

CLASSIFICATION OF NIGERIAN ARCHITECTURE

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1.0 ABSTRACT

This paper presents the classification of architecture of Nigeria starting from pre-colonial until contemporary times. It depicts the historical perspective and portrays contemporary trends and movements. It shows the richness of Nigerian heritage and deciphers recent developments. A main achievement of this paper is a synthesised classification of Nigerian architecture. It portrays the Historical Style (represented by the European, Brazilian and North African Trends) through Traditional Architecture and the Modern Style (with the International Style, the New West African Style and the Post-Modern Trend).

There is a very weak link between the Historical Style (including Traditional Architecture), and contemporary modern architecture of Nigeria. The Historical Style reveals how architects can draw inspiration from historical heritage as evidenced by the Regional Trend of contemporary Nigerian architecture.

The author studied the work, ideas and aspirations of some leading architects in the country in order to see how the trends and styles of this genealogy relate logically to the contemporary situation. The presentation of contemporary masterpieces gives a general overview of the recent situation and identifies the basic problems that the designers are facing.

Keywords:

Style: Distinctive or characteristic expression of architectural ideas, as of a specified period in history.

Trend: To have a tendency or prevailing direction: general tendency.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

The period embraced by this presentation spans a few centuries starting from pre-colonial times and ending with recent developments. The genealogy is portrayed by a model of evolution in Nigerian architecture (Fig. 1).

The inspirations were drawn from such architectural critics as Kenzo Tange, Louis Khan, Ada Louis Huxtable, Nikolaus Pevsner and Charles Jencks to mention a few. This paper often relies on some recognized movements but some trends are newly defined.

3.0 THE HISTORICAL STYLE AND TRADITIONAL ARCHITECTURE

A basic distinction in Nigerian architecture can be made between the North and the South, and this is best pronounced by Traditional Architecture and Traditional Style. The strongest influences on indigenous architecture were the introduction of Islam into Northern Nigeria, the return of the ex-slaves from the Americas (especially Brazil), and colonization. The Historical Style consists of the European Trend followed by the Colonial Style. The Brazilian Trend evolved into the Brazilian Style while the North African Trend evolved into Sudanese Architecture. The blend of Traditional Architecture and Historical Styles formed Vernacular Architecture.

Before considering the historical influences, a mention should be made of antiquity. The Nok civilization developed in the central part of Nigeria's present territory between 500 BC and 200 BC. Possessing the knowledge of iron, these grassland people moved into the forest country (Clarke 1984) and that was when people "set up new homes" at Ife and other places. The Hausas were then a number of different people. Although knowledge of the achievements of the Nok civilization is wide it is difficult to imagine the form of their settlements. On the contrary knowledge of the architecture of the Middle Ages is rather extensive.

3.1 Traditional Architecture and Traditional Style

The more stable and enduring towns of pre-colonial Africa developed because of the intense ritual of market activity. Oliver (1976) called these cities pre-industrial cities, which were theatres of competition for the symbols of power and material well being. Initially, some towns emerged as collecting points for wandering immigrants who used their favourable locations as spiritual or cultural bases for subsequent territorial expansion. For the Hausa and Yoruba, Daura and Ife respectively became spiritual springboards for the establishment of extensive empires. In a city like Kano, group masons and other specialized trades could be found in the past, basic elements of a real building industry.

From the 15th century, the mosque was one of the most prominent buildings in Hausa towns. **Houses,**

