



Contemporary Architecture in Nigeria: Evolution or Decadence

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Abstract This paper examines the development of contemporary architecture in Nigeria using a case study approach. The study reveals how the practice of architecture has evolved in some aspects and declined in others. The case study of a contemporary style, New Classical Style has revealed the positive and the negative sides of this architecture. The study suggests that globalisation of styles through creation of a cultural and technological bridge contributed by evolving Nigerian contemporary architecture through modern technologies and ideas. On the other hand, the decadence in the lowered standard of living due to non-affordability of decent housing in comparison to the traditional setting is on the other side. Porter's five forces were examined and the study suggested ways at addressing the five forces that act against evolution of architecture and have entrenched design decadence as the order of the day.

Keywords Contemporary Architecture, Globalisation, New Classical Style, Porter's five forces

Introduction

From the earliest recorded practice of architecture in 3000 BC [1] to present times, design practice is adapting to remain viable and sustainable. The dynamism observed is against a background of changes in the very nature of practice. Global trends (contemporary) in architecture have enabled several developing nations evolve particularly in the area of the built environment. Eastern nations such as Malaysia and Singapore have successfully utilised modern techniques of contemporary architecture to augment their economic development using a combination of indigenous and expatriate talent [2]. While the countries like the United Arab Emirates rely heavily on expatriate architecture firms, the contemporary practice of architecture on the built environment has had a profound effect on the tourism industry, while largely utilising styles that reflects regionalism [3-4]. Nigerian architecture on the other hand is still in a defining moment for both a regional Nigerian Architecture style and practice.

Architects Registration Council of Nigeria defines architecture as the art and science of designing buildings. Architecture of Nigeria covers all architectural activities from traditional structures to vernacular or folk architecture) through modern architecture and beyond [5-6]. Architects Registration Council of Nigeria, (ARCON), the regulatory body charged with the oversight of architectural practice in Nigeria has over one thousand registered architectural firms in the country [7]. While the ARCON Register remains the only valid determinant of the number of firms in Nigeria, the register alone does not present an accurate population of firms in Nigeria. There are five forms of architectural practices observed in Nigeria [8-9], namely:

- a. registered firms that are listed in the ARCON Register
- b. registered firms that are not listed in the ARCON Register
- c. registered architects who do not have ARCON registered firms
- d. registered architectural technologists
- e. quacks



Forces that Promote Evolution or Decline of Architectural Practice

Architecture practice like all knowledge-based professions is subject to forces and conditions that promote the development or the decline of a profession. Porter [10] identifies five forces that can lead to the growth or decline of architecture namely:

- Market Driven/ Arbitrary Pricing of Building Materials (Bargaining Power of Suppliers)
- Influx of Architects from Foreign Countries (Threat of New Entrants)
- Supplanting (Rivalry among Existing Competitors)
- Quacks & Other Allied Professionals (Threat of Substitute Products or Services)
- Depressed Economy of Prospective Homeowners (Bargaining Power of Buyers)

Incidentally all five forces are prevalent in Nigeria and magnified by the recession. In fact, Nigerian Architecture appears to be going full circle. The earliest architecture firms were expatriate arriving in the late 1930s and 40s. A number of firms eventually naturalised including, James Cubitt Architects and Godwin Hopwood (now GHK) from the late 1940s to early 1950s [11]. Today the influx of the foreign firms has a tinge of neo colonialism as a large segment of public sector architecture and construction appears to be the exclusive preserve of expatriate firms [12-13]. Furthermore, Nigerian architecture is yet to evolve ways to counter the five forces that shape architecture practice strategies as illustrated in Figure 1 [11].

