

## The Merchant-Venturer's Bungalow: A Vernacular Archetype in Nigeria's Niger Delta

Warebi Gabriel Brisibe  
Rivers State University, Nigeria

### Abstract

*This paper is part of a larger study on heritage buildings and conservation in Nigeria's Niger Delta region. It examines a type of vernacular dwelling based on the concept of 'building-back-home', common amongst merchants, seafarers, and migrant fishermen between the 1920s and the 1940s in the study area. This work adopts a case study approach zooming in on existing building types within the cartographic Niger Delta region which is this study area. It examines architectural traits and building elements as a means of 'reading' spatial configurations and interrelationships, craftsmanship, collective interpretation and symbolism to ascertain typologies or variations of this vernacular dwelling in the region. The aim is to investigate why this dwelling type was highly popular and found across different groups in the region. It explores the building-back-home culture of its earliest proponents and how that has translated into vernacular built forms. Through the case studies that were analyzed, the study reveals the development, cultural and colonial influences, and design philosophy of this vernacular archetype.*

**Keywords:** Cultural Influence, Vernacular Architecture, Bungalow, Niger Delta, Merchant-Venturer.

### Introduction

The term ‘merchant-venturer’ was used as a reference to the occupation of the first set of owners or owners of the earliest set of this built form in Nigeria’s Niger Delta region. Based on the oral history obtained during fieldwork, it was gathered that many of the early developers of these bungalow buildings from the Niger Delta region were mostly migrant fishermen; merchants who traded in illicit gin; men who worked as labour migrants in cities; people who acted as middlemen to foreign trading companies for palm oil produce; Men who acted as guides to explorers or prospectors; or dealers in imported products with general goods stores. What these groups had in common was that migration or mobility was an essential part of their livelihood.

The merchant-venturer lifestyle can be categorized under the labour migration industry which is as old as development in Africa. The connection between labour migration and trades like fishing was made by Diaw(1983) when he examined the social and production relationships among artisanal fishers of West Africa. He observed that the migration patterns practiced by these fishermen were related to two essential forms of movement in fisheries, which are, “Regulated Fishing Migrations” and “Labour Migrations”. Adepoju (1991) also observed that large scale migrations were carried out by nomads, semi-nomads such as merchants and fishermen in the West African sub-region. In the same vein, merchants had to travel far and wide regularly to obtain products and sell products, often across borders. What was common amongst these people was the culture of building-back-home either by savings or remittances.

There have been several studies on people of the Niger Delta regions of Nigeria, who practice labour migration and this ‘building-back-home’ culture. Leis, N (1964) observed that the men in this fishing community all shared the long-term goal of building bigger and better houses in their homes of origin; The most popular locations (*for fishing*) for Korokorosei men are near Calabar and further east even to the Cameroons, some in the vicinity of Douala. These men, who usually take their families because they expect to spend several years away, hope to accumulate money for use when they return home permanently. At the time of our study, however, only one man appeared to have had an especially worthwhile stay – he was planning to build a fine house (Leis 1964:40).

While in another village (Patani) it was observed that several men who chose to travel far to work, to earn enough money to build houses had achieved their goal. Perhaps the most prevalent goal, however, is to build a fine house, and from the number that is in existence and in the process of being built, it appears many have achieved this end. To our knowledge, only men who have gone to the “coast” earn enough for this purpose (Leis 1964: 47).

In both cases, the reports show the migrant labour mindset and the building-back-home culture being practiced amongst these riverine communities (Brisibe 2016). The literature on migrant workers focuses more on economic issues such as income from labour, savings, types of investments and remittances. In this approach, housing or buildings is usually considered as a

form of investment for which the migrant labourers save up for, or send remittances back home to invest in. But the fact here is that the buildings they invest in are not self-built. More often than not local builders and sometimes professional artisans brought in from as far as Lagos or the Middle-belt region of Nigeria, are commissioned to carry out these building projects being supervised by close relatives on ground. The merchant-venturer may not regularly see the project until its completion, as the flow of finance needed for the build can only continue by their continued engagement in migrant labour away from home (Brisibe 2016).

This study focuses on the type of houses these merchants and fishermen who venture out to other regions and offshore waters have ended up building in fulfilment of their building-back-home practice. The building types are known as bungalows, introduced by the British as a habitation for Foreign Service personnel during the colonial era. Home (1997) traced the origin of this British-inspired bungalow in his study of the making of British colonial cities. He states that the bungalow, derived from the word Bengali in India where it was first built, became the main residential unit of the white colonial community in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It eventually became a feature of colonial and settler housing found all over the empire as the other designs were either too expensive or unsuitable for the tropical climes. In his own words;

“The bungalow is a reminder of the frailty of white European occupation. Its thinness on the ground, an almost defiant acknowledgement signalling an unwillingness to be more deeply rooted in the country....a somewhat covert form of nomadism” (1997:101).

In essence, the development of this bungalow structure came as a result of the colonialist apparent unwillingness to invest much in permanent housing, but rather in simple functional dwellings that will suffice for empire expansion and resource extraction. Kramer’s (2014) work, on the other hand, showed that the traditional Bengali building served as a model for the British bungalow designs that were eventually developed. She posits that it was the traditional buildings that were called ‘Bangla’ or ‘Banggolo’ from which the term ‘Bungalow’ was then derived. The original English model adapted many traditional Indian strategies from the Bangla for improving climatic responses. Some of the main features that were borrowed include the extended roof overhang to provide additional shelter from the rains; the frontal extension of the roof creating a verandah, the use of a clerestory, and the insistence on small cottage-like repetitive units as opposed to single large buildings. Nilsson (1968) presented a quote from an early English settler who described the abode in this way:

“Englishmen live in what are really stationary tents which have run aground on low brick platforms. They are ‘Bungalows’ a word I know not how to render unless by a cottage” (Nilsson 1968:187)

It is not quite clear how this bungalow structure arrived in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria or which was the first copy built there. However, what has been discovered in the course of this study is that many of the early copies of these buildings were located in rural communities, with a few located in townships owned by wealthy chiefs who wanted a second home in the township. By the time the building craze had caught on with the indigenous elite and other few affluent members of the society, even middle-level staff in the employ of the colonial administrators started building theirs on leasehold landed properties. The earliest reports obtained from the Nigerian National Archives on mass housing using this bungalow as a prototype was the design

of service quarters for senior staff of the Port-Harcourt administrative province. The document showed correspondence and a survey for the design of bungalows based on a similar brief as the late model which will be discussed further on in this article (RIVPROF 13/1/298 – 1949-1951).

### Study Location

Two areas were selected as study locations, one for the early design models and the other for the late design models. Because of the difficulty in finding early design models that are relatively intact within the townships, good samples of case buildings were obtained from two rural communities in Ogbia Local Government Area in Bayelsa State. These are the Opume and Otuabagi communities. Both buildings were identified during part of a larger study undertaken in 2016 on buildings constructed in the early colonial periods within the cartographic Niger Delta region of Nigeria. This region is made up primarily of States that fall within Nigeria's actual delta and they include; Bayelsa, Rivers and Delta States. Since this current study falls within the same Niger Delta region, data from that previous study is also apt in this case.

