

# Perceptions of Yoruba Cultural Ornamentation on Monumental Buildings in Lagos, Nigeria

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## Abstract

Ornamentation is the art and science of representing the rich image and culture of people using clay, wood or metal as sculpture and artifact. Yoruba decoration represents designs on walls, floors, roofs, windows, doors openings of buildings and pain works. The aim of this study is to evaluate the Perceptions of ornamentation and decorations in the design and construction of monument buildings in Lagos with a view to understand reasons for the gradual disappearance of Yoruba architectural features on monumental buildings. This was achieved by examining some existing monument buildings in Lagos to understand how the rich culture of the Yoruba People in the urban milieu of Lagos is being promoted. Five monumental buildings were purposely selected in Lagos and 400 questionnaires were administered to workers of these buildings and professionals in the building industry including the tourists. 305 were returned out of which 235 were valid representing 58.75%. The responses were first analyzed at descriptive level and a 5-point likert scale was employed to determine how people perceive the use of ornamentation and decoration features on monument buildings. The result shows that the rich culture of the people is less emphasized on these buildings studied which suggest that some of these buildings were not purposely designed as monument building and the users are indifferent about it. The findings also indicate that religious Beliefs, over dependence on foreign goods and lack of value for these features among the urban population are some of the reasons discovered. The study thereby suggests for collaborations among the professionals for providing necessary modern tools for productions of these features in commercial quantities. The study concludes that Yoruba ornamentation and decorations should be used to customize monumental building fabrics for promotion of Yoruba regional identity.

**Keywords:** Buildings, Decoration, Monument, Ornamentation, Yoruba,

## Introduction

Nigeria is multicultural and of several ethnic groups with distinct cultural values and beliefs (Onyima, 2016). One of the three largest ethnic groups are the Yoruba of south-western Nigeria. The Yoruba people of Southwestern Nigeria are also one of the socially diverse group 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, many

indigenous works on the African traditional architecture including Yoruba architecture are now gaining academic attention. Indigenous architecture is a term used to describe culture-specific architecture (Uduku, 2006; Adebaike *et al.*, 2020).

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 (Bray, 1969). This has encouraged more research work into indigenous African Architecture



(Ekundayo, 2008). Globalization has brought about numerous cross-application of cultures. This has led to the dominance of foreign culture which impact significantly on the Yoruba traditional architecture if not completely eroding it (Jolaoso & Bello, 2017).

In recent times despite the fact that there is increasing interest in vernacular architecture its advantages are yet to be fully utilized in contemporary designs (Olusola & Ozugur, 2009). Vernacular architecture are traditional buildings, designed and built to reflect the local climate, skills and culture of the region where the buildings are located (Murakami & Ikaga, 2008; Puspitasari & Lakawa, 2020).

This is seen in the design of some Nigerian iconic buildings, whose designs are either copied from foreign architecture or replicas of buildings from other part of the world. Such buildings include National Theatre, Lagos, which is a replica of Bulgarian Palace of Culture and Sports as shown in Plate I and II. The striking similarity between Palace of Culture and Sport, Bulgaria and National Arts Theatre, Lagos, is obvious and devoid of any indigenous architecture. 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 (Bode, 1995; Emielu, 2006; Babatunde & Oladipo, 2018).

Previous studies on Yoruba ornatmentation and decorations like Abejide and Ijasikin (2014) looked into indigenous wall ornatmentation in Yoruba domestic architecture. The study established that the use of ornatmentation for adornment was part of Yoruba means of family identity. Adedokun (2014) examined incorporating traditional architecture into modern architecture and the study observed a distinct departure from the tradition use of building materials and skill to the modern use of technology and materials in the construction of Obas' palaces. In all these studies none examine the people's perceptions of Yoruba cultural ornatmentation on monumental buildings in Lagos which is the focus of this study.

The aim of the study is to assess the people's perceptions of Yoruba ornatment and decoration features on the architecture of monumental buildings in Lagos with view to encourage indigenous heritage and regional identity through architecture. This would be achieved by promoting the arts and crafts skills of Yoruba ornatmentation among young people using modern technology for mass production of these features on building fabrics.



Plate I: Palace of Culture and Sports, Bulgaria  
Source: Google Images, Jan, 2022

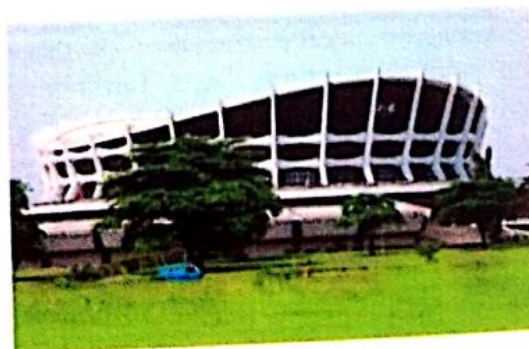


Plate II: National Arts Theatre, Lagos



## Yoruba Architecture

The domestic architecture is the architecture that reflects the culture of the people of a given region (Gopinath, & Kulkarni, 2014). The traditional Yoruba architecture has its soul in multiple open courtyards and corridor within or around the houses. Besides, the courtyards are usually surrounded by rooms built of locally sourced building materials (Dmochowski, 1990). Yoruba people started ornamentation with plastering of floors and walls with animal dung called *ipale* (Johnson, 2001). This ornamentation serves dual purposes besides beautification it also preserves the building from termites and other attack which destroy the building fabric.

