

# Palace Architecture: Culture as a Determinant of Its Design

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**Abstract:** Proposing that architecture and culture coexistence between them, it follows that architecture must 'house' the activities of culture. Culture is the manner in which people do things, how life is lived, and describes the total life style of the people in a particular location. Culture to fulfill its role, must have functional space in which it can display and manifest its activity. Architectural design must therefore be able to provide space in which this activity and life style can take place. While it is a fact that both architecture and culture are dynamic in nature and will move towards what is better, culture must not easily succumb to architectural demands and its attractiveness. To this end, research must be thorough enough to provide solutions to avoid erasing the richness of culture. Architecture must not be too quick to give its solution at the expense of culture. The coming up of design and construction of tradition chiefs palaces country wide has prompted the writing of this paper to avoid the approaches to the designs which seem to have omitted the aspect of culture which is supposed to have manifested in the designs. The argument lies in that culture must be compensated in the design of architecture because of the interaction which exists between culture and architecture. The paper tries to investigate the major importance of palace architecture development of the Lamba chiefs of the Copperbelt Province of Zambia.

**Keywords:** Architecture, Chiefs, Culture, Functionality, Palace, Zambia

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## 1. Introduction

Tradition chiefs are important in the roles which they play together with the government in the governance of the country's affairs even though they seem to lack types of residences which suit them as tradition rulers. To address this situation, the government of the Republic of Zambia has started construction of chiefs' palaces country wide [7]. The essence of this programme is to provide better palaces which suits their status as tradition chiefs.

The current palace layouts do not seem to work adequately for today's chieftom with its bigger and more sophisticated population. Therefore there is need to design and construct palaces which will have good functional spaces in which activities of the chiefs inhabitants can be performed.

The available information on the current conditions and type of chiefs' palaces has its own limitations and research shows only a tip of the ice berg of what has been explored.

Both western and modern trends have not done much to educate younger generations of the traditional residence patterns and forms which may now be resulting in the

gradual loss of knowledge of culture of Zambia.

For architecture to perform and achieve its goal, it must provide activity and functional spaces that are needed to allow these activities to take place in a dignified lifestyle. The palace design for the chiefs needs to be revised in line with the space and infrastructure requirements of Zambian chieftaincy and culture.

During the field work for collection of data for this article, it was observed in the three palaces visited, which were for Senior Chief Mushili, Chief Nkambo and Her Royal Highness Chieftainess Malembeka that the design of these palaces opted for a replica of an ordinary medium or high cost house design and tagged palace. Not much attention seemed to have been given to intertwine between cultural architecture and urban architecture. This paper therefore queries the rationale behind the palace architecture in use for construction of the chiefs' palaces and seeks that such phenomenal used must have some viewpoints of cultural background.

In taking up the challenge, this research tends to collect

some information and present a documentation of the traditional residences on the Copperbelt Province of Zambia which can then be used towards achieving this very important government policy.

The paper seeks to emphasize culture as one of the great determinants which can be used in arriving at the rationale in the design of the chiefs' palaces. The paper has used a case study of Senior Chief Mushili's Palace to take inventory of the current status of the palace and the structures that composes the chief's residence. The paper further defines the role of a chief as a traditional leader, a brief history and culture of the lamba people and then concludes its discussion, findings and recommendations.

## 2. Palace Architecture: Culture as a Determinant to Its Design

Architecture is an important factor in strengthening and preserving culture. This is seen when the various activities performed in a space reveals values of culture of the people in such a space. This implies the need for architecture to provide functional space in which culture is practiced and manifested. Because there is a relationship between culture and architecture, it shows the reason to care about the link of man's behavior in such space. In this way, culture is said to be the reason why man relates to space.

There are a number of variables that affect the types of rural buildings found in Zambia. However cultural influence on architecture is discussed here as it defines palace architecture in this paper. Gathering the definition of the word culture from many respected authors on this subject, culture here simply means the life style of the people, and how their shelters are used. It is of such important factor in determining the types and forms of building structures. How big the family is, how the various spaces are shared, how food is prepared and how it is consumed, how people mingle with each other and the culture of the people in general determines the type of a dwelling layout and its size.

Culture also affects how the building appears to look like because the people themselves chooses how to decorate their buildings based on their understanding of their culture as well as their beliefs.

