

ARCHITECTURE AND THE POLITICS OF NATIONALISM IN THE ERA OF GLOBALIZATION

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ABSTRACT: Architecture is a physical force and a communication medium that speaks to power of value and ideals of a society through effective communication of socio-political messages embedded in its physical configurations. It helps to create the physical as well as the political institutions of establishments in the society that embodies the civilization codes of “law and order.” However, the power of architecture as a political propaganda tool is reminiscent of nationalism in many facets and circumstances. In the past imperial establishments, the ruler used architecture as a control tool to influence the people’s perception of the state and the achievements of the civilization. Whereas, the later civilization of globalization in the 21st century helps to create the institutional establishments of democratic architecture with a renewed strategy to wield power to entertain and gain political and socio-economic supports for the governments and corporate organizations. This review therefore demonstrates the role of architecture in the politics of power and influence vividly evident in the emergent democracies and some current establishments of globalization, a case reference of Dubai.

KEYWORDS: Architecture, Politics, Nationalism, Civilization, Globalization.

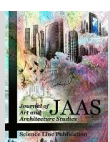
INTRODUCTION

The subject of study centres generally on architecture and its role in national politics of development focusing on the present age of globalization. For ages, architecture as a discipline has been deployed as a propaganda tool for political and social objectives, demonstrating on the existing socio-physical variables in the built environment. However, it has been argued that architecture is a self-contained sign system that can be read in its own language with potency for delivering messages in its physical form to serve public interests [1]. Hence, it provides the space for the principal institutions of the society in which social and political activities take place [2].

In fact, all nations of the world in the past as well as the present attempt to build their reputations through a process of nation building or ‘nation brand’ which is synonymous with the term nationalism. This involves the build-up of symbolic values of social, political and economic products that can project distinctive characteristics of the nation to the foreign public. According to Yari et al. [1],

buildings offer the most appropriate medium to help attain these goals in many powerful ways. This is because, the aesthetic value of architecture and the physical imposing power of buildings do motivate human emotions and help to engage consumers to its content using their physical senses to recognize the function. By this phenomenon, architecture portrays its values of utility and aesthetics. Consequently, architecture is being deployed by many countries of the world to propagate their foreign and domestic politics, and also to glorify their economies. Literature records present ideological and aesthetic motifs in fascist Italy, Japan and the former USSR as typical examples of the early scenarios; followed by the reformed kind of architecture established by the Art-Nouveau representatives and early functionalism, and influenced official, administrative edifices used for the state purposes [1]. On this note, Dr. Alice Sabrina Ismail in Yari et al. [1] asserts that architecture “arouses nationalistic emotions in the people and sensitizes them to maintain status and position in the society.”

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Architecture and politics have successfully combined together to shape the human society on the local and international levels. While architecture helps to conceive the physical structures in which we dwell, the political art helps to conceive institutional structures that allow humans to live together harmoniously in their respective societies [3]. Thus, this review is aimed at projecting the value of architecture as a physical entity in nation building particularly in the politics of nationalism.

ARCHITECTURE AND ITS ROLE IN NATIONAL POLITICS

There is the potency in the physical components of architecture to denote and symbolize societal and national values in diverse ways. In fact, the glass as a physical entity of a structure has been used to signify transparency which in political language denotes democratic accountability. In the same manner, the element of height has also been used to symbolize freedom of the society from oppression, intimidation and the likes. Though, it is argued that these symbolic representations in the view of the common observers, which may not equally be comprehensible, are susceptible to further explanations that do actually influence the political experiences of buildings [1].

Roussinos [4] asserts that architecture is a political act that serves as a permanent marker of a civilization that demonstrates dramatic expression of a society's relationship to power providing most reliable guides to the "life" of past civilizations through the readings of historic buildings [2]. Thus, the public character of architecture is evident in its account of world architecture characterized by the value of its historic monumentality and state order, exclusively evident in the architectural works on capitols, courts, palaces, tombs, temples, and churches of the past days. These architectural values elucidate on the state's order, the creed of its civilization, the ruling institutions and its political economy. In consequence, it enshrines the society's civilization codes of "law and order" to ensure a conservative alliance between it and the state power [2]. On this note, Norris Kelly Smith in Milne [2] refers to the uniqueness of architecture as an "establishment art" responsible for institutional establishments not common with other forms of art.

