



A Study of British Colonial-era Architectural Heritage in Nigeria: A Case Study of Selected Church Buildings in Oshogbo, Osun State Nigeria

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Abstract: Multifaceted nature of heritage-architecture conservation has been discussed in literature. This paper explores issues related to British Colonial Era Architectural Heritage in Nigeria – particularly with respect to church buildings. It posits that Nigerian British Colonial experience gave rise to direct legacies of colonization. Nigeria has witnessed different civilizations throughout its long history and as such, has come to own diverse architectural remains from all of these eras. Some of such remnants especially of the distant past are now listed as ancient buildings while some architectural evidence of the recent past, particularly of the British colonial era (1900-1960) have not yet received heritage attention. By initiating a new style in architectural design and construction know-how, this era transformed the built landscape of the country in many forms. The main aim of this research is to investigate the case of the selected church buildings that were erected during the British colonial era in Oshogbo, Nigeria and to assess their heritage values. Through archival survey, interviews, site visits cum pilot study, literature review and documentation this research provides insights into the building practices viz a viz technology and materials both during Nigeria's pre-colonial and colonial era. It also discusses the current trend in the country's heritage conservation practices. Afterwards, recommendations are made towards ensuring that historic buildings are properly cared for in order to ensure their continued relevance.

Keywords: Architectural Conservation, Value Assessment, British Colonial Era, Oshogbo, Nigeria

Introduction

Nigeria has witnessed different civilizations throughout its long history and as such, it has come to own diverse architectural remains from all of these eras. Some of such remnants especially of the distant past are now listed as ancient buildings while some architectural evidence of the recent past, particularly of the British colonial period (1900-1960) have not yet received heritage attention. By initiating a new style in architectural design and construction know-how, the colonial era transformed the built landscape of the country both intrinsically and extrinsically. As such, the main aim of this research is to assess the case of the church buildings that were erected during the British colonial era in Oshogbo (Nigeria) and to evaluate their heritage values. By doing this, it will present highlights regarding their didactic role in the understanding of the country's colonial past hence informing the urgency in their consideration as national heritage warranting preservation.

This research employs a research methodology based on archival survey, physical observations and documentation on case study buildings. Field work also includes freehand sketches and measured drawings. Besides, oral, written and graphical data are collected concerning construction materials and techniques, and spatial layouts. The scarcity of existing literatures in the field of architectural heritage and conservation in Nigeria constitutes a huge limitation. On these reasons, in order to understand the approaches adopted during the restoration of the selected case study buildings, semi-structured elite interviews are conducted with the concerned bodies.

Architectural Conservation

Heritage conservation could be divided into tangible and intangible aspects. The tangible aspect comprises of movable and immovable items while the intangible aspect comprises of folklore, music, dance, social values, beliefs and religions (Kurin, Richard, 2004), (Lenzerini, 2011). Since most of human activities are gravitating towards ensuring sustainability both in architectural practice and in fact, every other aspect, architectural conservation well describes as the process that assures both the sustenance and longevity of design,

construction, and historical integrity of the built heritage through carefully planned interventions. In other words conservation includes undertaking necessary maintenance to retain a built property in its existing form and condition.

Architectural Heritage and Conservation Context in Nigeria

It could be observed that the more robust and effective a country's heritage conservation regulations are, the more successful the practice of conservation and the more the number of protected properties. The case of England, Italy, United States and even South Africa bears witness to this. Regardless of whatever localized challenges, their approach to heritage conservation has been well adapted over the years so as to produce results. According to Ndlovu, (2011), there are two challenges that noticeably affect the practicality and implementation of the laws and regulations guiding the practice of conservation in Sub-Saharan Africa; they are "lack of proactive management strategy", and having a "legal sector that does not fully understand the concept and principles of heritage legislations". In order to face these challenges and others, apart from the respective government ministries such as the National Heritage Resources Act (NHRA) of South Africa, Antiquities Department of Tanzania, and the National Museums and Monuments of Ghana (among others) that are primarily saddled with the responsibility of safe-guarding these heritage properties, other non-governmental agencies work hand-in-hand especially with African countries to provide help in preserving the heritage they've got such as the African Union, UNESCO, African World Heritage Fund, World Bank and the International Center for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments thereby providing a veritable platform for capacity building.

