THE PATTERNS OF RECOGNITION FOR NIGERIAN DOMESTICITY:

WHICH ASPECTS OF TRADITIONAL NIGERIAN HOUSING ARE STILL READABLE WITHIN THE MODERN-DAY VERNACULAR?

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PLAGARISM PLEDGE

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ABSTRACT

With respect of personal experience of living in Nigeria and acknowledgment of the poor climate suitability considerations of the average modern home, this essay serves as a comparative assessment of the retention of the traditional domestic practices against their modern-day counterparts.

This essay starts by exploring traditional domesticity; outlining typical layouts of Yoruba and Igbo communities in Nigeria, before expanding on the assigned meanings attached to domestic space, and of the community's roles in their erection and maintenance efforts.

The following chapter explores key influences of the shift from traditional to contemporary housing; how the introduction of Afro-Brazilian design from colonialism and the slave trade, compounded with government inaction, all led to the inevitability of the discordant requirements of modern living against tradition.

Third, comes identifying the current 'vernacular,' expanding on the misuse of domestic space, as well as the resulting threat on material heritage due to elitism and of western 'posturing.' A potential avenue for positive change is through acknowledgement of ongoing efforts to redefine domestic architecture: of individual efforts from designers like Tosin Oshinowo, and of a uptick of housing like Ile Timi - one such home that already employs the theories discussed.

Ultimately, the intention of most core values and beliefs – building impermanence, proverbs as a form of expression, and social connectivity – have survived the progression. The manner in which they reflect the needs of Nigerian residents has gone through varying degrees of perversion. This is as a result of the impact of the aforementioned factors for change which has been assessed within the final chapter of this essay, along with additional speculation for potential routes for future domestic practice.

INTRODUCTION

This essay explores both the traditional and contemporary domestic practices within Nigerian housing to draw links between spaces and their ability to reflect Nigerian core values. The motivation of this research on the evolving Nigerian vernacular was the mention of the "striking invisibility" of female voices operating from non-western countries in the "mainstream context" in an article from Jane Hall and Audrey Thomas-Hayes.[1] In response, the 'non-Western' aspect was made the focal point of this exploration, while my Nigerian heritage was the deciding factor of which country to examine 'home' as a topic.

One of the first points brought up in discussions of what I miss most of home in Lagos (see Figure 1) is the weather since one of the harshest transitions from Nigeria to the UK was the heat. Though Nigerian heat was objectively stronger, British humidity was an uncomfortable new experience.

I have a lot of prominent memories relating to this weather, including dashing back inside from play to the crisp, cool air from the air conditioning, and the same air conditioning when broken, left the third floor (which was entirely the master bedroom) an inhospitable, torrid, stuffy mess. Once, I wanted to scare my mother by jumping out from under this master bed, but a sudden and intense fear of scolding wound up with me cowering under there. Although it could not have been more than half an hour of hiding, my childish brain (and perhaps the onset of heatstroke) had thought I had just sealed my fate.

Figure 1 The old Ikoyi compound

[1] Jane Hall & Audrey Thomas-Hayes, "*Would They Still Call Me a Diva?"* in *Breaking Ground: Architecture by Women* (New York: Phaidon Press, 2019), 10.

A retrospective analysis into why this was such an uncomfortable environment is likely answered by the walls being a thick brick, and the lack of sufficient ventilation. Ultimately it was this memory that sparked the desire to explore housing design across Nigeria, and of the disconnects between traditional practices of building 'for' the climate, not 'despite' it.

A full comparison of modern practices against their traditional counterparts across the entirety of Nigeria is too broad for the scope of this essay so a few limitations were set:

1

Firstly, outside of geographical city/village borders, Nigeria is also regionally separated by over 200 ethnic groups, the most prominent three being the Yoruba people most concentrated in the south-west, Igbo people in the southeast, and Hausa-Fulani up in the northern region (see Figure 2).[2] Most sources focus on these three areas as they have the most dominant recorded historical presence. This essay further focuses on the former two groups due to personal affiliations of being of Igbo descent, and of living primarily within Lagos, situated within the Yoruba region.