The houses were usually built by members of the household and craftsmen with assistance from friends, in-laws and neighbours (Jolaoso & Bello 2017). The basic house walls and perimeter walls were often made of mud and roofs in towns until the early twentieth century, most of the compounds as well as the Oba's palace were roofed with thatch (Adedokun, 2013; Arenibafo, 2017). The thatched roof was subsequently replaced by zinc, concrete slab, asbestos and aluminium roofing sheets in recent times due to advancement in technology, durability and maintainability. The use of ornamentation for adornment on floors, walls, door and window openings in house construction was part of Yoruba tradition and means of family identity (Abejide & Ijasikin, 2020). The task of floor plastering and decoration was initially exclusive to women with the use of materials such as *yunyun* (*aspilia latifolia*), *èlú* (*indigo ferra trees*) or *ijòkùn* leaves (*mucuna solanei*) which are pounded together with cow dungs (*bóto* or *elébóto*) (Osasona, 2005; Abejide & Ijasikin, 2020). The Yoruba architecture use of multiple courtyard and corridor encourages extended family social interactions which culminate to large urbanization setting (Bray, 1968;

Sonaiya & Dincyurek, 2009). Thus the concept of Yoruba urbanization has root in their architecture.

The use of Ornamentation has been present in the Yoruba architecture throughout recorded time, revealing human desires, activities and beliefs (Vlach, 1984; Osasona, 2005; Jolaoso & Bello, 2017). Ornament increases qualitative features of buildings (Saglam, 2014). Ornament in Yoruba architecture creates not only desire for standard but also for depicting a strong sense of identity, status and authority (Osasona, 2005). 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, authority or serve as unique family identity (Glaveanu, 2014; Ahani et al., 2017). Ornaments and decoration are not the true subjects of architecture, but rather secondary referential vehicles for representing subject matters such as nature, iconography, mythology, religion, ritual, history, or cultural practice which are external to building (Carlson-Redding, 1998). Plates III-VI are different decorative facades of Yoruba architecture. Decoration on the other hand, is a derivation of Late Latin '*Decoracionem*' (The Free Dictionary, 2016), which is defined as "The act, process, technique, or art of decorating". Oxford English Dictionary (2017) defines it as an emblem of honor.

Decoration is an art and science of putting something in place like logo to attract attention to a special function. Most cultures have over time developed their own repertoire of architectural ornament and decoration. 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).



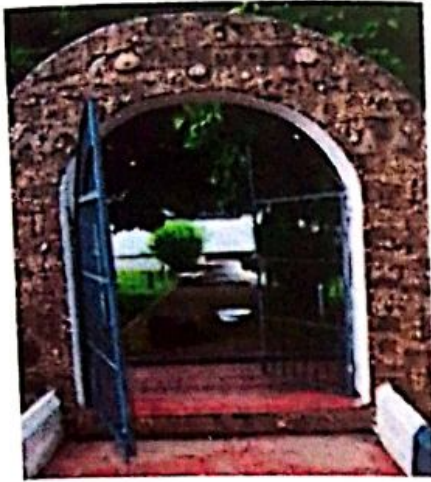


Plate III: Stone mosaic rendering at Ooni's palace entrance, Ife, Nigeria.  
Source: (Ogunye, 2018)



Plate IV: The Okonkwo's Family House in 1940s at Ijebu-ode, Nigeria  
Source: (Jillaroos & Bello 2017)



Plate V: Intricate details on a palace door at Ekiti, Nigeria.  
Source: (Ogunye, 2018)



Plate VI: Mural on the interior wall of the Oluorogbo Shrine, Ife, Nigeria.  
Source: (Ogunye, 2018)

Decorations are usually employed to change, beautify environment and houses during festivals as a sign of celebration and are used in such a way to reflect the nature of the celebration (Osasona, 2005). The use of ornament and decorations as aesthetic elements are very important part of Yoruba architectural heritage since the pre-colonial area.

### Examples of Early Painted Yoruba Ornammentation and Murals

Abejide & Ijasikin, (2020) documented oral accounts of skilful traditional plastering and ornamentation personnel in south-western Nigeria, which reveals were achieved with plant concoctions for different designs in commemoration of special events such as festivals and coronations. Plate VII are different designs of Yoruba ancient decorations and plate VIII are different designs of Yoruba modern decorations.



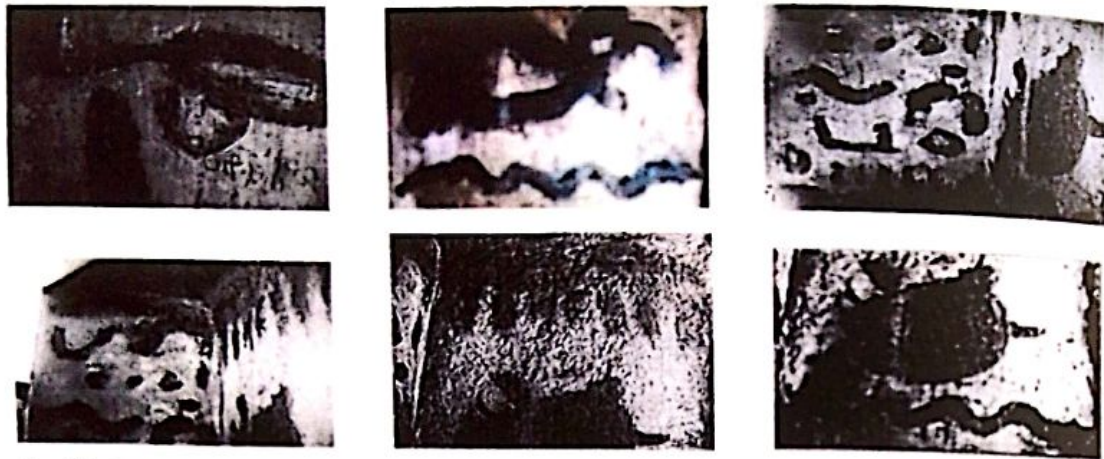


Plate VII: Graffiti made with Plant concoction on the lower walls of Aduloju's building, Osogbo, Nigeria  
Source: Abejide & Ijasikin, 2020

a). wall and Door ornament



b). Wall and Door Ornament



c). Balustrades ornament



d).Door ornament.



