

# Decoloniality and healing: confronting inter-generational trauma/ideologies through architectural preservation and education

Anna O. Ibru

Northeastern University, Boston MA, USA

## Abstract

Historic architecture is often preserved as tangible history that is useful for assessing flawed histories. However, in the case of British Colonial Bungalows, they are continually destroyed. Lagos, Nigeria, for example, was one of the most prominent cities from Nigeria's colonial era due to its role as the main administrative base for colonists in the country at the time. Today, Lagos –currently the country's commercial capital– faces capitalist pressures linked to accelerated development. This has come at a price to its historic urban fabric. Lagos is a rather small coastal state/city, and the need for viable land space continues to balloon. In recent years, this has ultimately led to the destruction of British Colonial Bungalows for the development of newer building projects and infrastructure.

Even though Nigeria has somewhat embraced this residential architectural typology by means of replicating its design principles as neo-colonial residential architecture, the country has ironically continued to turn a blind eye to the destruction of the original bungalows from its colonial era because of their links to the country's traumatic colonial past. This is despite the fact that these buildings hold rich primary evidence and teachable history. Backing reasonings behind the replication of design principles, but a sense of apathy towards the preservation of original British Colonial Bungalows in Nigeria is highlighted by architectural historian, Cordelia O. Osasona, in her write-up *Colonial Architecture in Ile-Ife* (Osasona, n.d.). In "Nigerian Architectural Conservation: A Case for Grassroots Engagement for Renewal," she points out that although apathy to historic preservation in Nigeria is a commonplace mindset, it is only seen as acceptable when it does not facilitate the idea of unprogressiveness (Osasona, 2017).

Moreover, Osasona also notes how failures are still encountered even when preservation efforts are attempted, by suggesting that these failures are due to knowledge gaps about how to facilitate historic preservation practices, logistical, financial, and ideological limitations in Nigeria. Although this reasoning could be agreed upon to an extent, a counterargument notes that Nigeria already has developed policies to safeguard material, as well as non-material heritage by means of its *National Commission for Museums and Monuments Act* (National Commission for Museums and Monuments, 1990). But, as is also commonplace in Nigeria, policies have a high likelihood of failure, owing to the disconnect that exists regarding how

the Nigerian government as well as its agencies' work with the country's public (Peter, M. & Philip, D., 2013).

Considering these points, the proposed research seeks to develop strategies to preserve British Colonial Bungalows in Nigeria, while acknowledging the ongoing apathy that exists toward preservation in the country. It also seeks to develop ways to use these residential buildings as an educational tool for younger generations to confront and evolve beyond post-colonial trauma. This assertion reinforces the idea that as we care for architecture, it can, in turn, help us heal.

The approach for conducting this research would mainly be centered on qualitative research methodologies including historical and phenomenological observations, as well as comparative analyses that would then be used to inform policy and transition design-based interventions that are linked to preservation and adaptation.

## Author keywords

Architecture; Design; Policy Recommendations; Post-Colonial Trauma; Preservation; Stakeholders

## Background

Intergenerational trauma is a terminology that is used to describe generational challenges that are experienced in families. This kind of trauma often results as a translation of trauma from specific historical events (Duke, n.d.). The normalization of exploitative ideologies that are linked to traumatic histories—such as colonialism across generations—is an example of how intergenerational trauma can present itself. Colonialism can be described as the domination of people by means of subjugation (Kavita & John, 2017). And, when examining colonial histories in countries, the British Empire provides a prominent and relatively recent example of this phenomenon, which spanned several continents, including Africa. It also provides an example that sheds light on mechanisms of oppression as well as their adverse impacts that have continued to become more evident across generations.

The built environment is often a useful tool for examining a country's history and national identity. In Nigeria, British Colonial Bungalows are artifacts from the country's colonial era, which help to establish a theoretical framework that highlights colonial influence in Nigeria before and after its independence.



