

Foreign Influences and Actors of Change: Heritage Architecture in Nigeria's Niger Delta (1860 – 1960)

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Abstract: *Nigeria like most African countries was colonized by a foreign culture and evidence of colonial influences can be seen in some of its heritage buildings. This paper discusses the different actors of change and their influences on residential architectural styles in the cartographic Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Using the Case study method, it stems from a much larger study that examines architectural traits of buildings, structures and monuments of special interest in the study location, built from between 1860 to 1960. The study further employs the use of oral history and secondary data in analyzing these architectural built forms and their origins of influence. Past studies presuppose the existence of just one major foreign influence in this region but this study investigates and discovers other little known foreign influences that came via the more subtle actors of change.*

Keywords: Heritage buildings, Actors of Change, Architecture, Foreign Influences, Niger Delta

1 Introduction

There are different foreign influences mostly of European origin credited with the production of various building types and architectural styles in most former colonies across the world. The Spanish influence is recognizable in most of South America with the exception of Brazil who were colonized by Portugal. Africa on the other hand has several colonial influences including the British, French, Dutch, Portuguese, Spanish, Belgian, Italian, Arabic and German influences. Some of these countries have even experienced layers of colonialism in the course of their history, giving rise to a cocktail of architectural heritage styles in their built-scape. For most of Asia, the predominant influences are Chinese and Indian, but with

the occasional British or other colonial imprints seen through post-civilization conquests in some countries.

This paper forms part of the findings of a wider study on heritage architecture or built heritage that was introduced into parts of the Nigerian urban scene between 1860 and 1960. The present geographical entity known as Nigeria was created by the British in 1914, from an amalgamation of various empires, several Islamic emirates, kingdoms, autonomous regions and tribal clans. It was brought about by the exertions of the Royal Niger Company over the territories for which they had extended British influence initially through exploration and trade from the 1850s and then through military conquest and rule from the 1890s. A gradual amalgamation of the various protectorates and colonies

commenced in 1898 with another instalment in 1906 and again in 1914 (Tamuno 1980). Colonial rule in Nigeria eventually came to an end in 1960 with the declaration of independence.

Although, the British presence in Nigeria spanned about a century, their rule did not only provide an opportunity for their direct influence but also created avenues for other cultures to come in and settle with the expansion of the empire. To highlight the fact that there were other contributors other than the British Osasona (2015), states that "the British were responsible for creating the enabling milieu for other cultures to intervene architecturally in Nigeria". This alludes to the fact that the British gave passage to two returning groups of emancipated slaves from Freetown and Latin America respectively that brought in their own cultures. With settlement comes expression of material culture, evident in several areas, the most conspicuous and lasting of which is architecture. In their work on what constitutes material culture, Tilley et al (2006) listed architecture, especially vernacular built forms under the objects and subjects that make up material culture. Similarly, (Glassie, 2000; Glassie, 1999) had earlier examined the concept of vernacular architecture as material culture. The vast collection of these pieces of architecture now form part of our heritage as a nation and has become the main focus of this study.

As part of the introduction, it is only apt to define what constitutes heritage architecture used sometimes interchangeably as built heritage. Benhamou (2011) defines built heritage as "the buildings and monuments inherited from the past, with a cultural or historical dimension justifying their preservation for future generations, but also modern monuments whose symbolic or cultural value

is high" (pg. 255). Osasona (2017) simply defines heritage architecture as „buildings of a bygone era which are imbued with cultural significance". The Granada convention defines architectural heritage as those buildings, structures, groups of buildings or sites having conspicuous historical, architectural, archaeological, artistic, scientific, social or technological interest.

Heritage architecture does not translate into Indigenous or vernacular architecture per se, although this could be one its constituents. What this suggests in essence is that, unlike indigenous architecture that is developed purely "in-culture", heritage architecture is more often than not a syncretism of indigenous, borrowed and or imposed foreign cultures of a people over time. Okoye (2017) describes it as a colourful hybrid language, historically comparable to the likes of patois and creole which is a mix of colonial and local lingual influence. It is the agglomeration of these different cultural influences that have culminated in the formation of an architectural identity, which is often inevitably inherited as part of the urban landscape.

