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## Architectural Semiotic Study Of Islamic Heritage Factors In Southwest Nigeria Cultural Spaces.

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### ABSTRACT

The cultural role of architecture must be put in proper perspective in the ever dynamic culture of the built-environment. African architecture remain built on the tripod of the indigenous, Islamic and western heritages. Despite this being an imminent and already accepted culture in the study area; it was observed that some influences of the Islamic aspect of the heritage there has been on, that made it possible to identify Muslim owned built-forms. This research from field observation of selected southwest Nigeria cities showed the original indigenous traditional built-form as contained in the resulting vernacular architecture with blended initial foreign-ness from Islamic contacts. Some pre-1960 case-study spaces and built-forms were selected purposively based on some cultural affiliations; there were semi-structured interviews. A systematic literature review included the adaptation of a table used to examine the trend of evolution of space usage as part of semiotic tools for better interpretation to get meanings. The archaeological method was used to analyse the selected spaces studied. There is an established need for preservation of symbolic cultural built-form; some of Islamic influences distinguish where pragmatic. The adoption of the conceptual indexical positives in the established Islamic influences on study area vernacular built-form applicable space usage for a sustainable environment was concluded. This was predicated on U.N indigenous peoples' declaration and Sustainable Development Goals

**Keywords:** Islamic Heritage, Architectural Semiotics, Cultural Spaces, Southwest Nigeria

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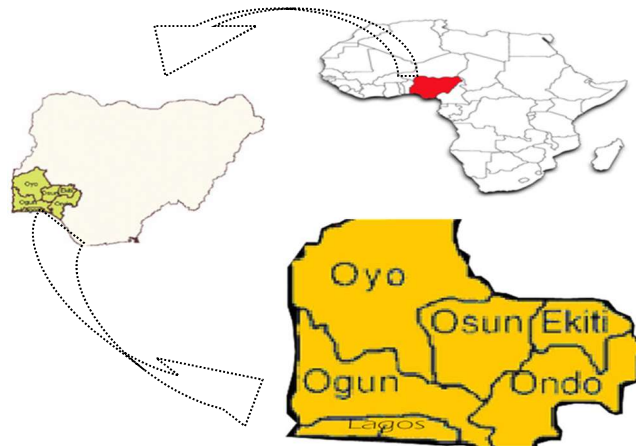
## 1. INTRODUCTION

The 'African triple heritage' concept of Mazrui has been applied by Elleh (1997) and Falola (2021) as a general framework to understand African regional architecture including that of the study area. Indigenous southwest Nigeria folk architecture had no magnificent temples; however, typical village had well laid out, cultural spaces and built-forms with socio-cultural indexical and symbolic meanings beyond their primary functions (Osasona 2011; Denyer 1979). However, a recent attempt to identify and study the cultural built-forms of Southwest Nigeria showed a greater state of dereliction, near loss of the truly indigenous or typologies and the interfacing sustainable architectural role of vernacular built-forms. This formed part of efforts to use comparisons, including time-line, to explain the interplay of indigenous, Islamic and western heritages of Yorùbá-African architecture. Built-form and its practice in the study area have as part of its origin, contacts and its modifying influences.

This is in the context of the subsequently predominating vernacular architecture prominently related to the much earlier contact and influence Islamic culture-contacts evident in Mosques buildings. Western influences including Christian had the Brazil and other South Americas slave trade returnees bringing along their wealth of experience and expertise array of new material and technology. There were also earlier explorers and trade expeditions, culture contacts that became accepted enriching and heritage factors (Elleh, 1997). The Islamic influence in Architecture mainly in mosques, with ogee arches and roofs, onion domes, walls decorated with carved stones, paintings, inlays, or mosaics mostly adaptations of Christian by Muslim to for propaganda imperial authority using architectural exteriors (Ultimate Visual Dictionary, 2011; Sterlin, 2005). A comparative look at the receptivity and effect of cultural contact on indigenous built-form and practice in the study area showed a more indiscriminate acceptance and preference of the Islamic and western heritages. Islamic contacts with the indigenous culture of the study area were earlier and tend to show more similarities than with western heritage. This is despite Al-Sayyad (2010)'s claim of vernacular architecture as a being a nineteenth century invention. All these theories, models, concepts and symbolic linguistics languages now have wider application in the triple architecture heritage.

