Continuity and Change in the Yoruba Palace Architectural Tradition: The Example of Five Selected Palaces in Ogun State, Southwest, Nigeria

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Abstract

Aafin Oba (palace) is an age-long aspect of Yoruba traditional architecture in Nigeria. Its evolution is traced to the emergence of Oduduwa, the acclaimed progenitor of the Yoruba race, in Ile-Ife in the ancient period. Yoruba traditional architecture has witnessed unprecedented changes in materials, technology, designs, sizes, structural components and organisation, occasioned by contacts with European missionaries, colonial masters and freed Yoruba slaves. These changes have influenced Yoruba *Oba* palaces' architecture such that some of the traditional elements that used to make *Aafin Oba* spectacular in their designs seem to be extinct, while some modernisations had been incorporated. This paper examined the paradigm shift in architectural designs of *Aafin Oba* in Ogun State. It adopted the qualitative descriptive research design, using the historical research method. It applied a structured in-depth interview guide to collect data. Population of the study comprised palaces of 256 officially recognised *Obas* in Ogun State. Purposive sampling technique was used to select five palaces of paramount rulers to represent each of the five major groups: the *Akarigbo* of Remoland, *Alake* of Egbaland, *Olowu* of Owu, Abeokuta,

Olu-Ilaro and *Awujale* of Ijebuland. Data collected through visits to the palaces and interviews were analysed thematically. The study found continuity in few ancient components but more dynamism in modern architectural designs of *Oba* palaces in Ogun State. It concluded that contacts with the Western world had ambivalent effects on Yoruba traditional architecture, which include royal residences. The paper recommended that communities should ensure that, regardless of the size or design of the palaces, vital ancient components such as museums, courtrooms, halls, temples and artifacts should be incorporated into the construction of new palaces.

Keywords: *Aafin Oba*, Architectural designs, Components, Continuity and Change, Southwest-Nigeria

Introduction

In the traditional African society, particularly among the Yoruba of Southwest Nigeria, three major types and functions of architecture are recognised. They are the domestic, religious (temple/shrine) and those architecture that are dedicated to their monarchs/Kings (*Oba*) otherwise referred to as *Aafin Oba* (palaces). Hence, in this paper *Aafin Oba* will be interchangeably used with palace(s). *Aafin Oba* is an age-long aspect of Yoruba traditional architecture in Southwest Nigeria. Its evolution is traced to the emergence of Oduduwa, the acclaimed progenitor of the Yoruba race, in Ile-Ife in the ancient period. Adekoya, Bada and Adenle (2014) posited that *Aafin* is where the *Oba* and his family live. Thus, it is a tradition among the Yoruba of the ancient period to construct an *Aafin* for their king. Not that alone, it is also a tradition that the *Aafin* must be the largest in the community. This is because the *Oba* is considered the richest in the community. Secondly, it is a mark of respect and honour for the *Oba* who is also regarded as the most important figure in the community. Thirdly, the *Aafin* usually contains very many structural components or apartments such as, living rooms, museums, cells, shrines/temples, stores and large halls where the *Oba* receives visitors and holds meetings with the chiefs and performs some other activities.

Alluding to the foregoing, Olaoba (2012) stressed that palace culture was as old as the commencement of kingship tradition in Yorubaland, just as it is also safe to emphasise that palace culture was as old as Yoruba history. Adekoya (2024) noted that in the olden days, before the advent of British colonialism or contact with the Western world, a typical Yoruba traditional palace architecture otherwise known as *Aafin* used to be the largest in a community, the most magnificent, imposing and the most beautiful, usually located against a very thick forest, at the center of each community where it exists. Adekoya (2024) noted further that earlier scholars, both foreign and local, have acknowledged the architecture of palaces to be opulent, and with splendor as a result of their sizes and the kind of decorations on them such as carved wooden verandah posts, carved wooden door panels, ornamented walls and beams. Reference were made to *Ooni's* palace in Ile-Ife, Osun State; *Alaafin's* palace in Oyo, Oyo State, *Olowo's* Palace in Owo in the present Ondo State; and the palace of the *Ogoga* of Ikere, Ekiti State which was brought to limelight by the verandah post and carved wooden door panels produced by the famous Yoruba traditional woodcarver Olowe of Ise Ekiti, whose works adorned various Yoruba royal residences in the early 19th and 20th centuries.

