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TRADITIONAL ARCHITECTURE AMONG THE IGBO OF NIGERIA: A CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

Ifeyinwa Cordelia Isidienu [1]
Lotachukwu Loveth Amalukwue [2]
Department of Igbo, African and Communication Studies, Faculty of Arts, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria [1]
Department of English Language and Literature, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria [2]
Corresponding E-mail: ll.amalukwue@unizik.edu.ng [2]

Abstract
The Igbo people of South-Eastern Nigeria are endowed with a lot of cultural heritage-their language, religion, arts and crafts, architecture, music, clothing, food, literature, and the totality of their way of life. People's culture is their identity. Thus, the traditional Igbo architecture which is basically in vogue in precolonial Igbo society is part of the culture of the Igbo people and it is embedded in their values and belief system. Unfortunately, this traditional Igbo architecture is waning and moribund in the face of modernization.Thus, this research comes handy as it calls for urgent revitalization of traditional Igbo architectural designs and the creation of awareness of its importance through a detailed examination of the different architectural designs that existed in Igbo society, the material for their construction and the convenience, comfort and satisfaction one gets from them. The research is qualitative in that the researchers employ library research and direct observations in carrying out the research. The theoretical framework is based on New Historicism which emphasizes the cultural and social context in which a work is interpreted. The paper concludes on the note that craft and creativity also reside in non-literate societies whose architectural designs are the focus of this research.

Keywords: Traditional, Architecture, Culture, Igbo, Identity, Nigeria.

Introduction

Igbo people constitute one of the major ethnic groups in Nigeria. They are found in the South-Eastern part of Nigeria. Because of their enterprising, independent and adventurous nature, they are found in different parts of the world. They are quick in emulating other people's culture as they travel from one part of the country to another or from different parts of the world. This gives way to the decline in some aspects of Igbo cultural identity, especially Igbo architectural designs coupled with the twentieth and twenty first century's globalization and homogenization

phenomena. In the past, it was the local materials found in Igbo environment that were used to construct houses, but now Igbo people have abandoned the old patterns and adopted the modern architectural designs found in European and other advanced countries of the world.

Architecture is the art and science of building; the art or practice of designing and building structures, especially habitable ones (Merriam-Webster). Durand (2019) states that architecture is the art of composing and realizing all public and private buildings; arguing that for a building to be appropriate, it must be solid, healthy, and comfortable. Therefore, architecture is the science of designing and erecting buildings, be it residential, commercial, business centres, recreation centres, town halls, worship centres, among others. Architectural design, therefore, is a discipline that focuses on covering and meeting the needs and demands to create living spaces using certain tools and, especially, creativity (Munari, 2020). In pre colonial Igbo society, architectural designs are seen in the people's ideas as they construct their huts with mud walls and thatch roofs. They are able to design their houses which, in most cases, distinguish the different types of houses owned by different people according to their cultural values, social class and so on. Therefore, to the Igbo speaking areas of South-Eastern Nigeria, architecture is neither a purely artistic nor an exclusively technical activity, and its aim is to provide material frame for the major part of human life: work and rest, religious, social and artistic activities (Alozie, 2020).

The purpose of architecture is to improve human life, create timeless, free, joyous spaces for all activities in life. The infinite variety of these spaces can be as varied as life itself and they must be as sensible as nature in deriving from a main idea and flowering into a beautiful entity (Lautner, 2011). Architecture is the starting point for anyone who wants to take humanity towards a better future (Charles-Edouard 2019). It is based on the above that architecture can be seen as more than a mere record or reflection of who we are. It is a means of creating our culture and ourselves. Determining who we want to be, or what it means to be fully human, can be properly understood as a design problem (Buchanan, 2012). Architecture expresses people's values, belief system, and philosophy; and identifies them. It exists to create the physical environment in which people live. Igbo Architecture is more than just the built environment; it is also part of our culture. It stands as a representation of how we see ourselves, as well as how we see the world. Throughout history, societies have developed unique types of architecture, reflecting their local, cultural, geographical and economic forces. Igbo people of South-Eastern Nigeria are no exception.

