

THE NIGERIAN ARCHITECTURE: THE TREND IN HOUSING DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

This paper deals with the dynamics and challenges of Nigerian architecture in practice. The focus is on the trend and development of housing forms in Nigerian cities, the forces that have shaped and patterned their evolution overtime. The elements of this research were based on oral interviews and examination of information from existing records. Drawing on the divergent example of the transition from traditional to modern urban housing forms in post colonial Nigeria, the paper reveals that social changes, particularly the shift from traditional community, family values to more western ways of life, have had variegated impact on buildings and residential layouts. One of these is the 'inhabitant' alienated from the urban environment and the seeming identification with home place of origin outside the city. While this situation poses a major challenge to the practice of architecture, professional planning practice on the other hand seems to have demonstrated little interest in what people think or feel about places. The paper concludes by suggesting ways to promote the practice of contemporary Architecture and planning to enhance communal living in Nigeria.

Key words: Architecture, Forms, Housing, Modern, Traditional, Values

INTRODUCTION

The idea of housing came as an objective of fulfilling one of the basic needs of man principally in the provision of shelter, security and comfort. In the practical establishment of homes, the planning and construction takes a pattern or form, which varies from society to society and from country to country. Consequently, the form housing chosen or built offers a direct insight into the study of various cultures and societies of the people. Nigeria as a nation for example is a heterogeneous society comprising of ethno-geographical region like the north, middle belt, east, west and south. Each of these regions has its own culture and as such exhibits peculiar housing form. Consequently upon the above, the Nigerian traditional architecture differs not only temporarily but also spatially and from one period to another. The later being obviously due to trend of civilization, cultural infiltration and technological advancement. It is universal that certain architecture is identified with certain group of people either as a state or nation. For example, there is the Chinese architecture, the American, the early Egyptian, the Greek, the Roman and so on. Within this sphere of national architecture, there exists architecture of specific functions. Consequently, the Chinese pyramidal cake-form is a depiction of temples whereas the ordinary linear design is reserved for housing, while in America the simple wooden architecture is peculiar cottage buildings.

Architecture in this dimension could be seen as art of design buildings and structures for convenient human habitation and utilization, considering such factors as the variation in norms and social values for the attainment of social comfort in different societies. The tendency in exhibiting these values and the character of life coupled with factors like the materials available and the use of building, significantly suggest the king of design for the function in this society. The architecture evolved depicts the language the society in question can understand. A good architecture must satisfy a trinity of requirements in a user – his physical needs (satisfactory body reaction of feeling), his emotional needs (aesthetic and psychological) and his intellectual needs (logic, orderliness and flawlessness); hence the appeal to architecture to be both art and science (Astrolabe, 2002). Architecture designs and builds or fabricates, the former a process and the later a product, which are both significant in housing development. Highlighting the various housing forms with respect to the practice of architecture is the objective of this study. The paper also points out the gains and shortfall of modern architecture in Nigeria.

HOUSING DEVELOPMENT: THE EVOLUTION PHENOMENON

The evolution of architecture can be trace back to the late Stone Age. As the hunter gatherers of that age move about in search of food, they built the earliest temporary structures that appeared in archeological record. Human shelter was at first simple and perhaps lasted only a few days or months. Over time however, even temporary structures evolved into highly reformed forms. Gradually, more durable structures began to appear, particularly after the advent of agriculture when people began to stay for longer periods in one

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location. Thus shelter began to expand from mere dwellings, to serve other more specialized functions such as food storage, commerce, religious ceremonies, and festival and so on. Structures began to have symbolic as well functional values; these became possible as the society evolved. Societal evolution also affected nature of building materials used as there was a departure from leaves, reeds and sticks which characterized early buildings to more durable materials such as clay, timber, stone, etc.

With passage of time, subsequent development in the intellectual and social ability of man took place. The development of man's inherent ability (his instincts) led him to the understanding of the social, political and economic consequences of the elements of nature within his sphere of existence. This subsequently led him to the assumption of the position of his environment. Consequently, there the quest for master's abode which gave birth to the question of housing; a phenomenon so vital to our lives, second only to food.

METHODOLOGY

Information was collected from the core of the city, which had a lot of colonial influences as well as from the peri-urban areas regarding their development and the forces that shaped them overtime. The elements, which inform this write up were compiled into physical elements, territorial, social interaction, individual and societal relationships. Data collection was effected in two stages. The first stage involved interview of elders, traders, city administrators and researchers in the field of study concerning housing form and the trend of development. The second stage covered the examination of information from existing records particularly of growth of settlements and population movements during the colonial era. It was also possible to obtain information on the design philosophy of various traditional architectural styles prevalent in Nigerian urban centers. This information was documented in form of photographs and sketches of compounds.

