Creolization or mimicry? A study of British colonial architecture in the Niger Delta

Warebi Gabriel BRISIBE[1], Ramota OBAGAH-STEPHEN[2*]
[1] warebi.brisibe@ust.edu.ng • Department of Architecture, Faculty of Environmental Sciences, Rivers State University, Port-Harcourt, Nigeria
[2] ramota.obagah@ust.edu.ng • Department of Architecture, Faculty of Environmental Sciences, Rivers State University, Port-Harcourt, Nigeria

Abstract
This study examines the concept of creolization in colonial architecture based on a discourse of works by Melville Herskovits, Robert Baron and Jay Edwards. It also highlights the influence of the found architectural knowledge of the indigenous peoples on the emergent colonial-built forms. In previously colonized societies, majority of public heritage architecture is an agglomeration of building ideas, spatial arrangement, and architectural features, mimicked, borrowed and indigent from the colonizers and the colonized. This article argues that creolization in the context of this study is simply reversed mimicry based on found architectural knowledge. Using a combination of archival data, discourse analysis and actual case study research, this paper examines some selected colonial buildings in the Niger Delta which are of British authorship but with noticeable indigenous attributes. This article presupposes that in some settings reversed mimicry masked as creolization thrived by reason of found architectural knowledge, resulting in a distinct stilt architectural style found during the colonial era in the study region.

1. Introduction: Concepts and metaphors of creolization

Creolization is a form of cultural change or transformation of vernacular expressive forms resulting from interaction of two or more cultures pressured into involuntary contact by colonialism. It takes its root from linguistic theory which involves creation of a new language structure using a combination of existing building blocks of morphs and syntaxes, which when crystalized and stabilized becomes an existing norm with an identity of its own. Although first formulated through the study of languages in colonial situations, language is only a small part of the expressive means of creolization, as it is also linked to folklore, material culture and other forms of artistic production that emerged as the creative response of the coming together of people from multicultural communities (Baron & Cara, 2011). It is on this basis that the study examines the parallel this linguistic concept finds in an alternate universe like architecture birthed by contact and cultural diffusion. It uses content analysis of scholarly works to investigate the import of these concepts and draw comparisons.

According to Edwards (1994) the word creole (Criollo) derives from 15th century Portuguese. The earliest use of its attribution to architecture was by N.C Curtis (1943), the Cuban architectural historian Frat Puig (1947) and Buford Pickins (1948). He goes further to state that although most scholars agree on the definition of what a creole house is, they generally differ on the origins of its architecture as he discusses in the origins of the Louisiana Creole Cottage (1988).

To comprehend the full import of the concept of creolization as it relates to architecture, it is pertinent to first explore its characteristics. These characteristics are best described under what Baron (2011) terms as "metaphors" of creolization. Metaphors in this context are used to explain a combination of cultural components that typify or to a large extent are indicative of creolization. Baron (2011) maintains in this quote that "creolization which encompasses both form and process is both rendered through metaphors that speak to states of both being and becoming" (Baron, 2011, p. 281).

A series of terms that capture the varied concepts of creolization were made popular by Herskovits from his early studies of black diasporan cultural influences in the United States, Suriname, the West Indies as well as West Africa, in the 1930s through to the 1940s and form part of the Herskovitian metaphors (Herskovits, 1958 as cited in Baron, 2011).

Herskovits created a compendium of metaphors to represent how cultural forms combine and how these in turn have been transmogrified into new entities, all co-existing in a system in spite of their different origins, although not all metaphors have been attributed to Herskovits. Ian Hancock for instance, uses the metaphor of 'compound and mixtures' in describing creole languages. He was of the opinion that creole languages have become whole new entities combined from constituent elements devoid of traces of their original identities due to blending i.e., compounds as opposed to mixtures; chemically combined together as opposed to separable. The restructuring that occurs through or during creolization he believes results in the formation of a new product be it language or in this context architecture (as cited in Baron, 2011). Other theorists do not agree but rather aver to the idea of non-fixed mixtures where distinct identities of the constituent elements are still distinguishable.

Edward Braithwaite views creolization by way of a prismatic concept; a process resulting in subtly leaning towards or drawing inspiration from original ancestral sources, based on a co-operative effort from all parties involved (Braithwaite, 1974). A prismatic concept sees all cultures within it as equal and connected from a single ancestral point of origin. However, over time each culture eventually develops its own lifestyle having evolved through contact with the environment and interface with other cultures, until the style becomes nativized or accepted by all even though it still retains vestiges of their original ancestry and heritage (Brathwaite, 1977).

Transculturation as described by Carranza (2010) is a selective process through which cultural producers take certain elements from an admired or colonizing culture and substitutes them for their own. Other terms popularized by Herkovits, that make up the repertoire of metaphors include: Syncretism, Assimilation, Consolidation, Amalgamation, Cultural Mosaics, Kaleidoscope and Intermingling (as cited in Baron, 2011).

But of all these metaphors, it is the concept of 'syncretism' that is more akin to the concept of creolization as it applies to architecture. Syncretism describes a mixture, a unifying of elements, and a metaphor of interspersal; a mingling, yet appropriately suggesting the retention of the identity of its constituent elements – elements found in a mixture rather than a compound. It is a response to an acculturation process; a combination of European traditions and Aboriginal African patterns to which they are exposed. In syncretism, elements from two distinct sources combine with neither of them losing their individual identities. It was first used by Herskovits in a comparative study between African gods and Catholic saints; identification between the two beliefs and creolized forms that show reconciliation between both systems. Among those of African origin in Brazil, Cuba and Haiti, the evidence of syncretism is most prominent in immediately recognizable traits of ancestral worship in organized religion.