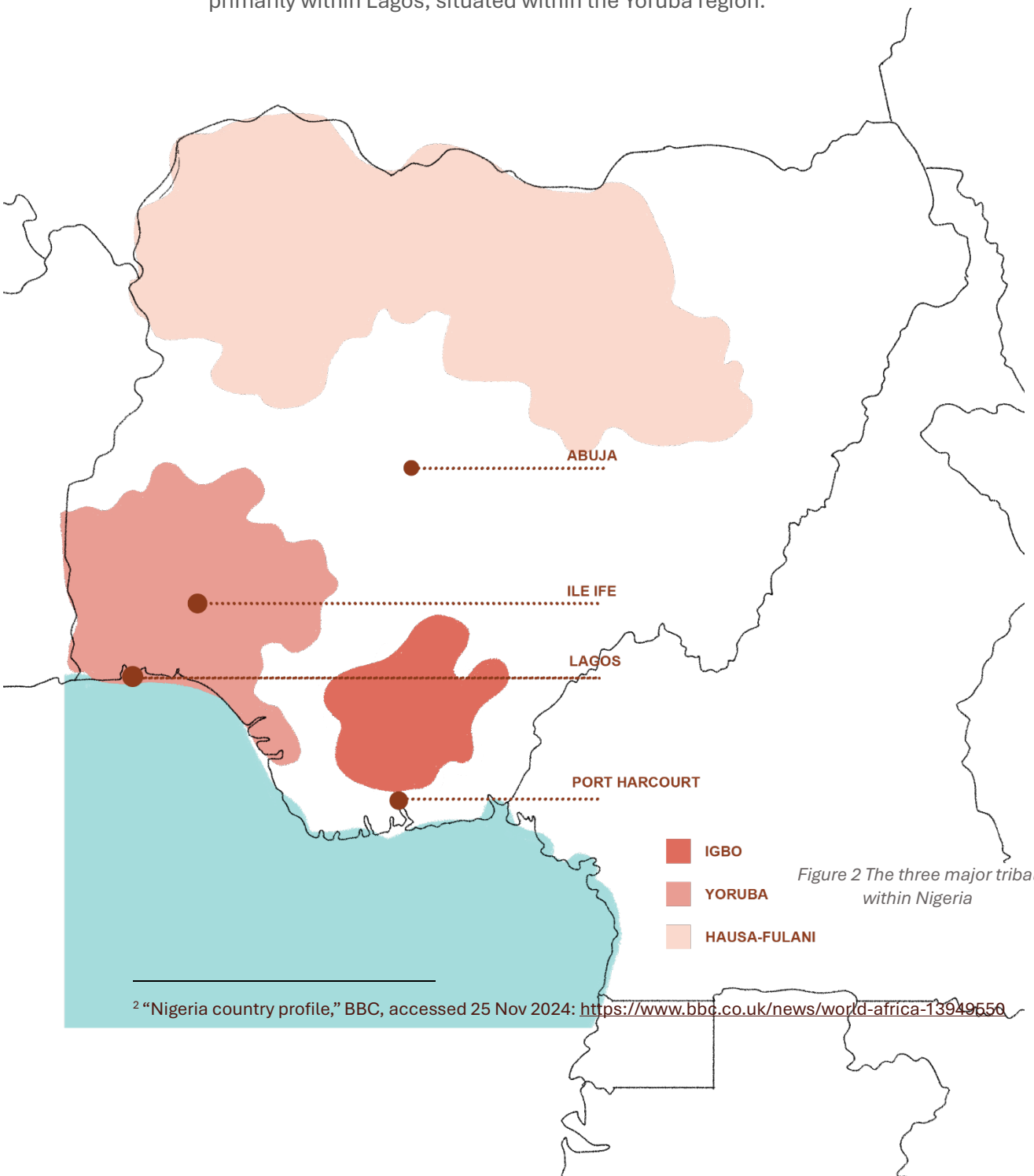

Figure 2 The three major tribal locations and cities within Nigeria

[2] "Nigeria country profile," BBC, accessed 25 Nov 2024: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13949550

2 Secondly, rather than just pointing out physical characteristics, this essay seeks to open a discussion of the resident: how the identities and needs of Nigerian residents living within these spaces are accounted for or repressed.

3 Third, defining what is meant by 'vernacular' or 'vernacular architecture' within this text. Architecture built informally is one interpretation, however within this essay, "vernacular" is used interchangeably with 'language' to imply the reflection of domestic practices against their relevant historical context.

4 Finally, I use the term 'intersectionality,' coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw to cover the "crossroads" of the different types of discrimination. These 'crossroads' could be considered entirely new facets of discrimination, independent of the original 'roads' they stem from.[3] Within the context of this essay, intersectionality is observed in the role of race, ethnicity (of the Yoruba and Igbo ethnic groups), and class on how the individual experiences a house's design.

1 NIGERIAN IDENTITY: CORE DOMESTIC VALUES AND BELIEFS

To analyse "domestic practices," an understanding of the core values of Nigerian residents needs to be established as a baseline. This chapter sets out to identify a few of these to be used as points of reference for speculating on the degree of adequate representation each aspect of domestic practice fulfils.

A study done by urban planner Temitope Adebara utilised focus group discussions to analyse the "level of importance" of the cultural components present in shared private spaces, proposing the results (see Figure 3) as a reflection of Nigeria culture.[4]

Components	RII_{Hausa}	RII_{Yoruba}	RII_{Igbo}
Family and social relations			
The need for social relationships among family members	3.97	5.00	4.92
The need to uphold family unity	3.83	5.00	5.00
To create space for family ceremonies and entertainment at home	1.13	4.94	4.07
To hold family meetings	4.59	4.91	4.91
To preserve the family's heritage	4.47	4.87	4.95
The need for a space for the reception of visitors	1.06	4.63	3.83
Group mean	*3.18*	*4.89*	*4.61*
Religious practice and belief			
The need for ancestral worship	–	3.45	4.89
The need for a separate space for prayers at home	4.96	2.01	2.03
The need for space to bury the dead	–	4.70	1.71
The need to satisfy religious doctrines and requirements	4.94	3.02	3.24
Group mean	*4.95*	*3.30*	*2.97*
Gender and privacy			
The need for women's privacy	5.00	–	–
The need for security and safety of household members	5.00	4.27	4.82
Conservative attitude towards women	4.91	–	–
The need for private recreational space	4.95	4.55	4.91
Group mean	*4.97*	*4.41*	*4.87*
Status and lifestyle			
The need for home gardening	1.85	1.00	5.00
To show social position in the society and claim prestige	3.81	–	–
Group mean	*2.83*	*1.00*	*5.00*

Figure 3 Adebara's focus group results

[3] TED, "The urgency of intersectionality | Kimberlé Crenshaw | TED," December 7, 2016, video, 18:49, https://youtu.be/akOe5-UsQ2o?si=PaRRzQrut8qq2wj8

[4] Temitope Adebara, "Private open space as a reflection of culture: the example of traditional courtyard houses in Nigeria," in *open house international* 48, 3 (2023): 622

Adebara's findings concluded a **heavy emphasis on family ties and involvement of extended family into common ceremonies and celebrations for Yoruba people**, due to a long standing belief in *Oduduwa,* a "common ancestor" within the people that classifies everyone under the same "ancestral origin."[5] Meanwhile, **status and lifestyle regarding communal gardening was highest ranking for Igbo people,** a people who are "reputed as gardeners and merchants."[6] Initially, these two factors appeared diametrically opposed, but further thought led to the realisation that **communal living** was a major link between the two ethnic groups (see Figure 4).

> "There is a courtyard garden in my house. The garden is not very large, but it is the source of the fresh vegetables, fruits, and spices we eat in my family. Apart from the nutritional benefits, home gardening is how my family saves money on our food budget. In Igboland, one can make money in the market by growing cassava and fruits like kola nuts and bitter kola (Igbo FGD-3, Female)."

Figure 4 Focus group discussion participant input

In line with Adebara's finding on communal gardening, the start of Okechukwu Agukoronye's article on traditional Igbo landscaping practices centres on *ala* – which means 'land' or 'earth.' The Igbo people saw *ala* as a deity and the "ultimate judge of morality of conduct," discussing how this earth goddess "must be treated with respect and care," and how she dictates the 'forbidden land acts' that followers must adhere to.[7] This reverence begins to imply another core value: religion.