2. Actors of Change and Foreign Influences

In most former colonies, colonization was not solely as a result of direct military conquest, but of more subtle means of ingress such as trade, exploration, or religious propagation. This study refers to them as 'actors of change' and reveals how each foreign influence gained access into the Niger Delta regions of Nigeria through one or more actors of change. In turn, each foreign influence introduces different building types that aid the establishment of their purpose in the eventual colonies. The results are a variation of built forms and structures constructed in the architectural styles of the different

invasive colonial and foreign cultures. Like biological invasive species that thrive by either taking over to become dominant species or mixing with the local species to form hybrids, the invasive architectural styles have either become the dominant heritage styles or hybridized into a national character of its own.

Nigeria like most of its African neighbours is a product of shared protectorates and subsequent colonization, achieved through several actors of change. This study focuses on the heritage buildings introduced by these actors in the Niger Delta regions of Nigeria. There are six known actors of change identified in Nigeria, these include;

- Explorers/ travelers, many of whom were concerned with navigating the River Niger and its course to the Atlantic Ocean and by so doing, discovering new trade routes. The buildings they were mostly associated with are residential structures such as base camps, lodges and even permanent dwellings.
- Christian missionaries from foreign church organizations such as the Church of England, the Catholic Church and others. The various building types they brought with them include; churches, schools, vicarages/ parsonages, monasteries and hospitals. Between 1842 and 1892, eight Christian missions were able to establish themselves in different parts of southern Nigeria. The Church Mission Society (CMS) was by far the largest and concentrated mainly in the western parts as well as the Niger Delta regions of Nigeria (Ayandele 1980) and European Christian Missionaries

such as these made construction of buildings a priority (Falola 2009).

- Military forces associated with the government who came to conduct expeditions and to enforce colonial rule. This group of actors is associated with the development of forts, prisons, bridges and cemeteries.
- Merchants and Trading companies dealing in exploration of natural resources and export of local produce. This group is credited with the building of warehouses to store produce for export at trading posts or terminals, office buildings, residential houses for staff and train stations to aid railways, as well as the development of banks.
- Colonial Administrators sent in to set up and maintain administrative structure in the overseas territories, maintain law and order and oversee the pre-established direct rule. Buildings associated with this group include; state houses, administrative buildings, court houses, post offices, hospitals, schools and official residences of colonial officers and their staff.
- Islamic crusaders are credited with the establishment of mosques and Arabic-styled palaces.

Only the first five of these actors are predominant in the Niger Delta region, as ingress of the Islamic crusades further south, was terminated at the Benue – Plateau regions of Nigeria's middle-belt and parts of the South-west.

However, this study suggests the existence of other lesser-known actors of change or ways that a number of foreign influences gained access into the study region in focus.

The foreign influences this study aims to examine were introduced into the region via one or more of these actors of change. For instance, the most notable foreign influence in the region is the British colonialists. Their ingress into the Nigerian society was through five of the six actors of change mentioned above, spanning about a century (1860 – 1960). They were first explorers, and then attempted trade before military invasions and conquests and then more trade via trading companies and finally colonial rule.

There have been a number of studies undertaken on the influence of colonial and other foreign cultures on the architectural styles of certain countries. This applies mainly to countries with a colonial history or that have been influenced by other cultures in previous eras in their history. One of such works by Chun et al (2005) highlighted the influence of colonial architecture to building styles in Malaysia. Their study examined how the agglomeration of different cultural influences may have culminated in the formation of a distinct identity for Malaysia's architecture. They recognized that for Malaysian architecture the external actors of change include traders/ merchants made up of the Indo-Chinese, British colonial administrators as well as Islamic crusaders through Moghul or Indian Muslim influences.

Frescura's (2015) study also examined external actors of change through religious influence. However, his study focused on European missionaries and their attempt at transforming the architecture of South Africa's indigenous tribes in the 19th and 20th centuries. He argues that although immigrant European settlers to this region did introduce new technologies to "the lexicon of indigenous architecture", the results were neither immediate nor widely accepted. His study argued that influence could only come in conjunction with other actors of change

such as traders, colonial administrators and expatriate farmers from Europe.

