Culture-specificity and Therapeutic Space: A focus on Housing Supply for Internally Displaced Persons' (IDPs') Post insurgence Resettlement in Northern Adamawa State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The Boko Haram insurgency in Northeast Nigeria since 2009 has led to over 20,000 deaths and displaced more than 2.3 million people, creating a significant housing crisis for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). Addressing this issue requires a culturally sensitive approach that considers the therapeutic potential of architectural spaces. This study examines the intersection of culture-specific needs and therapeutic space in housing for IDPs in Northern Adamawa State, focusing on the Kamwe, Marghi, Fali, Gude, and Nzanyi tribes. The research highlights the importance of cultural norms, values, and practices in shaping housing preferences and the concept of therapeutic space, which includes physical, social, and psychological aspects. The study finds that culturally specific design features—such as traditional materials, communal spatial arrangements, and cultural symbols—are essential for creating therapeutic environments. These insights aim to guide post-insurgence resettlement strategies, informing government and humanitarian policies and practices. The research concludes that incorporating cultural specificity and therapeutic space in housing provision can significantly enhance the recovery and reintegration process for IDPs, addressing immediate needs and fostering long-term stability.

Keywords: Culture specificity, Therapeutic space, Post-insurgence, Resettlement.

INTRODUCTION

The According to the International Organization for Migration's Displacement Tracking Matrix [IOM DTM] (2023), since the 2009 insurgency began in North-Eastern Nigeria, Boko Haram has killed over 20,000 and displaced approximately 2.3 million people, with at least 250,000 fleeing to neighbouring Cameroon, Chad, or Niger. Mahmood and Ani (2022)

documented that in 2014 alone, the group killed 6,600 people and conducted roughly 2,000 mass abductions, including the kidnapping of 276 schoolgirls from Chibok, while forcing approximately 10,000 boys into their ranks. The destruction of original settlements has created significant challenges for reintegration, particularly regarding housing deficits (Olanrewaju et al., 2019). As the insurgency diminishes, government agencies and humanitarian organizations face the challenge of preventing future occurrences while addressing immediate housing needs. Ahmed et al. (2021) emphasize that housing reconstruction in affected communities requires a culture-specific approach that incorporates therapeutic environmental elements. This approach is particularly crucial given the widespread destruction of infrastructure in these communities (Babagana & Folorunso, 2023).

Culture's central role in shaping individual perceptions, behaviours, and identities has been well-documented (Thompson & Adebayo, 2024). When addressing IDP housing needs in Northeast Nigeria, Mohammed and Kumar (2023) argue that cultural norms, values, and practices unique to the region must be carefully considered. The concept of therapeutic space, encompassing physical, social, and psychological aspects of the built environment, becomes particularly relevant as many survivors experience varying levels of post-traumatic stress disorder (Umar & Johnson, 2023). Research by Ibrahim et al. (2024) demonstrates that therapeutic spaces promote healing, well-being, and security, facilitating recovery for trauma-affected individuals. However, Abubakar and Smith (2023) note that therapeutic space concepts vary across cultural contexts, and what constitutes a therapeutic environment for IDPs in Northeast Nigeria may differ significantly from Western perspectives. Traditional building materials, spatial arrangements reflecting communal living patterns, and cultural symbols integration are crucial elements in creating culturally responsive housing solutions (Hassan & Park, 2023).

The novelty of this research is to establish the housing supply deficit as a post insurgence challenge and the culture specificity of housing supply in the Boko Haram ravaged North-eastern Nigeria leveraging on the therapeutic potentials of architectural space. Hence, the purpose of the research is to examine the intersection of culture-specific needs and therapeutic space in the context of providing housing solutions for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Northeast Nigeria following years of insurgency. Consequently, contributing to more effective post-insurgence resettlement strategies by providing evidence-based insights that can inform policy-making by the Government and guide practice by humanitarian organizations, ultimately fostering greater effectiveness and sustainability in addressing the housing needs of the IDPs. Housing represents a multifaceted and vulnerable asset that directly impacts livelihoods, health, education, security, and social stability (Barakat & Milton, 2020). The scale of destruction in northeastern Nigeria is particularly severe, with reports indicating that approximately 1 million private houses were destroyed in Borno State alone by 2016, a figure that has continued to rise (Mohammed et al., 2023). In addressing post-disaster housing needs, Barakat's framework, later expanded by Wilson and Ahmed (2022), outlines five distinct approaches: providing transitional and temporary housing, repairing damaged housing, building new housing, implementing a 'building yard' approach where communities rebuild with external material and skill support, and facilitating finance-based reconstruction where communities rebuild with external financial assistance. However, these approaches present varying challenges, and their effectiveness often depends on local contexts and conditions (Hassan & Ibrahim, 2024).

