Identity in Igbo Architecture: *Ekwuru, Obi*, and the African Continental Bank Building

A thesis presented to

the faculty of

the College of Fine Arts of Ohio University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts

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August 2009

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This thesis titled
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ABSTRACT

IKEBUDE, CHUKWUEMEKA, M.A., August 2009, Art History

Identity in Igbo Architecture: Ekwuru, Obi, and the African Continental Bank Building (93 pp.)

Director of Thesis: Andrea Frohne

To understand the architecture of a people, it is important to take those people’s worldview into consideration, as worldview plays a significant role in constructing how people perceive things. This thesis argues that architecture is capable of expressing identity because the structure of a building, its appearance, and where it is located in a society provide useful information relating to the general worldview of those people, the social status of individual members, and the balance of power in the society in which it is built. This thesis uses three case studies: ekwuru masquerade architectures, obi architecture, and the African Continental Bank (ACB) building, Enugu, over a period of time that covers the traditional, colonial and post-colonial presences, to explore how these architectures embody the worldview and identity of Igbo of Nigeria. It, however, considers a few other buildings located in Igboland to reinforce the points of the case study. It argues that to understand these architectures and how they function as carriers of Igbo ontology requires first an understanding of the Igbo worldview that informs their construction, as such world views have a different conception of architecture from Western notion of architecture.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my advisor, who directed this thesis, Andrea Frohne, for her interest, intellectual contribution and kind assistance with out which this thesis would not have become a reality. I would also like to thank the following people: Don Adleta, and Marilyn Bradshaw, who followed the text as it progressed into its present form; Betsy Story, whose assistance in the course of the library research was immense; Jennie Klein for her useful advise, and Chuck Reardon for going out of his way sometimes to make sure that I received attention.

Special thanks to Ejike, Ngozi, Nnamdi, and Ifeanyi, relatives and friends who contributed immensely to my field research, and to a whole community of people who provided their time, money and valuable information towards making this project work.
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INTRODUCTION

Architecture is a social activity that produces cultural legacy. Buildings, whether commanding public edifices or mud houses, are usually constructed in accordance with the laws of physics, in ways that embody cultural values and world-view of the builders. From the earliest time, the construction of buildings has involved the solving of problems arising from the organization of spaces and harnessing of resources. Kultermann (1963) notes that in solving these problems, different cultures of the world have shown great ingenuity and skill in achieving the maximum, positive effect.

The fact that cultural values of builders can be expressed in their architecture implies a likely relationship between built forms and human self-awareness. This thesis thus explores the role of architecture as an embodiment of worldview and identity of the Igbo of Nigeria. This exploration is carried out using three case studies: ekwuru masquerade architectures in Okija (fig. 1), obi architecture (fig. 2 and 3), and African Continental Bank (ACB) building, Enugu (fig. 4). It will, however, utilize a few other buildings that are located in Igboland to reinforce the case studies. To understand these architectures requires first understanding the Igbo worldview that informs their construction which conceives of architecture as performative, spiritual, conceptual, and communal. Since a peoples’ identity is encoded in their worldview, as posited by Sarup (1996), understanding this worldview, therefore, can lead to an understanding of the identities that are embodied by, and revealed in, seemingly lifeless, expressionless buildings.
This thesis focuses on the Igbo towns of Okija and Enugu (fig. 5). The choice of these towns for this study arose from how paramount they are to the social, cultural and political nexus of Igboland. Okija is located near the boundary of the old Anambra and Imo states, the two states that originally constituted Igboland. (Three other states, Enugu, Abia, and Ebonyi were later created from the Anambra and Imo states.) The town of Okija has unique socio-cultural attributes that exist in both states, for instance, the performance of masquerade traditions that are culturally specific to the Anambra state, such as *mmonwu* (spirit-masquerades), and those of the Enugu state, *odogwu* (human-costumed masquerades). Secondly, *ekwuru* architecture is only found in Okija and some of its neighbouring towns. *Ekwuru* is the built architecture where spirit masquerades called *mmonwu*, ‘live’, and where ceremonies pertaining to their outing and retreat are performed. Formally, *ekwuru* is usually a single-unit building and, in some cases, it is distinct from a residential architecture (see fig. 1).

On the other hand, Enugu was the former colonial and post-colonial administrative capital of the eastern Nigerian region, which was comprised of the whole of Igboland and most of the present-day states of the Niger delta region. Enugu city still remains the capital of Enugu state today. As the capital city, Enugu served as the hub of the social, cultural and political activities of Igbo people. Thus, a majority of public buildings and houses owned by Igbo people were located there. Therefore, when conducting a colonial and post-colonial study of the private and government-sponsored architectures of the Igbo, perhaps, no other city in Igboland offers better cases than Enugu. By focusing on the two towns of Okija and Enugu, this thesis explores specific
Igbo architecture that has not been written about in detail before. The author performed research during the summer of 2008 by visiting the sites written about in the thesis and by interviewing people connected to the architecture.

Furthermore, the argument in this thesis is not chronological. Rather, it provides insight into particular moments in time in an effort to demonstrate the ways in which particular buildings have expressed varied meanings, and projected diverse identities within particular periods, due to the introduction of foreign modes of thought, starting with Christianity, then colonialism, and finally post-colonial/independence power structures. The people interviewed in this thesis relied mainly on oral tradition as their source of knowledge. According to Collins (1996: xv), “The use of oral tradition to write African history has long been recognized, [and] fully utilized…” It is also important to mention that these people are very reliable sources as all of them are prominent village leaders and chiefs who rose to their various positions of authority by virtues of their age, trust, and contributions to their respective communities.

Knowledge of Western architectural history alone is not sufficient for studying world architectural histories, which includes architecture from Africa. A Western architectural paradigm in general is greatly influenced by the Vitruvian triad, in which 'utilitas' (variously translated as 'commodity', 'convenience' or 'utility') stands alongside 'venustas' (beauty) and 'firmitas' (firmness) as one of three classic goals of architecture. The dictum of “form follows function,” as espoused by the functionalist philosophies of the renowned twentieth century architects like Frank Lloyd Wright and Louis Sullivan, are rooted in the Vitruvian groundwork. Le Corbusier’s concept of a house as a machine
for living in, and Mies van der Rohe’s premise that buildings ought to express construction, materials, and accommodation of purpose, establish the assumption that a building must be something aesthetically significant in order to be architecture.

To view architecture solely from this (Western) lens means that only the great medieval cathedrals of Western Europe or the post-modern Guggenheim museums of the present time, for example, deserve the recognition as places of religious activities or for keeping art. In that sense, neither the “humble” Igbo obi (domestic architecture for a male head of Igbo compound) nor ekwuru deserve the term ‘architecture.’ However, Bourdier and Minh-ha (1996), Elleh (1996; 2002), Kultermann (1963), Aniakor (1988), Cole (1982; 1984), Anozie (1980), argue in favor of architecture that is defined from the standpoint of a people’s cosmology, since vision does not share the same epistemological status in all cultures. These scholars show that there are sociological elements that construct what people ‘see’ and how they see them. Their definition of architecture is thus inclusive of a role of visuality, as an element of a people’s worldview, and is based more on the conceptual and the performing than in the material form. This definition forces a re-thinking of the status of the object i.e. the material architecture, by making it secondary to the actions of the people whose repeated performances at sites of these architectures invest the buildings with their meanings. Also, such an alternative lens has infused performance into the meaning of architecture because during masquerade performance at sites of built form, for instance, both the dancer and the orator perform with the movements of their bodies, while the architecture itself “vibrates” (in the sense of it ‘coming alive’) due to its activation by the agency of human performance. Such a
conceptualization is therefore particularly important for architecture related to masquerading and performance. Lastly, such a definition of architecture that derives from a people’s cosmological dimension, reconsiders the notion of time and history, which it brings to the present through a cosmic network of spiritual dynamics and intensities. This is important when architectural construction relates to or involves the spirit world.

During my research, I encountered other “architectures” that were merely remnants of former structures, but which were still referred to as “architectures” by the people that owned and used them for repeated performances. The continuous actions of these human bodies make history present at these sites by reconnecting the spiritual intensities of their performances with those of their predecessors (fig. 6). It is therefore important to understand the complexity of *seeing*, which refers to not only the literal level of what is viewable with the eyes, but also the worldview that “interprets” what the eyes focus on.

Chapter one concerns the relationship between architecture and identity. An analysis of pre-European Igbo buildings reveals how buildings, silent and abstract, communicate information about the communities and people that built them. Sarup (1996) posits that identity is not given, that it arises with interaction with the *Other*, and that it is this interaction that leads to a process by which identity is constructed. In other words, identity is “cyclic” or ever-changing because the *self*, itself, is repeatedly in interaction with the *Other*. For instance, some aspects of Igbo culture exist due to Igbo interactions with their near and distant neighbours. Similarly, some architecture that is
considered traditionally Igbo today probably resulted from surrounding influences by Igbo’s neighbours. For instance, there is an *ekwuru* in Okija (only the site of performance of this *ekwuru* survives) which was conceived of after its *mmonwu* (spirit masquerade) had ‘returned from *udo* (a long period of beautification) in a distant village.’ (Interview with *nze* (councilor and judge) Emeanu: 2008.) Here, an explanation for a change in the architecture derives from an Igbo worldview. On the arrival of the white man, taller *mmonwu* began to emerge, whose “hair were as long and as shiny as those of the white man’s.” (Interview with *ozo* (elite chief) Nnabuenyi: 2008.) At this time, also, taller *ekwuru* were being built for the new, taller masquerades. It would then be insufficient to assume that the dynamic changes that have characterized Igbo architectures in time were due to only contact with Europe, although the European factor remains a visible and lasting influence.

Goodman (1988: quoted in Vale, 1992: 4) argues that “we must consider the question of how a particular work of architecture conveys meaning before we are able to address the issue of what the building may mean.” Goodman’s argument is important because it identifies categories of meanings that the built environments may convey as well as elucidates the mechanisms by which these meanings are transmitted. While it may be possible, through research and analysis, to gain some understanding of the symbolic intentions of a building, and by extension, those of its sponsors, it is not at all certain that those intentions will be legible to everyone who sees the building. Over time and across cultural boundaries the messages conveyed by buildings shift and change, as a host of distorting screens obscure intended meanings.
This chapter also examines the meaning of architecture to the Igbo in pre-European time, through the ‘eyes’ of a worldview that conceptualized them. Later in the thesis, it will help in understanding why a redefinition of this worldview was very important to the fore-running missionaries and colonial government. The thought and effort that are put in the design and building of a house contain personal and social beliefs and practices as well as specificity of an owner’s input. The pairing of the two terms in this thesis title is to suggest, in particular, that the one (architecture) is capable of "expressing" the other (identity). It will also show briefly how architecture was used in the negotiation of power between women and men, adults and children, and between the various traditional institutions.