A society has its culture, and based on this culture its architecture is also established. The architecture of such a society is what becomes the symbol of that culture. As a matter of fact architecture reveals the culture of the people and further dictates various ways in which space is formed and used.

Palace architecture ought to sustain cultural values because it is its role to preserve culture. Therefore, the architects and the other allied professions in building and construction industry and are assigned in this policy to construct chiefs' palaces should examine the approach through observing the cultural life style of the people and their cultural values. The paper urges the need for further data collection and theoretical analysis in order to be used in the design processes.

## 3. Literature Review

As earlier mentioned, there seems to exist a mutual relationship between Architecture and Culture. Buildings are constructed to help us solve practical problems and Ballantyne [2] argues that buildings actually do more than just that and when they do we are motivated to call them 'Architecture', because they have a cultural dimension. As Farhad and Mohammad [3] puts it, the identification of the society is embodied in the concept of 'architecture and culture' meaning that any civilization can be defined by its architecture and hence being seen to be a symbol as well as a culture which can easily be known and identify the type of a particular society. However, with the advent of globalization, this unique relationship between architecture and culture is slowly being ignored. Many scholars agree that world economic and cultural globalization has a big effluence in the disintegration which has occurred in relationship between architecture and culture. Yasser Mahgoub [8], quotes Lim [8] that architects in Singapore very actively undertook to change traditions to show how contemporary truths were able to alter cultural values and ways of life. Hence they developed a concept known as contemporary vernacular, which meant taking deliberate move to expose some specific customs to different layouts in different locations and different weather patterns. They then externalized the existing symbolic appearances into new forms. In developing countries, El-sheshtawy et. al. [11] claims that cities are being planned into what they term 'co-existence' model. This is where requirement of modernity and the need to change are enforced while still keeping the elements of traditions.

In their article, 'An Inquiry into Cultural Continuity and Change in Housing: Mokhtarshahi R. S. Mahasti and Mahasti P. [10], made the following observation:

Human beings can imagine of places in which they would want to settle in and some of the demands of the people in relation to modern settlements is to make sure that the settlement has some level of modernity in its existence. Currently, this plays a major reason why tradition housing types are less popular compared to the house types that are modern in their appearance. But even then, examples of Iranian residences are not currently classified in relation to their modernity appearance, the houses that are there are of different types which are not fully accepted to satisfy the occupants as the type of home they expect. Therefore the proper solution to providing contemporary dwellings is to keep to modernity demands as well as the traditional requirements. In keeping required characteristics of rural dwellings and at the same time keep modern features of modern housing, it is regarded possible that it can give answers in contemporary house development.

It is imperative for designers that they are alive to the fact that they cannot afford to completely annulment cultural factors in the way they design space if they are to provide the much desired client satisfaction. Architecture has been known to provide culture with the rhythm, philosophy, spirituality, values, ethics, vernacular culture, connection to

memory and history. On the other hand, the culture of each society can be identified through its manifestations such as Art and Architecture. Paul Memmott and Cathy Keys [9] further observe that the theory of 'cultural sustainability' in architecture must be supported by a definition of architecture that is sensitive to and embracing of cross-cultural contexts and values and not overly dominated by Western concepts.

## 4. Chiefs' Roles

Traditional chiefs have an obligation to ensure fairness and justice to all the people in their chiefdoms. They exercise control over all issues pertaining to land tenure, inheritance of wealth, resolving differences and conflicts and making sure that the tradition law is upheld. In short, chiefs are essentially over all overseers in managing their chiefdoms.

Traditional chiefs play a major part in partnering with the government, to build a better life for all their people. They ensure that both culture and tradition are maintained because they provide characteristics that recognizes and identifies the people.

Zambia has a deep and strong culture due to the prolonged reservation of information passed on from generation to generation by way of tradition and cultural ceremonies. Celebration of these ceremonies is one way which gives knowledge and understanding of what culture is and its necessity in the daily life and reveals the past while unfolding what the future holds. The position of the government has been to assist and uphold traditions and has therefore put up the policy to construct chiefs' palaces throughout the country.

The chief is the keeper of tradition and all that which is in it. He is the guardian of tradition and culture, moral principles, and the wellbeing of his people. It is therefore within his rights to put in place systems of values and moral principles to distinguish between good and bad behavior of his people. Around the chief's palace are seen images and symbols which characterize the chief. These include the entire chief's ceremonial clothing, animal parts and animal skins and other symbols of power strictly used by the chief alone. Typical furniture, music instruments and other royal belongings are particularly housed by provision of architecture space of the palace.