As homes can be attributed as being starting points for the human development of ideological principles and beliefs, examining these bungalows in Nigeria is useful to establish a nexus for assessing flawed colonial-era ideologies and inter-generational trauma which have continued to linger and have been normalized by Nigerians to date. And, by preserving these buildings, they are able to act as a continuous reminder to avoid repeating generational mistakes.

To develop a broader analysis that would then be used as a steppingstone for facilitating this research's agenda, some questions that would be helpful to examine include:

- » How is the British colonial legacy understood across different generations prior to and after Nigeria's independence in 1960?
- » What is the state of the existing colonial architectural fabric in Nigeria, specifically the Colonial Bungalows?
- » How can the sense of apathy regarding efforts at preserving and learning from colonial history-using Colonial Bungalows as a focal point in Nigeria- be mitigated?
- » How can policy and architecture facilitate sustainable long-term historic preservation within coastal states like Nigeria, in a manner that acknowledges the expanding risks posed by climate change?

### Data Collection

Data collection for this research plan would be centered on the following:

- » **Historical & Archival Research:** To fully comprehend the dimensions that are necessary to promote the premise of this paper, one must examine the existing landscape and challenges that are related to this discourse through historical/archival data. This archival data would include works from the International Center for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM). In addition, existing historic literature as well as photographic documentation from The National Archives, UK would also prove relevant. This phase of historical data collection would occur during the Fall and Summer of the 1st year of this proposed research plan and would be used to inform a historical literature review and other short pieces. In addition, literature on resilience, policy, and historic preservation in relation to architecture will also be examined during the summer of the 1st year and

2nd year of this research plan. This would be used to produce further background information, also through literature reviews and short pieces.

- » **Phenomenological Observations/Surveys:** Insights from human subjects would play a pivotal role in this research. However, prior to initiating research that involves humans, IRB (Institutional Review Board) approval would first be required, and this would be initiated during the Spring semester of the 1st year of this research plan. A representative group of Nigerian citizens in Lagos will act as the unit of analysis for this study, using a survey and interviews. Links to the survey for this proposed study will be dispersed through text messaging with the assistance of a survey company and the Lagos State Land Ministry, which holds contact records of property owners/residents in Lagos. This use of a survey would allow for the anonymity of respondents but also allow them to indicate their interest in partaking in subsequent in-depth interviews.

Lagos, Nigeria's densest city acts as a relevant location for human subject data collection because the city holds prominent significance in Nigeria. It was one of the earliest British colonial settlements in Nigeria; was also the country's first Federal Capital Territory; is currently Nigeria's commercial capital and has Nigeria's most diverse populace being the country's melting pot. Surveying would be developed as cross-sectional, and focus on three sample population groups:

1. Nigerians who reside in Ikoyi, Lagos,
2. Nigerians who reside in Ikeja, Lagos,
3. Nigerians who do not reside in these areas.

Ikoyi and Ikeja were selected as groups to focus on since they are both prominent hosts of several of the remaining British Colonial Bungalows still present in Nigeria. Selecting Nigerians who do not reside in these areas for this research as well would be helpful to give a representative sample of perspectives on the views of apathy towards the preservation of colonial artifacts in Nigeria. The goal of this phase would be to collect 50 responses from each group totaling 150. 10 participants from each group would also be selected from each of these three groups to conduct in-depth interviews. This work would be developed over the course of the Summer of the 3rd year and the Fall of the 4th year of this proposed research.

- » **Fieldwork:** Depending on the potential risks to participants that would partake in phenomenological observations and surveying, fieldwork that is focused on comparative analyses of the British Colonial Bungalows within Nigeria, as well as those in similar post-colonial contexts would be considered as an alternative means of data collection. Ikoyi and Ikeja, Lagos, Nigeria would be of particular interest when conducting fieldwork for this study. This is because they are both prominent areas that host the remaining British Colonial Bungalows that are still present in Nigeria. They have histories of being dense colonial residential areas during the British colonial era in Nigeria. Comparing these British Colonial Bungalows with those in cities from other British post-colonial contexts like Singa-

