

# The Influence of Modern Architecture on Ilorin Traditional buildings in Kwara State.

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## **Abstract**

The rapid decrease in the number of traditional buildings constructed 100 percent from local materials in Ilorin Township can be attributed to the persistent human needs to solve environmental problems caused by global warming, deforestation. Another reason is because people also like to modernize from the acculturation of the Western architecture with the use of new materials such as Glass, steel, aluminium, and concrete, which are now preferred as against earth, timber, reeds, stones, that were previously used. These materials were easy and flexible to use and thus have become basic building materials and components. The purpose of my paper is to examine the different cultural influences on traditional building designs in Ilorin, studying the gradual change in building techniques. An immediate observation would show that there are hardly many buildings in Ilorin today with complete local materials. I therefore want to study the pattern of reduction in the use of vernacular architectural building materials on traditional buildings. The study will conclude with an overview of impact of the adoption of modern building materials in the preservation of traditional heritage and local cultural sites / buildings in Ilorin, and how this situation can be salvaged.

**Key-words:** Ilorin, Traditional Buildings, Local Culture, Modern Architecture, Indigenous Building Materials, Western Architecture

## **1. Introduction**

There is an impending need to examine the past and be familiarized with some basic features of rich traditional architecture developed from cultural practices, and to compare its relationship with modern architecture thereby highlighting the numerous changes (Dmochowski1990).

There are three major ethnic groups in Nigeria –the Hausa, the Ibo, and the Yoruba. Each group is noted for specific design concepts and architecture that meet their various needs, as described by Barbour et al (1982), protection from weather, wild animals and the sign of cultural enrichment were the major drive for each concept used.

Furthermore, Nigerian traditional architecture is strongly influenced by religion, cultural practices, Sahara trade link and colonization which brought about western civilization. It is also influenced by the acquired tales of the returned former slaves after the slave trade era.

A closer look at Northern Nigeria traditional architecture depicts the influence of religion (Islam) on its design features using the curvilinear conical and mud dome shaped roof structures. Also decorative and figurative pattern structures were also predominantly used. However, the Southern Nigeria presents a slightly different architecture using the moulded balustrades, ornamental pillars and rectilinear thatch roof mud houses. These are believed to have been influenced by the return of ex-

slaves and the acculturation that existed during the Sahara trade link.

However, technological advancement has cut across the ancient Africa and Nigeria as a whole, bringing about a perceived “new Architecture” that presents buildings with changes in forms, shapes, materials, planning and building technology which has consequently affected the functional adequacy of materials used in the design of various buildings (Ijatuyi, and Taiwo, 2012).

## 2. Ilorin Emirate and Its Cultural Values

What is today Ilorin was said to be inhabited by several ethnic groups (clans) which were then separate and each with clan heads. Around 1450 century, one hunter called Ojo Isekuse was said to have sharpened his metal implement around a stone in Oke Koto, and the place came to be known as *Ilo Irin*, a place where metal are sharpened, Ojo was Yoruba, and he and other decided to remain in the area, in the midst of other Yorubas who were already settlers in Oke Koto. Yoruba is one of the three largest ethnic groups in Nigeria. Other ethnic groups in who formed clans in around Ilorin were the Baruba, the Hausa and the Nupe. In the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, the Are Kankanfo, the generalissimo of Yoruba army came and settled in Ilorin instead of returning to Oyo after an unsuccessful expedition. Ilorin therefore automatically became the provincial military headquarters of the ancient Oyo Empire. The Aare Ona Kanknafo waged war against the Alaafin of Oyo the King of the Oyo Empire, and requested military support from Shehu Alimi, a Fulani scholar who also was leader of a Muslim Jamaa. A few years later, there was an insurgence, in which the Shehu Alimi followers were said to Kill Aare and mobilized all the clans to come together to form City of Ilorin, and then pledged allegiance to the Sokoto Caliphate, through the Kingdom of Gwandu in the present day Kebbi State, thereby collecting and flew the Caliphate flag in Ilorin. She's son, AbdulSalam was appointed as the first Emir of Ilorin, a position that means the King, *Oba*, of Ilorin. Today Christianity is also widely practiced in Ilorin especially with the significant number of

immigrants from closer states who have settled in the city. However, the city still retains a strong Islamic influence. Ilorin is the largest city in Kwara State and the official capital of the state.

The city is therefore a confluence of cultures, populated by Yoruba, Nupe, Fulani, Hausa, Baruba, and foreign nationals.