However, in contemporary African society, the houses of the nobles, elites, rich, and the wealthy people in the society are now sometimes by far bigger than some palaces as a result of civilization and economic prosperity. Typical examples in Ogun State are the Bobasuwa house near Lagos motor park in Ijebu-Ode (see Figures 1 to 4), Late Chief Adeola Odutola's house and Late Chief Pa. Jumah Odutola's house both on Odutola street, Ijebu-Ode as well as Balogun Adesoye house at Oke-Ijasi, Ijebu-Ode (see Figures 5 to 10). They are all said to be products of the Brazilian slave returnees. Oladimeji (2001) asserted that several varieties of architectural styles, materials, decorations, etc. existed in the traditional African society long before their adoption of Europeans architectural styles.

Figure 1:
Façade of the Bobasuwa House at Lagos Garage



Source: Samson K. Adekoya, (2020)

Figure 2:
Left side view of the Bobasuwa House Ijebu Ode



Source: Samson K. Adekoya, (2020)

Figure 3: Right side view of Bobasuwa House at Lagos Garage



Source: Samson K. Adekoya, (2020)

Figure 4: Facade of the Adjoining Bungalow at Bobasuwa House at Lagos Garage, Ijebu-Ode



Source: Samson K. Adekoya,

Figure 5: Left side view of Balogun Adesoye House at Oke-Ijasi, Ijebu-Ode



Source: Samson K. Adekoya, (2020)

Figure 6: Right side view of Balogun Adesoye House at Oke-Ijasi, Ijebu-Ode



Source: Samson K. Adekoya, (2020)

Figure 7: Facade of Balogun Adesoye House at Oke Ijasi, Ijebu-Ode



Source: Samson K. Adekoya, (2020)

Figure 8: Adjoining Building at Balogun Adesoye House at Oke-Ijasi, Ijebu-Ode



Source: Samson K. Adekoya, (2020)

Figure 9:
Another adjoining building at Balogun Adesoye House at Oke-Ijasi, Ijebu-Ode



Source: Samson K. Adekoya, (2020)

Figure 10:
A section of the fence and the entrance gate of BalogunAdesoye House at Oke-Ijasi, Ijebu-Ode



Source: Samson K. Adekoya, (2020)

Aafin Oba in Yorubaland and the Provenance of the Changes in Designs and Materials

Traditional Yoruba architecture which include their *Aafin Oba* (palaces architecture) began to experience various kinds of changes and transformations which affected almost every aspect of their architecture – sizes, designs, structural components and materials shortly after their contact with the Western world through the returnee slaves from Brazil; British colonialism and its antecedent's civilisation, education and modernisation, Consequently, some have been demolished and rebuilt; some have been relocated while some have been renovated with modern materials. It should be noted that before the various influences on traditional Yoruba architecture that affected or transformed them into modern buildings or architecture, traditional Yoruba architecture were products of mud and thatch roofs. Corroborating the above assertion, while describing the new *Awujale* Palace, Adekoya, Bada and Adenle (2014) noted that *Awujale* palace architecture was built with modern materials, which contrast the typical or traditional palace of other towns that were built with mud. Dmochowski (1990) described the walls of these traditional Yoruba palaces that are built with mud as having an average thickness of 0.6m to 1.0m (about 2-3ft), and a height of about 2.7m to 4.4m. Dmochowski (1990) noted that they were built in layers, have thick walls and courtyard corridors that are decorated with relief carvings and carved posts.

His Highness *Oba* Adesoji Aderemi I, former *Ooni* of Ife between 1960s and 1980, in the foreword of G. J. A. Ojo's book, "*Yoruba Palaces, A Study of Aafins of Yorubaland*, published in 1966" observed that in broad terms, there were many features common to all the *Aafins* of the crowned *Obas* in Yorubaland such that, there was only one type of *Aafin* in the past. He however noted that, the course of history took varied directions in the different parts of Yorubaland and when some irresistible modifications were introduced and incorporated into the palaces of adjoining localities, the formerly universal pattern of palaces broke down. His highness emphasized that nobody will condemn the urge for changes and progress. He stressed that progress should be our watchword, but in our race for progress, we should learn to have some evidence of our past for the education of our children.

Oba Adesoji Aderemi I recounted that he visited many *Aafins* before he succeeded to the throne and before major changes started in any of them. He lamented that it is regrettable that none of the ancient palaces remains unimpaired today throughout Yorubaland. He observed that the change that has been done to each of them has detracted very much from their natural beauty and awe-inspiring grandeur. *Oba* Adesoji maintained that those who can rightly claim to know Yoruba palaces in their ancient form before the so-called 'modernising' changes must now be few indeed. He noted that one is bound to be overwhelmed by a feeling of nostalgia when the past of the palaces, and the changes that have enveloped them, are revealed through research. He posited that the urge to modernize our residences, and in fact everything around us, is rampant in the country. He claimed that his own *Aafin* has suffered many changes, for instance, it has shrunk considerably in size. He also claimed that he has it on good authority that the present *Aafin* is only about one-eighth of the former one which existed intact until about 400 years ago during the reign of his predecessors, *Oba* Lajodogun, who on account of his good nature was buried in a courtyard named after him.