> **Religion** has been a crucial factor of Nigerian society, with many people still upholding pre-colonial religions and spiritual practices despite the rise in conversion to Islam in the northern regions and Christianity in the south from colonial intervention.[8] In a Yoruba belief of which "deities controlled almost all aspects of their daily life," this can be depicted in the way they make their "spiritual feelings visible material," through the embellishment throughout the home.[9]

Several sources describe Nigerians as a people inclined towards **high adaptability**; of being "quick to embrace novelty."[10] One way this is evidenced was with the swift adoption of the Afro-Brazilian style. This offset of ornamentation for homes differed from the types observed on traditional housing but were still passing down through generations and eventually left to fall to ruin.[11] Their lack of maintenance was partially due to the (predominantly Yoruba) belief of impermanence regarding domestic space.[12]

Similarly, there is a large emphasis on **expression through proverbs**, especially within Igbo-speaking regions, known for their "rich oral tradition."[13] These highly contextualised sayings

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[5] Adebara, *Private open space*, 627
[6] Adebara, *Private open space*, 629
[7] Okechukwu Agukoronye, "Landscape Practices in Traditional Igbo Society, Nigeria," *Landscape Research* 26, 2 (2001): 85.
[8] Uduku, "The Urban Fabric of Igbo Architecture in South-eastern Nigeria in the 1990s," in *Habitat International*, 20, 2 (1996): 192.
[9] Ale Ayomide et al, "Expression and communication in architecture philosophy of vernacular architecture of the Yorubas in Nigeria," *preprint, submitted June 18, 2024, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foar.2024.07.015*,
[10] Olusola Sonaiya & Ozgur Dincyurek, "Tradition and Modernism in Yoruba Architecture: Bridging the Chasm," in *open house international* 30, 4 (2005): 75.
[11] "Lagos' Afro-Brazilian architecture faces down the bulldozers," Edvige Jean-François and Chris Giles, accessed October 27, 2024. https://edition.cnn.com/2017/07/19/architecture/nigeria-afro-brazilian-architecture/index.html
[12] Sonaiya & Dincyurek, Tradition and modernism in Yoruba architecture, 74.
[13] Uche Oboko, "Language as a Didactic Tool and Vehicle of Cultural Preservation: A Pragma-sociolinguistic Study of Selected Igbo Proverbs," *International Journal of Society, Culture and Language 8, 2 (2020): 97*

provide a window into common practices of Igbo people such as one that translates to "a cow owned by many people usually dies of starvation," and serves as a way of expressing the aversion to implement a strict allocation system for communal land.[14]

2 EXPLORING TRADITIONAL NIGERIAN DOMESTIC PRACTICES

A good place to start identifying the retained traits of traditional domesticity is with an exploration of traditional housing communities. This section starts by discussing Igbo and Yoruba community layouts before zooming in and picking apart ways the symbolism of different aspects of the home, such as room layout and decoration are used to communicate different facets of Nigerian domestic practice, and finally, of the roles of the resident within the birth and maintenance stages of such communities.

2.1 Typical Arrangements of Traditional Nigerian Villages and Compounds

Traditionally, Yoruba dwellings were arranged in a hierarchy of social importance to the homeowner or central 'king' in concentric circles (see Figure 5); the central space was typically a palace, a marketplace and shrine.[15] For Ile-Ife, a town in the south-west established between 500 B.C. and 1000 B.C., this arrangement is directly applied, with the central residence being the *Ooni's* (or 'traditional ruler') as stated by Cordelia Osasona, an architect based in Ibadan, Nigeria.[16]

Typical traditional Igbo communities share visual similarities to their Yoruba counterparts (see Figure 6 on the following page), including general accommodation for the male head-of-house, and further sleeping huts for each wife of his and their children. Igbo communities however did not usually have a king or a ruler, instead they favoured social connectivity and the individuals generating their own "agricultural or trading wealth," a direct reflection of the highest Igbo voted requirement for their homes.[17]

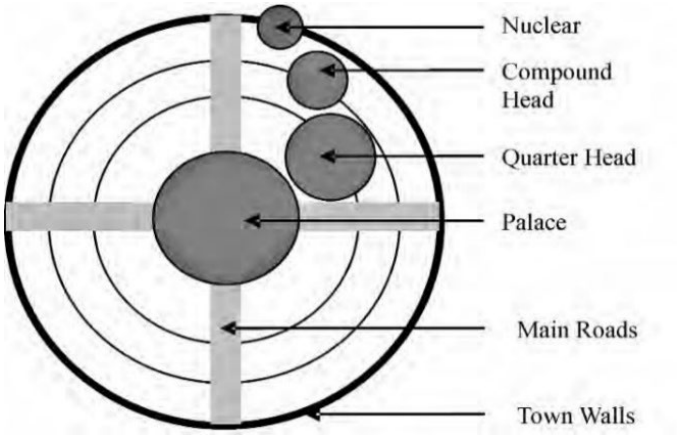
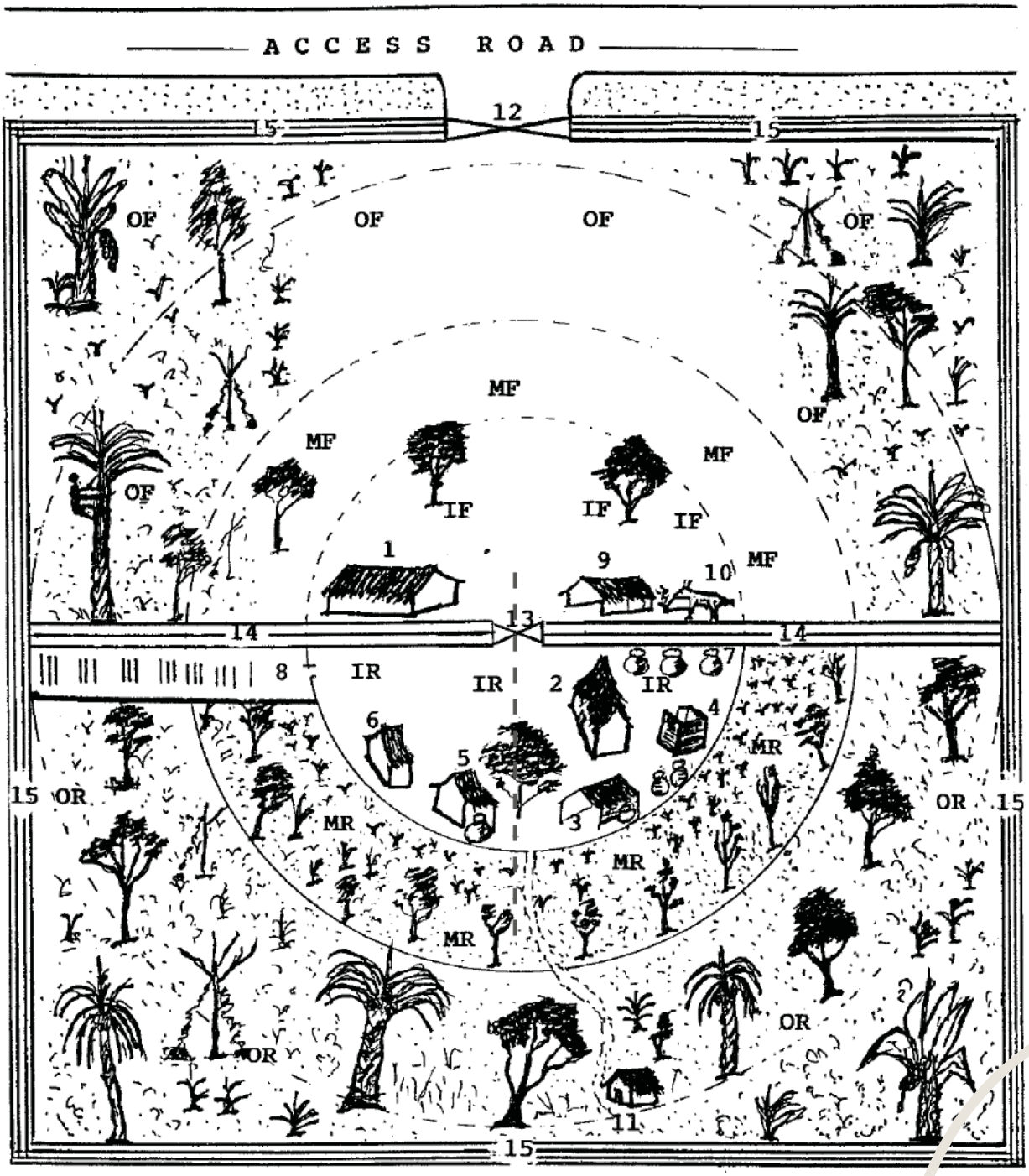


