

Assessment of Yoruba Cultural Ornamentation on Nigerian Monumental Buildings in Lagos, Nigeria.

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Abstract

Yoruba ornamentation involves the use of wood, clay, murals or metal works to represent the rich culture of the Yoruba people and this is presented in the form of paintings, relief ornaments or sculptures on building walls, doors, floors and window openings. The aim of this study is to evaluate the application of ornamentation in the design and construction of monumental buildings such as museum buildings in Lagos. This was achieved by examining some existing monumental buildings in Lagos to know how modernization has impacted on the rich culture of the Yoruba People in the urban milieu of Lagos. Five monumental buildings were purposely selected in Lagos and 400 questionnaires were administered to the workers in these buildings and professionals in the building industry. 271 questionnaires were returned out of which 235 was valid representing 58.75%. The responses were analysed at descriptive level. The result shows that respondents agreed to over bearing of modernization on monumental buildings but would prefer to prioritize the use of mural wall paintings and sculptures on monumental building designs. This study concludes that public monumental buildings should always reflect the culture of its location through the use of its ornamentation and this can be achieved by prioritizing cultural artistic inputs such as mural paintings on buildings and by extension, promoting the use of Yoruba ornamentation and relief on monumental buildings in the entire Yoruba speaking south-western Nigeria.

Introduction

Background to the Study

Nigeria is multicultural. The country is made up of several ethnic group with distinct cultural values and believes (Onyima, 2016). One of the three largest ethnic group are the Yoruba's, of south-

western Nigeria. They are also one of the socially diverse groups on the African continent (Babatunde & Oladipo, 2018).

Apart from the short descriptions of settlements and traditional housing types found in the notes of early explorers to Africa and the European missionaries, limited and unstructured information is available on the African traditional architecture, of which Yoruba architecture is part. There have been arguments over the years however that before colonization, Africans majorly lived in unplanned, isolated rural communities, with little or no appreciation for building or town aesthetics. This has been described as one of the main reasons for the limited inquiry into indigenous African Architecture (Ekundayo, 2008). Vernacular architecture is a combination of foreign expertise and materials with traditional architecture, in a bid to achieve improved forms and workmanship, without compromising the basic socio-cultural features and functions of the traditional architecture (Adebaïke *et al.*, 2020). Globalization has brought about numerous cross-application of cultures, and at instances where the cultural transfers impacts the architecture to a large extent, it cannot be described as traditional or vernacular. Hence, indigenous architecture is a term used to describe culture-specific architecture (Uduku, 2006; Adebaïke *et al.*, 2020).

Problem Statement

Although recent years have seen increasing interest in vernacular architecture, its advantages are still yet to be fully recognised and utilized in contemporary design (Olusola & Ozgur, 2009). This is seen in the design of Nigerian iconic buildings, whose designs are either copied from foreign architecture or replicas of buildings from other part of the world, such as National Theatre, Lagos which is a replica of Bulgarian Palace of Culture and Sports (Constanze, 2013). There is therefore a need for Nigerian Architects and personnel in creative industries against sacrificing the rich Nigerian cultural identities on the altar of globalization and capitalism (Babatunde & Oladipo, 2018; Emielu, 2006; Bode, 1995).

Aim and Objectives

Aim

The study assesses the use of Yoruba cultural elements in the architecture of monumental museum buildings in southwest Nigeria with a view to revive the culture-specific design in monumental buildings in Nigeria.

Objectives

- i. To review relevant and current literature on Yoruba cultural ornamentation and architecture in pre-colonial era.
- ii. To identify and analyse different styles of Yoruba murals and decorative elements.
- iii. To determine the best practices for inclusion of Yoruba cultural ornamentation on museum buildings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Origin of Yoruba Ornamentation

In Yoruba culture, the exact origin of ornamentation is difficult to trace, as there is no written documentation in this regards, no one can tell with absolute certainty when it started or where

it originated from (Abejide & Ijasikin, 2020). Early Yoruba houses were constructed from earth, which has a relatively short lifespan and dilapidate easily, making the preservation of the earliest form of ornamentation almost impossible. However, oral histories which were collected and later published by scholars revealed that the Yoruba people started ornamenting with plastering of floors with herbal concoctions called *ìgbolé* or *ìpalé*, which was a response to the directive by *ifa*, a popular Yoruba god, to fix a problem. Once floor adornment was allowed, its spread was inevitable (Abejide & Ijasikin, 2020).

