



Igala Sacred Spaces: Architectural Expression of Spirituality

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the profound and complex relationship between spirituality and the traditional architecture of the Igala people, uncovering how spiritual beliefs shape the built environment. Spirituality, a core component of Igala tradition and culture, deeply influences not only their spiritual practices but also the architectural forms and spatial configurations of their homesteads. The aim of this research is to examine how spirituality and associated rituals influence the architectural practices of the Igala people. Employing a narrative approach, the study draws on historical research methods, field surveys, and in-depth interviews with local communities. This methodology revealed how the Igala people's connection to their ancestors and the spiritual realm is expressed through architectural features such as: strategic use of sacred spaces, use of construction techniques and building materials imbued with spiritual meaning, and the intentional design of building openings to regulate the flow of spiritual energies. The findings demonstrate that the Igala homestead is not merely a physical shelter but a sacred space that embodies and facilitates ongoing spiritual interactions. This research underscores the essential role of spirituality and associated rituals in shaping architectural practices, offering critical understanding for the preservation of indigenous cultural heritage in Nigeria. Furthermore, it suggests that incorporating traditional spiritual knowledge into contemporary architectural design can lead to more culturally resonant and spiritually meaningful built environments, particularly in Africa, where culture and spirituality are deeply interrelated, embodying the essence of the saying, 'Africans and their ancestors are inseparable, each defining the essence of the other.'

Keywords: Ancestor; Culture; Igala Homestead; Spirituality; Traditional Architecture.

1. INTRODUCTION

Modern architecture has disregarded spirituality as a means to its concretization. This, in conjunction with other proliferating ideological misconceptions, has contributed to a spiritual deficiency in architecture. Consequently, modern buildings have become increasingly detached from the emotional and spiritual needs of its users. This has led to buildings that, while physically comfortable due to advancements in lighting, air-conditioning, and materials, often fail to provide a sense of belonging or emotional resonance with their occupants. The shift towards client-based design, where dwellers have substantial influence over the design process, echoes some aspects of primitive architecture but does not fully address the deeper psychological and spiritual needs of modern users. Moreover, the international style and standardization of architectural design have further contributed to the erosion of cultural values and traditional beliefs, particularly in developing countries. This loss is felt in the disregard for culturally significant architectural practices and the homogenization of built environments. The disconnect between modern architectural practices and the rich, spiritual heritage of traditional architecture highlights a broader issue: the need to integrate spiritual and cultural dimensions into contemporary design (Fazeli and Negarestan, 2023).

The relationship between culture, spirituality, and architecture has been a subject of scholarly interest, as physical environments often reflect the spiritual beliefs and practices of a community. In traditional societies, architecture serves not merely as a functional construct but as a manifestation of spiritual worldview. This is particularly evident in the Igala indigenous homestead, where spiritual beliefs significantly influence architectural design and spatial organization. For the Igala people, spirituality, defined as a search for meaning, purpose, and connection to the sacred or transcendent permeates their architectural practices, impacting everything from spatial configuration to the materials used in construction. Traditional African architecture, including that of the Igala people, is deeply related with spiritual beliefs, serving as a medium for expressing and preserving cultural identity. The Igala homestead is more than just a shelter; it is a sacred space that facilitates interactions with the spiritual realm, reflecting the community's values, rituals, and ancestral connections (Owoicho et al. 2024).

Therefore, this research aims to assess how spirituality and associated rituals shape the physical structures, spatial organization, choice of building materials, and architectural elements of the Igala indigenous homestead. The research seeks to examine how these indigenous architectural practices can contribute to more indigenously responsive and culturally relevant building designs in contemporary architecture in Nigeria. The objectives of this study are to: (i) identify the key spiritual features of Igala culture; (ii) examine the relationship between spirituality in Igala culture and the Igala indigenous homestead; and (iii) identify the key features and values of the Igala traditional architecture.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Study Area

This study focuses on Igala community, situated in Kogi State, North Central Nigeria. The region's boundaries lie between latitudes 6°30' and 8°40' N and longitudes 6°30' and 7°40' E, covering approximately 13,665 km². Demographically, the Igala community boasts an estimated 1.5 million inhabitants, according to the 2006 National Population Census. The Igala people occupy nine Local Government Areas (LGAs) out of Kogi State's 21 LGAs, specifically: Ankpa, Bassa, Dekina, Ibadji, Idah, Igalamela-Odolu, Olamaboro, Omala, and Ofu (Fig. 1) (Owoicho et al., 2024).



