Full Length Research Paper

Architecture and culture: The dynamics of the informal sector in the changing house-form among the Yoruba in Nigeria

Atolagbe, A.M.O

Department of Architecture, Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomoso, Nigeria.
E-mail: aatolagbe7@gmail.com

The study surveys the incidence and changes in the informal sector (commercial activity spaces, which were a popular feature of the Yoruba indigenous houses), in modern houses, now popular in the developing, lower residential density areas of Ogbomoso. It examines and compares the relative recurrence of this cultural housing requirement, through the high, medium and low density, residential zones of the city; which correspond to precolonial, colonial and post independent settlements and their housing styles in the Nigerian urban city. The data for the study was collected through multistage sampling. Fifty percent of the streets from each zone of Ogbomoso was sampled randomly; and houses were sampled from each sampled street using randomly systematic method. This resulted in 1247 sampled houses, at 507, 377 and 363 houses from the high, medium and low density residential zones of the city, respectively. Descriptive and Chi-Square analyses were carried out on the result. The result shows that the informal sector, which was popular in the precolonial Yoruba houseforms, is still a popular feature of housing forms in both the colonial and post-independent, residential zones of the city.

Keywords: Architecture, culture and yoruba

INTRODUCTION

Architecture and indeed, the house, is often regarded and thus described as an encapsulation of the cultural heritage of a people (Rapaport, 1969, Kalilu 1997). A casual observation of Yoruba indigenous compound architecture reveals certain peculiarities and lifestyles in regards to housing and informal spaces. Specifically, the link between housing as a residence, as a place of worship and a place of commerce, for earning a living, is strong.

In the study of the Ikolaba Ajibosin compound in Ogbomoso, Atolagbe (1995) noted three distinct categories of spaces. The first is the area consisting of rooms for living, sleeping, dining, recreation/games, etc. The second is the religion space (Ogunojalu), the ancestral shrine for ancestral consultation and worship;

and the third are industrial/commercial activity areas like tying and dying (adire), weaving (aso oke), sales: of fettish ingredients, groundnut cake (kulikuli), bean cake (akara), pap (eko), artifacts (carving and sculpturing), etc. At a more recent period of the history of the over a hundred-year old compound, a carpenter shed/workshop was also established at its side court.

The Yoruba has a socio-cultural history spanning three distinct epochs – the precolonial, colonial and post-independent periods. These periods reflect three distinct settlement areas in the Yoruba city; associated with three different housing forms, styles and socio-cultural differences.

The wave of colonization, including religious colonization, that permeated Nigeria and its over 250,

Table 1.0. Incidence of Commercial Spaces in Residential Houses

Is there any Informal Sector around the house	Residential Density Type								Chi-Sq value	P-value
	High		Medium		Low		Total			
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	27.201	0.000
No Response	33	6.5	33	8.8	18	5.0	84	6.7		
Yes	275	54.2	166	44.0	143	39.4	584	46.8		
No	199	39.3	178	47.2	202	55.6	579	46.4		
Total	507	100	377	100	363	100	1247	100		

Source: Author's Compilation (2012

Table 2.0. Commercial Spaces Per Residential Density

Commercial Spaces	Residential Density Type								Chi-Sq value	P-value
	High		Medium		Low		Total			
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	8.688	0.000
1 – 3	465	40.1	360	31.1	334	28.8	159	100		
4 – 6	37	49.3	14	18.7	24	32.0	75	100		
7 – 9	4	40	3	30	3	30.0	10	100		
10 – 12	1	50.0	0	0	1	50.0	2	100		
13 and above	0	0	0	0	1	100	1	100		
Total	507	40.7	377	30.2	363	29.1	1247	100		

Source: Author's Compilation (2012).

tribal and ethnic groups, coupled with the extension of the Industrial Revolution of the 19th Century to these parts of the world, have both resulted in notable changes in religion and state of industrial production. Thus the trend in the informal housing sectors in regards to shrines (for ancestral and deity worship), and industrial processes have changed noticeably. First, private and household shrines have substantially given way to churches and mosques for congregative worship; away from the immediate confines of the house. Second, industrial process has assumed a large-scale dimension, requiring industrial estates which are now relocated to popular streets, away from immediate residential confines of the resident/trader. These aspects of informal spaces are glaring and may not require a significant study. The focus of this study is therefore limited to commercial sales areas and mini-production processes located within, as against those detached from residential precints of the city.