Figure 5 Traditional Yoruba town layout

[14] Agukoronye, *Landscape Practices in Traditional Igbo Society, Nigeria*, 97.
[15] Sonaiya & Dincyurek, *Tradition and Modernism in Yoruba Architecture,* 76.
[16] Cordelia Osasona & F. Ewamade, "Ile Timi: the interface between traditional and vernacular architecture in Ile-Ife" in *Structural Repairs and Maintenance of heritage Architecture* XIII (Southampton: WIT Press, 2011), 100.
[17] Oboko, *Language as a Didactic Tool,* 192.

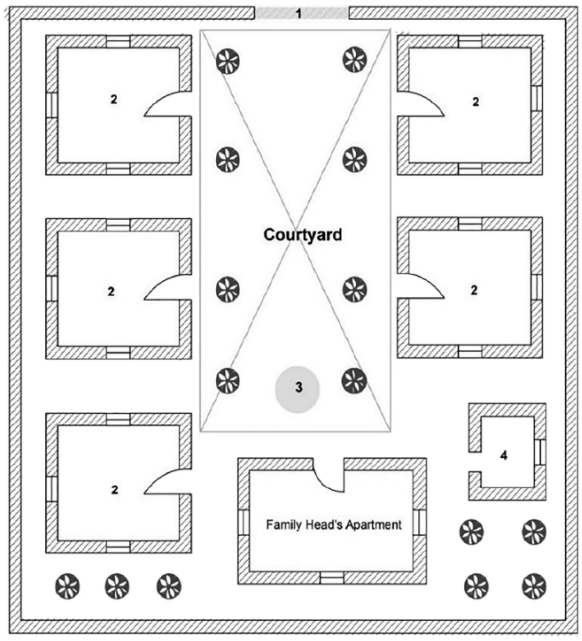


KEY:

1.	Men's House	12.	Main Gate
2.	Women's House	13.	Inner Gate
3.	Kitchen	14.	Middle Wall
4.	Lavatory	15.	Outer Wall
5.	Harvest Store		
6.	Animal House	IF	Inner Front Yard
7.	Winter Storage Pots	MF	Middle Front Yard
8.	Yarn Barn	OF	Outer Front Yard
9.	Outer House	IR	Inner Rear Yard
10.	Goats/Sheep On Tethers	MR	Middle Rear Yard
11.	Pit Latrine	OR	Outer Rear Yard

Figure 6 Traditional Igbo compound spatial subdivisions

2.2 Room Layouts and the Assigned Meanings Within



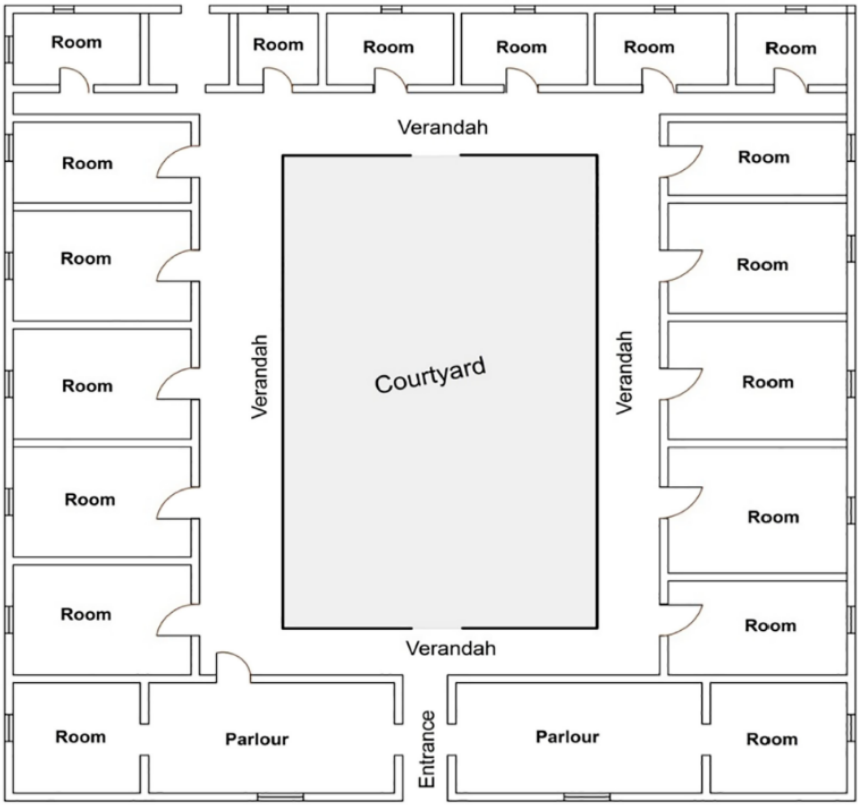


Figure 8 Typical Yoruba compound layout (above)

Figure 7 Typical Igbo compound layout (left)

Whilst there are multiple types of traditional housing a traditional Nigerian house is typically defined by three key areas: the entry, heart, and the rear.[18]

1. The entry usually holds the front yard and entry corridor, as well as any parlours and verandas
2. The heart is made up of the courtyard, halls/day rooms, and any bedrooms
3. The back boasts the backyard, kitchens and storage.