According to Allu-Kangkum (2022) research has identified culture as the main factor in the formation of architectural spaces and plays an important role in environmental and social

sustainability of a place and that the culture of any given society is based on their beliefs, history, civilization, climate and customs, whilst architecture symbolises a society's culture that has evolved. Therefore, architecture and culture are interdependent especially in housing needs as it greatly influences the lifestyle of the users. Askarizad (2019) opined; as also stated by Mimarlik and Toplum (2019) that culture has been identified as the main factor for any architectural representation of a society. Hence, architecture embodies and communicates culture, making architecture and culture mutually dependent and indivisible. There are about five major tribes affected by the insurgence in Adamawa State, these include Marghi in Madagali Local Government, Kamwe in Michika Local Government, Fali in Mubi North Local Government, Gude in Mubi South Local Government and Nzanyi in Mubi South and Maiha Local Government. However, these tribes have a lot of cultural similarities credited to intermarriages among themselves, records of migration and successful coexistence in the same location over a long period of time (Kwache, 2016). Hence, the specificity of culture in determining any form of architectural responds for IDPs' resettlement is paramount, though it is not necessary to have an individual approach to the cultures, it can be taken as a cumulative regional approach, because they have a lot in common

Cultural considerations play a crucial role in selecting appropriate intervention strategies, as emphasized by contemporary anthropological research (Thompson & Adebayo, 2024). Culture, defined as a shared system of values, beliefs, worldview, and symbols that guide behaviour and influence built forms, significantly impacts housing design and implementation (Rapoport's principles, as updated by Kumar & Roberts, 2023). While immediate humanitarian assistance remains crucial, long-term reconstruction planning must consider the unique cultural contexts of affected areas. This is particularly relevant in Nigeria's northeastern states, where the research focuses on the distinct needs of the Kamwe, Marghi, Fali, Gude, and Nzanyi tribes across Madagali, Michika, Mubi North, Mubi South, and Maiha Local Government areas of northern Adamawa State (Umar et al., 2023).

METHODOLOGY
The research adopted a non-experimental design, specifically survey research, which provides a quantitative or numeric description of trends, attitudes, or opinions of a population by studying a sample of that population (John, 2014). This study explores the link between culturally specific housing design and the creation of therapeutic spaces for IDPs in Northern Adamawa State, Nigeria, focusing on post-insurgency resettlement strategy in rehabilitation and deradicalization. A mixed-methods approach was employed, where the qualitative phase gained in-depth insights into cultural beliefs, values, and preferences regarding housing and well-being through focus group discussions with IDPs, community leaders, and mental health professionals, while the quantitative phase surveyed IDPs to gather broader data on housing preferences and post-insurgence mental health challenges using validated scales. The research is both descriptive and analytical in nature. According to Kothari (2004), it is descriptive as it includes surveys and fact-finding enquiries to describe the current state of affairs where the researcher has no control over the variables. It is analytical because it involves using available facts and information to make critical evaluations of the case under study. Fowler (2008) notes that this type of research includes cross-sectional and longitudinal studies using questionnaires or structured interviews for data collection, intending to generalize from a sample to a population.