ANALYSIS OF HOUSING FORMS AND DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

Different traditional housing forms are identified with different regions in Nigeria. These housing forms are the resultant effects of the quest for a rational abode for man as influenced by culture, religion, climate, urbanization, and recently professionalism.

A building is a dwelling house not because of its size, shape, appearance, location or material components but because of the purpose which include among other things day-to-day activities of the inhabitants; resting, sleeping and family gathering. Grimes (1976) postulated that housing not only provides shelter for a family but also serves as a center for its total residential environment, as a focus of economic activities, as a symbol of achievement and social acceptance and as an element of urban and income distribution. This has been largely affected by social changes particularly the shift from traditional community family values to western ways of life. In view of the above observations, the various housing forms prominent in Nigeria urban centers can be discussed under the traditional architecture with varying characteristics from one region to another. Traditional architecture is quite different from indigenous architecture. That which is traditional refers to what has been handed over from generation to generation or what has come to be accepted and practiced whereas what is indigenous to a people is what has been developed by their own experience and self expressions. This distinction is necessary because what is sometimes handed down may not have been developed from the cultural milieu of the people.

ARCHITECTURE IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

In Northern Nigeria, two styles of architecture have been identified in the area of housing in the traditional setting. The first is the Hausa homestead, which is the dominant and more stable architecture. The second is the Fulani nomadic shelter, which at best can be referred to as tents. They are often constructed of impermanent materials like reeds, leafages and elephant grasses in very simple techniques due to frequency of mobility with change in seasons (Hussaini, 1999). The housing form has been influenced by climatic, religious and socio-cultural factors of the environment. According to Friedrich (1982), Islam had no doubt some influence on the layout of compounds (see figure 4) particularly in the urban areas of Hausa land. Saleh (1995) argued that the courtyard house thus identified with this architecture regarded today as almost synonymous with the "Muslim house" was in existence long before Islam made its appearance on the Arabian Peninsula in the 7th Century AD. Other non-religious factors such as building materials, techniques and skills available to communities, their need for security, and scarcity of land especially in urban centers have contributed to the final shape of these courtyard houses.

ARCHITECTURE OF THE MIDDLE BELT

In the middle belt, the architecture comprises of the traditional architecture of the Tivs, Igalas, the Taroks, Beroms (see figure 1), Ngas, Kutep, the Bajus and so on. The various styles in this belt seemingly have common features in their curvilinear housing forms but noticeable differences in their housing pattern specifically in compound setting and techniques of construction. The middle belt-housing plan generally assumes a concentric pattern and the outer ring forms the base for the load bearing timber columns while the inner circle is for the walls. In a nutshell the general house form for the middle belt architecture has been influenced by external factors as has been noticed with modern trend recently. The new trend according to Agida in Awotona (1986) is the rectilinear forms I imitation of colonial buildings such as the churches, clinics, courthouses and residences. The rectangular form is thus associated with modernism, which has given rise to two housing forms as can be seen in the region today. First, the curvilinear plan, free standing, walled with mud, thatched roof, and arrangement in cluster of buildings around a compound and secondly, there is a rectilinear plan, free standing, and hipped roof, with walls of mud. This also could form a cluster of arrangement of dwelling units around a courtyard. In this region according to Awotona (1986), there is decrease in wind strength, an increase in rainfall and fairly thicker vegetation when compared to the north.

ARCHITECTURE IN WESTERN NIGERIA

The forms in western Nigeria comprise the architecture of the Yoruba and Benin traditional buildings. According to Awotona (1986), the Yoruba and the Benin housing forms have a lot in common; the construction materials, courtyard, impluvia and so on. The noticeable housing in this region is rectilinear, (see figure 3) which incorporates courtyards for every family set up. Friedrich (1986) observed that most Yoruba traditional compounds can be grouped into two categories: first is the compound built around a central hall or corridor to accommodate a plurality of polygamous families linked together by agnatic relations of senior male members. Every compound tended to show an identical basic form and framework being based set of adult males whose common agnatic decent furnished their inner organization and moral unity.

