

ANALYSING CULTURAL SYMBOL IN A PLACE OF WORSHIP: A CASE STUDY OF NIGERIAN NATIONAL MOSQUE ABUJA

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Abstract

The Nigerian National Mosque is situated in Abuja and stands for a colossal blend of Islamic architectural styles and Nigerian cultural traditions. Built in 1984, it is a center of religious and national pride, which conveys Nigeria's stand for diversity not only in religion but also in culture. This paper critically examines the mosque's installation as a public work of art which is discussed through the prism of visual culture in representation, ethics, global perspectives, subjective interpretations, and identity construction. This study maintains that based on the mosque's design and purposes, the mosque is seen not only as a house of worship but also as a major cultural and social symbol in Nigeria.

Keywords: Religious Architecture, Cultural Identity, Public Art Installation, Visual Culture, Religious Pluralism. National Mosque Abuja

Introduction

The Nigerian National Mosque is a Nigerian cultural and religious history landmark. It is located right in the centre of Abuja, the national capital. It was designed to be the country's central mosque for its large Muslim population, and it was completed in 1984. Architecturally, this mosque has been regarded as a masterpiece that represents Islamic architectural inspiration combined with Nigeria's rich cultural heritage. Through such symbolic design, ethical dimensions, global stance, diverse readings, and identity shaping, the mosque reinforces its surroundings and audiences.

The aim of this paper is to focus on how the national mosque visually engages with its environment and audience and explore the following attributes of visual culture; Representation, Ethics and Responsibilities, Global Perspectives, Subjective Interpretation and Identity Construction to evaluate the role of the mosque in representing Nigerian identity and cultural heritage and to examine the architectural design and artistic elements of the Nigerian National Mosque as a public art piece.



Figure 1: Aerial view of the National Mosque, Source: Sayed A. (2022)

Nigeria's religious and cultural identity is well represented by the Nigerian National Mosque which is a powerful symbol. Incorporating traditional Islamic elements and motifs from Nigerian culture, its architectural design depicts the country's vast artistic background (Adegbite, 2010). The central dome of the mosque is big and covered in gold, signifying the holy light of Islam whilst each of its four minarets at a height of 120 meters stands tall echoing the call to prayer that reverberates across the city. This blending of Nigerian and Islamic influences underscores Nigeria's cultural richness as well as religious pluralism.



Figure 2: Facade of the mosque, Source: Iqnar.com (2018)

Findings And Discussions Representation

The unity and coexistence among various religious communities in Nigeria can be seen through this mosque. Its strategic position in Abuja, Nigeria's capital city also shows it acts as a spiritual centre for Muslims living in Nigeria. The Mosque serves as a reminder of how much tolerance exists in Nigeria towards religion and also an acknowledgment of Muslim contributions to Nigeria history (Smith, 2012). It also works as a national symbol that helps reinforce beliefs in multicultural societies which welcome diversity instead of differences.

Inside the mosques, it has intricate carved wooden panels, beautiful patterns of geometric designs, marble floors, and calligraphic inscriptions from the Holy Quran on walls that have been designed for the mosque, and mosaics reflecting the rich artistic traditions of the Islamic culture.

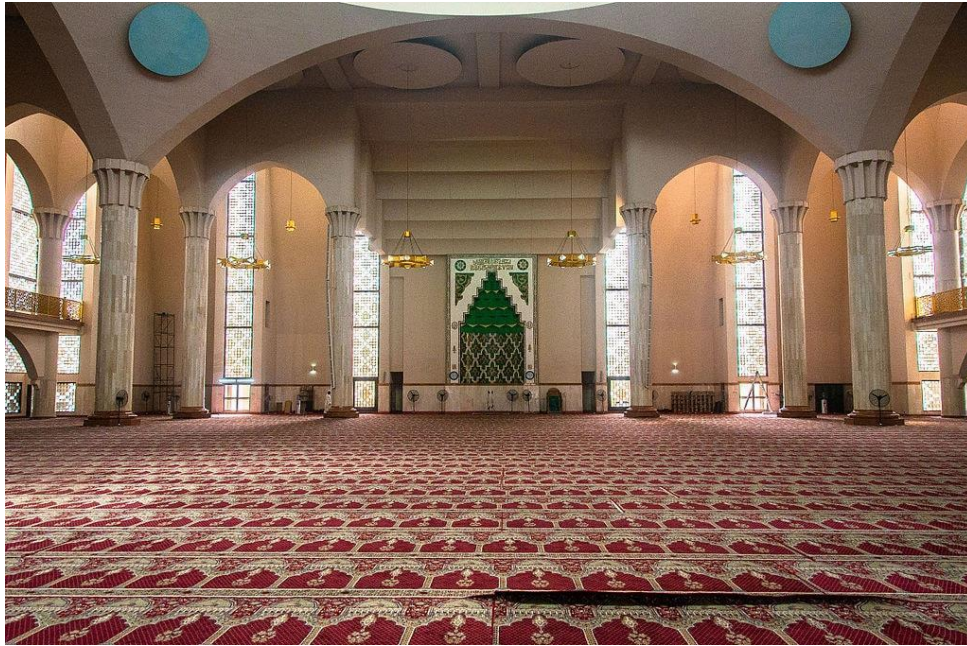


Figure 3: Interior view of the prayer hall, Source:Iqnar.com (2018)



Figure 4: Interior view of the prayer hall showing the upper floor where the women's section is situated, Source: Boomsbeat.com (2015)

These elements do not only enhance the aesthetic appeal of the mosque but are also vital visual representations of the Islamic teachings and values (Sulaiman, 2015). The mosque's prayer hall can accommodate thousands of worshippers, emphasising its role as a central hub for Nigeria's Muslim community. Its combination traditional Islamic designs and Nigerian architectural patterns the mosque comes out as a representation of Nigeria's multireligious status and identity, where these Islamic designs and Nigerian architecture styles have been seamlessly merged together. The mosque's construction design is a testament to the country's Islamic roots, and it symbolizes faith and unity in a nation characterized by cultural diversity.



