UNDERSTANDING THE INFLUENCE OF CULTURE-BASED EXPERIENCES ON URBAN HOUSING FABRIC: EXAMPLE OF THE IGBO AREA OF NIGERIA

***Ikenna Stephen Ezennia**[a,b]**; Ikenna Michael Onuorah**[a] **and Patrick Chukwuemeke Uwajeh** [b]
ezennia@unizik.edu.ng
[a]*Department of Architecture, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, P.M.B 5025, Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria.*
[b]*Department of Architecture, Eastern Mediterranean University, Famagusta, North Cyprus via Mersin10, Turkey.*

Abstract
Housing in Africa before colonization reflects the culture and tradition of the region and people. Today, due to globalization; acclimatization, which is the effect of colonization, housing patterns and forms in Igbo land has been transformed into something similar to those of the western world. This transformation in building pattern has impacted on the urban housing fabric. The Igbo's are one of the major ethnic groups in Nigeria that believe in their culture and identity. These cultural values and identity are reflected in their housing forms and choice. This study focuses on the developmental trends of housing forms in Igbo cities of Nigeria, as well as the culture-based experiences that had shaped and formed their evolution over time. Drawing on extensive review of published literature, this research reveals that social changes, especially the shift from traditional community and family values to more western ways of life, have had variegated impact on buildings and housing fabric in Igbo land. This study argues that to understand these housing fabrics and how they are influenced by Igbo ontology requires an understanding of the Igbo worldview that fuels their development, as such world view have a different conception from Western notion of architecture. The study concludes that the application form of Igbo housing in Nigeria suggests that using modern house form in conjunction with traditional style could greatly improve aspects of security, comfort, and convenience. However, professional urban planning practices in Nigeria have shown little interest in what people think or feel about places they reside, and how they live especially in the South-east, Nigeria. Therefore, this study recommends that local building materials as well as traditional values and styles, which appeal to the cultural and climatic needs of specific region, should be identified and utilized in residential development of the region.
Key words: Urban Housing, Culture-based Experience, Values, Residential Living, Igbo Nation

INTRODUCTION

Housing evolves in response to the environment, culture, and politics, as well as to availability of technology and building materials. Although, housing forms may reflect the process of architectural creation and usage, the socio-cultural aspects of architectural production and experience must be considered for a holistic understanding (Boyowa, 2005). Hence, architecture as a social activity creates cultural legacy (Ikebude, 2009). The African continent is extremely diverse culture, despite its comparatively small geographical size. For example, Nigeria is a multi-religious, multi-ethnic and cultural society with enormous potentials for democratic, social and economic development (Ojukwu, 2009). Several studies contend that Nigeria consists of more than 250 ethnic groups (Oduwaye 2008; Iweka 2012). These ethnic groups are broad groupings or collections of sub-groups; for instance, the Yoruba sub-group consists of the Aworis, the Eguns, the Ijebus, and the Egbas. This contrasts sharply with the situation in New Zealand where people can belong to more than one ethnic group (Statistics New Zealand 2012). However, in Nigeria ethnicity is indicative of cultural affiliation.

Culture is a mentality that is revealed in the activities and behavior of human beings as a form of reaction to the nature challenges occurring hereditary (Arifuddin, 2015). Cultures are autonomous and are evaluated only in their own terms. The fact that the cultural values of An ethnic group can be expressed in their architecture implies a likely relationship between built

forms and human self-awareness (Ikebude, 2009). On the practical establishment of homes, the planning and construction takes a pattern or form, which varies from society to society as well as nation to nation. Consequently, housing choice, preferences or form offers great insight into the study of various cultures and societies of any given people. Nigeria, for example, is a heterogeneous society which consists of Etna-geographical regions namely; the north, middle-belt, east, west and south. Each of these regions has its own culture and as such exhibits peculiar housing pattern (Rikko & Gwatau, 2011). Consequently, the Nigerian modern architecture differs not only temporarily, but also spatially. This is obviously due to trend of civilization, cultural infiltration and technological advancement.

To the Igbo people home means much more than a concrete shelter, a compound building, or a place to return to after a day's work (Ikebude, 2009). Housing, in all aspects, is more than just shelter since it embraces all the social utilities and services that combine to make a community or neighborhood a livable environment (Agbola, 1998). Aside providing shelter and security to man, housing plays an important role as an asset. For an average homeowner, the house is an asset that adds to his portfolio as well as for many households; the acquisition of a house symbolizes a store of wealth and a lifelong investment (Jiboye 2009; Omoniyi & Jiboye, 2011). In the social life of every Nigerian, home ownership boosts one's status in the society (Nubi, 2008). Housing as defined by several studies encompasses the housing unit and the entire ancillary services as well as community facilities that are necessary for human well-being. Similarly, Abram (1964) stated that housing is not just a shelter but also part of the fabric of the urban life as well as the entire social milieu. It is related to many facets of development and economic activity. Hence, housing promotes good image, social contacts, a sense of belonging as well as an indicator of social status.