Describing the prodigious size of the palace, he noted that at that time there were frequent cases of seizure of goods belonging to market women, and it was impossible to recover such goods once they were taken into the *Aafin* particularly because of its enormous size. He observed that this diminution in size made little

difference to the look of the *Aafin* because it was rebuilt in its former style. He noted that the reason why the *Aafin* put on a totally different look was that in 1921 many courtyards were destroyed to make room for the building of a reception hall now being used as a council hall. This was followed by the demolition of the entrance gate known as *Geru* to find room for the building of council offices and the modern museum, both created in 1948. It was the last changes that robbed Ife of the most massive and imposing edifice in the ancient city.

Corroborating the foregoing, Olaoba (1995) claimed that since the 1840s, it has become apparent that most Yoruba palaces had started witnessing a lot of tremendous changes. He noted that there was a dramatic change in the materials used in their building of the palaces. For example, corrugated iron sheet was used in place of thatch, and for a considerable length of time, the *Oba* disallowed its adoption by the commoners. Olaoba (1995) maintained that, indeed, in 1849, Rev. Henry Townsend noticed this urge for change by most Yoruba *Obas.* According to the Missionary:

> The Chief of Abeokuta (referring to the *Alake*) who has shown the greatest fondness for finery, is the man who has first attempted to initiate our mode of building houses: the first to have doorways to admit men walking through them erect, the first to have windows for light and air, the first to floor his rooms with boards, and the first to covet glass windows and paints for his house (Olaoba 1995, p.46).

For the above reason the Egba Ake people of Abeokuta see themselves as being the first group of people to taste civilization which they immortalized in a song as follows:

Egba Ake, Ibe lolaju ti se wa
Egba Ake, Ibe lolaju ti se wa
Omo Egba lo la ju ju o

Meaning, Egba Ake (referring to Abeokuta) is the origin, the source and the beginning of civilization.

Olaoba (1995) noted further that, no sooner had the Abeokuta potentates effected changes on their architectural designs of their palaces than it spread across Yoruba country. Alluding to the above view, Aniakor (1995) observed that studies in modern Nigeria architecture show clearly that it is a product of direct borrowing from Western architectural tradition. Supporting the foregoing, Olotua (2001) identified the Syrian and Lebanese immigrants in northern Nigeria, the British colonial government, Christianity, returnee slaves from Brazil and modern education as some agents of acculturation, which have engendered changes in Nigerian traditional house forms since the past one hundred years.

Egunjobi et al (2022) observed that the change in situation, most especially between the 18th and 19th century, was factorized by the Muslim Jihad and the Yoruba civil war; European exploration and missionary efforts; as well as revolution in trade. They maintained that a large group of slaves that revolted in Brazil in 1800 were repatriated to Nigeria. This heralded a new style of buildings called the Brazilian style. It emerged with a new architecture different from the traditional huts and colonial structures. The Brazilian style building is usually a two-storey cement building with heavy ornamental pillars and balustrades. They maintained that this type of building is evident in Lagos and other big metropolitan cities in the southern region of Nigeria. Jegede (1979) noted that change is part of Yoruba culture and its pace is however conditioned by the interaction of a combination of factors. He observed that in Nigeria, the rapid pace of change which occurred in traditional arts was occasioned essentially by contact with Europeans who arrived, beginning from the 1840s, first as missionaries and later as administrators. He maintained that in the process, the traditional base which used to sustain the arts has also changed.

Egunjobi et al (2022) maintained that the 1914 amalgamation and colonization brought about new types of architecture. This is because of trans-cultural trade which allows different cultural groups to have access to different types of architecture in other climes and European influences. Egunjobi et al noted that there were constructions with deep verandas and overhanging eaves. The period was also characterized by a continuous horizontal band of windows, corrugated iron sheeting and cement, with various new materials from Europe. These buildings represent the colonial style. This was about the period when the exotic

Adebisi Mansion of Idi Ikan, Ibadan was built by Chief Sanusi Adebisi Giwa. The building is a model of Yoruba Courtyard type in modern style (*agboole*).

Egunjobi et al (2022) noted further that the three major influences on Nigerian indigenous architecture are: introduction of Islamic religion; the return of the ex-slaves from Americas, especially Brazil; and colonization. They posited that the Mosque was one of the most prominent buildings in the northern part of Nigeria but noted that houses, boundary walls and roofs in Hausa towns were built in mud and that in the villages, the roofs were always of grass and the boundary walls were matting or corn stalks. However, in the Yoruba zone of south western Nigeria, the Oba's palace and the market place dominated the central arrears of well-planned cities. The populace lived in compounds, each of which had a large house set in a square-shaped space bounded by high walls, providing living space for a large family and kinsmen. The numerous room compounds usually have a single entrance.

