

Architectonic Interregnum

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Is politics more important than architecture? And is it true that the best city, the Utopia, exists only in speech? Until recently, the answers to these questions were elusive to me. These answers are what this story is about. But before we move any further, our understanding of the meaning of politics and the polity or *he polis* are important. Let us avoid the conventions so as to see politics in the classical sense. Carroll William Westfall in his co-authored book, *Architectural Principles In the Age of Historicism* reminds us about the meaning of these two terms in that sense. On one hand, Politics is *the art of living together in order to perfect the nature of each individual*.¹ On the other hand, the polity, *he polis* or the classical city is the place where politics as defined above can be practiced. The polity is different from and superior to a settlement because it has a higher claim on the citizen than what the market of the settlement offered.² But as a rule, the polity must necessarily evolve from the settlement, because no city can exist without the market.

I have head about political interregnum but not about "architectonic interregnum." This phrase best describe the situation at Otan Ayegbaju, my town of origin, a Yoruba town in Osun State, Nigeria. There are two architectural proposals for the *afin* [temple-palace] and the township divided between the more modern elements in favour of modern architecture and those who are interested in the preservation of the good elements [significant appearance] of the Yoruba tradition. In the Yoruba world, the design of the *afin* is necessarily connected with an alteration with the fulcrum of the urban fabric. While the modernist design attempts to dislocate the traditional urban fabric, the other attempts to preserve and improve it. In one way or the other, at different stages in my architectural training, I am involved with both proposals; I assisted with the former in the past and I am the designer of the latter. Nevertheless, an *a priori* knowledge of an "historic" presentation of the Yoruba "logic and language of morals" and civilization [normative and descriptive] is very important for the understanding of this story.

The term *Osehu*, created from the phrase *ose ilu* means politics. *Ose* means to make, and *ilu* means the polity/polis [city-state]. Therefore *ose ilu* means making the *polis*. *Ilu* is a proper polity, superior to a settlement. The Yoruba settlement may start as an *ago* or *aba* [camp settlement] around an attractive individual. It may then develop to become an *abule* [hamlet] and then an *ileto*[village]. With the evidence of a half of a dozen dwellings, the headman, *Bale*[father of the land] emerges. As all settlements, the purpose is "to allow its citizens to survive and perhaps to prosper".

The inclusion of the market at the entrance of the official dwelling of the *Bale* often at the center of the settlement, transforms, first, the settlement into a polity, and second, the *Bale* into an *Oloja* [Lord of the Market].³ The highest development of the *Ilu Oloja* is the *Ilu Alade* headed, in a more complex structure, by the *Oba* [Priest-King] and his chiefs. While *ade* means crown, and *alade* is the "to have a crown". *Ilu alade* means the "polity of the Crown." The classical *ade* is a decourated cone shape [see pics 1 & 2].

The "imperial axis" of the *Oba*, the *afin* [sacred palace] is at the center of the town with the principal market called *oja oba* [Oba's market]. This fulcrum is immediately surrounded by the disparate quarters, the political units that make up the polity. The roads and paths separate the disparate quarters [the *urbs*]. And as it is often said, all roads lead to the imperial axis, the *afin*. Each quarter as a distinct *ebi* [lineage] has its representative chief, and all the Chiefs together with the *Oba* govern the *ilu oloja* [the *civitas*], controlling the affairs of the market at the center. P.C. Lloyd called this phenomenon, the "federation of lineages".⁴

The verbal and visual symbolism of the *ade* is attached to a highly congruent "logic and language of morals".⁵ Evident in this logic is the perennial dualism; *ori* and *iwa*. While *ori* is man's purpose on earth-earth, chosen in freewill in heaven-dwelling, it is also the Roman *caput*; the head. Likewise, *iwa* means, "to be" on earth-market as well as the normative term; "good character." *Ori* is the essential potentiality that can only be actualized through the existential *iwa*. The representing image of *ori* venerated by every individual in the classical Yoruba age is a "cone", made of leather, adorned with cowries, the currency of the market⁶[see pics 3,4 &5]. Samuel Johnson in his book, *The History Of The Yorubas* simply writes, it is the "shape of a crown".⁷ This cone is further placed inside a case with a conical cover and a cylindrical base called *ile-ori*[the dwelling of the *ori*]. As a poetic taken of "measure" for architecture in the Martin Heidegger sense, Roland Abiodun likens the *ile ori* with the *afin*, calling it a mini-*afin*.⁸ It is infact, a crown of some sort, but only the *oba* wears his. Tradition holds that the top of the cone is *ori* in heaven-dwelling, while the round base of the cone is where *ori* intersect with *iwa* on earth-market. This "logic and language of morals," accessible to the intellect is evident in the many artifacts [see pics 6 & 7], some architectural elements, proverbs and the also in the vast body of knowledge called *Ifa* [comparable to the Chinese *fengshui*].