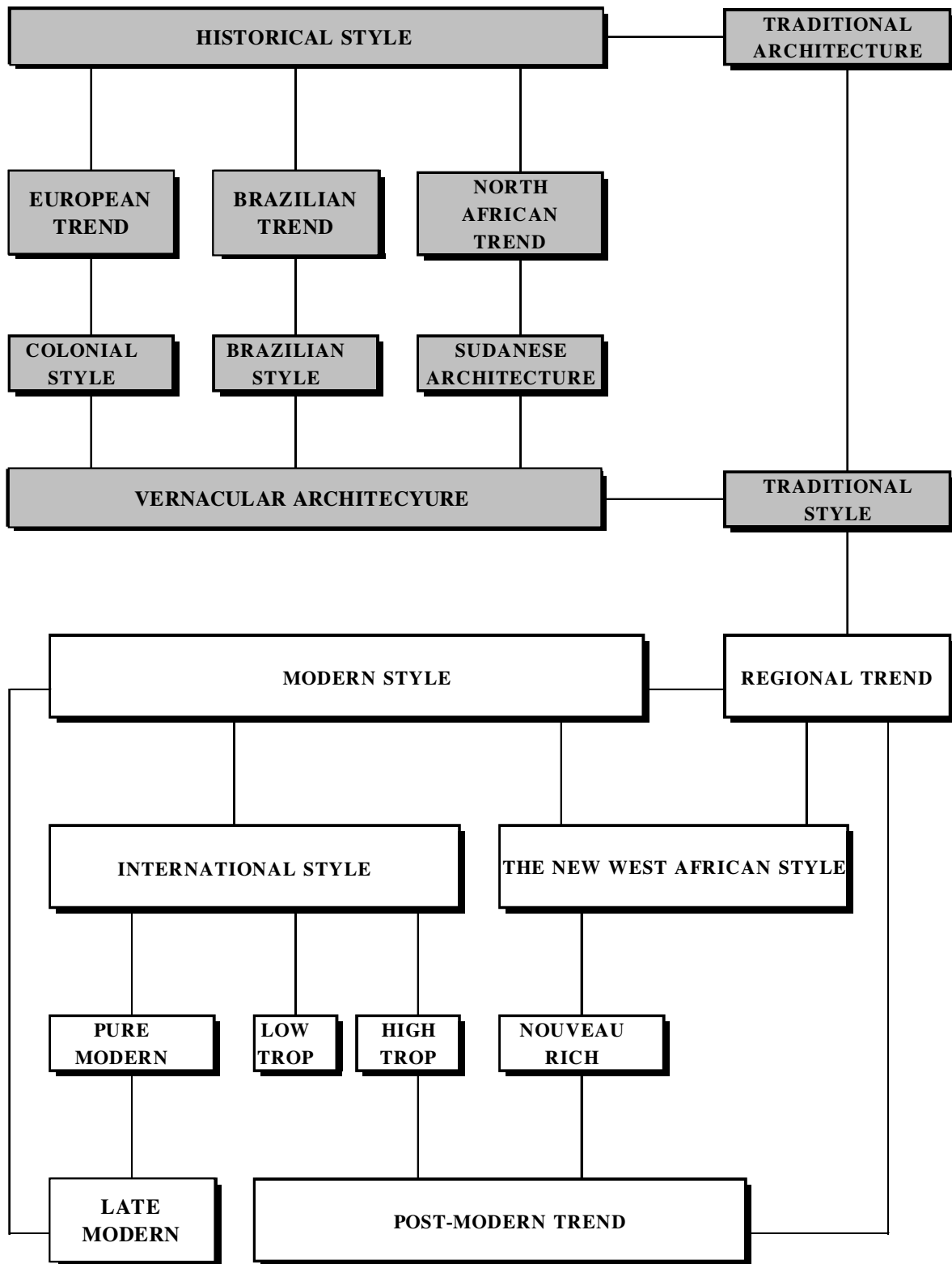


Figure 1: The evolution of Nigerian Architecture.

boundary walls and roofs in the towns were built of mud. In the villages the roofs were almost always of grass and boundary walls were of matting or corn stalks. The basic house walls were often made of mud.

In the Yoruba zone of Nigeria the chief's (Oba's) palace and the market place dominated the central areas of well-planned cities like Ile-Ife (11th century), Ilesha and Ekiti. The populace lived in compounds each of which had a large house set in a square-shaped space bounded by a high wall. Some were more than a half-acre in size and provided living space for a large family and kinsmen. There was only a single entrance. Inside, the compounds were divided into numerous rooms. Until the early twentieth century, most of the compounds as well as the Oba's palace were roofed with thatch.

The conclusion can then be drawn that in the Traditional Style the roofs of the houses were constructed of thatch, but quite early in the development of Northern Nigerian towns the thatched roof was replaced by the flat or dome-shaped mud roof (Fig. 2). The climate, human physiology and geography led to the development of curvilinear, conical and mud-roofed structures in the North and the rectilinear thatch-roof mud houses of the South (Awotona 1986, p. 55).