Sonaiya and Dincyurek talk about how each of these areas are not rigidly designated to a degree of public and private space, just that they showcase a unique blend that promotes communal practices. For example, they bring up the "rich spatial quality" provided by differing the floor and ceiling levels in traditional homes which would facilitate a seamless transition between the zones (see Figure 9).[19]

Figure 9 Multi-level flooring in a traditional home

[18] Sonaiya & Dincyurek, *Tradition and Modernism in Yoruba Architecture,* 76.
[19] Sonaiya & Dincyurek, *Tradition and Modernism in Yoruba Architecture,* 78

Figure 10 Social interactivity on Olugbenga's front porch

Uduku also talks more **about the open courtyard**, located in the heart, as **a gendered space, where the women made conversation or cooked, whilst the children played** (see Figure 10). The logistics of this space are expanded on by Okechukwu Agukoronye in their article about traditional Igbo landscape practices. Agukoronye showcases how the Igbo community importance for communal gardening results in a social area where the trees planted would provide ample shade and it was a common sight to see children "singing and calling on [the *'udalu'* (a native apple tree that "symbolises fertility and the spirit of children")] to let its fruits fall for them."[20]

Both ethnic groups placed a high level of importance on decoration through art or depictions of divinities.[21] These markings that adorned the interior and exterior of the homes provided a window into the wealth and status or the resident and further ascertain the social hierarchy. Within Yoruba communities, these embellishment line even the doors, with depictions of "narrative scenes" of "everyday life, like marketing, hunting, hawking, etc." being carved into the door frames themselves.[22]

2.3 Nigerian Community: Roles for the Residents

The arrangement of Nigerian village communities was indicative of a wider societal practice of men as leaders over women and children. However, that observation does not translate to a complete lack of women's involvement, whether by force or by choice.

Housing construction was a village-scale project, the construction would follow the homeowner first informing the village of his desire to build himself a home and him rounding up friends and 'well-wishers' to clear the site and then aid in the building process.[23] Care is taken to ensure two things simultaneously: that the home was "socially-culturally relevant," yet still

[20] Agukoronye, *Landscape Practices in Traditional Igbo Society,* 95.
[21] Ayomide et al, *Expression and communication,* 4.
[22] Ayomide et al, *Expression and communication,* 4.
[23] Cordelia Osasona, "The Role of Women in Traditional Nigerian architecture" in *The Nigerian Field* 60 (1995): 13.

possessed its "own subtle identity," as both were vital in showing standing within the community.[24]

Pre-industrial Yoruba mud house construction showed the male homeowner in charge of designing and constructing his home. Initially the women's role was to provide water for the mud used, as well as provide meals for the workers, but the 'art' of finishing the walls and floors with *eboto* – a mix of animal dung and local foliage – so they were durable was a job left to the women (see Figure 11).[25]

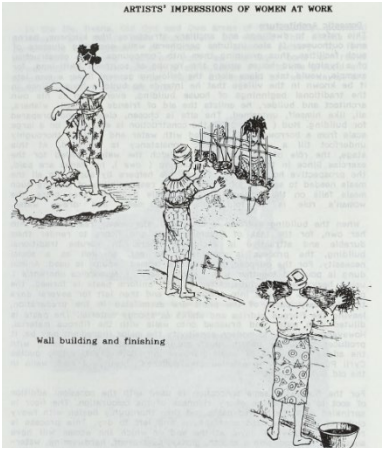


Figure 11 Women's construction contributions

Igbo construction utilised wattle and daub and the men produced the framework for the walls and roof, and doors, whilst the women were in charge of carrying over the timber and mud required, as well as, once again, finishing the walls.[26]

Children also have roles within family practices; of daily cleaning tasks to hone their environmental consideration and of partaking in stewardship training to prepare them for the eventual passing of land ownership from the previous heir.[27] Such activities foster environmental awareness from an early age and further aid in exercising independence even when surrounded by community.

Traditional construction and design of both Yoruba and Igbo homes showcases the talents and creativity of the resident. Clearly, a lot of thought went into self-representation, managing to balance practicality, aesthetics, and resourcefulness. So, the question now moves from identifying past principles, and onto exploring why changes to this language form were enacted.

3 FACTORS FOR CHANGE

A shift, to any degree, away from tradition is ultimately unavoidable; as time progresses, demand changes and housing design progresses accordingly. Several factors all coincide to shape the modern-day executions for domestic practice, these include:

- Physical i.e. the climate, environment conditions like soil conditions and available local material

[24] Osasona, *The role of women,* 11.
[25] Osasona, *The role of women,* 13.
[26] Osasona, *The role of women,* 15.
[27] Agukoronye, *Landscape Practices in Traditional Igbo Society,* 97.

- Socio-cultural i.e. religion and cohabitation practices as well as the maintenance of kinship systems and finally,
- Historic-political i.e. the political scene, the slave trade and colonial rule, alongside inter-tribal wars.[28]

This chapter explores the latter two overarching categories that have more nuance. In this instance, this will be on the matters of the government's role, the impact of colonial ideologies, and of foreign influence.

3.1 Contrasting Nigerian Core Values

Again, drawing back to the impermanence of traditional dwellings, architect professor Ola Uduku contrasts this concept with the frequent movement of families due to inter-clan disputes or for better farmland opportunities was a common ordeal.[29] Additionally, houses were "rebuilt in three-year cycles," which meant the attached meanings to home began to lose relevance within the minds of the residents themselves.[30]

The kinship system of dividing family land, and the dislike towards unclear territory boundaries for communal land (mentioned in this essay's introduction), meant that the size of the land acquired by heirs through the kinship system became "increasingly scarce."[31] Thus the younger generations have had to turn away from such practices and towards typical buying or temporary renting schemes, or of 'pledging:' transferring land to cover the cost for immediate needs and subsequent return once the debt has been paid.[32] Such different forms of transfer showcase the desire for individual growth but also allude to an increasing disregard for the appreciation for land maintenance acquired from traditional stewardship training practice.

Sonaiya and Dincyurek speak of how the rising rejection of traditional "unbaked earth habitations" match the uptick of the pursual of formal education within Nigerian society, implying a shame to their outward appearance.[33] They also share the dissatisfaction some feel towards the forced cohabitation from such close quarters pointing towards the central courtyard and shared spaces. People desire more definite privacy in the modern day with the rise of the nuclear family living as opposed to the polyamorous relations more common in traditional times that made such housing arrangements suitable. This reduced attachment to home can be linked with the rising trend of obtaining secondary residence, and of infrequent visits out of obligation.