The effect of the *ori* symbolism on the Yoruba city is that it is morphologically a wheel; the *afin* and the market at the center and the spokes are the circulation spaces separating the

disparate quarters, linking the rural with the urban. It is poetically a "flat cone" when one considers the structure of its political arrangement from the periphery to the center [see figs 1 & 2]. This form fits C.W. Westfall notion of the *tholos* as an enduring form for veneration.⁹ On the other hand, *iwa*, the agency of "being" and "good character," is the quest for order and clarity in Nature against CHAOS, the state of constant anxiety on the earth-market, towards human perfection and happiness. It is about the discovery of the permanent pattern or unchanging substratum with which the apparent chaotic experience of those who live with the changing, undefined, unmeasured apparently random impressions, could be measured and explained. The number four plays an important role in the establishment of order and organization of time, space, communication and meaning. As an example, the meeting point of the rural and urban is in the *oja-oba* every four days. There are 4 days in the traditional Yoruba week. I call these phenomena the *Olori-merin*[four headed] schemata.

Important to us here is the Yoruba cross, the reference to the four corners of the world and the use of squares and rectangles in the evolution of building plans. This phenomena is well explained in Dr L.A. Emanuel's celebrated book, *Ifa Festival*. Like the Chinese, the *kaa* [courtyards], *ita* [piazzas] are rectangles and squares. The dwelling units are organically arranged around the courtyards. From these four corners *iwa* subdues CHAOS and orders the earth-market. The effect of the agency of *iwa* on the landscape as regards the *afin* is the phenomenal concept of "the pivot of the four quarters", using Paul Wheatly's words. The *afin* is the pivot of the four quarters. While the large rectangular plan form of the *ita* fits the Westfall concept of *temple*, best for celebrating, the quadrilateral form with the *kaa* at the center is also Westfall's *regia*, best for governing.¹⁰

Thus, as heaven-dwelling shines the benign influence of the *tholos* of the *ori*-cone down on earth-market, mortals must with the *regia* of *iwa*-cross order and unite earth-market from the four quarters look up to heaven-dwelling. The meeting point of the both the *ori*-cone and *iwa*-cross is the *afin*. The *ori*-cone on the vertical plane and the *iwa*-cross on the horizontal are representative of the visual, verbal and generally, the cognitive balance between heaven-dwelling and earth-market towards human perfection and happiness on earth-market.

In a coherent manner, the *Oba* who wears the *ade*, stands for the *ori* and on the other hand the chiefs, representing the diverse lineages of the *ilu* are the *iwa*. None could do without the other. The *Oba* rules strictly with the approval of his chiefs in some kind of constitutional monarchy. In fact in a distinctly democratic manner, the chiefs govern the *ilu* in the *Oba*'s name with effective checks and balances. While the meeting point of the both the *ori*-cone and *iwa*-cross is the *afin*, the meeting point between the agencies of the *ade* and the *ilu* is *ilu alade*. The first is clearly the essential while the former is the existential and both are delicately balanced. This balance is important for the *Oloja* as the role model to keep the market at bay. [see fig 3]

The *ilu alade* in this way is a city of revelation where, borrowing from Martin Heidegger words, "the essence of Being is unconcealment" and where citizens could "seek to perfect their

individual natures and thereby find their unique pleasures." Within the *ilu alade*, citizens could live good life that is also a civic one. With this philosophical analogy there is celebrated liberty and freedom of religion under the dominant influence of the lineages. Thus, *ilu alade* is the Utopia that *ilu oloja* imitates. This is why the "conventional" form of each Yoruba *ilu* is diverse as their political structures while their structure and content are very much alike. In Adeagbo Akinjogbin's words "the unchanging nature made for stability and unity within which other items of culture developed."¹¹

The Utopia of the *Ilu Alade* was the vitality of the Yoruba constitution and civilization from about the 6th or 9th Century AD to the 18th Century. This vitality made the *ilu* a "bulwark of stability within a torrent of change" borrowing a phrase from Robert Jan van Pelt. The remarkable innovation is that the agrarian ancient Yoruba work in the rural and live in the city unlike the modern totalitarian claim of the metropolis where people live in the suburbs and work in the city. What brought people together as Louis Munoz emphasized was not "economic order" evident in the metropolis but the proper desire for human development and perfection.¹² According to Paul Wheatley it is "the proximity to the focus of power in its material and ritual aspects".¹³ The lessons are tremendous and illuminating, without the social pathologies, disorganization and social dislocation of the contemporary metropolis, the *ilu* were extremely large urban, "ceremonial".¹⁴ and "exemplary".¹⁵ centers, the very requisite of all productive economies.

For this very reason the *Oloja*, the Lord of the market and the role model, is placed at the cognitive and existential center above the market. It is only above the Market that the "being" be unconcealed.

The *ilu* shares the centrality of the Imperial axis and the quadrilateral form of dwelling plans with the Chinese *Cheng* [city], but unlike the checkerboard plan [*regia*] of the *Cheng*, the *ilu* is like a wheel. What the *ilu*, the *cheng*, the medieval city and also the Greek *polis* have in common was the existential positioning of the market at the center, in the very shadows of the "purpose" of the polity, human, perfection, development and happiness.

