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TECHNOLOGY****ACCULTURATION AND TRADITIONAL HOUSE FORMS IN NIGERIA****Abiodun Olukayode Olotuah <sup>1\*</sup>, Albert Abiodun Olotuah <sup>2</sup>, Ayobami Margaret Olotuah <sup>3</sup>,**<sup>1,3</sup>Department of Architecture, Federal University of Technology, Akure, Nigeria<sup>2</sup>Department of Architecture, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria

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**ABSTRACT**

In Nigeria there is a wide variety of house forms across its length and breadth, which developed in accordance with the cultures of the people, their level of technological development and the dictates of their climates. These house forms reflect the diversity of the natural domestic architecture of Nigeria's different ethnic groups. These house forms are however more evident in the rural landscapes than the urban since development and changes occur in the latter at a more rapid pace. Changes in indigenous house forms are informed by a number of factors, of which acculturation is of paramount importance. This paper takes a critical look at the effect of the various cross-cultural experiences of the Nigerian peoples that have profoundly affected house forms evolved by them. It examines the incidence of the seeming disappearance of traditional house forms in the urban centres.

**KEYWORDS:** acculturation, architecture, climate, house forms, Nigeria.**1. INTRODUCTION**

The form of housing evolved by man is dependent on environmental, socio-economic, political, and cultural factors. This results from a long process of collective adaptation to the dictates of the climate and response to the physiological, protective, and social needs of a given society. A house form is a reflection of the cultural heritage of the people, handed down to generations and having been communally worked out empirically to serve the needs of the people [1]. Housing is thus an important aspect of the culture of the people.

Housing is a part of the material culture of humanity that refers to products of his ingenuity and industry for his survival. Culture is not genetically transmitted but acquired through various processes of social intercourse and transmitted from one generation to the other. In Nigerian traditional house forms, for instance, spatial planning, and the organization of units within the compounds, their shapes, usage and sizes are rooted in the culture of the people. These traditional house forms are however rapidly changing in character and style and are, in some situations, fast giving way entirely to new forms. In many urban centres in Nigeria the occurrence of traditional house forms has ebbed considerably while new forms have emerged as a result of the assimilation of alien cultures by the people. Since the process of socialization is continuous and is responsible for the development of the material culture of people, the house forms developed by them are subject to change as cross-cultural contacts are experienced. House forms in Nigeria have over the years experienced tremendous changes in content, form, structure, and spatial planning (organisation and use). The changes have indelible consequences on the lifestyles of Nigerians and have affected their spatial, symbolic values, aesthetic conception, material preferences, and the nature of architectural forms that appeal to them. New house forms have emerged especially in the urban areas and old ones are fast disappearing even in rural areas.

The focus of this paper is the examination of the effect of acculturation on the traditional house forms of the Nigerian people. Acculturation is the adoption and assimilation of an alien culture through first-hand contact. It results in social adaptation and change in the original culture patterns of either or both groups of different cultures. The Nigerian people have had a long history of cross-cultural contacts with various peoples of different backgrounds with the coming of the colonialists, missionaries, returnee freed slaves, Islamic jihadists, and Middle East traders across the Sahara. The Nigerian colonial experience and Western education that it brought

in its wake have exposed Nigerians to the cultural values of the Western world. The effects of all these have been profound on traditional house forms and have led to their near-annihilation in the urban centres.

## 1. CULTURE AND NIGERIAN TRADITIONAL HOUSING

Housing is a reflection of the cultural, social, and economic values of a society. As a subset of traditional architecture it evolves from the culture of a community in accordance with the lifestyle of its people, the materials of construction available, and technical possibilities open to them [2-4]. It is a cultural phenomenon, which is expressed in the ability of a people to meet their needs of shelter in the context of their communities. The role of culture in housing is determinant alongside the moderating effects of economics, climate, and technology which is known to them. Culture enfolds the entire social, economic, anthropological, and spiritual life of a people. It is their patterned ways of thinking, feeling, and reacting which are acquired and transmitted mainly through symbols [5]. Culture is the personality of a social group which encompasses both the norms and values shared by the members of that group, and is influenced by a large number of factors such as religion, education, nationality, and social class [6, 7].

Housing is an essential need of mankind which is identifiable with every human society. It is required by every individual and is thus a *sine qua non* for human existence [8, 9]. It reflects the social, material, biological, and physical needs of individuals and their economic wherewithal to meet such needs. Adequacy in quantitative and qualitative terms is essential for dignified living and has been found to be a daunting challenge in many human societies particularly in developing countries such as Nigeria. Previous studies have shown the profound inadequacy in housing in Nigeria in both rural and urban areas of the country [10-14]. In traditional architecture the social patterns of societies require particular forms for their houses in consonance with their age-long material and spiritual needs [15]. There are various socio-cultural inputs into the development of house forms. Factors such as family size, occupation, religious beliefs, and social standing are of great importance. The house forms are thus a reflection of the cultural heritage of the people handed down the generations, and which have been empirically resolved communally to serve their needs. Spatial planning of the traditional houses and their placement in relation to one another are rooted in the culture of the people. Thus, dwellings are built from within the community as essential to its life and as a direct expression of it.