Types of Igbo Architecture

In traditional Igbo society, a man and his wife or wives and children do not live in the same house. The man lives in *òbí* (homestead) while the wife or wives and children live in *mìkpúkè* (huts). The man's house is rectangular in shape while the wife's or wives' house(es) is/are square in shape. The *òbí* is at the centre; near the entrance gate. Aniako (2002) acknowledges thus that " Obi is the seat of ritual, economic, political and social authority of the Igbo family compound." The huts of his wives housing their individual families are spread out around it in a large compound. There are shrine houses for religious purposes. Communality is an important aspect of Igbo cultural life and it is ingrained in the layout of the settlement pattern. Settlements have community spaces at the centre, and these spaces are the sites for public gatherings, discussions and meetings, as well as other community interactions (Njoku, 2019). The shrine houses are separately structured, and in the form of dwelling houses. There is also, among other forms of architectural types, the yam barns structured for yam storage; livestock pens for keeping of the different domestic animals like cattle,

goat, sheep, pig, horse and donkey; and structures where domestic birds such as chicken, duck and turkey roost and lay/hatch their eggs. Also, most of the traditional housing units are circular in shape. This reflects the Igbo idea of social success and achievement. The circular and oval house types are predominant in the areas south of Enugu; from Okunano to Ihe-Ogwu and extends eastwards to Okposi (Okoye and Ukanwa, 2019).

An in-depth study of the traditional Igbo architectural designs exposes a litany of styles of buildings which Igbo people could make. There are the *ụkpụ̀rụ̀* designs which are tower-like, often used for security purposes; the *mbàrị are* religious architectural designs that has strong walls from the entrance and the major gate drawn within from a long runway. There are also huts built with thatch roofs soaring high in the sky like the pyramid and many others.

As stated earlier, there is a particular type of this traditional structure called the *mkpúkè* and *òbí* (women homestead and men homestead respectively). A man builds *mkpúkè* based on the number of his wives. One can easily decipher whether a man married a wife or many wives by counting the *mkpúkè* in his compound. These mud houses (mkpuke) have a lot of architectural designs in carvings, paintings and intricate structures according to the owner's purpose and taste. The *mkpúkè* is a mud house that has a common entrance. The house is merely supported by a heavy tall rectangular pillar in the centre of the entrance of the building. This also supports the roof. Within the *mkpúkè* and on the outside, mud walls are more of artistic designs to the taste of the owner. These mud houses have some beds, a long rectangular mud base at the entrance and other necessary facilities, according to the financial capacity of the owner.

Additionally, some well to do families among the Igbo also have something much more than huts for their women. Such houses are called *sọ̀mánǵà*. *Sọ̀mánǵà* is a special type of *mkpúkè*. What makes it special is that though it is a mud house, it has a touch of the Western style in the early 1930s. The *sọ̀mánǵà*, like the *mkpúkè,* has only one common entrance. There are four long mud steps running from one end of that entrance to the other which finally leads the climber to a long rectangular mud base (the *ọ̀jọ́*), which also has the same length with the log steps. One would descend to the floor of the house which serves as the house's sitting room. The sitting room has a square shape of twelve feet by twelve feet.

Within the *mkpúkè* are some in-built aesthetic designs that make the *mkpúkè* a complete house to accommodate even the visitors. There is the *ọ̀kwụ́ị̀tọ̀*. It is the biggest mud bed of a rectangular shape (6ft x6ft) at one end of the house that joined the *ọ̀jọ́* immediately after the long rectangular pillar on that *ọ̀jọ́* which supported the house's ceiling. This rectangular mud bed, the *ọ̀kwụ́ị̀tọ̀* can contain like four adults who will spread the *úté nwáàlị̀* (mat) comfortably for a night's sleep. The head of the *ọ̀kwúị̀tọ̀* terminates at a cylindrical mud design that is raised above to join the wall at that end just like it is seen at the other end where the *ọ̀jọ́* terminates.