Unfortunately, by the end of the 18th Century this benevolent structure had terribly degenerated, coinciding with the same development in Europe. The doctrine of selfish interest among political operators became the clog in the wheel of the Yoruba polity, *ilu*. And the century that would follow was the most terrible for the Yoruba. Once corruption destroyed the dam holding chaos, the floodgate of carnage was opened. The consequences were the vicissitudes of wars, civil wars and slave raids, a perfect case study for the Hobbesian condition. Countless cities and humans were destroyed, many relocated and yet, many new cities were formed. By the 19th Century, the whole Yorubaland had degenerated into one ugly and fat market, a market without the *Oloja*. The cone now lies on its side as it is done to this representative symbol when the person that owns it dies. The obelisk of order has fallen and the venom of the serpentine CHAOS is left loose.

The British finally brought an end to the Hobbesian Condition in the late 19th Century, with the end of the 16 Year's Kiriji war in 1893, [though the war technically ended on the 23rd September, 1886] and established the *Pax Britannica* over a large part of the Yorubaland. The British benevolence was latter to become, the British Brutalism The British took some part and the French took the rest, both saved a people from self-destruction. Under the Colonial British the power of the *Oba* gradually increased in an unprecedented manner. This was extreme between 1914 when the Indirect Rule was introduced and 1930. *Ori* was elevated above *iwa* and naturally, *iwa* reacted and then revolted. This error fractured the damaged polities the more.

The reaction was to manifest in 1952 when the new elements in the polity, the elite, suspicious of the *Obas* as colonial instruments started limiting their political powers. It was the turn of *iwa* to discretely victimize *ori*. There was friction not only between the *oba* and the chiefs but also between the traditional institutions and the new, more modern political arrangements that are to take over political power from the Colonialists. Though the *Obas* and some chiefs are incorporated into the House of Chiefs of the Western Region in a British type parliamentary system, the constitution was clearly incoherent, particularly in the local government administration.¹⁶ Each time constitution or any convention for that matter does not imitate the natural, the foundation of CHAOS is laid. With the incoherency between the traditional institutions and the new political arrangements, the foundation for chaos was effectively laid. It did not take long after independence in 1960 that the entire polity of the Western Region collapsed dragging the whole nation into chaos and bringing the First Republic to an end. The art of *Oselu* in the classical sense has been forgotten by both the new elite and the more natural traditional institutions, all intoxicated with doctrine of selfish interest. And because of this, the cone lied on its side.

During those terrible days of political violence, the Yorubaland situated at the south-western part of Nigeria earned the notorious epithet; the Wild-Wild-West. In truth, the wildness had begun the century before. Once again, the Yoruba turned against themselves and their cities, possessed by the "suicidal witchcraft" of selfish interests. Countless peoples and properties were destroyed between 1964 to 1966. The *Owa Olotan* [*Oba*] Adebayo of Otan Ayegbaju at this time, who was much involved in the regional politics just as his predecessor had, had just finished the reconstruction and the beautification of his *afin* with the help of some specialists such as Susan Wenger and Ulli Beier. It was said to have been one of the best. On the New Year's eve of 1965 the *afin*, the pivot and the imperial axis was utterly burnt and completely destroyed by the *Oba's* political enemies who were also the enemies of the traditional institution. In the events that followed he was replaced by *Owa Adeniran* and a temporary bungalow was erected for him.

By this time, the *Obas* had lost their relevance in the formal structure of the modern political system when the parliamentary system was abandoned after the collapse of the Republic in 1966. In the Militocracy and the adopted American model presidential system that followed, the traditional institutions, without any constitutional relevance are the pampered zoological

enclaves injected with a slow poison and abandoned to exist side by side with the modern polity till it is finally extinguished. Sadly the institutions traditionally associated with the classical notion of *Oselu* and that had evolved and preserved the *ilu*-polity for centuries are now irrelevant. Today, in Otan Ayegbaju as well as the rest of the Yorubaland, the cone still lies on its side.

Owa Adeniran died in 1982 after which started a long interregnum for 22 years. During this period the responsibility of the administration of the town fell on the elite organized into the Otan Ayegbaju Progressive Union [OAPU]. In 1996, the then administration of [OAPU] under the presidency of Mr Ilugbon embarked on a project to build an "ultra modern" *afin*. The proposal was designed by Architect Femi Aina, a second cousin of mine and I had done my internship in his firm at Lagos. Lagos is in Lagos State and Otan Ayegbaju, in Osun State, and separated by Ogun State]. While I was preparing to go back to the Obafemi Awolowo University, for Masters of Science in Architecture, I was paid to make a the architectural model of the proposed *afin*, which I did. The design did not have any impact on me. It fitted well into my modernist orientation and education. I had spent my undergraduate years innocently as a stylistic modernist, completely engulfed by the phenomena of "historical relativism".¹⁷ The past is gone and the ugly and unfashionable age that produced the traditional culture, architecture and *afin* was created for its own sake and therefore out of date with the present. The deconstructivistic, machine-like and the brutalist aesthetics, and utilitarian architecture were my ideal. Goodness, beauty, discovery and progress were all the same to me. Therefore, I saw nothing wrong with proposed *afin* steeped into the paradigm of the avant-garde where "conventions" replace "nature", "aesthetics" replaces "ethics" and "facts" subdue "values".