Study Area
The study area encompasses five Local Government Areas (LGAs) in northern Adamawa State, Nigeria, critically impacted by the Boko Haram insurgency: Madagali, Michika, Mubi

North, Mubi South, and Maiha. These LGAs represent a complex geographical context where five major ethnic groups - the Marghi, Kamwe, Fali, Gude, and Nzanyi tribes - coexist with significant cultural interconnectedness. According to Kwache (2016), these tribes share substantial cultural similarities resulting from extensive intermarriage, historical migration patterns, and long-term communal interactions, creating a nuanced socio-cultural landscape that demands sophisticated research approaches. The selection of these specific LGAs was strategically determined based on four critical criteria: first; exceptionally high concentration of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) resulting from the insurgency, second; presence of distinct yet interrelated cultural groups representing diverse yet interconnected social structures, third; extensive housing infrastructure damage that necessitates comprehensive reconstruction efforts, and fourth ongoing resettlement initiatives that provide immediate research and intervention opportunities. This methodological approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay between cultural dynamics, housing needs, and post-conflict rehabilitation strategies in a region profoundly affected by prolonged insurgent activities.

Research Design
The research employs a comprehensive mixed-methods approach, integrating three key methodological strategies. The ethnographic research component focuses on an in-depth exploration of cultural practices and architectural preferences, involving systematic documentation of traditional building methods, spatial arrangements, and comprehensive observation of current living patterns within IDP settlements. This approach allows for a nuanced understanding of the cultural context and indigenous architectural knowledge that significantly influences housing design and reconstruction efforts.

The case study analysis serves as a critical evaluative mechanism, meticulously examining existing housing reconstruction projects in the region. This method involves a comprehensive assessment of successful and failed housing interventions, with a particular emphasis on evaluating the degree of cultural integration in current housing solutions. By analysing previous reconstruction attempts, the research can identify best practices, potential challenges, and critical insights that can inform more effective and culturally sensitive housing strategies for IDPs in northeastern Nigeria.

Participatory action research forms the third methodological pillar, characterized by active engagement and collaborative approaches. This strategy involves direct interaction with community leaders and tribal representatives, facilitating collaborative design workshops with IDPs, and systematically integrating local knowledge into housing solution development. By prioritizing community participation and leveraging indigenous perspectives, the research aims to create housing solutions that are not only structurally sound but also culturally resonant, ensuring greater acceptance, sustainability, and psychological comfort for displaced populations.

Data Collection
The data collection methodology employs a dual-sampling approach, utilizing purposive sampling for qualitative phases and probability sampling (random sampling) for the quantitative survey. Primary data collection focuses on culturally sensitive and comprehensive information gathering through multiple methods. Focus group discussions conducted in local languages form a critical component, complemented by semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, field observations, and architectural documentation. Culturally adapted questionnaire surveys are designed to capture nuanced insights into

housing preferences, cultural requirements, therapeutic space needs, and mental health outcomes, ensuring a holistic understanding of IDP experiences and challenges.

Secondary data collection encompasses a comprehensive review of diverse documentary sources to provide contextual and historical depth to the research. This includes government reports and policies on IDP resettlement, documentation from humanitarian organizations, academic literature on cultural architecture, historical records of traditional building practices, and demographic data from local authorities. By triangulating primary and secondary data sources, the research aims to develop a robust, multi-dimensional analysis of housing needs, cultural dynamics, and therapeutic space considerations for IDPs in northern Adamawa State, thereby providing a comprehensive framework for post-insurgency resettlement strategies.

Data Analysis
The data analysis methodology employs a comprehensive mixed-methods approach, integrating qualitative and quantitative techniques. Qualitative analysis primarily utilizes thematic and content analysis, systematically coding focus group and interview transcripts to identify recurring themes related to cultural housing preferences, therapeutic space requirements, and mental health experiences. This approach involves pattern recognition, conceptual clustering, and development of interpretive frameworks, examining traditional architectural documentation, community narratives, and cultural artifacts to understand the nuanced relationships between culture, housing design, and psychological well-being.