Architecture comprises of all establishments of structures, public spaces, and buildings including their interiors and landscapes created by man as contributions towards human social constructions; while the politics is bound with the task of

developing and improving on the social structure of the society. This is essentially important in order to create a good living environment and a sustainable society with high quality of life [5].

Architecture actually speaks to power of political, social and economic hegemony. It is used to conceptualize a social model of structural-thought based on the understanding of social and political relationships. These relationships of power are embodied in monumental architecture created by political powers and they do actually demonstrate the nature and strength of the power created in them [6].

Political leaders have wittingly used architecture as a symbolic medium to project on how they wished to be seen and perceived by the citizens and the foreign public. In addition, it serves as a tool of change capable of instilling mental control and intimidation; and subsequently impacting political ideals on the public. This forecast provides the control mechanism which runs on the emotions of people with the ability to create desired effects of the political power in place.

In the words of Lebbeus Woods in Yari et al. [1], 'buildings change the society that builds them, creating social and political transformations in the society.' These transformations are mostly achieved through the practice of monumental architecture which embodies the nature of their rule in the building plans and the city setting. These well-orchestrated plans and schemes serve as the visual statements of their ideology of power which astutely justifies the need for architecture as a potent tool for the development of the public realm. In fact, the shape and size of architectural feats in conjunction with the visual and relational properties are capable of evincing political authority of the state [1].

ARCHITECTURE AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PUBLIC REALM

The built environment which is a product of architecture and planning is considered a political setting. This is because the space created by architecture, in the words of Daniel Libeskind in Yari et al. [1] is recognized by the citizens as their polity and themselves as subscribing to democratic values. Architecture thrives in providing the space for democratic performance in the public realm of human existence; which in consequence acts as the medium by which the ruling class exercises authority. Thus, the ruling class creates the public order with political characteristics, and architecture connects with the public order by creating the

building institutions for political activities, such as the parliament buildings, the courts and the executive office complexes for the ministries and government agencies. It is architecture that interfaces with town planning to create the urban domain, which is the city platform. The city platform is further being shaped by political decisions in terms of policy formulation to determine the type and nature of development which includes physical planning, construction, infrastructure, recreation and the general organization of the social spaces [3].

It is with this understanding of architecture and politics that Lindvall [3] further relates that buildings and the city setting (architecture) are metaphors for the state or the political system; which he summarily affirms that;

“...a building’s purpose is to be useful to those who live, work, and convene within it, even if those people are very different from each other.....”

“....similarly, the purpose of a well-ordered political system is to make life easier and better for those who live in it, while recognizing that people differ from each other and have different goals and ideals in life.”

Accordingly, the classified metaphors tend to suggest that a sustainable political system should address the needs of the citizens and as well reflect their values and desired aspirations. To meet this requirement, the Roman architect, Vitruvius in Milne [2] argued that a good building or city setting (architecture) should be characterized by three values of strength, utility and beauty as a demand of the state constitution.

Architecture is the concurrence platform for the visual manifestation of the state power and ideology in the establishment of the public realms. However, the adopted plan configurations in the city setting are either axial or non-axial used to portray desired effects. The axial plans are intrinsically used to direct people to certain goals meant to represent the seat or symbol of power; while the non-axial plans reflect on the quality of the community setting and the associated freedom through choices rather than the supremacy of a single goal, thereby redirecting political power to the mandates of the people [6].

On the other hand, Yari et al. [1] elucidate widely on the attributes of scale and form of buildings on the political authority of the state. He stressed that the scale of a building in terms of height, length, width and depth when juxtaposed with its visibility and dramatic sculptural effects do in fact symbolize authority; and can be used as connotations to the following needs;

- i. Emphasis of dominancy and control,
- ii. Evocation of feelings of impressiveness in order to be remembered,
- iii. Assertion of identity in the world,
- iv. Visual prestige and dignity of the patron,
- v. Projection of influence in the society.