In Nigeria, the Federal Ministry of Tourism, Culture and National Orientation is the Ministry saddled with the responsibility of managing tangible and non-tangible cultural and natural heritage

The first requirement in conserving any building is a sensitive assessment of its history and merits; and according to Zubairu et al (2012), "a listed building" as it obtains in the *Nigerian context* "is one which has been formally declared to be of special architectural or historic interest by being placed on statutory lists compiled by the National Commission for Museums and Monuments". So, to ensure a successful long term sustainable management plan of not only natural resources but also of other heritage sites and facilities, the support of local people cannot be over-emphasized. "In this regards assessing local people's attitudes, taking into account their needs, and respecting their management opinions and native societal values must become a management priority".

Value Assessment Criteria and Terminology

Value could be described as an estimated worth employed in ascribing importance which often could be subjective. These attributes through which the values definition is carried out are often the high points of all heritage assessment evaluations.

Historic Value

"The historical value of a monument arises from the particular, individual stage it represents in the development of human activity in a certain field" and at a particular location (Viney, 2014). If a building perceived to possess some heritage values is well preserved in its original state, it will be adjudged as being rich in historical values: however, disfiguration and decay are not helpful in preserving this.

Architectural value

According to Orbasli (2008), "the exemplary qualities of design and proportion and the contribution that the architecture of a building makes on the quality of the everyday experience is its architectural value". Archetypically, the Parthenon for instance boasts of rich architectural values which for centuries fascinate people all around the world. The masterly display of skills, intelligence and ingenuity make such buildings worthy of preservation.

Age and Rarity value

The older a building is, the more values are likely to be attached to it. Although not all old buildings could be adjudged as being rare since the word *old* itself is relative, nevertheless, in any given landscape, the oldest buildings are often times accorded credible value by virtue of their rarity. Unlike buildings of more recent periods for which much information is available in various forms, no much documented evidence exists on rare buildings making them qualify for conservation.

Associative value

Like what the Osun-Oshogbo groove means to the Yoruba people of Nigeria and the Great Zimbabwe to Zimbabwe, it is impossible to dissociate monuments from groups of people. Hence, to ensure the continuing survival and relevance of such sites, their associative characters must be considered. Other compelling examples noted by Orbasli (2008) are historic battlefields which often are also representatives of emotional values.

Vernacular and Colonial-Era Architecture in Nigeria

Vernacular architecture is the oldest possible architectural expressions of any particular people (Oliver, 2007). It is characterized by the people, their needs and skills as well as the available materials. Vernacular building materials therefore, are the materials that have been in local production from ancient times using small-scale rudimentary technologies, such as laterite, gravel, thatch, straw, unstabilized and stabilized mud. On the other hand, contemporary Nigerian architecture has no correlation with the culture of its people and does not respect the environment upon which it exists (Uzuegbunam, 2012). However, that is not the way it has always been. The strongest influences on indigenous architecture were the introduction of Islam into Northern Nigeria, the return of ex-slaves to Southern Nigeria and colonization. Regardless of its location in Nigeria, traditional buildings are generally constructed with the most readily available naturally-occurring materials such as earth (as presented in different modes, shapes and forms like adobe, terra cotta or cob), bamboo, sorghum stalks, palm fronds and also stone and rock.

Hausa indigenous architecture on one hand is known for its ribbed vaulting, domed roofs with sculpted and painted external murals. Their buildings are composed of individual egg-shaped units of adobe which have been earth-plastered, presenting a monolithic appearance. A typical homestead comprises both rectilinear and circular spatial units, linked together by wall segments constituting a perimeter wall. Roofing essentially consists of linking shallow domes and vaults (evolved from an intricate arrangement of lengths of palm-tree timber, overlaid by processed laterite) together by small stretches of earth, laid relatively flat; rain-water run-off is led out of corrugated metal spouts fitted into the framing parapet wall (Muhammad-Oumar, 1997).

According to Ogunsote (2002), “there is a very weak link between the Historical Style (traditional architecture), and contemporary modern architecture of Nigeria”. In the Yoruba part of Nigeria on the other hand, the chief’s palace and the market place dominated the central areas of well-planned cities. The populace lived in compounds each of which had a large house set in a square-shaped space bounded by high walls. There was only a single entrance which also doubles as the exit. Inside, the compounds were divided into numerous rooms. Until during the colonial period, all of such compounds as well as the chief’s palace were roofed with thatch.