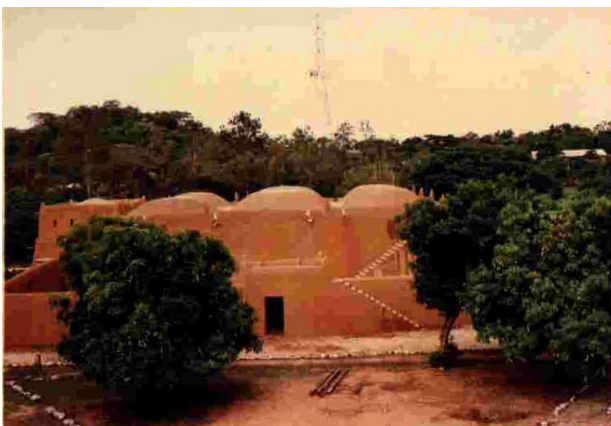


Figure 2: Traditional Architecture of the North. A structure masterly covered with several domes with very small openings on external walls. Source: Author's photograph.

3.2 The European Trend and the Development of the Colonial Style

During the 18th and 19th centuries the region occupying the territory of today's Nigeria developed dynamic economies, which adapted in a positive

manner to the expansion of world trade. According to Payne (1977), "a cash economy had developed and was well able to exploit the benefits of international trade for internal development". Three factors combined to make a radical transformation of the Nigerian scene in the 19th century - the Muslim jihads and Yoruba civil wars, European exploration and missionary efforts, and a revolution in trade.

The influence of Britain started mainly through the trade of slaves in the 18th century, which was however brought to an end in the middle of the 19th century. Nigeria became a protectorate of England with Lagos as a colony. In 1914 Southern Nigeria, Northern Nigeria and the Colony of Lagos got united and became the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria.

Because of the expansion of Britain in the landscape of Nigerian architecture new types of buildings were introduced. These were usually either imported 18th century houses of the English countryside or prefabricated constructions with deep verandas and overhanging eaves. These were sometimes raised on stilts (Adeyemi 1975-1976), and they usually had a continuous horizontal band of windows. The physical appearance of settlements changed because of the introduction of new building materials from Europe. Corrugated iron sheeting and cement have had perhaps the greatest effect (Denyer 1978). These buildings represent the Colonial Style, whose character is nevertheless most distinctively represented by public and administrative buildings from that era (Fig. 3). These are reminiscent of the classic revival in England with the classic orders carved out of walls to give impressive scale.



Figure 3: Colonial Style. High Court Building, Lagos, by Watkins and Partners, 1950. Source: Schultz, 1975, p.26.

3.3 Brazilian Style

For four centuries, the slave trade dominated relations between the peoples of Nigeria and peoples of Europe and America. Many Nigerians who were forcibly settled in the New World soon lost their identities. The Yoruba, on the other hand frequently preserved his cultural individuality. A large group of slaves revolted in Brazil in the 1800's, for example, and were repatriated to Nigeria. At the time when freed slaves returned to West Africa from the Americas, there appeared a new style called the Brazilian Style. It emerged with a new architecture different from the traditional huts and colonial structures. It also fulfilled the need for a more distinguished form. There were very often two-storey houses built in cement and embellished with heavy ornamental pillars and balustrades and can still be seen in Lagos and other Southern cities. They are certainly worth being preserved.

3.4 The North African Trend and the Development of Sudanese Architecture

Islam undoubtedly had a strong effect on home-grown architecture because:

- it applies geometric designs and
- it had an impact on form, scale, proportion and aesthetics.

The dome-shaped mud roof became very popular. It gave the North a distinctive appearance reminiscent of cities in North Africa. Worth noting is that Hausa vaults or *Bakan Gizo* were mostly used for ceiling construction and architectural decorations were adopted in mosque's ceiling construction. Further on in Hausa towns merchants began to adorn the outside walls of the otherwise traditional houses with elaborate moulded designs executed in cement. The old, non-figurative clay walls gave way to painted decorations executed in paint and sometimes in figurative patterns.