The task of floor plastering and decoration in Yoruba land was mostly exclusive to women and the major materials which includes *yunyun* (*aspilia latifolia*), *èlú* (*indigo ferra trees*) or *ijòkùn* leaves (*mucuna solanei*) are pounded together with cow dungs (*bóto* or *elébóto*). (Abejide & Ijasikin, 2020; Osasona, 2005).

Cultural Ornamentation in Yoruba Traditional Architecture

Ornaments are decorative elements which are not wholly essential to the functionality or usability of a building but they often are necessary to either emphasize a point or diminish the impact of a structural element, turning it into an edifice instead. Ornamentation could either be ichnographic representation of a logo or embodiment or merely for beautification purposes only. Most cultures have overtime developed their own repertoire of architectural ornaments (Adegoke, 2016). Some of which were inspired by shape of plants or floral motifs, animals, humans forms, or emblems and heraldry. Ornamentation is therefore seen by professionals as an adjunct embellishment or decoration to enhance aesthetic appeal (Adegoke, 2016; Curl, 2000). The use of ornaments as aesthetic elements is a very important part of Yoruba architectural heritage. The unaltered ornate forms were the pre-colonial ornamentation. Such decorations were mostly found in indigenous buildings of traditional cities such as Oshogbo and Ife in Osun State, especially, the centre of the city which were the early settlements (Okpako & Amole, 2012; Egúnjobí, 1995).

Examples of Early Painted Yoruba Ornamentations and Murals

Abejide & Ijasikin, (2020) documented oral accounts of skilful traditional plastering and ornamentation personnel in south-western Nigeria, which reveals that fresh application of plant concoctions were usually done either at intervals or in commemoration of special events such as festivals and coronations. Plate I below shows examples of Yoruba ornamentations at Adúlójú's compound, Aladiye Street, Oke-Baale, Osogbo Osun State.



Plate I: Graffiti made with Plant concoction on the lower walls of Aduloju's building, 19, Aladiye Street, Osogbo, Osun State.

Source: Abejide & Ijasikin, 2020

One of the major places Yoruba ornamentation were found on buildings are on the doorways. Plate II below shows examples of Yoruba ornamentation on doorways using synthetic paints



Plate II: Portal decorated with synthetic paints

Source: Abejide & Ijasikin, 2020

Cultural identity challenges in monumental buildings in Lagos

Ten years after the construction of the Palace for Sports and Culture, Varna, Bulgaria, the Nigerian military government was looking for an architecture that would host the largest event in African culture till date: the FESTAC 1977. The Nigerian delegation looked for a model of an appropriate building and found the palace for sports and Culture in Varna. The Engineers of the Bulgarian building were thereafter contracted to build its replica in Lagos (Constanze, 2013).

Plate III below displays the striking similarity between Palace of Culture and Sport, Bulgaria and National Arts Theatre, Lagos, which is its replica.



Plate III: Similarities between Palace of Culture and Sports, Bulgaria (left), and National Arts Theatre, Lagos (right), which is its replica. (Source: Google Images).

Significance of Ornamentation in Yoruba Architecture

The decorative elements of the Yoruba culture is an integral part of the Yoruba traditional architecture. These decorative elements includes arts presented in the form of patterns, symbols, motifs, carvings, metal works, pottery, bead-works and wall decorations. The Yoruba people displayed high quality of artistic intellect in the decorative arts on their buildings and environment (Anifowose & Olatubosun, 2020; Balogun, 1979). Examples of this is found in the famous ornamentations in Ife, Osun State as well the Palace door from Ekiti, shown in Plate IV and currently on display in British museum in London.



a) Stone mosaic rendering at Doni's palace, Ife, Osun.



b) Intricate details on a palace door at Ekiti



c) Mural on the interior wall of the Oluorogbo Shrine, Ife, Osun state.

Plate IV: Images of famous Yoruba ornamentation in Ife, Osun state and the Ekiti palace door now in British museum, London.

