

Ake Palace: A Reflection of Culture and Architecture in South-West, Nigeria

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Abstract - Yorùbá indigenous architecture is not haphazard. It results from an organized cultural and religious system. Family, community, and belief were given top priority while designing every part of the building, including the material choice, architectural style, and construction method. Culture needs a useful location where it can express and manifest its actions in order to fulfill its purpose. Therefore, the area in which this activity and lifestyle can be practiced must be provided through architectural design. Although it is true that both architecture and culture are dynamic and will change for the better, culture must not be readily changed yield to the demands of architecture and its allure. Authors have noted that socio-political, cultural, and religious ideas are expressed in art forms and emanate from them within the majority of societies and throughout time. This suggests that the building embodies and portrays the culture in terms of homage, food, hospitality, education, and sociopolitical ideas. Generally speaking, architecture offers, suggests, or demonstrates the direction of cultural values; it identifies or shows cultural identities. Ake palace in this study denote a series of techniques that establish the city's identity plans and concepts of the town image as a whole into an integrative city which is based on communal relationships of an urban fabrics. The gap in this study is the disregard for the natural and architectural environments, prior cultural expressions that weakened cultural identity. The aim of this study is to examine the relationship between culture and architecture using Ake palace in south-west Nigeria as a reflection of it. A qualitative approach was used, and focus groups made up of custodian leaders from Ake Palace was used to conduct in-depth interviews. Nvivo word trees and place theory was used to analyze the data. Description of Ake palace design concept was gathered from the custodian leaders. This study demonstrated how the architecture of squares reveals important information about the built environment of the current urban fabric, past historical accounts, cultural practices, and the traditional identity of the Ake people.

Keywords: Urban Fabric, Design Concept, Square, Cultural Identity, Cultural activities.

I. INTRODUCTION

Traditional Yoruba cities have communal pyramidal structures. The town extends from the king's palace to the suburbs, while the main market, the "Ojà-Oba," is located in the city center alongside the palace and an adjacent square. Palace' main purpose is to make it possible for individuals to congregate for religious, political, economic, and social traditions. Since all significant and noteworthy events that merit being remembered have occurred (and continue to occur) at the palace, they have historically been associated with the city (Ojo 1966). Levy (2012) stated that Yoruba palace, are an essential part of city planning that enhance the image and reputation of the city. According to Lynch (1981), the buildings which surround major centers give them a distinct visual identity. Generally speaking, squares share some traits, although their configurations might vary. Lynch, (1981).Carr (1992), affirms that as initiators, the palace draws people in, bind the neighborhood, serve as the primary social hub, encourage interactions between various people, and serve as a venue for social activities. (Francis, 1988; Carr, 1992). Lévy (2008), stated that palaces/squares, were places of commercial and economic activities, hosting the city's markets in the past. Although nowadays, commercial activities have moved into shopping malls in suburban areas, however squares remain the major attractors of people and therefore generate 'financial benefits '. In addition, several researches have shown that successful palaces increase the economic value of land and real estates in the neighborhood Akkar Ercan (2007), Lévy (2008), Shaftoe (2008). Sparke (1986) illuminated the relationship between design and culture that over the 20th century as a whole, a cultural sense of values of all the categories and dimensions presented in political ideologies or social activities and cultural activities or economic realities penetrate into designed arte facts through a number of infiltrations and such arte facts deliver a sense of values through visual forms. A community's culture comprises more than just the elements that were identified as its culture (values, rules, etc.). The term "material aspect" refers to structures like factories and structures in culture. In actuality, a society's culture is thought to include the following things. Because the relationship between culture and architecture can be seen from this point, it is anchored in values, beliefs, etc. Buildings are like a book that has dust on it; you should read