The second mud bed from the right side of the house is the *ìkpò. Ìkpò* is a rectangular mud bed for two adults. *Ìkpò* separates from the *ọ̀kwụ́ị̀tọ̀* with a raised mud wall of a heavy rectangular shape. By the side of this *ìkpò* is the small dwarf door to a small room called the *ḿgbábú*. This small room serves as a store house and a strong room for the woman of the house. That is where she secures all her valuables. It is through that store or strong room that one gains access to the ceiling of the house by using a ladder. The ceiling is the strongest and safest place in the house because of its security potentials. This is because the ceiling is made of very strong rafters. These rafters are referred to as *ùbúlù*. They are made from the stem of palm trees, and are naturally immune from termites attacks or from other insects.

The *ḿgbábú* has a small door facing one of the *ìkpò* or mud beds. One crosses the *ìkpò* before getting into the *ḿgbábú* where the woman keeps all her valuables, including wooden boxes of clothes, necklaces and bangles. Sometimes, a clay pot of drinking stream water covered with the shell of coconut, or a calabash dish with a calabash cup placed on the pot's cover is kept in the *ḿgbábú*. This stream water has a desirable 'taste' and cooling effect especially during the dry or hot weather. Generally, both the mud walls and thatch mats of *ḿgbábú* provide the needed air conditioner in the time of heat. Ukaegbu (2005) asserts that "Since the walls are thick, they retained some heat, thereby creating a stable condition of no extreme cold or heat." This *ḿgbábú* forms a link to the rafted ceiling which has a good opening for also preserving valuables. A ladder is also handy for climbing the ceiling. The ladder is usually removed immediately after use for security reasons. When children are big enough and could no more be hidden in the *ùkó* to safeguard them from the assailants, they are taken to the ceiling through the ladder and are as well locked from the outside and would be warned to maintain silence.

After this *ìkpò* that leads to the *ḿgbábú*, is another *ìkpò* that can comfortably contain two more adults for night's rest. It is directly joined by the *ágōdō,* a specially structured bed. The *ágōdō* had a mud pillow for resting the head. It has a hollow at the centre and a platform is raised above its hollow with some long tiny strong sticks joined at the two ends in close succession to form the bed for two persons. In place of the sticks to form the floor, *ḿgbō,* which is a flat wooden board, is used. In front of the *ágōdō*, from the floor of the house, is a hole that leads to the space under the long sticks/flat wooden board raised above to form the floor of the bed that usually has a mat on it. Through this hole, the nursing mother and the new baby are kept warm by some live charcoals in a clay oval plate called *ọ̀kụ̀,* which is inserted to the hollow of the *ágōdō* through the hole. *Ágōdō* is unique. It is purposely meant to help the woman who newly gave birth to a child to be placed on a serious warm temperature so that, according to belief, all blood clots after childbirth would dissolve freely. It is also believed that, the pains of childbirth and the cramps were taken care of with the heat of this *ágōdō*, together with some hot beverages, as there are no hospitals for childbirth but the backyard of the local/traditional midwives, with the thick rectangular wooden board, *ḿgbō*, serving as the birth bed.

At the foot of the *ágōdō* is the rectangular wall soaring high towards the ceiling. The rectangular wall has a rectangular tall structure that completely shields the foot of the *ágōdō.* The tail end of the *ágōdō* is about three feet, making it possible for someone to hide at the foot of the *ágōdō* unnoticed. Some mischievous children usually hide there to avoid being beaten. Some of the children also hide in order to frighten unsuspecting family members. That rectangular wall that joins directly to the foot of the *ágōdō* is the *ùkó* (shelf).

The front view of the *ùkó* x-rays three apartments. The eight feet-tall structure has the *ụ̀sọ́ékwū/ọ̀kpụ̀kpọ̀lọ́ńtụ́* (hearth) as the first apartment. This is arranged in such a way that it has enough space to contain the fire-place and a moderate size of an *òsíîtè* or the tripod stand. The *ụ̀sọ́ékwū* (hearth) is about four feet high and has a roof of rafters made from the stem of the palm tree which is joined to the two sides of the mud walls to form a base. This base is the *ányá ọ́kụ̄* where the woman keeps the fish, meat, *ògìrì* (oil bean wraps), and other perishable ingredients she would want to preserve. Because of the constant heat from the fire-place, flies finds it difficult to infest the ingredients. In some *ụ̀sọ́ékwū* (hearth) that are very high, the woman hangs some seed crops like cobs of maize tied with their leaves in bunches and hung beneath the rafters and allowed to suspend over the fire-place, dangling at the instance of any slightest disturbance. The