### NIGERIA -- CORE NIGER DELTA STATES

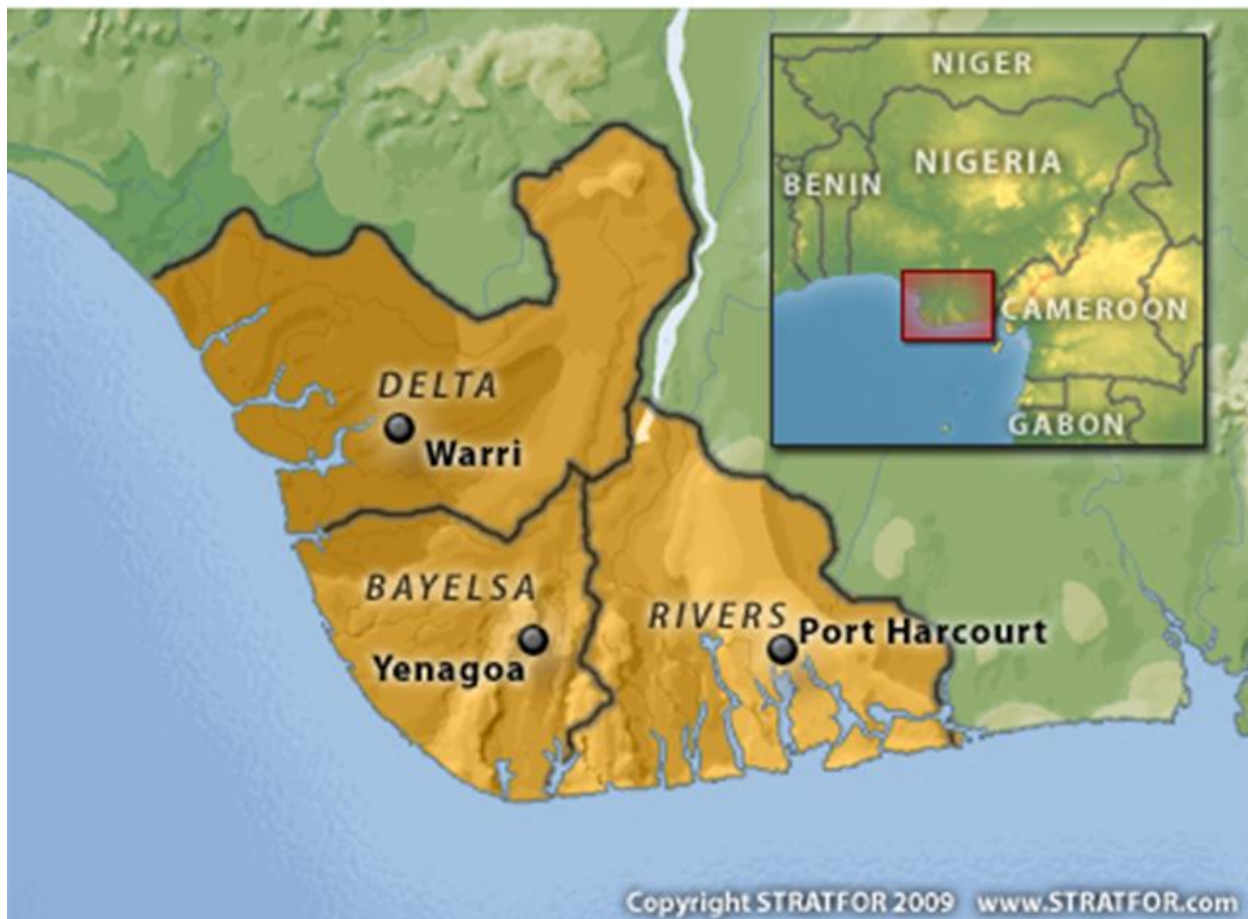


Fig I map showing core states that make up the cartographic Niger Delta region

### **The Vernacular - A Syncretism of Cultural Influence**

The most popular typology of buildings with colonial design influences that were ‘tropicalized’ to adapt to our climate was residential buildings (Osasona 2015). Indeed, colonial buildings may have metamorphosed to what, today, is acknowledged as ‘tropical architecture’ in Nigeria but that may not be its only contribution. This paper argues that some cultures both colonial and indigenous have in several ways contributed to what constitutes another form of architecture in Nigeria: the vernacular architecture. To highlight the fact that there were other contributors including the British, Osasona states that “the British were responsible for creating the enabling milieu for other cultures to intervene architecturally in Nigeria”.

This alludes to the fact that the British gave passage to two returning groups of emancipated slaves from Freetown and Latin America respectively that brought in their own cultures. It is the popularly held notion that some early vernacular buildings in Nigeria have British-Sierra Leonean (Saro) and possibly Afro-Brazilian (Aguda) influences. The Saros are ex-slaves repatriated from Britain and resettled in Freetown, Sierra Leone, in 1807. However, many of them migrated to Lagos haven retraced their Nigerian ancestry. Locally, they became known as saro (pidgin for their real name) and specialized in a building type very similar to that characteristic of the British occupation (Osasona 2015). Similarly, Afro-Brazilians who were ex-slaves from Brazil and Cuba and resettled in Lagos, in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century also brought in a style of architecture with them that featured a lot more ornate styling borrowed from Baroque styles popular in Brazil.

This migration of the Saros continued eastward to Port-Harcourt, a relatively new town established in 1912 with the potential or rapid development and expansion due to its newly constructed port and railway terminal. Both of which were crucial to the oil palm trade at the time. With the expansion of the town came the need for the development of property which required both skilled and unskilled labour. Although unskilled labor was drawn predominantly from the surrounding mainland and riverine Ijaw communities, the need for skilled labour in construction work and early administration provided many opportunities for Saros already resident in different areas of the territory (Dixon-Fyle 1999). The first set of Saros migrated to Port-Harcourt as early as the 1910s from Bonny, Calabar, Lagos, and Freetown, but eventually established a group presence in Port-Harcourt between 1930 and 1949 (Dixon-Fyle 1999). This coincided with the creation of the Port-Harcourt Township to house the fast-growing indigenous and foreign population.

Although this building type in focus reveals traits from the British, the Saro, and possibly Afro-Brazilian influences as we may see further on in the study, it nonetheless also includes indigenous expressions of culture all of which collectively constitute the vernacular. Although the use of the term ‘vernacular’ has been popularly subscribed to by most scholars, there is no commonly accepted definition. Oliver (2006) suggests that the term has as many meanings as the cultures and languages that there are. Over the years, a few studies have made a clear cut distinction between what is considered traditional architecture and the vernacular. While the ‘traditional’ is seen as ‘pure’ and uncompromising, phylogenetic architectural development, the

vernacular is more of a 'composite', an amalgamation of ideas, materials, components, and design traits, adapted due to cultural dynamism and the need of the environment. This may not be the popular definition, but as the vernacular discourse goes, this stance is equally acceptable. Brown and Maudlin (2012) support the fact that the term 'vernacular architecture' is not universally agreed and may be extended to include the everyday buildings and places. Carter and Collins (2005) defined vernacular architecture as the common form of building in a given place and time. In recent years, vernacular architecture is also seen as the study of the cultural impact of specific people upon building practices in a specific place (Brown and Maudlin 2012). It is therefore the more recent consensus amongst scholars that the vernacular is the architectural popular culture of a people in a particular place and a given era or period.