Bremmer and Caltana (2012) also suggest that much of the activity that drove European imperial expansion was achieved through several actors of influence such as governance, exploration, missionary endeavours or trade. Roberts (2014) in her study of Australian colonial settlements observed that architectural influence in colonies was birthed by foreign actors that focused primarily on trade and commerce. Her study argued that many chartered companies endorsed by colonizing powers, although established primarily for trade and production purposes, became 'lay agents' translating ideas and practices related to architecture from the core homelands to the periphery or colonies of the empire.

Ayandele (1980) also agrees with the plurality of actors of change before any meaningful influence can be exerted over a culture. He posited that the Europeans came into Nigeria initially through three actors of change – as explorers, missionaries and then as traders before carrying out military force to become overlords. They used the later to exact influence over all matters of culture they had initially respected but subtly abhorred and desired to change when the time was right. Military incursion became the main driver of that change, initially suggested by the three previous actors - explorers, missionaries and traders.

Dmochowski's (1990) an introduction to Nigerian Traditional Architecture, was one of the first books dedicated to documenting Nigeria's architectural history albeit traditional dwellings. One of the volumes dedicated to dwellings of cultural significance in the North, highlighted the architectural influence brought about by religious actors of change of the Islamic faith. This change was eventually strengthened

with trade and jihadist military might. Prussin (1971) in her work linked the development of rectangular mud walled buildings of the savannah regions of Nigeria and across West Africa to multiple factors such as the Bambara migrations, Islamic diffusion and the distribution of Songhai labor castes that specialized in mud-walled construction in adobe.

By the late colonial era, in the Old Port-Harcourt Township, early records indicate that the population was made up of at least five nationalities, namely: Indigenous Nigerians, British, Sierra Leoneans, Syrians and Lebanese and People of the Gold Coast region - present day Ghana (Mac-Fyle 1991).

The arguments of some of these scholars hinge on the premise that a foreign influence cannot bring about much architectural impact via a sole actor of change as it would via a combination of actors of change. But in this study, some foreign influences are shown to have gained ingress via just one solitary actor of change rather than a plurality of them and as such, it seeks to assess if such foreign influences have made any impact architecturally in the region they settled in or not, and if so, just how much of an impact did such foreign influences make.

3. Study Location

The Niger Delta region falls between 4 - 10°N of the equator, in the tropical rainforest and mangrove swamp zones in Nigeria. By cartographic and geographic definition, the Niger Delta lies between the Forcados River on the west and the Brass River on the east in Nigeria's southernmost part. Three States fall within these riverine boundaries namely; Bayelsa, Rivers and Delta States. Although due to climatic and topographical similarities in the area as well as historical and cultural similarities of the peoples in the region, neighbouring states such as Edo, Akwa Ibom

and Cross Rivers States are also considered as legitimate parts of the larger Niger delta region. However, the scope of this study is limited to the cartographic definitions stated earlier for the purpose of this study.

4. Data Collection and Analysis

A total of 40 sites and buildings, in 15 communities within the aforementioned States in the Niger Delta were visited and documented as case study areas. The location of each case study was mapped and available architectural data of historical and cultural relevance was collected. Measured drawings of plans and other architectural details were done for each case study in addition to extensive photographic surveys.

The buildings used as case studies were built between 1860 and 1960 and are either still standing or at least in parts. These are considered buildings of special architectural interests. Also, the building designs must have been commissioned by indigenous merchants, colonial government officials, foreign multinational companies, foreign church missions or simply individuals. For this study, buildings of special architectural interests are buildings associated with age, rarity, historical importance or distinctive craftsmanship, as well as having huge architectural, historical and cultural interests and some with tourism potentials (Brisibe and Osuku 2019). They are collectively referred to as heritage buildings.

Locations within the Niger Delta where the study was conducted include communities in Rivers, Bayelsa and Delta States.