Yoruba Palace Architecture and Visual Artistic Elements

For a very long time, visual artworks particularly sculpture (woodcarving) in the form of verandah post, pillars, panels, beams, doors, stools, staff of office, figurines as well as statues and sometimes paintings have been parts of the cultural elements that make the Yoruba palace architecture opulent and splendor. The palace architecture and the visual artistic elements are like Siamese twins that are conjoined. This tradition could be likened to the medieval period in Europe when sculptures were often created to embellish architecture. Sadly this tradition of embellishing the Yoruba palaces with artworks is gradually going into extinction.

Nwoko 1978 cited by Sogbesan and Awonusi (2022) posited that the decorative and artistic taste of the Yoruba people is determined by their environment, immediate society and their intangible spiritual orientation. Nwoko noted further that as a result, Yoruba architecture is emphasised through the use of decorative elements such as murals, motifs and carvings that indicates their religious affiliations, status and financial capability. Supporting the foregoing, Olaoba (1995) maintained that Yoruba palaces are uniquely and spectacularly opulent in architectural designs. He noted that the best architecture, art and craft are found in the royal residences. This entails that the palace symbolises the culture of the

people. Sogbesan and Awonusi (2022) admitted that the best of Yoruba decorative elements is easily identified in palaces as the highest structure revered aside shrines. They cited Adedokun (2014), Arenibafo (2017), and Osasona (2005) who all alluded to the fact that long before colonization and influence, Yoruba architectural main features are ornamentation in wood and carved motifs on doors and roof supports especially within palaces. Sogbesan and Awonusi (2022) observed that ornamentation is reflected in architectural elements fabricated by woodcarvers such as veranda posts, doors panels, facial-boards, doors and windows. They noted further that murals are also commonplace on the walls of palaces where animals and objects connected to divinity of the *Obas* are depicted. They cited the *Oju abata* to the *Alaafin* of Oyo's palace which has over 300 zoomorphic murals as a good example.

Anifowose and Olatubosun (2020) posited that *Aafins* in Yorubaland are built to house the whole community's wealth, riches, cultural artifacts, beliefs and tradition that is reflected in the ornamentation. Thus, the decorative and ornamental elements found in the palaces are reflections of the rank and prestige of the *Oba*. Ojo (1967) noted that this structural support, though artistically finished, are integral and functional elements of the building. However, as decorative elements, they constitute master pieces of Yoruba carvings and depict an integral part of their culture. Sogbesan and Awonusi (2022) maintained that each carved post tells a story as it is used to record events in the absence of writing. Thus, serve as visual markers of identity and culture. They observed that in modern Yoruba architecture, traditional decorative mouldings and ornamentations are nearly eliminated, paving way for a clean aesthetic where materials such as wood, brick and stone are used unornamented. Hence, the tradition is gradually fading away as modern designs emerge.

Sogbesan and Awonusi (2022), writing on *Irefin* Palace in Ibadan, noted that palaces within the Yoruba culture are important places that are perceived as the position of power after the *Orisas*. The Yoruba town radiates around the *Oba's* palace whose architectural style spans years of experiences and cultural elements of identity. Mainly constructed using laterite and other traditionally sourced materials, they have withstood the test of time and are worthy of preservation. Remarkably, interaction with outsiders brought about changes in taste and value

that tends to influence the built environment of the Yoruba people. As a result, traditional institutional structures like Yoruba palaces are gradually changing to vernacular, eclectic or losing their traditional elements. Sadly, the loss of these distinctive architectural elements that differentiates and identify Yoruba palace architecture could simply translate to loss of history and heritage.

Continuity and Change in the Traditional Elements of *Aafin Oba* in Yorubaland

As stated earlier, traditional Yoruba Palace architecture in the olden days usually have some features that serve as elements which are common to them and made them appear as one type. Apart from the locally sourced materials (mud, thatch), other elements include religious temples/shrines, courtroom (*ile igbejo*), cell, artworks in the form of woodcarvings, museum, courtyards, halls of various sizes, thick forest, Oba's market (*Oja Oba*), kobi (porch) to mention a few. However, some of these traditional elements are completely missing in some *Aafin* of Yoruba *Oba.* For instance, in the olden days, there used to be a market directly in front of *Oba's* palaces called *Oja Oba* (King's market). This tradition has gone into extinction as it was observed that it was only at *Awujale's* palace in Ijebu Ode that there exists a market and it is called *Oja Oba*. Other palaces in the study are some distance away from the location of the towns market.