Figure 1: Map of Kogi State Showing the Local Government Areas Occupied by the Igala People.
Source: Kogi State Ministry of Land and Environment (2008)

2.2 Architecture as an Expression of Culture

Culture arises from spiritual beliefs and local traditions, closely connected to the surrounding environment, natural resources, and geographical conditions. In local communities, culture is expressed through people's beliefs and daily practices. These cultural expressions serve specific functions and purposes, adapting to the needs of the community and its environment. In architecture, culture is reflected through the meaning and use of space, creating a sense of identity that aligns with the local environment (Setyaningrum, 2018).

Culture and built spaces are intertwined, helping people shape environments that have unique identities, which are reflected in their elements and features. These environments foster unity and a sense of belonging among community members. Architecture has always been and remains a genuine reflection of a nation's culture, as noted by Askarizad (2019). It is more than a physical structure, it embodies cultural, spiritual, religious, economic, and environmental influences, acting as a cultural phenomenon shaped by the society it emerges from. The design of buildings conveys specific ideas, reflecting the culture of the time. Architecture is often seen as a spiritual art form, with each building serving as evidence of cultural values, whether positive or negative. Thus, architecture is the physical representation of a nation's culture and an authentic measure of its cultural identity (Ettehad et al., 2015; Al-Thahab, 2021).

2.3 Architecture and Spirituality

Architecture and spirituality are interrelated ideas that have profoundly influenced human history and culture. Spirituality refers to individuals' internal beliefs regarding life's meaning, purpose, and connection with the immortal, which intertwines with the art and science of constructing buildings (Architecture). Spirituality is deemed to give life meaning, purpose and connection with others; it is distinguished from religiosity but may incorporate religious beliefs for some people; and may comprise a religious system of beliefs and values or a nonreligious system of beliefs and values. It can be a metaphysical or transcendental phenomenon related to life's connectedness, transcendence, meaning, and purpose (Raghani et al, 2021).

According to Birch and Sinclair (2013), spirituality weaves its threads in the tapestry of human existence, providing a profound lens through which individuals perceive and engage with the world around them. Rooted in a deep-seated longing for connection to something greater than oneself, spirituality encompasses a diverse array of beliefs, practices, and experiences that transcend the boundaries of the material realm. From ancient rituals to modern contemplative practices, spirituality permeates every aspect of human life, infusing it with meaning, purpose, and transcendence. In the intersection of spirituality and the built environment lies a rich landscape of inquiry, a realm where architecture serves as both a vessel and a catalyst for spiritual experiences. As the art and science of designing physical spaces, architecture profoundly influences individual's perceptions, emotions, and interactions

within the built environment. From sacred temples and cathedrals to serene natural landscapes and contemplative spaces, architectural design has long been recognized as a powerful medium for facilitating and enhancing spiritual engagement.

The concepts of spirituality and architecture have a rich history in human society as evident in the ability of architecture to create connections with the immortal, accomplished through creating sacred spaces that are spiritually enriching. Among diverse reasons and goals, people have deliberately created sacred places to provide metaphysical and spiritual meaning (Ezenweke, 2017).

2.4 Spirituality in African Cultures

African spirituality refers to the spiritual beliefs and practices of the people of Africa. It encompasses a wide range of beliefs and practices, including ancestor veneration, divination, healing practices, music and dance, and community building. African spirituality is diverse and complex, and it varies from region to region and from tribe to tribe. Ancestor veneration is a central component of African traditional spirituality. In Africa, ancestors are believed to be able to influence the lives of their living descendants, and they are often invoked for guidance and protection. This stems from the fact that the African families consist of both, the living and the dead. One of the dead group members of the family include the ancestors. Ancestors in Africa are treated with high respect as Africans believe in the continuity of life even after death. Ancestor veneration is an integral part of African spirituality because it reflects the African belief in the continuity of life beyond death (Alifa, 2023).