The metamorphosis of traditional housing in Nigeria is directly linked with numerous factors. These include the Nigerian colonial experience and consequent contact with the Western world. In spite of these remarkable changes there are elements that have remained constant or perhaps have survived the onslaught of changes [16]. Furthermore, in spite of the cultural differences of the people, their environmental conditions and the effect of the various causative factors of change, similarities run across the sub-species of Nigerian traditional architecture, exemplified in particular by their housing. These are informed by significant cultural motifs of the various ethnic groups. The motifs can be defined broadly as formal, spatial, and decorative [17]. They are elements, forms, objects, images, symbols, and prevailing ideas or concepts recurring frequently in the traditional housing of a particular culture. These motifs exhibit the continuity of traditional architecture despite tremendous pressure for changes and can be assimilated into contemporary architecture which would ensure the retention of cultural identity.

The similarities in the traditional Nigerian housing include sieve elements or filtering spaces (*zauru* in Hausa architecture, *obi* in Igbo architecture and *ate* in Tiv architecture), courtyards (including impluvia and patios), the nature and organization of living spaces, services and utility spaces, and circulation spaces. The other features of traditional housing which cut across all sub-species include the dynamism of traditional spaces and forms, plasticity of space and architectural forms, and the persistent impact of the extended Nigerian family. These similarities evidently create some uniformity in the design of modern dwelling units [18-20].

## 2. NIGERIAN TRADITIONAL HOUSE FORMS

Traditional house forms in Nigeria are an integral part of the domestic architecture of the various ethnic groups of the Nigerian people. These groups include the Hausa and Fulani of the far north, the Nupe and Gwari of the Guinea Savannah, the Yoruba, Ibibio, and the Igbo of the equatorial rain forest. Their houses are built in the context of the communities, the lifestyles of the people, and in accordance with their material, biological, and spiritual needs. Housing is definable in terms of the materials indigenous to the people, their level of technological development, and most importantly their lifestyles. This is why housing is defined as the purest reflection of the lifestyle of a people [21].

### Equatorial Rainforests

Mainly the Yoruba, Igbo, and other closely related group such as the Edo, Ijaw, Urhobo, and Ibibio inhabit the equatorial rain forests. The sub-region experiences heavy rainfall as is typical of the tropical hot-wet climate. This ranges between 1000mm and 1250mm and is often higher in swampy areas. High temperatures and humidity are characteristic of the climate.

In the South-West of Nigeria the traditional house forms of the Yoruba people are informed by their kinship organisation and social structure on the one hand, and climatic requirements on the other. There are two house forms indigenous to the Yoruba people. In the first, the houses are built round one or more courtyards, more often as four rectangular units facing one another. Their compounds usually house several patrilineally-related families who are agnatically linked and are composed of adult males of a particular lineage [22]. There is usually a single main entrance with the head of the house and sometimes strangers and distant relatives having rooms close to it. The rooms all open onto a wide verandah running round the courtyard. The courtyard is used as an intensive activity area where domestic chores such as outdoor cooking, animal rearing, arts and craft (mat weaving, cloth dyeing) are done. The courtyard is also used as an impluvium and where there are more than one, others are as well used as meeting places. The roof of the building is usually a continuous saddle-back type supported by caryatids and sometimes mud columns in the courtyard. In houses of chiefs, as in palaces, the roofing usually has a raised and projected gable known as *kobi* in Yoruba language.

The second type of house forms of the Yoruba people is much smaller than the first and is simply an arrangement of rooms in two rows facing a common hall. The hall is usually quite wide as it serves several domestic purposes. Out-houses are usually built at the back to serve as toilets and kitchens. In the main building the hall serves as a kitchen space for some households and even a sleeping space for night visitors. The walls in both house types are usually constructed of mud. Swish-puddling is the method commonly employed in wall construction. Roofing is usually done with palm leaf mats on a timber framework.

The house forms of the Edo tribes (Bini, Esan, Etsako, Itsekiri) and Urhobo are very similar to those of the Yoruba. The houses have several impluvia that are drained by carefully constructed tanks and pipes. Courtyards are features of the houses too with decorative trees.