Similarly, the tradition of having a very thick forest at the back of the palace for rituals or spiritual activities does not exist any longer. This is owing to the introduction of foreign religions (Christianity and Islam) which have eroded traditional worship from most of the Yoruba *Oba.* We now have churches or chapel and mosques in the palaces of Yoruba monarchs as against shrines for deities or *Orisas.* However, something close to the thick forest tradition called "Royal Summer Garden" is kept in *Alake's* palace, although the garden is for relaxation and not for ritual activities.

The Royal Summer Garden at the *Alake's* palace (Figures 11, 12, 13, 14, 15 and 16) is located directly at the back of the new auditorium under construction and the *Alake chapel* (Figure 19). The serene, quiet and peaceful environment of the Royal Summer Garden reminiscent the thick forest that used to be part of the features of the ancient traditional Yoruba palaces that was usually located at the back of the

palaces. Information on the marble inscription (Figure 14) mounted on one side of the walls in the garden shows that the garden is a century old and newly renovated sometimes in March 2021 by Dr. and Mrs. Adebola Ismail Akindele (The *Atunluse* and *EreluAtunluse* of Egbaland). The renovation included tilling of the walk-ways and erection of iron railings on both sides (Figures 11 and 12) and concrete interlocking and landscaped with beautiful flowers (Figure 13). The newly renovated Royal Summer Garden reveals the paradigm shift that occurs between the thick forest that existed in the olden days' palaces and the renovated palace of the *Alake* of Egbaland. There are still reflections of big trees and there are two shed-like small structures: one hexagon shape (Figure 15) and the other heptagon shape (Figure 16). Prince Babatunde Gbadebo maintained that the *Alake* normally stays in the hexagon shaped shed (Figure 15) whenever he visits the garden to relax. Observably, there are seats inside the shed to attest to the claim.

Figure 11:
Section 1 of the Royal Summer Garden at the Alake's Palace



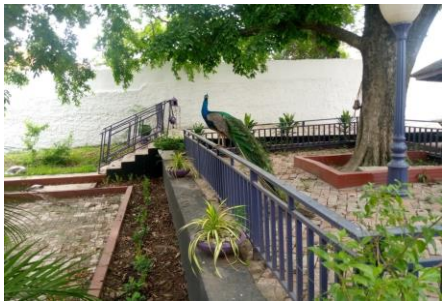
Source: Samson K. Adekoya, (2022)

Figure 12:
Section 2 of the Royal Summer Garden at the Alake's Palace



Source: Samson K. Adekoya, (2022)

Figure 13:
Concrete Interlocking and Landscaped of the Section Garden



Source: Samson K. Adekoya, (2022)

Figure 14:
Marble Inscription at the Royal Summer 2 Royal Summer Garden



Source: Samson K. Adekoya, (2022)

Figure 15:
Hexagon shape Shed at the Royal Summer Garden



Source: Samson K. Adekoya, (2022)

Figure 16:
Heptagon shape Shed at the Royal Summer Garden



Source: Samson K. Adekoya, (2022)

Religious Cohabitation as a Change to the Tradition

Religious temples particularly shrines for various deities used to be one of the important and major elements or structural components of the Yoruba Traditional Palace architecture in the olden days and African Traditional Religion (ATR) being the only religion available in the African society before the coming of the Europeans. The shrine was where the *Oba* used to venerate and commune with his ancestors, offering prayers and sacrifices for protection, peaceful co-existence, growth and development of their communities. However, findings showed that the tradition is almost going into extinction because out of the five selected *Obas'* palaces, only one palace, particularly *Alake's* palace in Abeokuta still have shrines (Figures 17 and 18) located within the palace. Other palaces in the study do not have shrines for deities but structures for churches and mosques, examples are

Alake (see Figures 19 and 20) and *Olu*-Ilaro's palaces (see Figures 21 and 22). *Olowu's* palace only has an apartment for church (Figure 23) while *Akarigbo* and *Awujale's* palaces do not have any. It was also discovered that the *Olu-Ilaro* was formerly a Pastor of the Redeemed Christian Church of God before he ascended the throne of his forefathers just like the *Soun* of Ogbomoso who was also a former pastor of the Redeemed Christian Church.