### 1.1 The Study Area

The southwest geo-political zone is made up of six states namely: Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun, and Oyo that homes most Yoruba speaking people of Nigeria. The land area occupies a landmass of about 76,852 square kilometres within longitude 1° 25' and 6° 45'; latitude 5° 55' and 9° 10' N., with Edo, Kwara and Kogi states also being part. (Fajuyigbe & Okunade, 2015, Adejumo, Okedele, Adebamowo, 2012) They are peoples with a long history of socio-political organization and cultural cohesion, evident in their house-form and the fact of being ruled by chiefs and kings as far back as 600 A.D, (Jiboye & Ogunshakin, 2010). The Yoruba language is of the West Benue-Congo bit of the Niger-Congo strand of African languages. About 30million Nigerians speak Yoruba as is also done in Togo, Republic of Benin, Ghana, Sudan, Sierra-Leone and Cote D'Ivoire. There are also a great number of Yoruba speaking people in Brazil, Cuba including Trinidad and Tobago among others in the diaspora (Fabunmi and Salawu 2005).



**Figure 1: Yoruba Speaking Area in Nigeria**

South Western Nigeria is home to the Yoruba speaking people of Nigeria, with a legend of having a common ancestry in Oduduwa and Ile-Ife from where they migrated to other places. The case study people are located mostly in the hot and humid rain forest geographical region with traditional domestic architecture consisting of buildings constructed from locally abundant materials (Adeokun, 2013).

### **1.2 Scope of Study**

This study scope is within the pre-industrial vernacular forms typologies exemplified in the rare traditional and more common vernacular built-forms with characteristic well-defined contextual pattern languages and symbols. The study focussed on changes in most built-forms and spaces from their original state or past intended purpose due to 'culture contact' and technology, as well as their interpretation and symbolic representations. The present-day perception, use, attitudes by professionals, governments and others in the study area and elsewhere. The Indigenous pre-slave trade, Islamic, Christian, Colonial and slave returnees' eras culminating in the vernacular, excluding the strictly modern or international styles, that is architectural representations up to the Nigerian independence timeline.

