Character-Extinction of Yoruba Architecture: An Overview of Facades of Residential Buildings in South-Western, Nigeria

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Abstract
Architecture could be classified based on the character and symbolic features on buildings and structures which somewhat expresses the climatic, cultural, socio-economic, geo-political, historical and the function of the building/structures and the activities of the inhabitants of the environment. This is often referred to as Tectonics in the world of Art. The architectural characters through motifs, ornamentations, relics, signs, images or symbolic expressions appears to be fast fizzling out in this contemporary period. The paper is an overview of facades as expression of traditional Yoruba architectural character in selected Building structures of yester-years and recently built ones within the Yoruba environment, with a view to encouraging and promoting the preservation and conservation or restoration of indigenous identity/image through architectural character. Information was gathered from literature, field observations from case studies of traditional and contemporary Yoruba buildings, (by purposive sampling) from major Yoruba towns, Nigeria. These were reviewed and descriptively presented. Findings amongst others reveal that shelter speaks volume about the Cultural heritage of the people and that the traditional Yoruba Architectural character is being eroded by the influence of foreign character through materials’ choice and technology, and has become a threat to conservation of cultural identity/values and heritage. The paper therefore identifies causes and recommends remedies towards the preservation, restoration, development and execution of strategies for branding and Cultural/National identity.

Keywords: yoruba architecture, character, heritage, branding, identity

INTRODUCTION
Architecture is neither purely an art nor exclusively technical profession. Rather, it combines the two, providing a material frame for the human existence, bringing together their religious, social and artistic lives. Essentially, architecture is to meet the needs of man and satisfy his quest for aesthetics. Dmochowski (1990) stated that, a building is not an end in itself, but rather serves as a means to an end, which it is to satisfy the material and spiritual needs of the people. It therefore implies that, architecture that does not provide for spiritual needs of the people is not a good architecture. Dmochowski (ibid) in agreement with Leonardo da Vinci further posits that no good architecture can originate without paying respect and having some kind of symmetry with the society in which it is situated. This become more important in a society which is conscious and proud of its culture. The concept of heritage conservation as a contemporary development is becoming significant in modern architecture because of the faster pace in the development and redevelopment of towns and cities. As Manley and Guise (1998) observed, ancient and/or historic buildings are assuming a great risk in contemporary houses, with the development which has evolved demand for knowledge of antiquity that was disappearing. It implies that, this day, heritage retention is largely driven by the criticism of the lack of sense of place and identity associated with new developments and the need to exploit resources for economic purposes. Paradoxically, Cities are metaphorically described as historically solidified environment in time and in space. They depict physical, archival and artefacts of the past and present, from this develops the future of human civilization and cultures set in a time series continuum.

The question that ordinarily comes to the fore is, there is any link between Dmochowski’s assertion and the contemporary concept of heritage conservation? This is important in enabling an understanding with regard to architecture in fulfilling one of its basic roles (protection of heritages) in the life of the society. Ashworth (2003) views heritage as a process that involves selecting from everything that happened in the past in form of recorded history and aggregating the collective and individual memory and physical relics of a society together. The manner of selection, in his view, leads to how heritage can be interpreted and packaged as a commodity. The process of selection and interpretation also embodies the need to address how to retain such heritage, either through preservation or conservation. It’s in this stead that Manley & Guise (1998) posits that:
Preservation implies, buildings and areas should be retained in their original state, regardless of the need to adapt to changing circumstances in order to ensure their survival; whereas, conservation allows for enhancement or changes but still ensure the protection of historic environment.

The influence of western education, ideas and way of life over the years, have eroded the native intelligence, knowledge, values and building character/architecture. Traditions have often been seen and depicted by western idea as antithetical to modernization. One major observation about contemporary architecture appears to be the criticism of its tendency to disconnect with the cultural, socio-economic, geo-political and even religious expressions/values of the environment and people it is serving. This is resulting from ever changing material development, material choice and technology, which are in turn, manifestation of foreign economic and societal influence. The disappearing of the traditional heritage/cultural character in the architecture of Yoruba Residential buildings, becomes a major issue.