The field of vernacular studies came into prominence in the post-war period of the 1950s and 1960s but gained traction in the US in the 1970s and 1980s as an offshoot of the new history movement. History is more focused on the average and ordinary. The commonplace architecture of the masses, the building types more in use during a certain time – 'the ordinary buildings for ordinary people', which more often than not is an agglomeration of ideas, borrowed and indigent: this is what constitutes the vernacular. The popularity of the merchant-venturer bungalow puts it in this category, an archetype that can be found in townships as well as rural areas of the Niger Delta. So the study investigates how borrowed as well as indigent cultural expressions were harnessed and appropriated to take on an architectural life of its own. It is based on this premise that the said bungalow models will be examined as a vernacular archetype in this study.

However, not all schools of thought support the narrative that the styles popularized by Afro-Brazilian and British Sierra-Leonean repatriates are entirely influenced by the cultures they were repatriated from. Okoye (2013) believes that the architecture these groups promote is a colourful hybrid language, historically comparable to the likes of patois and creole which is a mix of colonial and local lingual influence. He argues that the repatriates would have encountered the traditional architectures of the regions they had come to inhabit such as the Fante, Yoruba, Izon, and Benin and thus absorbed the architectural languages of these regions into their styles. For instance, quite some buildings that have been named Brazilian incorporate the idea of the courtyard – an element central to the archi-culture of the Yoruba and Edo of Benin, well before the homecoming of the repatriates. Courtyards became a standard part of the 'new way architecture' of all West and Central African coastline cultures at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Okoye 2013). The story of the new way architecture is in essence the story of the merchant-venturer archetype because as will be discussed further on in this paper, the courtyard amongst other things became an integral feature of the late design model of the merchant-venturer archetype.

Uduku (2006) also hinted about this new way architecture observed from the mixing of different architectural traits when discussing the 1960s to early 1970s buildings of the late tropical era in Nigeria. Buildings like those of Alan Vaughn-Richards that attempted to re-invent Nigerian architecture by merging traits of certain West African traditional architecture with attributes of

the modern are a case in point. Although such case buildings were few due to the initial high cost of construction, it nonetheless exemplifies and buttresses the concept of the 'new way architecture' in Nigeria.

At variance with the terms hybridization, blending, or mixing, this study leans more to the school of thought of 'syncretism', which argues that there is a composite of varied cultures brought together by migration but not blended into a melting pot of hybridization. It is rather more akin to a 'mosaic' mixture of cultures, all with its easily identifiable architectural components in the display. This syncretism is a product of colonization, an inescapable characteristic of post-colonial societies. Even as syncretism was produced by colonization, hybridization is also one of colonialism's unintended consequences, the product of unintended cross-breeding between the metropolitan and the colonial (Morton 2000). The difference is that while syncretism was seen as 'difference amongst equals', the hybrid was viewed as a degeneration of the superior due to what they termed mixing with an inferior, hence demeaning its position on the cultural ladder. In relating this to the architecture in question, we believe that all contributions to the vernacular archetype are of equal value regardless of their source of cultural input be it Indigenous, Saro, British or Afro-Brazilian. But whatever the distinctly recognizable architectural features of this archetype, this paper argues that cultural syncretism, with its composition, peculiarities, and variations that have been standardized over time and across board qualifies this as its archetype. This is the case of the merchant-venturer bungalow and it is these peculiarities and variations that may have come about as a result of this syncretism that makes it worth investigating.

Rapoport's (1990) definition of vernacular architecture is not based on a single characteristic; rather it is a form of characterization that fits between extremes of a continuum but tending towards an ideal type. Within this continuum is a wide range of attributes of which, a dwelling type may possess some but not necessarily all of these attributes. Two of the attributes suggest that vernacular designs often emanate from single models that undergo changes, which result in variations over time. In this study, two different models and four variations of the archetype are discussed below.

### **Early design Model of the Merchant-Venturer Archetype**

Chronologically, the early model was introduced into the building scene in the Niger Delta in the late 1910s and was popularized with several variations until the early 1930s. Most early models consist primarily of four bedrooms and a living area, but with no kitchen and toilet spaces. For some of the buildings, these were attached or built at the rear of the compound as ancillary buildings in later years. All early model buildings were conservative in their footprint both for those built in the township with restricted access to land and even those built in rural communities with ample land for development. They never exceeded 80 square meters on average. For the early model, although the four bedrooms and a single room were a constant feature, there were several variations in the layout of these spaces. Each owner could create the spatial layout arbitrarily and connect the spaces in terms of depth as they desired. Some of the

early designs were constructed with external access to some bedrooms, while others had a connecting door between two bedrooms.

The peculiarities of the Niger Delta terrain helped differentiate the early models in this region from other locations in Nigeria, with a characteristically elevated floor level. The floor levels ranged from 0.6m to as much as 1.2m depending on the flood levels experienced in the location of the particular building. This means the verandahs of such buildings can be accessed by as much as three to six flight of steps from the original ground level. This was as a result of the swampy topography and annual floods experienced in this region.

The building materials of choice were concrete blocks with either plain or personalized finishes depicting aspects of the owner's work, life, family insignia, traditional titles, or other ornamented patterned finish. Although finished concrete blocks were relatively expensive, they were more accessible at this time and did not require any further rendering besides a simple paint over or a pointed dressing. Bricks which were the building material preferred by the colonial authorities were being imported for Government commissioned projects or by affluent members of society who wanted stately residences. Based on archival reports importation of bricks for buildings from the UK continued until the late 1930s before the establishment of early indigenous brick making companies emerged in towns such as Lagos, Enugu, and later in Port-Harcourt. Dixon-Fyle (1999) reports that it was in 1939, a certain E.A. koku retired from Government service and established the first brick-making business in Port-Harcourt.

For the early model bungalow, not many copies exist as earlier stated and for those that do, the majority have been renovated or are in rural communities that are not easily accessible. Two of such buildings located in rural communities have been included as case studies for this article.

### **Case Study 1 (Early Model) – House of Chief Damson Adaye Agadaga, Opume, Ogbia Local Government Area, Bayelsa State.**

Based on oral history, this British inspired bungalow was built in the 1910s to 1920s. It was owned by Damson Agadaga who was a hunter by profession and known for raising and training hunting dogs. His vast knowledge of the tropical rainforests and the mangrove swamp terrain made him a highly sought after forest guide to white explorers in Nigeria and the Cameroons. The income he derived from his guide tours and venturer lifestyle enabled him to save enough to build his own house over time. Part of his claim to fame besides his early contact with European explorers and colonial administrators was being credited as the first man of Ogbia origin to ride in a helicopter whilst serving as a guide for an aerial reconnaissance survey and mapping exercise.

The house is located in Opume, a small rural community in the current day Ogbia Local Government Council, one of eight local councils that make up Bayelsa State. It takes it pride of place, sitting adjacent to a newer family hall building overlooking a large open family square used for gatherings and ceremonies. It is the oldest building in the community and the first block building of its kind in most of the Ogbiakingdom. Apart from the original owner, no details exist of either the designer or builder of this iconic structure. All that is known is that all materials



used for construction were brought in from Lagos through coastal and inland waterways by large wooden vessels known as lunch boats which are still in use today as the main means of transporting building materials and market produce to rural riverine communities yet to have access by road.

