

Chapter 19

Consumption of Landed Properties in Africa: The Mediating Role of Culture

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ABSTRACT

This chapter demonstrates the impact of ethnic entombment practices on the consumption of housing market in a heterogeneous society. It illustrates the dynamics in relationships, either in inter-family interactions or exchanges between 'the living and the dead'. This signifies an expanded traditional frontiers of stakeholders (e.g., marketers and governments) in the negotiation of consumption in the market. Particularly, the chapter analyses how circumstances of customs and belief systems impact the supply of houses and consequent deterioration of neighbourhoods (e.g., slumming). It draws on narratives gathered from in-depth interviews conducted with eleven informants/gatekeepers undertaken in a large metropolitan city in the South-West region of Nigeria. Findings reveal the interchange between culture and consumption in housing market and how the affective potentiality of a tradition initiates emotive configurations that shape a community's housing stock aesthetic exposition.

INTRODUCTION

Whilst it is not a new knowledge that culture impacts consumption, the intersection of materiality with rituals and its transformative role in this respect is continually a matter of interest to marketers and social scientists. The organisation, operations, and outcomes of marketing are profoundly influenced by contextual customs and traditions. As suggested by Ghemawat (2007), knowledge of and embedding in local context remains a key success element. Essentially, the cognisance of cultural differences among groups informs the wisdom that marketing cannot follow a uniformly predicted path conceptually.

Yet, common to people across regional, lingual, and religious divides are educed emotions that become part of a shared repertoire. This is evidenced in the similarity of stories articulated, as well as the commonality of metaphors (Kane, 2001) that are used (e.g. graveyards, markings, and sacrifice) in

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describing experiences and encounters. Death and the consequent burial rites associated with it provide a metaphoric articulation of such experiences and encounters. There are legal, ethical, financial, environmental, commercial, and social implications, around the management of death, which also include the disposition of possessions through wills, the environmental effects of burial practices and the implications of cryogenic storage (Dobscha, 2012). Researchers (e.g. Walter, 1999) have studied specific ways in which the dead and the living 'cohabit' in groups, the preservation of "a sense of continuity and ancestry, and 'police the grieving' by establishing norms for the feelings and behaviors of survivors" (Neimeyer, Prigerson, & Davies, 2002, p. 237). In the same vein, Chronis (2006) asserts that exhibited objects act as tangible mnemonic devices and radiate perceptions of cultural continuity due to their multi-sensory bodily associations and ritualistic performances in the everyday life of the consumers. Consequently, funeral rites (Bonsu & Belk, 2003), heritage exhibitions (Chronis, 2006), and consecrated landscapes (Chronis, Arnould, & Hampton, 2012) have been argued to generate an opportunity to become habituated.

Recently, Dobscha (2012) identified two main research areas at an ACR (Advances in Consumer Research) roundtable on research on death and consumer behavior. The first involves the ritual aspects of death (e.g., Bonsu & Belk, 2003; O'Donohoe & Turley, 2005) and the second relates to "identity and meaning made of death by the dead, the dying, and the living" (e.g., Neimeyer, 2000; Arndt, Solomon, Kasser, & Sheldon, 2004) (p. 1098). In speaking to the second theme, this chapter is motivated, using funerary practices, to investigate how cultural excitements and sensitivities collaborate to impact and penetrate ethnic housing markets and stock, and in the process, probe the advent of slum and slumming conditions in a non-Western society. Therefore, the extent to which the complexities of family relationship and the cultural context contribute to urban housing deterioration and neighbourhood slums is interrogated in order to amplify our knowledge of ethnic housing market dynamics. This is imperative given that "researchers need to understand the scale, scope and dynamics around the development and growth of informal/slum areas" (UN-HABITAT, 2010, p. 73).

Furthermore, the set task is buoyed by the awareness that sociocultural factors (i.e. ethnic specific cultural attributes) rarely command attention (at least in main-stream academic journals) in relation to the market of housing in Nigeria. To fill this gap, the cultural imperatives of the Yoruba people of South-West Nigeria, which include kinship and avoidance relationships, beliefs in ancestral mythology, and interment practices are examined as contextual frame. In essence, the fundamental question within this research frame can be expressed as follows: How does an ethnic funerary practices and family dynamics contribute to the degeneration of housing stock in a suburban area? The study is structured into six sections: Contextual analysis; Theoretical framework; Methodology; Findings and analysis, Discussion; Summary and implications.

CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

This chapter explores a contextual framework based on a cultural embeddedness perspective on ethnic marketing in a developing society. The framework emphasises how the characteristics of tradition and family systems (e.g. transitions, culture, values, norms, and resources) can impact marketing system and procedures with consequent effects on the physical environment. Issues around housing market and culture are appraised in this section.

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