Nevertheless, while I was in school I had the first paradigm shift after attending many of the lectures of Professor Bayo Amole on Advanced Architectural Theory. I was suddenly able to place the proposed *afin* clearly in the modernist category and see the perversion of modernism, its apathy for the essential, symbolic and cultural expressions of ordinary people. Though Professor Amole could not be grouped with the post-modernists, I ended up with the precarious post-modern pack. As far as I was concerned, the cultural identity of all peoples should be preserved either they account for human development or they hinder it. In order to correct the architectural error, I decided to redesign the *afin* Otan Ayegbaju as my final dissertation for the Masters degree. Unknown to me, I had chosen a dreaded path. I was caught in the merciless war between the modernists and the post-modernists in at the very center of the world. I had incurred the wrath of those historians who saw nothing wrong with the notion that the architectural heritage of each age portrays the values that produced them and that those values are only relevant for the respective ages that produced them.

For these naïve, but well-meaning instructors, going back to the terribly ugly past of ancient and corrupt gods is like a mortal sin. I became a stigma, which I enjoyed. In my quiet solitude I dug the past as much as I could and left my hairs on my head and face to grow wild to repulse the unenlightened. During those painful years, from 1997 to 2000, I submitted

two works on Yoruba architecture in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the award of Masters of Architecture. The first, Independent Work In *Architecture on Decourative Elements In Yoruba Palace Architecture* and the second, on Advanced Architectural Design Studio II is *Afin Otan Ayeigbaju*. It was a result of many case studies of numerous *afins* in Yorubaland.

The design proposal of the *Afin Otan Ayeigbaju* is a post-modern reaction that attempts to evolve architectural variants of both the vernacular and monumental architecture from the traditional architecture whilst borrowing diverse elements from all the other architectural periods, the Colonial, the Afro-Brazilian-Baroque to modern architecture. It addresses the problem of identity as regards the formal character of the Yoruba architecture; the dramaturgical analogy of the *kaa* and *ita*; the biological and biomorphic nature of traditional buildings around the *kaa*; the symbolism or grammatical models of the cone [as explained] but metamorphosized into a pyramid; and the application of the *Olori-merinschemata*. In these schemata the number 4 plays an important role as mathematical and geometric models as well as in the orientation analogy. Yet, with all these, except as polemic to modernism, the design still falls short, due to the post-modern pretension. It offers minimal basis for true human development, perfection and happiness.

Finally, with all the difficulty and overwhelming opposition I graduated with the help of the God a year after my mates. By then, the opposition had subsided when the sacrifice of humility had been ritually performed.

The discovery of the "historical relativism" was very shocking for me. All along I have been operating in the same despicable paradigm that gave birth to both modernism and post-modernism, a paradigm that disagrees with the Ciceronian idiom; *historia magistra vitae* [history is the teacher of life]. After digesting *Architectural Principles In the Age of Historicism* co-authored by Robert Jan van Pelt and Carroll William Westfall and *A Living Tradition – Studies In Yoruba Civilization* and *The Roots Of The West* both by Louis J. Munoz, with illuminating conversations with Westfall, Munoz, Rev Fr Joe Faniran, late Architect Siji Dosekun, Architect Tito Minty, and Dr L.A. Emanuel, it was obvious to me that my post-modern reaction if it is buildable at all, is as infallible as the design solution I was reacting against. Both committed two main errors. I had the second paradigm shift.

The Yoruba urban fabric has its own syntax and is so conceived to facilitate the revelation of being as well as the human perfection as people live together. The modernistic proposal submitted by Architect Aina with the architectural fees donated as a contribution to the city's development was so conceived by omission or commission to destroy the urban fabric. Apart from the fact that, the design denied the Yoruba cultural identity, the *afin* with the *ita* or *gbagede* at the entrance of the *afin* were moved from the very easily accessible axis, where it had been for centuries and relocated to a swamp that is not as accessible. The *gbagede* is formally placed adjacent to the *oja-oba* [the *Oba's* market]. Secondly, the background forest [the prominent green zone] within the urban center characteristic of all Yoruba *afin* is to give

way for other structures. The questions are, is it right to destroy a traditional focal point established many centuries ago in the name of progress and fashion? Is correct to suddenly change what the ordinary people have been used to for years and that has worked for them? Why can't the architect perfect the urban fabric he works on, preserving the "significant appearance" and the traditional dialogue rather than imposing his own *progress*? The interesting thing is that it is not only Architect Aina's design that is guilty of this crime; my reactionary solution is also guilty of the same crime.

The 22 Years interregnum finally ended on the 22nd of July 2004 with the installation of Oba Anthony Adegbite Okeyode. This was largely made possible by the Governor of Osun State, Prince Olagunsoye Oyinlola and the President of OAPU, Mr Olusegun Aina, brother to Architect Femi Aina. And because I do agree with Westfall that to avoid that responsibility of improving the cities for human development either by avoiding politics or one's work, is to be less than human.¹⁸