Source: (Ogunye, 2018).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The Survey

The data collection involves the use of questionnaire survey administered to personnel in the built environment, majorly architects, as well as users including workers and tourists to monumental buildings in Lagos, Nigeria. The rationale for the selection of a survey approach according to Luthans & Davis (1982), is due to its benefits of recognising characteristics of a large group of individuals, including its economy of design and quick approach in data collection.

Instrument for data Collection

The use of questionnaire was identified as the most suitable instrument through which the respondents could be easily reached in the most economical and efficient manner. It is also a popular method used to collect required information. The questionnaire was administered to built environment professionals, professionals in art and culture related field, users including workers and tourists to monumental buildings in Lagos, Nigeria. This improved the correctness of the data and its validity. A pilot study was carried out where 15 respondents were interviewed using the structured questionnaire to ensure the questionnaire was easily understood by the respondents.

Sample Selection

Lagos has an estimated population of 20,000,000 people. According to Krejcie (1970), for a known population above 1,000,000 the questionnaires needed to be sent out is 385. Out of which 30% valid and completely filled questionnaires responses must be returned for analysis. 30% of 385 is 116. Hence, a minimum of 115 valid responses is needed for this survey. In this regards, 5 monumental buildings were visited where 400 questionnaires were sent out electronically and 235 valid responses were retrieved.

The respondents are majorly built environment professionals, most especially architects within the study area and professionals from fields such as Arts, craft and culture. The professionals were randomly selected to minimize bias. The questionnaires were sent through electronic means and administered online.

Data Analysis Method

To accomplish the objectives of this study, descriptive method of data analysis is used. Descriptive analysis was employed to summarize the demographic data while descriptive statistical analysis including tables, pie and bar charts are used to examine problems identified in this study.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Respondents' response rate

Table 1 below shows the number of questionnaires distributed and the respondents' response rates. Of the 400 questionnaires sent out, only 235 were fully completed and submitted. This represents about 59% response rate. Emuze (2011) argues a 25.4% response rate for a similar survey and is enough, hence, the response rate in adequate.

Table 1: Respondent's response rate

(Source: Authors' field work)

Location	Distributed (No)	Returned (No)	% of response rate
Lagos	400	235	58.75%
Total	400	235	59%

Background Data / Demographics

Gender of Respondents

1. Select your gender

235 responses

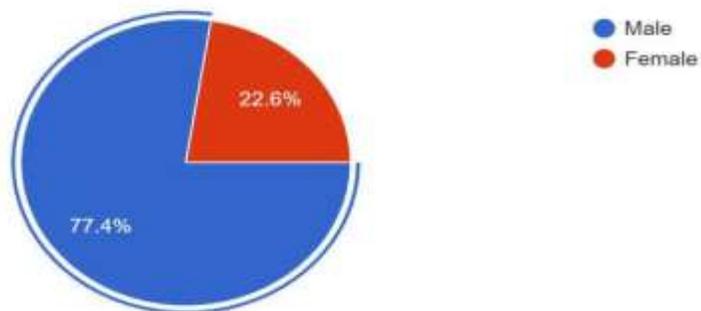


Figure 1: Gender of Respondents
(Source: Authors' field work)

Figure 1 above shows the gender distribution of respondents. 77.4% of which are male and 32.2% are female. This is understandable as the sample consist of majorly built environment professionals where males are predominant.

Age of Respondents

2. Please select your age group

235 responses

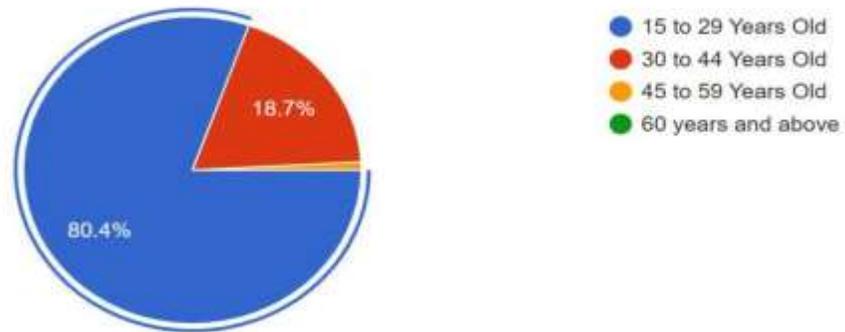


Figure 2: Age of Respondents
(Source: Authors' field work)

The second questions shows the age distribution of respondents. 80.4% of which are between the ages of 15 to 29. This is expected since the questionnaire was administered mainly online and this age group which comprises of Millennials and generation Z (people born between 1997 and 2010) are the most active internet users. Not only in Nigeria, but across the world. Ages 30 to 44 represents 18.7%, ages 45 to 59 represents 0.9%, while 60 years and above has no representation.