The developmental trends of urban housing fabric in Nigeria have varied distinctly from that of Northern and South-western Nigeria, which were the reflections of Islamic influence and, in the latter region, Brazilian and European influence. Both these regions have had more urbanized and cosmopolitan cultural indigenous development patterns than the South-East (the Igbo nation). However, it would seem that 'Igbo land' escaped these influences mainly due to its geographical location in the hinterland of South-eastern Nigeria. Islam did not penetrate as far down from North-eastern Nigeria to the South-east as it did from North-western Nigeria to the South-west. This was partly due to the more tropical humid terrain which was unfavorable to horses and mounted warfare and the manner in which religious wars or Jihads were traditionally fought (Uduku, 1996). Housing to the Igbo people is almost as diverse as other parts of their culture.

This study seeks to explore the extent to which cultural-based experiences have influenced the modern urban housing development in primarily Igbo-speaking areas of Nigeria. Its premise is that there are vestiges of cultural ideologies which remain part of the urban fabric in most South-Eastern Nigerian towns. Therefore, it is believed that these traditions can, and should, be enhanced further to ensure that there is a progressive integration of the old and the new, in the physical form, aesthetics as well as theoretical interpretations of urban housing. For instance, several studies have shown that developing countries embrace foreign planning concepts in place of indigenous housing forms (Mosha 2011). Consequently, these studies suggested a fusion of indigenous culture with technology in housing design.

Literature Review

The two theoretical issues adopted for this study is the Man-Environment Relation theory and the Explanatory Theory of Environment-Behaviour Relation.

Man–Environment Relation (MER) Theory

This theory is concerned with culture specificity and attempts to combine traditional cultural core and modern ideologies through culture syncretism in the cultural change process of urban environments (Rapoport, 1983). It narrates the relationship between man and the environment

as understood in respect to specific cultures in promoting design concepts. Highly recommended for developing countries, this theory attempts to develop, design ideas based on historical periods, cultural traditions and design forms. Consequently, it supports adequate evidence which validates these design ideals certifying them in wide-ranging problem-solving activity. This theory supports trends that facilitate traditional core values, thereby generating ideal design evidence for the development of culture sensitive contextual architecture. Hence, it is mainly associated with housing transformation.

Explanatory Theory of Environment–Behaviour Relation (EBR)

In accordance with this theory, culture assessment should be based on specific traditions and social norms that syncretically constitute culture. These cultural specificities are appropriate in relation to various housing aspects for design and research purposes (Rapoport, 2000). Basically, it creates a platform to relate housing and culture in respect to a specific setting and research outlook, linked to specific housing components with particular cultural variable. However, adopting this theory for evaluation involves acknowledging researched variables, and then combining them by comparative analysis. Subsequently, the influence of these variables is determined in context and in generality. Afterwards, they are examined to check for uniformity or variation, steadiness or change, as well as context relation or universality (Rapoport 2000). However, it is worthy to note that both MER and EBR theories support limiting physical and behavioural environmental studies to specific contexts.

Conceptual clarifications: Igbo nation

Let's begin by asking, who are the Igbos? Who does this "Igboness" encompass? and where are they found? The word Igbo is not a tribal identity, it is linguistic identity. It is a language of a people collectively residing in the eastern region that used to be known in the 14th, 15th and 16th century as southern Sudan (Ameh, 2016). Certainly, the Igbos are those who have as their natural home the Igbo-land which is located formerly in the East Central region of the Southern Nigeria, but of today located in the South East geopolitical zone comprising five core Igbo speaking states – Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo. It also extends to some parts of Delta state (Agbor, Ika, Issel-Uku, Anioma) and parts of Rivers State (Obigbo, Ikwerre, Egbema, Elle, Omoku). Typically, the Igbo nation is one of the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria, the others are, Hausa-Fulani and the Yoruba (Imoagene, 1990).



Fig 1: Ethnic Map of Nigeria
Source: Google Map 2016

Igbo residential Housing

The family unit is very important in Igbo culture and it is manifest in the architecture of the compound. Titled elders usually marry more than one wife in earlier times; hence his compound consists of many buildings. The 'obi' or meeting house was most important. It is the symbolic centre of the compound, where the personal altar of the head of the family is housed as well as a place he received his guests as shown in figure 2.