Prior to the installation of the *Owa*, a very sad development took place. The administration of Boluwaduro Local Government under the chairmanship of Prince Adegbenro Ilori had constructed a row of shops, architecturally utilitarian, at the periphery of what used to be the *gbagede* and placed at the entrance of the *afin*. So that, if you are driving by, you do not see the *afin* anymore, what you see is the arched row of shops. It was unbelievable. I was living and working in Lagos and had not been to Otan Ayegbaju for a while. I was shocked. It is a nightmare. It is like when you build supermarket at the periphery of the Vatican piazza or right in front of Capitol Hill. What does "*res publica*" [the civic realm] mean to these people? Transforming this space and the appearance into an emporium, a market, is nothing but a destructive blow to reduce the *ilu alade* to an *ago*, an ordinary settlement. It is an aberration of the Yoruba formal tradition. The *oja oba* [*Oba's* market] has its formal space beside the *afin*. The former is representative of the earth-market, while the latter of the heaven-dwelling. Why should this dialogue and this pivot of memory be tampered with? As it were, Earth-market has encroached on the sacred space of memory. The future the modernists preach about has finally come to this innocent town. This must be the modernist's future of bliss; the Market encroached upon the space an *afin* once stood.

What led to the burning of the former *afin* was caused largely by the friction between the modern and the traditional political institutions. A row of shop is now built on the *afin* by the modern local government administration that lacks the knowledge of the *Oselu* in the classical sense and is unfortunately headed by a prince of another rival town. The result is that this "exemplary" enclave, the major requisite of the productive cities, is been dominated by the metropolis nomenclature where people only make money at the city center without the *Oloja*.

The removal off the *Oloja* is at first preceded first by his political removal, in this case by the Local Government Law of the 1952 passed by Obafemi Awolowo led Action Group Party. If the *Oba* is in control of his city with perhaps the support of modern institutions, except he is

very irresponsible, he would not build a row of shops on his *res publica*. Nevertheless, there are two tendencies towards the traditional institutions.

The first is the attitude of the Nigerian government since independence. People's Democratic Party, the political party of the Chairman that built the row of shops and that is in control of the whole country is largely a child of modernization that emphasizes industrialization over the evolution of productive cities, and places the totalitarian state above the society. The party lacks the wisdom that before a city can become productive, it must at first be an exemplar center, a *polis*, or a *cheng* or *ilu alade*, where humanity is cultivated. This is not only the case with this party but with all the government that had ruled the country. This cannot be otherwise; since the constitutions that produced the governments are not responsive to the natural reality. The 1999 constitution enforces in Ambassador T.A.O. Otula's words a "unified centralized entity – often in total disregard for the political, social and economic sensitivities of the component nationalities".¹⁹ This in reality furthers the concentration of power at the center, depriving the "component nationalities" their God given natural resources and pace of development. And that is why Prince Ilori built the modernist row of shop on the *afin*. The second tendency is characterized by an inchoate reaction against unitary Nigerian government. These reactions against the "unified centralized entity" often take a regional nature characterized by the shortcoming of the post-modernism. They offer partial acceptance of traditional institutions without a healthy symbiosis. As mentioned earlier, the Action Group, the party founded by the late Chief Obafemi Awolowo in the First Republic manipulated primordial sentiments to capture the electorate of the then Western Region but totally and constitutionally deprived the traditional institutions the administration of their cities by the making of the Local Government Law of 1952. The eventual result of the complex friction within and between traditional institutions and modern arrangements on one hand; and the "unified centralized entity" and the reacting "component nationalities" on the other hand was the total collapse of the Western regional government in 1962 and in fact, most of the Nigerian woes past and present. It led to the destruction of the *afin* in 1966 and the construction of the row of shops. There can never be progress until these complex anomalies are dealt with. Recently, Yoruba Constitution Group, likewise reacting against the deficiencies of the 1999 constitution, came up with its own without the involvement of the traditional institution. This is only a continuation of mediocrity.

What all these naïve or market politicians lack is the knowledge that the *he polis*, the *cheng* or the *ilu alade* are the vitality of the productive cities and that development can only be furthered by the evolution of productive cities and not by modernization or industrialization process, the slogan of liberalism. Liberalism has found its way to Otan Ayegbaju, that social dimension "that can not be defined in political terms as it is only explained by economics. Its only title to domination is wealth".²⁰ Is this the purpose of the historical relativism [modernism and post-modernism], the post Enlightenment worldview? Is this why we at first set out to dislocate the center of the urban fabric? It is a replay of the French Revolution, the King is been taken to the guillotine. But would he be beheaded? His *ade* is lying on its side, anyway.

I had acquainted myself with His Highness, *Owa* and his *Olori* [the Queen] when he was a catechist at SS Peter and Paul Catholic Church at Ile-Ife during the Masters programme. We used to see each other almost everyday during the morning mass and occasionally talk about the interregnum and my academic *afin* project. He was moral support. On the 31st of July, I visited His Highness, *Owa* in the apartment he is staying to congratulate him and remind him about the *afin* project I had been working on [he is staying outside the axis because the bungalow in which the late *Owa Adeniran* is no longer habitable]. He encouraged me and instructed me to take the proposal to the President of the OAPU since the funds for the construction is going to be provided by the OAPU. We also spoke about the row of shop on the *afin*, he told me that the royal lineage protested and it was built against their wish. Both of us favoured its removal but we were told that the people would be against demolishing it.