Ilorin presents the visitors with friendly environment [generally called "Home of Peace"], it radiates a friendly environment to all tourists. (Kwara State Association of Nigeria, 2009)

## 3. Features of Ilorin traditional buildings

Traditional buildings in Ilorin have unique curvilinear conical designs surrounded by trees for relaxation; the buildings were deep rooted in Nok terracotta art by the use of thick mud walls. The soundproof roofs were made of thatch, reeds and logs of wood mainly gotten from Neem trees and coconut trees. The buildings had characteristics of gothic shaped doors that served as entrance points only and not as a form of security to protect the house from intruders as everyone lived cordially and there was no fear of encroachment. The houses also had few and very small window openings on the sides and the approach elevations, leaving the inner rooms and the rear side of the building without having any. The building interiors had wall designs made from decorative patterns, broken ceramics and floor covers made up of animal dung (faeces of cattle).



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5

#### **4. Transition from the use of 100% indigenous materials in traditional buildings to materials for modernized buildings**

The patterns of reduction in the use of vernacular architectural building materials on traditional buildings in Ilorin are considered to be caused by the following factors.

##### **4.1. Life style and family structural transformation**

Ilorin tradition encouraged communal living thereby extended families lived together and thus gave rise to the building of multiple rooms and a common sitting area. As time went on, there was the rise of individual interest development, growing up and exposure of children, inter tribal marriages which made a lot move to other towns, there was reduction in family sizes which consequently made families reduce the building sizes with fewer rooms.

##### **4.2. Trade**

The Sahara trade link brought about acculturation, Merchants daily transported goods and valuable commodities along the trans-Saharan routes bringing about direct exposure to the Ilorin Emirate. They went out, observed, brought back cultural ideas, and tried to gradually introduce the new ideas into the already existing traditional building ideas.

#### **5. The pattern of reduction in the use of vernacular architectural building materials on traditional buildings.**

##### **5.1. Environmental problems such as Climate change**

Heavy rain falls contributed to the reduction in use of indigenous materials such as thatch, reeds, and logs as they persistently could no longer withstand the strong winds that accompany heavy rainfalls. This brought about the search of stronger roofing materials, and the use of aluminium roofing sheets continuously got applause as it could solve the



impending problem. Hence, the use of aluminium roofing sheets on traditional mud buildings was adopted. Also with climatic changes over the last decade and the increase in rainfall and flood in sub-Saharan Africa where Ilorin is not left out, mud walls got weakened and stained easily and thus the search for a protective cover to support the mud walls brought about the use of cement for plastering the walls and to support the building foundation. However after the adoption of the use of cement, another challenge surfaced as the walls could no longer withstand the decorative and figurative terracotta wall patterns. Hence, the use of paint was adopted to decorate the traditional buildings.



Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9

## 5.2. Deforestation

The crave for more buildings by individuals brought about the use of virgin lands and felling of many trees and thus increased numbers and sizes of windows were introduced to traditional buildings to aid ventilation, thereby phasing out the old tradition small windows.

## 5.3. Individual Interest

It is also believed that due to economic pressure, with time that individuals reduced the number of time spent to socialize, instead, they spent a longer time sitting in their inner rooms to think, plan and strategize. This brought about the implementation of windows to inner rooms.

## 5.4. Western Education

In the mid-nineteenth century when Western education was introduced into Nigeria, which was centuries after Islam had taken roots, parents and children who went to western schools needed some study time after school, this brought about the need for furniture such as chairs, tables and beds. Though they were still designed to fit the curvilinear conical shaped traditional buildings and achieving this was too stressful for the craftsmen making the furniture. Hence, rectilinear shaped buildings were adopted to conveniently house the items.



Figure 10



Figure 12

## 6. Conclusion

The city of Ilorin has a mixture of mud flat, domed, corrugated metal and concrete outline. Modernized Architecture and its accompanying 21<sup>st</sup> century materials have gradually changed and transformed architecture in Ilorin, making the houses built from indigenous materials only a tale from history and not something the younger generation can see.



Figure 11



Figure 13



Figure 14

In the years to come mud houses built of complete indigenous materials will be rare sights as the recent innovations of building materials and buildings techniques have become the order of the day. However, these modern houses may never be able to stand the strength of mud houses that have an average life span of 100 years if well built.

It is doubtful however, if there are any houses under construction in Ilorin today that will use absolutely indigenous materials. This situation, if continued, will only lead to an extinction of houses built from indigenous materials in Ilorin, unless researches and government, local and state, go out of their way to safeguard this noble traditional practice. We cannot see a series of photo that shows the kind of architectural designs and contents of Ilorin houses.



Figure 15



Figure 16



Figure 17

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