Herskovits is convinced that syncretism is as prominent in Cuba and Brazil as it is in Haiti. Vlach (1978) attributes the design of the caille - a Haitian vernacular-built form, to a three-way interaction between the Arawak Indians, French colonials and African slaves, a marriage of convenience between African, European, and Amerindian. The African slaves in this case being the Yorubas whose culture formed the primary source for the production of the caille. Vlach (1978) summarized the three cultural sources for this house type in these words "it contains the gable door and porch of the Arawak bohio, the construction technique of French peasant cottages, and the spatial volume of a Yoruba two-room house" (Vlach, 1978, p. 125).

This brings into the picture, slaves from Western Nigeria, imported to work in the plantations of Cuba and Brazil whose freed descendants found their way back to Lagos in the mid-1800s and for whom their renowned building artisanry form a large part of the courtyard styled, colonial architecture found in some parts of Lagos and western Nigeria.

2. Creolization in colonial era architecture: A reading of Jay Edwards

Creolization in architecture like linguistics is clearly a product of cultural diffusion, common only to regions considered as the 'new world' (colonies) that were associated with the 'old world' (empires), such as the West Indies, West Africa, Louisiana in the United States etc. According to Edwards (2001) colonial architecture first appeared in and around the coastal insular, riverine forts and trading posts established by Europeans in West Africa in the 1440s (Edwards, 2001, p. 85). He defines creole architecture as "any architectural tradition genetically descended from a synthesized tropical colonial form" (Edwards, 1994, p. 4).

This is based on the conjecture that the tropical vernacular posed the greatest problem of adaptation to the European designer-builder (Edwards, 2001, p. 85).

Edwards' study on colonial adopted variants in architecture, achieved through maritime diffusion patterns over the years credits him as one of the foremost authorities in the study and application of creolization to architecture in a scientific way, especially as it relates to colonial and post-colonial architecture. The study of creole architecture is all about revealing patterns, principles and a unique generic language for which Edwards advocates the use of anthropo-historical study as a means to that end. One thing that remains a constant amongst most creolization theorists is the parallel drawn from linguistic theories.

The transformation of European and local vernacular architecture into creole architecture replicates the transformation process that begats creole

languages. The evolutionary stages and culminating structural patterns in both cases show significant parallels. Just as similarities in the process of koineization (Smith & Veenstra, 2001) and the building of creole language structure in general can be observed in linguistics, Edwards' study argues that creole architecture has become a unified tradition based on its own unique principles similarly across board. This implies that anywhere creole architecture is found there is a universal creole pattern language in operation irrespective of the location it exists. This unique language can be traced by following the historical movements of architectural features and design brokers between countries and colonies across the oceans and across time (Edward, 2001, p. 94).

Nonetheless, he categorically states that "early colonial architecture is not European architecture transported into the colonies, rather it is architecture developed based on found knowledge, which has been harnessed and adopted by colonists for functionality. Knowledge adopted from pre-existing vernacular-built forms, local building techniques and culture of the locales of the colony.

2.1. Vernacularizing indigenous architecture

Over the years, the term 'vernacular' has been generally assented to by most scholars nonetheless; there is still no commonly accepted definition. Paul Oliver who was one of the earliest and widely cited proponents of this discourse is of the opinion that the term has as many meanings as the cultures and languages that exist (Oliver, 2006). There are a few studies that have attempted to clearly define and differentiate what is considered indigenous traditional architecture from vernacular architecture. The summary of it is that while the 'traditional' on one hand, is seen as 'pure' and uncompromising - a form of architecture that develops instinctually, the 'vernacular' on the other hand is more of a 'composite' - a combination of indigenous and borrowed traits in layout, material usage and design features, that came about due to cultural dynamism and environmental

need. This definition is more in sync with the concept of creolization and its role in architectural development, especially in poly dialectic societies.

The vernacular is the architectural popular culture of a people in a particular place and a given era or period. It can also be described as the commonplace architecture of the masses, the building types more in use during a certain time, which oftentimes is an agglomeration of ideas, borrowed and indigent (Brisibe, 2020). Upton (1990) asserts that the resulting creole architecture is evident of the invaluable role the humble vernacular buildings of indigenous folks have played in the creative process. For which we might add the creative process of syncretism. This is because, the knowledge that is being referred to, comes about through a complex multiethnic and syncretic process' as seen from Edwards' description of creolization; as the process of cultural reformation and syncretism common to colonial and post-colonial environments (Edwards, 2001, p. 90).

2.2. Creolization and mimicry

Although, the act of creolization in colonial-built forms have been attributed to colonialists as products of colonization by the likes of Edwards amongst others, there is undoubtedly the issue of mimicry embedded in this discourse. Mimicry, copy transfer and duplitecture are all terms synonymous with the exportation of architectural designs and ideologies predominantly from old established cultures in Europe to new cities or their colonies.