Olaoba (2012) observed that palace culture is gradually fading out in modern Yoruba society. This is due to a number of factors. Yoruba cultural values, generally, have been lost arising from the passive approach to them and lack of documentation before the arrival of the missionaries and British Administrators. Olaoba noted further that the missionaries and the British Administrators had their mission and vision on their arrival in Yoruba society. Such mission and vision were not readily known or understood by the Yoruba kings who initially welcomed them to their area of political jurisdiction. The teachings and preaching of the missionaries affected, quite seriously, Yoruba palace culture. Many of the cultural practices and activities in Yoruba palaces were adjudged barbaric and therefore, satanic. The missionaries frowned at them and condemned them outrightly leaving Yoruba kings helpless to control the missionary impact. Olaoba maintained that indeed, the missionaries engaged in a series of missions to plant Christianity in Yorubaland and were largely successful. He noted that today prayer meetings and Bible studies are held in most Yoruba palaces. He noted that the Late *Alaafin* of Oyo, Oba Lamidi Adeyemi III, recently commissioned and opened a new chapel building within his palace which had long housed a mosque. Many Yoruba kings have adopted the Christian faith and often attend Sunday services and important state programmes held in government houses. This new trend, no doubt, affects the ritual power of the *Oba* and sacrificial rites in Yoruba *Oba* palaces

Chief Moruf Ajani Egbeyemi, the *Asipa Owu* Kingdom, maintained that there is no shrine or mosque in *Olowu's* palace. He maintained further that the former *Olowu* being a Christian and church planter before he became the *Oba* succeeded in converting most of his people to Christianity while others chose to be Muslims but there is no room for traditional worshipers in *Olowu's* palace. Thus, the *Olowu* eradicated anything that had to do with traditional religion in his palace. As a

church planter, he established branches of the Mainland Independent Baptist Church in different locations in Nigeria such as the one on separate plots of land some distance away behind the *Olowu's* palace (Figure 23) where the Olowu, his immediate family and other members of the community worshipped on Sundays. At some other times he also conducts devotion, prayer sessions or crusades in the palace Courtyard depending on the number of people in attendance. Chief Egbeyemi affirms that, that is the main reason a marble lectern on which an inscription "CHRIST THE CORNERSTONE" is written is erected there as can be seen in (Figure 24) to preach and to address the gathering.

Figure 17:
The Iyamode Shrine at Alake's Palace



Source: Samson K. Adekoya, (2022)

Figure 18:
The Ipebi Shrine at Alake's Palace



Source: Samson K. Adekoya, (2022)

Figure 19:
Alake's Palace Chapel



Source: Samson K. Adekoya, (2022)

Figure 20:
The Central Mosque Ake at Alake's Palace



Source: Samson K. Adekoya, (2021)

Figure 21:
The Redeemed Christian Church of God Rock of Ages Chapel at OluIlaro's Palace



Source: Samson K. Adekoya, (2022)

Figure 22:
The Olu-Ilaro's Palace Mosque



Source: Samson K. Adekoya, (2021)

Figure 23:
Mainland Independent Baptist Church behind the Olowu palace in Oke Ago-Owu



Source: Samson K. Adekoya, (2021)

Figure 24:
The enclosed courtyard at Olowu's Palace



Source: Samson K. Adekoya, (2021)

Aafin as an Institution for Governance and Administration of Justice

In the olden days, before the coming of the European missionaries and administrators (colonialism), Yoruba *Oba*, usually were the supreme head of the throne of judgment of their respective jurisdictions. They constituted or inaugurated the royal council consisting of traditional chiefs (the membership composition varies from town to town) with whom they run the affairs of their domain. During the period, whatever the *Oba* says or does is the final. Nobody questions his authority. That is why they are being referred to as '*Alase Ekeji Orisa'*. Meaning, the authority that is second in command to the Supreme Being. They

have courts (*Ile igbejo*) or *Oba*-in-Council's apartments where conflicts were being managed in the olden days. People or offenders who have been tried in the courts by the *Oba*-in-Council and condemned were sent to prison which used to be part of the structural components located within the palace.

This tradition is still in existence but with some changes necessitated by the contact with the Europeans. For instance, the *Oba* does not have the supreme power again over his subject, and does not have any power to imprison anybody. Corroborating the foregoing, Olaoba (2012) noted that there existed formal courts in Yoruba palaces which were often considered as the throne of judgment where machinery of justice was exhibited. He maintained that the throne of judgment was the most significant courtyard in any Yoruba palace. This is the courtyard for managing conflicts by the Yoruba *Oba*. Olaoba asserted that in terms of governance, Yoruba Oba were at the apex of the hierarchy of power in their kingdom. Invested with divine power and ancestral authority, Yoruba kings were not alone in the task of governing Yoruba society. They were assisted by the chiefly class who teamed up with the kings as a council otherwise known as *Igbimo*. Olaoba observed that the royal councils were variously named in Yoruba society. It was known as *Oyomesi* in Oyo, *Osugbo* in Ijebu, *Modewa* in Ile-Ife, and *Iwarefa* in Ekitiland.