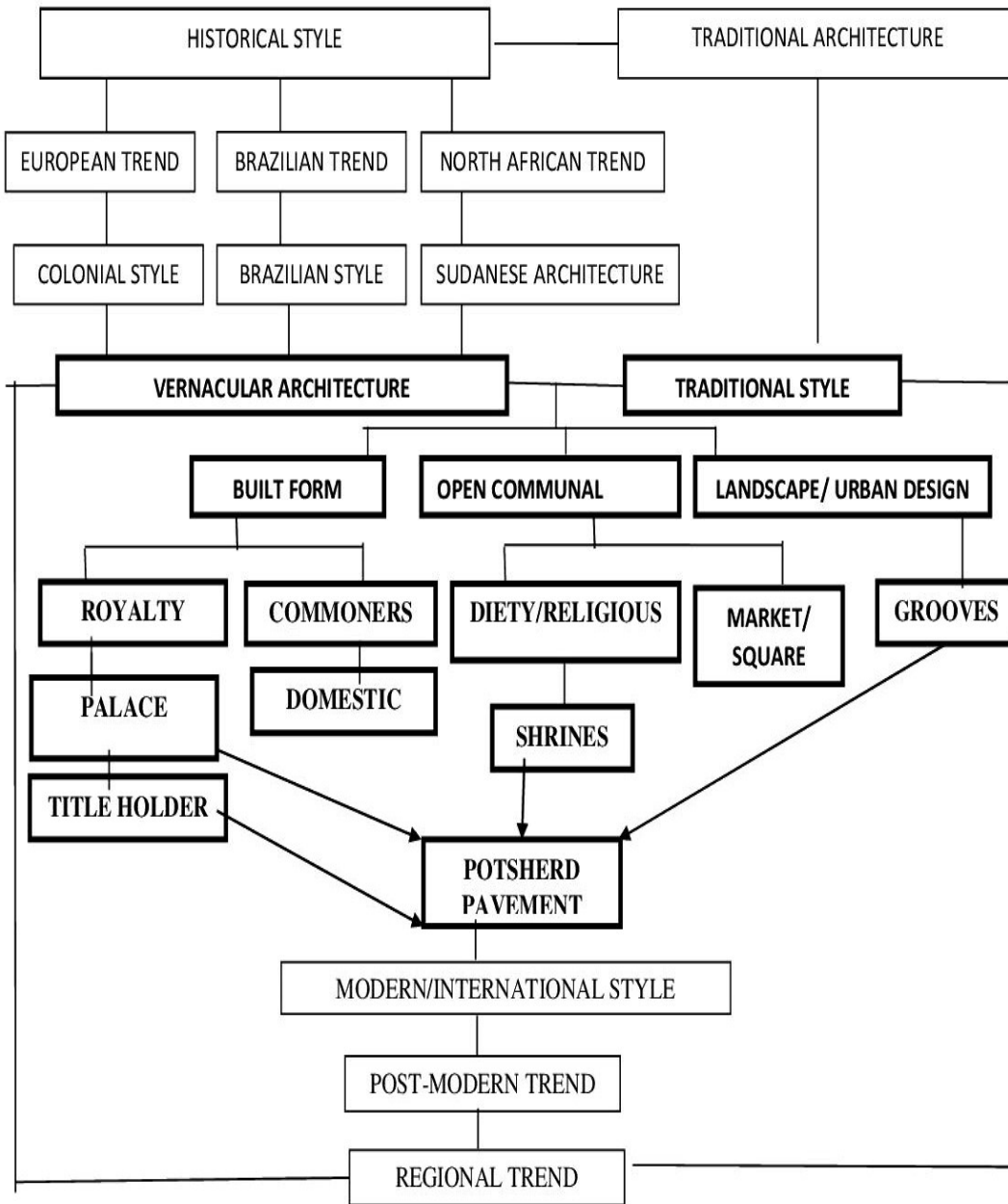
### **1.3 Limitations**

This is limited to the built-form and spaces of southwest Nigeria cultural with features Islamic features like harems and family mosques and cases of use of indigenous built-forms with similar features to reinforce the case being put forth.

## **2. CLASSIFICATION OF ARCHITECTURAL BUILT FORM IN THE STUDY AREA**

The historical style classification included the 500-200 B.C North Central Nigerian Nok to the Ife 900-1200 A.D civilizations culturally indigenous with contacts through the period of the inter-tribal wars and the slave trade's (European (colonial), North African and Brazilian trends). There is the Modern style (International), New West African and Post Modern styles and trends). The locally adapted vernacular architectural style evolved from a culmination of all the above through the colonial, missionaries from Islamic and western cultural contact as mix of Brazilian, Portuguese colonial and early modern architectural influences up unto 1960; the year of

Nigeria's independence around which the face-me-i-face-you architecture emerged (Clarke, 1984; Elleh, 1997; Ogunsote, 2001). Within this timeline was the colonial and Brazilian building styles that led to tropical modern buildings better or the international 'style' to post-modern style up to and post 1960 Nigeria all reflecting the African triple architectural heritage on a 3-Era timeline. Table 2 is an adaptation of *Prucnal-Ogunsote, (2001)* classifications of architecture in Nigeria along the line of styles and trends titled 'the evolution of Nigerian architecture.