e).Wall and window ornament.



f). Balustrades ornament

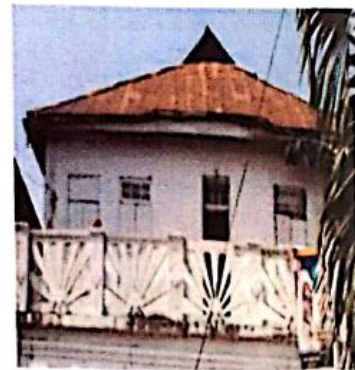


Plate VIII (a-f) application of ornaments in ancient Doors, window and Balustrades ornamentation in Yoruba architecture. Source: Adegoke, 2015

### Significance of Ornamentation in Yoruba Architecture.

In architecture, ornamentation is applied for beautifications, and for communicating past events in a given culture (Grabar, 1992). It comes in various styles on buildings, furniture, columns, fascia boards, and around entryways of buildings as

shown in plate VII (a-g). Ahani and Etessam (2015) describe ornamentation as secondary features on a building as they are inessential and can be ignored. However, Graber (1992) asserts to the fact that ornament communicate meanings and serve to fulfill value to the building which create comfort and



delight to the users and this makes ornament an essential part of the building architecture. Thus ornamentation is individual family, or community means of identification, a display of individual authority and society status in Yoruba architecture. The Yoruba people employed high quality of artistic decorative arts on their buildings and environment (Anifowose & Olatubosun, 2020). Some of these ornamentation are shown in plate VIII (a-f).

### Methodology

The methodology applied in this research was based upon the standard procedures of scientific research to ensure the validity and reliability of the results. Figure 1 presents the methodological approach to the study. The usage of photographs as a surrogate for illustrations and refreshment of memory was adopted from previous studies.

The study was carried out by using a practical observation fieldwork on selected monument buildings in Lagos through observation schedules, structured questionnaire and photographs. Plate IX (a-

e) are some aspect pictures of the monument buildings purposely selected for the study. The observation schedules was used to identify types of ornament on windows, doors, fascia board, columns, walls and type of fenestration provided in these selected buildings.

A total of five such buildings at different locations of Lagos were purposely visited. The purpose sampling technique was adopted due to paucity of the building type under investigation in the study area. The available samples that are famous, admissible and of high degree of patronage by tourists in Lagos were visited for the study. Information was elicited from both the academic scholars, professionals in the built environment, tourists and users of the selected monument buildings in Lagos through self-administered questionnaire. The rationale for the selection of a survey approach according to Luthans & Davis (1982), is due to its benefits of identifying characteristics of a large group of individuals, including its economy of design and quick approach in data collection.

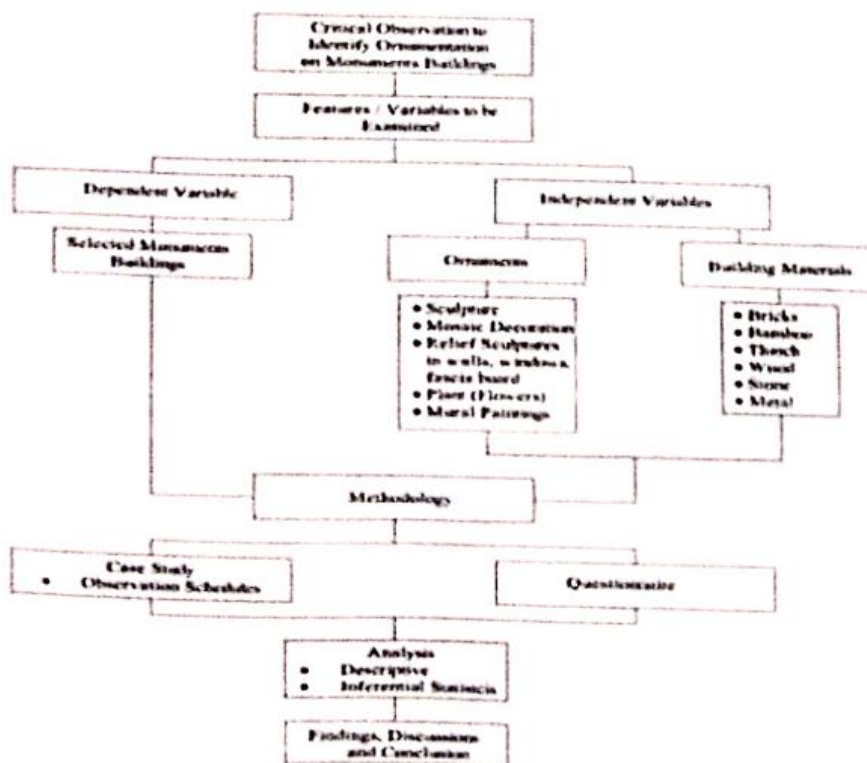


Figure 1: Methodological approach to the study diagram.  
Source: authors, 2021





a). Fela kalakuta Museum, Lagos.



b). Mosaic and Mural paint decoration,



c). Fela Tomb in kalakuta Lagos



d). stone rubble decoration at national museum, Lagos



e). Mural Painting at Nike arts gallery, Lagos.



f). relief ornament on walls at Nike art gallery, Lagos



g). Library entrance paint deco at Terra Kulture. Lagos

Plate IX: (a-g) application of ornaments and decoration in some of the monument buildings studied.