Atolagbe (2011) has shown that population density decreases as economic status increases, and security consciousness increases from the core, through the intermediate, to the new developing residential areas of the city. He also showed that housing stability, landscaping, interstitial spaces and road network increased from the high, through the medium, to the low density residential zones of the city (Atolagbe, 2011). This study is concerned with the status of commercial space in the different zones of the city.

How has the informal sector, specifically the commercial sector, as a socio-cultural space, changed through the settlement periods and zones of the city, Ogbomoso? Has this trend assumed an increase or decrease with time, acculturation or shifts in socio-cultural preferences? How does this trend differ with the different zones of the city.

METHODOLOGY

A survey of commercial spaces was made in sampled houses across the three residential zones of Ogbomoso. This was done through a multi-stage sampling procedure. First, fifty percent (50%), of the streets in each zone of the city were sampled by a random process, using the base map of Ogbomoso. This gave a total of 18, 15 and 14 streets from the high, medium and low density residential zones of the city, respectively. Second, every fifth house was sampled from each sampled street in each zone, noting and recording the incidence and number of commercial spaces in each and all the streets. A contingency table was drawn for descriptive analyses of the incidence (Table 1.0) and frequency (Table 2.0) of commercial spaces, where available, in each house and household interviewed in the city. A Chi-square analysis was carried out to test the significance of the results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In this section, findings and discursions on results of descriptive and inferential analyses on incidence and frequency of commercial spaces, number of commercial spaces per house and zone, are provided.

Incidence of Commercial Spaces in Residential Houses

The incidence of commercial spaces in the residential houses and zones of the city is shown in Table 1.0. Houses, with commercial space in them are significantly more (54.2%), in the high residential, precolonial zone of the city. This is followed by 44.0 and 39.4 percents in the medium (colonial settlement), and low (post – independent), density zones of the city. The result, which has a Chi-square value of 27.201 is also significant at 99 percent limit of confidence. This result implies that incidence of commercial space in residential houses decreases with lower density residential zones. Conversely, houses without provision for buying and selling increases with decreasing density zones in the city. Generally houses with provision of spaces for selling, buying, and other similar commercial activities are only slightly, but significantly higher (46.8%), than those without such spaces (46.4%) in the city. It should be noted, that whereas spaces for buying and selling are done mostly on verandahs and the double-banking halls in the high and medium density zones of the city, respectively, such spaces are purposely built as kiosks and shops, sometimes built into houses and sometimes free-standing by the side or in the front of houses in the low density residential zones. Two reasons may be adduced to explain these differences. First, at the precolonial history of the city, houses were in compound forms with a rectilinear arrangement of rooms around common, entrance verandahs and an open, interior courtyard. Each room faces a verandah which constitutes an interface for selling and buying and other similar interactions with neighbours. This pattern persists in the face-me-I-face-you barrack–house arrangement (Olorunfemi 1981, 1995), popular in the medium density, colonial settlement zone of the city; where the central double-loaded hall is purposely enlarged to permit commercial and reception activities.

The vogue in these two periods was to sell in few open markets in the town, consisting of the Oja Oba (often in close proximity to the palace of the paramount ruler of the town), and other minor neighbourhood markets. There were no noticeable Central Business Districts (CBD) then. Even at the colonial period, only a few sales outlets, usually one among UAC, GBO, Leventis, etc, was available in a fairly large town. These were not only far away from many neighbourhods, they sold imported goods. A few of these that interested the local residents (like salt, kerosene, etc), was bought wholesale, in bags, tins, etc; respectively, and resold at retail prices in the verandahs. Second, at independence, the compound house-form and Brazilian style of houses, with their emphasized, long, halls, had given way to nuclear family houses – in the form of apartments for single, immediate families (husband, wife and children). By this time, the concept of Central Business Districts (CBD), locked market stalls and street shops had begun to develop; thereby reducing traders who stayed on housing verandahs. Nevertheless, petty retail trading and traders in consumables like toiletries, soup ingredients, fried cake, etc; still remain within and around their houses. Such category of traders build spaces for their wares into, or around their nuclear family houses (Table 1.0).