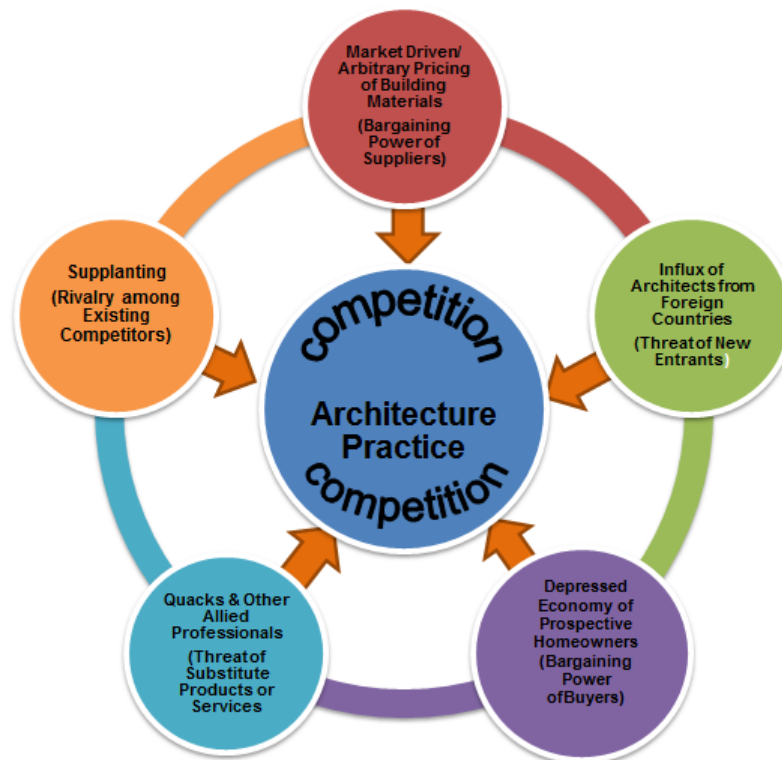


Figure 1: The Five Competitive Forces That Shape Architectural Practice Strategy [10]

Modern versus Contemporary Architecture

According to Relish Interiors [14], Modern and Contemporary architecture are not synonymous. Modern architecture refers to a period of time between 1920's – 1950's. This is a fixed period of time which does not change; also Modernism is a defined style which will remain the same forever. Contemporary architecture on the other hand is continuously evolving. This is the architecture of the moment.

Modernism is the deliberate departure from tradition with the use of innovative forms of expression that distinguish many styles in the arts, architecture and literature of the 20th century. It is a mode of expression or practice characteristic of modern times [11]. Tropical modernism is an architectural idiom which developed shortly after the Second World War by architects building in British West Africa, particularly Nigeria by the



end of the 1960s [11]. Examples of International Style in Nigeria by First generation architects Godwin and Hopwood are illustrated in Plate i.

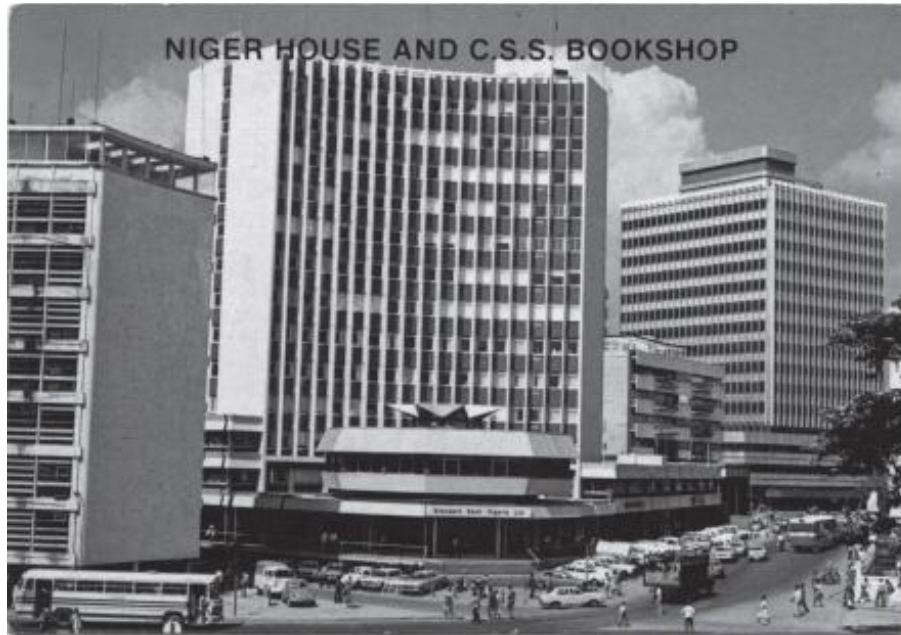


Plate i: Niger House, Lagos, (left) and Bookshop House, Lagos(right), by Godwin Hopwood [15]