3.5 Vernacular Architecture

In the evolution of historic settlements, external models dominated increasingly the choice of materials and techniques as well as decoration, the size and relationship of the rooms and the formal organization of the dwellings. These models mastered by the people would, according to Langley (1976) become the foundations for a vernacular architecture, "an architecture specific to a country and a people". In the Nigerian context, vernacular architecture is expressed in forms deriving from the

culture influences of Brazil, North Africa and Europe. "These forms have a traditional base in the socio-cultural organization of the Nigerian society and the interaction between it and the other influences have crystallized into the Nigerian Vernacular Architecture" (Adeyemi 1975-76). For example in the rural areas of South-Eastern Nigeria, family mutual help gradually disappeared, and a housing model inspired from the "Brazilian" urban houses, involving the use of new materials and new building techniques spread rapidly.

4.0 MODERN STYLE

In Nigeria motifs of the modern movement had become very popular by the late 1930s. One of these was the modern flat roof, which proved to be a bad solution for the tropics with heavy rainfall. The first tall buildings in the new Modern Style appeared in Lagos in the late 1950s starting with Shell now (National House) and Co-op Bank.

In the Middle East in the early 1960's Western models for buildings were used almost without thinking in order to meet local wishes and produce progressive buildings which were noticeably up-to-date and by implication, Western in flavour. In the Nigerian context architects often tried to make the buildings suitable to the weather and local conditions. Successful were such architectural firms as Deji Oyenuga and Partners, Design Group Nigeria, Oluwole Olumuyiwa and Associates and Ella Waziri Associates.

4.1 International Style

The International Style adapted to Nigeria dominates contemporary modern architecture of Nigeria. It usually explores simple geometrical forms but often with exposed parapet walls. Characteristic is the use of concrete external walls supplemented by concrete, steel or aluminium sun shading devices (Senate Building at ABU Zaria, Management House in Lagos, CSS Bookshop House in Lagos).

This style is well represented by the architecture created by architects of the older generation who were trained abroad in modern ideas. This architecture is best portrayed by the term **Pure Modern**. The International Style is also represented in Nigeria by high rise buildings portrayed by the term **High-Trop** and by housing for the low income group referred to as **Low-Trop** architecture. More than one third of modern buildings in Nigeria urban centers belong to the International Style. The

buildings are designed here along with modern ideas with the use of clean forms like cubes, cuboids or compositions of simple geometrical solids. They explore the ideas of simplicity and functionality.

4.2 Pure Modern

Some of the young architects (foreigners) who were behind the first modern buildings came to Nigeria as to an unknown exotic country. All Nigerians practicing then were also educated abroad. They came with all the hopes and dreams the new generation had about modern architecture. Perfection was attained by Arc. Olumuyiwa in his Management House on Idowu Taylor Street at Victoria Island in Lagos. It is only through working and reworking that the idea of a brain was embodied in architectural form.

The design for the Faculty of Education in Ibadan by Deji Oyenuga and Partners completed in 1976 but unfortunately only partly built, is very simple. It pronounces the architecture of modern pioneers. Excellence was attained by James Cubitt in the Senate Building at UNILAG and Mobil Building - both in Lagos.

There are numerous good examples because according to Prucnal-Ogunsote (1993, p.217) 36% of buildings in Nigeria were designed in the International Style and very many of them belong to the Pure Modern Trend.

4.3 High-Trop: A proud architecture

High-trop architecture is an architecture of glass boxes. The buildings in that trend are extra modern and use high technologies, reflective glass and central air conditioning. To this group belong mainly banks and offices especially in Lagos. This group will normally embrace buildings from five floors and above. The risk for people in such buildings starts beyond the reach of turntable ladders because the Nigerian fire fighting capacity is entirely ground based.

The High-Trop trend does not necessarily follow Miesian formulas for tall buildings. The buildings which explore different meanings are: IMB Building, Victoria Island, Lagos (1985), by Inchscape Architects (Fig. 4), and First Bank Headquarters in Lagos (1982/83) by Ronald Ward Associates. The forms of the buildings are in contradiction to what the bureaucratic movement with pure forms and curtain walls of skyscrapers in America represent.