I showed the proposals to His Highness, *Owa*, on the 7th of August., and he liked it much. I also gave a copy to Mr Bayo Fabule, the Vice President of the OAPU and to Professor Olu Aina who has a great respect for traditional institutions. Mr Fabule duly warned and hinted me that my proposal may not be accepted by some element in OAPU. After many informal meetings with His Highness, *Owa* and the OAPU Presidents, the architectural programming of the proposal was reduced in scale. On many occasions, I was asked to perform seemingly impossible tasks most of which I did. I was working at Siji Dosekun Partnership at that time and I needed more time to work on the *afin* proposal. Because of this and other things, after talking to my fiancée about it, I resigned.



Left, the designer showing His Highness Owa Olotan, His chiefs and local people the model on 2 Dec 2004 at the symbolic foundation-laying ceremony.

Below, model of the Afin on display during Otan Day 2004 and the fund-raising on 4 December 2004.



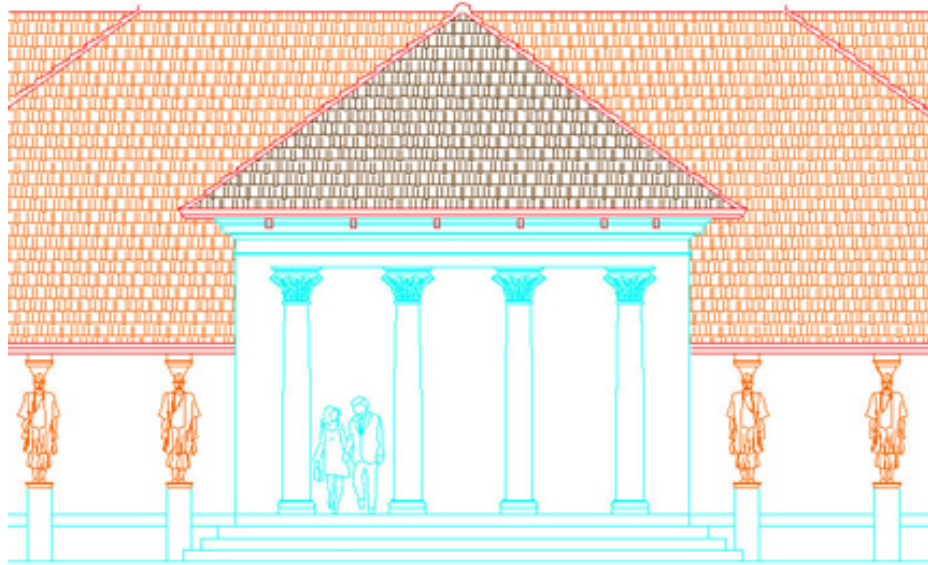
In preparation for the annual festivity of the Otan Day 2004 on the 4th of December, it was agreed that a model of the afin should be made and used to raise fund for the construction of the afin. It is to be a week of social activity ending on the 5th of December. I received letter from the OAPU President on the 15th of November confirming the arrival of the final drawings sent to him. We also had a telephone conversation on the same day about the production of handbills, the architectural model and the need to know my architect's fees.

I replied to him with another letter on the 19th of November concerning the cost of architect's fees, model making and other things. I put a clause in the letter that I wish to be paid for the running cost of the project and I am donating the rest towards the development of the city. I delivered the letter personally. After reading it, he gave it back to me and complained that he would have preferred if I or any other architect would be doing it for free.

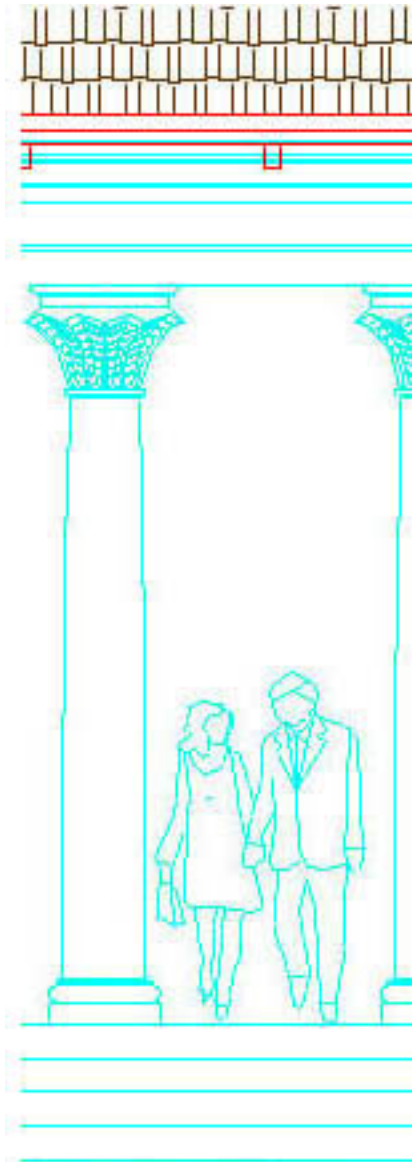
His Highness, *Owa* also informed me on the 20th of November about his plans to perform the foundation laying ceremony of the afin on the 2nd of December during the Otan week. However, it was not printed in the programme of events for that day.