The term contemporary by definition means “existing, occurring, or living at the same time; belonging to the same time” [14]. Contemporary architecture also refers to what is popular or in vogue. Contemporary architecture for this reason is eclectic as it is always changing and borrowing styles from different eras. Contemporary Nigerian Architecture for instance is experiencing the Future Trend, Green Trend and New Classical Style (Figure 2). An example of Contemporary Nigerian Architecture is illustrated in Plate ii. This apartment building is also designed by Godwin Hopwood, now GHK.



Plate ii: Contemporary Apartment Building, Lagos by Godwin Hopwood Kuye (GHK) [16]



Characteristics of 'Modernism' in Contemporary Architecture

With the distinction between modern and contemporary architecture made, Modernism highlights the significance of modern architecture as a movement, making it even relevant and almost synonymous with today's contemporary architecture. Vitruvius in his famous *De architectura* asserted that a structure must exhibit the three qualities of *firmitas, utilitas, venustas* — or it must be solid, useful, beautiful (McEwen, 2004). These qualities are referred to as the Vitruvian virtues or the Vitruvian Triad. According to Vitruvius, architecture is an imitation of nature, encouraging bio mimicry. Distinct Build Okanagan (2012) states that Modern architecture is expanded to include characteristics of functionality; simplicity in form and design; transparent; use of linear elements; bold roof lines; windows as prominent design element; creative open floor plans; post-and-beam architecture as opposed to load bearing walls; landscaped and well defined outdoor spaces connecting the interior spaces to the exterior ones and emphasis on materials and technologies. These characteristics outlined are also criteria to determine whether architecture is evolving or in decline.

Evolution of Modern Nigerian Architecture

The indigenous tropical design group gained first major institutional foothold in 1953, when Adedokun Adeyemi setup a tropical architecture conference. Adeyemi was one of the three architects that founded the Nigerian Institute of Architects in 1960 [11]. A principal thrust with the early architects was to utilise the available new technologies to provide innovative solutions to climatic concerns. This was to ensure architecture was sustainable in function through the use of sun shading elements, providing a transitional platform for colonial architecture (with the characteristic overhanging eaves in public buildings in the south and parapets in the north) to create a more homogenous architecture. It also ensured the viability of modernism as a movement in Nigeria and architecture as a practice, coming out of the shadow of the colonial Public Works Department engineer [11].

The seventies and eighties saw the oil boom and the return to politics respectively and those were the heydays for architectural practice in Nigeria where the indigenously trained architects held sway. The military interventions and the downturn in the financial climate had much effect on the sustenance of architectural practice in Nigeria. A robust relationship between the state of the Nigerian economy, state of the construction industry and the housing market had a profound effect on the 'fortunes' of the architectural profession. Architectural practices fare badly during periods of recession, as fewer new commissions, slower execution of projects by major clients and increased competition made surplus staff (from the 70s and 80s) redundant. Remuneration became very competitive, and many companies accepted small commissions that would not normally be attractive, in order to survive until an upturn in the economy [11].

An increased demand for construction projects in the mid-2000s, as a lengthy period of low-interest rates strengthened the global property market. Low-interest rates encouraged architectural firms to employ more staff to cope with an increasing workload. However, the construction sector remained competitive, as clients maintained the desire to retain the remuneration status quo. Furthermore, major construction companies offering 'design and build' packages affected the volume of commissions handled by architects and increased competition [11, 17-18]. Demand for architectural services dropped significantly during the late 2000s with several practices reported income drop of about twenty-five percent (25%). The property market also performed very poorly in the 2010s [11, 19]. This could be attributed to the severe downturn in the economy and the construction industry. Additionally, large market shares of grassroots (residential and small-scale development in the rural and suburban populace) were lost to either architectural technologists located in these areas or outright quacks. These activities contribute to the decadence or decline in contemporary Nigerian architecture.