The compound was encircled by an earthen boundary wall broken only by an entrance which usually was decorated to reflect the wealth and status of its owner. During important festivals,

or when the family head takes a title, the compound walls and houses were painted by the women with various designs. The designs are decorative however many also have symbolic meanings. See figure 3.

The procession from the public to the private space is ritualistic and often marked by a series of transitional passages. Residences in compounds are often determined by lineage, a characteristic that seems to be common among many traditional societies. Other traditional groups have always used ancestry as a way of defining neighbourhood, and the religious significance is quite obvious.



Figure 2. A Typical 'Obi' for the Mbari Igbo peoples in the Museum of Traditional Nigerian Architecture.
Source: http://bit.do/evk3G



Figure 3. Entrance gate and walls with relief in the northern Igbo area.
Source: http://bit.do/evk5o

History of Urban Housing Development in Igbo Land since the Nigeria's Amalgamation In 1914

It would appear abstract and incomprehensible for any discourse on early Igbo settlers or even the pattern of their settlement without a good understanding and knowledge of the people's house-types from the pre-colonial to the post-colonial era. As observed in other regions of Africa or even world over, patterns of Igbo residential architecture reflected the cultural, environmental and defense needs of the people at any given period. (Okpoko & Okpoko, 1999). For instance, societies in cold areas would evolve building architectural designs that would provide warmth to the inhabitants. Equally, in traditional African society such as the Igbo-land where polygamy was the practice, a man built multiple houses to accommodate himself, his wives, children, and other dependants (Okpoko & Okpoko, 1999). See figure 4 and 5.

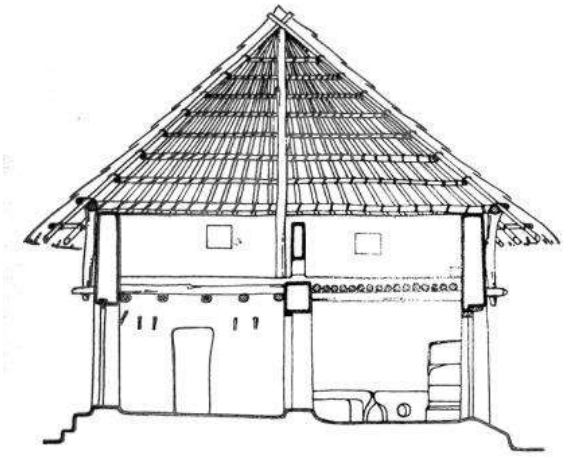


Fig. 4: Cross Section of Igbo Traditional House
Source: Source: www.google.com.ng/



Fig.5: The typical Igbo Traditional Building (Before the advent of the British)
Source: www.google.com.ng/

Urbanization in Igbo land is therefore intricately associated with the advent of British colonial rule, and could be regarded as one of the revolutionary changes of the period. It was observed that although urban development has had a long history in some parts of Africa, nevertheless, its modern manifestation can be said to be essentially due to active European penetration of the continent in the last decades of the 19th century (Mabogunje, 1978).

It is worthy to note the fact that Igbo-land had no history of urbanization prior to the advent of British colonial conquest and domination in the early 20th century. In pre-colonial times, people lived in autonomous village-groups and developed a traditional political system commonly called village democracy. The major occupation of the people in pre-colonial era was farming and trading. The arrival of the British, spurred a revolutionary trend towards developing urban cities throughout Igbo-land. Consequently, many areas where the British established administrative headquarters, mining and notable commercial centres was transformed into urban centres with modern infrastructural facilities like good railway, road network, schools, hospitals, modern markets and potable water supply etc. Moreover, modern houses were built not just to house the British political officers, but also the African staff as well. Over time, the Igbo's who migrated to the urban cities in the quest for economic opportunities or colonial government jobs began to build modern houses for themselves and their families, which was a feat they gained by emulating the British overlords. The enterprising spirit of the Igbo's combined with their propensity for acquisition of modern skills contributed immensely in the phenomenal infrastructural expansion in urban cities like Aba, Onitsha, Enugu, Owerri, Port Harcourt and Umuahia etc. in colonial era. Subsequently, in 1960 after Nigeria's independence; successive regional and state governments, enacted policies and

commitments which improved and expanded the urban infrastructural facilities. Creation of States and the advent democratic governance have added greater impetus to urbanization and infrastructural expansion in Igbo land.

