultural context of the Hausa people of Northern Nigeria. Human habitats are like a network of sentimental and spatial considerations that form an interactive whole. For this fundamental reason, knowledge and information about the design, meaning, and use of boundaries and spaces in Hausa residential architecture can only be derived from a comprehensive understanding of the socio-cultural and religious norms present in this society.

This research was established to find out ways in which the privacy which is a very essential component in the socio-cultural requirements of the Hausa people could be enhanced in the design of residential houses. A house means more than a dwelling place to the occupants; it is a source of identification and cultural reference. This cultural reference stems from the way of life of the people and transmits into every sphere in their lives including their houses. Both qualitative and quantitative research strategies were adopted using case study approach. A proportionate stratified random sampling technique was employed to select three estates. Both primary and secondary sources of data were employed and the instrument of data collection used was questionnaires.

The design strategies adopted from literature were used in assessment of selected cases. The research objectives were met and from the section section of the questionnaire, the

level of satisfaction with the present residential building and the variables considered shows that among the three tiers of privacy, the one which offered the least satisfaction among the respondents in all three estates are the satisfaction against the external world with a total average of 30% followed by the satisfaction among members of the household with a rating of 55.5%. The satisfaction with privacy against those allowed into the house had the highest rating of 61%.

For the elements considered, the ranking according to respondents as to the performance of building elements in terms of privacy according to descending order is as follows: Anti-room (Mean, 4.53), followed by the courtyard (Mean, 4.29) and the entrance porch (Mean, 3.93) while the other variable also shows high level of privacy and they includes: Private Quarters (Mean, 3.65); Surrounding Fence (Mean, 2.75); Partition walls (Mean, 2.21); Male Adolescent room (Mean, 1.99) and lastly the reading room (Mean, 1.84).

### Recommendations

Understanding the Hausa principles of privacy and the mechanisms employed to control it will enhance the professional acumen of parties involved in the development of the built environment. It is important, therefore, that a dialogue between designers and users of human places be established. This will provide a better understanding of how various individuals value the concept of privacy, and will help establish more appropriate parameters for the design of residential spaces.

- I. Building codes and regulations should be revised and incorporate lessons from the cultural needs and demands of all regions in Nigeria.
- II. Privacy in residential housing cannot be achieved if the potential users socio-cultural requirements are not considered at the design stage.
- III. Designers should embark on more research in order to make the housing provided acceptable to occupants.
- IV. A multi-disciplinary approach which also involves potential users should be adopted when planning and designing residential houses.
- V. Professional practice regulatory bodies should encourage designers who express culture in their works through awards and recognition.

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