British Colonial-Era Architecture in Nigeria

After the abolishment of slave trade in the 19th century, various European explorers and Christian missionaries recorded a higher level of contact with Africa thereby exposing in a greater way, the richness in mineral and natural resources in its core interiors and coastal towns. Mark (1997) opined that “as an embodiment of British presence, architecture was the form in which British ambitions and identities were made physically apparent”. By this, it was only seen as a matter of expediency the necessity for doing all it needed to stamp its presence on the already-existing way of life of their colonial subjects – and colonizing their architecture was not excluded. Osasona, Hyland (2006) classified all such building typologies traceable to this particular period as are notable during the colonial era into the following categories:

- i Administrative Buildings: examples of this include District Offices, Town Halls, and Palaces
- ii Commercial Buildings: examples of this include Warehouses and Stores
- iii Religious Buildings such as Churches, Mosques and Shrines
- iv Residential Buildings and
- v Social Services Buildings such as Hospitals, Schools, Post Offices and Parks.

Overview of Church Plan Types

Church is any physical structure designed for Christian religious activities. Referring to the architecture of places of worship for Christians, Church design started from converting already-existing buildings meant for other purposes to meet this need and then transcended into having its own style and unique characters and attributes (Fletcher, 1896), (Kostof, 1995): synonymous to the Christians is the Gothic architecture Periods, regions and affiliations are three important factors that hence determine the type of ecclesiastical buildings erected for church activities.

The beginning of the colonial rule in Nigeria coincided with the Victorian era architectural discourses in Great Britain. Spanning between 1819 and 1901, the era which was characteristic of British architecture symbolized the use of new building materials, which emerged in the construction market following the Industrial Revolution (Mokyr, 1998), (Engelman, 2015). This era could not particularly be said to have heralded an entirely new church architecture; rather, there were certain ways and manners in which massive production of industrialized materials highly influenced arts, sculpting and architecture. While the plan types remained in practice without significant changes, architectural styles varied: early nineteenth century witnessed revivalism of the medieval architecture while the twentieth century witnessed the emergence of modern style (Whytock, 2011), (Scully, 1958).

Depending on its origin and the degree of influence exerted upon it by the missionaries, colonial church buildings in Nigeria systematically differ from one denomination to another. The Baptist denomination, for example, had in itself evolved in the United States with its built form from the *cottage-plan* building to the *chapel plan* and the then *Akron plan*. With simple, gable-roofed single floored mud-walled building, the early Baptist churches which began in Nigeria in 1850 typically consisted of two columns of pew each belonging to each sex.

Similarly, with the initial emergence of the Anglican denomination in 1845 in Lagos, organic “ecclesiastical architecture” began incorporating “indigenous style of labour and materials like bamboo walls and thatch roof” thereby “borrowing a lot from the traditional domestic and religious architecture” (Adeboye et al, 2014). As much as the Anglican denomination is from Britain, Catholic Church from Rome and the Baptist Church from the United States of America, they all have striking similarities in their architecture and especially the choice of construction materials used for the earliest structures erected in the colonial era.

Architectural Features of the Studied Church Buildings: Assessment of 1900-1960 Churches in Oshogbo

The first attempt to build a church in Oshogbo started exactly at the place in 1895, where the present All Saints’ Cathedral now stands approximately 3 km south of the Osun – Osogbo Cultural Grove. “Christian missions used the strategy of founding mission stations, out-stations, churches and institutions as means of occupying and entrenching their presence within African territory” (Galadima, Turaki, 2001). One of the first of such mission stations in Oshogbo that is being examined here vis-à-vis its history, architectural and artistic characteristics, values and conservation attempts is the All Saints’ Cathedral. The church, whose history dates back to 1901 is considered to be the oldest in town. The construction of the current building started in at the twilight of the colonial era in 1953 at the same location where the three previous buildings stood. The design of the building of dimension 47 meters by 22 meters and an arguable replica of the Christ Church Marina, Lagos was done by an unnamed missionary. The highest point on its tower is 31 meters.

The churches examined are good examples of simple symmetrical buildings with double volume congregational space. With no exception, they have been designed on longitudinal layout, symmetrically arranged along the middle axis crossing the space lengthwise (refer o figure 3). With a total area generally less than a thousand square meters, they could be described as fairly small with consequent maximum capacity of users under seven hundred.

Their layouts have rather simplistic lines although the construction materials used are much easily available in the local markets in the present time, it shall be remembered that at the time of their construction these materials were new to the environment. This can be understood when a comparison with the materials mentioned in the above descriptions and those typical to vernacular Yoruba architecture is made. In their construction, indigenous people worked with them as apprentices during which they learned the details of designing church buildings (as draughtsmen) and constructing with them utilizing imported industrialized materials.