them. This allows for the identification of different thoughts and the society within which they were raised (Parhizgar, 2008). Every culture and civilization begin where the previous ones left off, having encountered a crisis. However, it develops and follows old, historical paths, and occasionally rebuilds its structures. Culture has a direct influence on architecture, and thus it stands to reason that as cultures change, successful theories and concepts shaping how buildings look will change as well. As a result, new conceptions of architecture will emerge. Every society has a distinct culture that served as the basis for the creation of its architectural structure, which serves as an objective representation of that culture. In actuality, a country's culture can be accurately assessed by its architecture. The way places are created is a manifestation of the local culture.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A well-known phenomenon is the representation of culture through architectural design and practice of a place, a civilization, and its inhabitants. Palace, serves as the community's hub and home to both commoners and the royal family's members Ojo (1966). It is revered by the populace as a hallowed space since it serves as a venue for both important socio-cultural celebrations and choices regarding life and death Demochowski (1990). Culture is one of the major factors that define identity as it related to people and places. Cultural identity is what makes people who they are. Okoye & Ukanwa (2019), stated that culture is the foundation upon which every other aspect of their being is built. Okoye & Ukanwa (2019), stressed further that architecture is an aspect of material culture as well as an element of cultural identity. Akande (2020) opined that Yoruba traditional architecture is not spontaneous but it is a product of a well- structured cultural and religious system.

He concluded that every aspect from the choice of material to the style of building and even its construction system was designed with primary consideration for family, community and belief. Jolaoso (2017), discovered that Yoruba traditional architectural character is being eroded by the influence of foreign character through material choice and technology and it is a threat to conservation of value and heritage. Anifowose & Olatubosun (2020) affirmed that culture learned way of life that reflects social, political, educational and economic institutions; value and belief system, languages and arte facts. They stressed further that identity of a place can be seen as part of one's self-identity derived from everyday experiences of places and the built environment. Suzanne (2012), stated that the architects, authors, educators, and architectural theorists relate cultural identity to its place through architecture as the manifestation of people and the ambient environment. She concluded that

architecture is neither pure art nor exclusively a technical profession, rather it combines the two, providing a material frame for human existence and bringing together their religious, social and artistic lives. Osasona & Ewemade (2011) stated that architecture is a product of people, place and culture as one facet of identity. Jolaoso & Bello (2017), stated that architecture could be classified based on the character and symbolic features of buildings and structures that somewhat expresses the climatic, cultural, socio-economic, geo-political, historical and function of the building structures and the activities of the inhabitants of the environment. They concluded that for many decades, the erection of buildings in Yoruba land followed their traditional pattern. Tomori (2014), defined palace as a public edifice built and maintained by the entire population of the kingdom, which is not the property of the incumbent king.

III. CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

Ake palace in Egba-Ake towns, Abeokuta, are the subjects of the chosen case study. The Nigerian state of Ogun contain Egba-Ake in its Abeokuta South Local Government Area. Ake Abeokuta's local government is based in Egba-Ake. 3°21'00"E longitude and 7°09'00"N latitude. In terms of home construction and population growth, Egba-Ake has experienced amazing growth during the past fourteen years. Abeokuta's population is 449,088 out of Ogun state's 3,751,140, according to Population Commission's 2006 Census. Egba-administrative Ake's center, Ake, is where the Ake people are traditionally governed. While Itoku Market serves as the town's economic center and is known for its Adire fabrics, the palace also serves as the residence of Abeokuta's paramount king. The map of Abeokuta south is depicted in Figure 1 below, with Ake serving as the administrative center for Yoruba south-west towns.