ARCHITECTURE IN EASTERN NIGERIA

In the eastern part of Nigeria where the Igbos are dominant tribe, only a few architectural features can be accepted as typical for the entire Igbo land: the rectangular plan of dwellings, which are without windows, the verandah in front of the houses and universal use of the forked posts to carry the roofs (Dmochowski, 1990). Apart from dwelling, other common features of Igbo architecture as observed by Dmochowski (1990) were: massive compound gates, meeting houses, shrines and two or three storey semi-defensive buildings called Obuna Enu. Each compound is fenced with only one entrance and exit. There are roofs made with such exquisite skill that their texture of palm ribs and grasses serves by itself as an architectural adornment. Various rooms, stores and a kitchen normally surround the impluvium. Normally, the men's section is separated from the women and children section is grouped together. The materials for construction used in Igbo land are mud, hardwood timber, palm leaves and midribs, bush twines and pawpaw trunks for constructing a drain for the impluvium.

ANALYSIS OF MODERN ARCHITECTURE IN NIGERIA: THE GAINS AND SHORTFALL

What we now have as modern architecture or contemporary Nigerian architecture is a preponderance of imported motifs and models that have little links with our socio-cultural heritage. Urbanization, collision of cultural values, relics of our colonial experience and exposure to western education have all made what is imported from other cultures part of what is now passed down from one generation to another. This may probably explain the disappearance of the indigenous courtyard type of house in Nigerian urban centers and also open space architecture and settlement pattern, all of which is obsolete now. Architects today have noted the contending arguments advanced for this alienating architecture.

The foundation of modern architecture in Nigeria was laid in Europe in the second decade of the twentieth century in terms of concepts and methodologies. The "new" post war architecture engendered new attitudes to architecture such as the consideration of architecture primarily as a volume and not a mass, the reliance on new materials like reinforced concrete, steel and glass which rendered conventional construction obsolete and the emergence of machine aesthetics among others (Kostof 1995). The documented history of modern architecture in Nigeria dates back from the early nineteenth century with the coming of the colonialist and later, the Brazilian slaves. Up to the middle twentieth century, the hybrid style produce by these two events was the dominant style. It was however, in the fifties that modern architecture as conceived in Europe emerged in Nigeria, with clear guidelines and conceptualization. Institutional and residential buildings

benefitted from this style (see figure 5). From the late fifties when the appreciation of modern architecture became obvious in Nigeria, its development has been along diverse philosophical standpoints. From the perspective of form, the dominant repertoire from the late fifties to the middle eighties was the linear expressive form either in glass or concrete. From the middle eighties through the late nineties, there appear to have been a reorientation towards the sculptured and expressionist form.

There is also this explanation that our elites equates flamboyant structures for status and social recognition, while this reasons cannot be totally ignored, we need the emergence of an architecture to aptly synchronize with our socio-cultural needs with elemental topography harmonized in space as a reflection of much deeper gain in our identity as a people. Nigeria's indigenous architecture should be re-invented through the decolonization of our thinking and orientation.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The evidence presented in the foregoing paragraphs support strongly, that Nigeria is a heterogeneous society comprising of five regions namely Northern Nigeria, the Middle Belt, Western Nigeria, Eastern Nigeria and Southern Nigeria with distinct trend in housing development. The plan of the traditional core Nigeria house form was purposeful; it has as its basis certain social and cultural rules and is backed by society's objectives for aggregating the way they did. The pattern has been dictated intensely by various types of needs and influences as highlighted in this paper.

The urban growth processes that set in with the increase in urbanization in Nigeria after independence, substantial modification to the traditional compound structure. Many of them got broken up. The continuous extending rectangular enclosures broke up into smaller self-contained residential units. The buildings aggregated closely together rather than dispersed and are orderly because of the need for defence, as a result of inter-tribal war conditions during which these early settlements developed.

The physical arrangement of the traditional Nigerian city is also a clear reflection of the sophisticated and efficient system of governance based on kinship, social stratification and political segmentation.

CONCLUSION

Contemporary world civilization influences architecture in manner responsive to technological advancement, modern materials available, socio-economic status of individuals and lifestyles of people. In view of our peculiar cultural and socio-economic circumstances in the light of our architectural development, our architecture must be relevant to our social environment and must deviate from western stereotypes. Housing form in traditional setting are purposeful and reflect the needs and aspirations of the people as presently influenced by such factors as social/marital influences, economic, educational, religious and cultural background of the people concern as highlighted in this paper.

The objective of preserving our cultural heritage through housing form need to be upheld to promote communal living in our urban centers so that the inhabitants should not feel alienated from the urban environment. It is only when this is achieved that we can truly say we have an indigenous architecture which is in harmony with our societal evolution.

This paper concludes by suggesting that the courtyard house type which has been our indigenous architecture should be reinvented by our professionals with the open space architecture as our likely Nigerian Architecture.

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