Professional background of respondents

3. Are you a professional in the built environment industry?

235 responses

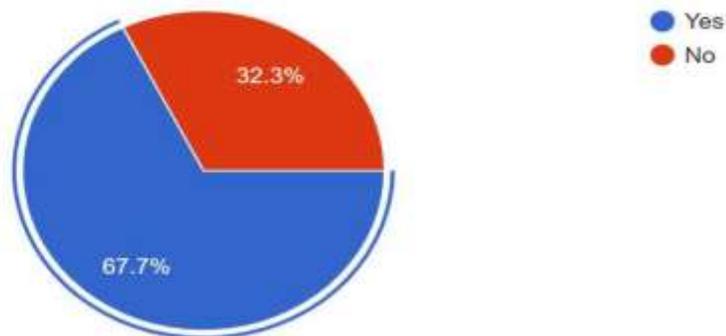


Figure 3: Professional background of Respondents (Source: Authors' field work)

From the sampling, built environment professionals were one of the primary focus. Figure 3 above shows that 67.7% of respondents has a professional background in a field under the built environment, which fosters a better understanding of the questions asked and help in getting a well-informed response. Thereby, further validating the data collected.

Profession of respondents

4. Please indicate what best describe your profession or field

235 responses

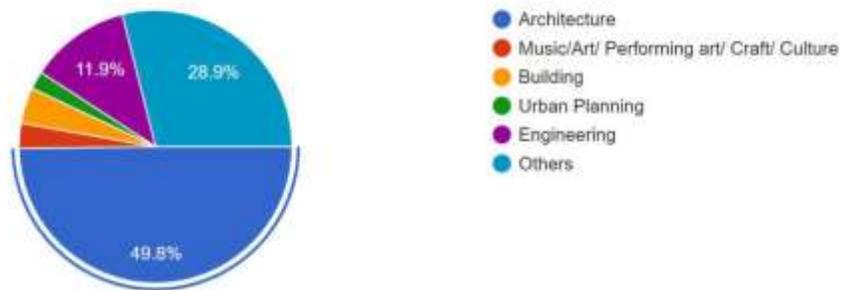


Figure 4: Profession of Respondents
(Source: Authors' field work)

Majority of the respondents (49.8%) are from architecture field. 11.9% in engineering related fields, 4.3% in the field of building and 3% are from the field of art, craft and culture. The remaining 28.9% are from other various fields. They include tourists and visitors to monumental buildings and museums across the study area.

Respondents' Years of Professional Experience

5. How long have you been practicing the profession?

235 responses

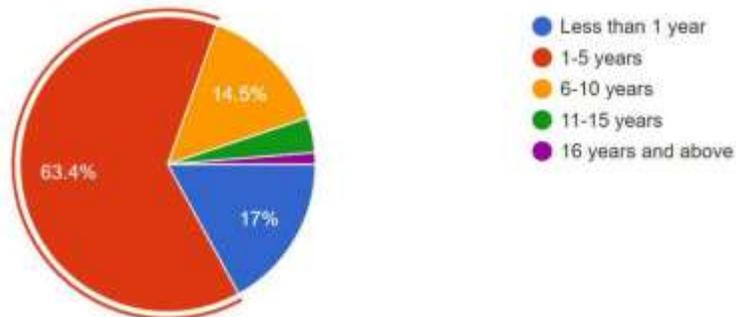


Figure 5: Number of years of respondents' professional experience
(Source: Authors' field work)

63.4% of respondents have been practicing their profession between 1-5 years, 14.5% have been practicing between 6 to 10 years, 3.8% have been in practice between 11-15 years, and

1.3% have been practicing their profession for over 16 years, while 17% have been in practice for less than a year.

