

Urbanization and Globalization of Gbagyi Housing Transformation

Moukhtar Mohammed Mai and Shuhana Shamsuddin

Faculty of Built Environment,
Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes the changing patterns of Gbagyi housing in three decades, from 1976 to 2006. The traditional spatial order was tied to cosmology psychologically; isolated round huts physically; and tribal cohesion, socially. Focusing on housing characters and motivations of transformation, a case study research design was applied to qualitatively evaluate physical, social and psychological changes of the traditional extended family compounds. An emergent conceptual theory was triangulated with field observations to check errors. The research findings suggest a fusion of isolated housing units into a hollowed-out structure physically and fission (break up) of the tribal group socially. A fashion of individualism apparently replaces communal responsibility, with Islam and Christianity as moderators. Some identified motives for transformation are socio-economic, cultural and spatial; but economics of income generation assumes priority. Such a loss of spatial identity has a global implication on cultural sustainability of vernacular settlements in urban environments.

Keywords: Environmental design behaviour, housing transformation, spatial identity, motivation and Nigeria.

1. INTRODUCTION

The rate of urbanization and globalization has an impact on the transformation of traditional settlements physically and culturally. This phenomenon is most glaring in fast growing cities like Abuja, Nigeria's federal capital territory (FCT). Here, the influx of settlers cashing in on the expanding economic opportunities has put pressure on the existing settlements to accommodate them. Nigeria, as in other developing countries, still depends more on informal housing delivery system. The traditional Gbagyi vernacular housing as observed in many traditional settings is being subjected to modifications and improvisation to

accommodate more spaces for tenants. The sustainability of this housing spatial identity is hereby questioned, as the transformation affects the long established indigenous cultural values. Urbanization and acculturation apparently contribute to the gradual lost of such indigenous housing patterns. This paper analyzes the changing patterns of a case study on Gbagyi housing in three significant periods of FCT-Abuja development: *incipient* (1976-1986), *intermediate* (1987-1991) and *consolidated* (1992-2006). It also attempts to highlight the contributing factors for the transformation.

The paper is divided into five sections. It starts with an introduction of Gbagyi housing modifications and improvisations due to informal urbanism. This is followed by the research background that spells out Gbagyi identity crisis, and the impact of urbanization on indigenes' worldview. Thirdly, the research method outlines the qualitative case study research design, triangulated by multiple field observations and other sources. Section 4 discusses the research results in terms of structural analysis of motives for the transformation, as well as the physical, social and psychological patterns. The final section concludes the paper with its contributions to knowledge, as well as recommendations for the appropriate integration of indigenous settlements promptly into sustainable urban environments.

2. BACKGROUND: GBAGYI IDENTITY CRISIS

Karu Community, made up of Karu, Nyanya and Jikwoyi villages, has been regarded as the fastest growing Abuja peri-urban settlements. In 2004, it accommodates nearly 60,000 inhabitants, and majority of who are migrants (Junaidu, 2004: 130-137; CASSAD, 2004). The destitute condition of the migrants' coupled with the severe shortage in the supply of residential land accelerated the transformation of the traditional dwellings especially urban fringes. Balogun (2001: 103) described a typical Gbagyi housing unit to be

composed of a cluster of rooms around a courtyard, with a centrally placed family granary.

This indigenous cultural group suffered identity crisis due to urbanization, and acculturation. Huntington (1996: 125) in his classic, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, observed that the 1990s saw the eruption of global identity crisis. The post-cold war years witnessed severe identity related contestations worldwide. Joireman (2003: 13) opined that those violent manifestations of nationalism in the 1990s and early twenty first century were “surprisingly in their brutality”. Gbagyi housing pattern as manifested in vernacular housing form and spatial order is a physical identity that needs to be appraised by its characters. It has to respond to the influx of the urban poor migrants into the federal capital, Abuja. Consequently, residential transformation to meet economics of demand and supply on one hand, and the invading cultures on the other. Jega (2000), Osaghae (1995) submitted that economic forces transform several identities considerably. Ogoh (2004) noted most identities, invented or natural, real or imagined are riddled with “internal contradictions and a multiplicity of contestation layers”. Gbagyi contestation of multiple identities could be traced to inhabiting factors such as Islam, Christianity, dispersion, colonialism, modernization, urbanization, weak power base, and poverty. Moreover, Gbagyi cultural group through national and local platforms is currently coordinating efforts to sustain its identity (Je’adeyibe, 2005).

Housing, as a physical manifestation of society’s culture, is dynamic. Housing transformation is an inevitable response to changing needs occasioned by socio-economics of survival. As universally observed, families require satisfactory dwelling environment throughout their respective life cycles. Housing transformation, whether by moving, improving or a combination of both seeks to obtain satisfactory habitat.

Gbagyi is at cross roads, engulfed by conflicting dictates of religions, cultures, political decisions and survival economics. No wonder their response to such myriad influences is multi-layered. As shown in Figures 1 and 2 below, both Gbagyi traditional settlement and compound assume circular pattern.

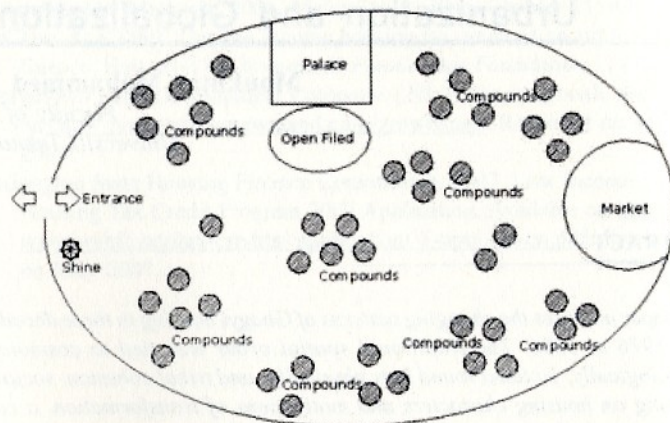


Figure 1: A typical Gbagyi traditional settlement as sketched by a key informant.

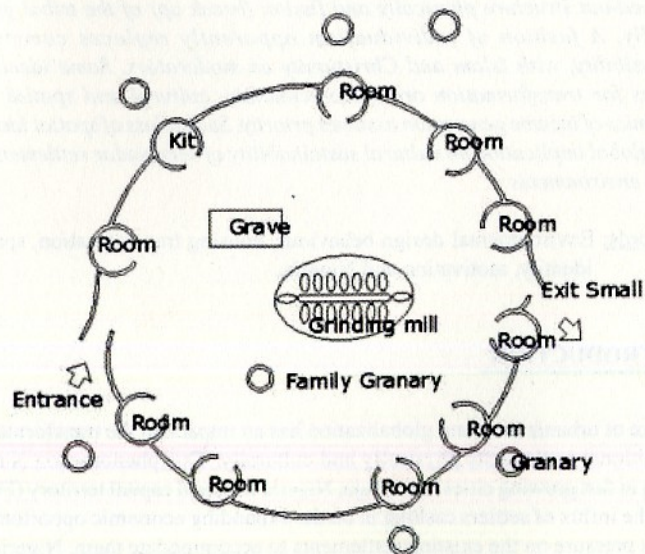


Figure 2: Typical Gbagyi rural compound (Source: Adapted from Balogun, 2001: 103)