Besides, questionnaire approach became appropriate due to the busy nature of the respondents in Lagos who had no time for personal interview. Central to the study is information on how people perceive the use of ornamentation and decorations in Yoruba architecture on monument buildings. A total of 400 questionnaires were randomly distributed across the respondents who were majorly from pools of built environment professionals like architects, Artists, craftsmen, tourists and workers in the selected buildings within the study area. Krejcie and Morgan (1970) recommend 384

respondents for a population of one million. Thus the distributed questionnaire was also adequate for this study. A total of 305 questionnaires were returned out of which 235 was valid. This represents about 59% response rate. Table 1 presents the distribution and results of the questionnaire across the respondents. Emuze (2011) argues that a 25.4% response rate for a similar survey and 59% response rate is therefore adequate for the study. Table 1 presents the questionnaire distribution.



**Table 1: Monument Buildings Covered by the Questionnaire and Observation Schedule.**

SN	Monument Building	Respondents Covered (y)	No. of Retrieved Questionnaire(x)	No. of valid Questionnaire(z)	% Valid (Z/400*100)
1	Kalakuta Museum, Ikeja	40	25	18	4.50
2	Terra Kulture, Victoria Island	30	16	12	3.00
3	National Museum Lagos, Onikan	40	26	23	5.75
4	National Art Theatre, Iganmu	40	25	19	4.75
5	Nike Art Gallery, Lekki Phase I.	35	18	15	3.75
6	Professionals, artist, Tourists, workers.	215	195	148	37.00
Total		400	305	235	58.75%

(Source: Authors' field work, 2021)

The data was analyzed at descriptive level and the results are presented in charts. A five point likert scale was used to ascertain the degree of preference for ornamentation in monument buildings by the respondents in order to know the respondents views about the phenomenon investigated.

## Results and Findings

### Socioeconomic Characteristics of Respondent.

#### Gender of respondents

Figure 1 shows that about 77% of the respondents were male while 22% were female. The male respondents dominates the participants in this study. This suggests that male gender patronize these monument buildings in the studied area.

#### Age of Respondents

The second questions shows the age distribution of respondents in figure 2. About 80% of the respondents were youths between 15 to 29 years. This reflects the

1. Select your gender

235 responses

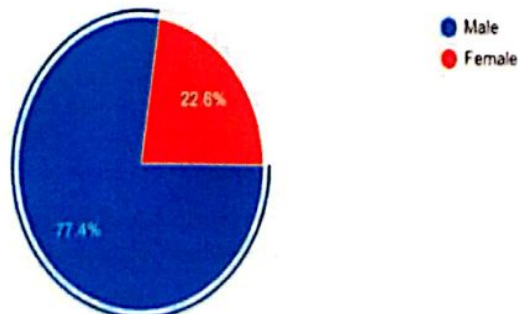


Figure 1: Gender of Respondents

predominant age group that frequent the studied buildings.

#### Professional background of respondents

As shown in figure 3, the professionals were one of the primary focus of this study and has 67.7% respondents. This group include architects, artists, sculpture makers, engineers, and urban managers. It is believed that this group has some background understanding of the discussion to further reinforce the credibility of the responses.

#### Profession of respondents

The analysis of the professionals in figure 4 shows that majority of the respondents (49.8%) are architects. 11.9% are engineers in different field of engineering, while 4.3% are builders, 3% are from the field of arts and crafts. The remaining 28.9% are tourists and visitors to the Museums.



(Source: Authors' field work, 2021)

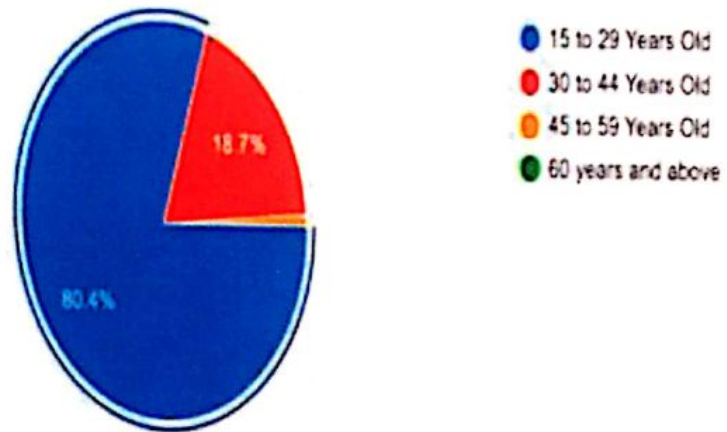


Figure 2: Age of Respondents  
(Source: Authors' field work, 2021)

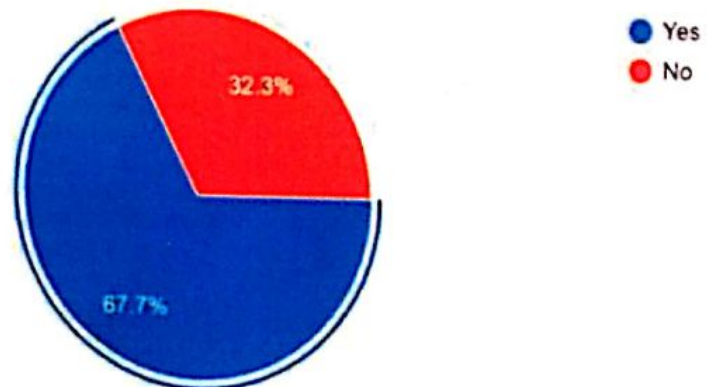


Figure 3: Professional background of Respondents  
(Source: Authors' field work, 2021)