Ethnic Group of Respondents

6. Please indicate your ethnic group

235 responses

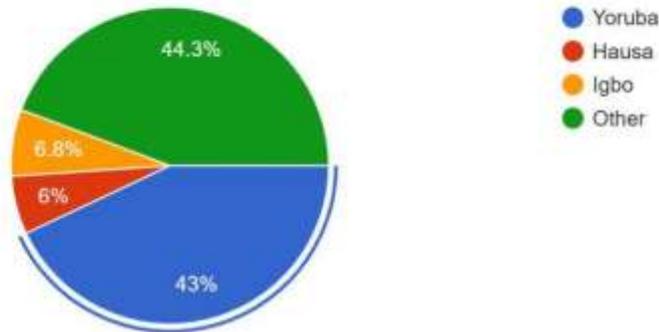


Figure 6: Ethnic group of respondents
(Source: Authors' field work)

The Yoruba ethnic group represents 43% of the total number of respondents. This is because, the study area is predominantly a Yoruba speaking state. However, being a mega city, there are also other ethnic groups as represented in the questionnaire. 6.8% of the respondents are Igbo, 6% are Hausa while 44.3% are from other various ethnic group in the country.

Use of Cultural elements of monumental buildings

8. Do you agree that traditional and cultural elements should be displayed on monumental buildings (such as museums) in Nigeria?

235 responses

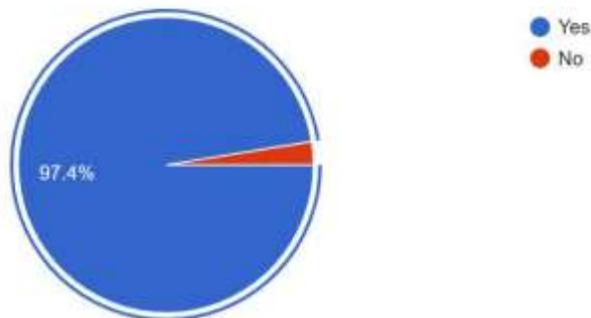


Figure 7: Use of cultural elements on Monumental buildings
(Source: Authors' field work)

97.4% of the respondents agrees that monumental buildings in Nigeria, such as museum building should have cultural elements displayed on them.

Ranking of cultural elements on monumental buildings

9. Please rate how you prioritize (wishes to see) the following design elements on monumental buildings (1 is very low, 5 is very high)

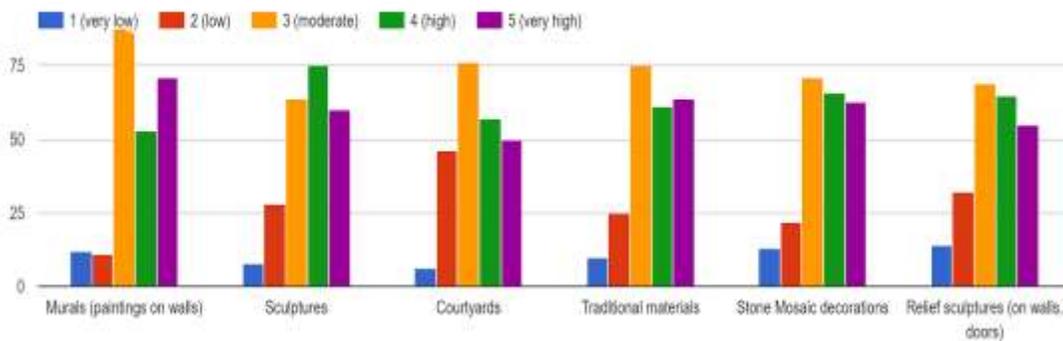


Figure 8: Ranking of cultural elements on Monumental buildings
(Source: Authors' field work)

From figure 8 above, respondents prioritised the use of ornamentations such as murals, stone mosaic decorations and relief sculptures as means of achieving aesthetics on monumental buildings. Murals as a decorative element however was rated with highest number of “very high”.