Restoration and Maintenance Practice

Whereas the church building might have undergone various undocumented renovations and repairs since 1961 when it was opened, the one embarked upon beginning from 2010 is of significant importance, one because it was documented and secondly because none other has been done since then. Renovations included:

- i Partial flooring of the west entrance
- ii Partial wall tiling of the chancel/vestibule
- iii Renovation of the children’s hall (which is not part of the main building)
- iv Face lift (painting) of the wall and pillars

Synopsis of the First Baptist Church, Oshogbo

As the custom was for the colonialists to import building designs into their colonies that, “the very first set of colonial residential buildings were practically direct transplants from Britain” (Osasona, Hyland (2006). This particular church design was not an exception but rather a hybrid of a number of other cultures not indigenous to Oshogbo in particular and Nigeria in general. It is a statement of fact that the Baptist church originated from England and got to Nigeria through American missionaries via the Atlantic coast, hence, the valid architectural similarities between the preceding Baptist churches already in existence in colonial West Africa and the ones subsequently erected in Nigeria.

Restoration and Maintenance Practice of First Baptist Church, Oshogbo

Regarding technical expertise, basically, the building professionals in the church’s building committee assume all responsibilities including technical and financial. So for better grasp of these details, direct labour has always been the most preferred method employed with the church leadership’s discretion. The on-going construction of a new, bigger and contemporary building in the same compound makes clear the possible further neglect and eventual demolition this building of particular interest faces in the near future. When responding to what the main factors are that are involved in the upkeep planning, it was discovered that current needs on ground usually inform the scope and extent of the upkeep and maintenance work to be done while offerings and freewill donations are the main sources of funds for all renovations and maintenance projects without any sort of government’s intervention or involvement whatsoever. As such, the demands of the local community and the benefactors stand out as highly influential in deciding the nature and scope of these physical interventions. The other factor is aesthetics. And oftentimes, the nature of the functional or aesthetic requirements determines the nature of physical interventions on the building. As it happened in the case of the first church that was originally built on the site in 1914, the local community and the church management may decide to replace it with a new and bigger building to meet their demands.

Conclusion

The emergence of Christianity in Nigeria has been largely associated with colonization. Consequently, church buildings started to be erected in accordance with colonial architectural design understandings making them possess both architectural and religious values. Sammy Said (2013) noted that Nigeria is the second most religious country in the world with Africa among the most religious continents (Richard Greene, 2010). It is also a common knowledge that there is a church building to every one thousand Nigerian. So, Oshogbo being a town of about three hundred thousand people (according to the 2006 national census figures) could be rightly be said to have about three hundred different church buildings, tents or shelters (used for Christian religious purposes). So, to further justify the need for the protection of the older buildings is to note that only a handful of them were constructed during the colonial era of which some have ceased to exist and function.

The architectural layouts of the case studied church building (as seen in the appendices) and their material characteristics were documented in the field study. It shall be concluded from the findings that these British colonial era church buildings are the markers of the beginning of a new architectural form in the country as such, deserving to be identified and inscribed into the built heritage list of Nigeria because the importance and benefits of heritage properties is manifold. Apart from ensuring adequate protection and preservation of the remains of the past for future generations, conservation is also a veritable yardstick in defining a given geography.

Based on field observations and available literatures, a number of socio- cultural issues have constituted themselves as huge limitations to a robust general conservation practice especially of religious properties in Nigeria at large. The field work investigation and oral interviews have indicated that such limitations could be discussed under three broad sub-headings which are:

Lack of community Awareness:

General lack of adequate architectural heritage conservation lessons in the curriculum of higher education in Nigeria is hugely responsible for the obvious deficiencies in the understanding of the necessity of preserving rare edifices especially of both pre and post-colonial era. Another direct result of this is the dearth of sufficient manpower trained and adequately equipped with all relevant technical-know-how. Lack of awareness is surely to blame for the indiscriminate repairs, alterations, modifications and outright demolition of this category of buildings by their owners in the name of maintenance and expansion.

Funds:

The last on the list of the limitations is funds. To professionally manage heritage properties especially in accordance with international standard is at a cost. It also might not be a ready means of generating revenue for any government in the short-term; so, for a government in a third world country to budget huge sums of money in the form of expenditure might not realistically be appealing. This explains why hitherto, no special financial commitment is being made both by the Osun state government and the Federal government of Nigeria in catering for these buildings.

Evident from the research questions posed to the respondents from the church is that the concept of living religious heritage and consequently the conservation of such heritage properties in accordance with core conservation principles is not well-understood. By this, what at best they do is mere building maintenance and renovations! No stipulated rules or written guidelines are followed in any of such work; in fact, hardly could any documentation cataloguing such repair be found. With each upkeep work, extensive alterations are made to the original architectural layout or materials.