**Fig. 2: Further Classification of Traditional Architectural Styles for This Research**  
 Source: Author's Adaptation of Architectural classifications.

Nigerian architecture is further divided into built-forms, communal and urban spaces in figure 2. It covers the aspects of the African triple architectural heritage from the past indigenous civilizations along an historical timeline approach up to pre-independence Nigeria. (Okeyinka and Odetoeye 2015; Olotuah 1997; Adeokun, 2012).

### **2.1 The Domestic Architecture of South West Nigeria**

In the southwest communal setting, the house and the city symbolised the people's socio-cultural domestic architectural heritage as divided into categories; that include the houses cum spaces of the common people royalties and palaces (Aafin) in their various sizes, functional planning, rich interior decorations and furnishings as well as being variously of great symbolic importance. The spaces vary from private to public uses found in exterior, internal walls, posts, beams, lintels, ceiling boards, furnishings, decorations and artefacts used in domestic activities including traditional altars located within the houses.

Yoruba architecture entail expansive veranda and roofs supported by wooden posts caryatids often richly carved forms testifying to the peoples' artistic prowess. Ordinary people houses have less expensive joinery or mud-built posts. However, with time there was technological advancements, improved materials and cultural contacts ranging from the Brazilian styles to other modern movement and the colonial Thus there have been various classifications of Nigerian and southwest built-forms (Okpako & Amole,2012; Osasona, 2007; Dmochowski, 1990;). Changes in houses across board from huts in the more standard sizes, planning, fenestrations, had the indigenous separation of the male and female sections more elaborated in built-form owned by Muslims. The evolution was also from bungalow into storey buildings called *ile-petesi*, or *ile-alaja*.

## **3. METHODOLOGY**

The field interpretive architectural semiotics research (a language based study of signs and symbols) is qualitative. It evolved from the author's broader field observations of cultural built-form in 18 selected historical southwest Nigeria towns from which built-forms with some symbolic features could be found to study meaning. This was across board based on the background knowledge of the indigenous, Islamic and western heritages of African architecture. The archaeological method (which like archaeology seek out hidden worthy elements in the environment) was deliberately adopted to look deeply into those features in such buildings that are not as iconic or easily aesthetically visible in modern built-forms.

## **4. FINDINGS**

### **The Centralised "Orúwá" (Family lobby) with rooms on either side**

Central back *Orúwá*; surrounded by rooms with small wooden windows, as the building's women older indigenous section, the first back right room belonged to the late patriarch's first wife with raised sleeping mound. Newer front male area with western influenced narrower corridor, small parlour and two rooms for the patriarch and son. The Ifè Makinde house and Efon Babalola street house are examples.

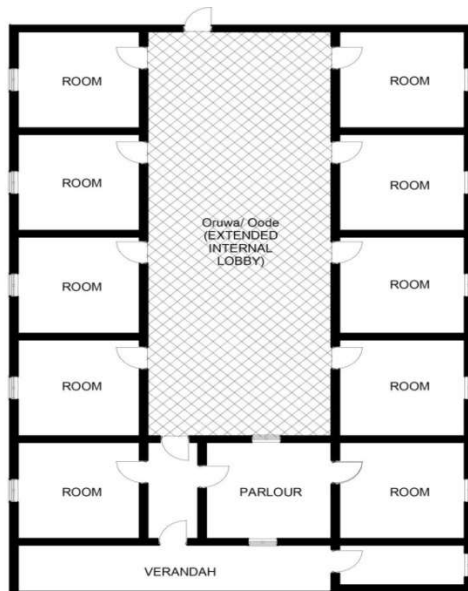


Figure 3 Centralised “Orúwá” family lobby) with rooms on either side as found in Makinde house Ilé-Ifè and Babalola Street house, Efon-Alaye