Yari et al. [1] further affirm that the form of a building has the capacity to arouse perceptual interest in people; a strategy the ruling class deploys to express authority in many diverse ways from historic past to the era of globalization.

ARCHITECTURE AND POLITICS IN THE ERA OF GLOBALIZATION

Though, architecture had staged a global influence on national politics of all times, there is a great divergence in its public character of the state and religious edifices of the historic past, and the modern corporate and opulent structures of the globalization era [2]. Be that as it may, the epoch of globalization is characterized by keen advancement in technology that has greatly influenced the rate and nature of developments evident in the eulogies of politics and architectural practice of the 21st century.

Beyond the depiction of the power of the state and its influence on the emotions of the citizens, architecture has endured a more sustainable approach in creating enduring values in our daily experiences in recent times by deploying the advanced technologies. Accordingly, globalization demands a change in our ways of life and our urban development scheme in order to create a sustainable society [5]. This is explicitly evident in the ongoing socio-political and physical developments in both the western and eastern blocks of the globe. As such, the developmental trend in the new city setting is considered key to sustainability with a concern for the reduction in the greenhouse gas emissions and effective as well as efficient resources management.

Strunke & Careholm [5] advocate globalization to intently accommodate good communication facilities for nearness, convenience and security in order to attain salutary living conditions. This is occasioned by good transportation systems that ensure good traffic flow through a well-coordinated system of settlements and transport infrastructure planning intended to minimize resources. Therefore, a sustainable urban future demands an architecture that provides the needed social and physical integration liable to peaceful coexistence. This is attainable through a

formidable design process and value initiatives that give birth to the evolution of a city 'whole' of harmonious life devoid of social tensions and conflicts.

Globalization is reminiscent of sustainable architecture that is responsible for the creation of sustainable built environment undoubtedly dependent on energy-efficient technologies based on considerations of ecological, social and economic sustainability. In addition to the needed conservation measures to tackle issues of resources depletion, the preservation of our heritage achievable through effective and efficient programmes of upgrading and modernization of old facilities, amenable to changing needs and functions is heavily desired [5].

Typical examples of architecture as symbolic medium of political power can be found in past civilizations of the Egyptian, Greek, Roman empires, etc. in the monumental display of the pyramids, temples, and cathedrals. But a more recent example of monumental architecture can be found in the Gulf States and in some western and eastern parts of the world. A case study is the city of Dubai, which is almost non-existent in the '1980s' but has now become a global attraction through the Dubai strategy of the ruling class via architecture. Dubai as an outcome of globalization is able to wield power to entertain, gain support for the government's campaigns and encourage a formidable unity of the new-built city. This is a successful story of a situation where great political transformations are attained through immense architectural practice to gain the loyalty of the people and to promote their image [1].

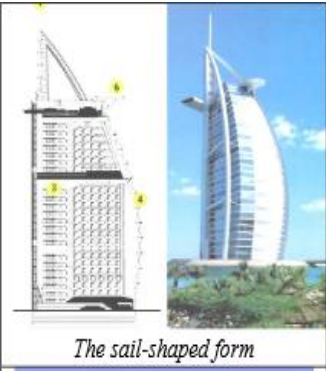



Unlike the period of imperialism, the current dispensation of secular and democratic society has no place for ambitious militarists and would-be dictators who might desire to perpetually cling on to power on feudal or autocratic jurisdiction. Nevertheless, architecture remains a powerful tool in the hands of political leaders in addition to technology and other important contemporary media for the propagation of ideals of globalization [7].





Similar to the historic past, the architecture of the globalization era is characterized by the presence of super structures of monumental heights and grandeur. The emergence of the supertall buildings as widely recognizable icon of the cities is an impetus for future building growth and economic development [8]. In a grandiose show of eminence and propaganda of strength in socio-cultural, political and economic development, the skylines across the major cities of the world have been rising considerably over the past decades. A typical example of this development is the current trends of supertall building developments in the Gulf States of the Arab world. The current architectural feat of this region has helped to shape the image of the emerging cities and the national leadership with strong influences on the perception of the inhabitants and the outside world, and traction towards a more sustainable tomorrow. The politics of prominence through physical/economic development and social integration is massively on the display. The buildings' imagery (shown in table 1) represents a cultural iconic symbol that depicts societal identities; a reflection of the cultural aspects through historical analysis of the cities [9, 10].