Every building tells a story, and Sarup (1996:14) supports this claim by noting that “identity has a history which is told as story”. Identity manifests in buildings. Traditional Igbo means of rendering this story was mainly oral. Thus, whatever identity that is expressed in their architecture is only a part of the entire story, and even this told part can not be understood if the “listener” does not have necessary ethnography of Igbo culture. However this story is narrated, it always links together social dynamics of class, community, ethnicity, gender and religion.

Chapter two focuses on foreign architectural styles imported by the colonial administration and hybrid contexts that developed from the importation. European architectural styles were a major colonizing tool used by the colonists in conveying a message of superiority and difference, which they needed for empire building. According to Sarup (1996: 47), “identity is conceivable through difference”, meaning that to
maintain a separate identity, one has to define oneself against the *Other*. Specific examples of ‘architecture of difference’ are the African Continental Bank (ACB) building (see fig. 4), the Central Post Office (fig. 8), and the exclusively European Quarters in Enugu. Hybrid styles which emerged from these imported buildings are hybrid *obi*, and *ekwuru*. The hybrid style did not last long before the European style dominated the architectural space.

Chapter three discusses the power factor of architecture. Structure and appearance of buildings tell us a lot about the balance of power in the society that produces them. This chapter will seek to briefly explore ways in which a variety of individuals, religious organizations and national governments have used architecture and urban design to express political power and control over the three presences focused on in this thesis. It will also look at how builders have manipulated the rural and urban built environment to promote a version of identity that supported and helped legitimize power. Baum and Valins (1974) suggest that the physical environment (including architecture and architectural space) limits the range of behavioural options available and helps define human experience. The author adds that the architectural environment represents a third environment interposed between us and the world. What Baum and Valins allude to is the fact that architectural designs have consequences for human experience and behaviour, but that the effects of a given design are manifested by complex interaction with other physical, social, and psychological dynamics. If architecture can have such impact on the human behaviour, it follows that the agency that wields the power will aim to utilize it for controlling a society. Many writings on architecture by Elleh (1996, 2002); Kultermann
(1963); Valins (1974); Aniakor and Cole (1984); Tschumi (1994); Woods (1992); Okoye (2002) have rightly stressed that buildings are products of social and cultural conditions, which Geertz (1973: 245) terms the “cultural balance of power.”

Chapter four focuses on post-colonial architectures and the paradox of hybridity arising from independence. Many post-independence buildings like the ACB building were built with an explicit functional purpose in mind, by the new governments and individuals, who, because their new identities were still in formation, preferred an identity that had “historical root”. In such cases, architecture played a critical role in the consolidation and promulgation of a new national and personal image. Ironically, European architecture which had represented domination and oppression now became the new leaders’ symbol of freedom, having been established by the colonial government as a signifier of modernity and in some way, legitimacy. This irony buttresses the position adopted by Sarup (1996) on the fragility and instability of identity. Holistically, the chapter will look at how architecture brought about this (reverse) shift in identity, such that the new political power agency at the time began to see freedom through the lens of colonialism.
Figure 1. An ekwuru at Umuatuegwu, Okija. Photograph by the author, 2008.
CHAPTER ONE: IDENTITY IN ARCHITECTURE

Other Meanings of a Dwelling

Building and manipulation of space were already an established pre-occupation in Igboland by the time the first Europeans arrived. Analysis of some of these pre-European Igbo buildings yields important information about the cosmology and worldview of the communities and people that made them. In other words, Igbo traditional building is not a mere silent, abstract material, but a way through which people invented and defined themselves. If one looks at Igbo architecture through a Western lens of progress and advancement that measured cultures based on the “sophistry” of their material productions, then the Igbo meet such criteria. For instance, the famous excavation at Igbo-Ukwu in 1938, in which precious iron and bronze objects produced at about the ninth century were found, nullifies notions of a perpetually primitive Africa (Shaw, 1970). If by the ninth century Igbo cultural and artistic development had reached such an advanced stage as revealed in Shaw’s finding, it would not be illogical to argue that architecture, too, attained some level of development. According to Nsude (1987: 43),

…the traditional buildings that survive today represent the result of centuries of perfecting architecture in relation to Igbo philosophy, culture, social organization and geography.

To understand an age-old practice such as Igbo architecture requires a knowledge of Igbo worldview as, according to King (1976: xiv), “Cultures are autonomous and should be evaluated only in their own terms.” To the Igbo, home means much more than a concrete shelter, a compound building, or a place to return to after a day’s work. This
concept agrees with a position adopted by Bourdier and Minh-ha (1996), who differentiates between building as cultivating, preserving, nurturing, and growing things, and building as the raising up of edifices. Heidegger clarifies that building cannot be reduced to being merely a technique of construction, because to build is in itself already to dwell, and not the reverse since one does not dwell because one has built. In traditional Igbo society, dwelling as a worldview is highly regarded such that it is unthinkable for a “man” (as women did not own houses) to not own a dwelling place. An Igbo adage says that ‘beauty starts with the home’ (A na-esi n’ulo mara nma puo n’ezí.) A person without a home is hardly considered a legitimate member of the living community and is thought to not be admitted into the world of the spirits (ancestors) upon departure from this realm of existence. This particular belief had more currency in the traditional presence, when a house was affordable due to availability of building materials in nature and to free labour for its construction, than in the present time when the cost of European-influenced buildings is too high.

**Location and Geography**

Igbo people believe in utilizing their natural and artificial resources and this inward-looking philosophy is circumscribed in their proverb: “nku di na mba, na-eghere mba nri,” which translates to “be resourceful.” Their location determined the kinds of materials they used for their traditional architecture. These materials in turn, often determine the character of those architectures. Hence, a cursory glance at Igbo geography will explain, for instance, the source of the mud for building the walls, the timber for erecting posts and making panels, and palm fronds for roofing.
Igboland is situated on both sides of the lower parts of the River Niger, with the bigger portion lying on the eastern side of the river (see fig. 5). This portion includes Enugu and Anambra, the two states in which the towns of Enugu and Okija are located. A greater part of the southern Igboland and about a half of the western part is underlain by unconsolidated, coarse-to-medium fine grains of sand and clayey shale. Presence of clay shale means an abundance of suitable mud for building. Apart from clay, there are outcrops of stone which is suitable for building. Enugu, for instance, has stone outcrops in abundance (the name Enugu means “top of the hill”). Finer particles of stone are occasionally mixed with mud to achieve stronger buildings but exclusive use of stone which would have been a more durable building material is not witnessed in traditional Igbo, for reasons this thesis can not ascertain. However, assumptions of poor craftsmanship and technology in stone quarrying, as adduced by Prussin (in Nsude, 1987) does not hold water because even the neighbouring Essie, in Cross River, which is known for exceptional craftsmanship in stone carving, does not have traditional architectures made of stone. Similarly, there are no stone architectures around Nkalagu axis, where there is abundant deposit of limestone, an important mineral that would be necessary for the construction of a stone architecture.

**Architecture of Worldview**

The geographical location of Igbo people is a responsible factor of their worldview, especially those worldviews that have architectural implications. Both Elleh (1996) and Kultermann (1963) agree with this notion. Baum and Valins (1977) also posit that architectural settings help to shape human experience and behaviour. According to
Nsude (1987: 87), “The Igbo worldview and religion have architectural implications because in them are found reasons for certain features of their traditional architecture and meanings of those features.” In essence, Igbo identity, in its dynamic and variegated forms, is a product of this worldview. Thus, there is Igbo identity resulting from Igbo worldview which is influenced by the location and geography. The early Europeans, who did not live in the same geographical setting as the Igbo would not understand the dynamics of this worldview hence, they concluded that they (the Igbo) were either idolaters or animists” (Smith, in Basden 1921). Basden (1921: 246) opposed this view when he says that:

The people are intensely religious. A casual observer might pronounce them superstitious, but the fact is the belief in the spiritual exercises profound influence over every detail of their lives. Their religion is not an idolatrous one as that term is commonly interpreted, the idols, so called, being merely tangible symbols to assist them in the service and worship of the invisible.

While ‘idols’ were understood by Europeans as “tangible symbols” of Igbo religious expression, architecture and architectural sites, such as ekwuru and obom, constitute the larger and intangible of these symbols operating in Igbo worldview.

I should clarify that Igbo believe in a philosophy that portrays residential territory and the home as representing a microcosm of their universe of three worlds: the land, the sky and the spiritual. Architecture takes meaning from this concept of a three-world universe, where God, gods, the dead, the unborn, and the living interact. At the core of Igbo religion/spirituality is Chukwu, the supreme deity. Most of the Igbo social and religious life revolve around the belief in the existence of Chineke (another name for Chukwu), which means the supreme creator, the creator of everything, including the
lesser gods. *Chineke*, God the creator, manifests as the author of light, knowledge, fertility and procreativity. *Chineke* provides every human being with his/her own *chi*, which can be equated with a guardian angel. Achebe (1958) says that chi is regarded as always being with one and directing the person’s actions here on earth.

Below *Chukwu* are a pantheon of lesser gods such as *Igwe*, the sky god, *Ala*, the earth goddess, and *Agwu*, the patron deity of health, divination, and all creative arts, including architecture. These three gods are important in Igbo architecture. They can be supplicated to, as well as harnessed, to achieve favourable ends. For instance, *Igwe*, as god of the sky, is omniscient, and controls the terrestrial bodies, while ensuring that rainfall and sunshine are provided in moderation. Rainy season is a time when the earth is provided with water and the forests bring forth timber and palm fronds for building. In dry season, building materials stored at the end of the rainy season are used, and there is little or no rain to disturb building work. *Ala*, the earth goddess, is an omni-present witness to all the actions of people living on its earth. It provides the mud with which the building is shaped. The superiority of the land goddess over all other deities in traditional Igbo does not only depict the importance of land, but it also recognizes the role and importance of women. When Christianity was brought by the Europeans, who taught the Igbo that God lived in heaven, the superiority bestowed upon *Ala* was transferred to *Igwe* (Aguwa, 1995), hence, the saying, “*Igwe ka Ala*” (the sky which is superior to the earth). A creative talent, which *Agwu* controls, is needed for building and wall decoration. For a person to live successfully, therefore, the person should strive at all times to maintain a
delicate equilibrium by attracting the benevolent forces and repelling or avoiding the malevolent ones.