Combination of courtyard, Orúwá and corridor core house type

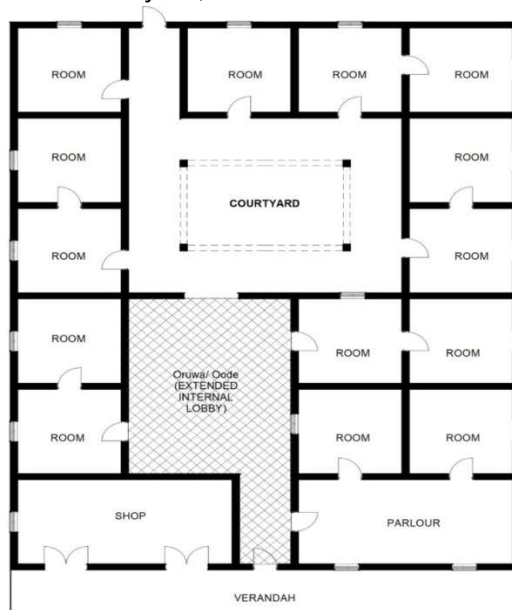
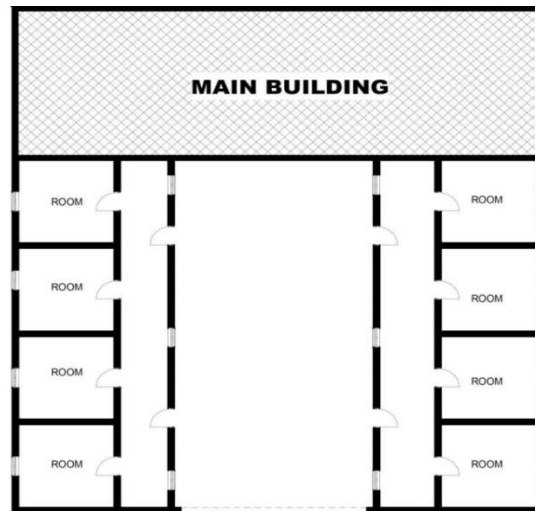


Figure 4 Combined courtyard; Orúwá and corridor house type (Awotiku house Igbara-Odo)

This depicts all 3-era and architectural heritages, it is presumably a most revealing case study. All factors of economy, culture contact and others are fully reflected in this home owned by a then newly emerged elite class based on civilisation and commerce. It however still has the women section at the back. The very typical example is the *Awotiku* house in Igbara-Odo

**One-Storey Vernacular building sometimes with harems attached**

This typically represents the emergence of storey buildings popularly known as *Ilé-Pètè̀sì* or *Ilé-alàjà* right from the vicarages first and second storey buildings in Badagry and Ota heralded by the industrial revolution. General acceptances, made vernacular architecture evolve as a ragbag of indigenous, Islamic and western African architecture heritages.



**Figure 5 One-Storey Vernacular building with harems bungalow buildings at Balogun Kuku and Gbadegesin houses, Ijebu Ode and Oyo**



**a) Street view**



**b) Family mosque for public use (Islamic influence)**



c) Patriarch & women section opening into the open fenced fore court (Islamic influence)



d) Oba Bello Gbadegesin Ladigbolu Estate Oyo

Source: Author's field work

The sketch (Figure 4) precisely represents the *Gbadegesin* Òṣyó (royal) and *Kuku Ijebu-Ode* (affluent) family houses whose original patriarchs were polygamous Muslims with adjoining typical rooms as women harem. These rooms; on either side, open through a long wide corridor for interaction to the central storey building's forecourt. The sketch precisely represents another slightly different version affluent original Muslim polygamous patriarch's front house with adjoining typical (drawings not to scale) bungalow buildings as women harem. These buildings; with rooms on either side, open through a long wide corridor for interaction to the central storey building's forecourt. Different here is the long wide interactive corridor opening into the rooms, totally walled but with door and window lightening and opening. The front house remain the typical Brazilian architecture one-storey space in this place, used the family patriarch and male members'.