The Agadaga house is an example of the early design model of this archetype, consisting primarily of four bedrooms and a living room space. A fully detached kitchen and conveniences were a much later addition at the rear. The rectangular bungalow sits on a conservative footprint of about 80 square meters. It has an entrance verandah that also acts as a sit-out area for relaxation but this is not the only access point into the building. A second access directly into a passage area with two rooms in what has been described as the guest wing exists. Four steps are required to get to the threshold of the second entrance and a similar number of steps are also required to access the verandah space.

Protruding block work acts as columns on the four corners of the building, giving an impression of structural stability. Corrugated sheets of zinc were the material of choice for the characteristic hip roof with large overhanging eaves which was the popular roof design in that era. Plain fascia boards of seasoned timber planks are used for the eaves and the ceilings are made of particleboards with wooden battens at 1200mm centers. Perforations are provided at intervals with thin steel mesh coverings acting as vents for the ceiling. But it is the walls and walling elements that reveal the idiosyncrasies of the owner expressed through custom symbolisms in finished blockwork. For the Agadaga house, the finished blocks were imprinted or stamped with impressions of dogs and local heart-shaped water snails which the owner commissioned to commemorate his love for dogs and hunting. A skirting at the window sill of the external walls is used to separate two types of imprints on the finished concrete blocks. The upper half is mostly blocks stamped with the heart-shaped water snails while the lower half has more of imprints of dogs on the finished concrete blocks. Both halves are distinguished by faded hues of terracotta paint that coat the exterior of the building. The windows are the traditional wooden shutters with jalousies in white-wash paint, with complimentary panel doors all of which have fixed clerestory panels above them.

This building like most of the early models exudes a simple but not simplistic appearance. It was not designed to be stylistic rather functional. Its conservative cottage appearance is reminiscent of British-inspired bungalows of the era and based on the materials and choice of finishes, durability must have been top of the agenda. The middle-aged granddaughter of the original owner, who inherited the building, stated categorically that she was not aware of any restoration or renovation work done on the property since it was constructed till the time of the interview. Because the kitchen and toilet facilities are detached units added much later, no retrofitting for plumbing had been done either.



**Fig iii The Agadaga house overlooking the open compound square where gatherings take place (Author 2016)**



**Fig iv steps leading to the threshold of the second access (Author 2016)**

**Fig v imprint of dogs on lower half of external skirting (Author 2016)**



**Fig v skirting detail separating two hues of paint work  
jalousies**



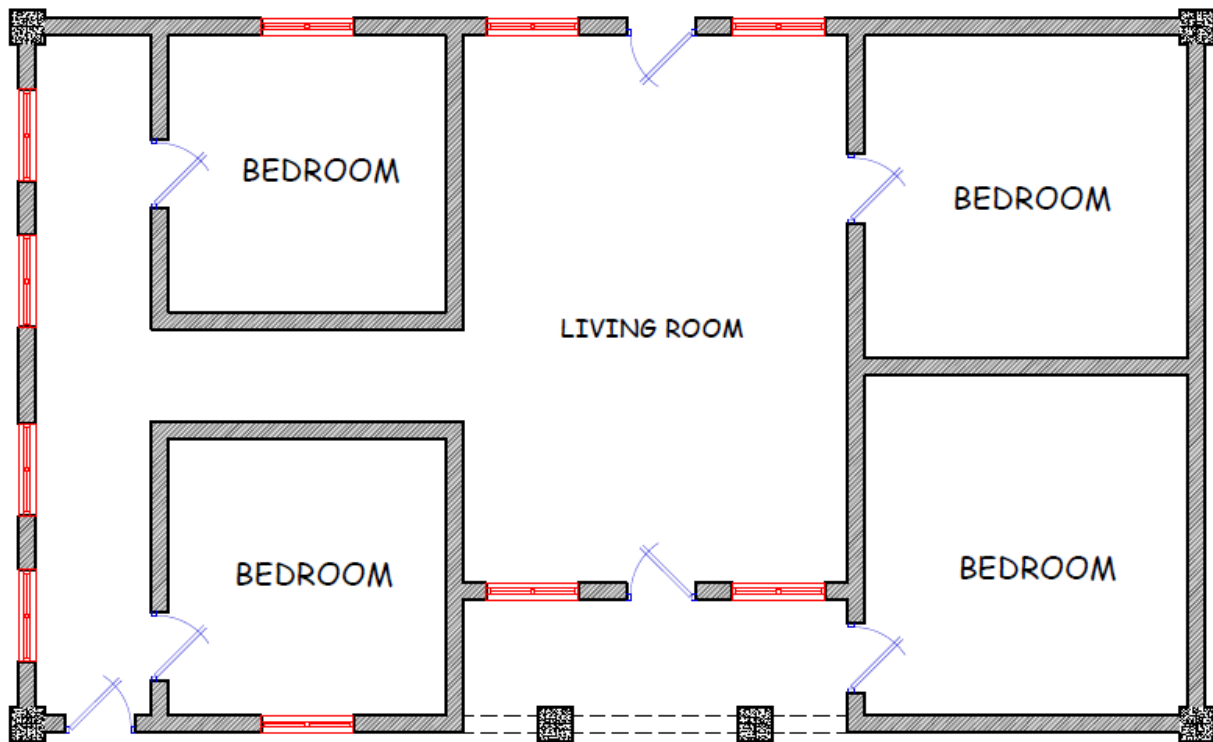
**Fig vi wooden shutter with  
jalousies**



**Fig vii detail of relief ornamentation on finished concrete block depicting a hunting dog  
(Author 2016)**



Fig viii detail of relief ornamentation on finished concrete block depicting a heart-shaped water snail (Author 2016)



**Fig ix Floor plan of the early model (Damson Agadaga House) Author 2016**

**CASE STUDY 2 (Early Model) – House of Thompson Ogborisi, Otuabagi, Ogbia Local Government Area, Bayelsa State.**

This building is considered to be the first concrete block building in the Otuabagi community, a village in the Ogbia Local Council of Bayelsa State. Built around the 1920s by Ogborisi who was a merchant, trading in various commodities ranging from tobacco to household goods, it is a typical example of the early model bungalow that has retained all of its original features.

The building, like most early model bungalows, is rectangular and consists essentially of four bedrooms of similar size and a living area that acts as a multifunctional space and utility. Besides the main entrance and exit doors, there is also external access to one of the bedrooms. This also appears to be a constant feature amongst the early models, serving as a guest space. The conveniences and the kitchen space are also later additions but built with less permanent materials. The bedrooms flank the living area on the left and the right, two on each side.

In a similar pattern to the Agadaga bungalow, the four corners of the building have protruding block work that gives the impression of enlarged columns for added structural stability. The columns terminate at the top with a simple capital, all four of which are connected with an external cornice made of moulded mortar. The entire external walls are constructed with the characteristic finished concrete blocks. Each block is embossed with relief patterns of two sea shells each but none of the descendants currently living in the house could provide any oral history regarding the symbolic implications of the shells to the original owner. An external skirting line also made of moulded mortar that sits at the window sill level, terminating at the corner columns divides the block work into two sections. The bottom section made up of four courses is finished using a relief pointing technique as opposed to an indented one used in the upper section.



**Fig ix view of Ogorosi house**

Casement windows with timber frames and translucent glass panels have been preferred in this build over wooden shutters with jalousies. Both window types were hugely popular in that era, with the glass panes commanding a slightly higher price than the timber shutters, which was no less status-enhancing.