Generally, Igbo physical world is conceived of as being in dynamic equilibrium, but is also constantly threatened by opposition energies called ajo mmuo (malevolent spirits). For instance, Agwu has both a positive and a negative end, meaning that it can bring good health and sickness, wealth and poverty, and fortune and misfortune (Aguwa, 1995). A builder who is struck by the negative end of Agwu may not be able to complete a building project because such a person will begin to behave like an insane person. There is also the belief in the land of the living called uwa, and the land of the spirits or ala mmuo. When a person who has lived a good life dies in a socially-approved manner (suicide, for instance, is not approved), the person transcends to ala mmuo to continue living with the ancestors, and interceding for the living as a member of ndi ichie. A person who did not live a good life, or died a bad death, or does not receive a proper burial, becomes an ajo mmuo. All these dimensions of Igbo worldview have consequences for architecture and explain why a non-Igbo, Western, perspective can not throw adequate light into the depths Igbo architecture.
Figure 2. Obi Nwandu, Nimo. Photograph, courtesy of Jstor, 2008.
Figure 3. The remains of a traditional *obi* architecture (Okija). ca. 1890s - early 1900s.

(The date of construction of this architecture is approximated to the late nineteenth century based on the historical narratives that trace the birth of the late owner of the compound, *ozo* Ikebude, who died in 1967 at the age of 83. Oral tradition maintains that the house was built by his father, the late *ozo* Ezenwa, when *ozo* Ikebude was about 10 years old. Photograph by the author, 2008.)

Communality in Igbo Architecture: *Ekwuru* and *Obi*

This section shall highlight the processes involved in the building of *ekwuru* and *obi* in traditional Igbo, and how these processes are linked to Igbo worldview because the process of building are as, if not more, important than the built architecture itself. *Ekwuru* and *obi* are built architectures but, in most cases, they serve different purposes; while *ekwuru* is primarily an architecture that serves a spiritual purpose, *obi* is a temporal architecture. However both *ekwuru* and *obi* can have an intersection of functions if an *ekwuru* is inhabited by a human being, the *mmonwu* (spirit masquerade) high chief.
Before delving into building process, an explanation of the form and meaning of both institutions suffices. Formally, ekwuru is usually a single-unit building with a large main room and one or two smaller rooms (see figs. 1 and 9). What distinguishes it (a dedicated ekwuru) from a domestic architecture is more of its isolated location than its physical size and shape. The author found that the more affluent communities built ekwuru that are solely for the use of mmonwu (fig. 12) activities, while some communities use the house of the eldest mmonwu initiate as their ekwuru. The human form masquerades can be performed during important occasions like New Yam festival, but ekwuru mmonwu (spirit masquerade) is performed intermittently and it is the agency through which the communities unite and reify their existence as a link between the past and the present, their ancestors and the unborn. Traditionally, ekwuru (the physical building) and obom (the masquerade’s site of performance) were important aspects of Igbo mechanisms for social control and traditional governance. There are different types of mmonwu, and not all of them live in ekwuru. Ugonna (1984) identifies two categories of mmonwu: the spirit and the human or secular categories. Spirit masquerades live in ekwuru, are highly venerated, and are believed to emerge from, and retreat to, ant-holes located in an inner section of ekwuru. They are performed mainly in Okija and its neighbouring towns. Human form masquerades are those which no pretence is made about their carriers or performers/or masqueraders are human being human. In Okija, where a mere mention of mmonwu invokes a spirit presence, the human form masquerades are called odogwu, and are less venerated. In Enugu, however, mmonwu is the general name for every form of masquerade. My research confirms that odogwu are always differently costumed during
masquerade events and may not disguise their human features, whereas mmonwu, there is every attempt at iconizing their non-human nature, particularly the use of features that instill awe and fear (see fig. 5 for the areas in Igboland where the different types of mmonwu are performed).

Every ekwuru in Okija is built with a corresponding obom, which is a site of performance of masquerade activities. Obom is easily recognized by the presence of ekwuru that is situated on it, but since many ekwuru are located away from obom (usually by about 200 meters), the only marker of obom is mainly iroko and other tall, and aged trees. These trees that mark obom spaces gain their size and age from their sacredness that protects them from cut down without special ceremonies (see fig. 6). A village is more easily known by the name of its obom than by its civic name. For instance, a person is said to come from, say, obom Akoba if such a person comes from Umuatuegwu, even though Umuatuegwu is the name of the village in which the obom Akoba and the ekwuru are located. Thus, architecture, which in this case includes a site of performance, becomes a signifier of a people’s identity. In more extreme cases, people’s behavioural characteristics are understood to be in consonance with the architectural behaviour of their obom and ekwuru. An obom and ekwuru are considered, for example, to be “aggressive,” if the mmonwu that dwells in, and performs on, them are aggressive. By extension, people from there could be regarded as aggressive.
Figure 4. The African Continental Bank (ACB) building Enugu was built in the late 1960s.

(The building typifies the obliteration of traditional architectural styles by European influence. The building has a wrong east-west orientation, present in much traditional architecture, leading to high cooling and lighting costs. Photograph by the author, 2008.)
Figure 5. Map of Igbo geographical area, showing the various names by which masquerades are known. After Cole and Aniakor, 1984.

(In Enugu, and most parts of Igbo, every masquerade is known as “mmanwu,” while in Okija and its neighbouring towns, they are known as “odogwu.” “Mmonwu” is a highly revered conception for only the spirit masquerades that inhabit ekwuru.)
The size, design, and worth of *ekwuru* can apparently reveal the values which a people uphold, the extent of their wealth, and in some cases, the size of their landmass. In traditional presence, a stranger in a community in Okija would easily estimate the size of the community’s landmass through the size of its *obom*. It usually follows, for instance, that if *Umuatuegwu* community has a larger *obom* than *Umuofor*, then the former occupies a larger land mass than the latter. As Westernization swept across the land in the early days of colonialism, *ekwuru* became one of the indices of determining which village was faster in embracing ‘development.’ Building European-styled architectures at that time was a sign of “positive” change and development. This notion extended to *ekwuru* architecture such that even in the present time, the first community in Okija that built a multi-storey *ekwuru* is still believed to be more progressive than the rest in terms of Western development. Here, multi-storey architecture was associated solely with Western styles of architecture, and thus becomes an indicator of a Western presence.

In contrast to *ekwuru*, Cole and Aniakor (1984) describe *obi* as the male meeting house of an extended family, which is the conceptual and, often, the physical centre of a domestic Igbo architecture. The male meeting house for each extended family usually decides the size and location of a compound wall, gateway, and interior divisions and structures of the compound. The status of the person who is the head of the compound can be seen in the size and style of his *obi*. Cole and Aniakor, as cited above, state that children are often conceived there and this could be responsible for a tradition of patrimony, which dictates that children belong to their fathers first. The functions of *obi* and those of *ekwuru* sometimes overlap in the traditional and present times in the sense
that where a community can not afford both, as in the case of Umuofor village, Okija, an obi can serve as both a domestic and a spiritual architecture.

Having explained the meaning and significance of the institutions of ekwuru and obi, it is necessary to discuss the communality and relevant processes involved in their construction, because those processes provide further insight necessary for a better understanding of Igbo worldview. The process of construction of ekwuru and obi follow the same principles as in other domestic architectures, except that in the case of a dedicated ekwuru, the roofs are raised higher to accommodate the very tall size of the female mmonwu, which are usually taller that their male counterparts. Cole, Aniakor, and Achebe (1984) also agree that building a house in traditional Igbo was a communal responsibility. The Igbo social structure explains this communalism. Extended family members are usually known as umunna, which means the off springs of one man. Umunna is the lowest level of patrilineal organization that is made up of a number of nuclear families living in individual compounds. So, when all these people gather to lend their services in making a new building, whether it is an ekwuru or an obi, it is based on the common understanding that building is a group responsibility. Cole (1969) reinforces this view by adding that the traditional building practice forms a site of performance in which series of interrelated and overlapping art forms such as dances, songs and chants usually accompany building activity. The obi and particularly, ekwuru architectures have shown that these performances continue after the building is completed and even when the building has ceased to exist there.
In Igbo architecture, generally, building extensions such as walls and posts, and panels such as doors, are considered architecture (fig. 10). As such murals and other wall decorations, and relief carvings on posts and doors are all architectural processes. Motifs used in wall designs are adapted mainly from *uli* and *nsibidi* patterns. Uli is traditionally a women’s art form made up of a set of designs and symbols that are painted onto bodies, woven into textiles, and painted on the outside of buildings. Nsibidi is a written and performed language that belongs to a male secret society called *Ekpe* (meaning leopard) (Cole and Aniakor, 1984: 34). Visona, et al, (2001) states that *uli* designs are
done by women and that they also transplant these body motifs on to the walls of domestic compounds and shrines. Circles of all shapes are among the most recurring motifs in many Igbo wall and panel decorations. They appear as planetary bodies such as sun, part of a moon, centre of stars, and as reptiles, human beings, instruments. Many Igbo compounds in Okija and Enugu are also circular, oval or semi-circle; even when the plots of land on which they are built do not demand so. Also, the layout design of Igbo village as analyzed by scholars such as Ottenberg (1968), and Nsude (1987), reveal maps that depict Igbo villages as branching out from a circular center. Many wall and panel decorations also depict images that adhere to designs with the circle as the centre (fig. 7). Since these illustrations were drawn mostly by Europeans, whose presence is outdated by these wall designs, it then calls for a question about how such coincidences could have existed. Whatever these circles mean, they point to a worldview which believed in a round world or cyclical understandings of the universe.
In conclusion, the *obi* and *ekwuru* have remained among some of the architectural means by which Igbo people represent themselves. The building styles, spatial arrangement, and the natural materials used for their construction, have offered valuable glimpses into ways of life of past and present Igbo, but it is on the wall and post decorations that these ways of life have been rendered most legibly. The notion that decorative motifs on Igbo architectures served only utilitarian functions as opined by Neaher (1980) may be insufficient. Certain motifs in the murals are, no doubt, used in the hope that they will offer protection and healing, but this is not always the case. If
utilitarianism is the only function of the decorative motifs, a traditional house decoration would be reduced to a mere functional activity resulting from fear. If one is to go by Carlyle’s (quoted in Neaher, 1980) assertion that aesthetic drive is the first spiritual want of “man”, then the aesthetic and functional aspects of Igbo wall decorations come first and second respectively. In most cases, the people first set out to decorate their compounds and surroundings, but end up using a combination of motifs to tell stories. In modern times, the waning of *ichi* and *uli* traditions as body art coincides with the waning of wall decorations. Present-day buildings, made of mainly imported materials, are more durable, and the existence of multi-storey building means that less land is needed for single buildings that are meant to accommodate large numbers of people. However, they pose conflicting identity questions and confront the viewers with historiographic difficulties. The next chapter shows that the present day buildings of imported materials are also neither affordable for everyone nor ecologically friendly.
Figure 8. Section of the Central Post Office, Enugu. Photograph by the author, 2008.
CHAPTER TWO: ARCHITECTURE OF COLONIZATION

Early Contact

Contact between Europe and Igboland took place in the early fifteenth century, but remained only on the periphery of Igbo mainland, due to the competence of native middlemen in supplying slaves and other goods desired by the Europeans, who were restricted to the port of Bonny. However, as English explorers Richard and John Lander (known as the Lander Brothers) became the first Europeans to access the route along the River Niger in 1841, their adventure led to the opening of trade contact with the interior of Igboland. These exploits helped a team of Protestant missionaries, led by Ajayi Crowther, to open the early missions in Igbo towns and villages. By the early sixteenth century, the missionaries had built the earliest of the European-inspired houses.