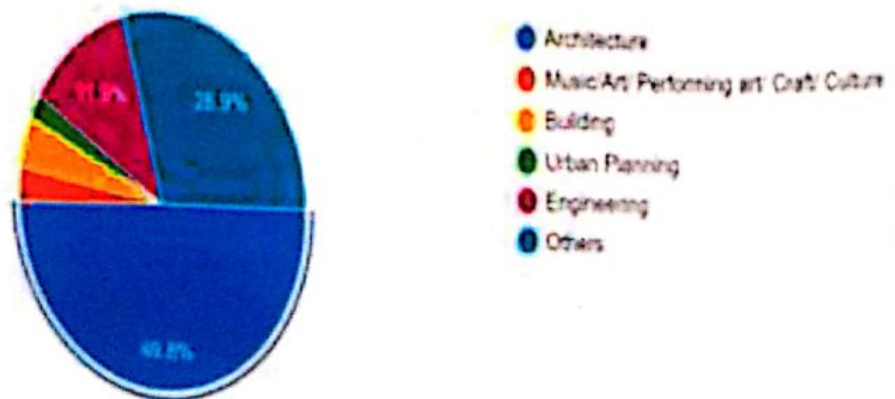


Figure 4: Profession of Respondents  
(Source: Authors' field work, 2021)



### Respondents' years of professional experience

Figure 5 shows the breakdown of respondents' years of practicing their trade. About 63.4% of respondents have been practicing between 5-10 years, 14.5% have been practicing between 11-15 years, 3.8% have been in their trade for between 16-20 years and 1.3% have been practicing their profession for over 20 years, while 17% have been in practice for less than five years.

### Ethnic group of respondents

The Yoruba ethnic group represents 43% of the respondents as shown in figure 6. This makes Yoruba the single dominant language group in Lagos. This could be understood as

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 in monument buildings

Figure 7 show that 97.4% of the respondents agree that monument buildings such as Museum buildings should be unique with cultural ornaments and decorations displayed on the building.

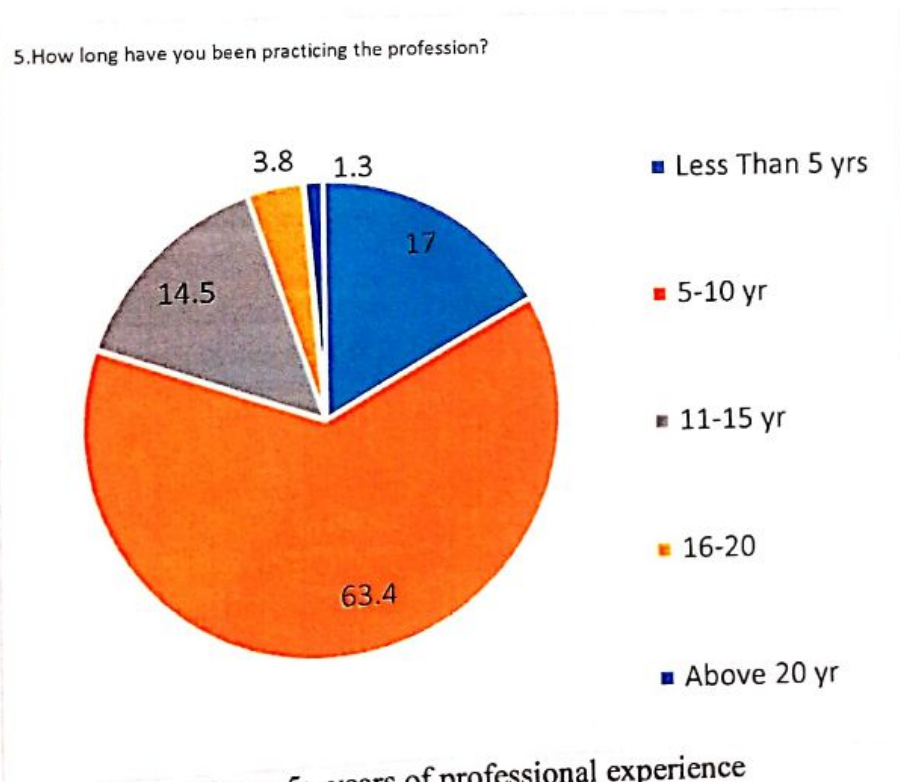


Figure 5: years of professional experience  
(Source: Authors' field work, 2021)



## 6. Please indicate your ethnic group

235 responses

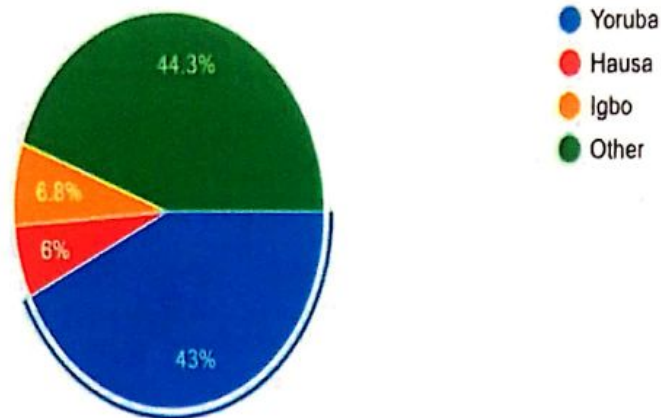


Figure 6: Ethnic group of respondents  
(Source: Authors' field work, 2021)