heat from the fire-place scared pests, such that the seedlings would ever remain safe till the next planting season. The dry ọ́kwụ̀rụ̀ (okro) seeds, dry *àkị́dị̀* (local beans) pods, and seeds of *ìnìnè (*light green amarantus) are tied and are hung above the cooking pot to dry. Also, *ńgī̀gā,* a pot-like basket with cover, used to preserve meat and fish, helps to keep away the enticing content from rats and mischievous children. This also dangles over the fire-place. The fire place also plays very significant role in the *mkpúkè*. Apart from those mentioned earlier, fire glows constantly at that fire place in the heart of the raining season and at the peak of the harmattan/dry season to keep the house warm mostly for the little children and the aged, and serve as the source of fire for the following day for household use; or else,one will have go to the neighbours to fetch fire.

Directly above this segment, *ụ̀sọ́ékwū* (hearth) is a decking which houses the *ùkó* (main shelf). *Ùkó* has a small door and is usually under lock. *Ùkó,* just like the *ḿgbábú* is another place of utmost privacy for the woman. This is where she preserves her most valuable items ranging from money, jewelries and other valuables that are kept out of the public glare. The woman would also arrange her hot pot of *ófé ōnūgbù* (bitter leaf soup) and calabash of *ńrí ákpụ̄* (pounded cassava) rolled in big balls, covered tightly and carefully placed in the *ùkó* to maintain their warmness for the next morning, especially, in readiness for the workers in the farmland during the planting season who usually left at the first crow of the cock (around 4am).

One particular thing is unique about this 'treasury' called the *ùkó*. It is a strong refuge where a mother keeps her little children while she is away. This is commonly seen in precolonial Igbo society when the slave trade is still in vogue. Then, slave traders hunt for people, especially children they will kidnap and sell into slavery. To protect their children, mothers hide them in the *ùkó,* provides them with food and drinks and locked them up, while sounding a note of serious warning that they must not make a noise. In those days these evil men that hunt for children will come and search the whole compound and go away empty handed, without seeing the children.

It is worthy to note that the *ùkó* itself is decked above the 'rafted' *ányá ọ́kụ̄* and decked again, giving it a small space between it and the house's ceiling. It is also made of *ùbúlù* or the palm tree rafters which are very strong and can last for so many years and still withstand the test of time. For the rafters to make the *ányá ọ́kụ̄* which the two ends are buried at the two sides of the walls of the *ùkó* building, some people use the bamboo stems cut to size. Sometimes, it is used as a whole or opened diagonally making the inside face the *ụ̀sọ́ékwū*. The length of time it is in use can be detected from the extent of smoke that smears it. In some cases, the whole of the rafters are *ùbúlù* for the ceiling and the *ányá ọ́kụ̄*. Igbo architectural designs are unique. Some designs are only seen in the well-to-do families. Most houses has the thatch roof while some, built by people who had the taste of the fast spreading modernity, has the zinc roof.

Generally, the interior of the mud houses is cleaned at intervals with a chunk of *ǹtítè* (decayed banana stem) which is used to soak water from the working calabash of water to rub the walls, mud beds and the floor. A sizeable pebble is used to rub the watered area until it shone. This constant cleaning gives all the mud houses some cooling effects for comfort. In some cases, especially during popular festivals like New Yam Festival, women paint the interiors of the mud houses. They usually use some black and milky colorants like the *ánùnùù* leaves and *ńzū* (chalk-like substance) respectively to give their houses some lovely dark and light colour paintings believed to have coolness effects.