Rating Various Types of Mural Designs

10. Please rate the following types of mural designs according to your preference for suitability on museum building (1 is very low, 5 is very high)

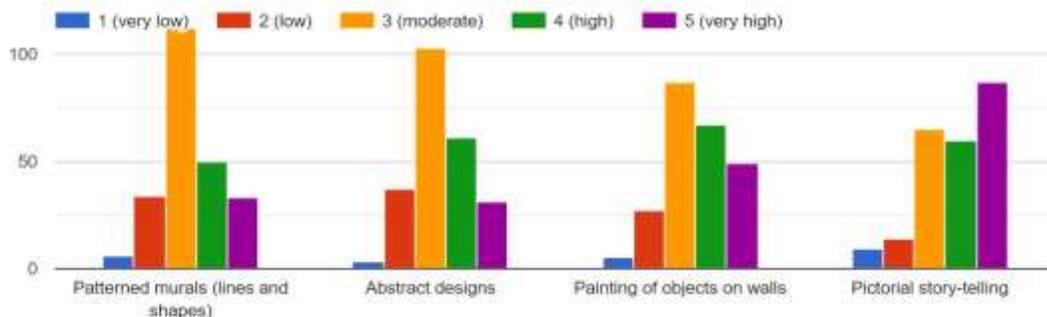


Figure 9: Rating the various types of Mural designs
(Source: Authors' field work)

Respondents were asked to rate the most common types of mural designs. Pictorial story-telling, which is a form of mural design that has meanings embedded that tells a story got the highest ratings as shown in figure 9. This was followed by the paintings of objects on walls. Patterned and abstract mural designs are rated least based on respondent’s preferences.

Use of Sculptures as a form of ornamentation

12. Would you encourage the use of sculpted images in building designs as seen in Yoruba culture?

235 responses

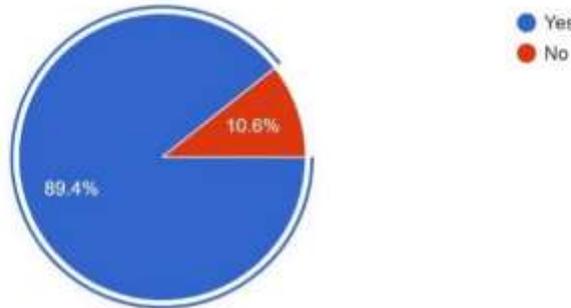


Figure 10: Respondent’s preference for the use of sculptures
(Source: Authors’ field work)

89.4% of respondents agrees they would encourage the use of sculptures as seen in the Yoruba culture, such as the sculpted columns, while 10.6% of the respondents are against the use of sculptures.

Respondents’ belief about the use of sculptures.

13. What is your belief about the use of sculptures on buildings designs (tick all that applies).

235 responses

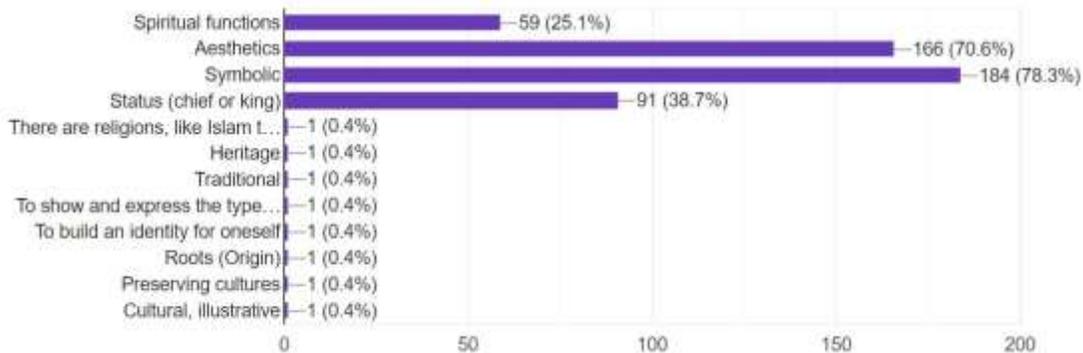


Figure 11: Respondent’s preference for the use of sculptures
(Source: Authors’ field work)

Figure 10 shows 10.6% of respondents are not comfortable with the use of sculptures on buildings. Figure 11 further shows a breakdown of respondents’ belief about the use of sculpture. 78.3% believes they have symbolic functions, 70.6% believes they have aesthetic functions, 38.7% believes they are used to show status or affluence, traditionally, while 25.1% believes they have spiritual purposes.