Divination is another important aspect of African spirituality. Divination is a method of communicating with the spiritual world and seeking guidance and advice. There are many forms of divination in African spirituality, including the use of bones, shells, and other objects. Divination reflects the African belief in the interconnectedness of all things. Healing practices are also a key aspect of African spirituality. Healing practices include the use of herbal remedies, prayer, and other forms of spiritual healing. Music and dance are also important components of African spirituality. Music and dance are used as a means of expressing joy, gratitude, and faith. Community building is another important aspect of African spirituality. African spirituality emphasizes the importance of building relationships and communities (Sisiani et al., 2023).

2.4.1 The Cult of Ancestors in African Cultures

For a better understanding of the cult of ancestors in African communities, a brief insight into the concept of death and burial rites is deemed necessary. Death, although a dreaded event, is perceived as the beginning of a person's deeper relationship with all of creation, the complementing of life and the beginning of the communication between the visible and the invisible worlds. In traditional African society, the goal of life is to become an ancestor after death. This is the reason that every person who dies must be given a 'proper' funeral, supported by a number of religious ceremonies. If this is not done, the dead person may become a wandering ghost, unable to 'live' properly after death and therefore a danger to those who remain alive. It might be argued that 'proper' funeral rites are more a guarantee of protection for the living than to secure a safe passage for the dead. It is believed that the dead have power over the living (Ezenweke, 2017).

The ancestors, or the living-dead, are believed to be disembodied spirits of people who lived upright lives here on earth, died 'good' and natural death, that is at ripe old age, and received the acknowledged funerary rites. They could be men or women. However, more often than not, male ancestors are prominent since patrilineage is the dominant system of family and social integration in most traditional African societies. For matrilineal groups like the Ashanti of Ghana and the Ndembu of Zambia, both male and female ancestors are duly acknowledged. With the completion of prescribed funeral rites, a deceased person is believed to transform into an ancestor (Ezenweke, 2017).

Ancestor cults and ancestor worship loom large in the anthropological image of sub-Saharan Africa. Comparatively viewed, African ancestor worship has a remarkably uniform structural framework. The spirit world is believed to be a radically different world. Ancestors are vested with mystical powers and authority. They retain a functional role in the world of the living, specifically in the life of their living kinsmen; indeed, African kin-groups are often described as communities of both the living and the dead. Ancestors are intimately involved with the welfare of their kin-group but they are not linked in the same way to every member of that group. The linkage is structured through the elders of the kin-group, whom are the representatives of the ancestors and the mediators between them and the kin-group. (Egbunu, 2013).

The ancestors are seen as retaining their role in the affairs of their kin-group and only of their kin-group. They are appropriated with 'sacrifices'. They are seen as dispensing both favours and misfortune; they are often accused of being capricious and of failing in their responsibilities, but, at the same time, their actions are related to possible lapses on the part of the living and are seen as legitimately punitive. This comparatively, conforms to the psalmist pattern of prayer. Many African burial rites begin with the sending away of the departed with a request that they do not bring trouble to the living, and they end with a plea for the strengthening of life on the earth and all that favors it. (Mbiti, 1969)

Ancestors perform many roles; these roles may be summarized as follows: unifying, empowering and blessing families and people; protecting families and clans from diseases, evil and enemies; mediating between people and the Divinity; enforcing discipline in case of taboos and abominations; and facilitating healing (Egbunu, 2013).

2.4.2 Ritual Spaces in African Spirituality

Ritual spaces in African spirituality are integral to the practice of spiritual rites and ceremonies. These spaces are often designated or specially designed to facilitate the connection between the spiritual and physical realms. They embody cultural values and religious beliefs, serving as focal points for communal and individual practices. Ritual spaces in African traditions are meticulously designed to reflect and enhance their spiritual significance. The design often incorporates specific elements that are believed to harness spiritual energy and facilitate communication with the divine. In various African cultures, forests, mountains, rivers, tree and groves are revered as sacred spaces. They are considered the abode of spirits and ancestors, where rituals and offerings are made to maintain harmony with the spiritual world. In the Yoruba tradition for instance, sacred groves are essential to religious practices

and are protected by community norms. In Africa, the place of shrines cannot be overemphasized. There is no doubt that Africans are notoriously religious and that religion colours all aspect of their lives. The socio-religious values of shrines and sacred places are amongst the make ups of the historical identity of the African people. Africans believe in the existence of deities, spirits and ancestors whose abodes are shrines and sacred places. Africans also believe that the properties of the Supreme Being can rest on natural objects and places for the wellbeing of man. Shrines and other sacred places are therefore, treated with fear, awe and respect (Ezenweke, 2017).

