

The Place of Vernacular Architecture in Urban Housing Development a Case Study of Ile-Timi (Timi's House) Okerewe Street, Ile-Ife, Osun State

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Abstract:-There are many wonderful building styles from all over the world that can inform us with their shapes, materials, arrangements, decorations, concepts for heating and cooling, etc. With the influx of oil revenue and foreigners, Nigerian cities have grown to resemble many western urban centers. Lagos, for examples, is massive, overcrowded city characterized with urban features like traffic jam, movie theaters, departmental stores, restaurants, and supermarkets. Because most Nigerian cities grew out of much older towns, very little urban planning was used as the cities expanded. Streets are laid out in confusing and often mazelike fashion, adding to the chaos for pedestrian and traffic. The influx of people into urban areas has put a strain on many services. Power outages and disruptions of telephone service are not uncommon. Sustainable design requires that design practitioners respond to a particular set of social, cultural and environmental conditions. 'Vernacular Architecture and Regional Design' defines a set of strategies for understanding the complexities of a regional setting. Through a series of case studies, it examines how architects and designers have applied a variety of tactics to achieve culturally and environmental appropriate design solutions. Also shows that architecture and design are inextricably linked to social and environmental processes, and are not just technical or aesthetic exercises. It articulates a variety of methods to realize goals of socially responsible and environmental responsive design. This calls for a principled approach to design in an effort to preserve urban environments and forge sustainable best practice. Changes and developments in architecture at any point in time are reflections of the attempt by man to respond to the challenges posed by natural and environmental factors. This attempt is expressed in Technological, economical and socio-cultural attainments, which are reflected in his ability to develop and use the various materials he finds available. He also demonstrates this in the various construction technologies he develops to enable him use the materials that abound in nature. Despite the massive increase in urban populations and modern settlements, a very significant proportion of vernacular and traditional characteristics exists transformed in numerous ways and adapting to ongoing change or urban development. Case studies will be drawn from contemporary building types, (in the light of their influences by traditional and vernacular) supported by structured interviews. It is hoped that the research findings will highlight contemporary buildings that have recaptured elements from indigenous architecture. As such, a break from all that went before will neither be taken for granted, nor that the past has to teach, is assumed.

Keywords: Vernacular; Urban Housing Development; Architecture; Design; Building.

I. BACKGROUND

It is common knowledge that the term "Timi" refers to the official title of the traditional ruler of Ede, a town on the outskirts of Ile-Ife, Osun State. Investigations and interviews carried out show that the present occupants of Ede town migrated from Ile-ife to settle in what is currently referred to as Ede, a place which originally served as a stop-over for hunters on their hunting expeditions. Specifically they migrated from "Agboole Timi" (Timi's compound) in Ile-Ife the compound within which the building under study is located. Coincidentally the first "Timi" came from "Ile Timi", the focus of this study.

The building, "Ile Timi" was said to have been constructed sometime between 1890 and 1920, but particularly the date is put sometime during World War I. No member of the family interviewed seemed to be able to confirm the particular year of construction. Built by Awoyede Aderierin, a hunter of great repute and from a hunting lineage as the name Aderierin implies (one who beheads the elephant) the building sits atop a hilly terrain, surrounded by other houses that belong to the compound of Timi. Since it was only wealthy individuals who could build houses this size, at the time, it is only right to conclude that Awoyele Aderierin was a very wealthy hunter in ancient times.

To understand and appreciate the monumental importance of this building it is important that the social status of Awoyele Aderierin be fully explained. Besides the fact that he was a great hunter as mentioned earlier, he is also noted in history to be one of the foremost pioneers of the Islamic faith in Ile-Ife and he was the Imam of the mosque at Itakogun, a small hamlet within Ife City. It was thus not surprising that he practiced polygamy and this accounts for the number of spaces provided in the house as living quarters for his many wives. Coming from a lineage of hunters, his forefathers were said to have worshipped many deities particularly Ogun and Sango. Even with the advent of civilization, Christianity and Islam, interviews conducted revealed that all sons and daughters of this compound still come back at appointed times

to worship these deities irrespective of their religious affiliations.

Another fact which establishes the importance of this building and the status of its owner is that it overlooks the palace of the traditional ruler of Ile-Ife, the Ooni of Ife and according to a family source; a tunnel links the compound to the Ooni's palace.