Colonial urbanization in Nigeria was as a result of the introduction of monetized economy based on agriculture, exploitation of mineral resources and the development of modern transportation system by the British (Oyeleye, 2001; Edem, et. al, 2012). However, it can be argued that colonial urbanization in Nigeria was due to the creation of new colonial cities, the introduction of planned and low density residential quarters called Government Reservation Areas (GRAs) in Nigerian towns and the construction of south-north rail lines. In contrast to the pre-colonial era when most urban areas were in the northern part of Nigeria, the reverse was the case during the colonial era as most of cities in Nigeria were found in the southern region. The initial contacts with western civilization that came with colonial rule at the onset of twentieth century might help to explain this development (Egidario, et.al. 2016).



Fig. 6: Contemporary housing types the Igbo people live in today.
Source: (Authors field work, 2018S)

In recent times, life patterns are influenced by religion and expressed in the built form. Western-style housing produced a different kind of urban structure that reflects class distinctions. As a result, the educated, wealthy citizens can easily be identified by the type of housing and neighbourhood in which they live. The major difference between this form of urban plan and the traditional urban plan is the separation of people based on class and lifestyle. This pattern has grown since the turn of the century when Europeans developed some centres for the convenience of administering and exploiting the colonies they had seized. New towns in recent times follow this pattern by developing special sectors called government reserved quarters (GRAs) for both the rich and government officials.

In general, as shown in Fig. 7; most Nigerian cities are organized into the following composite sectors: (1) New towns, developed during or after the colonial period, sometimes including the central business districts; (2) The European Quarters, reserved for Europeans only during the colonial periods; (3) The African immigrant quarters, found mainly in parts of Nigeria with strong Islamic influence such as Kano and Zaria; and (4) The indigenous Nigerian towns where the chief lived before government or Europeans expanded the city.

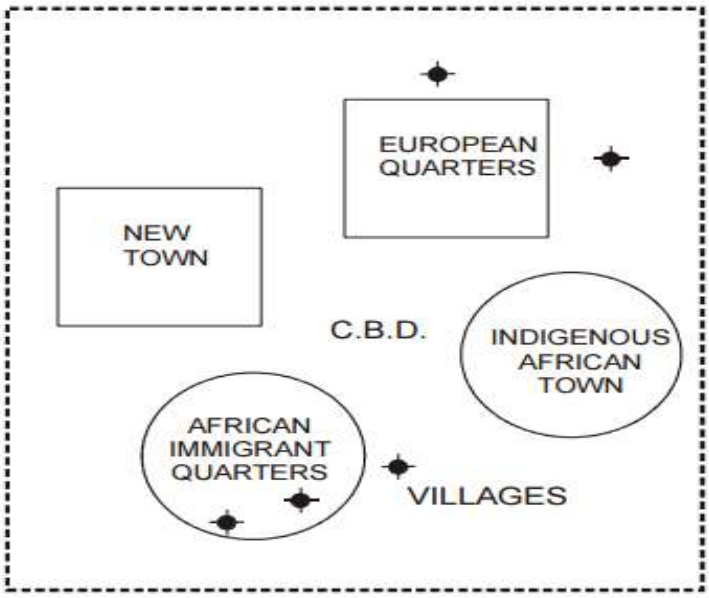


Fig. 7: Schematic representation of a typical settlement pattern of the triple heritage city Adapted from Elleh, 1996

Culture Adaptation in Urban Housing Configuration

The natural tendency to behave in a particular way by urban residents who has strong attachments to their roots remains evident in the cultural features adapted into urban house form (Gopinath& Kulkarni 2014). However, such building culture comprises of all synchronized knowledge outlines as well as the housing development process in a given time and situation (Davis 2000). Therefore, Housing patterns are perceived as socio-cultural outlines and social formations developed to convey social meaning with constant ideological content in both structural and social components (Isah, 2016).

Urban housing regions need layout adjustment control so as to preserve the rights of households, and support positive urban development. Hence, ensuring housing satisfaction and safeguarding cultural desires in a harmonious living built environment.

Housing Transformation and Urbanization

Housing and neighbourhood transformation patterns of forms and structure cannot be fully discussed without some references and related understanding of globalization and urbanization and their processes. Urbanization has visibly been given highly contested terms and definition with a voluminous literature devoted to both clarification and obfuscation. Held & McGrew (2000) in their extensive collection of cultural, social and political and economic dimensions of urbanization offer the following definition. "Simply put, urbanization denotes the expanding scale, growing magnitude, speeding up and deepening the impact of regional of interregional flows and patterns of social interaction. It refers to a shift in or transformation in the scale of human social organization that links distant communities and expands the reach of power relations across the world's major regions and continents. The advent of globalization as an idea to be considered in the way one looks at things has in no small measure caused a demographic shift from one place to the other and in all societies, shifts in population structure are a primary pressure on housing systems and are certain to become more marked and pressing in the nearest future. Pre-existing housing systems and housing stocks have to accommodate rapid demographic transformations associated with shift in social and behavioral norms or in some cases large scale in or out migration. Urbanization is seen as a process that can produce divergence as well as convergence, disharmony as well as harmony. However, this presumption was opposed by McGee (2002), he argued that for an appreciation of both the local embeddedness of those so called globalizing processes and in particular, the differential pattern of incorporation of parts of the region into the global system.