In African cultures, ritual spaces are not merely functional but are deeply embedded with cultural significance. They act as a bridge between the material and spiritual worlds, embodying the collective memory and values of the community. Rituals performed in these spaces often aim to invoke blessings, seek guidance, or maintain cosmic balance. In Nigeria today, one of the notable sacred places is the Osun-Oshogbo sacred grove which is enlisted in the world's heritage list by the UNESCO. Other notable sacred places include *Ubinukpabi* sacred grove that is associated with *Chukwu* shrine at Arochuku, Abia state, *Ohia-Udowerre* sacred grove at *Ndiowu* and *Okija* shrine at Ihiala, Anambra State to mention a few. Shrines are also found in traditional compounds of most ethnic groups in Nigeria. The Igbo, Yoruba, Benin, Igala to mention a few, are known to incorporate shrines in their traditional compounds. For example, in the Igbo tradition, the shrine is dedicated to the compound's protective deity, be it *egbo*, *egya*, *mmuo*, or another tutelary *alusi*, believed to safeguard inhabitants against malevolent spiritual forces. The Yoruba people of South-west Nigeria usually have a secluded backyard used for sacred family rituals performed to honour ancestors buried nearby, and symbolizes a connection between human life, nature, and spiritual beliefs. The traditional compounds of Benin people incorporate shrines in the courtyards, which are made entirely of mud with highly polished surfaces that exhibit remarkable durability, functioning as a place of traditional and spiritual rituals for the family (Emusa, 2024).

2.5 Spirituality in Igala Culture

Spirituality in Igala culture is deeply intertwined with the belief in three distinct realms: the world of the living (efi'le), the world of the dead (ef'ojegwu), and the space inhabited by the Supreme Being (Odoaba, Qgagwu, Qjochamachala). Central to Igala spirituality is the belief in God (Qjq) as the Supreme Being, who oversees these realms. Below the Supreme Being in hierarchy are various divinities or deities (Fig. 2), which are personified in natural forces and phenomena such as rivers, lakes, trees, wind, deserts, stones, and hills. These deities include water spirits (alijenu), spirit husbands (ikpakachi), earth goddesses (ane), fairies or bush babies (ichekpa), twins (ejima), and symbols of good luck (egbunu). Next to the deities in spiritual hierarchy are the deified ancestors (ibegwu). These are the spirits of deceased elders who died a non-violent or non-evil death and left promising offspring behind. These ancestral spirits hold a significant place in Igala spirituality, reflecting a deep respect for lineage and heritage. The Igala people also believe in various mysterious powers that manifest through incantations (ache), medicine (ogwu), magic (ifamfam), and witchcraft (ochu, qgbẹ) (Egbunu, 2013).



Figure 2: Image of Igala Deity
Source: Egbunu (2013)

The fundamental elements of worship in Igala culture include sacrifice, music and dancing, and prayer. Certain individuals, such as family heads (elders), village heads, or town leaders, are regarded as sacred and often act as chief priests at traditional shrines. These leaders are involved in practices that include divination by seeds (ifa-anwa), sand (ifa-ebutu), cowries (ifa eƳq-qkq), and water (ifa-omi) (Egbunu, 2013). Other cultural practices include various stages of burial rites: first burial (egwu-eji), second burial (ebie), third burial (egwẹle), and final burial rites (ubi). In addition, masquerade cults, coronations, initiation of traditional rulers, caste systems, the use of charms, incisions, oath-taking, rain-making, reincarnation rites, and traditional festivals are integral to Igala spiritual life. Other spiritual practices of the Igala people include first burial (egwu-eji), second burial (ebie), third burial (egwẹle) and fourth or final burial rites (ubi) (Egbunu, 2013).