A few scholars have also examined the concept of mimicry, copy transfer and duplitecture of iconic architecture and ideologies through colonial influence. Lagae and Matos (2012) in examining the issue of copy transfer, observed that the diaspora of 19th and 20th century architecture is the exclusive result of an export of ideals, models and practices from the 'centre', being Europe and North America to the 'periphery' (being the colonies). Studies in this area have also been conducted by the likes of Roberts (2014) who examined the influence of commercial or trading networks, in particular on the dissemination of architectural ideas and practices in colonies.

But with regards to mimicry, Bhabha's (1994) exposition on the concept especially in relation to colonial imposition throws more light on the issue. He suggests that

"colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed recognizable other as a subject of difference that is almost the same but not quite….it is the desire that reverses in part the colonial appropriation by now producing a partial vision of the colonizer's presence" (pp. 86-88).

In essence, Bhabha suggests that mimicry leads to mere repetition of the colonial material culture in question, rather than a true representation of the colonial culture itself and with each repetition or stereotype, a difference is created. Yet mimicry has emerged as one of the most effective strategies of colonial imposition especially in relation to architecture (Bhabha, 1994). Although there is limited research in this area, there is however sufficient evidence of such practice emanating from empires to colonies across the world and there's even lesser research of such practice going the reverse direction even with similar sufficient evidence.

The idea of reverse mimicry, where the colonizers copied from the colonized and transferred such knowledge in the opposite direction appears lost in the general mimicry discourse and even obfuscated as it relates to creolization. The picture that has been painted and the point repeatedly driven home is that of mimicry being a one-way street a unidirectional imposition of colonial ideas and material culture. However, mimicry as the term implies connotes copy, imitation and even impersonation amongst other things. From the earlier quote by Edwards (2001) on colonial architecture being based on found knowledge, the terms harnessed and adopted used are simply synonyms for imitation, copying and personalizing - taking something found and making it one's own. But the issue of impersonation comes up when credit for the adopted knowledge is not given to the indigenous original founders, rather it is usurped.

Bhabha (1994), Lagae and Matos (2012) and Roberts (2014) all emphasize the idea of copy as being from the empire to the colonies with the addi-tion of the term 'transfer'. Yet, while the act of copy transfer is not in dispute, the act of copying from the colonies is less emphasized or at best subsumed under creolization as a mixture. The fact is, copying or copy transfer is a reciprocal act on a two-way street and this study highlights what has been copied from the colonized and used by the empire although not transferred back overseas in this particular case.

Based on this premise, we argue for reverse mimicry as inclusive global histories. Inclusivity of non-western views, methodologies and epistemologies have formed part of the advocacy agenda for the Global South in the last two decades (MacDonald, 2016). Reverse mimicry engages with and challenges the issue of who's perspectives are used or from who's viewpoint is a concept seen or established knowledge attributed to. Inclusive histories address misrecognitions or non-recognitions of due accolades. It should therefore, suggest the retelling of reverse mimicry as a key part of our colonial history in a manner that recognizes the contribution of Nigeria's indigenous architectural found knowledge in creating the architectural heritage of the British colonial era.

3. Creolization and 'found architectural knowledge'

Found knowledge is knowledge adopted from pre-existing vernacular-built forms, local building techniques and culture of the locales of the colony. Edwards (2001) emphasizes that creolizations in colonial-built forms are products of the colonialists while that of post-colonial built forms emerge from the thought processes of the indigenous folks. This study focuses on colonial architecture and as such examines the process of creolization from the perspective of the colonialists. Although, the reasons colonialists give for their empire expansion actions are framed in the guise of bringing civilization via knowledge to the darker fringes or peripheries of the world, what has been observed is that in every territory these European empires have colonized they met with 'Found knowledge'. Found knowledge is material culture, resources and

technology existing in the territories prior to the advent of the colonialists. History has shown that more often than not, colonialists find out that what they referred to as primitive societies have always been more advanced in several aspects than they anticipated and are often met with surprise upon arrival at the shores of these so-called primitive worlds. At the top of the list is found architectural knowledge, since architecture has been described as the largest form of material culture (Glassie, 1999; Tilley et al., 2006).

There are several reports of found architectural knowledge in founding cities and old empires across Western, Eastern and Southern Africa. A mini compilation of some scholars and their works depicting existing pre-colonial African Urban centres were succinctly captured in a book section called 'Theorizing African Architecture: Typologies, Buildings and Urbanism by Philipp Mueser (2021). In it he chronicles Olfert Dapper and other scholars' description of found architectural knowledge in some Western, Central and Southern African cities in the 17th century. Some of these depictions were culled from reports and memoirs of Dutch sea farer and Captain Olfert Dapper drawn from other peoples' visitations or experiences.

Two of Dapper's most pertinent historical descriptions with accompanying sketch illustrations, were architectural and planning details of the city of Loango (called Lovango 1641) in today's Congo, Brazzaville and the ancient city of Benin (1668) in modern day Nigeria. Dapper's descriptions were vivid and incredibly detailed, especially for one who never visited these places in person. To this end, Dapper could be considered a master at retelling stories, documenting oral histories while filling in blank spaces with factual embellishments like the placement of puzzle pieces obtained from different sources. His descriptions were delivered with the same dexterity as built environment professionals would deliver building survey and site analysis reports in modern day practice. He commences with exterior macro spaces such as streetscapes, neighborhoods, and general urban layouts and con-

verges to interior smaller spaces and details like specific functional areas, roof designs, building materials, architectural features etc all these described with nautical dimensions.

His depiction of found architectural knowledge of the ancient city of Benin has been described as being more credible than any other having been corroborated by a surviving model of a typical building model that dates back to the ancient Benin era.