3.2 Colonial Ideologies and the Impact of the Slave Trade

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[28] "Nigerian Traditional Architecture: What are the Factors that Influences it's Development?" Jonathan Adewumi, accessed October 6, 2024, https://eniitanblog.wordpress.com/2016/09/27/nigerian-traditional-architecture-what-are-the-factors-that-influences-its-development/

[29] Ola Uduku, "The Urban Fabric of Igbo Architecture in South-eastern Nigeria in the 1990s," in *Habitat International*, 20, 2 (1996): 195.

[30] Uduku, *Urban Fabric of Igbo Architecture,* 195.
Uduku, *Urban Fabric of Igbo Architecture,* 195.

[31] Agukoronye, *Landscape Practices in Traditional Igbo Society,* 88.

[32] Agukoronye, *Landscape Practices in Traditional Igbo Society,* 88.

[33] Sonaiya & Dincyurek, *Tradition and Modernism in Yoruba Architecture,* 77.

Osasona and Ewamade describe “vernacular” as the “product of cultural diffusion,” and for Nigeria, this further includes colonial influence: primarily of British or Brazilian origin in the southern regions of the country.[34] Similarly, in her talk “The Afromodernist Diaries,” Nigerian architect Tosin Oshinowo questions what can be defined as “truly African architecture,” describing the murky identifiable differences between ethnic building practice and colonising influences.[35]

Where the three authors differ is that Oshinowo, as an architect, has situated herself within Nigeria and begun to realise projects that reimagine solutions suited to the community based on her belief:

“Architecture must “listen to its environment and its users.”[36]

In her article, Uduku discusses the gradual urbanisation process within Igbo regions because of the turn from native religions to Christianity that took place due to the efforts of Christian missionaries around 1857.[37] These efforts combined with the ”semi-segregated urban lifestyles” during colonial rule, led to the implementation of housing layouts usually planned by the assumptions of ‘British miliary engineers or city planners’ of what was required for daily life.[38] This meant that the traditional Igbo farm-based livelihood was then challenged by western ‘sophistication.’

3.2.1 The Afro-Brazilian Style, Lagos

Slave returnees from Brazilian regions brought back the influences from the north-eastern Brazilian state, Bahia, one of cities which they played a key role in realising, which made recycling the construction techniques and skills acquired from their time away in the Nigerian landscape a natural escalation. As time has passed, the inclination for heavy ornamentation has dwindled.

A mix of impermanence belief and government inaction has resulted in a major decline in the number of existing structures, so whilst embracing novelty may come swift, the turnaround period is often just as fast, leaving constructed homes to ruin. One instance of this is the current state of Ologbenla house (see Figure 12), introduced during this Afro-Brazilian influence period.[39]

Figure 12 Evidence of decay: broken joists and peeling wall plaster

[34] Osasona & Ewamade, *Ile Timi,* 106.
[35] TEDx Talks, “The Afromodernist Diaries | Tosin Oshinowo | TEDxPortHarcourt,” January 30, 2018, video, 21:45, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A2_XnKH_mOI&ab_channel=TEDxTalks
[36] “Tosin Oshinowo: Redefining African Architecture Through Context and Collaboration,” Nour Fakharany, accessed December 12, 2024, https://www.archdaily.com/1024037/tosin-oshinowo-redefining-african-architecture-through-context-and-collaboration
[37] Uduku, *Urban Fabric of Igbo Architecture,* 193.
[38] Uduku, *Urban Fabric of Igbo Architecture,* 193.
[39] Cordelia Osasona, “Heritage Architecture as Domestic Space: A Tale of Three Buildings in Ile-Ife, Nigeria,” in *International Journal of Sustainable Development and Planning 10,1 (2015)*: 58

3.3 The Government's Role

Whilst this subsection mostly follows government action (or lack thereof) within house planning and construction and the negative implications, it should be acknowledged that there have been many coinciding issues requiring their prioritisation over the past few decades which Osasona summarises to:

> "Critical ones like overcoming a civil war, grappling with basic community health issues (such as polio-eradication), growing the economy and sustaining it in buoyancy, providing viable power for industrial and domestic use – right up to resolving intermittent religious and ethnic crises."[40]

In respect of this, the efforts the government has since taken to housing policy were still poor in outcome. Chukudi Izeogu and Amy Latessa both explore housing policy failure at the hands of the country's leaders for low- and middle-income earners across Port Harcourt and Abuja respectively and the failure of housing policy and of political leaders to provide residents with the appropriate means of living.[41]

Latessa talks about how the Abuja masterplan revealed the governments failed land ideals for Lagos, the previous capital, where the urban housing plan drafted by the authorities promised a reduction of overcrowding through the provision of "quality living standards" to reduce the occurrence of slum dwelling.[42] In actuality, elitist agendas between government officials and Nigeria's richest figures resulted with little more than slum clearance and 'short-term' displacement with no set plan for resettlement in a "vision where the poor were not seen," referring to those of lower working classes.[43]

For the capital in River State, Port Harcourt's early 20th century development was routed in "colonial segregation practices," and similarly reflects the elitist agenda.[44] The National Housing Policy 1992 and 2001 promises to all Nigerians were reinterpreted by the different state governments. The River State government instead offered up high-cost construction plots that excluded the lower-income households, and the housing numbers promised were far from adhered to. Like Abuja, the members of lower-income houses were instead evicted, their homes bulldozed in favour of a city masterplan with similar false promises.

This elitism is barely concealed within the empty mansions Ndukwu toured, with the richest earners having free rein to purchase large plots of land for their own private expansions, stripping away opportunities for the availability of affordable housing for lower-income earners. Whilst they showboat, the government turned their efforts towards transformations and started following large western architectural figures like Le Corbusier and his protégés who heavily

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[40] Osasona, *Heritage Architecture as Domestic Space*,60.
[41] Chukudi Izeogu, "A Case Study of Port Harcourt, Nigeria" in *Reading the Architecture of the Underprivileged Classes*, (Surrey: Ashgate, 2014), 227.
Amy Latessa, "Invisible Visibility: The Abuja Housing Deficit as a Political Mirage" in *Reading the Architecture of the Underprivileged Classes*, (Surrey: Ashgate, 2014), 249.
[42] Latessa, *Invisible Visibility*, 256
[43] Latessa, *Invisible Visibility,* 250, 258
[44] Izeogu, *A Case of Port Harcourt, Nigeria*, 229.

influenced the onset of tropical modernism, believing that this would showcase their "advanced national development" to international onlookers.[45]

4 MODERN-DAY NIGERIAN DOMESTIC PRACTICES

If from own experience, the unsuitability of the average modern home in Lagos can be recognised, then a branch outward is beneficial to see if there is a recognisable pattern of poor design decisions for the resident's use.