In the South-East, the Igbo people are the dominant group. Their compounds usually have a single entrance with a covered porch. The fence or compound walls are usually strongly built and sometimes with defensive contrivances. The buildings within the compounds do not have courtyards inside them but rather they are built facing one another creating a common courtyard. The buildings are usually one or two-room houses. A typical compound comprises the entrance to the compound, the *obi* (meeting place and ritual altar location), the house of the family head, wives' houses, kitchen, toilet, bathroom, and sheds for domestic animals.

The walls are constructed of puddled mud that is often reinforced with wattle or lashed palm midribs. The building earth commonly found in Igbo land is loam which in its best form is clay-like and viscous. The loam in most locations is usually greyish and so weak that it cannot be used as walling material without an inner reinforcement of wattle. Excellent hardwoods grow luxuriantly in the rain forests and these serve for use as beams and posts. Various species of palm trees provide fronds for roof thatches and their trunks are used for door posts. The Ijaw people live in the riverine areas in the swampy mangrove regions in southern Nigeria. Their houses are basically rectangular in plan with walls of mangrove poles and are usually raised on stilts. The walls are sometimes built with palm midribs or planks and with the interstices filled with mud. Palm mats are used in roofing the houses that are often divided into two or three rooms internally.

### Guinea Savannah

The guinea savannah is inhabited by the Tiv, Nupe, Gwari, Jukun, Idoma and others of similar culture. Rainfall in the region is sparse. The consequence of this is a drier climate than the equatorial hot-wet climate with less luxuriant vegetation of tall grasses and short trees. Houses are built in clusters within a surrounding fence, hedge or wall. The house form is usually of circular plan, free standing, with the diameter of the building equal to or greater than its height. Verandahs running round them are common features of such buildings. Walls are built of mud and interesting shapes are ingeniously built, examples of which are the Mousgum shell houses of the Tiv, often described as roofs without walls. The walls are reinforced with wattle while bamboo and palm fronds are also used for construction. Thatch is used for roofing that is often conical in convex or concave profile.

### Semi-Arid Region

The semi-arid region experiences very little rainfall that however comes in a few storms. The climate is characterized by bright sunshine and high temperature range consequent upon the incidence of very hot afternoons and cold nights. This region is the home of the Hausa, Fulani, Kanuri and other related tribes in the far North of Nigeria. As it is the case with all the other sub-regions, house forms are products of a wide variety of economic, social, political, and technological factors. They are physical reflections of the way of life of the people and a generalized solution to their problems of habitation. The commonest type of house form is the round hut with thatched roof or flat tops. Homesteads are built as compounds that are commonly divided into two; the inner women restricted area and the outer male visitor reception area. The division is informed by the need for separation between the two sexes as required in Islam. Reception rooms are usually provided in the outer area while they serve as elements of security in Hausa traditional architecture. The family head has his bedroom and living room strategically located close to the entrance. The buildings most often face the east and that could be attributed to the influence of Islam (facing the *Ka'aba* in Mecca). Consequently the frontages of buildings become relaxation arenas in the evenings and they are well shaded from the setting sun.

Walls are built of vegetable materials, mud bricks, or mud reinforced with beams split from the *deleb* palm. Pear-shaped mud bricks are the most common materials. Mud is particularly suited to the climate because of its thermal properties. The Hausas have developed the art of texturing the surface of mud walls because of their mastery, and fond for ornamentation. The beauty in mud construction is highly exhibited in these buildings. Native builders have also developed what has come to be termed the Hausa Vault in mud construction. Mud roofs (flat or domed) are built depending on the amount of rain experienced in a particular location. In the **northern most parts where there is scanty rain (Kano, Katsina Daura, Sokoto) flat roofs are common, while in places with heavier rainfalls as in Zaria, dome-shaped mud roofs are built.**

### 3. CROSS-CULTURAL EXPERIENCES AND EMERGING HOUSE FORMS

Nigerians have experienced first-hand contacts with the outside world with tell-tale consequences on their traditional house forms in the last one hundred years or more. White explorers, missionaries, the colonialists, and the returnee freed slaves constituted the early contacts with the southerners from which assimilation of alien culture began. The Trans - Saharan trade and the Islamic jihad constitute the genesis of cultural adaptation in the north. Islam has however assisted significantly in establishing traditional house forms prevalent in the northern part of Nigeria.

Cross-cultural influences in Hausa cities began to affect traditional house forms with the coming of the Syrian and Lebanese settlers. Their house forms have been adopted by the generality of the people in preference to the traditional house types. Indigenous builders have come to learn the alien designs that are repeated everywhere in the cities. The buildings are symmetrical in design with an entrance porch in the middle. Bedrooms and toilets are arranged on either sides of a hall with a living room in the middle and the kitchen at the tail end of the hall. External staircases are provided for storey buildings.