235 responses

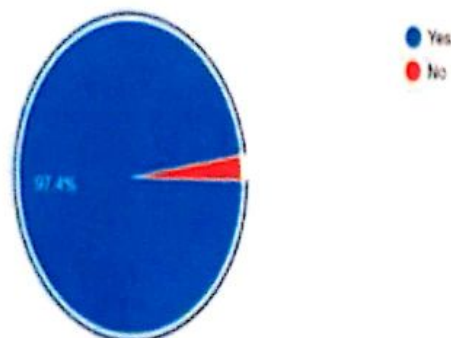


Figure 7: Use of cultural elements on Monument buildings  
(Source: Authors' field work, 2021)

### Respondents' perception of ornament and decorations on monument buildings in the study area.

The analysis in Figure 8 shows the perception from urban respondents interacted with in the study on the application of ornamentation and decoration elements on monument buildings in Lagos. The analysis from figure 8 reveals that the majority of the respondents interacted with in the course of the fieldwork perceived mural painting (85%), availability of courtyard (75%), use of traditional building materials(75%), application of stone mosaic decorations(72%), and use of relief

sculptures on doors and windows (70%) respectively as "somewhat true of what I believe or moderate true" of use of ornament and decorations on monument buildings as means of achieving aesthetics on these buildings. The respondents see ornaments and decorations as secondary features on a building as they are inessential and can be omitted. Similarly the majority of the respondents rated the use of sculpture as highly true of what is believe or known (75%) of use of ornamentation on monument buildings for aesthetics and for defining a landmark.



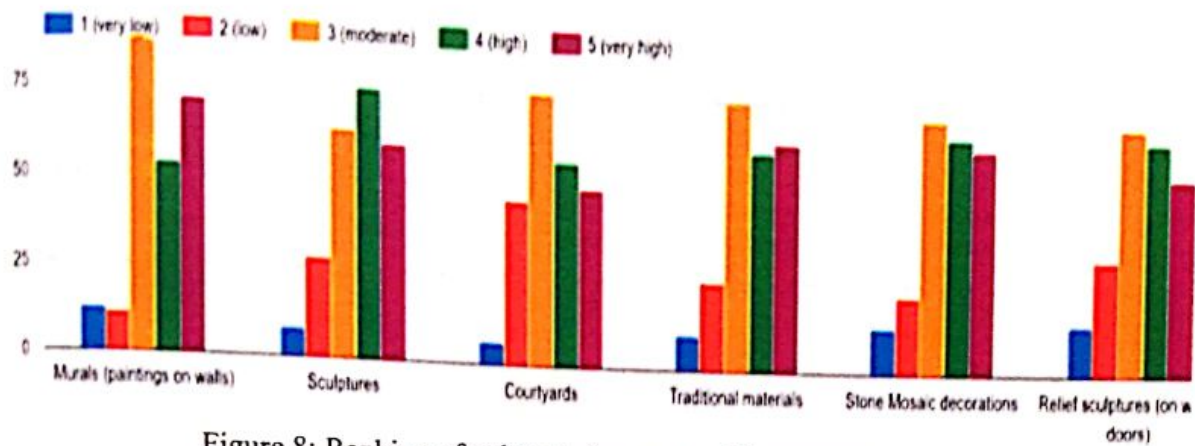


Figure 8: Ranking of cultural elements on Monument buildings  
(Source: Authors' field work, 2021)

### Respondents rating of various types of mural designs

Mural decorations are designs, patterns, lines, shapes that are creatively designs to reflect abstract images, storytelling paint works and other graphical artists on interior and exterior walls for decoration purposes. The Respondents' ratings of these designs are presented in figure 9 for preferred mural designs and painting works. This is to identify the most common types of mural designs preferred by the respondents.

The analysis in figure 9 reveals the respondents' preference for pictorial story telling paint works (87%) more than other forms of mural works. The lines and shapes mural patterns(100%), abstract designs on doors, walls and windows (100%), and

painting of abstract objects on wall(80%) respectively are rated moderate or neutral by the respondents in the decoration of monument buildings. Pictorial story-telling, which is a form of mural design that has meanings, got the highest rating as shown in figure 9.

### Use of sculptures as ornamentation

The preference use of sculpture as ornamentation has 89.4% of respondents as revealed in figure 10. This further confirmed the analysis of figure 9. While about 10% of the respondents are not comfortable with the use of sculpture on a building.

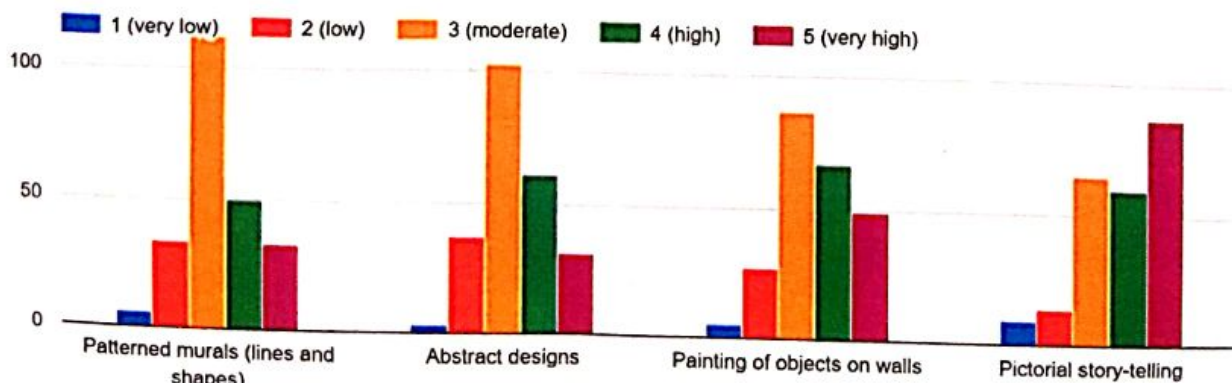


Figure 9: Rating the various types of Mural designs  
(Source: Authors' field work, 2021)