## 5. DISCUSSIONS

Figure 6. Show efforts to use various comparisons, including time-line, to explain the interplay of indigenous, Islamic and western heritages of Yorùbá-African architecture. The indigenous, Islamic and western African architectural heritages are shown as far back as possible and to show forms of independent space and built-form making processes, to the point that the past and present converged. It tries to show the evolving incorporation of cultural contacts in vernacular architecture representational blend, of the indigenous Islamic and western factors. Comparatively, the Balogun Kuku family House; built in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and by far the best finished has its bungalow harem sections on either sides of the entrance.

This is likely so because history had it that the patriarch originally converted into Christianity as an already married person before becoming a Muslim that accommodated polygamy better. It is constantly renovated for tourists' attraction. The Alaafin Gbadegesin family house is most similar to and comes next to the Kuku's in grandiose and level of maintenance, being the private estate of a one-time also polygamous Alaafin of Oyo built 20<sup>th</sup> century first half. The Alhaji Salawu family house differs just in the full wall covering of the long-entry common circulation area serving as well as the family hall, virtually like the more indigenous figures 3 and 4 *oruwa*. it is also less ostentatious and in the worst state of disrepair.

## 6. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Sociologically as it would seem, the commonality of polygamy in the indigenous and Islamic aspects of African architectural heritage was easily observable. Literature has shown the basis of the triple African architectural heritage to be Muslim and western cultural contacts. Thus first in the universal older bungalow buildings, and even in the later, technology and western cultural contact induced storey *ile-petesi* or *ile-alaja*. The broader semiotic linguistic interpretive tool of architecture much beyond the more common modern visual and oftentimes aesthetic perspective was mainly deployed for this field research.

This had to be used in conjunction with the archaeological method, which therefore meant that beyond mere cursory visual appreciation some digging-into as in archaeology of the site or better still floor plan arrangements were made. As an historical yet cultural architecture study the spaces and built-forms were identified by the commonality their functional arrangements and symbolic characteristics. Geographically and historically, these were more discovered in the vernacular architecture influenced traditional settlements. These were mostly at the phase of the storey buildings the element of foreign-ness of the imported Brazilian craftsmanship was observable