"The city has 30 straight streets. Each about 120ft wide and has many wide and some narrow side streets running towards it. The houses have long been in the streets and are built in good order, close together like Europe. They are adorned with gables and steps and covered with palm and banana leaves.... the king's castle is square-shaped and located on the right-hand side of the city when you enter the Guttonic gate. It is probably as big as the city of Harlem and is surrounded by a strange wall. It is divided into many grand apartments, and has beautiful long, square-shaped galleries that are about the size of the Amsterdam exchange; but one is bigger than the other. The roof stands on wooden pillars that are covered with brass from top to bottom and decorated with scenes of war and battle. Everything is kept very clean. Most of the royal apartments are covered with palm leaves instead of square planks. Each gable is crowned with a turret that tapers as it rises and features a bird cast from copper at the top. Its outstretched wings have been inspired by a real bird."

For other pre-colonial architectural masterpieces, such as the Great Zimbabwe, Udo Kultermann (1963) describes them as a fascinating form of construction developed from functional processes which emerged here long before the European architectural revolution: It is artistic architecture expressed in the form of necessity and freedom. This again is found architectural knowledge, although intentionally muffled and subdued as was common with colonialists threatened by other thriving cultures as Mueser rightly states;

"The fact that so little is known about this unique urban centre in the Southern regions of Africa is also a result of

British colonial policy: the history of high African civilizations did not fit into the image of the European occupying power" (Mueser, 2021, p. 65).

With this policy in force, any borrowed architectural forms creolized from indigenous architecture by colonialists were selected. The more striking and architecturally significant forms noticeable in the indigenous architecture appeared to have been intentionally stifled or altogether dropped for what was considered less conspicuous but more practical forms, the likes of which if not adopted would result in the impracticability of the imposed colonial architecture in the region. This may explain why the simple, yet practical courtyard design of the ancient Benin house type was adopted and creolized into the colonial residential architecture while the more imposing brass-covered saddleback roof design with amazing turrets and bronze casted figures were overlooked. This unique roof design was apparently as imposing and exciting as it was threatening to the cultural as well as architectural colonization agenda of the empire expansionists of Europe.

Edwards described the introduction of certain architectural features marking the creolization process in the tropical forest zone of West Africa. The borrowing and adoption of the court-form or courtyard compound architecture was one of the earliest forms of creolization of residential folk architecture in this tropical forest zone. Between Southern Sierra Leone and coastal Cameroon or Liberia and Eastern Nigeria (Edwards, 2001), rectangular gable-roof house forms assembled into enclosed "court-form" compounds predominated. Alternatively, impluvium houses were adopted in coastal areas laid out with a central court, surrounded with interior gallery, covered with a continuous roof and surrounded by peripheral rooms. These rectangular forms originated from the ancient Benin Kingdom and could also be found amongst the Yoruba empires as well as the Igbo culture (Fassassi, 1978, pp. 132-133).

Another notable found architecture documented by colonialists includes the crops and cattle protected villages in Gambia (Moore, 1723, as cited in Mueser, 2021). Moore's travelogue goes further to reveal early forms of creolization, where colonial architecture was influenced by indigenous or found architectural knowledge. It showed a plan of a colonial rubber factory that was developed based on a similar design layout to the typical crop and cattle protected village layout and floor plan.

In a previous study, the author argued that colonial buildings may have evolved into what is considered as 'tropical architecture' in Nigeria. This study argues that colonialist may have borrowed certain traits from the indigenous culture which in several ways contributed to what constitutes the creolization of architecture in Nigeria with the resulting tropical architecture one of its inevitable offspring (Brisibe, 2020). Uduku (2006) refers to this as the 'new way architecture', which is a product of the mixing of different architectural traits of the late tropical era in Nigeria. Examples include the works of Alan Vaughn-Richards who was known to merge traits of certain West African traditional architecture in a bid to reinvent Nigerian architecture.

Osasona (2015) highlights the fact that besides the British, there are other cultures that may have intervened architecturally in Nigeria although not as colonialists. Nonetheless, their presence may have resulted in other forms of creolization as on arrival they also met with existing found architectural knowledge. The cultures consist of emancipated slaves from Freetown and Latin America respectively that brought in their own architectural ideas.

The Saros, who are ex-slaves, repatriated from Britain and resettled in Freetown, Sierra Leone and who subsequently made their home in Lagos, developed a type of architecture based on British influence (Osasona, 2015). Similarly, Afro-Brazilians who were ex-slaves from Brazil and Cuba brought with them architecture reminiscent of popular Baroque styles in Brazil that featured a lot more ornamentation. Okoye (2013) argues that these styles the Afro- Brazilians and British Sierra-Leoneans developed were not entirely influenced by the

cultures they were repatriated from. He believes the architecture these groups promote is a creolized mix of colonial and local influence similar to what is obtainable in linguistics. He argues that the repatriates would have encountered indigenous tribes in the regions, like the Yorubas and Bini amongst others and borrowed aspects of their traditional architecture to create their own styles. This he also attributed to 'Found architectural knowledge'. An example is the courtyard concept which has been associated with Bini kingdom and also used by their ancient neighbours the Yorubas long before the repatriates arrived but has been spotted as a key feature in some Afro-Brazilian architecture. Edwards (2001) mentioned that courtyards became a staple feature of the "new way architecture" of all cultures found along the West and Central African coastline at the turn of the 20th century.