According to Elleh (1996):

European contact in Nigeria probably took place earlier, but the first well-documented contacts are with the Portuguese in 1472, who expanded the slave trade in the region in the 15th, 16th, and 17th centuries, and gradually introduced Western architecture, first as trading infrastructure, and then as colonial administrative facility. (Elleh, 1996:297.) [The emphasis, which highlights the prior use of Igbo architectures by the Europeans, is mine.]

The emphasis on Elleh’s statement above supports the claim that at first, Europeans lived in houses built by the Igbo until the Europeans had enough followers to help them build mission houses. When the earliest of these mission schools, churches and quarters were built, they utilized only the indigenous materials and labour, but their design features, such as opposite-window setting for cross-ventilation, extended roof to form awning, and inner demarcations, were of European or European hybrid conception. So, from the onset, architecture was a major tool in the ‘civilizing mission’ of missionary activities in
Igboland, and was later deployed more effectively as a colonizing tool by the colonial administration.

Among the lasting imprints of early colonial architectures in Igboland are a short span of hybrid presence, and a long and permanent presence of the European types. Of the three architectural presences in this thesis (traditional, hybrid, and colonial), a hybrid style has not been explored by scholars. Soyinka, quoted in Msiska (2007), posits that hybridity is the foundation of contemporary African culture. Soyinka urges that Africans need to adopt it as a strategy of engagement with the Other. However, Soyinka condemns the conception of hybridity that is mere ‘conjunction,’ but rather that indigenous traditional architecture and cultures are fused, rather than synthesized, with those of Europe (Msiska, 2007). Lauber (2005) describes hybrid architecture as the escape of architecture from the restraints imposed by places and material. The British Empire project confirms this assertion with its ‘exportation’ of European architectures to distant places such as China (Said, 1979), India and Africa, demonstrating that “identical buildings can be seen in almost all corners of the world” (Lauber, 2005:29). Vogel (1991) quoted in Elleh, (1996: 306) says that the “incorporation of Western images into traditional Igbo architecture is indicative of a multifarious aesthetic expression.” The introduction of foreign elements into traditional architectural style took place simultaneously with the introduction of new Christian religious beliefs. Apparently, the superiority of the new, combined with imported architectural elements over the traditional ones served as a material proof needed to convince Igbo people that the other new values being inculcated in them were equally superior to their old values.
**Result of Hybridity**

Foreign architectural styles imported by the colonists first reproduced what I call a hybrid style that had both traditional and European elements. Terrence, in Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983), states that traditions (including architecture) which the colonialists imported from Europe provided whites with models of command while offering the African models of ‘modern’ behaviour. A regime of command and obedience connotes a presence of strong and weak, and history agrees with the position that in contests between cultures and ideals of unequal strengths, the weaker is usually overwhelmed and annihilated, with time. In this sense, hybrid styles arising from the merger of European and Igbo contexts lasted for only as long as it could, before it was effaced along with the traditional style. While it might be argued that in societies such as Morocco and Algeria, where the assimilation of traditional (metropolitan) and colonial styles resulted in new architectural expressions that were neither French nor indigenous (Morton, 2000), what architectures in Igboland enacts in all of their modern form is a colonial and post-colonial dialectics that unsettled aspects of Igbo identity.

Two stages of identity transformation are observable in the formal transformations in Igbo architectures from traditional to hybrid, to European styles. The traditional-to-hybrid stage produced a kind of “in-between space” (Bhabha, 1994) in which a new ideology was formed. The new ideology exploited the similarities and differences between the two cultures, producing a hybrid identity that was neither ‘traditional’ nor Western. Conflicts arising from a clash the new and old ideologies found a common ground on the political stage. The late 1920s and 1930s thus was a period of
intense political activities in Igboland. The first Nigerian political party, the Nigerian
Democratic Party, had been formed in the early part of the 1920s, and eastern Nigeria
(home of the Igbo people) was prominent on the political map due, partly, to the political
exploits of Nnamdi Azikiwe. The most written-about of the political crises of this period
is the Aba Womens’ Revolt. There is also a little-known political struggle that led to a
brief war between the Uhuobo and Ubahu villages in Okija, in the 1930s, in which
ekwuru was transformed into an architectural zone of that war. The primary cause of the
war, which relates to the distribution of hand-outs of European privileges, such as the
Native Chief office, saw the ekwuru and obom becoming sites of the war. Some villages
were embracing Westernization faster than others (through the construction of European-
style architectures as ekwuru, and introduction of mmonwu, that bore European
influences) while the others were resisting it more than the rest. The war, says an elite
chief, ozo Nwakanwa, “ended only when one of the communities pursued the other’s
warriors into their ekwuru,” signaling a surrender.

The second stage of transformation from hybrid to full-blown European
architectural style took place between the time of consolidation of colonialism and the
dawn of political independence. This transformational stage is mainly conceptual as it
does not reflect visibly on the body of the architectures. Synthesis, in the sense of “…to
pick out what is best from European culture and diluting it with what they had”
(Hobsbawm, 1983: 253), did not happen. Two factors were responsible for the problem
of non-synthesis: first, it was clear that the emerging leaders of the Igbo nation were more
concerned about stepping into the shoes of the departing colonists and enjoying the same
privileges as did the colonial masters than in implementing architectural policies that encouraged traditional input in building style; second, traditional architectural started fizzling out early, such that those earlier European architectures that still existed were probably conceptualized of as “traditional” because they had stayed long in both Igbo architectural space and psyche and have acquired historical significance. Figure 9 is an example of European-influenced architecture, which some people that this author interviewed referred to as ‘traditional’, because it had stayed long enough in the people’s memory to acquire that term.
Figure 9. A 1958 hybrid architecture showing *ekwuru* that also served as *obi* in Okija.

(There are two rooms: the one on the left was where *mmonwu* paraphernalia were kept, while the one on the right was a living space of the head of the compound, who was also an *mmonwu* high chief. The central room always remained an *obi* and a living room for *mmonwu* on its days of appearance. Notice the mud block the architectural style as the only remaining link to tradition in the architecture. The metal roof and cemented wall are of European origin. Photograph by the author, 2008.)

**Architecture of Displacement**

Colonial architectural policies were a tool of mass displacement and a system of segregation. The ‘triumph’ of European architecture over Igbo traditional architecture, serves as a background to a manifestation of cultural superiority by the colonists and missionaries, who viewed the native Igbo people as inferior, and their culture and architecture as an anachronism that must be eradicated and replaced with better European ones. European colonists reasoned that by introducing the so-called savages to European civilization, they would raise them to a higher plane of existence (Mudimbe, 1988).
Missionaries, who had become ubiquitous in most parts of the interiors of Igboland by the beginning of the twentieth century, openly branded most traditional things as idolatrous and primitive. Converts were seriously pressed to abandon many traditional activities and European culture was portrayed as a higher stage of cultural development for all peoples. The Igbo were meant to look up to the European culture and adopt it. The segregation-based town planning policy further reinforced this concept, because it further increased the prestige of the European reservations. In fact, the people, who in traditional times had common cosmological beliefs, were now divided, and their architecture became one of the clearest indicators of these differences in belief. According to Afigbo (1981):

The nascent urban settler looked up to the European officers and their servants for examples whether with regard to the form of houses they put up, how they run their houses or even how they dress for work in their ceremonial occasions (Afigbo, 1981: 344.)

There are other means by which the colonizing mission of architecture displaced Igbo social setting and worldview. Before contact with the West, achievements in society were mainly attained through farming, trading, carving and ironwork. But contact with Europeans and colonization diversified the avenues of achieving them. It became a mark of achievement and a way of gaining status in society to become an expert in European knowledge and other aspects of life. In fact, Igbo admiration of Europeans’ knowledge and achievements, especially the Europeans’ ability to manipulate the physical world with science, which they had accepted with resignation and fear over the years, was profuse.
So, in significant ways, colonization, Christianity, and the establishment of European-style architectures that appeared in the form of schools, churches, civic centers, and towns, opened up new and attractive avenues of achieving their much desired authority, prestige, and leadership in society. This was widely expressed by educating children in schools, building European-type houses in the rural areas, and acquiring other items of European culture, such as clothing, and adopting European behaviour. Group achievements, which are also stressed in Igbo culture, found new dimensions in European culture. Village groups, villages and wards, started competing with one another to build
the first or the best schools and churches in the European style, and to send their children to Europe to acquire European education and ways of life.

Migration to the new European-style towns was necessary, almost compulsory, for employment and to acquire and peddle new skills needed for success that now had an expanded meaning. People who worked in the towns, including traders, and professionals, made more money and were influenced by the new urban societal life. They began to build houses similar to European buildings, using imported materials and enlisting the services of local architects, who either were trained locally by the Europeans or were graduates of European tertiary schools of architecture. Foreign building materials like cement, corrugated metal and asbestos sheets, fiber board and imported paint also became a sign of prestige and achievement. Transformation of *ekwuru* (fig. 11) resulted in the transformation of *mmonwu*, a spirit that in Igbo cosmology is formless, hence intransmutable. The new multi-story *ekwuru that are based on European style* initiated a need for *mmonwu* whose form and beauty would be commensurate with the new architectures (fig. 12). All these meant that *obi* and *ekwuru* could no longer be built in their traditional forms, and that *mmonwu*, which ensured the existence of *ekwuru*, started becoming unpopular especially among Christians, who did not only dissociate themselves from it, but also condemned its practice. These changes in architecture have their corresponding changes in Igbo identity: the more new buildings of religious activities were being introduced, the more poignant changes in Igbo spiritual identity were becoming; while new European-style civic buildings helped in conditioning the minds of Igbo people towards becoming more Europeanized subjects.
Figure 11. Uncompleted *ekwuru* built in a tropical modernist form. Photograph by the author, 2008.

Figure 12. Left: *Mmonwu* mask in its pre-European form. Right: *Mmonwu* ensemble (inside an *ekwuru*) in its European-era form. Photograph by the author, 2008.
New Cityscape and New Identity

European architectural and city planning traditions that were implanted in Igboland by the colonial administration and subsequently continued by post-colonial Igbo governments have far-reaching impacts on the Igbo architectural space and identity. Nsude (1987) states that the colonists adopted a policy of re-planning some of the traditional villages to become urban centers. For instance, Enugu, which was established in 1915 to serve as a camp for miners and other colonial workers, following the discovery of coal there in 1914, was developed around the coal mines and its layouts were based on European concepts.