Figure 2 illustrates the evolution of design styles in Nigeria. Nigerian Architecture can be classified into four generations. First Generation architects (1950s to 1960s), Second Generation architects (1970s to 1980s), Third Generation architects (1990s) and Fourth Generation architects (2000 to date). Most of today's architecture can be classified as Future Trend, Eco Trend, Neo Traditional Style and New Classical Style.



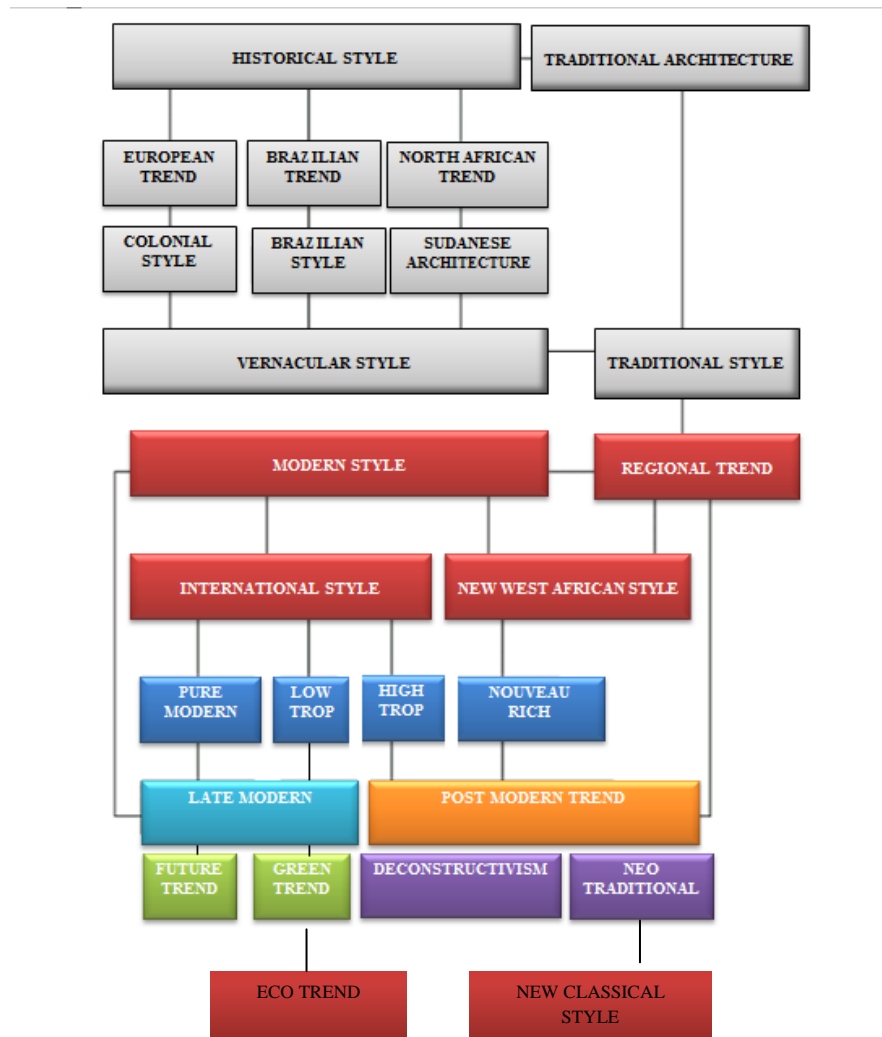


Figure 2: Evolution of Nigerian Architecture [20]

The Development or Decline of New Classical Style in Nigeria

New Classic Style is so called because the buildings seek to revive a style or movement of classical times. In Nigeria a popular example is Neo-Palladian trend. Studies have identified Neo-Palladian style (under New Classical Style), named after Andrea Palladio [20]. Plates iii and iv clearly demonstrate the similarities in proportion and the use of a roof parapet without eaves between the Palladian building of the 1600s and the contemporary version. With rainfall in most climatic zones of Nigeria, this design is tantamount to having a building whose windows are not conveniently opened during the rain. Furthermore, the external wall cladding is subject to more than reasonable wear and tear due to constant exposure to the elements.