Concerned about the sad developments in the afin at Otan Ayegbaju, I began the search for like-minded people. I believe that the problem at Otan Ayegbaju is evident all over the Yorubaland. The Market economy has come to destroy the Social Welfarism [using Professor Bolaji Akinyemi's term]. Perhaps, there are people out there who share my views. I met the Jazz musician, Mr Tunde Kuboye who invited me to the 118th anniversary of Kiriji Armistice organized by the Yoruba Foundation on the 23rd September 2004 at Lisabi Hall Ebute Meta to celebrate the end of all the Yoruba wars I the 19th Century. On that day, I met the other members of the governing council of Yoruba Foundation. Ambassador T.A.O. Otunla, Baba Omojola, Mr Rotimi Obadofin. I also meet Professor Bolaji Akinyemi and His Lordship, retired Bishop Emmanuel B. Gbonigi, the leader of the well focused Igbimo Omo-Oduduwa, an organization founded as a rallying point to promote the well being of the Yoruba people all over the world. I acquainted some of them about the problem, but there was so little they could do. Mr Tunde Kuboye and Ambassador T.A.O. Otunla advised, in line

with the objectives of the Yoruba Foundation, which I am now a member, that a mechanism for social-engineering through dance drama presentation may go a long way in the necessary social education. I was linked with Segun Adefila, the leader of the Crown Troupe of Africa. I wrote a play for him called *The Tragicomedy of Iwalanwa* and he wonderfully turned it into an entertaining dance drama called *Ori fe' iwa* [*ori* marries *iwa*].



CAD drawing of the Afin designed by Richard Olusegun Babalola.



The Orifewa column.

Segun Adefila took the "measure" for the ideal city and architecture as mortals perspire on earth-market, yet look up to heaven-dwelling, where the only enduring "measure" is. This is the "measure" Martin Heidegger spoke about. The first time I watched the performance, the poems, the songs, the chant, the music, the choreography and then the *ilu alade*, the proposed *afin*, I saw myself as my *ori* marries my *iwa* in a world of reality that exist only somewhere in the mind. Saw a glimpse of perfect beauty, a beauty that cannot be measured against wealth or power, pure, clear, undefiled, untouchable by the corruption of mortality and vanities of life. What I saw was the rekindling of hope, first within me and then outside, that the unconcealment of being is the essence of life and the only place this can be best achieved is in the collective mind; the *ilu alade*, *he polis*, the *cheng* while living in my body with others. Adefila had only captured with speech and movement the reality of perfect beauty that is only accessible to those who have nourished true virtue. Truly, as Leo Strauss points out, the best city, the city we aspire to

live in, exist only in speech. Adefila's work continues to amaze me so much that I name one of the columns in the proposed *afin*; *Orifewa*. The column is an adaptation of the Tuscan column very evident in the British colonial architecture of the King's College in Lagos and Mapo Hall Ibadan. The palm tree, a very important symbol in Yoruba traditions and memory is simply metamorphorsized in the Tuscan Order. The *Ori* or the *caput*, that is, the capital is simply replaced by; the top of the palm tree with an Egyptian signature. While the shaft is the *Iwa*, the palm capital is the *Ori*. The palm tree is so much relevant that the Action Group party adopted it as the party symbol during the Republic [see sketches].

Subsequently, Adefila and I under the business name of Orifewa Art Ventures began the social engineering with my wedding on the 27th of November 2004. It was performed in the church. It was surprising and as it turned out, shocking, for the naive congregation under the spell of "historical relativism" who would want nothing to do with the demonic past and those who do not see how philosophy and religion could be related. "Not in the Church" one of my friends said. Also, in a meeting of the organizing committee of the Otan Day, I suggested a dance drama should be included in the events of the 4th of December to assist in the fund raising. My advice was turned down.

While still holding on to the elements of cultural identity understood under the post-modern paradigm, in the new proposal the *afin* and the *gbagede* are returned to the proper place. Unlike, modernism and the reaction against it, this proposal is based on the belief that we can learn from the past and that there are certain universal, natural and enduring principles that though, are conventionally evolved, but true for all ages. These principles are evident in the coherent "logic and language of morals" and the contents are accessible to the intellect through familiarization with the sort or sorts or kind or kinds of forms. This "logic and language of morals" leads to what Edmund Burke referred to as "wisdom without reflection".²¹

The new proposal is thus based on the normative standards of *ilu alade*. The *ori*-cone and *ade* reappears here as a decorative tower above the central courtyard and a *iwa*-cross plan. On the four sides of the courtyard are four pyramidal blocks each with a pyramidal-glass-covered courtyard as well. Each is a sort of a pyramid. The fusion of the cone and the *olori-merin* schemata lead to the pyramid, which would also be easier to construct. While all are connected together around the courtyard, three of them are well integrated and the fourth separate from them is a civic section specifically created as human development center for the town. This fourth section is opened to the *gbagede*. Each of the three units are specifically for the three political forms clearly defined in the Yoruba *afin* architecture and in Afolabi Ojo's book; *Yoruba Palace* as: residential, administrative and socio-cultural functions.