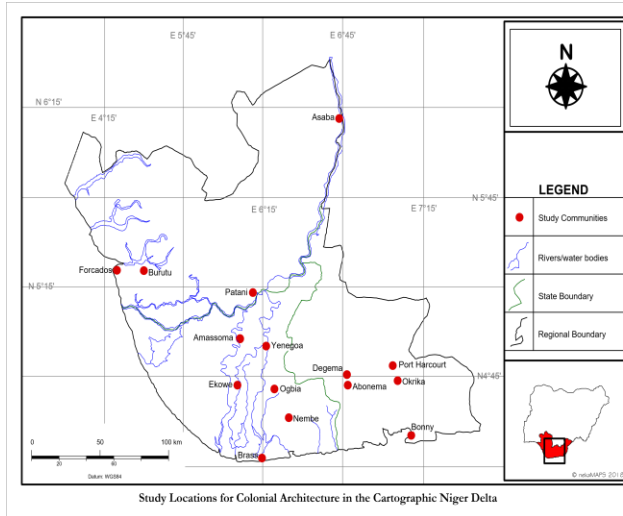


Figure 1: Map showing the locations of the heritage sites in the Niger Delta
Source: Author (2022)

From the larger study, ten types of buildings of historic and cultural significance were discovered in these 15 communities namely; Churches, Court houses, Warehouses/ Industrial buildings, Residential dwellings, Parsonages/ Vicarages, Schools, Train Station buildings, Offices/ Administrative buildings, Banks and Workshops. A list of the building types, the communities where they are located and their year of completion where available are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Communities in the different States and their Heritage sites

No	Community	No. of Buildings	Building Types	Year Completed
Bayelsa State				
1.	Amassoma	2	Warehouses	1921
2.	Brass	2	Residential	Circa 1920s
3.	Ekowe	2	Warehouses	1886 1927

			Court House	
4.	Nembe	1	Parsonage	NA
5.	Ogbia	3	- Residential	Circa 1910s 1928
			-Church Building	1956
			- Workshop / Farm Buildings	
6.	Yenagoa	2	- Residential	NA

Delta State

1.	Asaba	3	-Church	1935
			-Parsonage	NA
2.	Burutu	4	- Warehouse s/ Industrial buildings	Circa 1920s
3.	Forcados	3	- Warehouse s/ Industrial buildings	Circa 1920s
4.	Patani	2	-Vicarage	Circa 1898
			- Warehouse / Industrial building	Circa 1920s

Rivers State

1.	Abonema	7	-Residential	1920 & 1925
			- Warehouse s/ Industrial Buildings	1884 - 1932
			-Bank	1928
			-School	Circa 1890
				1924



			-Offices/ Admin. building	1923
			-Church	
2.	Bonny	3	-Residential Buildings	NA
3.	Degema	3	-Residential	NA
			-Health center	
4.	Okrika	1	-Church	1924
5.	Port- Harcourt	5	-Bank	1925
			-Railway terminal Building	NA 1930 – 1948
			- Residential buildings(3)	

The main constraint encountered during the process of data collection was the paucity or out-right non availability of records for some of the buildings used as case studies. Some were demolished prior to the commencement of fieldwork (Yenagoa), others demolished after the completion of fieldwork (Abonema). For buildings and structures without commissioning plaques, building plans or other records from the local council or municipality, the date of building completion was often deduced from notable events around the time as recounted by oral history from descendants of the owners or elders in the communities. Data for many of the residential buildings still owned by the original families were also obtained via oral history from surviving descendants and relatives.

However, data from historic church buildings were much easier to come by as most of them had surviving plaques stating the date they were commissioned. In some cases, building records indicating the church

founders and in a rare case the name of the British clergyman who designed and supervised the construction of a particular vicarage was available.

Since it is the case study method that has been adopted to analyze building types and ascertain their influences, there is the need to have sufficient case types of each building classification for in-depth comparative analysis to be achieved. So, from the 48 sites analyzed during fieldwork the classes of buildings with sufficient case structures include residential buildings, office/administrative buildings, warehouses and industrial buildings and churches. Other classes of buildings such as institutional/educational buildings, court houses, health centres and railway terminal buildings were in limited numbers. This paper focused primarily on residential buildings.

5. Colonial and other Foreign Influences in Nigeria

Nigeria like most African countries has had its share of foreign cultures to have made contact with some of its indigenous tribes. It is expected that through the nature and duration of these contacts, there may have been cross-pollination of some traits of material culture on the indigenous community. As such, the traits of material culture being investigated in this study are architectural features and elements of the heritage buildings.