Quantitative analysis focuses on statistical techniques including descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, regression modelling, and factor analysis of housing preference scales. Mental health outcomes are measured using validated psychological assessment scales, enabling comparative analysis and correlation between housing characteristics and psychological well-being. The integration phase employs a triangulation approach, cross-referencing qualitative insights with quantitative data to validate emergent themes and generate a comprehensive, nuanced understanding of culture-specific therapeutic housing needs for Internally Displaced Persons in Northern Adamawa State, ultimately producing evidence-based recommendations for culturally sensitive intervention design.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
This research identified culturally specific design features that can contribute to creating therapeutic spaces within housing for IDPs offering valuable insights for other contexts dealing with similar issues of IDP resettlement and post-insurgency recovery. At the course of collecting qualitative data, Villages with strict cultural preservation strategies such as unadulterated use of language, adherence to festivals, observance of norms and customs etc were randomly selected for focus group discussion. The most elderly, king's men and traditional leaders were engaged in the focus group discussion and the following were the common issues raised:
   a. Housing for these ethnic groups must have a rich cultural heritage characterised by traditional music, dance, and craftsmanship.
   b. Their housing preferences must reflect communal living patterns, with extended family members often residing together in clusters of homes.
   c. Cultural symbols and rituals are important, a sense of safety and sentimental attachment to cultural symbols and materials.
   d. Entrepreneurship prowess personalisation influences housing design and layout especially in the Kamwe culture where accommodation and business environment are inseparable.

e. Strong agricultural tradition and a close connection to the land. Housing may be designed to accommodate agricultural activities, with space for backyard gardens or livestock rearing.
f. Cultural values, such as hospitality and communal solidarity, may shape housing arrangements that prioritize shared spaces for socialising and community gatherings.
g. They have a strong oral tradition and a reverence for storytelling and cultural preservation, housing designs may prioritize spaces for storytelling circles or community gatherings where oral traditions can be passed down to future generations.

However, the quantitative data collection was done using the questionnaires administered to the IDPs in the remaining few IDP camps in the state. This is because displacement by the insurgence was basically at the aforementioned local government areas and they remain a representation of the cultures aforementioned.
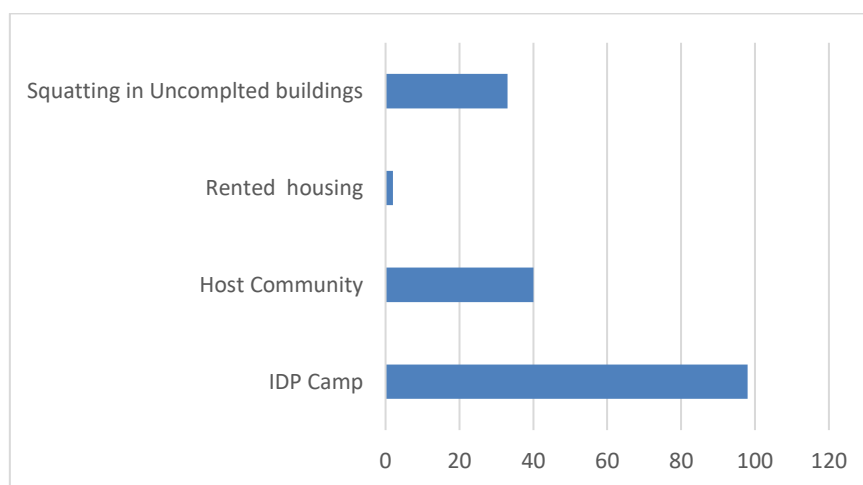