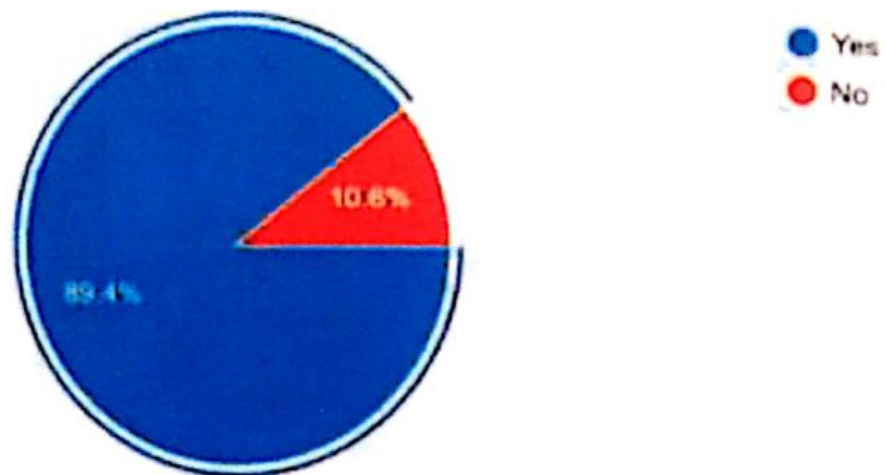


Figure 10: Respondents preference for the use of sculpture  
(Source: Authors' field work, 2021)

### Respondents' Belief about the use of sculptures.

The respondents' Belief about the use of sculpture ornamentation in monument buildings revealed in figure 11. The majority of the respondents believe that sculpture is a symbol (78%), this is closely followed by those who see it as an element of aesthetics (70.6%) and some of the respondents believe it is a symbol associated with Yoruba King or high Chief (38.7%) status. Others (25.1%) believe sculptures have spiritual meanings.

### Factors preventing the use of cultural ornamentation on monument buildings

The study examined some factors militating against the use of cultural ornamentation on monument buildings and the result is revealed in figure 12.

Religious factor (63%) accounts for the largest reason why use of cultural ornamentation is being rejected. About 51.9% of the respondents agree that civilization is also a major factor inhibiting the use of sculptures for ornamentation on buildings in Yoruba architecture. This is

closely followed by dearth of local skills (39.1%) for producing sculptures in commercial quantity. While ignorance about its value (34.5%) is rated next to dearth of local skills and Globalization (26.8%) has the least factors limiting the use of this element on monument buildings.

### Benefit of Yoruba cultural ornamentation on monument building Designs.

The benefits of cultural ornamentation on monument buildings examined and respondents' perceptions are presented in figure 13. The majority of the respondents (100%) strongly agree that cultural ornamentation on a building is a means of culture preservation (100%) and a means of promoting the culture of a given urban milieu (100%). Similarly, the majority of the respondents (100%) also agree that use of cultural ornamentation is a means of identifying the architecture of a locality. Similarly, the majority of the respondents (90%) also strongly agree that it is a unique architecture language about the purpose for which the building is meant for.



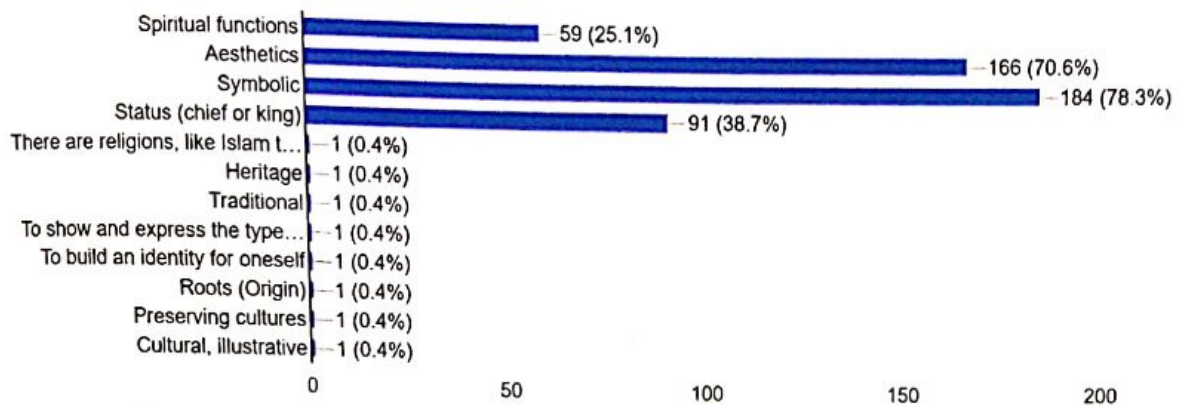


Figure 11: Respondents believe in the use of sculptures in monument buildings.  
(Source: Authors' field work, 2021)