It is our supposition that some select architectural built forms in the Niger Delta region falls under this category. But unlike Osasona's viewpoint we perceive that the resulting structures are architecture developed based on a syncretism of imported and found knowledge, which has been harnessed and adopted mainly for functionality. What has been found here can be considered a syncretism of the British and other predominant indigent cultures represented in the area, having being brought together by empire expansion through colonialism. However, these different cultures did not form a hybridized blend; rather it is similar to a 'mosaic' where the different architectural components can be easily distinguished in the mix (Brisibe, 2020).

4. Creolizing buildings to fit: Case studies from the Niger Delta

To understand creolization within the context of colonialism and architecture is to examine its tacit purpose as a revolutionary tool for decolonization. Baron and Cara (2011) believe that the main reason for creolization is that both the new language and new expressive forms developed by combining the indigenous and foreign, embodied some form of resistance to colonial domination and subjugation. They maintained that through creolization colonized people resisted imposition, systematization, and standardization of norms from the colonizers.

By the late colonial era, in the Old Port-Harcourt Township, early records indicate that the population was made up of at least five nationalities, namely: Indigenous Nigerians, British, Sierra Leoneans, Syrians and Lebanese and People of the Gold Coast region - present day Ghana (Dixon-Fyle, 1999). A previous study explored the architectural contributions and influences of these foreign contacts in Nigeria's Niger Delta region but with emphasis on the architectural influences in Rivers State of which Port-Harcourt is the capital. It was observed that while some of the buildings bore the distinct markings of their foreign influences, others were a cocktail of two or more of these influences put together (Brisibe, 2023).

As a result of the nature and duration of the British contact, it is expected that British colonial influence can be observed in architectural built forms in Nigeria. The British formed the bulk of the foreign actors of change in Nigeria coming in first as explorers and traders and then through military conquest and finally colonialists. The distinct architectural features that characterize the British influence were mostly early 20thcentury styles. For residential structures, the predominant style exported to the Nigerian colony were those reminiscent of the Late Victorian and Edwardian architecture from the 1880s to the early 1900s and British domestic architecture developed between the world wars (1918 to 1939). Within these periods, certain architectural elements that characterize the residential building types were adopted and creolized.

One of the early 20th century British dwelling types to be creolized is the 'bungalow', a British adaptation of a previous dwelling model found in Bengal, India Introduced into the Niger Delta regions of Nigeria as practical staff housing for the colonial officers, it however quickly struck a chord with wealthy chiefs who wanted a second home in the township leading to several copies being built in the rural areas (Brisibe, 2020). "The bungalow was in the first place, a technological device

- a form of Shelter for British colonial officials providing protection against malaria and reducing the effects of tropical heat. In its construction and design, it drew on over two and a half centuries of tropical experience from India, South East Asia, the Caribbean and West Africa, incorporating ideas from the other people over whom they ruled" (King, 1984).

In a previous study by one of the authors, the popular bungalow structure in Port-Harcourt Township reveals traits from the British influences as well as indigenous expressions of culture all of which invariably describes the vernacular birthed by the process of creolization (Brisibe, 2020). Although a lot of the indigenes put their own spin on the British bungalows, there were however, a few constant features that distinguish it from the likes of French colonial buildings such as:

- Use of bricks for walls with or without white render
- Use of front porches
- Use of chimneys and vents (Features carried over from early British domestic architecture)
- Interior fireplaces with less relief ornamentation
- Gabled or Hipped roofs and the occasional Dutch-hip roofs (with shingles or cup tiles)
- Straight-flight stairs
- Large eave overhangs
- Timber-board construction or columned and massive masonry structuring
- Roof gutters and use of spouts
- Timber paneled window shutters or timber slatted jalousies (earlier versions)

NIGERIA -- CORE NIGER DELTA STATES

Figure 1. Map of Southern Nigeria depicting core Niger Delta States.[1]

- Multi-paneled glass casement windows (later versions)
- Use of Bay windows for spaces on the façade

Finished concrete or brick was the building material of choice, some with ornamented patterned finish and others with a simple plain finish (Brisibe, 2023).

The British-styled bungalows comprised of either one or two floors. Usually elevated on iron stilts or brick vaults to achieve better airflow and adequate height against floods. This study examines bungalows elevated on stilts as its main case buildings.

4.1. Stilt buildings: The indigenous architecture of riverine dwellers in the Niger Delta

The tropical rainforest and mangrove swamp regions of the Niger Delta are full of dwellings on stilt, particularly around the creeks and brackish water belts of the region. Although these buildings are often associated with the fishing tribes native to the Niger Delta region, they are also just the everyday buildings of the people in these places. Carter and Collins (2005) defined vernacular architecture as the common form of building in a given place and time. We can therefore surmise that this building type is the architectural popular culture of a people in a particular place and a given era or period, determined by their unique culture and environment. It was Rapoport (1990) that examined the relationship between culture, environment, climate and natural resources within the geographical location and the eventual architectural product it delivers. In the Niger Delta region, the terrain and climate play key roles in the formation of the built product. The region experiences between 1500 – 2500mm of rainfall per annum and is highly susceptible to flooding, with recent flood depths of up to 2m. Building houses on stilts are part of the age-long indigenous knowledge applications for dealing with annual floods common to the region. This was one of the most prominent bits of indigenous architectural knowledge the colonialists 'found' and adopted. It became a feature for the colonialists

in residential buildings around flood prone rainforests or mangrove swamp regions of the Niger Delta.