According to Elleh (1996: 329), “Enugu was founded by the colonial administration for the purpose of extracting coal from the hills of Udi.” Its growth was accelerated by the construction of a railway line between it and Port Harcourt. The railway line linking Port Harcourt and Enugu was laid to run across the length of Igbo geographical area. It cuts through many traditional settlements and opened up a wide area of the land to trade, and greatly facilitated communication. European companies which were earlier confined to the banks of the River Niger now penetrated the interior of Igbo, building European-style trading post and depots. Many Igbo people moved to these trading posts to sell their products and to acquire European goods. Soon, some of the trading posts became townships; still their architectural patterns were based on European models.

In the new cities growing from the passage of the railway lines, new established ministries and executive departments, in the towns, the colonial governments took over
all the public service functions that traditionally had been provided by the community or kin-groups. Different departments, including town planning authorities were therefore needed. The colonialists, without regards to indigenous institutions, established civil institutions, including urban planning and development ministries similar to those in Britain. Kultermann (1982) posits that the re-organization that was enforced following these new developments meddled seriously with the social fabric of Igbo society, and threatened some of the institutions of the traditional setting. For instance the colonists adopted a policy by which they claimed sovereign right over all the land of the Igbo. This practice contrasted with the traditional land tenure system, which operates on a social structural basis, and set architectural precedents of land distribution unknown to the Igbo.

Environmental and building standards, including detailed municipal legislation were imported from Europe (fig. 13). The practices were adopted without reference to indigenous cultural and environmental traditions, thus initiating transformations in which the organization of the pre-European Igbo settlements gave way to an alien one. The alien zoning system was imposed on the traditional layout systems and only Europeans and “better class” Africans were considered because the zoning patterns were too rigid to accommodate aspects of Igbo way of life. For instance, the colonial zoning system limits movement pattern, known to the local people are excluded, and others are placed too far away from the residential zone. Following the traditional pattern, people moved inwards to the centre for cultural activities, and outwards beyond the residential zone for their economic activities. The towns were also characterized by segregation, and usually surrounded by “buffer zones” that made it difficult for Igbo people to interact with the
Europeans freely, as they did in traditional settings. Elleh (1996) describes the early hybrid architectures thus:

At... Enugu, English cottage housing and Victorian houses were built for the Europeans and Nigerian colonial civil servants. In public buildings, the colonials combined their understanding of tropical architecture with twentieth century English Georgian architecture to meet their needs. Here, the major characteristics of this Western influence are delicate, refined ornaments and elements that can be traced easily to Greek and Roman origins, like the arches and the columns. Indigenous influence is expressed in slanted roofs that almost cover the upper story and the use of a screen in front of a building for cooling purposes (Elleh, 1996: 331.)

Figure 13. Part of a colonial residential quarters in Enugu. Photograph by the author, 2008.

As a conclusion to this chapter, it would be pertinent to ask why the Europeans did not encourage indigenous architectural practice in Igboland even in the face of their lower cost and environmental suitability. Reason could be found in Sarup’s (1996: 47) position that “identity is conceivable through difference”, meaning that to maintain a separate
identity, one has to define oneself against the Other. As European architecture was becoming a model, the Igbo began to build similar houses, which greatly encouraged the neglect of traditional house building practices. At the dawn of independence when the Europeans left, these reservations were occupied by the Igbo, who were faced with adapting their indigenous ways of life in these foreign architectures or imbibe western ways of life to live in them." Lauber (2005: 29) revealed that “such buildings either cause unacceptable running costs or are far more uncomfortable than old buildings that are adapted to the climactic conditions could ever be.” A typical manifestation of the statement is the African Continental Bank (ACB) building (see fig. 4), which began deteriorating and was detrimental to the lives of the occupants when it became very expensive to maintain and supply its electricity needs for lighting and cooling. The deterioration that the ACB and other European quarters soon experienced after independence, confirms how alien these architectural styles were to the Igbo, who had maintained their buildings and wall murals in traditional times.

Present Igbo architectural environment is in continuous transition, both in Enugu and Okija. The economic conditions of the past decades have put enormous pressure on the modern architectures that were imported from Europe. Lauber (2005) identifies population, general pattern of social deprivation, imbalanced rural-urban growth rates, illiteracy, health, lack of social security as some of the major elements influencing the African urban situation. Okija and Enugu are not spared from these problems. For a region struggling to develop, inadequate housing is a major problem that should be tackled. Modern housing in Igbo land is very expensive because the majority of the
building materials are imported from Western countries and Asia. To build in Igboland, just as in other tropical societies has meant a confrontation with climactic conditions. The modern building should consider the factors of heat, strong solar radiation, high level of air humidity and torrential rain. From an economic and ecological perspective, it does not make sense to build houses that require constant electricity to maintain their cooling systems when electricity supply is not stable, adding to the fact that these electrical devices produce substances that are harmful to the physical and human environments. The Igbo developed intelligent traditional building practice that evolved with time. The traditional architectural proved that cheap houses could be provided for a majority of the people. Although European architectures have proved more durable, they are neither cheap to build or maintain. Therefore, the encounter with European civilization through colonization should not lead to a complete demise of indigenous building practices; instead, the Igbo should adopt productive hybrid style architectures in which the same traditional materials are refined, using Western technology to make them more durable in order to provide cheap and effective housing.
Figure 14. The State Assembly complex, Enugu, with a statue of the former premier of eastern Nigeria, and the first President of Nigeria, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe. Photograph by the author, 2008.
CHAPTER THREE: ARCHITECTURE, POWER AND IDENTITY

The power of architecture to influence human perception and behaviour has been utilized by architectural patrons and designers in history. The structure, appearance, and placement of buildings can tell a lot about the social status of their owners, as well as the balance of power in the society that produces them. Geertz’s notion of “cultural balance of power” is supported by architectures of Igbo which have been used to support and promote political and religious as well as the social orders out of which they are produced (cited in Okoye, 2001). The intertwining notion of power and identity and its manifestation in architecture has been advanced by Elleh (2002), Aniakor and Cole (1984), and Woods (1992), who argue that political, social, and cultural conditions are responsible for the shapes that buildings take. The shape of the buildings to be analyzed in this chapter take has largely been determined by the kind of identity that their patrons or designers intended to project (Okoye, 2001). Although social hierarchies can be read from traditional Igbo architectures, in some cases, such as ekwuru, their social significances depended on the meanings that people projected on them. However, the colonial and post-colonial presences helped to force a change on the meaning and significance of a building.

*Ekwuru and Mmonwu as Agents of Power and Social Control*

Against this background, this chapter investigates the functioning of ekwuru, obi, and a parliamentary building complex, called the State Assembly (fig. 14), over the course of traditional and colonial / post-colonial presences. In pre-European times, ekwuru (the physical building) and obom (the masquerade’s site of performance) were
important aspects of Igbo mechanisms for social control and traditional governance. In addition to their primary function as masquerade architectures, they were also places for deciding important (judicial) issues affecting the society. To understand the social role of *ekwuru* in relation to power and identity, it is important to briefly discuss the meaning and categories of *mmonwu* in Igbo because it is *mmonwu* that ‘lives’ in the ekwuru architecture. Literally, *mmonwu* is a masquerade. Cole and Aniakor (1984) perceive *mmonwu* as a temporary embodiment of the world of the dead in the material world. This masked performance is organized by male associations. At a different level, *mmonwu* represents the unison between the material world and world of spirits (see fig. 12). It is a means of entertainment and enacting myth of a society, in addition to being a pillar of social equilibrium. They are the physical symbols of a broad range of gods and deities in rites and beliefs that have been practiced by the Igbo of Nigeria.

In relation to *ekwuru*, when a serious social issue, such as crime or imminent war arises, *ekwuru* and *obom* become sites for problem-solving. If a person is found guilty of a serious crime such as would deserve a death penalty, it is *mmonwu* that is sent to affect the arrest of the person. In this instance, *ekwuru* becomes a court of law in which the elders and other titled men are the judges. This function continued in a modified form during the colonial presence, when the British colonial administration encouraged minor cases to be settled there. Similarly, in times of trouble, the decisions to wage a war was usually taken in the ekwuru, while other preparations regarding the war, such as assembling of warriors, are performed at *obom*. Achebe presents *mmonwu* as the presence of dead ancestors that must be revered and feared, and states that even when people know
that it is after all a human being who is performing the masquerade and who serves as a physical receptacle for the spirit entity; they keep such knowledge to themselves. To reveal that the masked spirit is a human is regarded as a terrible abomination:

Okonkwo's wives and perhaps other women as well, might have noticed that the second egwugwu [monwu] had the springy walk of Okonkwo. And they might also have noticed that Okonkwo was not among the titled men and elders who sat behind the row of egwugwu. But if they thought these things they kept them within themselves (Achebe: 1986: 63-64).

The reinvention of the being of the masquerader and preservation of the secrecy and sacredness of its mystery in this respect enable the masquerade to function in political and social spheres as an agent of conflict resolution and peace building, to police the land and to create solidarity in the community. Achebe (1986) presents another interesting case of the procedure of the use of the masquerade in traditional Igbo resolution of conflict. In the fictional context of the novel Things Fall Apart, a matrimonial conflict develops into an inter-group conflict, and the mmonwu, representing the presence and the unquestionable voice/wisdom of the ancestors (and of the village), is brought in to mediate. Indeed, masquerade, as presented by Achebe, is an indigenous African model of conflict resolution and peace building.

The Resurgence of Tradition in Modern obi Architecture

If ekwuru and obom were religious/political sites of social ordering and power structuring, obi, a male domain in Igbo architecture, was a site of domestic administration and a reflector of the power and social status of the head of the family. Modern obi has undergone remarkable transformations, although history and power are ever-present (fig. 15). These transformations of obi, which Okoye (2002) attributes to strong influences of foreign context (European, Arabian and Igbo sculpture), render them a multi-cultural
cartography (Okoye, 2002). While independence from the British colonial system in 1960 provided impetus for building modern “functionalist” obi, an oil boom in the 1970s was responsible for the aesthetically-driven nature of their designs. The oil boom, particularly, was responsible for the emergence of *Nouveau riche* Igbo who embarked on massive building projects to reconstruct the war-ravaged region (the Nigerian – Biafra war of 1967 – 1970 destroyed a majority of the buildings in Igboland), and to exhibit new social status.