National Oil & Chemical Marketing Company Building (Eagle House) in Lagos and Broking House in Ibadan by Design Group Nigeria are valued here particularly for the first level which refer to human scale. Only on rare occasions one is able to perceive a whole - the building is usually seen in pieces from the perspective of a pedestrian. Buildings like the office block on Ibrahim Taiwo Road in Kano by Femi Majekodunmi Associates having a perfect location constitute a strong accent with its polygonal shape on plan and its transparency contrasting with more solid concrete surfaces. Femi Majekodunmi Associates are also the authors of IBRU Building in Apapa, Lagos where they made use of reflecting surfaces to create an abstract image of piercing solids. In NAL Towers at Marina in Lagos the bright white wall surfaces contrast sharply with elegant dark strips and wide window bands. This same idea is used by Multi-Systems in the proposal for Nigerian Agricultural and Cooperative Bank at Abuja. In conclusion it can be said that this presentation concerns very elegant but extremely expensive structures.



Figure 4: High Trop. IMB Building, Victoria Island, Lagos by Inchscape Architects. Source: Photograph by Arc. O.A. Oyediran.

4.4 Low-trop: The architecture of the masses

Low-trop Architecture represents architecture of the masses, architecture of draughtsmen, and low income estates reminiscent of monotonous housing estates in Eastern Europe. Here apart from lack of good aesthetics, the standard of living is very low. Common are “face me I face you” apartments, bungalows or two-storey houses. When constructing, local materials and local labour are used. (Izomoh, 1997).

This architecture can be easily observed in cities and suburban areas and it shapes the landscape of Nigerian Architecture. This is probably the most challenging area for architects, to find ways and means to influence this architecture to make it more human but not more expensive. Here the call of Benna Associates for innovations is somehow answered by Triad Architects who designed screen wall elements (blocks), which allow for privacy and air penetration. They applied the blocks in the Political Party Offices all over Nigeria and even started its local production in Kaduna. A low-cost row prototype house was designed and built by Prof. Olusanya in Lagos. The building can be constructed on a very small plot size and is the answer to high prices of land in Lagos.

5.0 THE NEW WEST AFRICAN STYLE

New West African Style was recognised by Akinsemoyin (1977) and Kultermann (1969) and it was meant to cover buildings, which are more suitable for the country (designed with climate). The climate and building form are quite relevant here.

In Lagos University Science Complex at UNILAG in Lagos, 1978 by Godwin and Hopwood the breeze can freely penetrate the entire complex. In

James Cubitt Architects' buildings although air conditioning is assumed, and they use tinted or reflective glass usually there is a provision for cross ventilation as in Mobil Building in Lagos (1991) with its atrium. Cross ventilation is particularly valued in buildings by Deji Oyenuga and Partners and by Niger Consultants. Climate plays a very dominant role in Olumuyiwa and Associates' architecture. Olumuyiwa recognized the importance of vegetation and believed in incorporating water into design (Management House, Architecture House and Eko Meridien Hotel in Lagos).

Very original in the approach of making buildings suitable to the weather is Environmental Development Consultants' architecture by making use of staggered windows. Deep overhangs like in United Bank for Africa in Hadejia, Kano (Fig. 5) also help.

6.0 LATE MODERN

Late-Modernism according to Jencks is a pragmatic and technocratic architecture, which draws its inspirations from the highest achievements of Modernism. The buildings that must be mentioned here are political party offices by Triad Associates (1989), which from the beginning strongly dominated the landscape of Nigerian Architecture (Fig. 6). The architects' proposals were in "extreme of



Figure 5: The New West African Style. United Bank for Africa Branch Office, Hadejia, Kano, by Environmental Development Consultants. Source: Environmental Development Consultants' photograph.



Figure 6: Late Modern Trend. State Party Office by Triad Associates, 1989. Source: Triad Associates' photograph.

international style" later on amended to suit the purpose. The proposed large glazed surfaces for example were removed to avoid breakage during riots and disturbances.

There are three alternatives: for local, state and national offices. Local offices are only one storey buildings with a simple Conference Hall. Different and unique entrances were proposed according to the type of the office. The roofs usually have a small slope except in case of Rivers / Cross Rivers States.