Figure 2. Stilt dwellings of migrant fishermen, Bayelsa State.[2]

The height of the wooden stilts supporting the dwellings are gauged for adequacy in height against flooding using local knowledge acquired over time. Their numbers are also based on calculations using the grid system. This grid system was identified in all such dwellings since drawings are not used by the local builders; ground plans are developed in-situ from the positioning of the main structural frames (stilts) on ground. The technique of spacing stilts to ascertain the required grid for a particular size of dwelling is part of the found structural knowledge. The floor plan of the dwelling unit is often rectangular in shape, with the longer side (length) being approximately twice the dimension of the shorter side (width) i.e. $L \approx 2W$. In almost all cases, 2 to 3 stilts are used for the width of small buildings while a minimum of 4 stilts are used for the width of larger buildings (Brisibe, 2011). The alignment of key partition walls along grid lines shows how the dwelling is developed using the grid system. It enhances speed, repetitiveness and it is economical. Also, the grid system makes the estimation of the number of structural support components required fairly accurate. An example of how estimation of building components work, based on the grid system is shown in this interview extract, "To build a small house we use at least 10 – 15 stilts and to build bigger houses we use between 20 – 40 stilts normally, depending on the size of the house" (Headman Inegerman II, Bakassi - interview April 2008)
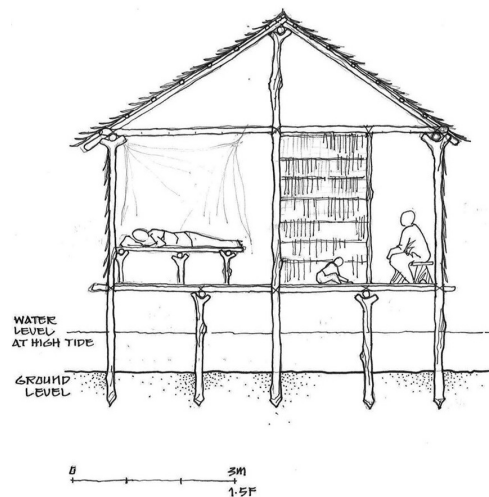

Figure 3. Section of a typical stilt building.[3]

Figure 4. Stems of the palm frond used in construction.[4]

Figure 5. Stems of the palm frond used in construction.[5]

The raffia palm is found in abundance in the mangrove swamps and rainforest areas. It is easy to collect as the fronds hang low. The stem of the palm frond stripped of the leaves or the leaves themselves woven or braided together are used as cladding for walls. The woven raffia leaves are also used as thatch for either cladding or roofing. Braiding or weaving requires specialized knowledge, which is hand-

ed-down from elders. Although the use of thatch as wall cladding material is more popular than the use of fronds due to its easy assemblage, yet fronds are preferable due to their durability in terms of weather resistance and strength.

The creolized buildings in the case studies below are designed to mimic a typical stilt dwelling in a migrant fishing base camp, both in structure and appearance. Structurally, the same calculations for the use of stilts to raise the building above water levels are deployed. Also, the use of corrugated metal sheets as cladding material mimics the appearance of vertical flutings or grooves reminiscent of palm frond stems used in the migrant fishing base camps.

The two examples of buildings creolized by colonial administrators based on found architectural knowledge are the colonial stilt buildings in Bonny Island, Rivers State. One of them is fully restored and currently in use as the headmaster's residence in a local primary school in Bonny Island (see Fig 7), while the other although still inhabited was in a dilapidated state at the time fieldwork was conducted (see Fig 9). Both buildings are clad in weather resistant steel corrugated sheets, with wooden shutter windows and timber panel doors. The windows and doors both have fixed panels above for lighting. Dutch hip roofs with and without vents were used respectively with large eave overhangs in both cases.

The traditional method of building stilts by using Y-peg stakes pinned into the ground was replaced by thick round metal pipes cast in concrete footings. The traditional cross beams of unprocessed Iron-wood timber logs on top of which joists and hand cut floorboards would rest, was simply replaced by seasoned machine-sawn timber beams (4" by 6") and 2" by 4" joists with equally seasoned hard wood floor boards.

5. Discussions and conclusion

As long as the creolization discourse exists, the question of mimicry is inherent, no matter how subtle or muffled it may be. Fortunately, these questions of who copied whom can always be raised and these claims can

Figure 6. *Y-shaped stilt pegs carry the beams, joists and framework for partition wall of the traditional stilt building.*[6]

Figure 7. *Old Colonial bungalow on stilts, Bonny Island, Rivers State.*[7]

Figure 8. *Metal stilts cast in concrete foundation footings.*[8]

be reviewed as long as the buildings which are the subject of these claims exist. Buildings speak or at least express character albeit through silent voices which are a collection of disparate contributions of ideas, convictions, assertions, eccentricities and manifestoes of an individual expressed in built form (Brisibe, 2023). By studying buildings, we can extrapolate meaning, identity, culture, and most of all origin.