The Nigerian colonial experience provided substantial opportunity for acculturation that manifests in the changes obvious in the built environment. In the government residential areas (GRAs) buildings of Western trend dominate the scenery. Most of the buildings are in the British colonial style. The designs were initially brought from Britain for implementation in Nigeria to house the colonialists. The buildings are characterized by wide-glazed windows, wide porches, and verandahs (or balconies). They also have small-sized rooms, fire places (hearth), chimneys, and tall clay-tiled roofing. They are usually designed for small nuclear families. The buildings are located on large expanse of land, fenced in, with boys' quarters at the rear, backing the house. With the spread of Western education and re-orientation of social norms and values the house type has been well received by the populace and adopted especially by the well-to-do as the ideal house form. It is the second most dominating form in most Hausa cities. The buildings are built with sandcrete blocks rather than mud bricks as in traditional architecture.

In villages and small towns where traditional house forms still exist, changes are apparent in materials of construction, as thatch roof is almost non-existent. Corrugated iron sheets have gradually replaced thatch. They are fire-proof making the buildings much safer but are difficult in roofing circular buildings. Thus, circular buildings are gradually giving way to rectangular ones. Traditional moulded decorations on clay walls have been replaced with painted decoration of figurative patterns done in paints. Even in the cities surface decorations have changed from the old patterns as they are quite open to variations. Existing traditional house form are



adorned with elaborate moulded designs. These are executed in cement often in figurative patterns in complete contrast to the old non-figurative ones.

In the southern part of Nigeria the coming of the colonialists and missionaries brought sweeping changes in the traditional life and culture of the people. The contact with the British resulted in the change in the economic, political, and social conditions of the people giving rise to new lifestyle, new social orientation, and architectural needs. The earliest impact of the contact with the whites is in the change in materials of construction. Thatch roofs require frequent maintenance and are prone to fire disasters. Houses of missionaries were roofed with corrugated iron sheets that they brought into the country. The people soon adopted this practice. By 1920 virtually all buildings with thatch roof in Ibadan had been re-roofed with corrugated iron sheets [23]. .

The missionaries introduced western education. The influence of Western education vis-a-vis Christianity profoundly altered the lifestyle of the people. The people gradually adopted nuclear family habitation, which is a cultural trait of the English. Homesteads which house single households began to emerge in Yoruba land while traditional buildings still house several patrilinearly related families. Houses were designed in the style of the British colonial buildings. Since those buildings did not have courtyards, emerging house forms too excluded them. Chimneys were to be found, in the buildings, located above the kitchens, as was in the colonial buildings. Mud construction began to wane with the introduction of sandcrete blocks into the country.

The return of freed slaves to the western coast of Nigeria also influenced the acculturation of the Yoruba and affected their house forms. The returnee slaves brought with them their building experience from Latin/South America where they had emigrated. This resulted in the emergence of the new house form commonly referred to as Brazilian architecture. This is characterised by masterful ornamentation of building elements such as the balustrade, columns, architectural mouldings, and wrought iron gates. The buildings had no courtyards but rather a common hall onto which all rooms open as in the smaller traditional Yoruba house type. The influence of Brazilian architecture is felt in Yoruba land as elements of it are entrenched in traditional and emerging house forms.

Western education has taken deep roots in Nigeria and with it the adoption of Western civilisation and culture. In this regard, the advent of modern architecture into Nigeria has been significant. Its major contributions are the introduction of new materials of construction such as glass, steel, and concrete, greater range of technological possibilities, and new concepts of organisation and use of space.

Post-modern classicism has dominated the architectural scenery in Nigeria, albeit superficially, as in the use of Greco-Roman orders and triangular pediments of classical architraves. This has put paid to the use of caryatids in Yoruba housing as houses, even in the rural areas, are decorated with Greco-Roman (doric and ionic) orders that are often incompetently done. The consequence of this is the appearance of strange house forms dotting the landscape mostly in the urban centres, and rare occurrence of modern buildings in traditional forms.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This paper examines the Nigerian traditional house forms-in-change and the influence of acculturation on the phenomenon. In the last one hundred years the house forms have transformed into contemporary style and in many instances have been replaced completely owing to cultural assimilation emanating from contact with other people. The concepts of form and structure, material and technology of construction, and spatial planning have been subject to rapid changes especially in the urban centres.

The cross-cultural contacts between Nigerians and especially with foreign nationals that resulted in new patterns of behaviours and lifestyle, changing social orientation, and consequently new sets of architectural needs significantly influenced the transformation of traditional house forms and the emergence of contemporary ones. The paper affirms the influence of Western education and civilization on the process of social adaptation of the people that resulted in the acquisition of alien cultural elements with new house forms and the rejection of the old order.

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