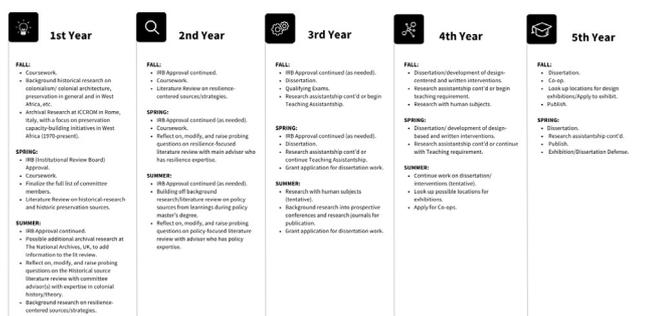


Figure 1. Sample Ph.D. Timeline

pore, India, etc. would allow for the assessment of similarities and differences among them, as well as areas where proposed research interventions—from the Nigerian context—could be replicable.

### Outcomes/Research Interventions

The final output of this research will be a dissertation that includes a collection of short written pieces—including literature reviews and case studies. It will also include an accompanying visual exhibition during the 5th year of the research plan to promote ease of engagement and encourage interaction with research findings. Since existing challenges to the premise of this research are focused on interdisciplinary schools of thought centered around architectural history, and policy, as well as challenges linked to the fields of education, resilience, and historic preservation, this proposed research would help to establish interdisciplinary discourses regarding the role of architecture and education for addressing inter-generational trauma that has resulted from British Colonialism. Moreover, this research would also be useful for contributing to future theoretical discourses on the impacts of British colonialism, especially in Africa. This is because to date, the topic is still largely under-researched, and the existing information that can be obtained is mainly from western/westernized voices.

Moreover, the challenges posed by the apathy of Nigerians towards preservation provide a significant opportunity to assess the impacts of colonialism in Nigeria that led to this commonplace mindset while harnessing inclusive cultural, technological, policy, and design-focused strategies to tackle them through preservation and adaptation. With the aid of the responses gathered throughout the course of this proposed study, research interventions would include the following:

- » *Policy Recommendations:* Government-issued policy interventions and effective implementation strategies are relevant for ensuring the successful preservation and restoration of historic/cultural property. Analyzing the context behind apathy toward preserving colonial-era architecture in Nigeria, and the root causes of policy failures in Nigeria would allow for the creation of effective context-specific policy recommendations to be implemented in Nigeria. These recommenda-

tions would focus on addressing existing challenges to preservation policy implementation in Nigeria, and steps to be taken within its educational sector to encourage learnings on the legacy of colonial history, as well as the importance of preserving colonial artifacts as a learning tool for future generations. These recommendations would also act as a framework for other post-colonial contexts with similar challenges that are related to confronting and learning from the British colonial legacy.

- » *Transition Design-Based Interventions:* Transition design acknowledges that we are currently living in transitional times that prompt the need for societal transitions to more sustainable futures. This understanding is relevant for solving wicked problems like issues linked to climate change. The most prominent cities in Nigeria that still hold the remaining colonial bungalows from the country's British colonial past are along or close to the country's coast. Examples of these areas include Lagos and Ile-Ife. Considering that, this proposed study will also focus on developing design-based solutions. These solutions will not just center on the adaptive use of these buildings to act as a learning tool, but will also include strategies to make Nigeria's urban fabric, in general, resilient to climate change-instigated risks of natural disasters.

### Conclusion

Beyond the scope of this research, understanding and developing solutions to resolve the trauma caused by colonialism in Nigeria – through the lens of British Colonial Bungalows and their symbolic legacy – can be advantageous when tracing other British post-colonial contexts with similar challenges where this building typology still exists. This provides an opportunity to replicate solutions to issues like those to be examined in Nigeria, within other related contexts. The British Colonial Bungalow not only holds a key for piecing together a long line of material, cultural, historical, and architectural heritage that has transcended continents, but it also provides an opportunity to echo a sense of healing from the trauma that they represent to diverse contexts because of these links.

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