It is the nature of some of these contacts as discussed earlier e.g. trade, military conquest, evangelization etc. and the duration of these contacts that determined the extent of architectural influence these foreign actors had on the built forms recorded in Nigeria's early architectural landscape. This study has identified four broad classifications of foreign contacts in

the history of Nigeria's Niger Delta region namely; European, South American/ Caribbean, British-Sierra Leonean and Syrian/ Lebanese. These have been further sub-divided according to their specific cultures;

- European – British, Portuguese influence
- South American/ Caribbean – Brazilian and Cuban 'Aguda' influence
- British-Sierra Leonean – 'Saro' influence
- Syrian/ Lebanese – Syrian influence

5.1 British Influence

Direct British influence on the region spanned about a century with administrative seats in the North, west, east and coastal southern regions. As a result of the nature and duration of the British contact, it is expected that British colonial influence can be observed in architectural built forms in Nigeria. The British formed the bulk of the foreign actors of change in Nigeria coming in as explorers, traders, military forces and finally colonial administrators. The distinct architectural features that characterize the British influence were mostly early 20th century styles, mainly consisting of residential, administrative and Christian religious structures.

For residential structures, the predominant style exported to the Nigerian colony were those reminiscent of the Late Victorian and Edwardian architecture from the 1880s to the early 1900s and British domestic architecture developed between the world wars (1918 to 1939). Within these periods, certain architectural elements that characterize the residential building types include;

- Use of bricks for walls with or without white render
- Use of front porches

- Use of chimneys and vents (Features carried over from early British domestic architecture)
- Interior fireplaces with less relief ornamentation
- Gabled or Hipped roofs and the occasional Dutch-hip roofs (with shingles or cup tiles)
- Straight-flight stairs
- Use of wrought iron for railings and staircases
- Large eave overhangs
- Timber-board construction or columned and massive masonry structuring
- Roof gutters and use of spouts
- Timber paneled window shutters or timber slatted jalousies (earlier versions)
- Multi-paneled glass casement windows (later versions)
- Use of Bay windows for spaces on the facade

Most of these elements are evident in their architectural introductions Abonema, Bonny, Degema and the old port-Harcourt Township in Rivers State; old parts of Yenagoa, Ogbia and Amassoma in current day Bayelsa State and several parts of Warri, Forcados and Asaba in present day Delta State. A previous study described one of the early 20th century British introductions - the archetype known as the 'bungalow', a British adaptation of a previous dwelling model found in Bengal, India (Brisibe 2020).

It is not quite clear how this bungalow structure arrived in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria or which was the first copy built there. However, the findings of that study stipulated that many of the early copies of these buildings were located in rural communities, with a few located in townships owned by wealthy chiefs who wanted a second home in the township. The earliest reports obtained

from the Nigerian National Archives on mass housing using this bungalow as a prototype was the design of service quarters for senior staff of the Port-Harcourt administrative province. The document showed correspondence and a survey for the design of bungalows based on a similar brief as the late model (RIVPROF 13/1/298 – 1949-1951).

Besides the introduction of bungalow structures, there were other archetypes of British influence such as cottages with the characteristic chimneys for fire places. A feature meant primarily for temperate weather but used in tropical weather probably out of mimicry.

In addition, larger stately one-storey residential dwellings were also introduced for high-ranking colonial officers and the gentry of the Royal Niger Company and other trading companies such as the United Africa Company. Buildings of this caliber are dotted around the early provincial headquarters such as Degema and Brass but are found in larger quantity in the European quarters or old Government Reserved Area (GRA) in Port-Harcourt.

For such buildings, the traditional bricks, timber and iron works required for the building envelope and key features such as suspended floors, staircase and balcony railings were often imported from England for that purpose. Some of the buildings in the European quarters were very stately with rooms for hosting events and set within large grounds reminiscent of some British country homes. The current old GRA in Port-Harcourt boasts of one of the largest collection of such British-styled dwellings second only to certain areas in Lagos State in Nigeria.