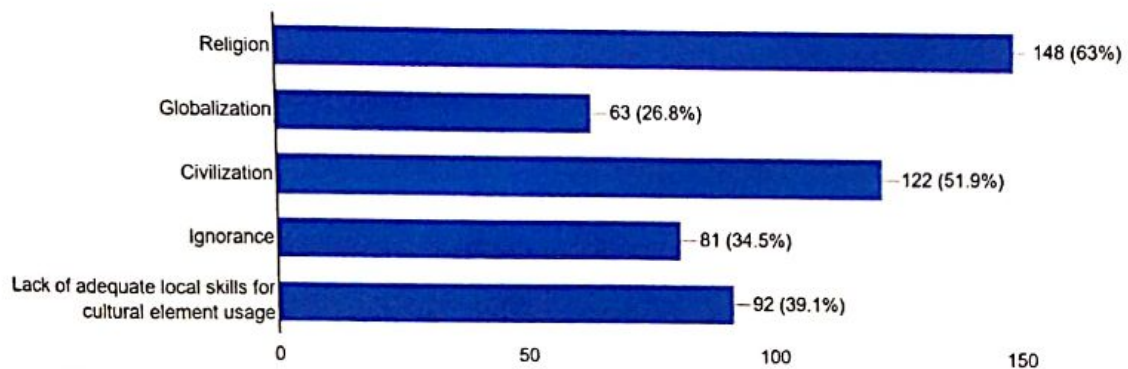


Figure 12: factors preventing the use of cultural ornamentation on monument buildings.  
(Source: Authors' field work, ,2021)

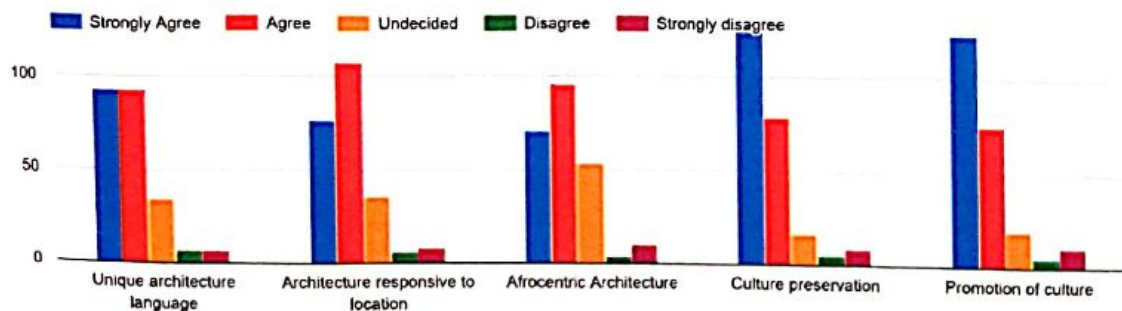


Figure 13: Benefits of including Yoruba cultural ornamentation in building designs  
(Source: Authors' field work, 2021)

## Conclusion and Recommendation

### Conclusion

The study examined people's perceptions of Yoruba ornamentation and decoration features as means of expressing Yoruba architecture on monument buildings in Lagos, Nigeria. The focus of the study is to understand reasons for the gradual disappearance of these features in the design and construction of monument buildings in recent times. The findings from the five

purposely studied monument buildings show that the use of Yoruba ornamentation and decoration features is gaining less attention on monument buildings and majority of the respondents perceived decorations (mural painting, use of courtyard, traditional building materials, mosaic decorations, and relief sculptures) on doors and windows respectively as "moderate true" as means of achieving aesthetics on these buildings. The



respondents see ornaments and decorations as secondary features on a building as they are inessential and can be omitted. Similarly the majority of the respondents rated the use of sculpture as highly true of what is believed or known (75%) for use of ornamentation on monument buildings for aesthetics and landmarks.

The study findings show that religious belief has been a major factor largely responsible for the rejection of cultural ornamentation in monument buildings. This is true for Islamic religion which prohibits the use of relief picture on walls, doors, windows, ceilings and floors decorations. The respondents also agreed that globalization is also a major factor inhibiting the use of sculptures for ornamentation on buildings in Yoruba architecture. The labour intensive ways of producing most of the monuments is time consuming with little productivity. This led to the gradual disappearance of local skills for producing these sculptures and the quest for alternative foreign fabrics that are easily available become popular and globalized. The consequences are lack of encouragement towards developing the required technology for producing these features in commercial quantity, loss of value for its purposes, dearth of patronage and quest for foreign alternatives.

### **Recommendation.**

There is the need for revival of this rich Yoruba ornamentation and decoration features. This can be understood from the majority of the respondents who strongly agree that cultural ornamentation on a building is a means of culture preservation, a strong tool for promoting culture of a given urban milieu as housing is an artifact and cultural ornamentation and decorations could be used for achieving architecture of a locality. This Yoruba unique architecture features if deployed would enhance a building that reflects its purpose.

Among these uniqueness of Yoruba architecture besides those explored is the customization of building fabrics which can be an entrepreneurship skill acquisition

trade among youths using simple locally fabricated tools. Thus building fabrics like doors, windows, facial board, beams and columns can be customized in ornamentation and decorations typical of Yoruba architecture on buildings for unique identity.

There should be collaboration among the trained professionals: architects, builders, engineers, artists and skilled craftsmen on how to promote this unique features by ways of evolving simple machines for ease of production of these goods in large commercial quantity at affordable cost using modern technology for achieving these ornamentation and decoration revival. Besides, promotion of Yoruba ornamentation and decorations could be used to encourage a flourishing entrepreneurship among the urban youths. When these tangible products are readily available at affordable cost and the tools for producing them are locally manufactured the youths could be trained continuously on how to fabricate these ornamentation products. Thus the production of Yoruba ornamentation will be readily available and can compete favourably with other global monument products. However, the current approach is labour intensive and time consuming with little outputs. This would not encourage quick revival of the trade for ornamentation and decorations of Yoruba architecture.

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