Conversely, not all the blame can be put on designers for any potential shortfalls, some trends will only survive if enabled by the public. This section explores some of the major components at play in the modern-day Nigerian scene that define its classification.

4.1 The Misappropriation of Domestic Space

Interpretations of foreign ideologies is a positive practice if the referenced material is adapted to suit the change of "local people's socio-cultural lifestyle," states Adebara in his discussion of the modernisation of Nigerian architecture.[46] This is a major factor to why Nigerian attempts of following Western planning ideologies perpetuated by the formal education system fall tend to flat. Personally, I believe this is partly due some underlying desire to 'prove' resilience, wealth and status to foreign bodies, intensified by the civil war during the late 60s.

In Steven Ndukwu's month-long informal investigation, he visited several mansions across eastern Nigeria to discuss the motives behind their construction with the homeowners.[47] Some of the interviewee's bring up the **Igbo saying: "*akụ ruo n'ụlọ; ọ na-ekwu maka onye kpatara ya*"** which translates to **"when wealth, reaches home; it speaks of its source or the generator,"** explaining that wealth obtained outside the country has no meaning if none of it is reflected back in their home.[48] The interviewees go on to justify this as motivation for the younger generations, whilst others share contradictive opinions including admissions that there is a large monetary waste. In theory, the Igbo saying showcases positive representation of Igbo beliefs, however it gets overshadowed by classism and elitism on a city-scale. It can be hard for member of the lower classes to feel inspiration with such a large gap between the economical

[45] Latessa, *Invisible Visibility*, 250.
[46] Adebara, *Private open space*, 632.
[47] Steven Ndukwu, "Why Nigerians own Empty Mansions in their Villages," February 2, 2024, video, 25:17, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hNGhWdwkGks&t=1s&ab_channel=StevenNdukwu
[48] Steven Ndukwu, *Why Nigerians own empty mansions in their villages*. 25:17

classes, so broadcasting status in this way would likely be perceived negatively for those unable to afford the lifestyle.

Figure 13 Rooms within the toured mansions

Within these homes, Ndukwu uncovers a pattern whereby most of the homeowners spend no more than a month yearly in residence, with many of their primary residences being abroad. Additionally, the heavy reliance on importation for the interior decoration (see Figure 13) speaks of a wider issue of the preservation of cultural heritage if there is no attempt to even employ any manner of socio-cultural relevance. The owners themselves acknowledge the wasteful nature of their mansion ownership with passive acceptance and Ola Uduku faults the lack of "innovative indigenous design to challenge" this Nigerian societal resignation.[49]

4.2 The Impact of Formal Education on the Maintenance of Cultural Heritage

The beginning of the third chapter briefly touched on formal education; as members of Nigerian society go out and pursue higher education, their desire or even mere acceptance of traditional dwellings seems to dwindle respectively.[50] In mainstream media, a lot of the coverage for Africa as a whole tends to be calls for help and donations to those in need (which are valid regardless of continent), but there seems to be a micro-aggressive undertone to global perception of this content. This only undermines the intelligence and capabilities of the over 1.3 billion people with blanket statements that just fuels a continuous cycle of ignorance.

The pursuit of higher education and its general lack of non-western perspectives in mainstream context then breeds shame or outright rejection of longstanding heritage which hinders its preservation. Class imbalance sees that the rich and those able to afford formal education split off to construct their own grandiose homes as a reflection of their 'high standing' identity, leaving lower classes to rely on limited resources to keep up preservation efforts.

4.3 Unique Meshes of the Traditional and Modern Practices: Ile Timi

Whilst some, like Tosin Oshinowo, have already begun taking actions towards the realisation of a future whereby environmental and cultural suitability of architecture planning and

[49] Uduku, *Urban Fabric of Igbo Architecture,* 197.
[50] Adebara, *Private open* space, 623-624.

construction is the considered the norm rather than the exception, there are existing informally produced examples that could be drawn on as a point of reference.[51]

Cordelia Osasona suggests a positive blend of traditional and what is now considered the Nigerian vernacular as the best approach. She uses the building Ile-Timi located in Ile-Ife, a city in south-west Nigeria, to cross reference her points.

The home's nucleus was arranged to suit the zoning requirements of the original owner, Awoyele Adarierin, a polygamous man who wanted separation between his wives that got along and those that did not, and additional rooms were added to the original centre as required (see Figure 14).