Figure 2: British colonial residence in Degema
Source: Author (2022)



Figure 3: British-styled bungalow Old Port-Harcourt Town
Source: Author (2022)



Figure 4: British Colonial residence Brass, Bayelsa
Source: Author (2022)



Figure 5: British-styled cottage with chimney, Bayelsa
Source: Author (2022)

5.2 Portuguese Influence

During the 15th and 16th centuries, the Portuguese expanded their empire mainly across the coastal settlements of Brazil, Africa, India and the far East and according to Teixeira (1990), the architecture and urban spaces of these settlements reflected the dual influence and interbreeding of Portuguese and local cultures. Falola et al (1989) had earlier confirmed this when they stated that the Portuguese were the first recorded Europeans to visit the Nigerian coastal communities and establish trade relations. The method of ingress as actors of change was primarily via trade in Nigeria but they have been known to into via missionary activities and conquest in other regions of the world.

Joao Alfonso D'Aviro was recorded to have visited the Benin Kingdom in 1486. The Portuguese visited these regions to expand trade and spread Christianity amongst the Bini, Itshekiri, Iagos, Calabar and Ijaw ethnic groups. They initially established a settlement in Ughoton, the main Bini port but eventually withdrew to the Islands of Principe and Sao Tome on the Gulf of Guinea in the 16th century (Falola et al 1989). Their relatively brief sojourn in Ughoton meant that they left

very little cultural influence on the architectural built forms in that region.

However, their trade relations amongst the Ijaw ethnic groups, especially the Kalabari tribes of the eastern Ijaw region resulted in a few built heritage legacies. From the 18th to the 20th century, Portuguese traditional architecture adopted the use of timber in buildings especially in floor and wall construction. Most scholars suggest that this came as a design response to earthquake and seismic activities in Portugal, especially after the 1755 Lisbon earthquake (Branco 2009, Henriques 2020). Timber combines its light weight with a high resistance to bending stress, making it an ideal building material in seismic zones.

A house built with timber framed reinforcement for walls is known as the 'Gaiola'. There are two types of timber walls used in gaiolas – the light-framed timber partition walls (Tabique) and the timber reinforced masonry walls (Frontal). For the frontal walls, wood is placed in the walls and in-filled with stone, masonry and lime. Houses built with this pattern are referred to as 'Pombalino gaiolas'. They are identified by the presence of a 3-dimensional timber framework. Henriques (2020) describes this structure as a cage made with vertical and horizontal elements braced with diagonals.

The most iconic of the Eurafican legacies left behind by the Portuguese in this region is the 1884 Amadayabo's palace in Bob-manuel compound, Abonema in Rivers State. The material of choice for this building was primarily timber and the method of construction used for the walls were like the Pombalino gaiolas but without the customary masonry and stone infill.

Based on oral traditions, this rare architectural piece was built by Portuguese artisans two years after the migration of the Kalabari Ijaws to their current location. This

structure is reminiscent of traditional Portuguese craftsmanship in timber but cladded using corrugated iron sheets in place of masonry. The distinct 3-dimensional timber cage or framework used in constructing the wall is one of the most evident features characterizing the Portuguese influence in this region as shown in Figure 9 below.



Figure 6: Amayanabo's palace Abonema, Rivers State
Source: Author (2022)



Figure 7: Example of Portuguese timber fretwork
Source: Author (2022)



Figure 8: Restored suspended timber floor
Source: House in Lisbon, Henriques (2020)



Figure 9: suspended timber floor Bobmanuel house Abonema
Source: Author (2016)



Figure 10: Connection of elements in "frontal"
Source: House in Lisbon, Henriques (2020)



Figure 11: 3-dim timber 'frontal-styled' lintel frame
BobManuel house, Abonema
Source: Author (2016)

5.3 Brazilian and Cuban 'Aguda' Influence

This style of architecture was introduced into Nigeria by ex-slaves or repatriates from Brazil and Cuba who were resettled in Lagos, in the latter half of the 19th century (Hallen 1988). These African settlers came in via repatriation and resettlement as actors of change. This is the least known or recognized of the actors of change that was experienced in Nigeria. Mabogunje (1968), Akinsemoyin and Vaughan-Richards (1976), Osasona (2017) all agreed in that whilst the designs were simple, they featured a lot more ornate styling borrowed from Baroque styles popular in Brazil. The influence of Brazilian-style architecture was felt mainly in non-Government initiated buildings (Immerwahr 2007). The distinct features of this style predominant among heritage building stock in Nigeria include;