Commercial Sector Distribution by Zones

Table 2.0 illustrates the distribution of commercial spaces in houses within the different residential density zones of the city. The highest percentages (40.1, 49.3, 40 and 50), are found in the high density residential zone of the city. These correspond to 1-3, 4-6, 7-9 and 10-12 commercial spaces per house, respectively. This is followed by the medium and low density residential zones with about 31, 19 and 30 percents; and 29, 30, 32 and 50 percents respectively. Thus there are, generally, more selling and buying spaces within the high (40.7%), followed by the medium (30.2%), and low (29.1), density residential zones, respectively, in the study area. The result, with a Chi-square value of 8.688 is significant at 99 percent level of confidence.

The greater number of commercial spaces in the high density residential zone of the city may be better understood with the following additional information. Whereas commercial sectors consist of relatively smaller spaces along a verandah in higher density zones of the city, they are purpose-made spaces in the form of kiosks, shops or built containers in the low density zone. Thus, in terms of the total area of space per person, it is much higher in the low density zone. Besides, even though, there are a greater number of households per compound house in the higher residential zones who share the verandahs among themselves, there are, relatively fewer number of traders per household (Table 2.0). In other words, more residents within the few, in the low residential density households engage in paid employments; whereas more from the high density zones engage in self-employed trading (Atolagbe, 2012). From this observation it is understandable, as also apparent in Tables 1.0 and 2.0, that the incidence of incorporating socio-cultural commercial spaces in houses reduces with
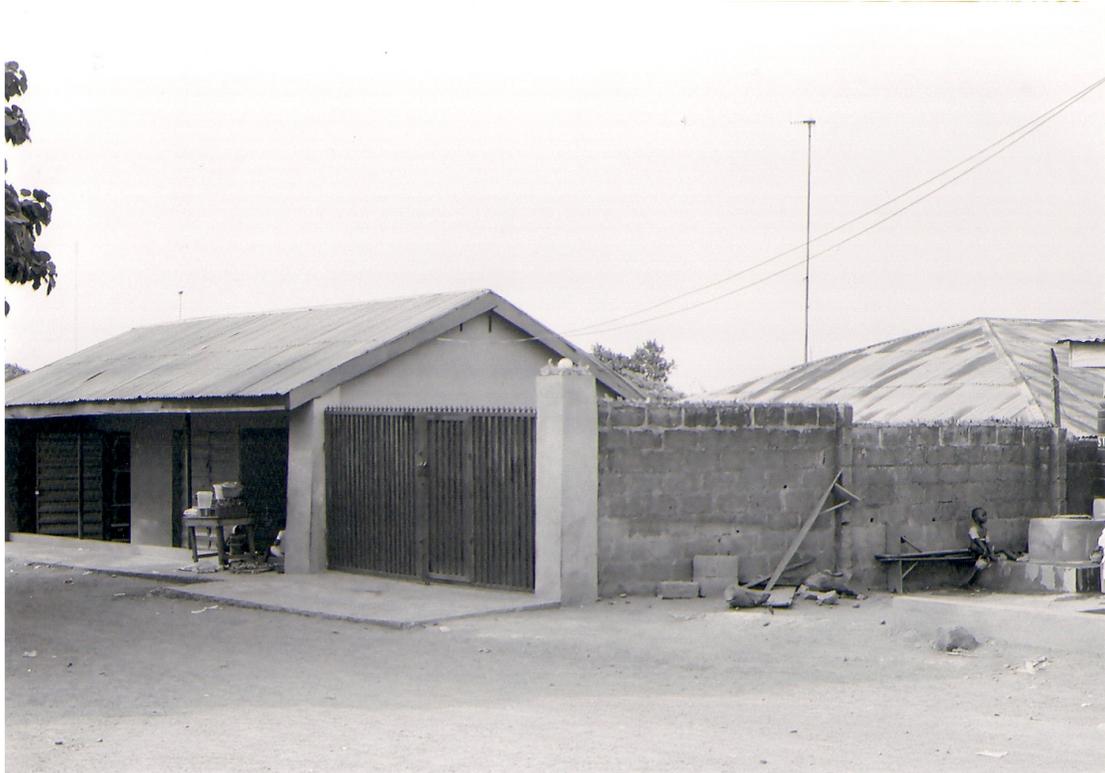
Figure 1.0. Commercial Spaces (shops) in Private Housing Premises: behind Are-Ago Primary School II, Ogbomoso. **Source:** Author's Survey, (2012).