Figure 5: Facade of the mosque, Source: Outravelandtour.com (2015)

Ethics And Responsibilities

Some ethical issues are raised concerning the manner in which public funds are used for religious projects in the process of construction and the maintenance of the Nigerian National Mosque. Though this mosque shows how committed the government is towards religious inclusivity and national oneness, it still raises these concerns regarding just and fair distribution of resources among different religious groups. By making use of public funds in a way that is sensitive to and mindful of all religious communities, a sense of ethical responsibility is met by the Nigerian government in regard to its people (Williams, 2017).

The status of the mosque implies that it is essential for the mosque to contribute to the cause of inter-religious dialogue and peaceful coexistence. It is a platform in which respect and understanding among the different religious groups of Nigeria are promoted. Through the organising of interfaith events and discourse, the mosque becomes an essential player in enhancing social cohesion and peace in the society (Sulaiman, 2015). Its presence in the capital city expresses respect toward religious tolerance and constructs bridges between different communities.

Moreover, the mosque does not limit itself to religious duties but also shoulders some social and community roles. The place offers programs and projects on education in understanding religion and culture. In its outreach function to society and in the development of a caring attitude toward societal issues, the mosque discharges its ethical duty to make a positive difference in society (Zakari, 2016). This is very crucial to a nation that values religious pluralism and diversity.

Subjective Interpretation

Different audiences have different subjective interpretations about the Nigerian National Mosque. To Nigerian Muslims, it's a sacred place where they go for prayers, meditation, gathering and meeting others. It's a symbol of their faith and is considered as spiritual anchor in the city centre (Sulaiman, 2015). The Muslim community feels united by the presence of mosque that provides them an opportunity to reconnect with their faith and heritage.

The Mosque has drawn wide-ranging interpretations from different groups in Nigeria. It could be seen by non-Muslim Nigerians and foreigners visiting the country as a remarkable piece of architecture which also reflects the diversity of religions in Nigeria. Its imposing structure and elaborate carvings make people curious about its meaning within Nigeria's national and religious identity (Zakari, 2016). For some, it may represent Nigeria's artistic genius and rich cultural heritage while others may see it as a representation of the nation's dedication to religious tolerance and coexistence.

The mosque's design elements, such as the elaborate mosaics and expansive prayer halls, invite contemplation, admiration and reflection. They serve as visual narratives that communicate the spiritual and cultural values of Islam. These elements contribute to the mosque's role as a space for dialogue and understanding, encouraging visitors to engage with its beauty and symbolism on a personal and emotional level (Williams, 2017).

Identity Construction

The Nigerian National Mosque plays a vital role in the identity construction of Muslims in Nigeria. It is a tangible representation of their religion and cultural background, fostering feelings of being part of something bigger and having self-respect (Adegbite, 2010). Also, it contributes to the larger narrative of Nigerian identity which is built on religious multiplicity and pluralism.

This mosque's architectural design merges Islamic and Nigerian elements thereby buttressing the notion that there exists an all-inclusive national identity with respect for religious diversity. It also reminds about how rich in culture and historical heritage Muslim community of Nigeria is, pointing out its notable contributions to development and nation's history (Smith, 2012).

The presence of this mosque in the capital city is critical as it emphasises on religious diversities shaping the national identity. The importance of this mosque extends beyond just the Muslim population within Nigeria into encompassing the entire country. It represents Nigeria's commitment to religious tolerance and co-existence thereby embodying unity and inclusiveness (Zakari, 2016). By promoting a shared sense of belonging among people, it facilitates national storylines that celebrate diversity and embodies all religious groups.

Conclusion

From a global perspective, the Nigerian National Mosque is evidence of cultural and religious importance of the country. The house of worship attracts visitors and scholars from all over the world thereby signifying Nigeria's engagement with global Islamic community (Smith, 2012). Through its architectural design which mixes traditional Islamic elements with modernist principles, it has placed itself on a league of its own amongst other structures constructed globally.

Through various international engagements and dialogues by this mosque, Nigeria positions itself as a leading African nation within the Islamic context. It acts like a cultural representative showcasing Nigeria's great heritage as well as her contribution to global debates on religion, architecture or culture (Williams, 2017). By holding conferences/exhibitions at international level through such activities done by it makes Nigeria reiterate her commitment towards fostering global cooperation and understanding.

Moreover, the Nigerian mosques design embodies the fusion of global styles and local cultural values. This is a typical of how nations can mix internationally accepted architectural patterns with their specific socio-cultural backgrounds to come up with structures that are appealing and relatable to both local and global audiences (Adegbite, 2010). The international importance of this mosque highlights Nigeria as an exemplar of cultural dynamism and religious multiplicity.

The Nigerian National Mosque in Abuja is a large piece of public art engaging its environment and audience through representation, ethics, global relevance, subjective interpretation, and identity construction. It speaks of religious unity and cultural pride, reflecting the role that architecture can play in bringing about national and religious identity. The mosque is an embodiment of faith and one of strong expressions of culture that should be able to foster peace, understanding and harmony among the various communities in Nigeria.

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