### 4.1. The Lamba Chiefs

The Copperbelt Province of Zambia has a total number of 15 chiefs. These include both males and females. In the past, a chief had such powers as to imprison, enslave or in extreme cases even execute the wrong doers. These powers were passed on onto them by way of inheritance from their ancestors and were respected and accepted by the people under their chieftaincy. It is interesting to note that although the Copperbelt Province has been urbanized quite extensively, traditions and culture to a large extent has been maintained by its people.

Abena Mishishi clan is the major clan that rules the Lamba people. Senior chief Mushili is designated the Paramount Chief and he is recognized and respected by his people, other

chiefs and the government. As stated earlier in this paper, one of the major roles of the chief is to oversee and govern the wellbeing of the people in his chiefdom. Therefore the term palace is defined as an official residence of a high ranked or a very important person, in this case it means the residence of the chief. Palace is further defined by Jon Sojkowski [5], as a compound of structures. The quality, size and number of palace structures depend on power and wealth of the chief in that area. The objective of this paper is urge designers of the chiefs palaces to take into consideration to have residential designs with accommodation befitting a modern chief, to create adequate administrative facilities for the royal establishment and the ultimate goal is to provide chiefs palaces which will be structured upon what may be perceived as the needs of the chiefs in keeping with culture of the palace dwellers.

### 4.2. The Study Area

This study was carried out in Ndola rural of the Copperbelt Province of Zambia at three palaces of Senior Chief Mushili, Chief Nkambo in Ndola rural and Her Royal Highness Chieftainess Malembeka in Mpongwe District.

There are three different classifications of villages. The first one is called Umushiwamfumu, a chief's village; a chief's clan usually runs a village like this. The second one is referred to as Umushiwamuchyete, a ordinary village, it is headed by headman who is a well-known man in the community. The last type is Ichipembwe, which is headed by an ordinary man but is related to the chief [4].

This study looks at umushiwamfumu, the village of the chief where the chief resides. This study area has not been documented in any of the major literature on palace architecture in Zambia and that is why it became apparent to document the type of the palace architecture found among the Lamba chiefs on the Copperbelt Province.

## 5. Method of Collecting Data

Study materials for use in this paper were obtained through literature reviews of various documents, interviews, and general observations. Three study areas of Senior Chief Mushili, Chief Nkambo and that of Her Royal highness Chieftainess Malembeka were identified as adequate study areas.

### 5.1. Discussion of the Research Findings

When examining the cases in the study area, interpretation of the traditional and use of cultural elements have been seen to be the lacking parts of palace architecture.

Modern materials have allowed architects the freedom to express themselves in ways they could not with materials of old. Hassan Fathy an Egyptian architect acknowledges every advance in technology has been directed towards man's mastery of his environment, but advises that however fast technology advances, however radically the economy changes, all change must relate to the rate of change of man himself [6].

Modern designers are continually tempted with these material advances to replace decorative elements of past architectural styles with technological equipment. Whether this will have detrimental effect on culture is difficult to tell.

The ultimate goal of this research is to emphasize the need to sustain culture through design of functional space in which cultural style of life is enhanced. Construction of the chiefs' palaces should be structured upon what is perceived as the needs of the chiefs. These needs are based on the research findings on how a modern chieftainship may be run. The main problem with the existing palaces is the inadequacies of functional spaces. The goal is therefore to be able to satisfy the space and infrastructure needs. It is hoped that by revision, the palace architecture will adapt to the changing world whilst providing a focal point of preserving culture.

Therefore design professionals should make workable design solutions that will give improvement to the current designs and will positively and adequately affect the lifestyle of a palace. Architects and other allied professionals should consider determinants which preserve culture. It must further be emphasized that culture should be the major factor that will determine what form is to be derived at which will suit to accommodate the activity of the culture. Here, the appreciation of Zambian culture extends to architecture as much as it would extend to cover fashion, literature, and music. It must be agreed that, external influences may erode the manner and distinctive characteristics of culture if not deliberately passed on to the new generation.

## 5.2. Identity

The current palace architecture has not emphasized much of cultural identity in its form of design. Therefore functional space requirement is shared amongst different activities. Other activities are also hindered or compromised because they are not provided for.