7.0 REGIONAL TREND

The tendency towards regional expression is mainly observed in private houses like in residences by Environmental Development Consultants or in Mr. Adesuyi's House in Zaria followed by Institutional buildings like NIPSS in Kuru with its circular forms and former NIA Secretariat in Lagos which is a courtyard building. *Zanko motives*, which are very popular in the North are characteristic of elevations and also sometimes used for city gates. Sometimes it is a decorated column, a sculpture or just a gate that is used to enhance the traditional

aspect. First Bank in Bauchi by Archcon Nigeria is reminiscent of traditional architecture of the North (Fig. 7). A stucco column with traditional motifs designed by an artisan is used in the approach elevation for First Bank Headquarters in Lagos. Horizontal strips may be used on the building like on Federal Palace Hotel, Lagos.

In conclusion, the Regional Trend is represented by contemporary modern buildings using the motif of a hut (N.I.P.S.S. in Kuru by Fola Alade and Bank of the North, Kano Branch by Multi-Systems) or using courtyard or impluvium concepts. Natural materials like timber or stone may be explored but most essential is the natural ventilation (Department of Nursing at University of Ibadan by Design Group Nigeria). Very important in this trend is the **functional layout of residences, which is most capable of reflecting the Nigerian way of life** and generally important here is the closeness to nature through outdoor areas. For example in Moslem residences characteristic is the observed separation of sitting rooms from family living rooms.

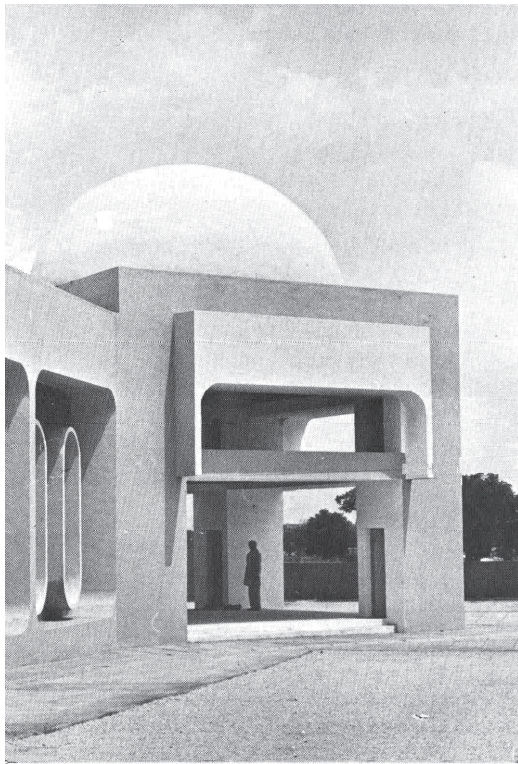


Figure 7: Regional Trend. First Bank in Bauchi by Archcon Nigeria, 1983-89. Source: Archcon Nigeria Brochure.

8.0 NOUVEAU RICH: THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE SUPER RICH

This is the architecture of the newly rich easily found in Lagos on Lekki Peninsula. It is characterised by bourgeois forms, expensive decorations and materials and exotic atmosphere. Usually found in residential houses with typical post-modern elements, in particular semicircular windows, verandas or balconies and other picturesque elements (Fig. 8). Favoured also are the red villa roofing sheets although criticised by some masters of Nigerian Architecture. Positive examples of such buildings can be found among houses designed by Inchscape Architects.

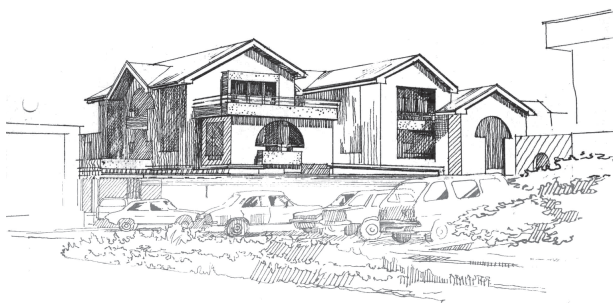


Figure 8: Nouveau Rich. Residential building at Maroko Extension, Lagos. Source: Author's sketch.

9.0 POST-MODERN TREND

Postmodern Architecture in Nigeria has got many “faces”. Sometimes it will pretend to look like a ship and sometimes it will tend to “wear” historical style.

9.1 Pluralism of Styles

Postmodern trend explores pluralism of styles. It uses historical styles like neoclassicism, gets inspiration from Egyptian architecture and reaches also to the roots of Nigerian architecture.