**Fig x casement window with glass pane used in place of wooden shutters (Author 2016)**

**Fig xi view of steps leading to the threshold of second entrance door (Author 2016)**



Fig xii view showing external skirting differentiating two pointing techniques at window sill (Author 2016)

Fig xiii detail of relief ornamentation on finished concrete block depicting a circular shellfish (Author 2016)

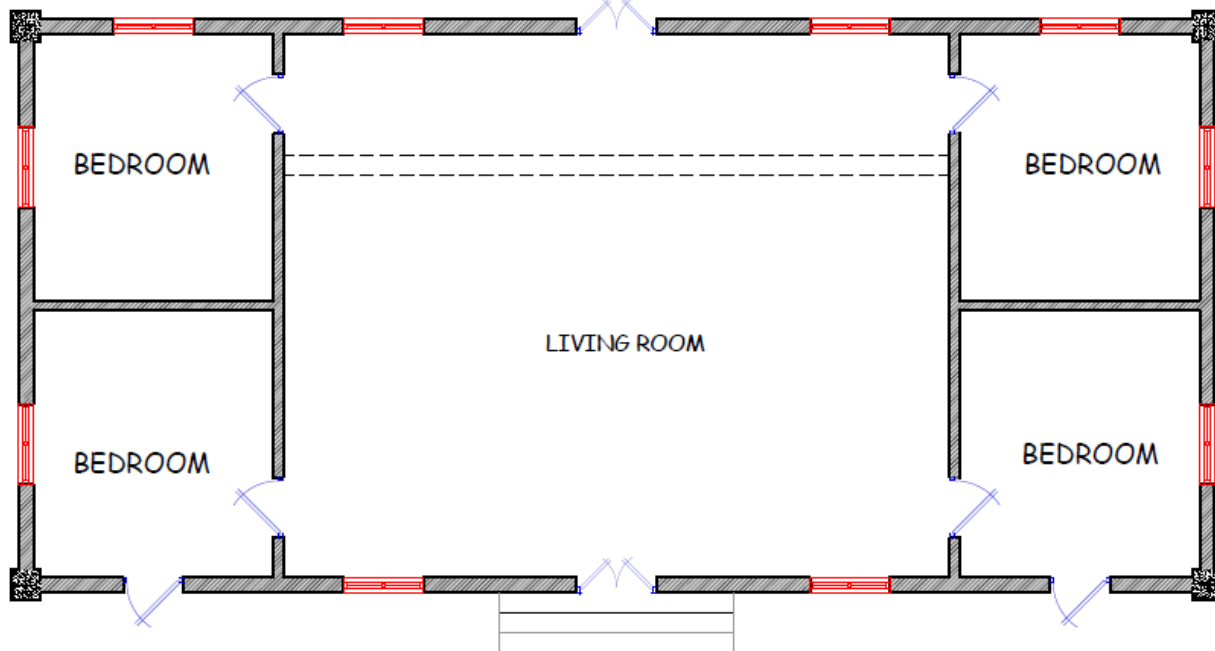


Fig xiv floor plan of the early model (Thompson Ogorisi House) Author 2016

### Late Design models of the Merchant-Venturer Archetype

The late design model was more common from the early 1930s until the late 1940s. The popularity and cost-effectiveness of brick as a building material heralded the coming of the late design model. By the 1930s, mass production of bricks was in full swing in towns and provinces such as Lagos, Enugu, and Ibadan and much later in Port-Harcourt. This helped reduce the cost

of buildings but also removed the idea of personalization of finished concrete blocks due to mass production. The blocks became plain, less ornamented, and cheaper due to the reduced cost of producing simple block moulds and templates. As such, a lot of the later housing models were constructed using bricks rendered over with cement mortar and dressed with a simply pointed finish.

Besides the change in construction material, another major difference observed in the late model is the inclusion of toilet and kitchen facilities in the detached or semi-detached form at the rear end of the plot, resulting in the creation of a courtyard by default. Buildings in the old Port-Harcourt Township were oriented back end to back end, with narrow service access separating them. Their main entrances faced the access or street roads with setbacks just sufficient to create off-road parking. Besides, the later model bungalows were no longer perfect rectangles, as recesses were sometimes created to introduce steps up to the verandah that was becoming more prominent or living rooms were being designed with hexagonal forms.

Besides, not only were spatial forms being changed but innovative designs were being added to other features that had otherwise been left bare. For instance, Saro designers and builders began exploring with new ornamentation styles on column capitals, window hoods, and window sills. This might not be unconnected to the rising popularity of the Afro-Brazilian style known for its unique stucco ornamentation that some potential homeowners had seen on their travels to Lagos and Ibadan (Osasona 2015). The Afro-Brazilians specialized in multi-storey structures known for heavy ornamentation, but also used complex roof configurations, sometimes with attics; double-loaded corridors flanked on either side with living spaces; and conspicuously detached kitchen and toilets placed behind the main buildings. Fired brick with well-seasoned hardwood were the materials of choice for both groups but with the addition of stucco for the Afro-Brazilian. Stucco allowed for elaborate artistic expression on a variety of architectural elements as did wood. The late models incorporated the use of double-loaded corridors with bedrooms on either side different from the simpler early model designs where the bedrooms flanked the main living room. Where the early models primarily used hip roofs that suited the rectangular plans, the late models adopted the use of more complex roofs to accommodate the irregular design plans now in vogue. Another conspicuous Afro-Brazilian adaptation was the inclusion of detached kitchens and toilet, an obvious omission in the early models. The preference for fired brick and stucco ornamentation was also glaring in the late models. These additions seem to add credence to the supposition that there was more Afro-Brazilian influence in the late models than the original Saro influence.

The Afro-Brazilian influence must have come by way of knowledge and technology transfer through travels or by way of mimicry, then the actual movement of descendants of Brazilian repatriates from Lagos taking up building commissions in Port-Harcourt. Pre and post-war census figures in Port-Harcourt showed specifically that there were no Afro-Brazilians captured in the demographics during this period. Besides indigenous Africans, Saros, and some Ghanaians that made up the population in Port-Harcourt, the others were foreigners of British, Lebanese, or Syrian descent (Dixon-Fyle 1999). Also, there were no records from the office of the resident or



the Township Advisory Board (TAB) of contractors of Aguda origin, undertaking any Government or private construction jobs in Port-Harcourt. Rather what is most captured in the records are the frequent travels of elite members of the society, clergymen, Government staff, merchants, and traders, to and from Lagos and sometimes beyond. It would not be out of place to assume that ideas on such popular architectural culture could filter across regions, borrowed by the affluent members of society who come across them on their numerous travels and copied by indigenous craftsmen and artisans in their locality.

In the old Port-Harcourt Township, the late models became the recommended templates for the development of 100x50 sqft leasehold plots during the colonial administration. Notable carpenters turned building contractors of Saro origin such as C.P Coker and E. Odu Thomas (Dixon-Fyle 1999) frequently turned out variations of the late models for clients who could afford them. The Colonial administration adopted these designs as standard buildings and often insisted that all buildings must be carried out in conformity with the templates and building covenants or the owners will risk being relieved of their plots (Dixon-Fyle 1999). These late models grew in popularity in the 1940s until the rise of the one-storey buildings that offered more living spaces for the same square feet of leasehold plots. By the 1950s, there were far more commissions for one-storey family buildings that could cater to the spatial needs of the African extended family system than the conservative British-inspired bungalows.