The Courtroom/*Oba* in Council Hall

The Courtroom/*Oba*-in-Council Hall is one of the major elements or components of the traditional Yoruba palace architecture in the olden days. In some cases, the apartment is called the Court (*Ile-Igbejo)* or *Oba*-in-Council Hall (*Awon Igbimo Oba*). The apartment is where disputes, conflicts and or quarrels are settled among the people in the town. The *Oba* constitutes a committee that is saddled with the responsibility of settling disputes among the indigenes and other residents in the palace. It should be stated that it is not all the issues brought to the palace that the *Oba* is involved or intervenes in. From one palace to another, the settings of the apartment being used for the courtroom or the *Oba*-in-Council differ in terms of the construction, furniture and the arrangements. While the settings of other palaces in the study have been influenced by European contact as evident in the furniture and the apartment used, the *Alake*-in-Council still used locally produced

furniture (benches) for seat and the lobby of the first palace building built in 1854 which is now called *Idi Ere* for their activities.

Figure 25:
The Aluminum framed glass doors leading to the Court room at *Olowu's* Palace



Source: Samson Kehinde Adekoya, (2022)

Figure 26:
Awujale-in-Council Hall inside the Heritage Hall



Source: Samson Kehinde Adekoya, (2022)

Figure 27:
The *Akarigbo*-in-Council Hall from the rear



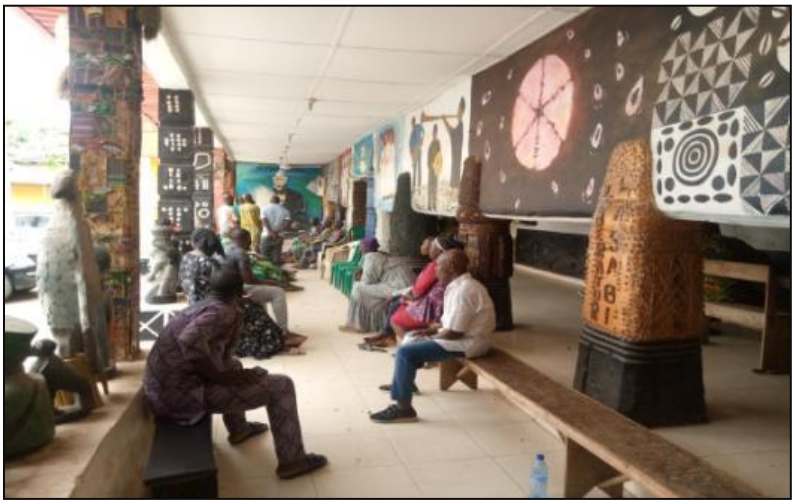
Source: Sam K. ADEKOYA, (2022)

Figure 28:
The *Akarigbo's* throne and other chiefs'seats in the *Akarigbo*-in-Council Hall



Source: Sam K. ADEKOYA, (2022)

Figure 29:
Idi-Ere Afin Ake Abeokuta where community issues and conflicts are settled



Source: Samson Kehinde Adekoya, (2022)

Cell/Prison in the Palaces

The Cell/Prison used to be an integral part/element of the traditional Yoruba *Oba's* palace architecture in the olden days. The Yoruba *Oba's* are seen as the owner of the land and they wielded so much unquestionable power and authority, thus, the main reason they are being praised or referred to as "*Kabiyesi"* meaning no one questions their authority. Thus, they created in their palaces, cells or prison where they keep offenders or criminals that have been condemned by the *Oba*-in-Council. Usually, the cell is fortified with very tight security to watch over the cell so as to prevent criminals from escaping. Surprisingly, there is a paradigm shift; the *Oba's* are no longer unquestionable as before the coming of the Europeans. This is consequent upon the effect of colonialism which affected the Yoruba aged-long monarchical system of government that recognised the *Oba* as the overall being and the controller of the land. Thus, this tradition is fading away, the reason being that, among the five selected *Oba's* palaces for the study, it is only at *Olowu's* palace that there exists a cell. The remaining four palaces in the study do not have cells or prisons among their structural components.