lower density zones in the city.

Indicators of Commercial Spaces

The number of commercial spaces in a house can not be effectively estimated by physical observations only. Such spaces are mostly not apparent. Only a few houses with kiosks, shops and purpose made sales spaces present clear physical evidences from both planning and legal considerations. Provision of such spaces attract additional development approval charges by the Town Planning Authority and other Development Control agencies in new developing (low density) residential zone of the city. Shops, offices, etc; are assessed as commercial spaces and charged higher when proposed within a residential building. When such spaces are detached, as temporary, like kiosks, moveable containers, they also attract annual payments to the agencies.

Incidences of verandah-display of wares and service-providers station points like phone calls, battery charging (for cell phones), grinding mills, recharge pin retailing, sales of kerosene (in bottles), and local bean cakes, etc; are obvious evidences from the reckoning of observatory researchers/surveyors. A lot more smaller-scale, commercial activities goes on unnoticed within the different houses among households. These are operated mostly, by dependent household members - the aged, children, etc; or and part-time traders in full-time public employment, to argument their incomes. They include diverse range of selling and buying activities that have no specific location in the house; such as ice blocks (brought out of the kitchen's freezer but sold in the sitting room, corridors, etc). Jelweries (sold from the sitting, even bedrooms), Chin-chin, wedding and birthday cakes (made in one kitchen and displayed for sales in other spaces; even a neighbour's kiosk), pure honey (sold occasionally in the house, or taken to workers in their offices), etc. The full scope of these, may be difficult to document, except through participant – observation (or research done by researchers who live among households being researched).

Another dimension in the residential cum commercial development schemes is becoming increasingly popular. This involves an array of lockable shops, provided by housing units along the streets of residential zones in the city. They range from two to eight, even more; per residential building with the approval of the development control agencies in the Local Government of their location. The shop-building venture is not only gaining grounds among private residential houses (Figures 1.0 and 2.0); but even, in the premises of worship buildings (Figure 3.0) along the streets of Ogbomoso.

Figure 2.0. Commercial Spaces in Private Housing Precincts: Olaniyan House, Olugbon Hotels Area, Ogbomoso.
Source: Author's Survey, (2012).

Figure 3.0. Shops in Church Premises: Odo-Oru Baptist Church, Ogbomoso.
Source: Author's Survey, (2012).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Buying and selling, a socio-cultural activity space that had existed in the pre-colonial housing form of the Yoruba, is an important feature of their houses till date; and has continued to be part of their housing requirement. First, these activities had been earmarked for the long verandahs and corridors in front of the bedrooms; and around the courtyards in the pre-colonial compound house forms. Later the same activities took place in the larger halls of the double banking, Afro-Brazilian form of houses that became the vogue during the colonial period. The Afro Brazilian face-me-I-face you, rooming houses are a combination of the indigenous Yoruba houseform and the Brazilian version, brought into this part of the country through slave returnees, from South America during the colonial period (Osasona and Hyland, 2006). Part of these (commercial) activities sometimes take place under straight stairs in instances when these houses assume more than a storey-height. In other instances, one or two purpose-built shops are incorporated; often, opening into the entrance verandahs.