It is worthwhile to note that in pre colonial Igbo society, the forebears do not have seats in the *mkpúkè*. All the mud beds and the *ọ̀jọ́* at the entrance serve as seats. Those who cannot not

find spaces at the *ọjọ* and *ìkpò* will quickly settle down at the neat floor. It is normal for people to have their rest by sleeping on the bare, clean, cool floor of the *m̀kpúkè*. Actually, people really lived very close to nature. The ingenuity of these buildings remains a marvel. There is a careful thought in the Igbo style of building.The *m̀kpúkè,* which is for women and *òbí* that is for men in the Igbo traditional society form an epitome of Igbo intricate cultural designs. It may not be easy to find *m̀kpúkè* and *òbí* in these modern times because of dilapidation and lack of maintenance of the original traditional *m̀kpúkè* and *obi*. They suffer neglect, as people have shifted their architectural focus on modern structures.

On the other hand, the *òbí,* has a thatch roof, and some intricate designs within and outside the mud walls. These make it so beautiful and comfortable. Also, just like the women's homestead, the men's *obi* appears in different shapes and forms according to the owner's social class. The *obi* of the traditional ruler usually stands out as a unique structure which stands out as an epitome of architectural design. It is often larger in size than the average obi and the paintings and designs are even more intricate, more elaborate and more beautiful, often depicting wild animals, totems and the occupations which the community is known for. Only professional painters and designers are engaged for the work on the traditional ruler's *obi.*

Apart from the *m̀kpúkè* and *òbí,* there are other architectural designs that are seen in different parts of the Igbo community. For instance, in Agbaja, there are ancestral homes in various shapes and sizes. There are also the ten Nsude pyramids on the Udi highlands of Enugu State.The Nsude pyramids originally stand as a testimony of Black Africa's cultural enlightenment. Built with hardened red mud and clay, the structures lasted for centuries until the 1930s when degradation, followed by years of negligence that only their faint outlines can be traced (Ozoene, 2016). The first base section of the pyramid is sixty (60) feet in circumference and three (3) feet in height. The stacks are forty-five (45) feet in circumference. Circular stacks continued till it reaches the top. The structures are temples for the god *Àlà/Uto* who is believed to reside at the top. A stick is placed at the top to represent the god's residence. The structures are laid in groups of five parallel to each other (Omotolani, 2021). A source also states that, Nsude pyramids are ten (10) pyramid structures built by the Igbo people in Nsude and Agbaja Owa. The structures are made of mud and clay with five circular stacks, laid on each other, with decreasing circumference. The base is sixty (60) feet in circumference with a height of two-six (2-6) feet. The second layer is forty-five (45) feet in circumference. The structure is sacred in Igbo culture and is considered the residence of the god, Ala (Afropedia, 2010).

The Materials Used for the Construction of Houses among the Igbo

It is interesting to note that all the materials used in constructing traditional structures in traditional Igbo society are sourced locally. As Ebenezer, (2020) points out, the buildings are usually made of mud and thatched roofs and this choice of materials is very significant, as the materials are readily available and fit our tropical climate. The major material mostly used is *ájá ụ́pà,* (the red mud). This is collected from the environment. The local hoe and digger are used to evacuate the soil. Then the mud is collected from the earth with local containers like the baskets or earthen wares. Women and children are usually seen making several trips from the excavated points to the family compound where the red earth will be used. They heap trips of the desired quantity of the red earth. The quantity of the red mud to be desired for the house depends on the type of house it is used for. Also, several clay pots are filled with water.

Having gotten the desired quantity, the man of the house will invite some able bodied men, usually his friends, to help him trample the red earth (an exercise referred to as *ịzọ ọtọ)*. They will scoop a manageable quantity from the big heap and create a permanent enabling environment within the family compound where the red earth would be mashed. The men so employed will normally start the work very early in the morning, at the first crow of the cock (around 4am). They usually make the work an early morning affair so that the hot sun of the day will neither disrupt their work nor sap their energy. As they trample the red earth, they will add water gradually until they produce a soft, smooth, silky pulp. They will roll the pulp in very big balls and pack somewhere within the family compound. When they are done each day, they will use the fresh banana leaves to cover the heaps they have prepared. They will continue like this until they whole red mud heap are appropriately prepared. It is worthy of note that these men are not paid for their services. They feed from the food prepared by the women. The women of the house usually cook the delicious *ófé ōnūgbù áká ágá n'ọ̀kụ̀* (bitter leaf soup with lots of meat and fish) and *ńrí ákpụ̄*-cassava fufu. The man of the house usually provides some kegs of *ńgwọ̀* or *ńkwụ́ élū (*palm wine) to make his friends glad. Whereas *ńgwọ̀* is tapped from raffia palm, *ńkwụ́ élū* (literally 'upwine') is gotten from the oil palm. Both are delicious alcoholic beverages; the latter being more alcoholic than the former. The job of house construction is rotated among the group of friends who need to build or mend their houses. It was called *òfú ọ́rụ̄* or *ịgbā ōnwè ọ́rụ̄*, which means exchange of labour.