We have earlier established that syncretism describes a mixture, a unifying of elements, a metaphor of interspersal; a mingling, yet appropriately suggesting maintenance of the identity of component elements. In syncretism, elements from two distinct sources operate within the same system and all the while maintaining their various

Figure 9. *Old Colonial bungalow on stilts, Bonny Island, Rivers State.*[9]

Figure 10. *Figure showing round stilts made of steel holding up timber cross beams on which the joists rest.*[10]

identities. As such, a syncretism of indigenous and colonial features could be observed from the case studies shown and the origins of the built forms deduced from comprehensive case study research. As shown from this study, syncretism is simply unblended creolization which is imported architecture from the empire mixed with copied indigenous found knowledge authored by colonialists.

To understand creolization within the context of colonialism and architecture there is need to examine generative concepts of built forms and its tacit purpose as a revolutionary tool for decolonization. Baron and Cara (2011) believe that the main reason for creolization is that both the new language and new expressive forms developed by combining the indigenous and foreign, embodied resistance to domination by colonial powers. This action is reminiscent of the concept of the architecture of revolution, developed as a response to possibly imposed application of European traditions during colonization (Carranza, 2010). Similarly, Henni (2016) posits that just as there are built environments all around previous col-

onies that showcase obedience to colonial directives, there are also those that clearly show direct disobedience to those directives in the area of planning and building design. She discusses this extensively in her work on 'The Architecture of Counterrevolution' and 'Discreet Violence: Architecture and the French war in Algeria' or architecture produced as direct defiance to the oppressive systems of colonization. It infers therefore that different architectural solutions reflected the varied understandings of the revolution's significance to various members of the indigenous populace. So, if architecture reflects the needs, desires and struggles of a society, it can be understood as material expression of that society. As such, like Carranza and Henni we can equally infer that the complex and multiple expressions of revolution and decolonization are observable through residential architecture of a previously colonized people.

These scholars maintained that through creolization subaltern communities resisted the imposition of mechanistic, systematizing, standardizing norms from official, politically dominant cultures. But in addition; we argue that creolization created opportunities for reversed mimicry through appropriation of found architectural knowledge. Through this and other studies we have observed that found architectural knowledge, especially those that offer practical solutions to geo-climatic problems encountered by the colonialists were often coopted as part of building design solutions in the otherwise harsh tropical regions.

Endnotes

[1] The Niger delta of Nigeria is made up of six states, Akwa Ibom State, Bayelsa state, Cross River State, Delta state, Edo State and Rivers State. But the core Niger delta region is made up of Bayelsa State, Delta State and Rivers State and they are known for their vast networks of rivers, creeks and mangrove swamps. From "The Merchant-Venturer's Bungalow: A Vernacular Archetype in Nigeria's Niger Delta," by W. G. Brisibe, 2020, *International Journal, 7*(1). p. 59 (https://www.researchgate.net/publication/342579453).

[2] The stilt-dwelling was adopted in most riverine areas in the Niger Delta. For flood prone areas, Mangrove swamps and rainforests. From "The dynamics of change in migrant architecture: A case study of Ijo fisher dwellings in Nigeria and Cameroon" by W. G. Brisibe, 2011, *(Unpublished doctoral dissertation) Newcastle University, Newcastle upon Tyne, United Kingdom.*

[3] This section was sketched during one of the author's fieldworks, showing details of the stilt building type prevalent for the Ijo migrant fishermen. From "The dynamics of change in migrant architecture: A case study of Ijo fisher dwellings in Nigeria and Cameroon" by W. G. Brisibe, 2011, *(Unpublished doctoral dissertation) Newcastle University, Newcastle upon Tyne, United Kingdom.*

[4] The Palm frond was a key material for different parts of buildings such as the walls, roof, partitions amongst others. It was also readily available, flexible and sustainable. From "The dynamics of change in migrant architecture: A case study of Ijo fisher dwellings in Nigeria and Cameroon" by W. G. Brisibe, 2011, *(Unpublished doctoral dissertation) Newcastle University, Newcastle upon Tyne, United Kingdom.*

[5] This figure is an example of the application of the palm frond. From "The dynamics of change in migrant architecture: A case study of Ijo fisher dwellings in Nigeria and Cameroon" by W. G. Brisibe, 2011, *(Unpublished doctoral dissertation) Newcastle University, Newcastle upon Tyne, United Kingdom.*

[6] This Y-shaped pegs are used for may purposes apart from those mentioned above. They are also used as floor supports which provides dry raised flooring for the stilt houses. From "The dynamics of change in migrant architecture: A case study of Ijo fisher dwellings in Nigeria and Cameroon" by W. G. Brisibe, 2011, *(Unpublished doctoral dissertation) Newcastle University, Newcastle upon Tyne, United Kingdom.*

[7] A colonial-styled stilt building Rehabilitated for use as head masters residence in Bonny Island, Rivers state, in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. From "Stakeholder efforts in heritage building conservation in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria" by W. G. Brisibe, 2019, *Association of Architectural Educators (AARCHES) Journal*, p. 58. *(https://www.researchgate.net/publication/341413126)*

[8] This shows an adaptation of the stilt style using steel stanchions cast in concrete in a flood prone area in Bonny Island, Rivers state, in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. From "The dynamics of change in migrant architecture: A case study of Ijo fisher dwellings in Nigeria and Cameroon" by W. G. Brisibe, 2011, *(Unpublished doctoral dissertation) Newcastle University, Newcastle upon Tyne, United Kingdom.*

[9] A dilapidated stilt styled residential area in a flood prone area in Bonny Island, Rivers state, in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. From "Stakeholder efforts in heritage building conservation in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria" by W. G. Brisibe, 2019, *Association of Architectural Educators (AARCHES) Journal*, p. 58. *(https://www.researchgate.net/publication/341413126)*

[10] A closer view of the stilt foundation of the dilapidated building area in Bonny Island, Rivers state, in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. From "Stakeholder efforts in heritage building conservation in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria" by W. G. Brisibe, 2019, *Association of Architectural Educators (AARCHES) Journal*, p. 58. *(https://www.researchgate.net/publication/341413126)*

References

Baron, R. (2011). Amalgams and mosaics, syncretisms and reinterpretations: Reading Herskovits and contemporary theorists for metaphors of creolization. In R. Baron & A. C. Cara (Eds.), *Creolization as cultural creativity*. University Press of Mississippi.