There are over 400 copies of the late model bungalow still in existence in old Port-Harcourt Township alone. Although, just like the old model, many have been renovated or demolished in favour of larger contemporary buildings, yet some are still intact and retain much of their original design features, building materials and products. For this paper, two of such buildings have been included below as a case study.

### **Case Study 1 (Late Model) –Wakama House, Niger Street, Old Port-Harcourt Township, Rivers State**

This building is located on a corner plot on number 167, Niger Street in the old Port-Harcourt Township area, between two access roads sitting perpendicular to each other. Like many of the houses in this location, details of the original architect and builders were not available at the time of fieldwork. This building like others in the study area had been purchased from the original owners or their descendants and the current owners had little or no knowledge of the building's history or its contributors.

On first impressions, the external form, shape, ornamentation, and roof structure of this model appears to have been taken a notch higher in comparison to the early models. However, the size of the buildings in terms of square meterage of footprint remains the same as that of the early models. One of the striking characteristics of this case building is the celebration of the entrance area and verandah. An ascension of steps leads to a verandah space both of which are wrapped in ornamented concrete balustrades. For ornamentation, the case building carries a sunray design pattern that must have been hugely popular in that era. The sunray design was carried through

other parts of the building like the v-shaped window sills beneath protruding windows with curved chamfer ends which were another innovation that came with the late models. The window hood was another addition to the late model that spotted several designs. For the Wakama house, a short cantilevered slab with two short supporting beams was adopted as window hoods. This was simple in comparison to other more ornamented versions spotted in this as well as other variations of the late model.

The roof is a bit more complex than the early models with three gable ends, two of which are facing the access roads perpendicular to each other. The walls on the gable ends are designed with relief vertical motifs and the larger gable face contains ornamentation. This design feature can be spotted on other case buildings within old Port-Harcourt Township as shown in figure xvii below. Corrugated roofing sheets are still the material of choice even for this model but with shorter eaves and a Bengalese-inspired clerestory with an ornamental ridge cap on one gable end. A continuous beam acts as both lintel and roof beam around the entire perimeter of the building with a soffit of 2.5metres, giving an impression of windows with more height.

Even with the added ornamentations in this model, the building still exudes a cottage-like appearance because of its scale. It adopts the use of the double-loaded corridor absent in the early model and includes a detached kitchen, store and toilet space at the rear end of the plot. The inclusion of these functional spaces brought about the addition of a courtyard which is accessed via a side gate.



**Fig xiv view of the main building frontal access showing verandah with sunray balustrades and two main gable ends with relief designs of vertical lines (Source: Obagah-Stephen and Lawson 2019)**

The relief vertical design patterns are also indicated on the gable end of the detached toilet and kitchen unit as shown in figure xv below. The difference in the height of the roof pitch between the main building and the ancillary toilet/kitchen unit reveals a sense of hierarchy among the units.



**Fig xv showing side access gate into courtyard space and similar vertical design patterns on the gable end of the main building and detached kitchen/toilet building (Source: Obagah-Stephen and Lawson 2019)**

The Wakama house is a perfect example of a brick house rendered over with mortar and a simple paint finish.

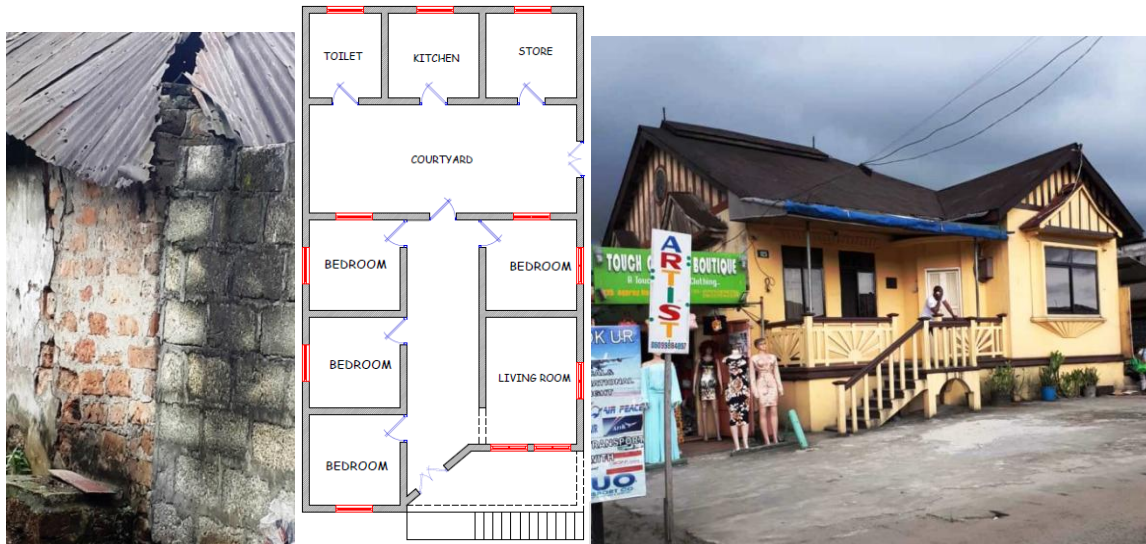


Fig xvi

**Kitchen wall of the detached unit showing brick rendered over with mortar (Author 2019)**

**Fig xvii Floor plan/layout of the late model (Wakama House) Author 2019**

**Fig xviii A variation of the case building of the late model showing similar sunray ornamentations on balustrades, window sills and gable ends. But with a different window hood design (Author 2019)**

### **Case Study 2 (Late Model) – The Bay Window Front House, Niger Street, Port-Harcourt**

This variation is an even later model popularized in the mid to late 1940s. This late model borrowed one of the characteristic features of the 1930s British semi which is the curved or three-sided bay windows. The three-sided types are known as canted bay, with protrusions from the front rooms like half a hexagon or semi cylinders and each side having a window. The protrusions have a flat front and chamfered or angled sides. This feature helps increase the amount of natural light in the space, afford the occupants a lateral view, and make the interior room appear more spacious. Just as bungalows became popular around this period, so the three-sided facing grew in popularity, until it eventually became one of the most common housing features in Britain.

This late model has certain differentiating characteristics from the previous variation with the main features being: asymmetrical three-sided front design with each of the three sides having a window; also the double-loaded corridor is extended fully from the entrance to the rear end exit that leads to the courtyard at the back. Some features from the early model were also revisited, such as the adoption of a simple hip roof which works well with the re-emergence of the rectangular form and the application of symmetry. For fenestration, most examples spot wooden shutters with jalousies and matching doors while some others use glass casement or push out windows. The window sill designs vary from the simple skirting to the more ornamented sunray pattern. Similarly, the window hood designs range from simple continuous skirting to short cantilevered protrusions with short supporting beams.

In this model, the corridor becomes the point of entry at one end, the point of distribution to other functional spaces and the point of exit at the other end. The symmetry being talked about exists only on the façade, while on the plan three bedrooms are on one wing and a living room and another bedroom make up the other wing.