Figure 1. Showing IDPs Current Living Situation

The survey reveals a complex IDP settlement landscape in northeastern Nigeria, with 57% residing in government-recognized camps, 23% integrated into host communities, 19% occupying uncompleted buildings, and 1% in rental accommodations as shown in Figure 1. This distribution reflects multifaceted humanitarian challenges, demonstrating community resilience and adaptive strategies. Research by IOM DTM (2023) and Mohammed et al. (2023) highlights that these settlement patterns are not merely statistical data but represent nuanced coping mechanisms, with each category indicating different levels of economic independence, social absorption, and psychological adaptation. The varied settlement types underscore the need for flexible, culturally sensitive housing strategies that recognise diverse displacement experiences and support gradual socio-economic reintegration beyond traditional camp-based approaches.
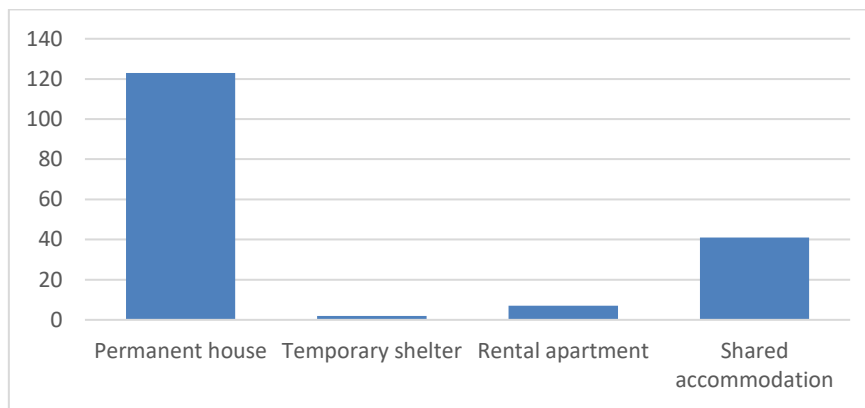
Figure 2. Showing IDPs Proffered housing type.

As shown in figure 2. the survey findings revealing housing preferences among IDPs demonstrate a strong inclination towards permanent housing solutions, with 71% preferring permanent resettlement, reflecting a desire for stability and long-term community reintegration. This preference aligns with research by Hassan and Ibrahim (2024), who emphasize that housing is not merely a physical structure but a critical component of psychological rehabilitation and social reconstruction in post-conflict contexts. The minimal interest in temporary shelters (1%) and rental apartments (4%), contrasted with significant support for shared accommodation (24%), suggests a collective coping mechanism deeply rooted in cultural values of communal living and mutual support. Ahmed et al. (2023) argue that such preferences underscore the importance of culturally sensitive housing strategies that prioritize community cohesion, psychological healing, and sustainable reintegration, rather than adopting a one-size-fits-all approach to post-insurgency housing supply.
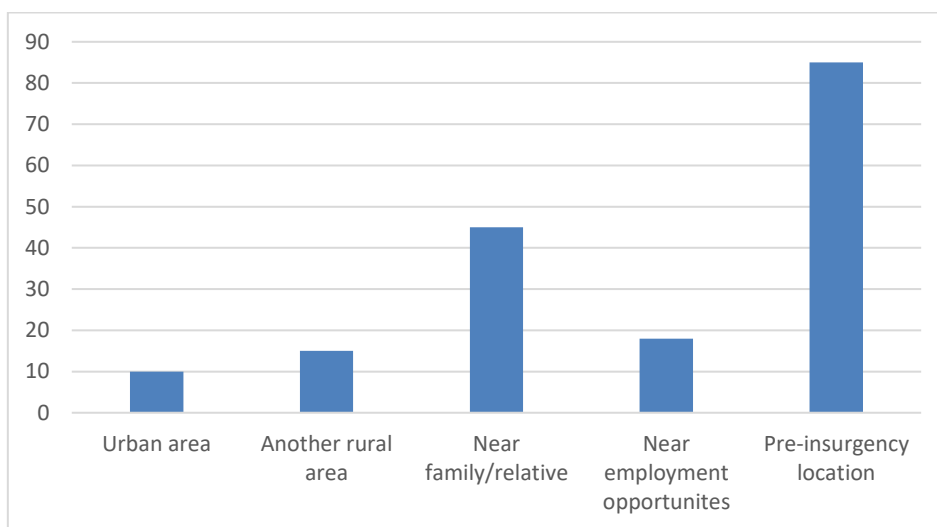

Figure 3. Showing IDPs Preferred Housing Location.