When the desired quantity of mud is ready, the workers join their friend/their host, to the farm land to collect *ájù/ákịrịká* or the reeds that is used in roofing the *ụ́nọ̀ ájù* or *ụ́nọ̀ ákịrịká* (grass house). Sometimes, women and children join them in bringing the roofing reeds home, carrying the smaller bundles cut and tied by the men. On the completion of the day's work, the host and the hostess, as was the custom, will provide food and drinks (palm wine) for their guests/workers. That is communal living in action. These reeds are collected and heaped in the same family compound where they had the big mound or heap of mud. They are spread to dry, as wet or fresh reeds are not suitable for roofing because they are not be durable.

When the desired quantities of reeds are ready, the men bring in the rafters. The man of the house may have some tall strong palm trees he felled for the building project, or his friends may give him if he does not have. They will fell the palm trees, cut off all the palm fronds and saw the stems into *ùbúlù.* These are long strong cylindrical 'planks' that are used as the rafters and for ceiling the house. The *ùbúlù* is dried and are packed in the same family house. Note that the person who intends to erect a house has to start some nine months earlier to fell trees for the building. The required trees are very heavy ones. He has to cut down the trees in time so that the heat of the sun can help in making them lighter before use. Apart from palm tree, other trees that are used are oil bean tree and *ùrù* tree.

The trunks of oil bean tree are used as pillars. The trunks of palm tree (split into two) are used as wall-plates. The wood from *ùrù* tree is lighter than those from other trees and is split length-wise and measured about five metres long, and are used as rafters. Tough vegetable cables known as *àpàḷị̀* are collected from the forest, split into convenient sizes and used for tying together the pillars, wall-plates and the rafters. According to Orji (1999), "Another thing is the provision of sufficient amount of special type of wild tall grass (*ájù/átā/ọma*), for roofing the house."

Generally speaking, Igbo people live in the rain forest area where there is abundant and high quality hardwood that are easily harnessed for the construction of buildings. Mahogany is used for making planks. *Ọ́jị̀* (iroko) and *Úkpì*, both hardwoods, serve in making beams and posts in

building construction. The mangrove is another hardwood which is termite resistant. The areas outside the forest are often heavily farmed and it is mostly there that many kinds of palm trees grow. Of the various species of palm tree, practically every part is used for building purposes: timber, fronds and fibres. Bamboo, which grows in clusters, is available in almost all parts of Igbo countryside (Alozie, 2020).

After the three major raw materials comprising mud, reeds and planks are ready to be put in use in the building project, the man of the house will invite his friends to help him. He and his wife or wives will provide the food and drinks throughout the period the building project lasts. As we already stated, the workmen are not paid in monetary terms for their services, because it is a communal labour which makes the members of the community help each other in turn. During the erection of this project, these friends ensure that they help their friend to achieve his desired goal of building a durable, beautiful family house; either his *obi* or the *m̀kpúkè* for his wife. In some parts of Igbo land, the minstrels entertain these men while they work. With the music, the tough task of trampling the red earth and erecting the structure become pleasurable events.

With the architectural design of erecting the mud walls fully completed, the structure is allowed to dry before the rafters are put in place. After the rafters, which form the skeletal part of the house, is the roofing. The ceiling of the house is done according to the owner's taste and ability. The rolls of the parked mud are supplied by the labourers to the builders as they construct the desired design of the structure. The *ùbúlù* or planks made from the stem of palm tree are used for the rafters and the ceiling while the dry reeds are used for the roof. *Ékwérē/ékwélē,* which is twine from the palm fronds, or the string from the raffia palm is used to tie the reeds tightly onto the rafters and filling the reeds so closely together to avoid leakages during the rains. It is, therefore, necessary to note, as rightly pointed out by Okoye and Ukanwa (2019), that the indigenous builders never used nails to join two or more parts of the building, instead they make use of various kinds of cord and strings like *ákwálà* from raffia palm and *ékwélē* from palm fronds.