The whole "logic and language of morals" idea is evident in the vast cultural heritage, in the proverbs and urban realities, but is jealously protected by the body of knowledge referred to as *Ifa*. I have only built the concept on it as a Chinese architect may do as well to *Fengshui*, or a European or a North American may be inspired by the Greco-Roman tradition. My premise is simple; it is about "philosophical analogy" [borrowing from Burke]. To be inspired

by a source does not mean one must worship the source even when some people do. *Ifa* embodies a "logic and language of morals" applicable to all religions and peoples. This is why the Yoruba *ilu* is very vibrant and rich with diverse peoples of disparate religions.

The traditional Yoruba architecture based on the courtyard system as the Chinese was organic in nature. The dwelling grew as the dweller grew organically. This is no more when communalism of *agbo-ile* [the compound] had fragmented after the long wars into detached housing system encouraged by individualism. Going back to *adgbo-ile* is almost impossible accept in the arrangement of interconnected house blocks, which I hope to experiment with. It is therefore better to adopt the detached system while still holding on to the vernacular architecture. For the *afin*, this lead to the idea of a mandalas, unity of all things with the *olori-merin* schemata within the circle, like the Yoruba cross within the circle of the *ifa* board or St. John's vision of new Jerusalem, the foursquare city with entrances on the four sides. [see sketches]

In the proposed program, only the *afin* in Yorubaland is to be so constructed, the chiefs' dwelling with varied symbolism could be based on one pyramidal block out of the four within the *afin*. The idea is to preserve the significant appearance and produce a structure of timeless character.

I got married on the 27th of November. My wife, a friend, Seyi Awogbile and I spent our honeymoon making the model of the *afin*. On the 1st of December Segun Adefila, the Crown Troupe of Africa, some of my friends, my wife and I headed for Otan Ayegbaju with the model. On the 2nd of December before the symbolic the foundation laying ceremony which no representative of the OAPU attended, His Highness, *Owa* and many of his chiefs and some indigenes after they had seen the architectural model *afin*, were entertained with the *Ori fe' iwadance* drama. The next twenty minutes were very wonderful for us all as we all experienced an unprecedented unity of minds, what W.H. Auden probably referred to as "that Immortal Type Commonwealth." This act one way or the other furthered recommitments to the *afin* project by the traditional institution.



The Orifewa Dance Drama, the poetic taking of 'measure', 2 December 2004 at the symbolic foundation-laying ceremony.

After the fund raising, a committee comprising the representatives of OAPU and the traditional institution. Many of the members of this committee are well known to my parents and I. In fact, the chairman of the committee, Deacon Olu Ogunleye is a close relation of mine. About 4 meetings were organized, on 15th of January 2005, 12th and 26th of February and 12th of March 2005 respectively. I attended the last three. The committee approved the design on the 12th of February and it was agreed that the actual laying of the foundation be done on the 28th of February 2005. To this end we set out to the excavation of the earth for the strip foundation on the 24th of February. On the 27th, His Highness, *Owat* told me that the OAPU Vice President and the Public Relation Officer, Mr Lasun Lanlehin earlier in the day, visited him and instructed him that the construction is to be stopped. The reason given is that, the OAPU had decided that the *afin* design submitted by Architect Aina should be looked into. He lamented that if he had money he would have continued with the construction. He also warned me that I should not hold anything against those who may have opposed my ideas. They do what they do because of their level of understanding. We should pray for them so that they may see what we see. The foundation laying ceremony is to be continued but work would stop after.



*His Highness
Owa Olotan, His
chiefs and local
residents at the
symbolic foundation-
laying ceremony,
2 December 2004.*

The ceremony went as planned, the *Owa* in council [with all the traditional chiefs], the members of the building committee and the indigenes. Also Christians, Muslims and traditional priests said prayers. On the 12th of March, in a very short meeting with two executives and one representative of the OAPU, a Chief, His Highness, *Owa* and I, it was decided that the project should be stopped until further notice. The cone lies on its side, rolling around a spot, and the King is been taken to the "guillotine" as they once did in England, later in France and then everywhere!

There are so many questions that are being asked, one of which is, why was I paid to make the model when my design would be thrown out of the window? The Yoruba say, when a child falls, he looks forward, but the wise would look backward. What is important is that one should learn from all circumstances. That is why the notion of "One World, Many Traditions"²² would for ever remain viable, so that certain universal principles may find relevance elsewhere, when it is reject by the descendants of those who discovered it. The ultimate aim as perfectly stated by His Highness the Aga Khan; "what we are trying to achieve in this environment... is not only ours. It is something we want to share with the whole world, not as an exercise in pride or vanity, but because of our belief that the means at our disposal may allow us to sharpen issues, to discover solutions for all mankind to use and understand".²³

Is politics more important than architecture? And is it true that the best city, the Utopia, exist only in speech? For me the answer to both questions is yes. If I had political power, the *afin* would have been finished by now and also, the only way to keep the project alive is only through speech. For this very reason, Segun Adefila and I named our babies *Orifewa* [*ori* marries *iwa*]. Each time she cries, my wife and I often put her on the shoulder, sing and dance a stanza or two of the Adefila's *Ori fe'wa* dance drama:

Bi Ori ba fe' iwa. [If *Ori* marries *Iwa*]

Bi Iwa ba fe ori [And *Iwa* marries *Ori*]

Aiye a gun rege [The earth would be livable]

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