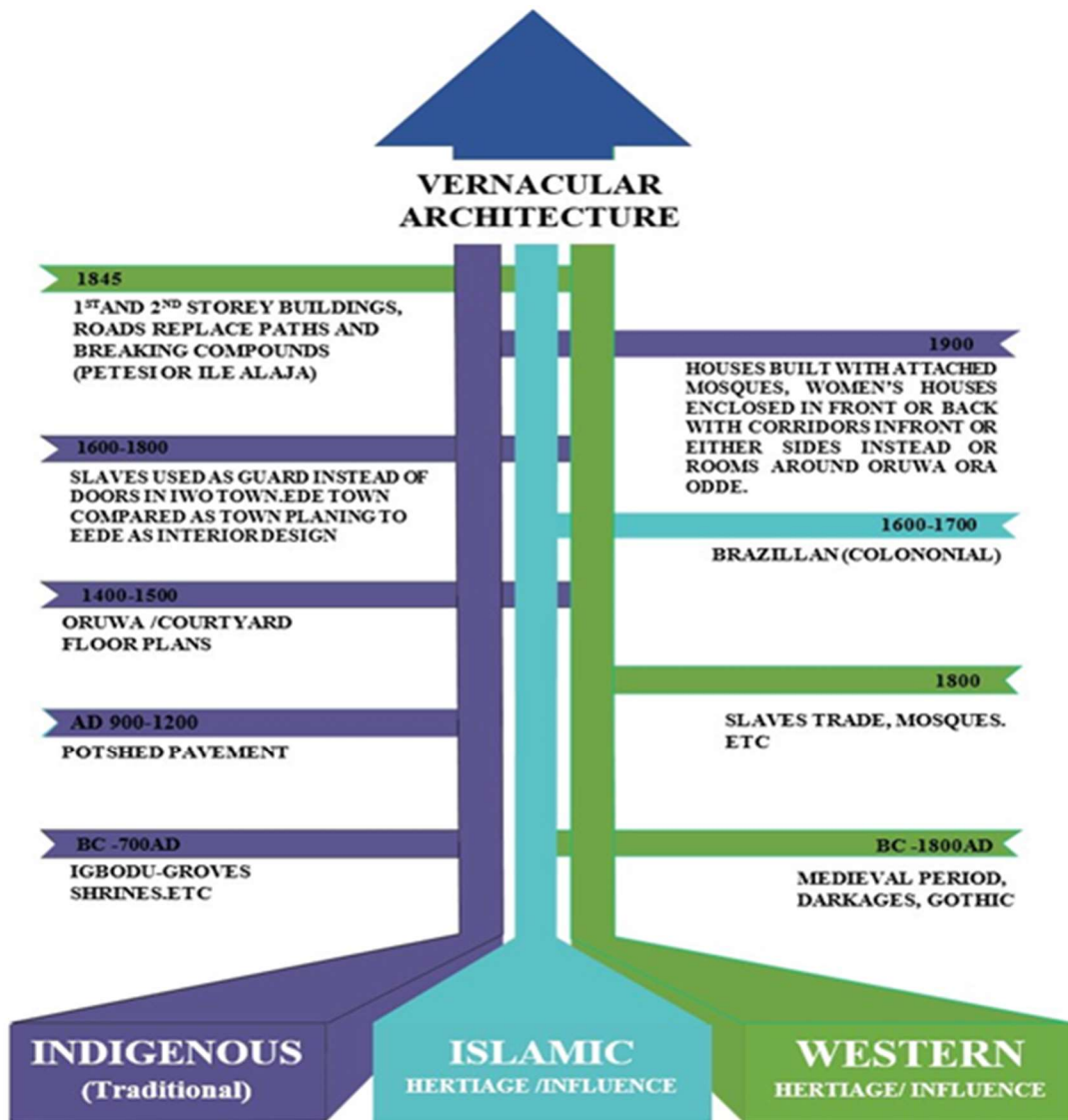


Figure 7: Vernacular Architecture in Time-line

It is observed as stated by Sanni (2018) that colonial contact reduced the study area's cultural values by demonising, housing spaces, places, elements and artefacts that can be classified as traditional built-forms without distinguishing the cultural and religious connotations. Bungalows *ile-ile* continued to evolve into its vernacular versions of separation of the women area either within the same building around the family living *oruwa*, or a courtyard, with economic affluence also sometimes a determining factor of the vastness or complexity. Storey buildings *ile-alaja* were after-runners of bungalows as products of technological advancement and western cultural contacts as well as influence. The first and second-storey building as church vicarage depicted the Christian religion among other such buildings. However, the Balogun Kuku, Alaafin Gbadegesin and Alhaji Salami houses all clearly represented the Islamic factors in African architecture despite similarities.

The bungalow harem sections in the latter three case studies stood for the Islamic heritage of African architecture. A side home mosque that is open to the public is another common feature here. There has been a psyching that nuclear family life, individualism and the western lonesome living are better than the age-long African extended family and communal structure. Societal demands, means of livelihood and environmental factors continue to change with values. Therefore, it is discovered that it is not often that the features of a built-form are appreciated and interpreted appropriately. It was discovered in the course of the focus group interview that it is more the people who change, and the more information a person has about spaces and built-forms the better his judgement or interpretation. There is a need to correctly understand the African architecture heritage, beyond what is presently taught in schools. This would enable a learner to have a balanced perspective when interpreting signs, symbols or meanings of cultural spaces and built forms. The study has brought to the fore a broader bird's eye view semiotic and "archaeological methods" Saidi, (2017) to better handle interpretive architecture.

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