**Fig xx The late-model showing symmetrical three-sided front (This sample shows some recent renovations such as sliding windows in place of the original wooden shutters with jalousies) Author 2019**

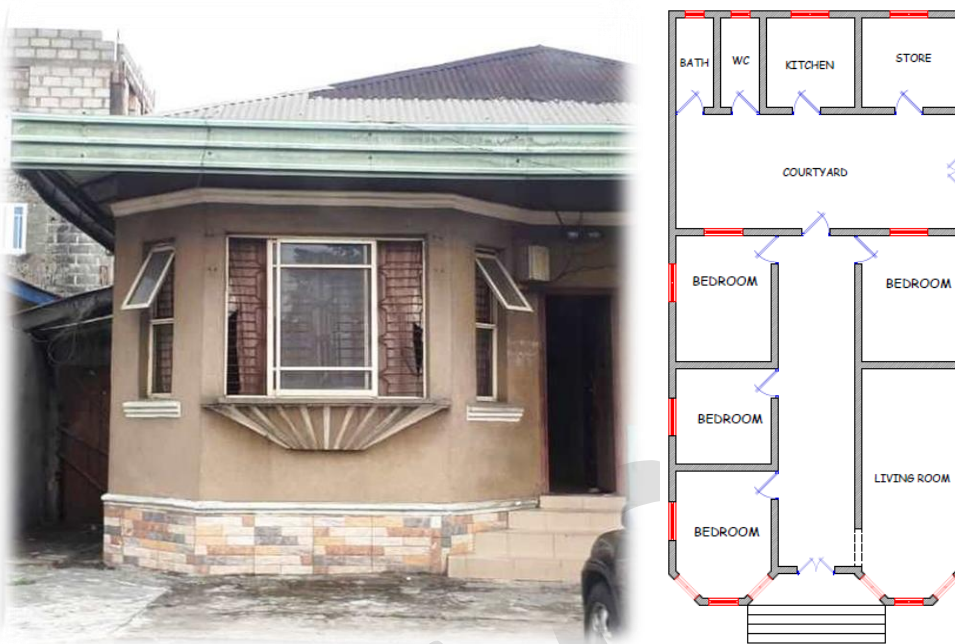


Fig xxi picture showing top and bottom external skirtings and the popular sunray ornamentation of the window (Author 2019)

Fig xxii Plan of the symmetrical three-sided (Bay window) front variation (Author 2019)

**Discussion**

The study commenced by showing how the British were responsible for creating the enabling milieu for other cultures to intervene architecturally in Nigeria, But going farther back in time, we observed that they were also responsible for introducing a style of buildings but developing the bungalow archetype itself. Although, originally a functional adaptation of Bengalese vernacular, it metamorphosed into a tropical-friendly, cost-effective residential dwelling.

From the case studies that were analyzed, the identifiable features linked to the different cultural influences being discussed can be easily distinguished. The table below shows the features that are clearly of British origin, Saro influence, Afro-Brazilian influence, and those that were indigenously grown. What this paper revealed is that although the British, Saro, and Afro-Brazilian influence is the most heralded the features that highlight the indigenous influence also stand out without which this vernacular archetype would not be complete. Besides the addition of some unique indigenous features, the pattern of combining the other attributes is also an arbitrary decision that adds another indigenous stamp on individual buildings.

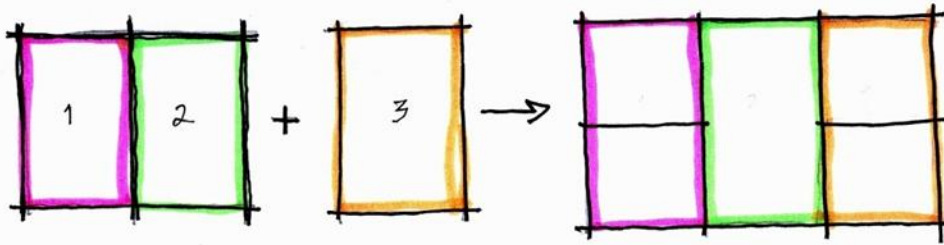
**Table 1**Design attributes from different cultural influences

	MATERIALS	LAYOUT	FINISHES	ORNAMENTATIONS	SPACES	ROOF DESIGNS	WINDOWS
	Fired brick		Pointing over brick/ concrete blockwork		Verandah/ Porch	Hip and Gable roof designs	Canted windows Bay

<b>BRITISH</b>	Concrete Block					Extended roof eaves	Casement windows with glass panels  Wooden shutters with panels or slatted Jalousies
<b>SARO</b>	Fired brick -						
<b>AFRO-BRAZILIAN</b>	Concrete Stucco	Centrally located double-loaded corridor	Mortar render over fired brick	Baroque-styled ornamentation	Detached Kitchen and Toilets	Complex roof styles	-
<b>INDIGENOUS (NIGER-DELTA)</b>	-	Living room flanked on either side by bedrooms	-	Personalized relief sculptures and finishes on concrete blocks	Courtyard space		-

The table indicates more contributions from three out of the four cultures being discussed. It is not surprising that the table indicates the fewest contributions from the Saros this is because the Saros are ex-slaves repatriated from Britain and resettled in Freetown and then in Lagos as earlier stated. Their specialization is in building types very similar to that characteristic of the British occupation and as observed by their ascendants in Britain. Their other specialty is in timber fretwork on eaves and fascias and timber-framed and boarded houses, which do not constitute choice materials for building in the wet, humid regions of the Niger Delta (Osasona and Hyland 2006). Nonetheless, the Saros gained a reputation as skilled artisans who could replicate other styles as well as interpreting design ideas for their affluent indigenous clientele. The table indicates three main contributions by the indigenous culture to this vernacular archetype, in the area of space, ornamentation, and layout. The origins of the courtyard space have already been established earlier in the study and with the entire Niger Delta being a part of the defunct Benin Empire, the indigenous communities can also lay claim to the courtyard as part of their culture.

An earlier study on architectural variations in Ijo migrant fisher base camps gives an idea as to the possible origins of the bedrooms flanking the living area layout. The study shows the use of rectangular modules combined to form three spaces. The central space is the living area and the spaces on either side which could be further divided into smaller sleeping areas form bedrooms or storage areas. In the paper, Brisibe (2011) showed that this has been the age-long building layout adopted by Ijomigrant fishermen from their inception and which has been carried over as design layout for their more sedentary country and township homes.



A combination of three modular units are used for buildings in base camps with large households, as well as in permanent family homes at the fishermen's villages of origin.