Within the context of "Agboole Timi", "Ile Timi" is centrally located and it sits on the highest point on the land mass, which further signifies its importance.

Over the years changes and alterations were made to the house and the many rooms originally made for Awoyele's many wives have had their uses altered for other purposes. The next section of this report is a detailed description and location of the house.

II. DOCUMENTATION OF VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE IN ILE-IFE

Historically, man's root has been closely associated with physical symbols which speak eloquently of his antecedents but none does this more eloquently than Architectural monuments and significant buildings which have stood from time immemorial as a representation of a people's culture,

values, strengths and in essence an embodiment of their beliefs and history. These pieces by virtue of their size, and events associated with them present individually and collectively, a "silent historical continuum" and serve as reminders of symbolic events that have taken their places in the histories of any group of people or race.

These symbols as a result of their constituent materials are degradable not only by weather and nature but also by will-full destruction. Architectural conservation seeks to preserve these symbols and their inherent significance through cleaning, repairs and restoration works which sometimes infuse new uses but ultimately restore the buildings as much as possible to their past glories.

Vernacular buildings are selected through a very fine discriminatory process, which according to J. Harvey has Quality, Date and Position as the operative criteria. The purpose of this documentation is to write a history of vernacular buildings in Ile-Ife. A vernacular building has being carefully selected for this documentation based on a critique and comparison of what presently exists with what it was before along the lines of the aforementioned operative criteria.

Case Study: Ile-Timi House



Figure 1: ILE-TIMI (Timi's House) Okerewe Street, Ile- Ife, Osun State

III. THE BUILDING LOCATION

As mentioned earlier, Ile Timi is located off Iredunni Street, which is off Okerewe Street. Okerewe Street is one of the roads that lead to the palace of the traditional ruler of Ile Ife, The Ooni. Okerewe road branches off Irewo road, which leads to the entrance of the Ooni's Palace and to Enuwa square. The road, on the left, is bounded by the palace walls making it

easy for one to look into parts of the palace compound from the Okerewe end of Ile Timi. The survey maps below show the location of Ile Timi within Ile-Ife and in relation

to other important buildings. "Ile Timi" cannot be accessed by any motorable road but by foot paths from both Iredunni Street and Okerewe Road.