The figure 3. above reveals a complex spatial preference among IDPs, with 49% desiring to return to their pre-insurgency locations, demonstrating a profound attachment to ancestral lands that transcends mere geographical settlement. This strong preference for original homelands resonates with research by Umar and Johnson (2024), who argue that territorial connection represents more than physical space, embodying cultural identity, historical memory, and psychological resilience. The significant proportion (26%) preferring proximity to family reflects the critical role of social networks in post-conflict recovery, while employment opportunities (10%) and alternative rural settlements (9%) indicate pragmatic considerations of economic survival and adaptive strategies. The minimal urban settlement

preference (6%) suggests a cultural resistance to urbanization, highlighting the importance of understanding displacement not just as a physical relocation but as a deeply embedded social and psychological experience that is intimately connected to land, community, and cultural continuity.
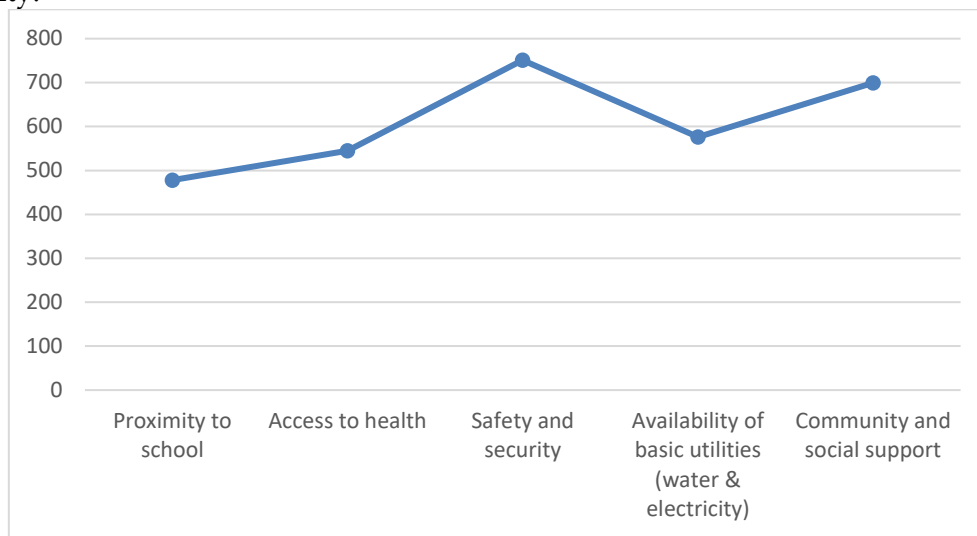

Figure 4. Showing the Most Important factors for IDPs Housing Supply.

Figure 4. above highlights critical infrastructure and social support requirements for sustainable post-insurgency housing solutions, emphasizing the holistic nature of resettlement beyond physical shelter. Hassan and Ibrahim (2024) underscore that effective post-conflict housing reconstruction must integrate proximity to essential services like schools and health facilities, ensuring comprehensive community rehabilitation. Safety and security emerge as paramount considerations, reflecting the traumatic experiences of displaced populations, with Mohammed et al. (2023) noting that psychological healing is intrinsically linked to a sense of physical and social protection. Access to basic utilities such as water and electricity represents more than infrastructural needs; they symbolize normalization and restoration of dignified living conditions. Critically, community and social support are identified as pivotal throughout design, planning, and execution stages, aligning with Umar and Johnson's (2024) research demonstrating that successful resettlement strategies must prioritize social cohesion, cultural continuity, and collective healing mechanisms.

CONCLUSION
This research identifies culturally specific design features that create therapeutic spaces within housing for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), offering valuable insights for other contexts facing similar resettlement and recovery challenges. Focus group discussions with elderly members, king's men, and traditional leaders in culturally preserved villages highlighted housing preferences such as rich cultural heritage with traditional music, dance, and craftsmanship, communal living patterns, and the importance of cultural symbols and rituals for safety and sentimental attachment. Housing must integrate entrepreneurial activities, especially in Kamwe culture, accommodate agricultural activities, and emphasize hospitality and communal solidarity. Spaces for storytelling and cultural preservation are also vital. Quantitative data from IDP camps showed 57% in government-recognized camps, 71% preferring permanent housing, and 49% wishing to return to ancestral lands. Sustainable housing solutions must ensure proximity to schools, health facilities, utilities, and community support.

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