- Doorways – rounded and pointed
- windows – rounded and pointed tops
- Columns – ornamented capitals, pendatives and base
- The use of bright colours
- Ornate metal and wood works on balcony and staircase balustrades
- Relief murals

- Detached conveniences
- Use of dormer windows
- Centrally located, double-loaded corridor
- Baroque-styled ornamental stucco
- Use of fired bricks and cement mortar

The building incorporating most the features listed above is the grand villa built by a female merchant in Abonema around 1925. Based on oral history, it was reported that she enlisted the services of the same afro-brazilian artisans from Lagos that built the famous St. Paul Nyemoni Church in Abonema. It was built using fired clay rendered over with cement mortar. Other features include the use of rounded doorways and arches; ornamented columns; relief murals on the walls and friezes; ornate interior woodwork and staircase balustrades as well as Baroque-styled ornamental stucco. Although, there are other features that show an eclectic mix of influences in this building, yet for the most part, it is indicative of the afro-Brazilian style.



Figure 12: Old Villa Abonema, Rivers State Source: Author (2022)



Figure 13: Ornamented staircase
Source: Author (2022)



Figure 14: Faded wall murals on the left (author)
Source: Author (2022)



Figure 15: Use of fired bricks rendered over with mortar
Source: Author (2022)

5.4 Sierra Leonean 'Saro' Influence

The 'Saro' as christened by the indigenes of Lagos were erstwhile British slaves repatriated to Freetown, Sierra Leone and then relocated eastward to Lagos in the 1800s. Their ingress as actors of change was primarily as labour migrants. They emigrated at various levels of migrant labour – from highly skilled experts to low level artisan labour. Records show that the Sierra Leonean work force comprised of the early set of British-trained doctors, clergymen, teachers and artisans employed by the colonial Government in the health sector, public works department and local Town councils (Mac-Fyle 1991).

The Saros came with their distinct architectural style that combines residential dwelling with home-based enterprises. This mixed-use archetype that widely dominated some large cities in western Nigeria such as Lagos and Ife and was also built extensively in the old Port-Harcourt Township area has been attributed fully to be based on Saro influence. This mixed-use archetype is the most extensively built one or two-storey dwelling in the Old Port-Harcourt Township as observed during fieldwork for this study.

Osasona and Hyland (2006) describe the residential dwellings of the Saros as two-storey mixed-use archetype – first floor living area and ground floor business area. The businesses ranged from simple shops to more complex offices for professional practice. Not only were houses owned by Saros built in this format, but also artisans of Saro extraction designed and built similar structures for their indigenous clients.

Although the features of their architectural built forms draw inspiration from the British style, it however developed a distinct character of its own in material

usage, spatial design, archetype and ornamentation. Their features include:

- Carved ornate frills on fascia boards, lintel beams and other areas
- Timber fretwork at the eaves
- Use of wood or fired brick
- Timber-framed and boarded houses



Figure 17: typical one-storey mixed-use building – living area top floor and business area ground floor

Source: Author (2022)



Figure 18: typical one-storey mixed-use building – living area top floor and business area ground floor

Source: Author (2022)

5.5 Syrian/ Lebanese Influence

The earliest record of the introduction of Syrians and Lebanese nationals in the Niger Delta regions was in the 1940 population census in Port-Harcourt (Ogionwo 1979). They had little influence on the architectural popular culture of that era by introducing certain design elements from their indigenous culture and home country. Information from archival data showed that some of them acquired plots of land for commercial and possibly residential development. For example, a copy of the minutes of meeting of the Port-Harcourt Township Board of 21 June 1948 showed the allocation of commercial plots of land at Harbour Road, Port-Harcourt to 12 persons, two of whom were Syrians/ Lebanese (RIVPROF 13/1/298 – 1949-1951). Other publications referred to them as Syrian/

Indian shopkeepers (Anyanwu 1979) but oral history refers more to them as Lebanese.