Observably, modern architectural designs do not apparently define and enhance the former social and communal living known with the Yoruba of the southern Nigeria. Drastically, has there been change in the creation of space and place for domestic affairs, crafts, ceremonies and entertainment, be it nuclear and the extended family that once was the basis of communal living of the Yoruba.

Agbo (1993) added that, in many cases in the traditional societies, compounds were not only held together by the bond of kinship but were also centres of trades like metal-casting, arts and crafts, etc, which hold monopolies protected by a communal guilds system. A range of trades and vocations like agriculture, blacksmithing, pottery, weaving, woodcarving, dyeing, bronze and brass-casting, goldsmithing were able to flourish in this environment. Little wonder that so many of the crafts in which the Yoruba excel were developed by those living within the walls of the traditional impluvia buildings.

A look beyond the structure but inclusive of the materials of the houses reveals the expression of the good qualities of the traditional Yoruba life styles. The buildings were the product of a communal work force called Owe. Owe, combines efforts and financial contribution of inhabitants within wall of the compound and from the extended family. At a particular period in the 19th century, as further highlighted by Agbo (1993), the return of slaves from Brazil had influence on the Yoruba architecture but did not totally alter or eradicate the past styles as it has become pronounced now in the 21st century. What has happened is that, instead of a total attrition, there was considerable weaving of elements into mélange of cultural innovation under the right local conditions which, revitalized the old culture and enriched it further. Thus, the problem the paper seeks to address.

The aim of the paper is to encourage and promote the preservation and conservation of indigenous heritages through architectural character, especially with the examples of the Yoruba architecture, while its objective is to draw attention to this area of architecture and not attempting to argue for a total reversal to the past in areas where life styles and values would not fit into traditional world. This paper is of importance in order, to stimulate awareness, rejuvenate and regenerate the Yoruba spiritual, cultural-heritage perceptibility through creative and integrative use of signs, symbols, relics, configurations, ornaments as symbolic expressions depicting history, branding and conveying one message or the other about the inhabitants, their socio-cultural and socio-economic environment. This will significantly provide opportunity for the understanding and conservation of memories of the Yoruba values and heritages.

YORUBA AND THEIR BELIEVE

Yoruba as a tribe, is a collection of diverse people of the Oduduwa descendants, bound together by common language, history and culture; their 401 dialects, somewhat large population and geographical spread notwithstanding. They are mostly located in the western part of Nigeria and stretches from the Savanah (grassland) region in the north to a region of tropical rainforest in the south. They constitute one of the largest African ethnic groups, South of the Sahara desert and spread across the States of Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Ondo, Ekiti, Lagos; parts of Edo, Kwara, Benin, Benue as well as Capitals of the Benin republic (ketu). Ashante and Dahomey. Yorubas are generally known to be religious, religion forms and governs their life. Idowu (1962) opines that, as far as Yorubas are concerned, attachment to traditional religion is manifested in the fact that nearly all the affairs are governed by one deity or the other. Every aspect of their life - puberty, betrothal, marriage, taking up a career, building a house etc, is ascribed to one deity or the other.

Their settlements, clothes, foods, dance and music always reflect their belief in deities. Some clans are totemic in origin, and claims to share some relationship with certain animals and such animals are regarded as the totem of their clans. The totem, therefore, becomes the emblem or coat of arms for the family and are expressed in images on buildings, that is: in totem poles, caryatids and on beams.
Popular in this respect are elephants and leopards. Lions, leopards and elephants are moulded in clay outside the palaces of kings as totemic animals.

Totemism derives its significance from the sense of unity, kinship, belongingness, togetherness and common affinity of the people. In support of this belief, Lander (1930) said that, Yoruba is very rich in various artifacts and these art or forms are concrete manifestation of their belief in and dependence on God. Yorubas also have strong attachment to divinities, their ancestors and belief in the practice of magic and medicine.

In the Yoruba religion, symbolic representation plays a very important part. It is a way of making the spiritual perceptible through the material. The method of symbolizing the unseen began with depiction and veneration of objects such as stone, plant, or a piece of wood. All these are carried out as sacred objects in spots or places set apart symbolic images of the deity or god or place of its worship. Harrison (1958), in explaining the idea refers to the period as plastic art when man ascribed to the divinities as the endowments of living objects, the consequence of which is to draw the shapes in the imaginaries of creatures carved from wood or sculpted with stone or metal.