Commercial activities in the low density, post-independent zone of the city are a further enhancement of what is obtainable in the medium density, colonial part of the city. Verandahs, under stairs and purpose-built shops are provided for selling and buying activities. In addition, detached or free-standing temporary structures are provided with the approval of development control agencies.

Thus, commercial spaces, have continued to be a part of the socio-cultural provisions in Yoruba houses; indigenous or modern. The tempo has however decreased insignificantly; and the form has undergone some modifications. Purpose made shops, kiosks and free-standing containers have gradually replaced buying and selling activities that had predominantly taken place in the verandahs of indigenous, pre-colonial houseforms. Today, it is increasingly common practice for single housing units and religious compounds to have an array of shops, of one or more storey heights along the streets.

The influence of foreign architecture from Europe, America, Japan, etc-has not only imparted, but greatly changed many of the Yoruba and indeed Nigerian housing concepts. Specifically, the diffusion of archetypes from more advanced to less developed, housing culture, is increasingly giving rise to a brand of amalgam, whose general characteristics can be described as vernacular - an architecture that is more closely related to the acculturation level of the majority in their current practical life; a state of equilibrium, when cultural diffusion from advanced economies of the world to the less developed ones tend to linger; at least for a while. At this stage of the Yoruba housing architecture, the socio-cultural space for commercial activities has not

only endured; but continued to evolve. The trend must be encouraged. Legitimacy must be built into a trend that has satisfied, and continues to satisfy and sustain the people. Approval is currently being given to developers who incorporate shops with their residential buildings. However the additional charges given to them as an informal sector of the house should stop; as the high charges discourage formal inclusion of commercial spaces in their housing proposals. Consequently, some developers without cars, propose garages and carports which they later deploy for commercial activities. Buying and selling was a part of the traditional houses of this tribe before the concept of Central Business Districts, Commercial and Industrial land uses influenced the colonies in Africa and Asia. The land uses and high approval rates should continue for large-scale commercial and industrial concerns only. If anything, a thought should be given to the provision of small-scale commercial area for every neighbhood; more or less like lockable shops or daily and statelite markets within designated residential neighbourhood. These statelite commercial markets should not be more than a five-minute walk to any household. They should be incorporated into city-planning. The present markets are too far away from most houses in their neighbourhoods; and as long as the situation remains, the current proliferation of buying and selling within each house will remain.

REFERENCES

Atolagbe AMO (1995). The Prospects and Possibilities of Yoruba Indigenous Compound Houses; A Case Study of Ikolaba Ajibosin Compound, Ogbomoso, Nigeria. *NIJ, Nigeria Institute of Architects J.* 10(1 – 2): 22 - 27.

Atolagbe AMO (2011). *An Evaluation of the Spatial Dimension of Housing Stress in Ogbomoso, Nigeria,* An Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis Submitted to the Department of Geography and Environmental Management, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria.

Kalilu ROR (1997). The House as an Encapsulation and Metaphor of Life: New Theoretical Perspectives in Nigerian Architecture in Amole B. (ed): *The House in Nigeria,* Proceedings of National Symposium Held in Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria, 23rd – 24th July. Pp. 46 - 49.

Olorunfemi JF (1981). The Crowding Index, An Alternative to Census in Nigeria, *AREA* 13 (1): 51-54.

Olorunfemi JF.(1995). Pattern of Change in Accessibility and Interstitial Space in Ilorin, *Environ. Issues* 1: 106 -117.

Osasona CO (2005). *Ornamentation in Yoruba Folk Architecture,* Bookbuilders, Ibadan.

Osasona CO, Hyland ADC. (2006); *Colonial Architecture in Ile-Ife, Nigeria*, Bookbuilders, Ibadan.

Rapaport, A. (1969); *Houseform and Culture,* Prentice Hall, New Jersy.

Saad TH, Ogunsusi S (1996). *Unity in Diversity Continuity in Change: The Traditional Architecture of Nigeria,* Prepared for the Colloquium on Nigeria Traditional Architecture at the Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (HABITAT II), Istanbul; Turkey, June pp. 3 – 14.