The palace layout must be practical in its design so that different performances can be performed in those areas. Therefore palace architecture should be designed in such a way to allow different activities to be performed so that it meets the requirements and cultural demands of its inhabitants. Functionally, the palace layout should be able to provide space for family affairs, general meetings as well as for business activities. The layout design should provide good control of security so that various functions of the palace are satisfied in the provision of space for their use. The layout pattern should further include requirement of modernity in its function, usage of local building materials and the general appearance.

There is need to incorporate traditional architecture in particular reference to its plan design, materials to be used, construction details and all other services which makes up for a good architectural design.

The palace layout should provide such spaces for social meetings, various celebrations, business meetings and defensive spaces. Its design should also provide for preservation of traditions and cultural characteristics which may eroded due to emphasis of modernity demands

especially in urban areas. Characteristics of tradition and cultural design should be learnt and be included in modern architectural designs.

Therefore there is need for this documentation because vernacular architecture in general is being ignored and it is disappearing not only is an art form but also in the country's culture.

The paper further urges to share the relevance of preserving and sustaining culture through palace architecture and its beauty.

## 5.3. The Idea of Space Use

The first aspect is to find out the requirements of the palace use of space so that the basic cultural need of the user is met by providing that required space. Culture has something to do with beliefs, so architecture must respond to the needs of the habitant and relate to culture.

Palace design in this paper is dedicated to attend to the activities programme of the user. From the study of space in lamba homesteads, it was noted that a number of activities are performed in the same space due to lack of provision of enough functional space. The function in that space is not homogeneous as in so many cultures. Kazuyo Sejima puts it that when human conditions of continuous action-eating resting, sleeping and so on is divided or cut the concept of function comes to into play [12]. In the study area of this paper the space remains the same but the activity changes with time of day, so time determines the function and merges them into a continuous act. The result is that the palace building becomes a stage on which palace life is acted out in a continuous manner.

In this way the emotive quality of the space will be varied to enhance certain functions and suggest their location and the ability to trace the use of space from the exterior elevation.

There are many illustrations mentioned by learned people on how family rankings can affect the design of the type of form and space. An example of this, is how a form can be in the shape it is found in because it has been effluenced by the demands to suit the woman in her status and authority in the hierarchy of the family.

A kitchen as a space has been normally and culturally been accepted as a room where the woman has her dominion and therefore her brief of how that space is to be designed must satisfy the demands of the usage of that space. This means for example that the size for the space to be used matters just as much as how equipment and utensils are arranged. It can be said therefore that space is designed according to the cultural and functional demands at the design conceptual stage.

## 5.4. The Case of Chieftainess Malembeka

Despite her chieftainess role and duty, Her Royal Highness has traditionally a role of being a mother and a role of being a wife. One of her roles though just occasionally is to be able to prepare meals for her family. Traditionally she cannot use the same space (kitchen) and kitchen utensils which her maids also use. Culture therefore must over power

architecture so that a different kitchen space is available for her to fulfill the role of mother and wife.

We can cite talks of Rapoport on culture and privacy and how this can affect the outcome of form [1]. Depending on one's status in society will dictate how much privacy one needs and in turn will affect that type of design which will suit such privacy. Different personalities and gender has an impact on the outcome of the design and also requires a type of form and structure of architecture.

## 6. Conclusion

The paper has tried to examine the meaning of culture as one major focus point in determining the influence it has on the present design of the chiefs' palaces in this study area. It is hoped that by revising it, it will provide the type of palace architecture which is able to adapt to the changing world while providing a focal point of culture as one of the influential determinants of a chief's palace design.

This paper therefore is intended to be of use to those whose responsibilities and profession lies within built environment and its other related fields. It emphasizes and makes recommendations that those who may be tasked and have the responsibility of carrying out architectural designs for chiefs palaces and entire layouts rely on cultural determinants concepts and experts in the field of palace design. It is hoped that in this way there can be a more proper and careful selection of building materials and application of principles of design in tradition architecture will help in achieving improved palace architecture design.

In preparing this paper many factors essential to the designs of palace architecture were considered. Impact of modernity blended with tradition understanding and concept based on cultural requirements was also taken into account. The paper puts emphases which relevant experts in the field of built environment should adhere to together with some of the accepted tradition building styles and their type of construction in order to keep and preserve their historical

importance. No doubt, there could be some shortcomings in their designs and construction process but these can be improved on by modern applications.

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