A prominent feature of Palladian architecture is the use of the concrete parapet. Early use of parapets is traceable to the CITEC Housing Estate in Mbor, FCT where polystyrene cornices were used (plate v). These were later improvised from pre-cast concrete fascia panels to cast-in-place panels (plates vi and vii). There are advantages and disadvantages of 'eave less buildings'. The major advantage of the so called concrete fascia is the fire proofing quality. Other advantages are mainly aesthetic.





Plate iii: Palladian house [21]

There are several advantages in using roof eaves (plate viii), which are a distinct feature in our traditional architecture of the south and middle belt and colonial architecture. The disadvantages are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1: Disadvantages of Concrete parapets [22]

S/N	Disadvantages
1.	Inability to protect walls, wall cladding, premature failure of paint on external walls, exterior doors, and windows from rot and water entry
2.	Inability to shade windows when solar heat gain is undesirable
3.	Inability to keep visitors dry while outside the building
4.	Inability to reduce water splash back
5.	Protecting walls by getting rain to drip away from the foundation
6.	Possibility of the building overheating, particularly in tropical weather
7.	Possibility of the structure suffering from water entry problems at windows and doors

The disadvantages of the use of concrete parapets notwithstanding, Nigerian architects often ‘bow to client driven pressures’ to conform to the vogue in the face of the real issue of this style as a result of the effect of globalisation, suggesting decadence rather than evolution of design. This trend leaves little room for innovation in thermal comfort, building maintenance and sustainability. Uduku (2006) in Ola-Adisa [6,11] and Odebiyi, Subramanian and Braimoh [23], refer to this trend as “American style or *high maintenance architecture*”, where greater emphasis is laid on the style rather than the substance. The problem identified here is not the introduction of any contemporary styles of architecture, but rather the substitution of traditional architecture instead of facilitating its technology which a characteristic of the tropicalisation of modern architecture utilised by first and second generation Nigerian architects [6, 11, 23].



Plate iv: Neo-Palladian House (New Classical Style) in Victoria Island, Lagos





Plate v: Polystyrene cornice at Citec [24]



Plate vi: Precast panels [24]

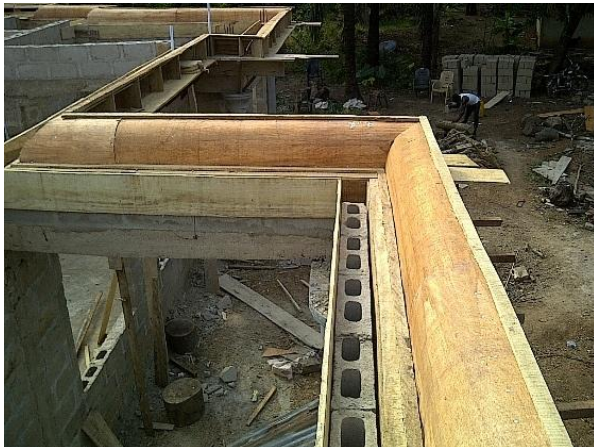


Plate vii: Cast in place Panels [24]
Source: Spydercraft Home Builders (2015)



Plate viii: Roof with eaves [22]
Source: Holladay (2014)

Conclusion

Nigeria has a rich history of modern architecture from the 1930s with the coming of expatriate architects to the first and second generation indigenous architects of the 1950s/60s and 1970s/80s. The building designs of these era were characterised by the ten features of modern architecture, which are also the criteria used to determine evolution or decline in architecture. However, as Nigeria moved on to embrace globalisation, styles characterised by the free floor plan, use of pure geometrical forms, parapet walls, flat roofs and the use of curtain walls created buildings with little regard for climate and social conditions. The case study of a contemporary style, New Classical Style has revealed the positive and the negative sides of this architecture. Prucnal-Ogunsote [15] identified the positive aspects of globalisation of styles through creation of a cultural and technological bridge. These aspects contributed by evolving Nigerian contemporary architecture through modern technologies and ideas. Odebiyi et al [23] and Ola-Adisa [20] identified on the other hand the decadence in the lowered standard of living due to non-affordability of decent housing in comparison to the traditional setting creation of high maintenance architecture and copyright infringement through the indiscriminate use of technology to 'adapt' already existing designs without recourse to the owner of copyright or climatic impact. This has further empowered the five forces that act against evolution of architecture and firmly entrenching decadence as the order of the day.

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