

Zanen Gida, Modernity and Postcolonial Ambience

Graves, Nelson P.

*Department of Fine and Applied
Arts, Ignatius Ajuru University
of Education, Rumuolumeni,
Port Harcourt*

Article DOI:
10.48028/iiprds/ijsreth.v9.i1.10

Abstract

Engaging a historical analogy, this article pursues a discourse of the revolution of imageries in the *Zanen Gida* artform. Employing a photographic documentation to show case basic examples of the traditional mud-wall decorations, firstly; but moving on with examples of recent developments in varied commonplace imageries, it is possible to dare a reading of modernity and, even the postcolonial ambience in this, otherwise, Hausa Islamic Wall decoration *realia*. A historical narrative, supported by a reel of visual images of the artwork were value able in delivering the subject of the essay.

Keywords:

Architecture,
Interior decorations,
Modernity,
Postcolonial,
Ambience.

Corresponding Author:
Graves, Nelson P.

Background to the Study

With Hausa-Islamic wall decorations, it is proper to recognise the influences of Islam and her civilization in the hybridization and development of architecture and its decorative paraphernalia. Decorations and Islamic Architecture associated with it, represents the crystallization of Islamic culture and the cultures of indigenous Hausa peoples. Hence the visual tableau *Zanen Gida* represents that unique synthesis that echoes features of Islamic hegemonic impressionistic dicta and local Hausa decorative elements. The resultant tableau tells us that Wall decoration entails a conscious effort on the part of the builder to order his materials into a design, which is, first and foremost, pleasing to the eye. Modern day decorator materials are numerous: cement, mortar, glass; and plastics with the varied synthetic fiber-glass realia now commonplace, and at the disposal of the builder and decorator.

Wall surface are tableaux of information flow and control mechanisms like contemporary advertisement Billboards. Indeed, walls have been engaged as prestige and status identification realia in the cities and towns of Hausa-land, the so called Birnin of Hausa-land (FIGS 1-5), and points of registrations for adherents of the Islamic faith, the dominant religion of Hausa-land. However, the keen observer gifted with the python's eye would notice the concentration of unique iconographies on Front-door entrances and facades of buildings, especially palaces and the homes of the aristocracy and the nouveau-riche; doorways and passage-ways, points of transition in buildings (FIGS, 1,2,3&4). However, in more recent walls, design and embellishment of outer wall, especially have moved away from the purity of Islamic religious hegemonic imageries/ images to more abstract and the direct representation of geometric Islamic dicta, permitting the smuggling-in of contemporary commonplace artifacts: Bicycle; commonplace icons like the Sword, the Butcher's knife, *et cetera*. The Lozenges image: and a host of items plucked from the Hausa town peoples' everyday (FIGS, 6&7). Even a modern-day architectural edifice, the Tafawa Balewa Mausoleum, Bauchi (FIG. 8).

In fact, modern day Walls and their melee of non-doctrine, deftly non-religious imageries and symbologist suggests an artistic modernist means of parting-ways from the titular *magi strum* of the once doctrinaire Islamic faith that the historian Adeleye (1971,232) described most graphically as a cohesive religion that regulates and directs even the behavior of her adherents. It is important to take a long look at the pre-history of Hausa land, before, the Jehads, wars of politico-religious conquest of Hausa-land; that land was a place made up of several and varied disparate peoples of Negros stock. This is the grounding from which to take a reading of the radical departures from the Islamic doctrine mud wall decorations that the discourse of this paper impinges upon. Even the entirely architectural studies of Nigerian traditional indigenous architecture executed by the Pole Dmochowski (1990) emphatically took an ethnography survey of the traditional architecture of the peoples of Nigeria, thus, it is bold to aver that the so called Hausa architecture of the Hausa-land borrowed the bulk of its building features (the rib-vaulting realia comes straight to mind) ; and architectonic mechanisms from the original peoples of the places of conquest.

The architect, art historian and writer Labelle Prussian's reflections on the subject keys-in; and is a conveyor-belts for the discourse of *Zanen Gida*, Modernity and Postcolonial Ambience.

Labelle Prussin (1976) avers:

;;;;; the surfaces of an architectural form constitute a graphic system revealing space as well as form to both viewer and user. Furthermore, surfaces are called upon to play a greater role in communication in non or semiliterate societies where communication can be affected through a wide range of visual and aural media".

The message, therefore, on these modern Hausa walls suggest subversion of the tenets of traditional decorations that have been the rule in traditional walls. Subversion is art's way implicating a change of guard in the subject, *Zanen Gida* Wall decorations.

Conclusion

In a postcolonial 20th century, it is simply real to recognize imperatives of development of individual and in a society that is multi-media dominates, in fact internet driven; modernity and the insistent break with traditional society, the *transvanguardist* lore is reality. It remains a shock of the new in all experience of everyday life. A circularist *verve* seems the new direction in the, otherwise, hegemony in Islam and its decoration practices. Besides, in the postcolonial time and place, with its post-industrial series of new materials it is imperative to note that the change that this paper suggests in the materials for Hausa architectural interior design is bound to change. It is only true for time to tell new materials with institute new methods of construction and frame new profiles. It is therefore true that modernity and the postcolonial time would frame another ambience in Hausa architectural wall decorations. The Tafawa Balewa mausoleum, Bauchi, its architecture inspite its simulation from the traditional architecture of old, it is now entirely a new edifice built of concrete, cement mortar; with on and all over pattern design in relief formation (FIG8).