Stressing the over-arching importance of the oil boom to modern Igbo (domestic) architecture, Cosentino (1991) states that money from “Udoji economy” (or oil economy) found its way from the big cities to the villages where the new rich constructed “villas” and “lodges”. “Udoji economy” is a phrase that described the Nigerian economy of the 1970s. Due to the enormous revenue being derived from the sale of crude oil, the Federal Government of Nigeria created a commission known as Udoji Civil Service Commission in 1973 to make recommendations regarding the salary levels of civil servants. The commission recommended an across-the-board pay-rise for federal workers, which increased consumer expenditure levels (Okoye, 2002). The identity and form of architectural self-representation of this group of wealthy persons took a very different form. For instance, *Oba* (meaning a wealthy man and leader) D.A. Nwandu, a prominent Igbo leader and businessman, commissioned a local architect, Mazi Nguko, to design and build “architecture of flamboyance” (Okoye, 2002). The obi, called Nwandu House, was built accordingly, in Nimo, (a community that is 25 miles from Okija) and thus becomes an example of architecture through which a patron satisfies a social end. The entrance to
the *obi* is defined by a gateway which, and as with the main house, is built from locally available stone (Okoye, 2002), the same way that traditional architectures were built with locally available mud.

*Figure 15. Old obi Nwandu, Nimo.*

(This is a typical example of a hybrid *obi* which the wealthy Igbo *ozo* title holders of post-colonial era preferred for depicting their social status, occupation and power. Inset: prominent Igbo chiefs arriving at *obi* Nwandu, during a ceremony that projects the importance of performance to architecture (many of the chiefs also had built similar architectures to that of D.A. Nwandu). After Okoye, 2001.)
Both Cosentino and Okoye agree on the apparent display of foreign influence on Nwandu’s house and obi, but where they differ is on the source of influence, and the degree to which those influences manifest. While Cosentino is of the view that Nwandu’s house is an Italian (Baroque) architectural prototype that found its way into the kitsch culture of the time, Okoye argues that something much more culturally situated and more meaningful and complex than kitsch unfolded in the architecture. What is important here is the fact that the house is a hybrid architecture which exists because of the quest of its patron to exhibit (or possibly to acquire) social status and power through built form. This
architecture also serves as a modern example of how actions that take place in an architecture and architectural site can have more ‘architectural meaning’ than the physical building in which it takes place. In fig. 15 (inset), some prominent Igbo people are seen arriving at obi Nwandu, in what is probably the commissioning ceremony that took place on completion of the obi. This ceremony usually involves the arrival of guests, different kinds of performances that include mmonwu, and oral tradition. All these actions, these people, the history that is written and rewritten, and the spirituality it all generates denote the importance of the immaterial over the material. At that moment, the architecture, for which the people gathered, becomes ephemeral to the actions that give it meaning; it ceases to be a site for human dwelling and becomes a site for the enactment of history. So, it supports an important notion that history is not always embedded in the material form, but is also tied to power and identity.

A consideration of the formal aspects of obi Nwandu reveals power and prestige and that both factors have a long history in Igboland. The entrance to the compound (fig. 16), which is a part of the architecture, is reminiscent of the entrance gateways of Igbo compounds in traditional presence (fig. 17). Okoye (2001) states that this entrance gateway indicates the status and power of the family and the importance of the head of the compound, which is communicated through the elaborate nature of the gate structure, and the richness of the door leaf it probably had once framed. The framing of a gateway in this style was a preferred architectural style of the rich, notably the ozo, who were and are the chiefs of their towns, some of whom were only so by warrant of the Colonial government. Okoye (2001) also states that in the 1920s, to the 1940s, that these types of
gateways were a mark of a particular ‘class’ of people. Figures. 2, 15, and 16 reveal that the surfaces are elaborately stylized in ways that emphasize the mortar joints, which is the architectural style of the 1970s. In the gateway design of the obi, a symmetrical composition combines rhythmically flowing linear progressions of curves and straight lines. Cosentino (1991) believes these moulded, linear elements to be as a result of the builder’s contact with Italian contractors because it looks very much like some decorative aspects of Italian Baroque architecture. Okoye, in contradiction to this position, argues that unlike the use of such moulds in classical or neo-classical European architecture when it was used for specific articulation of structure, the molding in this case is more of a way of identifying the building with what was then a newly emerging particularized aesthetic.

What the obi Nwandu represents is a hybridity of many cultures (Italian, European, Igbo and Jewish). The builders’ style borrows an emphasis on line, picking out the mortar joints in a manner that is opposite to Italian Baroque masonry practice, which is the dissolution of mortar joint. The adaptation of traditional uli motifs, which was used in traditional Igbo architectures, into linear curves and straight lines, combines with the circular, relief discs of the Italian baroque to enclose a “Star of David”, which references wealth, since there was a Nigerian coin that bore this mark exactly. The presence of the Star of David emblem in the motifs, aside from being an indicator of power, is a sign of a shifting belief and identity and is connected to a modern Igbo myth of a Jewish origin (Afigbo, 1981) that began to exist since the introduction of European Christianity.
Colonial and post-independence governments disrupted the social-control functions of ekwuru and other traditional architectures remarkably, which affected the social balance of power in post-traditional presence. New architectures of power such as cathedrals (fig. 18) and public buildings that were erected to legitimize religious and political power interests, later overshadowed ekwuru and hence projected new ideals that changed power equations.

Figure 17. A traditional obi Nwandu-style gatehouse, Undisclosed location. After Basden, 1920.

Religious and Political of Architectures:

Holy Ghost Cathedral and State Assembly Complex

From government-sponsored buildings such as the State Assembly complex (see fig. 14) and ACB building (see fig. 4), to religious institutions like the Holy Ghost Cathedral, Enugu (see fig. 18); symbolic meaning pertaining to power can be read.
Woods (1988:8) states that “The architect who designs building types… follows the hidden form already inscribed by those expressing and dominating others…” A part of these “hidden forms” may be traceable to mixed interest groups (as in the case of Holy Ghost cathedral) or to a political group (in the case of ACB and State Assembly buildings). In the case of the latter, the buildings are perceived as metonyms needed for the reinforcement of an idealized and stable regional government that are worthy of the trust and support of the people. Since most of these buildings are located within the privileged zones that arose from colonial segregation, their scale and surrounding reminds the ordinary people entering them that they enter the vicinity of power, usually as supplicants, and that they are subjects of authorities that they hardly understood (Vale, 1992). For the occupants of the two buildings, it reinforces their self-perception that the territory belonged to them.
The construction of Holy Ghost Cathedral, Enugu, in the early 1970s, opened a new page in the religious history of the city, which was the capital city of Igboland and eastern Nigeria. The political dimension of the construction of the cathedral is reinforced by architect Fakhoury (cited in Elleh, 2002) who states that as the architect of Our Lady’s Basilica, he was ordered by President Félix Houphouët-Boigny of Côte d'Ivoire to design a “Mansion for God Almighty.” Similarly, this notion applies also to the political currents that underpinned the construction of Holy Ghost Cathedral, Enugu. The cathedral patrons drew on the impact such edifices have made on the religious (and
spiritual) lives of people beginning with the earliest of European-style church architectures that deployed political and religious messages through architecture.

With its tall spires, beautiful bright white, yellow and sky-blue colours, the cathedral tends to remind the viewer about the overarching power of the Vatican over its (Catholic) faithful. Holy Ghost was built close to the centre of the metropolitan Enugu city, close to the peak of the hills on which Enugu settles, which makes it visible from far distances. The location at the heart of the city could be said to suggest the biblical injunction that God dwells in the heart (centre) of all people, and watches all their activities. Thus, it is the role of God, through the church, to define how the people should live their lives. In addition to the message conveyed by its location and grandeur, more subliminal messages are conveyed through the pictures on stained glass. No traditional decorative elements are incorporated in the design profile (traditional mode of worship such as drumming and dancing was initially banned in Catholic churches in Igboland).

The Notion of “performative architecture” which a traditional Igbo method of worship would engender seemed problematic for the church authority due to its challenge of European values and precepts that informed the Catholic Church’s mode of worship. When viewed in isolation, or against the Church’s background, the stained glass, with all the saintly figures creates an impression of a church that is situated in Europe. Of all the saintly figures, none had dark skin, which worshippers could interpret to be that whiteness, at least in behaviour, is a precondition for entering heaven. Another hidden implication of the Greco-roman-styled stained glass is that it is the European, not the Igbo, who can produce architecture that is worthy of the habitation of God. In this way,
Holy Ghost architecture defines the version of identity which the patrons needed to project.

Before the construction of the Holy Ghost cathedral, the regional government of eastern Nigeria, Enugu, had built the Eastern Nigeria State Assembly complex, at Enugu, in 1960 (fig. 14). The construction of the State Assembly Enugu by the regional Government of Dr. M.I. Okpara, the first Premier of Eastern Nigeria (he was later replaced with Dr. Azikiwe, when the latter failed to win the premiership of western Nigeria), and the building of the African Continental Bank confirm the desire of the newly independent government of 1960 to create a new architectural idiom for prestige by suggesting a rebellion from the colonial past. Both buildings were done in the tropical modernist style, which was becoming popular among West African governments in the 1960s due to its acclaim to being more of a “tropicalized” hybrid than mere European colonial architecture. The decision by the government to adopt this type of architecture merely because it serves the interest of a political identity that it wanted to project, ties to Wood’s (1992: 134) assertion that “Architecture is a political act.” As stated in chapter four, a less obvious but equally cogent reason for the adoption of tropical modernist style is due to its structural appearance that relates it to European architectures. The awe of Europe, which colonialism had instilled would suggest, through the buildings that signify it, that the new regional capital, and by extension, its political leaders, is powerful and stable.

The State Assembly House, by replicating ritualistically architectural elements from Europe, asserts the power and legitimacy of the new Premier, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe,
and brings prestige to the Eastern Region. Eastern Nigeria, between 1950 and 1975 was the world’s largest producer of palm produce, a major exporter of coal, and crude oil was recently found in Eleme, eastern Nigeria, just before the end of European colonization. So, the government deemed it necessary to build Enugu in a “modern” style that would reflect the wealth of the region. The imposing ACB building, which houses the government’s African Continental Bank, also became a physical manifestation of the financial and political power of the region.

The patrons and designers of the State Assembly complex moved beyond the architectural form of the building in expressing their message of power. They also erected a life-size sculpture of the premier in front of the State Assembly thus, making the building acquire meaning by way of metaphor. Architecturally, the building is treated as a kind of temple, with the statue of Nnamdi Azikiwe, popularly known as Zik, taking the place of a classical deity. Building on this metaphor, the State Assembly demonstrates what Goodman, quoted in Vale (1992: 4) calls “mediated reference.” Vale is referring to the Lincoln memorial with the sculpture of Abraham Lincoln, which suggests an association with the process of advancement of civil rights. The reference of this monument could be the reason why many of Washington’s civil rights rallies are held there. In the case of the State Assembly, also, there is a chain of reasoning which leads from the deification of Zik as the ultimate leader to a broader consideration of a regional unity. The presence of the sculpture in a legislative arm of government that is independent of the executive arm, has been interpreted differently, one being that it was intended to link the government to the achievements of Zik, who was the political father
of the Igbo. Clearly, the presence of this sculpture completes any architectural message that the building itself sends.