Ornamentations in buildings also became popular as means of expressing status and social positions of their owners. Among the Yorubas, carved doors post are found mostly in the palaces of traditional rulers or shrines of certain deities. The Alaafin’s palace in Oyo, for example, is carved with sunk relief images of symbolic importance according to Adepegba (1998). Willet (1971) also noted that, the interior of the building is decorated with sculpture, panel doors and windows.

Famed with the Yoruba, is wood-carving and blacksmithing. Ogun, the Yoruba deity is universally acknowledged in the indigenous belief as “god of Iron”, indispensable as a deity. Johnson (2001) says though carving in wood is executed in a rather primitive way, the natural genius displayed by the craftsmen is surprising because of the artistic achievement often displayed by their practitioners who are mostly illiterates and working with tools so simple and primitive. For instance, noticeable in the palace of The Alaafin were the verandahs covered with lean-to-roof, which is an extension of the saddle back roof above the dwellings. The verandah roofs were supported on posts which were decoratively carved. In the houses of some chiefs and palaces were caryatids in the form of human figure on the verandah.

Characteristic Of Yoruba Architecture: In The Beginning

In the early times, worship places tend to be more loosely defined. However, certain areas stand out as more significant than others. These are places such as areas around rocks, trees, plants, lakes, rivers, streams, etc. The earliest shrines then, must have been natural than man-made. With mobility over the time, as the Yoruba move, the stage was reached at which it became clear that, human beings worship could take place in their abode and become part and parcel of their life.

As a group, life began to take shape, communal shrine started coming into existence and buildings started springing up, delineated as shrines with emblems of the varieties of divinities. The shrines were embellished with carved objects as totem poles, caryatids, carved beams, metal works and so many more. At a particular period, shrines were made of mud like residences with the effect that embellishments became a distinguishing mark of traditional structures in Yoruba land.

The Yoruba traditional Architecture draws its form and characteristic features from these styles and ornamentations that were integral components of its designs. Buildings were largely rectangular in configuration which allows for add-on structures/ functional room spaces clustering around large courtyards and central corridors referred to as Oodede or kara with single entrance, places for cooking, weaving, embroidering, pottery, bead-workings, tye and dye folktales (like traditional music, poems and proverbs renditions, tongue twisting, riddles, cymbals, sporting, etc.) to form integrative compound(s) called Agboole, for their communal, socio-cultural and religious activities. It also involves the creative and integrative use of indigenous building materials (like mud/earth bricks, bamboo, wood, thatch, palm fronds, etc.) in the construction of walls, ceiling and roofs, decorations/ornamentations and furniture.

The architecture was functional to the extent that it accommodated both the communal shrine and the communal living within a defined space or territory. For so many decades, the erection of buildings in Yoruba land followed this traditional pattern. With the Owe (communal contributory participation/sweat-equity), was the emergence of professionals and other artisans in the areas of masonry, carving, carpentry, and so on. In a way, both the knowledge and technology that the Yoruba people depended upon could be said to be endogenous to their culture and existence.
Western Influence On Yoruba Traditional Architecture

The Yoruba region is known to be the cradle of western education and Christianity in Nigeria being once a part of the protectorate of the Great Britain in 1893. In that region resides over 60% of the Nigerian Universities, Polytechnics, Colleges of Education, Secondary and Primary schools, which assisted them to be well-educated and informed.

Westernization acting as social force has played no small role in de-emphasizing the significance of the traditional Yoruba religion. Many converts to these foreign religion, particularly Christianity, have been indoctrinated against the traditional beliefs, often painted in derogatory terms as being paganistic, idolatory, an exhibition of heathenism and/or fetishism. The effect of the various stigmatization and threats was largely to make many faithful adherents of the traditional religion to abandon the religion with very few people willing to take their place. People are no longer willing to come forward to be trained as priests, diviners, traditional carvers, blacksmiths, etc., contrary to the pride that the people have in the past. Thus the traditional practice is threatened by western ideas and ways of life have therefore eroded many of the old knowledge and native intelligence, especially technical know-how on how to develop and use local materials to meet in the modern time. This problem is compounded as a scholar, Munoz (2003) also observes by the fact that the tradition of the people has been seriously neglected. Tradition is often seen and treated as exact opposite of modernism or modernization, which western ideas depict of symbolize. Justice is seldom done to the centrality of tradition as a concept, especially in areas of architecture and in reflecting the dynamics, shaping people’s lives in the modern concept of designing buildings and structures for them. Yet, it is important to move beyond considering this important idea as representation of residual concept or as simply a tangential starting point in the development process of a people. Events have over the years revealed that urban regeneration, urban renewal, demolition, modification and replacement exercises has brought about a great degree of threat to the preservation of inherent Yoruba building architecture in Nigeria.