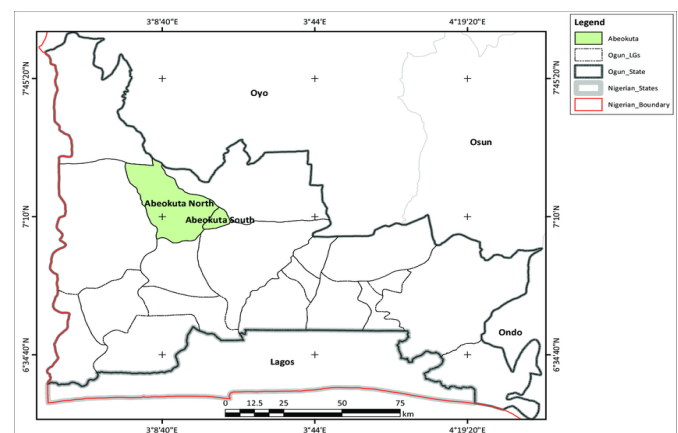


Figure 1: Map of South-West state in Nigeria showing Abeokuta south location

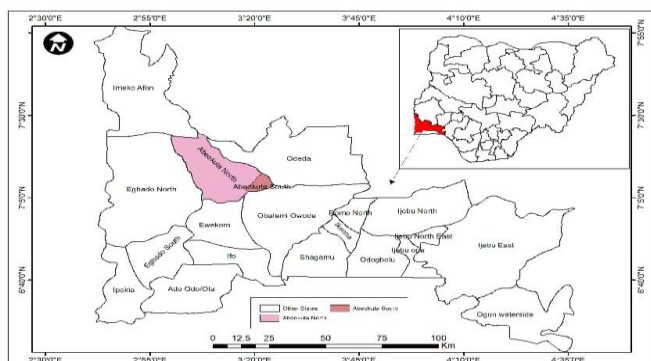


Figure 2: Map showing Abeokuta Metropolis (Source; Generated in 2021)

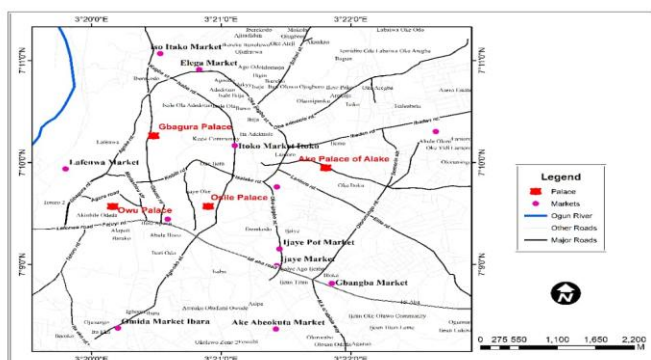


Figure 3: Map of Abeokuta Showing the Ake Palace- (Source generated in 2021)

IV. METHODOLOGY

A focus group comprised of representatives from the Ake traditional institution, local experts, and opinion leaders were used during this study as a technique for conducting an in-depth interview. The palace was seen firsthand. A description of the vernacular architectural idea used by an anonymous designer for the Ake palace was gleaned from opinion leaders. The gathered data were assessed and visualized using Nvivo word clouds, place theory, and sustainability theory.

V. RESULTS & DISCUSSIONS

Cultural attributes of Ake community were used to define the palace architecture. Since architecture must provide the activity and functional spaces required for these activities to occur in a dignified manner in order for it to function and accomplish its purpose. When gathering data for this study, it became apparent that Ake's palace's intertwining of cultural and urban design had received a lot of attention. This study agreed with the rationale behind the palace architecture in use for construction of the chiefs' palaces and appreciates phenomenal used from viewpoints of cultural background. The rationale behind palace architecture include architectural design element, environmental features of Ake's palace, the

historic value and cultural activities celebrated in Ake's palace.

5.1 Ake's Palace

The transcribed information of traditional opinion leaders, led by Adebola Lawal Esq (Bapitan of Egband) through focus group discussion was analyzed through Nvivo words tree in figure 4 Ake traditional square characters presented in Nvivo words tree.

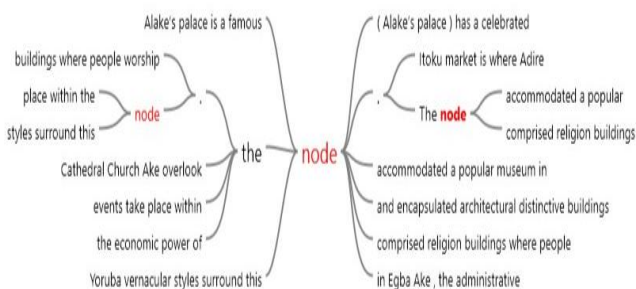


Figure 4: Nvivo analysis in word tree summarized Ake's traditional square character