In conclusion, political regimes, religious powers and citizens make powerful and symbolic use of physical environments. Patrons of Holy Ghost cathedral were aiming to find a nexus with the missionary (and colonial) past, by constructing a European prototype cathedral. Government patronage of the State Assembly complex and ACB building was a way of gaining political consolidation through architecture, but flexibility and continual change of statuses of power and identity call for a re-thinking of the original aims of both buildings. For the Holy Ghost cathedral building, its architectural shape has remained the same, but a prolonged aspiration of its users to shift from a “transfixed” mode of worship to a performative mode that would include dancing, clapping and drumming, as practiced in traditional presence, has been acceded to. Such a fundamental modification in a style of worship tends to now include the building in the actions that take place in it, as against the building being originally isolated from those actions because of its colonial tendency to overwhelm those actions with its magnificence and strictures.

For the State Assembly, however, the complex reenacts significant characteristics of colonial architectural projects, even though the building was designed in the “international style,” to function as a tool for reforming the collective memories of the citizens. The complex, more or less, has suited the exigencies of successive leaders and governments in Enugu, in the same way that the colonialists had invested in transforming the memories of the colonized people from free citizens that they were, to that of colonial
subjects. The *ekwuru, obi*, Holy Ghost cathedral, and the State Assembly complex provide good examples for exploring the issue of identity and power factors of architecture because each one of them is an act of design in which expressions of power and identity seem intentional and inevitable.

*Figure 19.* A building in an elite residential area in Enugu. Google image, 2008.
CHAPTER FOUR: POST-INDEPENDENCE IDENTITY

Background

Some of the post-colonial architectures built between the time of independence in 1960 and the Second Republic of late 1979 manifest evidences of both government and private desires to evolve architectural styles that would promote power interests, while indicating an entry of the Igbo into a modern (architectural) identity. An observation of some of these architectures show that there were probably three main trends that drove the rural and urban architectural visions of this period: (i) Government’s retention and sustenance of colonial identity through a continuation of British colonial administrative policy that in turn, shaped architectural policy. For instance, prestige architectures that replicate those in Europe were built in Independence Layout and Government Reservation Areas (fig. 19); (ii) Architectural vision of government officials and elites for the Enugu metropolis was countered by a proliferation of architectures of desperation and survival, by less-privileged people. By 1985, when the government introduced the Structural Adjustment Programme that increased poverty rate, almost all of these shanty-towns, in places such as Coal Camp, Artisan Quarters and Ama-Awusa, had became permanent residential areas (fig. 20), (iii) The oil boom of 1970s created a generation of rich Igbo professionals and businessmen and women who, contrary to the architectural policies of the regional governments, built informal architectures that incorporated indigenous and European building traditions, to create new and complex hybrid architectures that are Igbo in conception (figs 2 and 15). Below is an analysis of these developments, which marked both rural and urban architectural trends.
The independence years of 1960s and the post-civil war period of 1970s witnessed more architectural activities in Igboland, than at any time in recorded history (Nsude: 1987). At independence, the Eastern Nigerian government faced a number of choices about how to manage its urban environment, particularly in Enugu, the region’s capital city.

![Figure 20. A slum in Lagos, Nigeria. The shanty towns that sprouted in post-colonial Enugu appear similar to this. Photograph is courtesy of Google image, 2009.](image)

**Neo-Colonial Architectures as Hybrids**

Taking after King’s (1976) pioneering works, Abu-Lughod (1980) and Celik (1997) expand the boundaries of consequences of colonial urban policy. In the works of the two authors, the “colonial city” is depicted as a dual city, in which one part is composed of quarantined government quarters that features European architecture and
urban planning, while in the other part, the native quarters, local people were subject to heavy restrictive laws and are almost ignored entirely. Post-colonial Enugu was marked by the same segregation that marred the colonial city because the colonial pattern of land use, movement restriction, and neglect (Wright, 2002) can be seen in the independence-era Enugu landscape.

The dual city setting of colonial presence extended to independence-era Enugu. This time, “colonial [racial] segregation” (Elleh, 1997) is replaced with class segregation. Although the dual city setting was a visible social and architectural feature, architectural policies of the government in the 1960s yielded massive buildings that marked an architectural departure from the colonial past.

Figure 21. An adaptation of tropical modernist style architecture. Photograph by the author, 2008.
Adoption of Tropical Modernist Architecture

The eastern Nigerian government in Enugu sought to introduce buildings that did not bear marks of colonialism, but ironically it got entangled in the maze of an architectural style called the “International Style” that was more European than African, although it was promoted as being tropical-friendly (fig. 21). The label "International style" (Wright, 2002) was applied to modern architecture in the early 1930s by the Museum of Modern Art, New York City, which anticipated its growing acceptance around the world. Wright (2002: 225) states that “colonial Africa served as an ideal laboratory for the West, because architects could explore new models, unencumbered by the constraints of democratic politics or shared cultural norms.” The Result of this experiment becomes “tropical modernist architecture,” an adaptation of the “International Style” (Fry, 1962). Because the tropical modernist architecture was adapted for the warmer climates, it differs from the colonial architectures, which were imported from Europe without much consideration given to climate. Verandas, baroque ornamentation, and classical columns of colonial styles were replaced with rougher, geometric forms of concrete, steel, and glass (see fig. 21). The new style quickly gained the favour of both corporate clients and the government as the face of the new Nigeria; such that by the end of the 1960s, Lagos’s central business district had been almost entirely rebuilt in its image (Immerwahr, 2007). The preference for, and the popularity of tropical modernist architecture in Lagos prompted the government of eastern Nigerian region to embark on reproducing a similar architectural style in its own region. This experiment was not very successful in Enugu for reasons that are mentioned later in this chapter.
Tropical modernist architecture owes its existence to modernist architects in Europe, especially to Fry and Drew, who were the movement’s main theorists. On their own part, Fry and Drew (1964) owe their debt to Le Corbusier, who, as mentioned in the first chapter of this thesis, is responsible for creating a (Western) lens through which architecture is perceived; a perception that excludes the recognition of African dwellings as architecture. In that sense, it is no wonder that the tropical modernist architecture failed in Enugu, as in other big cities of Nigeria, such as Lagos. Many of the architects of the tropical modernist school of architecture were trained mostly in London and formed the Institute of Nigerian Architects there. They insisted that their field of operation required important architectural adaptations, most notably to Nigeria’s climate. It would be hard to overestimate the importance of climate as a category of thought when considering the suitability of particular architectures for particular places, but despite the other distinctions between Europe and Nigeria, in terms of economy, society, religion, culture, and history, it was climate that served as the new architects’ sign of architectural difference. The Department of Tropical Architecture at the Architectural Association (AA) in London, where Lagos’s most influential architects studied or taught, as its name suggests, focused on West Africa principally as a novel climate demanding new architectural solutions (Immerwahr, 2007).

The two principal theoretical works of the movement, Fry and Drew’s *Tropical architecture in the dry and humid zones* (1964) and Otto Koenigsberger’s two-volume *Manual of tropical housing and design* (1974), both focused a great deal of attention on technical questions of ventilation, shade, humidity, and so forth. In the subsequent years,
inconsistencies in electricity and power supply opened the lapses in the architecture. The architectures were discovered to not be indeed ventilation-effective, as they required huge recurrent capital to keep up with their electricity needs. The task of adapting a European architectural tradition to a hot and humid climate stimulated some innovations in the form of building. Most importantly, ventilation became a major obsession of the new style. It is worth noting that ventilation is not the only way of dealing with a hot climate. Krapf-Askari (1969) analyzes traditional Nigerian adaptation to heat, whereby the Yoruba and Igbo build small, dark rooms that allow very little light inside. In contrast to these indigenous technologies, tropical modernists, instead, preferred to make their spaces as open as possible.

Fry and Drew (1964: 63) propose a supplanting of Mies van der Rohe’s famed house of glass with a ‘house of air,’ by introducing large overhanging roofs with only mosquito nets and a few structural supports in the place of walls. This idea likely influenced the design of an un-named post-colonial building in Okpara Avenue, Enugu (see fig. 19). The building became a major icon of tropical modernism in Enugu, with its enormous grille of horizontal concrete interspersed by large volumes of air spaces to protect the building from heat. (Other modifications of Fry & Drew’s tropical buildings include the introduction of traditional or handicraft art into modern buildings, most often in the form of murals, mosaics, carved wooden doors, or statues, as seen in the State Assembly building, Enugu. Inclusion of art into modernist projects became the standard, and most new corporate buildings made some sort of gesture, however slight, toward making their buildings look more ‘African.’)
Rise of Shanty Towns: Coal Camp, Artisan Quarters and *Ama-Awusa*

The second trend that drove rural and urban architectural trends in Enugu in the years preceding the 1960 independence from colonial rule is the rise of shanty towns, otherwise known as “poor man’s Government Reservation Areas.” Immerwahr (2007) posits that a transition from colonial to postcolonial governance means a new scope for a state, which is how to represent an entire populace in more than just imperial interests. The Regional government in Enugu tried to play crucial roles in the development and representation of a regional identity in architecture by encouraging architects to create nationalist-oriented regional buildings and commissioned grandiose projects such as the ACB building that functioned as a symbol of the region for a long time.

On the other hand, the supply of government-provided housing and infrastructure did not rise to demand. Okoye (2002) looks further back in history and reveals that although Nigeria had known urbanization for long before colonialism, that housing per se was never a concern in Nigeria until the industrial economy pulled large numbers of workers into the urban areas in the twentieth century. In comparison to some places in the West, such as colonial cities in Australia or the Americas, where a settling population developed planned cities, the built environment of Enugu was for the most part touched by colonialism only indirectly, through economic forces rather than direct legislation (Immerwahr, 2007). Post-colonial government, however, did little to meet the needs of a growing urban population, prompting Peil (1991:145) to assert that “it was still the case that for every house owned by the government, there were at least one hundred privately owned houses.”
Immerwahr (2007) adds that it is

...the mass migration of labour from the rural to the urban centers, in response to the new job opportunities being created by the government, [as witnessed in the early day of colonialism] [that] led to the growth of the shanty towns (Immerwahr, 2007:166).

Thus, as government and elites tried to build and maintain European-style areas, less-privileged people in Enugu engaged in building alternative urban forms as ghettos, street-side markets, and unregulated, mixed-use spaces. With this development, one can argue that policymakers in Enugu, as in other major urban centers in post-colonial Nigeria, had what Immerwahr (2007:168) calls a “bifurcated architectural vision” that excluded the less-privileged, by favouring a tropical modernist style for government offices and European styles for residential buildings.