Selected Yesteryears Buildings And Recently Constructed Buildings In Selected Yoruba Major Towns

Plates 1-8 historically illustrates the characters of the Afro-Brazilian Vernacular architecture and their adoption in the development and construction of Yoruba building characters.


Sources: Authors’ fieldwork 2016

Plates 1-2 illustrates the interplay of the adoption of pillars with capitals in reminiscent of forked posts and decorative architraves along the verandahs and walls of palaces, residences of the Chiefs, community leaders, caryatids etc, in the form of signs or figures as vertical structural supports and ornaments respectively.

These were creatively craved from selected growing trees or wood joinery and/or metal crafting/casting, conspicuously put together as symbolic expressions in the form signs, configurations, human, tiger, crocodile, serpent, etc., figures depicting their socio-cultural or religious, geographical or socio-political or socio-economic and environmental identity or values. They were reflected on the building floors, walls, doors, windows, ceilings, roof structures and in furniture. These impressions and symbolic expressions can be found across the Palaces (such as the Alaafin of Oyo, Ooni of Ife; etc) and residences in the Yoruba communities.
CAUSES OF THE EXTINCTION
Colonialism had resulted in the introduction of new industrial goods and new commercial centres to trade in these goods outside the traditional city. This development led to the erosion of the craft oriented industrial base of the city and gradually to high unemployment and underemployment, and the attendant social problems associated with these.

Twenty-first Century technological developments in production, transportation and construction have also affected most other traditional cities and created problems of adaptation. The globalization process does not help matter in its quest for producing a change in values and attitudes that is, affecting traditional ways of doing things, and putting heritage resources under pressure.

In recent time, many have come to realize that foreign terminologies used to designate the traditional beliefs like paganism, idolatry, fetishism, are product of ignorant, prejudice, resisted illumination and intellectual dilemma as opined by Quarcoopome (1987). It is worthy of note that, outside of the impact or effect of religion, so many other factors also contributed to the fizzling of its art and architecture.

The decline of Yoruba tradition has affected the architecture of its people, as a result of many factors which include the tedious, slow, unattractive, obsolete and unsustainable technology for mass production; disintegration of traditional society; colonialisation; and probably due to the very economic success of a traditional society that was productive in agriculture/farming and desirous to trade. When inhabitant moved away from dyeing, wearing, pottery, metal work etc. to growing of colonial cash crops and importation of goods.

Another major decline is when functional traditional education was replaced with western education which made them vulnerable to indoctrination and negated the teaching of craftsmanship through apprenticeship. In no small measures does that further affect the development of Yoruba architecture and artifact alike. The combination of western education and Christianity indoctrination have somewhat accounted for incursion of foreign influences, flair for foreign taste and ideas, and excessive reliance on imported buildings materials and technology and of course, Euro-cerebral feudalism. Thus, the traditional practice became threatened by western ideas and ways of life have therefore eroded many of the indigenous knowledge and native intelligence, especially technical know-how on how to develop and use local materials to meet the expectation of the modern time. Attempts were made in the past, at reincarnating the practice in the school curriculum but that has been fruitless, because it was not practically rooted, but was rather theoretical.

Events have over the years revealed that the idea of government’s official residential quarters sprang up and courtyard gave way to storey building, bungalows and so on with corridors adequate for domestic affairs. Agbo (1993) added that in the 1950’s and 1960’s efficiency member moved out and put their energy and money into individual western type of haves which, of course, had some of the mod cons but which encourage social distancing; even though the modern houses and bungalows were often
built on family land. That was the beginning of abandonment, all we have now is nothing but memory of the past identity, and heritage. Tradition and culture have been traded for modern life without recourse to cultural identity. Most recently, the experiences of urban regeneration, urban renewal, demolition, modification and replacement exercises have brought about a great degree of threat to the preservation of inherent Yoruba building architecture in Nigeria.