The stunning square called Ake's Palace is located in Isale Ake, Abeokuta. The palace serves as the town's main attraction as it grows in 1830. Ake's palace is rich in natural, historical, and cultural tourism attractions because of its extensive history, convenient location, and cosmopolitan appeal. The Itoku Market, where the community's well-known tie-dye fabrics (admire) are sold, serves as its economic center. The supreme king of Egband lives in the palace. All Egba villages in Abeokuta revolve around Ake's Palace, which serves as their political, social, economic, and cultural center. The old museum, also known as Idi Ere or Dipomu, the city's religious heart, where civic affairs are conducted, and the public plaza were all included in the palace. On April 23, 1907, the museum in Ake Palace was officially opened by His Excellence Sir Walter Egerton KCMG, the governor of southern Nigeria. The palace is adorned with buildings that have distinctive architectural designs. Alake's palace has a well-known entrance that is connected to a prominent street that leads to the public area where festivities and events are hosted inside the palace. Centenary Hall (plate 5.2) and St. Peters Cathedral Church both provide views of the historic square. The followers of Obatala, Ogun, Masquerade, Ela, and Imole are all traditional religions practiced by Ake's people. While the Islamic faith was introduced by the Islamic faithful in 1926 and was acknowledged in 1935, the Europeans brought Christianity to Ake in 1843, thirteen years after the town was founded by Bishop Ajayi Crowther and Reverend H. Townsend.

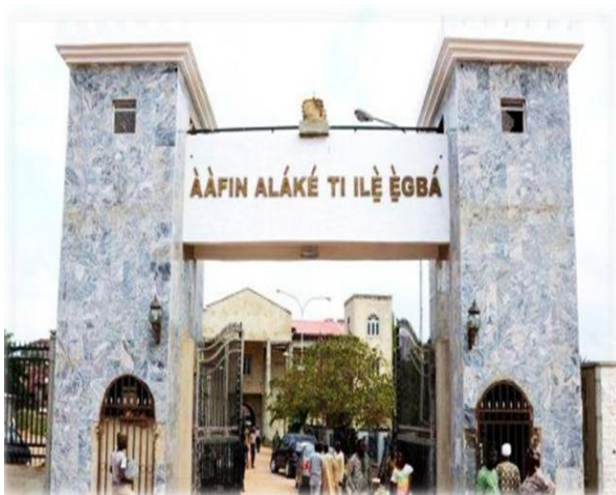


Plate 5.1: Ake's palace entrance porches (source: field work, 2018)



Plate 5.2: Centenary hall, Ake (source: field work, 2018)

5.2 Ake'S Palace Architectural Design Elements

The first Ake's Square structure was completed in 1854 and was built in the shape of an "L." It was decorated with different wood carvings depicting both animal and human characters, showcasing the town's cultural past. Additionally, it made mentions Ake Okekenu I's first king, who worked as an industrial sculptor. The palace building consisted of five chambers that led out into a large courtyard that was supported by twelve enormously molded poles that served as columns. The courtyard served as a meeting place for the king to have secret meetings with war chiefs and Ogbonis (the intelligent branch of the Yoruba). The community's numerous complaints are addressed at "Idi -Ere" or "Dipomu," which the king visits (Plate 5.3). When it comes to resolving disputes, the chiefs still hold the aforementioned factors in high regard. The second palace building was erected in 1922 by his royal majesty Oba Ladapo Gbadebo 1 to replace the first structure established by his father, according to an interview with

Adebola Lawal Esq., the bapitan of Egbaland. The second building had four rooms on the bottom floor, a big living room and eating area in the middle, and a very long courtyard for conducting meetings. It was a story-high building. A huge ornate wooden door connecting towards the patio of the original palace structure (Idi-Ere), constructed in 1854, and now a polished wooden staircase going to the top floor are both on the terrace. The building's slab was constructed of polished and polished wood, and the first level shares many of the same architectural aspects as the ground floor. They provided a Council chamber with Alake's state chair mounted. The Alake meets dignitaries in a famed vehicle port on the ground level that has two ornate 600 mm-diameter columns. At the back of the structure, there was an additional stairway for escape. In front of the palace, Oba Ladapo Ademola 1 constructed a secretariat, with the adjacent homes acting as the kitchen and laundry. The secretariat was constructed to serve as Ake's administrative hub on a platform, a private office for Alake and several other offices at the ground floor while the first floor accommodated the administrative, the treasury and the education departments of Ake native administration. State chair was also designed for the king in 1927 by Mr. Webber while the Ake's preferred symbol of two carved eagles were inscribed on the two armrests of the chair.