3.1 Vernacular Features

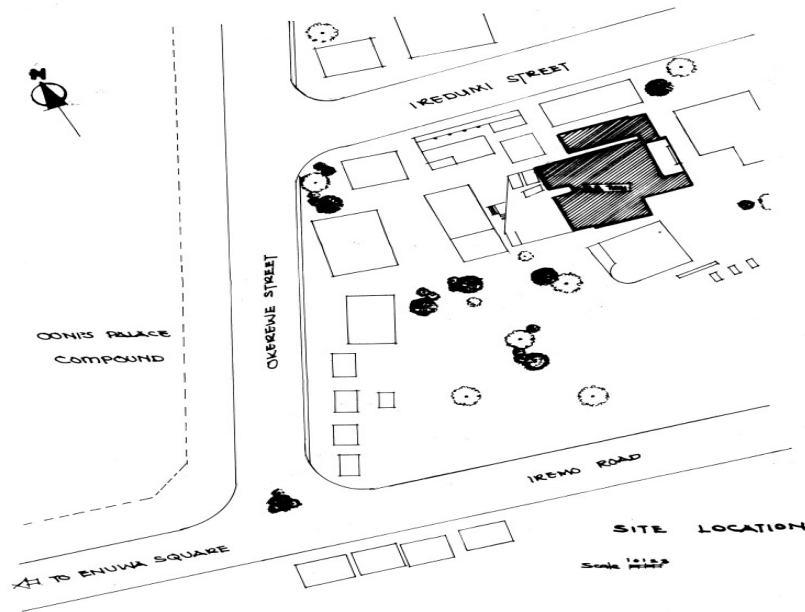


Figure 2: location plan of Ile Timi

3.2 The Floor Plan

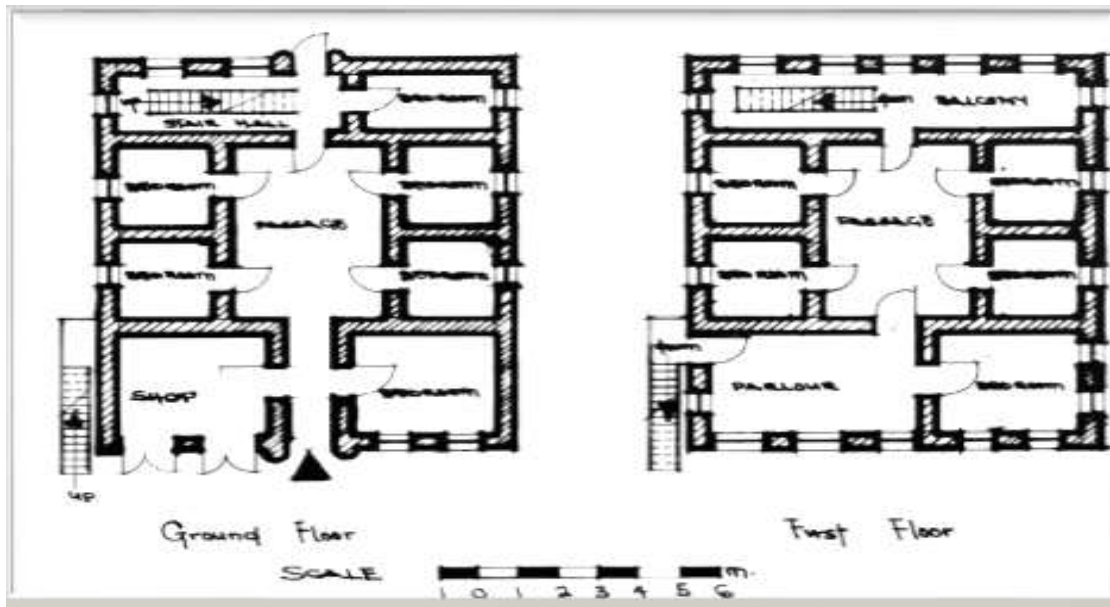


Figure 3: floor plan of Ile Timi

A single storey building, the main building has a frontal porch which is bounded by a simple reinforced concrete balustrade falling apart in some parts and in some places they are practically nonexistent. (See figure1). Figure 3 shows the balustrades and the main entrance into the front porch. Within this porch are five graves, one is the grave of Awoyele Aderierin himself, the second and third are of two of his wives ,the fourth is the grave of his first son and the fifth is without a tomb stone. According to family sources it is an ancient grave of an ancestor unknown to anybody. The top soil of the grave has gradually washed away due to erosion and according to reliable sources; the remains of the corpse might soon be exposed if appropriate precautions are not taken.



Figure 4: Approach view of 'Ile Timi'



Figure 5: The Arched Entrance



Figure 6: The Balustrades and the Main Entrance into the Front Porch

The building itself is accessed by a centrally located door which lead into a corridor which subsequently feeds into the 10 rooms in the house directly or indirectly. Originally a moderately celebrated entrance way (see figure 6) led into the main house. Presently, at some point in time, as a result of civilization two rooms were added to the front of the house on both sides of the doorway, to serve as sitting rooms, rooms meant for entertaining and receiving visitors. With these additions, a new arched entrance way was built. The addition is also evident in the different materials and methods of construction used in this part of the house. This has brought the total number of rooms to 12 rooms.

To both sides of the corridor are four doors, two of which lead directly into two rooms and the other two lead into a communal space which invariably leads into 3 rooms. Investigations revealed that, wives of Awoyele who got along were grouped together in one of these zones to foster peace while the troublesome ones were also grouped together in the second area.

After several years, as a result of a drastic increase in population of Awoyele Aderierin family (which was not surprising); additional rooms were added to the building, for more wives and also for children. Three of such rooms exist in the building. They include a room for "Famojure" a new wife from a rich family (figure 6 show the entrance to the room with her name written on the door lintel) while two other rooms now referred to as the boys quarters were added for grown up children. These two rooms were also provided with conveniences, which have collapsed over the years. Behind the house and opposite Famojure's room is the kitchen which has practically collapsed and has been abandoned. This description can further be seen on the consequent pages.