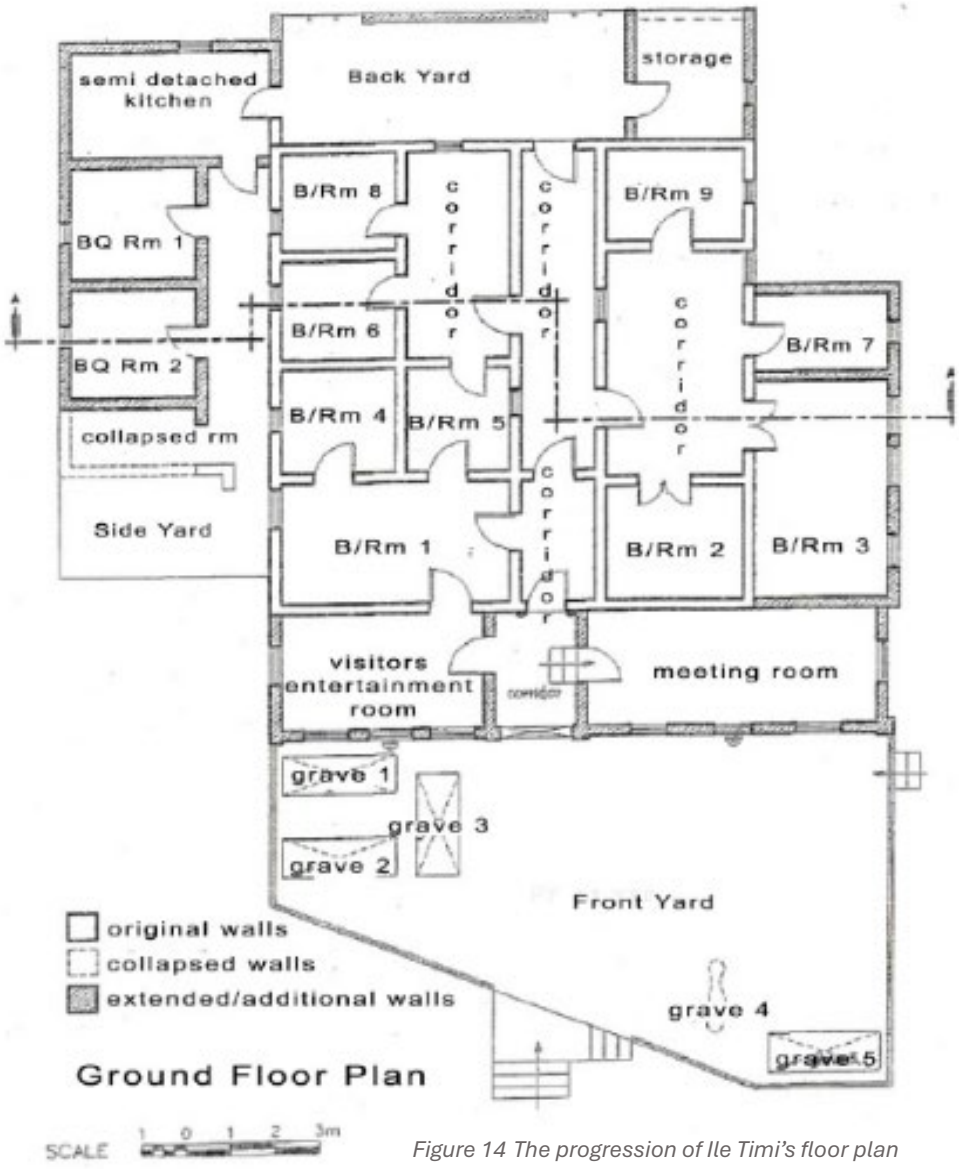

Figure 14 The progression of Ile Timi's floor plan

The construction materials and techniques utilised shifted as they developed on a global scale. Traditionally, the sizes of windows were minimal to control the amount of light coming in, but these were enlarged alongside the doors in the second developmental phases to suit the "contemporary folk building culture" of the time they were reconstructed, replacing the timber

[51] Nour Fakharany, *Tosin Oshinowo*.

shutters with glass frames. Additionally, the "apparent lack of morbidity" toward the family graves in the compounds front yard means they double as an airing/drying surface for washing, maize and cocoa beans, which showcases the persistence of the traditional multi-purpose functions of rooms, in a manner that reflects their needs.[52]

Ile Timi is quite distinct from the modern-day 'copy and paste' nature of housing design, but oddly, the house had not adhered entirely to traditional practices, mainly regarding the original house not containing any manner of courtyard spacing typically sighted across all regions.[53] This could be mostly attributed to the retention of the traditional practice of the homeowner also being the architect, and of the opportunity that provides to ensure that all your housing needs are met.

5 CONCLUSIONS: POSSIBLE FUTURES FOR NIGERIAN DOMESTICITY

This section casts a more speculative light on the discussion, addressing the overarching essay question and poses questions for potential routes of domestic practices within Nigeria's context.

The aspects of the of traditional domesticity still readable in the modern-day are more symbolic in nature than just a series of physical markers, although that is not intended to imply that the physical features hold no significance. After all, the stability of houses like Ile Timi is promising for the directions that domestic practice could go, even despite the factors for change at play regarding the retention of heritage architecture.

The word 'heritage' can have the connotation of being strongly routed in the traditional, so 'maintaining heritage' could be naturally interpreted as extremely as reverting entirely to pre-colonial practice, which would likely fail if implemented. The development of the common practices for housing design is inevitable so it was never a matter of which one to choose, rather a matter of ensuring that more thought is taken into the designs being erected and their impact on the current landscape as well as what it will mean for the future language.

The Nigerian belief in the "impermanence" of their own dwellings paired with the traditional three-year housing cycle is another retained aspect.[54] Admittedly, initial thoughts on this aspect of Nigerian values were more negative, and the question first considered was about how to raise morale amongst the people. On revisiting this throughout the researching process, this

[52] Osasona & Ewamade, *Ile Timi,* 110.
[53] Osasona & Ewamade, *Ile Timi,* 109-110.
[54] Sonaiya & Dincyurek, *Tradition and modernism in Yoruba architecture*, 74.

impermanence belief is also considerably a great strength. Material culture is important to keep an established collective cultural identity, but Nigeria is regarded as having a high adaptability which could start a cycle of adaptation and reflection of domestic spaces — a strong basis for a 'collective cultural identity' — if applied well.

Regarding the pursuit of formal education and of shame towards traditional housing, the assumption that the residents of such structures share a similar distaste could lead to individual attempts to enact 'saviourhood.' By this I mean the imposition of 'solutions' to ease the assumed discomfort of those living within the traditional houses. Again, open communication must be relied on to avoid this avenue, to prioritise projecting the identity and needs of those being designed for as **they** see fit.

Since this essay has established the borrowing nature of Nigeria, attempting to outright smother assimilation is out of the question. Instead, explorations should be about finding a way to shift the focus from showboating as individuals and onto showboating as a community, reducing the glaring lack of prioritisation of the more rural and low-income earner communities.

The use of proverbs as a means of expression, however, is still blatant in modern settings, with the Igbos still reciting them in reference to the uprise of secondary residences in the Igbo region utilised as a showcase of wealth. The resulting 'show' mimics traditional practices of housing size and embellishment as a reflection of status, although the execution within modern day seems to have given way to elitist agendas from the government and the most affluent members of society.

To summarise, the future of Nigerian domesticity could go a multitude of ways but facilitating open communication with the people residing within is a decent base to work from, as that disconnect has been a constant blockade in current efforts.

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APPENDICES

Going into this research, I had imagined that my conclusions would be more of a 'spot-the-difference' for physical markers between tradition and modern housing, but I quickly connected more with exploring how these two forms connected with the people when situated in their differing historical context.

Since progression is a cumulative process, elements of traditional domesticity were always going to peer through, I just had not imagined this would play out in the way I had believed at the beginning of this research, for one, the modern trend of imported decoration as an indicator of wealth, which echoed the traditional practices, just in a more exaggerated manner. Whilst the physical outcome looks different, the psychological nuance behind both overlaps significantly, which really intrigued me throughout my research.

Admittedly, whilst I naturally hold a lot of love for my country in my heart, it was too easy to slip into an overly critical tone of the country and some of its common ideals and practices so balancing the argument and leaving out bias was a little difficult at times. I will say though that being able to critique so harshly is also be a strength in my eyes, as it is healthy to question the data you are presented.