Oba Oyebade Lipede ordered the construction of the third Ake's Palace on January 26, 1985. Four rooms, a sizable auditorium, and a banquet hall make up the bottom floor of the new Palace structure. The theatre was built to accommodate crowds gathered during events and festivals on the ancient square, while the chambers serve as housing quarters for royal servants. The terrace at the hall's entrance was equipped with conveniences. The enormous feast was located across from the theater. 150 people could attend the banquet. In 1985, the Alake chair was moved to the new palace theater. When he was crowned ruler of Ake town in 2005, Oba Adedotun Gbadebo Okekenu IV rebuilt every square building.

5.3 Environmental features within Ake's palace

A block of four-bedroom flats was constructed on the western side of the new palace structure to house some palace assistants. A large hall on the eastern side was established in 1937 as the elementary school and chapel for Christians by Oba Sir Ladepo Ademola II, the Alake of Ake town.

A sports complex's buildings were located across the chapel

A summer garden is a reserved space adorned with beautiful flowers where Alake holds special meeting or dignitaries during courtesy visits to the traditional square.

For playing lawn tennis and other significant events within the plaza, a tennis court is constructed. A story building with a court and a gym that has all the amenities and relaxation areas has a squash court. The three-room offices of the Egba Traditional Council are located within the parlance. An ICT center and a royal clinic are located in a newly built administration block. When his royal majesty Oba Adedotun Gbadebo Okekenu IV assumed the role of the new guardian monarch of the Ake community around 2005, he placed all the aforementioned state institutions in place. A well-constructed podium as shown (Plate 5.4) was at the right-hand side of the main entrance to the traditional square where Alake receives large crowd during festivals and functions within the square. Towards the left side from the main entrance of the square is the traditional enclave known as Ogoni house where Ake chiefs hold their regular meetings. Adjacent to the enclave structure is the Iyamode called Mosade building where annual New Year Yam festival called Ela takes place every August within the palace. Opposite Mosade is Ipebi where Alake Elect undergoes tutelage in traditional ways before enthronement as the king. Beside Ipebi building is the Ake central Mosque where Muslims faithfuls converge for their daily prayers. Every architectural and environmental design feature within the square was renovated in 2011 by his royal majesty Oba Adedotun Gbadebo Okekenu IV, the Alake of Ake town to the modern architectural concepts. Nvivo analysis flow in words tree in figure 4.1 summarized all the characters in Ake traditional square.

The square serves as the town's administrative center and as the Ake people's evolutionary center. It included the old museum (idi are or Dipomu), as seen on plate 5.3 below, as well as the religious institutions that helped the town grow and function. It also included the main area where all events took place (Plate 5.4). The supreme king of Egbaland, known as Ake, resides at Ake's palace, which is also the Otaku marketplace, the town's economic center, and the name by which famed tie-and-dye fabrics known as Adire are known locally.



Plate 5.3: Idi-Ere (Dipomu) Ake palace



Plate 5.4: Ake's public square

Plate 5.3 and plate 5.4 squares in Ake Traditional square (source: field work, 2018)

V. CONCLUSION

Thus, the culture constitutes of a city has a multidimensional tendency and is visualized through a carrier called design. If urban architecture is said to be a virtual presentation of cultures, city design works not only for establishment of sustainable environment but also for provision of various cultural services to the city users and fort the creation of the economy (Sparke 1986). In the end, it all comes down to entertaining visitors. People who seek to comprehend a location to order to be drawn to its customs, beliefs, and culturally significant depictions of an Egbas Ake clan in south-west Nigeria. Owing to the evolutionary nature of place morphology, capturing the idea of true symbolic meaning of place seems only attainable by taking into consideration the various and dynamic elements constituting place identity creation. Some of such elements include culture, history and community setting through various socio-cultural activities. These elements have influenced the nature, design and character of the built environment while playing an integral role in decoding the symbolic meaning of each community that portray her image over time. This study perception and interest arose from the recognition that all communities possess a set of unique attributes that can be used to distinguish them from one another but sometimes overlooked or considered unimportant in relation to the community morphology. The ultimate objective of urban architecture is to provide satisfactory life by combining the subject - a city and, the action and the city's design, to create a sustainable environment Kim, (2008). This study emphasizes the excellence of the Ake palace in Abeokuta. Urban dwellers have strong emotional ties to significant Ake palace. The relevance of public realms as vibrant urban areas for residents to use as an entity for their individual identities through branding of public spaces is highlighted by this research of Ake's palace.

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