It is against this backdrop that this paper advocates for the relevance and regeneration of traditional architecture and indigenous knowledge, if architecture should be rooted in culture as claimed by various scholars. Therefore, steps that will blend tradition with modernity have to be taken. With this, Yoruba architecture of configuration, spatial manipulations and design morphology will continue to flourish and probably be exported.

**REMEDIES**

There is no completely modern society as there is no completely traditional society. This assertion is supported by Rose (1965) that a classical example is found in the first industrialized nation, England which is known to keep its tradition and blend of with the modern, thus giving stability to its development. Bennet (1968) also gave example of Alsam, Japan as one of the continent where modernity is well blended with tradition. Every modern or industrial society retains traditional structure, attitudes and institutions, even after the conditions that originated them have disappeared.

It is practicable to infuse the knowledge of traditions with the modern scientifically and technological developments in terms of choice and application of materials and technology, in order to reminiscence the old in the new era in a complimentary and appealing manner as illustrated in Plate 4-9.

Plates 4-5 illustrates the architectural conservation/restoration of building character of The Olongbona’s family house in Ile-Ife, Osun State. Nigeria, which speaks about the affluence of the owners way back (around 1928-’30s). The house was re-configured, re-roofed and re-painted sometimes in 1985, without significant loss of Yoruba traditional architecture or building character.

Plate 4: Before (1930s)  
Plate 5: After (around 1985)

**Source:** Osasona, 2016

Plates 6-9 illustrate the regeneration of traditional architecture and indigenous knowledge through the creative use of cement, wood, metals-based building materials in the form of signs, animations, impression/inscriptions, relics, ornamentations, motifs, styles and symbolic expressions conveying messages relating and having strong root in the ancestors, beliefs, vocations, trades, occupation and communal life of the people or inhabitants of such dwelling(s) in such a way and manner that communicates the socio-cultural/traditional Yoruba values or virtue in contrast to the globally uniform architecture of the cultural imperialism and/or feudalism.
Plates 6-7: Use of decorative/ornamental fascia boards, elongated eaves with roof-vents and quoin ornamentations on wall-corners/edges and columns

Source: Osasona, 2016

Plates 8-9 - illustrates the use of polished decorative carved and interlocking timber-slits as balusters, balustrades, hand/top railings to stairs and architraves in residential buildings. It therefore suggests that, the pragmatic way to achieving this, is through the introduction of culture/socio-cultural values and creative art into the school curricular (primary to junior secondary school levels) as part of effort to identify with the socio-cultural heritage.

The curricular of the schools of arts, industrial design, architecture and related courses should be re-invigorated to enhance the understanding of related courses in Yoruba traditional architecture, forms, motifs, totem poles, embroidered facial board, floral, caryatids etc. If architecture is said to be rooted in culture, then it’s imperative to make culture and creative art a compulsory requirement to study any
related courses in Art, Architecture, urban planning, development, regeneration/renewal and management.

A day should be designated as culture day with introduction of competitive programmes and effort should be made to encourage full participation of students at least at the pre-tertiary education levels.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION
The study has revealed that, site configuration expresses the traditional Yoruba cultural setting, value for outdoor activities, which are functionally put together to include place of worship, living and socio-interactive spaces within an enclosure, with the view to creating impressive and aesthetically appealing architectural and symbolic piece(s).

The paper further reveals that shelter speaks volume about the Cultural heritage of the people and that the traditional Yoruba Architectural character is being eroded by the influence of foreign character through materials choice and technology, and it is a threat to conservation of cultural values and heritage.

The paper also advocates conservation from the perspective of sustainable principles of historical, socio-cultural and geo-political practices for better adaptation and use of resources and concludes by recommending remedies towards the preservation, development and execution of strategies for branding and Cultural/National identity. It is hoped that the paper will provoke further discourse/conversation especially in face of the contraption of total demolition brought about by most successive government in Nigeria in the name of urban renewal and its concomitant adverse effect on the conservation and preservation of architectural character and heritages.

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