Questions of whether and how new buildings erected in Enugu after independence allowed architects and their clients to assert a new symbolic identity for eastern (Igbo) Nigerians were of great importance to local elites, but for the majority of Igbo, expensive government buildings, and corporate housing meant much less. Despite its rhetoric about changing the face of Enugu and eastern Nigeria, tropical modernism was limited to the central business districts of Ogui Road, Zik’s Avenue and Okpara Avenue, and to a few buildings scattered elsewhere throughout the city. When it came to the sorts of buildings, such as housing estates and apartment complexes, which would be of benefit to non-elite Igbo, tropical modernists had very little to say. In response, makeshift settlements (which eventually became permanent) began to sprout, either in proximity to the elite residential areas, or close to the areas of employment and trade (see fig. 20). As such, Coal Camp grew next to the coal mines, while Artisan Quarters nestled in-between Ogui Road,
Okpara Avenue and Independence Layout, for the “artisans,” (usually an offensive designation amongst the local population) to provide services for the running of the elite quarters.

Fry and Drew largely ignored the subject of housing in their handbook, *Tropical Architecture in Dry and Humid Climates* (1964). Of the few housing projects they did mention, not a single one was located in their own base of operations, West Africa. The omission does not seem to be accidental. Planning and public housing provisions in Enugu operated on a different track from prestige architecture. Although official reports occasionally mentioned the need for public housing, the government made no real attempt to distance itself from colonial blueprints for housing and the planning of residential estates. New lay-outs were created at Ogui Layout, Uwani and Achara Layout, but there are very few, or no, government-owned buildings on them. Even where government buildings exist for the public, they are dirty and decrepit and always, usually, degenerate to shanty-town status. Government also established town planning authority, which did little to plan and develop architectural infrastructures. Thus, shanty towns continue to grow and multiply.

**Hybrid Trend: Obi Nwandu**

The last trend in rural and urban architectural development occurred mainly outside the regional capital, Enugu. Cosentino (1991) identifies the contribution of a wealthy class of Igbo to architecture. The importance of their contribution lies in their ability to call for an attention to be paid to the social context of architectural productions from a private, non-government perspective. During the periods prior to, and after,
independence, and particularly in the post-war economic boom of 1970s, patrons and practitioners of architecture in Igboland manifested two impulses: to create and define their niches on the social ladder and to create architectures that would indicate their communities’ (by extension, Igboland’s) participation in modernity. To them as individuals, the goal of announcing their status took precedence over that of associating their communities with modernity.

A brief examination of obi Nwandu (see fig. 15) reveals that patrons of Igbo architecture of (especially) the 1970s chose to represent Igbo people as wealthy and powerful. This representation was a big psychological boost for the Igbo as they tried to screen the painful realities of their striving to rise from the trauma of war and defeat from the civil war that took place largely in their region (Biafran War). Cosentino (1991) agrees with Fernandez’s (1991) assertion of the role of architecture for a people emerging from the ruins of war, and where its need as tool for (re)constructing identity is urgent. Cosentino (1991) therefore implies a possibility of Igbo people to romantically recast the course of a history gone sour with the Nigerian civil war, through the healing effect of a sudden increase in money circulating the economy that enable them to reconstruct their identity, architecturally.

The evolutionary process of obi Nwandu type of architecture in Igboland is a complex one which has presented the viewers of these buildings with difficulties of dating and sources of influence. Okoye (2002) attributes this problem of not being able to easily hold down Igbo architecture to specific dates to a trend that makes historicity only possible for buildings produced either in the direct service of the Colonial
administrations, European traders and their concerns, or for euro-Christian missionary projects. For Cosentino (1991), the residential architecture, *obi* Nwandu, was a product of a contact between *Mazi* Nguko and an unspecified Italian construction group, while Okoye (2002) argues that the building dates:

…towards the 1920s and to a mixed bag of cultures: Igbo sculpture, Arab Muslim architecture, Igbo *uli* painting, the observation of ‘architecture’ in nature such as spider’s webs, the locally invented colonial era architecture of Onitsha and Awka, and perhaps the *Amaro* architecture of Lagos (Okoye, 2002:3).

What can be deduced from the historical analysis of *obi* Nwandu is that the style of the 1970s evolved from the style of the earlier form which, perhaps, dates earlier than the 1920s date that Okoye puts it. A brief review of the transformations of Igbo gatehouse in the 20th century would put this in perspective, and it would demonstrate why it was adopted by some elites in the post civil war period as a counter-action to government’s preference for the European-inspired tropical modernist style.

An early documentation of Nwandu-style gatehouse as an architectural type can be seen in fig. 22, a photograph published by Basden in 1920 (see fig. 17). No one knows when the photograph was actually taken, whether it was the same year that it was published, or earlier, but the erosion work on the sacrificial mounds in front may prompt one to assume that it was constructed a few years before the photograph was taken. However, such gates were already in vogue by the time that Basden himself arrived in the Igbo region at about 1900 (Okoye, 2002). Unfortunately, Basden did not indicate in which village that the gateway was located, or who the owner and architect were. Both are pieces of information which would be critical to any attempt to reconstruct its meaning. The photograph has recorded the clay portals which once framed such
entranceways. It can be seen that the whole surface is covered over in low relief. We may describe this as a kind of reversed-relief, the development of embedded shapes and forms arrested at the structure’s own implied surface. In a slight contrast to the Basden’s Igbo compound architecture, the design on the wall of obi Nwandu takes a bas relief.

In summary, an analysis of postcolonial Enugu reveals a quest by governments to establish an architectural identity for the Igbo in Enugu, and the many restrictions that hampered this vision, which created alternative visions and identities. Due to non availability of original and indigenous terms in the architectural language of government, architectural vision ended up replicating colonial presences, but with little means to effectively manage it. In all three architectural visions – the vision of government through expensive buildings; that of the masses by way of shanty towns; and the vision of hybrid mansions, through which some wealthy individuals moderated the other two visions - vied for attention and supremacy. In all these visions, it is evident from obi Nwandu architecture that there is a representation of “the traditional” that is more visible than those of the government. This traditional content is achieved mainly through the structural pattern and compound layout, but more so through themes and decorative motifs that are inspired by traditional art forms of uli and nsibidi. These traditional representations thus became essential to the construction of a (post-colonial Igbo) common heritage (Fernandez, 1992). The obi Nwandu also serves as a means through which Igbo people countered government’s ‘maltreatment’ of the less-privileged people by inappropriate housing schemes. Similarly, the architect Mazi Nguko’s mastered his art through local apprenticeship and observation of “architecture in nature” (Okoye, 2002)
such as spider’s webs, the locally invented colonial era architecture of Onitsha and Awka, and perhaps the *Amaro* architecture of Lagos.
This thesis has shown that architecture, which was already a major social and religious preoccupation in Igboland before the advent of Europeans, was also a means by which Igbo people invented and defined themselves. It is only by seeing through an alternative lens, which includes knowledge of Igbo worldview that this thesis proposes, can such nuances be felt; and can building practices of generations be recognized as architecture. The obi, ekwuru, and government buildings analyzed in this thesis, over the traditional, colonial, and post-colonial presences, indicate that a non-living architecture can “speak” about the people, political structure, and balance of power existing in the society that built it. Obi and ekwuru, which have been performed all through the three presences, demonstrate that it is not only from a building that the value of architecture is derived, but also from the people, and the actions that they enact and re-enact in or around buildings. The case of obom which has no ekwuru architecture on it (fig. 6) shows how the people do not discontinue their use of the site even though the built architecture is gone. For them, it is not more about replacing architecture with another than it is about continuing with those activities from which architecture derives its meaning and relevance. This is because in Igbo worldview, human actions, and the intersecting of these actions with the spiritual nodes, are more important than the physical objects on which these actions are performed.

Because the early contact between the Igbo and the Europeans was not based on “ethnographic present,” the European colonial missions insisted on ‘civilizing’ a people whose own civilization was remarkable and had followed a unique, progressive direction.
To force a shift on the identity and ideology of the Igbo, so as to ensure there was the least resistance by the Igbo, but a firmer colonial control, European architecture or its hybrid were introduced to act as a major tools of civilizing (colonizing) mission. Thus, European architecture served as an effective material proof needed for convincing Igbo people that a European presence and value were superior to, and more desirable than, their old traditional values.

European educational system in Igboland, especially, the training of Igbo pioneer professionals, among whom were architects trained in the United Kingdom, ensured that even at independence, European architectural tradition and the European identity it fostered, would remain. The later emergence of Igbo indigenous architects and elites, who were not trained in the European, way led to a questioning of the need and relevance of European-style buildings in an African architectural space. Although the “Europeanized” Igbo had better Western education and were occupying the more important government positions, the less (Western) educated Igbo elite traders, businessmen, and traditionally-trained professionals were in the majority and also wealthier. With their wealth and lesser Western influence, they were able to try to restore Igbo traditional architectural values and identity by using European architectural materials to build new houses in the old traditional plan and meaning.
Abia – one of the 5 states that comprise Igboland.

ACB – African Continental Bank, located in Enugu.

Agwu – patron deity of health, divination, and all creative arts.

Ajo mmuo – malevolent spirit

Ala – earth and earth goddess.

Ala mmuo – spirit world

Ama-Awusa – low-income residential area in Enugu.

Anambra – one of the 5 states that comprise Igboland.

Chi – guardian angel.

Chineke – God of creation.

Chukwu – Supreme God.

Ebonyi – one of the 5 states that comprise Igboland.

Ekpe – Leopard (a male secret society).

Ekwuru – spirit-masquerade architecture.

Enugu (city) – town in Enugu state, former capital of the defunct eastern Nigeria, and the present capital city of Enugu state.

Enugu (state) – one of the 5 states that comprise Igboland.

Ichí – body scarification.

Igbo – a major Nigerian cultural group.

Igbo-Ukwu – town in Anambra state.

Igwe – sky and sky goddess.
Imo – one of the 5 states that comprise Igboland.

*Mmonwu* – spirit-masquerade.

*Ndi ichie* – ancestors.

Nimo – town in Anambra state.

Nkalagu – town in Enugu state.

*Nsibidi* – written and performed language belonging to a male secret society called *Ekpe*

*Nze* – traditional councilor and judge.

*Obi* – male living section of Igbo architecture.

*Obom* – site of performance of spirit-masquerade activities

*Obom Akoba* – name of an *obom* in Okija.

*Odogwu* – human-costumed masquerade.

Okija – town in Anambra state.

*Ozo* – elite Igbo chief.

Ubahu – village in Okija

Udi – town in Enugu state

*Udo* – a long period of spirit-masquerade beautification.


*Uli* – set of designs and symbols that are painted onto bodies, woven into textiles, etc.

Umuatuegwu – village in Okija.

*Umunna* – male kindred

Umuofor – village in Okija

*Uwa* – world.
WORKS CONSULTED