Nonetheless, the motivating factor in these developments has been to push the boundaries of technology and accomplish feats of sustainable political power and socioeconomic strength never before imagined as exemplified by the Burj Khalifah superstructure [11].

Most of the emerging edifices of the globalization era are constructed using sustainable principles to achieve greater sustainability with a consideration for reduced greenhouse gas emissions and energy (cooling) loads in specifically hot climatic regions. Principal among others is the desirability of the super structures; and the intent of public awareness to raise super buildings to a state of the art environmental agenda in which technology innovation in the adoption of natural energy systems is integrated with innovative structures [9].

Table 1. Examples of high-rise buildings with responsive cultural patterns

	Description	The building design	Inspirative model
<p>Burji Al-Arab Hotel, UAE</p>	<p>The form resembles a sail that reflects the navigation activity, one of the major activities in Dubai, as a dramatic tribute to the region’s seafaring heritage (El-Kordy et al., 2007) [9].</p>	 <p><i>The sail-shaped form</i></p>	 <p><i>Traditional boat</i></p>
<p>Twin Towers, Doha, Qatar</p>	<p>The tea pot symbolism at the Twin Towers and Teapot Sculpture at Eastern End of the Corniche (http://www.allposters.com/) [9].</p>	 <p><i>Twin Towers and Teapot Sculpture.</i></p>	 <p><i>Qatari tea pot statue and modern tea pot statue</i></p>

<p>The Burj Dubai Tower, UAE</p>	<p>The tower is inspired from the geometrics of the indigenous desert flower and the patterning systems employed in Islamic architecture. The tower's base and the geometry reflect the six petal desert flower of the region. Its harmonious structure is one of the organizing principles for the design (El-Kordy et al., 2007) [9].</p>	 <p><i>The tower's base and geometry</i></p>	 <p><i>Native desert flower</i></p>
<p>Hilal (Half Moon) Headquarters for the Organization of Islamic States, Saudi Arabia</p>	<p>The building is designed as an abstract reading of Islamic Culture. The building is shaped in the form of the Islamic symbol of the Hilal coupled with the Nejme or Star (Azad-Hye Newsletter, 2006) [9].</p>	 <p><i>The hilal-shaped form</i></p>	 <p>Hilal</p>

Source: (Abdel-Hafeez et al., 2009) [9]

CONCLUSION

Studies have indicated that the metaphors of politics and architecture have collectively repositioned the issues of nationalism in all settings; and particularly in the era of globalization. While architecture is needed to accommodate and provide the shelter space for all human activities, it is the practice of politics that defines the manner and essence of such activities in the social, economic and environmental spheres of human existence. Architecture has played a significant role not only in shaping the physical environment of man, but also in defining human perceptions and the location of the civic functions; as well as showcasing the image and power of the society.

Public spaces meant for civic functions are the creation of architecture which invariably is responsible for potent political activities necessary for sound political performance which inevitably gives room to the ruling class to exercise authority. Hitherto, the remarkable building attributes provide the symbolic medium to project on how the rulers wished to be seen and perceived by the citizens and the foreign public.

The era of globalization has the fortune of technology to advance the potency of architecture to create sustainable built environment which enables good communication facilities for nearness, convenience and security in order to attain salutary living conditions.

The Gulf Arab States and particularly Dubai is a typical example of how architecture has served as a successful tool of propaganda in the politics of nationalism in the era of globalization. This is occasioned by the creation of super structures to boost the image of the leadership and the emerging city with strong influences on the perception of the inhabitants and the outside world, and a shift towards a more sustainable tomorrow.

DECLARATIONS

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Data availability

The datasets used and/or analysed during the current study available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Authors' contribution

All authors contributed equally to this work.

Competing interests

The author declares that there is no competing interest.

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