Kosremelli and Shorto's (2011) work – A Lebanese Perspective, summarized the key characteristics of Lebanese traditional architecture which include:

- The use of arches at entrance porches, balconies and window area
- Use of arched windows
- Use of triple arches
- High ceilings
- Use of double arches without a centre column
- Raised or elaborate single or double-sided staircase into front entrance porch or veranda
- Ornamented balustrades for staircases and balcony railings

In addition, Kosremelli states that “no two Lebanese houses are the same but here are basic components that are recurrent” (2011:10) such as:

- Simple volumes
- Red tiled roofs
- Regular courses of stone
- Arcaded openings within the main rooms
- External staircases
- Breezy loggias



Figure 19: A typical Lebanese Villa with a grand double-sided staircase to a main first floor entrance

Source: en.wikipedia.org (2022)



Figure 20: A typical Lebanese Villa with a grand double-sided staircase to a main first floor entrance

Source: en.wikipedia.org (2022)

An example of Syrian/ Lebanese influence was observed during early fieldwork in Abonema town in Rivers State. Two late 1920s villas were observed to have included elements such as double arches without a central column, the use of arched windows and predominantly the use of ornamented raised staircases leading to the main entrance of the buildings.

Information obtained by oral history from some of the descendants still inhabiting the buildings, indicated that one was built by a prominent chief and merchant of Kalabari extraction who had developed trade relations with foreign partners at the turn of the 20th century, while the second was built by the most prominent female merchant of her time using foreign artisans.



Figure 21: ornate staircase into front entrance
Source: Author (2022)



Figure 22: double-sided staircase to upper floor entrance
Source: Author (2022)



Figure 23: Use of arched windows and CMUs to replicate cut stone
Source: Author (2022)



Figure 24: Use of arches and elaborate stairs
Source: Author (2022)

6. Discussions and Conclusions

From the study, it is clear that not all contacts with foreign cultures resulted in widespread architectural influences. But for those that did, most of the architectural styles influenced were modified to cope with the tropical climate and topography of the regions they are situated in. Immerwahr (2007) stated that the task of adopting a European architectural style to a tropical climate like that of Nigeria stimulated some innovations that resulted in some unique building forms. A main part of it was getting the issue of ventilation right in addition to the problems that diverse topographies and terrains of the region posed. Nonetheless, even with the seeming innovations, the characteristic architectural features that confirm the existence of these foreign influences are evident.

But in trying to acclimatize the European style to the tropical climate, the building materials the foreign artisans and designers were used to, were hardly ever compromised. An example is the Bobmanuel house built based on the Portuguese Gaiola frame structure and using the traditional

timber material. For the Syrian/ Lebanese influences were stone would have been the material of choice, concrete masonry units (CMU) made to replicate cut stone were used to achieve similar effect as shown in Figures 19 and 20 above.

Of all the foreign influences observed, the study shows that the British have had more influence in terms of building styles and building typologies in the Niger Delta region. This could be attributed to the fact that of all the foreign influences in Nigeria the British have introduced the most actors of change and have spent the most time in colonial administrative capacity in the region.

The study also showed amongst other things that some buildings combined more than one foreign influence. The old villa in Abonema for instance, had elements of the Syrian/ Lebanese influence in its grandeur and use of elaborate double-sided staircase into the main entrance. However, the rest of the building showcases more of the afro-brazilian style in material usage, features and finishes. Oral history also confirmed that the original colours used were bright, just as it would have been in original baroque styles.

Okoye (2013) opines that the architecture these groups promote is a colourful hybrid language, historically comparable to the likes of patois and creole which is a mix of colonial and local lingual influence. He argues that the repatriates who in this case have become the foreign influences, would have encountered the traditional architectures of the regions they had come to inhabit such as the Fante, Yoruba, Izon, and Benin and thus absorbed the architectural languages of these regions into their styles. For instance, quite some buildings that have been named Brazilian incorporate the idea of the courtyard – an element central to the archi-culture of the Yoruba

and Edo of Benin, well before the homecoming of the repatriates.

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