The reeds are the earliest form of roofing materials for the traditional Igbo houses. With a touch of modernization, people begin to use the raffia palm mats called *àtáńị́/àkányá.*. These are the raffia palm leaves collected from the trees when they are fresh and sewn together. The fresh raffia palm fronds are cut in long tiny sticks (5feet each), which are placed in the centre of the mat. Before the sewing, one long stick is introduced to form the first base where the leaves are bent and are sewn with a long tiny flexible dry stick made from the dry raffia palm fronds. When few leaves are tied to put the base in place, the second stick is introduced to strengthen the first base. The leaves are sewn closely together without giving any gap. This is to avoid the case of leaking roofs when they are used. These mats are sown in large quantities depending on the size of the building. Other methods to build such is that the skeletal framework of the roof is first weaved using bamboo poles or sliced bamboo poles. The bamboo is placed in slopes and then crossed with palm fronds. To give a formidable roofing structure that can avert incidence such as wind, at various points, rafters are knotted or tied. The last process is thatching.The skeletal structure is covered with grasses and *àtáńị́/àkányá*. Most of these houses have no concrete beams due to the materials available at that time. In most of them, wood and bamboos are used as support system or beams (Ebenezer, 2020). Buildings that have *àtáńị́/àkányá* for their roof are called *ụ́nọ́ ātānī́/ụ́nọ̄ ākānyā* (literally meaning *àtáńị́/àkányá house*). After this stage of using mats for roofing, the Igbo people who travelled far and wide, copied the western culture and then introduced the corrugated iron sheets for roofing their mud houses. With time, they plastered their mud houses with cement and

subsequently, there was a total change over to modern architectural design as found in Western countries. Some scholars classified materials for Igbo architecture based on construction materials used in precolonial, colonial and postcolonial eras.

	Precolonial Era	**Colonial Era**	**Postcolonial Era**
Wall types	Walls are constructed with aja ọtọ - mud or red earth	Walls are constructed with mud and cement plastering	Sandcrete blocks with cement plastering and paintings
Roofing technique	Thatch roof using ajụ, akịrịka, atanị	Thatch roof and few zincs	Zincs, asbestos and aluminium sheets
Floor/slab type	Wood (deck) earthwork (ground floor)	Wood (deck) and earthwork (ground floor)	Concrete slab
Columns	None	None	Reinforced concrete and steel
Beams	Hardwood	Hardwood	Reinforced concrete
Gates	Bamboo + palm fronds	Wooden gates	Steel materials
Windows	none (except in security houses)	Wooden windows	Wooden windows, louvers, sliding glasses

Bert-okonkwo, Nzewi and Okolie (2017)

Modernization has, therefore, made its impact on Igbo architecture through the importation of new house forms, attesting to the dynamism's of culture. Aniako, (2002:298) attests that "The notion of modern architecture which places far greater stress on architecture as building technology differs from the largely humanistic content of Igbo architecture."

The Aesthetics in Traditional Igbo Architecture

Igbo people have evolved a very strong and durable architectural system which helps them to combat the unfavorable elements like the wind, rain, animals, invaders and so on. This architectural system which is part of the Igbo cultural heritage has aesthetic value in that it depicts the beauty of traditional Igbo society. One can see that some Nigerian writers, especially those who depict Igbo society like Chinua Achebe, John Munonye, Flora Nwapa, Chukwuemeka Ike and so on integrate aspects of Igbo architecture in their writings in order to enrich their work as well as depict the art of innovation inherent among the Igbo in pre colonial and colonial Igbo society. In fact, Chinua Achebe was very detailed in his description of the Igbo architectural design which depict the precolonial Igbo society in his classical work, *Things Fall Apart:*