References

Adeleye, R. A. (1971). *Poer and diplomacy in Northern Nigeria (1804-1900)* Longman, London,

Aradeon, S. B. (1984). *Traditional Hausa Mud- rooted architecture – A provisional classification of Hausa structural systems, and their resultant ceiling patterns*, Ph.D thesis, ABU,

Dmochowski, Z, R. (1990). *An introduction to Nigerian traditional architecture, 1*, Ethnographica Ltd, & The National Commission for Museums and Monuments,

Prussin, L. Fulani-Hausa architecture, *African Arts, ULCA, 19/b Vol X., No. 1* P.1b.

Prussin, L. Architecture t 19 lb) Representation; (ULCA) XIX, and Arts Bravamann, R Islam African No.33.

Saad, H. T. (1981). *Between myth and reality – The aesthetics of traditional architecture Hausa land (2 Vols)*, unpublished PhD dissertation, Uni-Michigan, An Arbor, Mich.,).

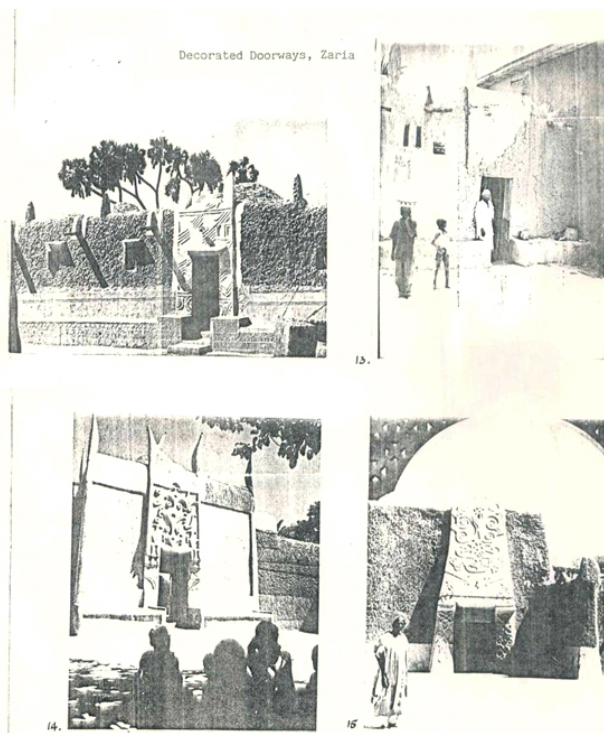


Fig. 1-4: Hausa Mud-wall architecture, concentration of Decratic Islamic pattern designs on Door-way lintel spaces,© African Arts Magazine.

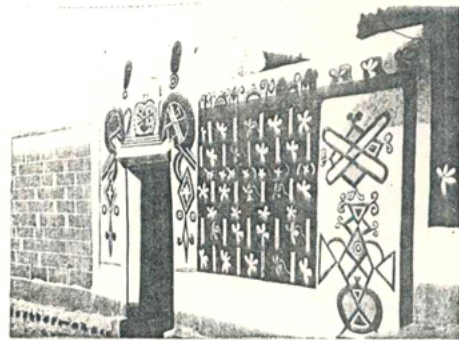
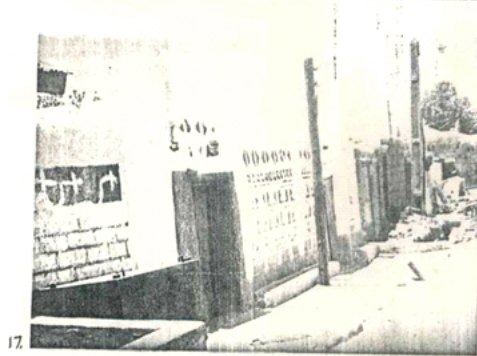
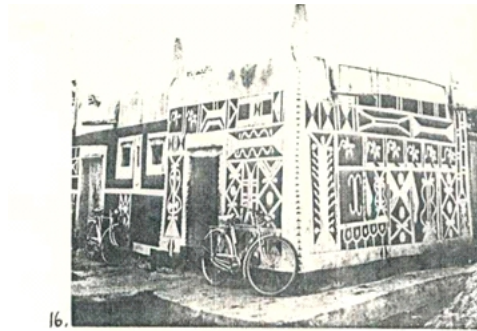


Fig. 5 & 6: All-over pattern design, Prominent Lozenges motifs, simple vegetals , Birnin Zaria, © Nelson Graves, 1989.



Fig. 7: Wall decoration Details, showing commonplace motifs like Bicycle, Trowel; the Star; © Nelson Graves, 1989.