Figure7: Doorway showing 'Famojure' on the lintel

3.3 Traditional Features

3.3.1 Materials/Finishes

A nephew to Awoyele Adarierin confirmed that as in ancient times, the house was built by the joint communal effort of those in the 'Agboole Timi' (Timi's compound) with different families taking turns to work on the building. In some instances other families not from the compound were also helpful. In return for this help, food was provided after or during construction and the Awoyele Adarierin family helped these families also to build at the appropriate time. The young and old, men and women helped in this effort.

1. **ROOFS:** The roof style adopted was the gable roof and the materials used were originally zinc roof of sheets and timber trusses. The ceiling was finished with strips of polished wood tied in rows across the longer section of spaces and then braced at considerable intervals.
2. **FLOOR:** The previous floor covering was of earth but was later covered with sand-cement screed.
3. **FENCE:** The fencing was done in two categories.
 - i. The frontal fence was made with precast perforated balusters, not more that 850mm in height.
 - ii. The fence behind the house was built of mud.
4. **SHADING DEVICE:** Efforts were made to shed off direct inflation of sun rays into the interior by adopting a combination of horizontal and vertical shading devices (eggcrate) on windows situated on the frontal façade.

They were constructed with concrete and finished with cement plaster.

WALLS: As earlier mentioned, in the first phase of the building, the walls were constructed with mud (adobe) using the wattle and daub method while the later phase of the construction was done with sun-dried bricks with mud as mortar carefully laid out to from a pleasing façade. A crack in the water walls reveals that the walls were rendered with cement plaster.

3.3.2 Fenestration

The windows and openings were finished with unique patterns; the windows laced with 4 different patterns and the materials being principally of wood and glass (mullions).

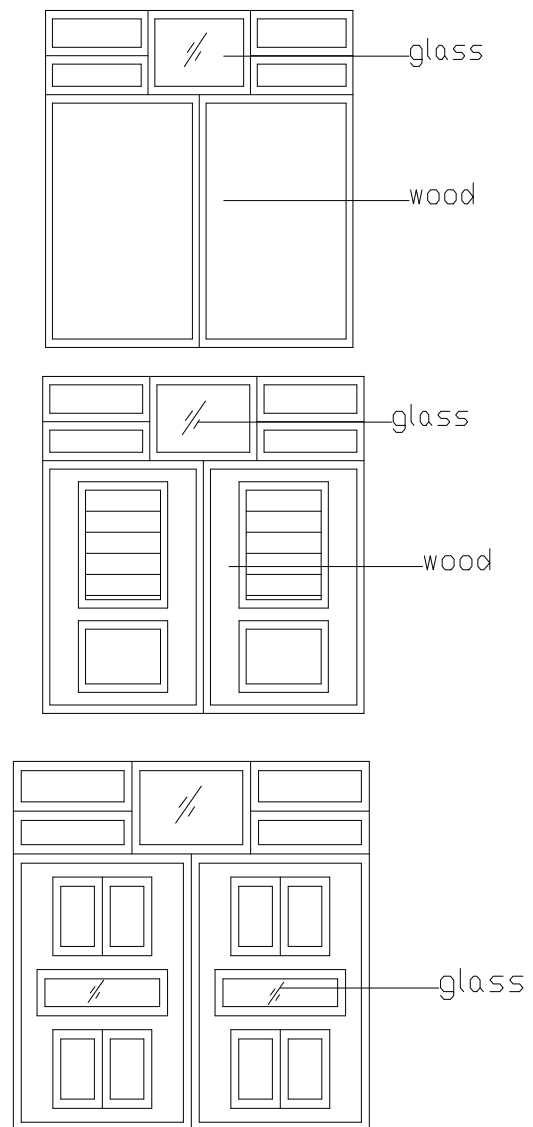


Figure 8: Window Patterns

DOORS: The doors also had some very unique patterns in their configuration. Firstly the door were paneled and embedded in a full frame that covered the entire width of the adjoining walls. Some door entrances were decorated with paintings (emulsion). The figure below shows a typical door adopted for the interior.

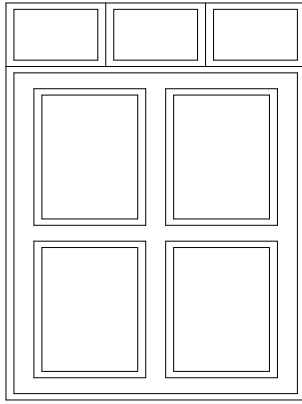


Figure 9: Door Pattern

ARCH: The arch that provides access into the interior was fully decorated with orders flanking both sides. The arch was finished with clay.

