

**SEMIOTICS AND MEANING IN ARCHITECTURE: A STUDY OF  
CULTURAL SPACES AND BUILT-FORMS OF SOUTHWEST  
NIGERIA**

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15PCA00911**

**FEBRUARY, 2022**

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**A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF POST GRADUATE  
STUDIES IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR  
THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY  
(Ph.D) IN ARCHITECTURE IN THE DEPARTMENT OF  
ARCHITECTURE, COLLEGE OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY  
COVENANT UNIVERSITY, OTA, OGUN STATE, NIGERIA**

**FEBRUARY, 2022**

## **ACCEPTANCE**

This is to attest that this report is accepted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D) in Architecture in the Department of Architecture, College of Science and Technology, Covenant University, Ota, Nigeria.

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## **DECLARATION**

**I, ADÉYẸMO, AJÍBÁDÉ ADÉDAYÒ** declare that this thesis was carried out entirely by me under the supervision of Prof. Ekundayo A. Adeyemi (Main Supervisor) and Dr. Isidore.C. Ezema (Co-supervisor) of the Department of Architecture, College of Science and Technology, Covenant University, Canaanland, Ota, Ogun State, Nigeria. I attest that the thesis has not been presented, either wholly or partly, for the award of any degree elsewhere. All sourced data and scholarly information used in this thesis are duly acknowledged.

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## **CERTIFICATION**

This is to certify that this thesis titled **SEMIOTICS AND MEANING IN ARCHITECTURE: A STUDY OF CULTURAL SPACE AND BUILT-FORM OF SOUTHWEST NIGERIA**, were carried out by **ADÉYẸMỌ, AJÍBÁDÉ ADÉDAYỌ (15PCA00911)** in the Department of Architecture, College of Science and Technology, Covenant University, Ota, Ogun State, Nigeria, under the supervision of Prof. Ekundayo A. Adeyemi (Main Supervisor) and Dr. Isidore.C. Ezema (Co-supervisor) the undersigned for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) degree in Architecture.

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## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to the greater glory of God of whom Psalm 44 verse 3 says; “It was not by their sword, that they won the land, nor did their arm bring them victory; it was Your right hand, Your arm and the light of Your face, for You loved them.” It is also dedicated to the emancipation of all Africans and the resuscitation of the past golden era of the great indigenous civilisation of Ilé-Ifè, the cradle of the Yorùbá race.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The foremost acknowledgement is to God, for the opportunity of starting and finishing this Ph.D, programme. Having made attempts since the year 2000, this finally was fulfilled through the Department of Architecture, Covenant University Ota.

I thank the Chancellor, Dr. David O. Oyedepo for bearing the vision of this great university. I also thank the Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Adebayo H. Abiodun, and the Registrar Dr. Oluwasegun Omidiora for sustaining integrity, hard work and high standards in the institution. I appreciate the Dean, Prof. Akan B. Williams and the Sub-Dean of the School of Postgraduate Studies, Dr Emmanuel O. Amoo, for diligently seeing to good quality theses from the University. I am grateful to the Dean of the College of Science and Technology, Prof. Temidayo V. Omothoso. I am deeply grateful to Prof. Ekundayo A Adeyemi (Main supervisor) who stood with me, mentored and gave scholarly guidance along with Dr. Isidore C. Ezema (Co-supervisor).

I want to express my gratitude to Prof. Eziyi. O. Ibem, Prof. Oluwole A. Alagbe, Prof. Akunnaya P. Opoko and Prof. (Mrs) Adedapo. A. Oluwatayo as Heads of Department at different times during the programme. All other faculty members in no particular order, including Mr. P. Omote are all appreciated for their contributions towards the success of this work. I wish to thank my colleagues in the Architecture Department (set 2015) with whom we started the Ph.D programme. They include; Dr. S. Tongo, Dr. O. Obaleye, Dr. E. Equere and Dr. Abraham O. Owoseni. I thank them for their prayers and encouragement. I also appreciate other colleagues in the department who were of great editorial assistance particularly Dr. Tosin Babalola and Arc. Funmi Adetoro

My thanks also go to the great African practitioners in the arts and built forms, whose works and good practices have inspired the need to grasp and study the nexus between architecture and meaning. On the field: Profs. Duro Oni, Adeyemi Daramola, Joseph Igwe and Orimogunje, Dr.Ayo Yusuf, Rev. Fr. Dr. Otiko Arc. Dr. Mike Adegbile, Dr. Timothy Adejumo, Dr. Adenle all from the University of Lagos were all part of the second and third focus group discussions. Other people in these Lagos focus group discussion included; Arc (Mrs) Olubukunola Ejiwumi (Past President, Nigeria Institute of Architects), Engr. Busuyi Onabolu Mrs.Babatunde and Mr. Abdullahi Raji. Mrs Christiana Olulode the secretary and other staff of the Department of Creative Arts of the University of Lagos are all greatly appreciated. The fourth focus group discussions involved Prof. Steve Adewusi, Ms. Kemi Alawode, two Ifa sages, Chief Owolabi.

O. Aworeni (Araba Agbaye), Chief Faloba Fagbenro (Tedimole Awo Ilare) and the Araba's personal assistant Mr Kabiru in Ile Ife for which I am also very grateful.

The Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFUND) is appreciated for the partial sponsorship of this thesis research as accessed through the Lagos State Polytechnic Ikorodu. I also appreciate the management and staff of Lagos State Polytechnic Ikorodu for supporting this endeavour especially the 10<sup>th</sup> Rector, Dr. N. Olaleye for his role in the approval of my study leave to complete this work. Mrs. Comfort Ogunnowo was there for the naughty typographical corrections, while Alhaji Nurudeen Basorun helped in language editing. Miss. Olutola Kolawole and Daniel Odebiyi helped as architectural editors. Special thanks go to all the people, especially the research team, who supported the field data collection, analysis, focus group interviews and the final presentation. This included Lanre Hassan who is specially appreciated for his outstanding roles, which started with encouraging me to seek admission for the programme through to the end. Messrs Abimbola Alawada and Agboola were variously to drive back and forth on the field and Canaan land Ota throughout the research period.

I appreciate friends and mentors, triumphant and militant who have all been contributors in one way or the other along my path to success. These include the immediate past and present Bishops of the Lagos Mainland Anglican Diocese, Most Rev. Prof. Adebayo. D. Akinde and Right Rev. B. C. Akinpelu Johnson respectively. I was greatly inspired by Ven Femi. Fatilé, the clergy as well as other lay members of the diocese. To my entire missionary friends, especially the Gbades, the clergy (past and present) and members of the Chapel of the Healing Cross Idi-Araba I say thank you for your great encouragement.

Finally, my acknowledgement goes to my extended and immediate family members, especially my loving wife, Eniola, and my children Oluwabunmilade and IyanuOluwa for sacrificing their comfort and time to facilitate the successful completion of the work.



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## **ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS**

- CADD: Computer-Aided Design and Drafting  
CSIS: Centre for Strategic and International Studies  
CBD: Central Business Districts  
CMS: Church Missionary Society  
CNMS: Church of Nigeria Missionary Society  
CPDI Africa: Community Planning and Design Initiative Africa  
DCP: Distributive Cognitive Paradigm  
FGD: Focus Group Discussion  
GSF: Global Semantic Fields  
ICOMOS: International Council on Monuments and Sites  
NIA: Nigeria Institute of Architects  
MCB: Mutual Contextual Beliefs  
SDG: Sustainable Development Goals  
YSAN: Yorùbá Studies Association of Nigeria  
UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

## ABSTRACT

Architecture is a symbolic channel of communicating peoples' culture. If well achieved, such architecture will be meaningful, easily understood, appreciated and can be applied to ensure a sustainable environment. Semiotics, which refers to the symbolic identities and meanings in cultural built-forms and spaces have been poorly understood and appreciated in Southwest Nigeria. As a study of sign systems, semiotics through our social and cultural background identifies culture as communication, with architecture as a relevant object of analysis. General semiotics studies have been undertaken in such areas as aesthetics, semantics and space syntax as a symbolic sign language. However, the dearth of studies on issues relating to signs, symbols and meanings of spaces and built-forms among the Yoruba people of Southwest Nigeria has necessitated this research. Hence, the research examined symbolic cultural values of architectural spaces and built-forms of Southwest Nigeria. The concept of architectural semiotics was used to investigate symbols and meanings associated with cultural built-forms and spaces in Southwest Nigeria. The study is descriptive and interpretive and adopted the ethnographic approach in the context of a multi-case study strategy. The cultural metaphorical framework of evaluating a house in the context of the human anatomy and the archaeological method of finding new sustainable traits from known cultural forms were used. Relevant traditional-Vernacular built forms were selected through an initial reconnaissance survey and symbolic Yoruba language common statements that helped better interpretation of samples' characteristics. A systematic review of the common statements and other data obtained from oral and written literature. Bungalows, storey buildings (Indigenous or with western and Islamic influences), palaces, relics, groves, rocks and other natural cultural spaces were sampled. Oral tradition made up for the absence of written texts and monumental built-forms to relive the past using the Southwest peoples' Mutual Contextual Beliefs (M.C.B). Semiotics' "Global Semantics Field" (G.S.F), Denotation and Connotation, and other theories were also applied. At least eight housing typologies were discovered, with commonalities of basic rectangular shape, courtyards, large family lobby (*oruwa*) are highlighted. Some potsherd pavements and groves among other relics were identified and non-preservation observed. Findings showed levels of meanings and multi-function in building components like the *àjà* (roof lofts), and *òpó* (columns). '*Aketes*' (plinthed upstand sitting/sleeping spaces) were in front of the first wife's rooms. Burial spaces inside the house in the study area depicting the communion of the living and the dead were also discovered in some Orthodox Church buildings. Built-forms and spaces terms interpretation, revealed in a statement like: '*ile abere wo b'ile okete*' (a low house like a rabbit's hole that entrants bend to enter), was deliberate in shrine designs. The traditional anthropometrics method was learnt. Unifying design qualities of cultural built-forms and spaces were confirmed to inspire concepts and practice for a sustainable environment. In conclusion, semiotic studies on cultural built-forms for their interpretation and preservation should be continuous and should be encouraged in other geo-political zones, with lessons there-from being made applicable to enhance sustainable built environments.

**Keywords:** *Semiotics, Meaning, Culture and Cultural Built-form Southwest Nigeria.*