In Igala culture, the soul of the dead ascends to the spiritual realm and takes another body and reappears in masquerade form. This concept emphasizes the continuity of life and the recycling of life which is referred to as reincarnation. The dead come back into this world again by being born to an offspring or a very close relative, or through masquerade (Fig. 3). The Igala religious piety and reverence hold ancestral spirits (Ibegwu) to a high esteem. The dead

who is now an ancestor is imbued with supernatural power to move at will to visit their living offspring through the process of reincarnation or sometimes as masquerade. The dead are always summoned into the masquerade representation, hence there is strong link between the living and the dead through masquerade. The dead are worshipped through ancestral shrines (achekwu) in every family compound (Omegoha, 2012).



Figure 3: A Typical Igala Masquerade in a Ceremony
Source: Emusa (2021)

2.6 Igala Indigenous Homestead

Prior to 1860, before colonization and the advent of modernization in Igala land, the Igala people practiced the circular curvilinear homestead which evolved from the influence of the people's culture, spirituality, environment, and socio-economic life style. This is evident in the layout of their compounds, the choice of building materials, and the construction techniques employed. The circular curvilinear homestead was prevalent across the Igala region. Each kindred within Igala land had individual compounds, and the number of houses within a compound was determined by the number of wives and children the man had (Owoicho et al., 2024).

The Igala indigenous homestead comprised of several spaces which include; the head of the family's house (unyi-udachi enegbani), wives' houses (unyi-udachi abobule), adult males' houses (unyi-udachi abokel), kitchen/cooking space (obuka), animals' pen (unyi-amn̄wu-qre), reception house (atakpa), courtyard (okolo/anuku). Others include; bathrooms (unyi ugw'ola), food storage barns (aka), traditional worship shrine (achekwu), ancestral worship shrine and perimeter fence (qgba). For compounds that represent a clan (qlopu) which was a custodian of a masquerade (egwu qlopu), a space was provided for the masquerade within the compound. The individual houses that accommodate these spaces were constructed with locally available building materials which were flexible and easily manipulated in construction. These building materials include; earth/mud (iketete), timber/wood (oli), bamboo stem (qtachq), thatch (egbe), palm frond (im'ekpe), palm stem (oli-ekpe), and vegetable fiber/bush twine (ikwu). The arrangement of individual buildings in the compound and the use of indigenous building materials reflected the harmonious relationship between Igala culture, spirituality and the natural environment (Owoicho et al., 2024).

3. METHODOLOGY

This research employed a qualitative research approach to examine the influence of spirituality on architectural design in Igala culture.

3.1 Research Design

The research design employed was a combination of three primary methods: archival/historical research, interviews, and physical observation, each executed according to specific procedures.

1. **Archival/Historical Research:** This involved a systematic review of historical records and cultural documents to establish the historical context and trace the evolution of Igala traditional architecture under the influence of spiritual beliefs. Relevant sources were identified, analyzed, and categorized to uncover patterns and transformations in architectural practices over time.
2. **Interviews:** Focus-group interviews were conducted with traditional leaders and guardians of Igala tradition, traditional building craftsmen, elders, and members of the Igala community. These interviews provided in-depth understanding into how spirituality informs space configuration. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and thematically analyzed to extract key perspectives and themes related to the influence of spirituality on Igala traditional architecture.
3. **Physical Observation:** Field visits were carried out to document and observe architectural features in Igala indigenous homesteads. This involved detailed observations and recordings of spatial layouts, construction materials, and design elements. A purposive sampling approach was employed

to select traditional compounds across several Igala communities based on their historical and cultural significance, ensuring a representative range of architectural styles and practices.

3.2 Method of Data Analysis

The research utilized a triangulation methodology to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings. Data were synthesized from three distinct sources: archival/historical research, interviews, and physical observation. By employing methodological triangulation, the study cross-referenced and corroborated data across these sources, thus enhancing the credibility of the results. This integrative approach allowed for a comprehensive analysis of the interplay between spirituality and architecture within Igala culture.

4. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Spiritual Spaces in Igala Indigenous Homestead

4.1.1 Courtyard (*anuku/okolo*)

The central courtyard known as *anuku* or *okolo*, stands as an essential feature within the Igala indigenous homestead, embodying a meticulously organized social structure and spatial arrangement that supports the cultural, religious and spiritual practices of the family unit. The *okolo* serves a multitude of purposes, functioning as the reception area, providing a space for women to carry out household activities, occasionally serving as a gathering place for family members, and acting as a supervised playground for children. The *okolo* hold high spiritual significance in Igala culture. Besides accommodating graves, reception hut and family shrine (*achekwu*), it is also a space used for spiritual activities such as ancestral worship (*otegwu*) and funeral rituals. A peak period of use of the *okolo* was when the remains of a dead relation was brought to the family for burial. The bereaved family and mourners gather in the courtyard where funeral rituals are performed before burial (*ogwu-aji*). Like any other traditional African society, the funeral rites and ceremonies are performed in a way as 'to draw attention to that permanent separation' of the deceased physically from other human beings. Large gathering of people from far and wide is the common features in order to fulfil such funeral rites. The funeral activities that take place in the courtyard include the bathing of the corpse (*ola-egwẹ*), the laying-in-state (*edu-kpekka*), the burial proper (*ogwu-aji*), and the communal wake-keep (*ide-okolo*). The Igala people believe that the spirit of the departed hovers around the homestead after burial until the second burial when they now join the ancestors (*Ibegwu*). This second burial is also performed in the courtyard.

4.1.2 Reception Hut (*atakpa*)

Located in the centre of the courtyard is the reception hut (*atakpa*), which serves as the first point of contact for visitors and is furnished with raised earth seats and a horizontal timber for support. *Atakpas* were curvilinear in shape until in the colonial period when they adopted the rectilinear shape. Like the Hausa *Zaure*, Igbo *Obi* and Tiv *Ate*, the *atakpa* in Igala traditional homestead was a multi-purpose space. Spiritual use of the *atakpa* include the display of the deceased family member before burial for mourners to view and bid final farewell for the proper laying-in-state and burial. Children, and sometimes pregnant women also were not allowed to enter the *atakpa* during such ceremonies according to the tradition of the people.

4.1.3 Shrine (*achekwu*)

Shrine, known as *achekwu*, holds significant sacred importance and is situated approximately 10m to 15m away from the centre of the courtyard. Constructed using bamboo stems and timber posts, the shrine is occasionally covered with palm fronds and does not feature solid walls. The shrine house deities that are representatives of gods (*ebq*) and ancestors (*ibegwu*). These are gods which are made and worshipped by individuals, and which are believed to ensure success in daily life by affording protection against the misfortunes that witchcraft and sorcery can bring. The *ebq* is the household god and is generally represented by a piece of wood with a cloth round it. It may be roughly carved in the semblance of a man or woman. Spiritual activities such as consultations of the dead and ancestral worship are conducted in front of the shrine.

4.1.4 Masquerade House (*unyi-egwu*)

Masquerade is an integral part of Igala tradition. Masquerades frown upon and punish severely any offence that borders on adultery, fornication, incest, stealing and any such actions considered immoral. They also stand out for justice and fair play by helping to enforce the laws of the land. Masquerades are seen as agent of peace and entertainment among Igala people. They play a role in funeral and burial rituals. The Igala people have different types and grades of masquerades which may be classified according to their locations, functions, behavioural manifestations, and forms.

Egwu Ugbẹ/Qlọpu (Ancestral Masquerades) which are ranked second in the category of masquerades after the Royal Masquerades (*Egwu Attah*), are specifically identified with very particular clans, forbearers or lineages as founder and custodians. A good example of these category of masquerades are *Egwu-gbomgbom*, *Akwuchi*, *Ogwuchẹ-aja*, *Ajamalede*, *Qlagenyi* and *Amuda* to mention a few, which are owned and managed by certain clans. They are revered and feared. Masquerade phenomenon stems the people's belief in life, death and life after death. They believe that if any of them dies, his soul ascends to the spiritual realm and takes another body and reappears in masquerade form. The dead are always summoned into the masquerade representation, hence there is strong link between the living and the dead through masquerade. Among clans that own masquerades, sacred spaces are designed in the homestead to accommodate masquerades. Women and children are prohibited from accessing these sacred spaces.