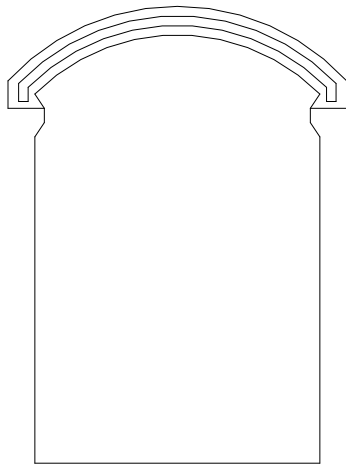


Figure 10: The Arch Pattern

3.4 Construction Methods

The various construction methods adopted for the various surfaces can be outlined as follows:

3.4.1 walls

The walls are constructed by the wattle and daub method whose process involves:

- Mixing “moist earth” (adobe) with palm oil and pudding with the feet. Afterwards, the paste mixture is left for a period of between 10days – 3months for

proper bonding. The walls are constructed in courses and each course is left to dry for a number of days before the next course is added. This is done until the require height is attained. Customarily, the construction process is one of communal effort as means of labor.

- Plastering: The plastering of walls is usually done with highly plasticized earth (Iledu) without any coarse aggregate. Proportions of this earth are spread on the wall surfaces and wet cloth is rubbed against the surface to make it smooth.

3.4.2 Roofs

The roofing materials used are: as follows:

- Wood Frame (Borokini) as trusses
- Palm Fronts (For the ceiling)
- Raffia Leaves (For the roof covering) but later converted to Zinc Sheets

3.4.3 Floors: The flooring was also done initially with ‘Iledu’ (waterlogged clay) and then rammed thoroughly until a firm and smooth surface is achieved. Usually the barks of trees and sand is added to the clay for reinforcement and then rammed for a period of about 16 days.

3.4.4 Painting: Painting (although not visible presently) was done with blue ‘aro’, which comes in different colors and was mostly used by the elite during the period. The ‘aro’ is mixed with water and applied on the wall surfaces.

3.4.5 Carvings: These are symbolical signs pasted on wall surfaces. See figure 5. This has gathered from interview was carried out to provide spiritual protection but it also boosts the aesthetic quality of the building.

IV. CONCLUSION

There is still much to be said about the studied buildings, and about vernacular buildings in general, and this study is no way an exhaustive effort. Having acquired necessary data and analysis it is imperative that conclusion be draw from the information. In the introduction the aim outlined is to study the place of vernacular architecture in an urban setting in Ile-Ife in order to identify and document salient characteristics of the style that is still in active existence and the impact or where it stands in the urban setting. There is still a pertinent need for the integration of indigenous architecture with contemporary housing and urban development in Nigeria. Moreover, relevant in this direction is the cultural heritage of the country. Most traditional building strategies have made great contributions to the development of modern architecture. With freedom achieved by the intervention of modern materials such as cement, steel, glass, among others, modern styles incorporate unique vernacular forms and expressions.

Vernacular houses have proven to be effective due to their excellent thermal qualities, cultural setting, and other forms of

climatic adaptability. One of the many ways Nigeria can reinvent itself is by highlighting the indigenous cultural elements that can be used to redefine the future. The present chaotic nature of housing and urban development in Nigeria characterized by painlessness, shortages, affordability and lack of expression, is as a result of failure to draw lessons from the past. Unique vernacular elements and characteristics as stated in the previous chapter such as the local arches, buttresses, motifs, among others, can be used to complement future building designs. The government should not only commission research but embark on passive housing and urban development using these materials to prove their usefulness and efficacies.

4.1 Recommendation

Because diversity and variety is the rule and not the exception, the challenge for each society and culture is to produce Architecture that is a true reflection of itself, contributing to the diversity of the world's urban built environment. The necessary component to achieve this goal is the development of an architectural vocabulary that is true to its people, their hopes, dreams, and aspirations. When one culture successfully accomplishes this task, it is often the case that other cultures adopt this successful architectural vocabulary without developing one of their own. To avoid this error, each culture must have the confidence and discipline to look squarely at itself to determine what is true and good about itself and what it wishes to say about its past and its hopes for the future through its Architecture.

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