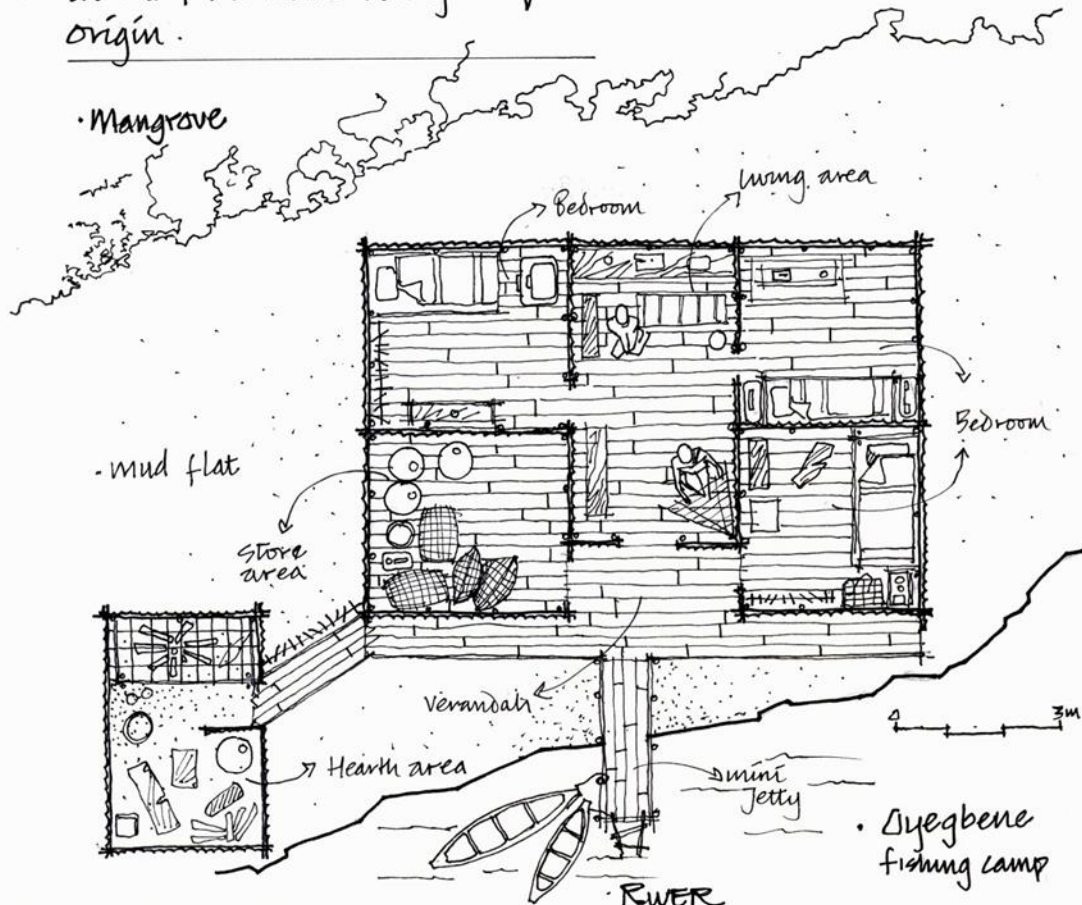
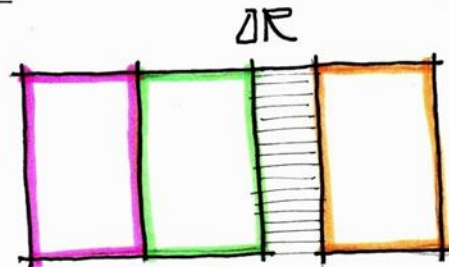


Fig xxiii a typical multi-family homestead in an Ijo migrant fisher base camp (Source: Author 2011)



Lastly, detailed relief ornamentations on concrete block facings are another hallmark of indigenous contributions especially, in the early models. The subjects of the ornamentations highlighted the idiosyncrasies of each merchant-venturer, thus giving each building a unique identity and opening a portal towards comprehending the vernacular not just as the popular architectural culture but as an authentic way of life for each member of the society in focus.

Although the study has revealed the immense contributions of the British and Afro-Brazilian cultures in actualizing the merchant-venturer archetype, it however also shows that while the other cultures fundamentally created the body or building envelope, the indigenous culture created the heart and soul of the dwelling type in its layout and stamp of personalization as observed in the early model. But with the variation being one of the key attributes of the vernacular following the dynamism of culture, building types tend to evolve with the transformation imminent in any polydialectic society subject to syncretism as a result of colonialization. It is this syncretism earlier alluded to that may be responsible for the late model and subsequent variations of this archetype and the possibility of other future models evolving. But whatever the case, this paper argues that this syncretism of various architectural cultures has created models and variations of the merchant-venturer bungalow, based on the idea of 'difference amongst equals' that qualifies it in its own right as a vernacular archetype.

### Funding

This study was made possible by the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFUND) Institutional Basic Research (IBR) grant 3rd Batch disbursement for 2015. The author is grateful to TETFUND for providing the much-needed funding to undertake fieldwork in the cartographic Niger Delta region of Nigeria.

### References

- Adepoju A (1991). South-North Migration: The African Experience. *Int. Migration* 29(2)
- Brisibe, W.G. (2011). *The Dynamics of Change in Migrant Architecture: A Case Study of Ijo Fisher Dwellings in Nigeria and Cameroon*. Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape, Newcastle University, Newcastle Upon Tyne, United Kingdom.
- Brisibe W.G. (2016) 'Moving, fishing and building': A building-back-home culture of Ijo migrant fishermen in Nigeria, *Journal of African Studies and Development*, 8(4), 35-48.
- Brown, R and Maudlin, D. (2012) Concepts of Vernacular Architecture, in *The Sage Handbook of Architectural Theory*, C.G. Crysler, S. Cairns and H. Heynen (eds) Sage: London, New York, Singapore
- Carter, T and Collins, E. (2005) *Invitation to Vernacular Architecture: a guide to the study of ordinary buildings and landscapes*. The University of Tennessee Press, Knoxville
- Diaw M.C (1983). *Social and production relationships in the artisanal maritime fisheries of West Africa: A comparative analysis*. Thesis: Michigan State University

- Diko J, Tipple G (1992). Migrants Build at Home: Long-distance Housing development by Ghanaians in London. *Cities*. 9(4):288-294
- Dixon-Fyle, M. (1999) A Saro Community in the Niger Delta, 1912-1984 : The Potts-Johnsons of Port Harcourt and their Heirs. Rochester Studies in African History and the Diaspora, University of Rochester Press
- Home, R. (1997) Of Planting and Planning: The Making of British Colonial Cities, E & FN SPON: An Imprint of Chapman & Hall. London: UK
- Kramer, K. (2014) Applying the Lessons of Indian Vernacular Architecture: The Bungalow, in Lessons from Vernacular Architecture, W. weber and S. Yannas (eds) Routledge: Taylor and Francis Group, London and New York
- Leis, N.B (1964) Economic independence and Ijo women; a comparative study of two communities in the Niger Delta. Ph.D Thesis. Northwestern University
- Morton, P.A. (2000) Hybrid Modernities. MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts
- Nilsson, S. (1968) European Architecture in India 1750-1850, London: Faber and Faber
- Okoye, I.S (2013) African Reimaginings: Presence, Absence and the New Way Architecture, in Gitti Salami and Monica Blackmun Visona (eds) *A Companion to Modern African Art*. Wiley and Sons Inc. West Sussex: UK
- Oliver, P. (2006) Built to meet needs: Cultural issues in vernacular architecture, Oxford Architectural Press.
- Osasona, C.O. (2015), Heritage architecture as domestic space: A tale of three buildings in Ile-Ife, Nigeria. *International Journal of Sustainable Development and Planning*, **10(1)**, Wessex Institute of Technology, Southampton, pp. 42–65, 2015. DOI: 10.2495/ SDP-V10-N1-42-65
- Osasona, C.O. and Hyland, A.D.C. (2006) *Colonial Architecture in Ile-Ife, Nigeria*, Ibadan: Bookbuilders, Editions Africa.
- Rapoport, A. (1990) 'Defining Vernacular Design', in Turan, M.(ed), Vernacular Architecture: Paradigms of Environmental Response. Avery, Gower Publishing Company England.
- Uduku, O. (2006) Modernist architecture and 'the tropical' in West Africa: The tropical architecture movement in West Africa, 1948–1970 *Habitat International* 30 (2006) 396–411