> Okonkwo's prosperity was visible in his household. He had a large compound enclosed by a thick wall of red earth. His own hut,or *obi* stood immediately behind the only gate in the red walls. Each of his three wives had her own hut, which together formed a half moon behind the *obi*.The barn was built against

> one end of the red walls and long stacks of yam stood out prosperously in it. At the opposite end of the compound was a shed for the goats and each wife built a small attachment to her hut for the hens. Near the barn was a small house, the "medicine house" or shrine where Okonkwo kept the wooden symbols of his personal god and of his ancestral spirits. He worshipped them with sacrifices of kola nut, food and palm wine and offered prayers to them on behalf of himself, his three wives and eight children. (Achebe, 1958)

The above description of Okonkwo's house paints the picture of what it takes to be a wealthy man in precolonial Igbo society. In order words, Igbo architecture goes beyond the art of mere construction of houses but makes a statement on how affluent the owner of the house/ compound is. Again, it shows how the precolonial Igbo society manages space(s) basically for utilitarian purposes. The position of the *obi* in Okonkwo's compound shows that it is to give the head of the house hold the ample view of the compound as well as protect the house hold from attackers. Even the wall of the compound is described as "thick" showing that the safety of the occupants of the compound is paramount in selection of the materials for the building.

Generally, the mud houses are usually very cool during the hot weather of the tropical dry season. It, therefore, creates a very conducive atmosphere for the inhabitants. The thatched roof also serves as a coolant, especially during the hot season, when temperature is high. The thatch does not generate heat. It absorbs moisture which can easily dry off with a little heat. The drinking water in a clay pot that is kept in the mud house is usually cool. It is usually desirable because it is very refreshing. Also, the materials used in Igbo traditional architecture is simple and of natural substance like wood, thatch, clay. They are readily available, easy to produce, cheap and easy to replace. Above all, the Igbo traditional houses has aesthetic value: they are convenient and offer comfort and satisfaction to their inhabitants.

Traditional Architecture as part of Igbo Cultural Identity

Architecture is an aspect of material culture and so an element of cultural identity. Traditional Igbo architecture portrays and reminds one of the Igbo cultural values which it (Igbo architecture) reflects :the Igbo belief system , social hierarchy and so on. The nature of the circular shape of most of the Igbo architectural designs depicts Igbo communal living, their victories and accomplishments. Igbo communities, whether village groups or the smaller settlements comprising them, are organized around an open, public space known as ilo or ama. The circles points to a worldview which believed in a round world or cyclical understandings of the universe (Okoye and Ukanwa, 2019). Moreover the obi which is at the centre of the compound is the first building to be seen in a compound. The positioning is strategic that the man of the house can see anyone that enters the compound, and serves as a protection to the members of the family. Obi is also a place for family meetings and a place where the man of the house receives his visitors. The various architectural designs offer to a great extent, a considerable scope to the understanding of the Igbo world view and the Igbo environment. Again, the building materials used for Igbo architecture are cheap and readily available in the local environment and so reflect the Igbo cultural environment and vegetation.The decorative arts are very attractive and they serve as a means of thought communication.

Conclusion

Unfortunately, most of these traditional Igbo architecture are mostly neglected in some places where they still exist and are not given sustainable maintenance. These have made them to fade away: most of them are gradually fading away naturally. It is equally regrettable that a lot of these traditional Igbo architectural designs are demolished on purpose in a bid to erect modern structures without concrete means of preserving them physically. The painful thing about this is that generations to come will only see a few of their forebears' traditional architectural designs in pictures and relics in the museums and archives, where some of these are available. Again, few traditional Igbo architectural designs that have survived modernization are now used either as relics or as special places of relaxation in some hotels and restaurants. This is not unconnected with the rise of modernity which has swept off most of the Igbo traditional architectural designs, replacing them with more modern ones. It behooves us as Igbo people to preserve this cultural heritage, not by going back to this form of architectural design but by recreating them in tourist village/s where we can showcase and sell them (hire out these traditional Igbo architecture/buildings to tourists) to the outside world and at the same time, instill the pride in our people that our culture is one that has come a long way which we should be proud of.

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