4.1.5 Grave (*ojinoji*)

In Igala tradition, a man is buried in his immediate hometown while a woman's corpse is returned to her hometown for burial. However, in some cases, the relatives may decide otherwise. The grave is not just for burial, it also serves for preserving the corpse for a maximum period of 3 days when the relations of the deceased may need to travel down long distance. The grave is a significant feature in the Igala traditional homestead because it is considered as the residing place of ancestors. After the corpse is laid in the grave and the grave is covered and levelled, a shrine (*achekwu*) is immediately erected on the grave especially if the deceased is an elderly member of the family. The *achekwu* is considered as the abode of the spirit of the deceased.

The *achekwu* automatically converts the grave into a sacred space in the homestead. Communication with the deceased subsequently takes place in the *achekwu*.

5. KEY VALUES OF SPIRITUAL SPACES IN IGALA INDIGENOUS HOMESTEAD

The spiritual spaces in Igala indigenous homesteads embody the community's core values, fostering a deep connection between the physical and spiritual realm. Key values of these spaces include:

5.1 Community and Ancestral Connection

Spiritual spaces within Igala traditional homesteads serve as conduits for family bonding, community cohesion, and ancestral reverence. These spaces, such as shrines and communal altars, are vital for honouring ancestors and maintaining relationships with the spiritual forces believed to guide and protect the living. Rituals and communal gatherings in these spaces foster a sense of unity and belonging among family members and the larger community. The physical presence of spiritual artefacts and the performance of ceremonies are central to the continuity of cultural heritage, ensuring that each generation remains connected to their lineage and the community's collective memory. By facilitating these connections, spiritual spaces actively uphold the community's core value of solidarity, bridging the temporal gap between the past, present, and future.

5.2 Spiritual Guidance and Protection

Igala spiritual spaces provide crucial channels for communication with the divine and ancestral spirits, playing a significant role in guiding individuals and offering protection against adversity. These sacred areas are often utilized for seeking divine intervention in matters affecting family and community well-being, such as health, prosperity, and security. Rituals performed in these spaces are believed to offer a formidable layer of protection against negative influences and misfortunes, acting as a spiritual buffer that safeguards the household from harm. Through the invocation of deities and ancestral spirits, spiritual spaces thus reinforce the community's belief in a higher power that governs and influences the well-being of individuals. This relationship fosters a sense of security that transcends the material world, emphasizing the importance of spiritual guardianship in the community's value system.

5.3 Cultural Preservation and Transmission

The role of spiritual spaces in preserving and transmitting cultural practices, beliefs, and values is fundamental to the identity of the Igala people. These spaces provide a context for traditional ceremonies, storytelling, and other cultural expressions that pass down vital knowledge and customs from one generation to the next. Through participation in rituals and observances, young members of the community learn the significance of cultural symbols, spiritual practices, and their historical context. The embodiment of cultural knowledge in these spiritual spaces ensures that traditions are not merely preserved but are actively practiced and adapted, safeguarding them against the erosion of external influences. By fostering a deep sense of cultural pride and belonging, these spaces play a crucial role in the intergenerational continuity of Igala cultural identity.

5.4 Moral and Social Justice

The Igala tradition places significant emphasis on moral conduct, justice, and fairness, which are reflected in practices associated with ancestral worship and the masquerade tradition. Masquerades, regarded as spiritual entities representing ancestors, are key in maintaining moral and social order. They serve as enforcers of societal norms, mediating conflicts and ensuring that transgressions are addressed. The presence of these spiritual entities symbolizes the community's collective conscience and acts as a deterrent to immoral behaviour. In this context, spiritual spaces serve as venues for reinforcing societal values, where rituals are performed to invoke the authority of ancestors in maintaining justice. This framework not only promotes social cohesion but also affirms the community's commitment to upholding ethical standards and ensuring that fairness prevails in communal dealings.