Factors preventing the use of Cultural ornamentation on monumental buildings

235 responses

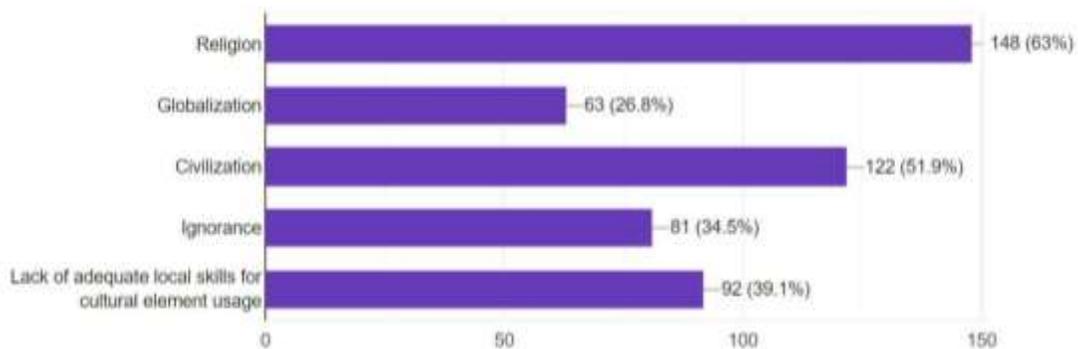


Figure 13: Respondent’s view on factors preventing the use of cultural ornamentation on monumental buildings
(Source: Authors’ field work)

Figure 12 above shows a breakdown of factors preventing the use of cultural ornamentation on monumental buildings. Religion accounts for the largest reason. 63% of respondents agrees religion is a factor preventing the use of sculpture. 51.9% of respondents agree civilization limits the use of sculptures, while 39.1% agrees that lack of local skills for creating these cultural features is a factor inhibiting its use on monumental buildings.

Benefit of including Yoruba Cultural ornamentation in building designs

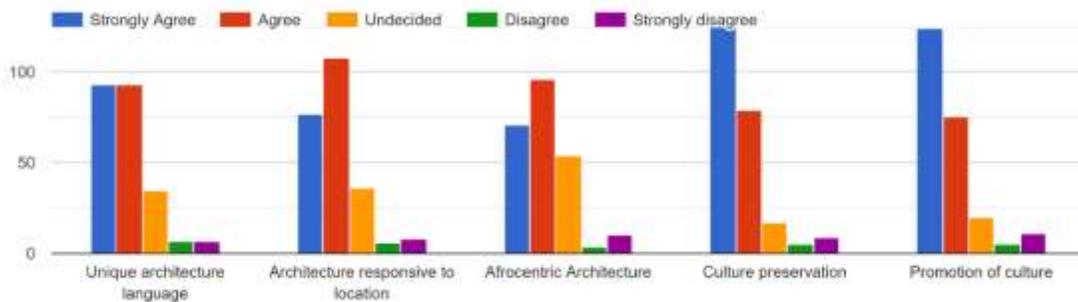


Figure 14: Benefits of including Yoruba cultural ornamentation in building designs
(Source: Authors’ field work)

Figure 14 above shows a breakdown of benefits of including Yoruba cultural ornamentation in building designs as rated by respondents. Preservation and promotion of culture as well as creation of a unique architectural language are ranked highest.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Conclusion

Recent years have seen increasing interest in vernacular architecture, however, its full implementation is yet to be seen in the monumental building designs in the country. From the survey carried out in this study, it was discovered that religion and religious believes is the

biggest single factor that prevents people from adding Yoruba Ornamentation in monumental building designs in Lagos. Furthermore, the use of murals, stone mosaic designs and relief sculptures on building are ranked as best practices for inclusion of Yoruba ornamentation in building designs, as this would further help in achieving preservation and promotion of cultural values, an ultimately help in defining a unique architecture language for monumental buildings in Lagos.

Recommendations

Proper education about the use of Cultural Ornamentation will further help people to appreciate their culture. Furthermore, for the use of Yoruba Ornamentation to be more readily acceptable in building design, monumental buildings such as museum has an important role to play, as they are the first stop while making enquire into the past. Hence, from the findings gathered in this study, it is recommended that monumental buildings in Lagos be modified to reflect the culture of its location, and this can serve as a model for the entire Yoruba speaking south-western Nigeria.

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