Figure 30:
The Stairs to the Cell (Dungeon) inside the Olowu's Palace



Source: Samson Kehinde Adekoya, (2022)

Sporting Facilities and Recreational Facilities

The ancient Yoruba palaces were said to be beehives of various cultural and traditional sporting activities such as *Ayo* games, *Okoto*, *Tente* to mention a few among men and women, as well as young and old of different age grades. Sadly, this study revealed that all the traditional sporting activities have disappeared, gone into extinction and have paved the way for various modern sporting facilities and activities which are products of the contact with the Europeans such as; lawn tennis (Figures 31, 32 and 33), table tennis (Figure 34), swimming pools (Figures 35, 36, 37, and 38), gymnasium and squash that are now evident in the Yoruba *Oba's* palaces. This accounts for the paradigm shift in the sporting facilities and the presence of the various modern sporting facilities that are now found in some of the *Oba's* palaces selected for this study. Out of the five selected palaces, four, namely *Olu* Ilaro's palace, *Akarigbo's* palace, *Awujale's* palace and *Alake's* palace all have one or two modern sporting facilities or the other while *Olowu's* palace does not have any sporting facility among its structural components.

Figure 31:
The Lawn Tennis Court at the Akarigbo's Palace



Source: Samson Kehinde Adekoya, (2022)

Figure 32:
The Lawn Tennis Court at the Palace of Olu-Ilaro



Source: Samson Kehinde Adekoya, (2022)

Figure 33:
The Lawn Tennis Court at the Awujale's Palace



Source: Samson K. Adekoya, (2021)

Figure 34:
Table tennis at the Akariagbo's palace main residence



Source: Samson K. Adekoya, (2022)

Figure 35:
Adults' Swimming Pool at the Awujale's Palace



Source: Samson K. Adekoya, (2021)

Figure 36:
Childrens' Swimming Pool at the Awujale's Palace



Source: Samson K. Adekoya, (2021)

Figure 37:
Adults' Swimming Pool at the Palace of Palace of Olu-Ilaro



Figure 38:
Children's Swimming Pool at the Olu-Ilaro

Source: Samson K. Adekoya, (2021)

Source: Samson K. Adekoya, (2021)

Museum/Library and Store

Museum is one of the major elements of the traditional Yoruba palaces. The *Oba* in the olden days and up till now are regarded as the custodians of the arts, culture and tradition in each town, hence, apart from using the artworks to decorate and adorn the palaces, Yoruba palaces house the museums where the arts, artifacts, and cultural items/materials which include; carvings from various materials and media such as wood, stone, ivory, pottery, drums, charms, clothing materials, technology, and other items of historical value are safely kept for posterity. Interestingly, this tradition still continues. Four out of the five selected *Obas'* palaces for the study (namely; *Akarigbo's* palace (Figure 39), *Olowu's* palace (Figure 40) *Alake's* palace (Figure 41), and *Awujale's* palace (Figure 42) have museum facilities carved out as part of their structural components except *Olu-Ilaro's* palace which does not have museum facility. This is because *Olu-Ilaro's* palace is a privately owned palace.

Figure 39:
A section of the Museum at Akarigbo's Palace



Source: Samson Kehinde Adekoya, (2022)

Figure 40:
The late Olowu HRM Oba Dr. Olusanya Adegboyega Dosunmu leading some researchers into the Museum.



Source: Prof. Chris Funke Ifeta (2021)

Figure 41:

Figure 42:

Egba Museum Building at Alake's Palace



Source: Samson Kehinde Adekoya, (2022)

The left side view of the Ijebu National Museum at Awujale's palace



Source: Samson Kehinde Adekoya, (2022)

Conclusion

The paper examined the effect of the contact of the Yoruba people of Southwest Nigeria with the Europeans and the Western world on traditional Yoruba architecture and organisation. The contacts with the Western world have had ambivalent effects on the Yoruba culture and tradition as well as their traditional architecture which did not spare their royal residences. The contact has influenced the traditional Yoruba architecture both positively and negatively. The contact has a more disadvantageous effect than the advantages on Yoruba culture and traditions which include the traditional Yoruba architecture. The contact has eroded some of Yoruba traditional cultures, way of life, cultural events and has also been replaced with modern or contemporary ones. For instance, modern materials and technology are now used in the construction or building of houses and palaces, which have improved the quality and aesthetic values of such structures. Corrugated iron sheets have replaced thatched roofs, iron, cement, concrete, aluminum and glass have replaced mud walls, wooden windows and doors. Usage of modern design has also drastically reduced the power and authority of the *Oba* and almost equated it with the common man under the modern constitution introduced by the Western world.

Earlier scholars such as Egunjobi et al (2022), Olotua (2001), and Aniakor (1995), to name a few, claimed the transformation emanated around the early 19th and 20th centuries from the Brazilian returnee slaves, British colonialist, missionaries, modern education, civilization and the encouragement of the Catholic Church to incorporate Yoruba indigenous artworks such as carved wooden panels also contributed in no small measure to the development of Yoruba indigenous or traditional architecture in Nigeria. These have brought about the paradigm shift noted in the palace architecture.

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