Design Group Nigeria architects used motives of Brazilian classical elements such as pillars and pilasters, lintels and pediments with their characteristic proportions in NNPC Office on Victoria Island, Lagos and similarly in case of their Musical Society Building in Lagos. More examples can be found among the most current buildings (in a style called “historicism”) at Victoria Island extension. Implementation of such “historical” forms is a difficult task for architects. Inspiration can be drawn from Brazilian buildings, old colonial buildings, traditional compound layouts of several kinds, and the larger old mosques of Northern Nigeria.

Egyptian architecture is reflected in Civil Engineering Complex at the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife by Niger Consultants (Fig. 9) and in Methodist Church in Ikenne by Deji Oyenuga through forms reminiscent of the pyramid.

9.2 Individuality of Forms

Borno State Secretariat in Maiduguri by Design Group Nigeria depends on a classical plan. In this elaborate but rigid design the Conference Hall, centrally placed, has a very characteristic roof and the passages with vaults dominate the architecture of this complex. Odd shapes which determine the building's appearance were used in Zaranda Hotel in Bauchi by Niger Consultants and in Union Bank in Kaduna by Benna Associates. Union Bank has columns exposed at the corners, a major feature of this design. The design is integrated by two piercing solids through all elements like balconies and parapet walls and with very consistent details.

Towry Towers/Coker Court and Abuja Sheraton Hotel please the eyes with their stepped surfaces. The effects achieved are fascinating, analogy can even be drawn to pyramidal shapes, but too many surfaces are exposed to the sun.

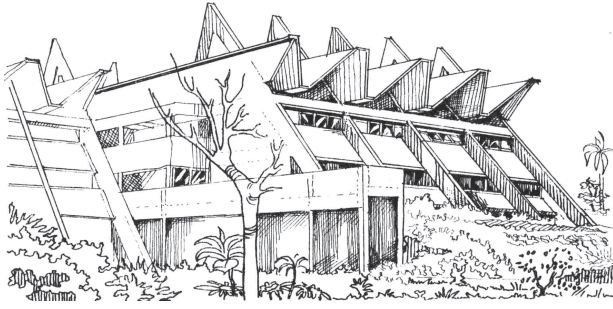


Figure 9: Postmodern Trend. Civil Engineering Complex, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife by Niger Consultants. Source: Author's sketch.

10.0 CONCLUSION

The introduction of new building materials has changed the physical appearance of settlements. It is not convenient to roof a circular house with corrugated sheeting, so its introduction in some areas changed not only the roofing material but also the basic shape of the house to a rectangular one. It was in this way that traditional patterns tended to persist longer where the basic shape of the house was rectangular rather than circular. Modern cities can not be turned into museums of vernacular architecture, but rather the spirit of this architecture should be preserved as it is done in case of the Regional Trend.

This paper has shown that contemporary modern Nigerian architecture is dominated by the International Style. This is architecture of the Nigerian urban landscape. Here belong also most of the popular buildings like First Bank Headquarters in Lagos by Ronald Ward, National Arts Theatre in Lagos by Techno-Export, Broking House in Ibadan by Design Group Nigeria, NAL Towers in Lagos by Femi Majekodunmi Associates. In some cases the buildings look ordinary but always are symbols of progress and modernism. It also brings delight in case of such buildings like Chellarams in Lagos by James Cubit & Partners, IMB Plaza in Lagos by Inchscape Architects (Fig. 4), et cetera. As stated earlier these types of buildings do not suit the level of technology in the country especially because of fire hazards.

In case of Regional Trend the architectural examples pointed out are very rare in the Nigerian landscape. They are mentioned as examples worth studying and pointed to by other architects, architecture students and the society as something

unique. They are able to satisfy the desire for identity.

Postmodern architecture reached Nigeria quite early with plastic forms but now it is difficult to continue its development due to economic crises. Clients often prefer simplified versions of what architects are proposing due to cost constraints. However this trend is still developing, for example through Nouveau Rich architecture.

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BROCHURES

1. Archcon Nigeria Limited Brochure
2. Design Group Nigeria Brochure
3. Environmental Development Consultants Brochure
4. Femi Majekodunmi Associates Brochure
5. Godwin Hopwood Kuye Brochure
6. Habitat Associates Brochure
7. Multi-Systems Brochure
8. Triad Associates Brochure