5.5 Emotional and Psychological Well-being

Spiritual spaces and practices within Igala homesteads provide avenues for comfort, emotional support, and healing, addressing the psychological and emotional challenges of life. The rituals and prayers conducted in these spaces often serve as means for individuals to cope with grief, loss, and adversity, offering solace and a sense of reassurance. Ceremonies focused on reconciliation and communal healing foster emotional well-being, helping to mend broken relationships and restore harmony within the community. By engaging with the spiritual realm, individuals find a means to express their fears, hopes, and desires, which facilitates emotional catharsis. The therapeutic effects of such practices are instrumental in promoting holistic well-being, encompassing not only physical and mental health but also spiritual fulfilment. This reinforces the community's belief in a balanced life, where the spiritual dimension is essential for overall health and happiness.

5.6 Healing and Health Restoration

Sacred spaces within Igala homesteads also play a crucial role in the healing of family members from sicknesses and protecting against epidemics. These spaces serve as sites for invoking ancestral and divine intervention in times of health crises, where rituals and offerings are conducted to seek the favour and healing power of the spirits. The belief in the efficacy of spiritual intervention is deeply embedded in the community's worldview, wherein illness is often seen as a manifestation of disharmony between the physical and spiritual realms. Traditional healers, priests, and family elders utilize these spaces to perform rituals that aim to restore this balance, thereby alleviating physical ailments. Such practices include offerings to appease offended spirits or ceremonies to cleanse individuals of negative energies that might have caused illness. In times of epidemics, the community often turns to these spiritual spaces collectively, conducting elaborate rituals to seek protection for all members, reflecting a communal approach to health and well-being. The faith in the potency of these spiritual interventions enhances the psychological resilience of the people, providing a source of hope and a pathway to recovery. Through these sacred rituals, the Igala community underscores the interconnectedness of spiritual health and physical well-being, affirming the belief that true healing can only be achieved by addressing both dimensions.

6. SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION

The architectural expression of Igala spirituality, as examined in this research, revealed a profound connection between built environment and spiritual practices. The Igala indigenous homestead have spiritual spaces that foster community bonding, ancestral reverence, spiritual guidance, cultural preservation, moral and social justice, and emotional well-being. Notably, five sacred spaces identified include the courtyard (okolo), reception hut (atakpa), shrine (achekwu), masquerade house (unyi-egwu), and grave (ojinoji). These spaces serve multiple purposes, facilitating social interaction, spiritual worship, cultural transmission, and communalism. The courtyard, for instance, functions as a communal gathering space for spiritual ceremonies, while the shrine provides a sacred sanctuary for ancestral and traditional worship. Similarly, the masquerade house embodies the connection between physical and spiritual realms. The graves, meanwhile, ensure continuity and connection with the past. These findings underscore the significance of spirituality in shaping the built environment. The findings also highlight the importance of preserving cultural heritage and traditional practices in the face of modernization and globalization.

7. CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

The study revealed that Igala spiritual spaces embody five core values: community and ancestral connection, spiritual guidance and protection, cultural preservation and transmission, moral and social justice, and emotional and psychological well-being. These values underscore the vital role spiritual spaces play in sustaining Igala community, culture, and individual well-being. The research demonstrates the intricate relationships between spirituality, culture, and space in indigenous homesteads, highlighting the importance of preserving cultural heritage and traditional practices. Sacred places serve many purposes that aid sustainable development. They are the trusted avenues for conflict resolution, social control, cultural education and moral development, thus, they are instrumental to sustainable development.

Nigeria can preserve its cultural heritage and promote culturally responsive architecture by documenting and restoring sacred spaces, integrating traditional elements into contemporary designs, and honouring spiritual practices, ensuring authentic community engagement and reflection of its diverse cultural identity

This research contributes significantly to the existing body of knowledge by providing an in-depth understanding of Igala spirituality and its architectural expression, with emphasis on the vital role spiritual spaces play in indigenous homesteads. By highlighting the significance of these spaces in sustaining community, culture, and individual well-being, this research underscores the intricate intersections between spirituality, culture, and space. The identification of core values embodied in Igala spiritual spaces provides a valuable framework for understanding these intersections, emphasizing the importance of preserving cultural heritage and traditional practices in the face of modernization and globalization. Ultimately, this research informs architectural and cultural heritage preservation policies and practices, promoting the integration of indigenous knowledge and perspectives to ensure the continued relevance and resilience of cultural identity of the Nigerian people.

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