Inadequacies of governmental policies:

By this, the government is observed as not being keen in providing a conducive environment that encourages people's participation in conserving personal historical properties. This could be discussed in two forms. First, the pluralistic nature of the religious atmosphere of Nigeria - a situation where Christianity, Islam and other traditional religions have strong followership - makes it tricky and almost impossible for the federal government to identify with a particular religion and indeed a certain sect although the case of the Osun-Oshogbo Grove is a unique exemption. The direct result of this could be felt in the state of derelict these buildings are currently in. The second aspect of this is the not-too-robust framework that upholds the National Commission for Museums and Monuments. It could be said to be so inadequately run such that the comprehensive lists of all national heritage properties are not included in its online database and repositories. Should the government be more deliberate in professionalizing this department, then the chances of a sustainable antiquities commissions will be brighter (such as is obtainable in the UK and other western countries). This brings forward the need for Governmental attention in defining these buildings as heritage properties and in preparation of the required policy in building conservation practices with the afore-mentioned points. Especially for the churches, which are amongst the colonial buildings that are fast disappearing, it is highly recommended that serious considerations should be given at the governmental level to the followings:

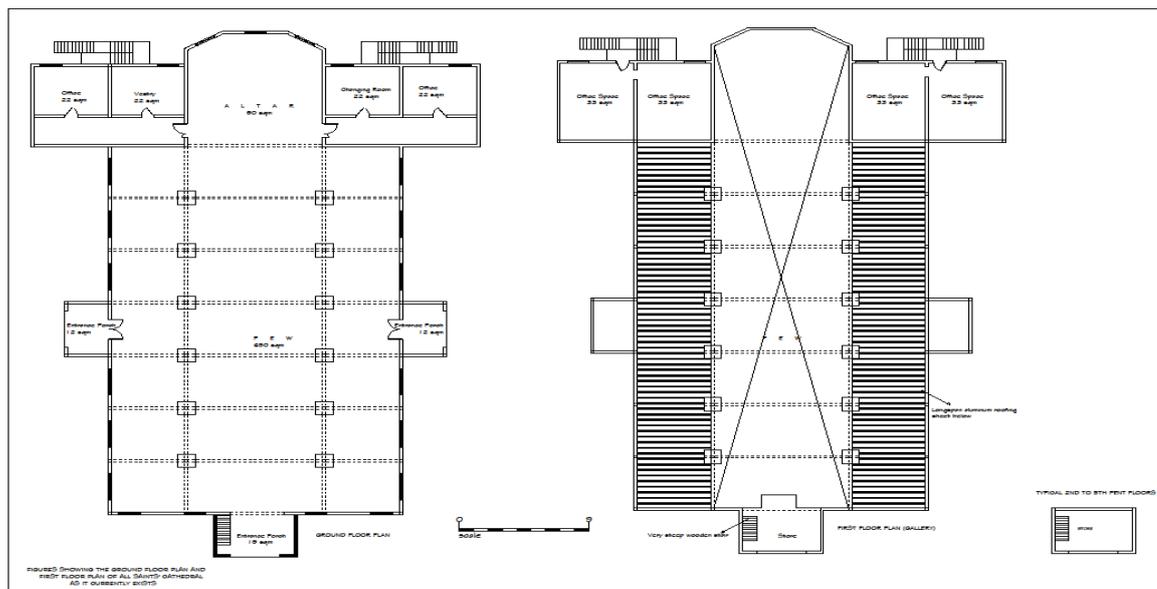
- i. Encouraging the inclusion of heritage conservation (both tangible and intangible) in the curriculum of students especially in tertiary institutions.
- ii. Provision of funds or incentives accessible by religious institutions in renovating, maintaining and conserving certain of their structures.
- iii. Willingness to provide alternative land area for groups of people whose buildings are so important that relinquishing their right of ownership (in order for such space to be turned to an ethnographic or religious museum) would be possible.

Appendices



Figure 1: Showing All Saints' Cathedral, Oshogbo (Courtesy: Google Earth)
A= Parking lots; B= Church building

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Figure 2: Showing Layout Spatial Distribution of the All Saints' Cathedral, Oshogbo (Author - 2015)



Figure 3: African motifs on the church building (Author –2020)



Figure 4: Front façade (south-west) of the All Saints' Cathedral, Oshogbo (Author –2020)



Figure 5: Hand-crafted door showing decorative motifs artistic figures (Author –2020)



Figure 6: Hand-crafted door showing decorative motifs artistic figures (Author –2015)

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