Baron, R., & Cara, A. C. (Eds.). (2011). *Creolization as cultural creativity*. Univ. Press of Mississippi.

Bhabha, H.K. (1994). *The Location of Culture.* Routledge: London and New York

Braithwaite, E. (1974). Reviewed work: *The unappropriated people: Freedmen in the slave society of Barbados* by Jerome S. Handler. *Caribbean Quarterly, 20*(3/4), 85–88.

Brathwaite, E. K. (1977). Caliban, Ariel, and Unprospero in the Conflict of Creolization: A Study of the Slave Revolt in Jamaica in 1831–32. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, *292*(1), 41-62.

Brisibe, W. G. (2011). *The dynamics of change in migrant architecture: A case study of Ijo fisher dwellings in Nigeria and Cameroon* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation) Newcastle University, Newcastle upon Tyne, United Kingdom.

Brisibe, W. G. (2019). *Stakeholder efforts in heritage Building Conservation in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria.* Association of Architectural Educators (AARCHES) Journal, 47 – 62.

Brisibe, W. G. (2020). The Merchant-Venturer's Bungalow: A Vernacular Archetype in Nigeria's Niger Delta. *International Journal*, *7*(1).

Brisibe, W. G. (2023). Foreign influences and actors of change: Heritage architecture in Nigeria's Niger Delta (1860–1960). *Journal of the Nigerian Institute of Architects (NIAJ)*, 1, 27–45.

Carranza, L. E. (2010). *Episodes in the history of modern Mexico: Architecture as revolution.* Roger Fullington Series in Architecture. University of Texas Press.

Curtis, N. C. (1943). Creole architecture of old New Orleans. *Architectural Record, 43*, 435–446.

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.

Edwards, J. D. (1994). The origins of creole architecture. *Winterthur Portfolio, 29*(2/3), 155–189.

Edwards, J. D. (2001). Architectural creolization: The importance of colonial architecture. In M.-J. Amerlinck (Ed.), *Architectural anthropology* (pp. 83–120). Bergin and Garvey.

Fassassi, M.A. (1978). *L'architecture en Afrique Noire.* Paris: Maspero

Glassie, H. (1999). '*Material Culture*'. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press.

Henni, S. (2016) *The Architecture of Counterrevolution: The French army in Algeria 1954-1962,* Published PhD thesis, Institute for the History and Theory of Architecture. https://doi.org/10.4000/abe.3105

Kultermann, U. (1963). *Neues Bauen in Afrika*. Tubingen.

Lagae, J., & Matos, M.C. (2012). Beyond Architecture: European Architecture Beyond Europe. *In COST Action (Ed.), COST Action ISO904 (COST European Co-operation in Science and Technology).*

MacDonald, J. (2016). Inclusive histories for inclusive futures: Interactions and entanglements then and now. *Yesterday & Today,* (15), 66–83. https://doi.org/10.17159/2223-0386/2016/n15a4

Mueser, P. (2021). Theorising African architecture: Typologies, buildings, and urbanism. In P. Mueser & A. Dalbai (Eds.), *Theorising architecture in Sub-Saharan Africa: Perspectives, questions, and concepts* (pp. 19–87). DOM Publishers.

Okoye, I. S. (2013). African re-imaginations: Presence, absence, and the new way architecture. In G. Salami & M. B. Visona (Eds.), *A companion to modern African art.* Wiley and Sons Inc.

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), 42–65. https://doi.org/10.2495/SDP-V10-N1-42-65

Pickins, B. (1948). Regional aspects of early Louisiana architecture. *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, 7*(1–2), 33–36.

Puig, P. (1947). *El pre-barraco en Cuba: Una escuela criolla de arquitectura morisca* (Reprinted 1974). Havanna, Buguay.

Roberts, W. (2014). Copy transfer: The architectural dialect at the edge of empire. In *Proceedings of the Society of Architectural Histo-*

rians, Australia and New Zealand (pp. 591–600). Sahanz and Unitec ePress.

Smith, N., & Veenstra, T. (2001). *Creolization and contact.* John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Tilley, C., Keane, W., Küchler, S., Rowlands, M., & Spyer, P. (2006). *Handbook of material culture.* Sage Publications Ltd.

Uduku, O. (2006). Modernist architecture and "the tropical" in West Africa: The tropical architecture movement in West Africa, 1948–1970. *Habitat International, 30*, 396–411.

Upton, D. (1990). Outside the academy: A century of vernacular architecture studies, 1890–1990. In E. B. MacDougall (Ed.), *The architectural historian in America* (pp. 199–213). National Gallery of Art.

Vlach, J. (1978). *The Afro-American tradition in decorative arts.* Kent State University Press.