As a consequence of globalization and after the 1980s, cities have been able to place an emphasis on aspects of their local culture that are relatively unique in the quest for economic development in competition with other locations. What is remarkable here is not just the speed with which culture-driven strategies have been advocated by governments and local development agencies as a means of bolstering the urban economy, but also how their diffusion has globalized.

Housing as a Progression of Culture

In all societies, housing traditions have long been established alongside other community traditions. These traditions, which are well understood among the inhabitants, inform settlement planning which is symptomatic of the attitudes and values of such communities. Housing is, thus, a cultural phenomenon since it is a reflection of what is acceptable to the community and is built within the context of the community (Olotuah & Olotuah, 2016).

The form of housing evolved by a people is an outgrowth of its function, environment and various socio-economic factors. In this regard housing is subject to influencing factors such as socials, structure, climate and economics, but its determining factor are culture which is the totality of the way of life of the people (Uji, 1992). Culture is the sum total of the material and intellectual equipment of a people by which their biological and social needs are satisfied, and through which they adapt themselves to their environment. Culture is essentially an adaptive mechanism which makes the satisfaction of human needs possible.

The forms and functions of housing are strongly related to customs and cultures since what people consider important in their housing is intimately related to the entire system of values and customs accepted by their cultural group. Housing, as a cultural phenomenon, has a major part to play in ensuring the continuity of community life. This is in view of the fact that the type of housing evolved by a people has always corresponded to the organization of the family which it has sustained and reinforced.

Effects of Socio-Cultural factors on Urban Housing Fabric

Cultural structures are integrals of civilization expressed in a system of behaviors, praxis, lifestyle and activities at the individual and communal aspects of the society. In sociological term, each civilization creates its own housing forms, which reflects the historically prevalent cultural values as well as objectively shaped by the structural system of social organization and production relations (Awotona, et al. 1994). This was also affirmed byRapoport (1977) and Lawrence (1987) that quality in housing development is determined by house patterns and traditional values, among others. Equally, evidence abound that certain cognitive factors such as experience and socio-cultural background influence the level of human perception of their housing environment (Makinde, 2015). The socio-cultural values of each individual are known to differ from one civilization or society to another and these values have influenced man's habitation both direct and indirect. In Nigeria, For instance, the compound house form is the predominant traditional house form; it differs in pattern with the diverse ethnic regions in the country (Mills–Tettey, 1989). These differences are the effects of the socio-cultural factors and values peculiar to the various ethnic regions. An individual's social status, occupation and other possessions also influences the type of house he constructs for himself (Mills-Tettey, 1989). This is due to fact that the house is perceived as an important investment (Godwin, 1997). However, the realities of contemporary urban life, the influence of colonialism as well as the advancements in building materials have influenced urban house types in developing countries especially Nigeria. The reason for this development is due to cultural contact with foreign civilization (Ojo, 1966).

Nevertheless, the influence of socio-cultural values and lifestyles of individuals are very much inherent in the determination of housing forms, quality and preference. Furthermore, if the essence of a house must be fully appreciated within the context of human habitation, then it calls for the need to preserve and promote socio-cultural values through housing design and

forms. This must not be predicated on overzealous and emotional rhetoric, but on the relationship between housing and cultural structures.

Conclusion

This research provides evidence of prompt insight into the urban housing fabric as a growing structure with people's behavioural tendencies influencing its growth pattern. Until architects accept this concept of housing as a 'flexible living object' configuration issues will persist. Therefore, designers should understand the 'cultural design paradigm' appropriate in urban housing design in culture sensitive situations in order to make progress. This study on urban housing fabric has revealed an appreciable degree of dynamism in this particular sector of the Igbo's over time. The dynamism of this particular aspect of the Igbo culture bordered on the traditional Igbo attitude of adapting to the changing environmental conditions at any given time, while, in addition striving to conserve some of her sterling identities. To this end, this study indicates that the traditional style of Igbo housing form exhibited a high degree of resilience in its quest for independent cultural identity. It is clear and evident that, the determining factor that influence urban housing form in Igbo land has social, environmental and religious undertones.

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