

Analysis of Forms on Pediments of Domestic Buildings in Osogbo, South-Western Nigeria

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ABSTRACT: *Pediments of domestic building are spaces for ornamentation inspired by the modern Yoruba culture of sealing up domestic buildings with gated fences. The erected fences often conceal ornamented buildings, thus preventing the showcasing of the beautiful embellishments on lower walls, in line with the institutionalized ostentation in Yoruba culture. The embellishment of pediments in Yorubaland, has not been treated with deserved importance despite the uniqueness of the forms, which leaves a gap in literature on this topic. This discourse examines and analyses the images on the pediments of domestic buildings, with the view to documenting the artistic embellishments and revealing the social-cultural significances of the presented forms. The study carried out in Osogbo metropolis, South-western Nigeria, utilized the ethnographic approach, with data derived mostly from primary sources. The paper submits that images on pediments send out information about the philosophies, religious and the socio-cultural affiliations of the owners of these sealed-up buildings to passers-by. It is also observed that although ornamented pediments beautify buildings, they are more of status symbols and are better appreciated from afar, thus enhancing the urban fabric in general.*

KEYWORDS: *Analysis, Domestic buildings, Ornamentation, Osogbo, Pediments*

INTRODUCTION

Ornamentation is the process of adding something beautiful to objects, to enhance the aesthetic characteristics (Hakan, 2014). Oşaşona (2005) equally described ornamentation of buildings as means of beautifying man's dwelling and making it aesthetically pleasing. However, studies such as Dada, (2014); Adegoke, (2015) and Adegoke (2016) identified pediments as part of the elements of buildings serving as locations for ornamentation. Pediments are triangular spaces at the upper part of facades of gabled buildings, just below the double pitched roofs. They are affirmed by

Adegoke (2015), as the allowance of the wall within the triangularly shaped structure of the roof.

The use of pediments as spaces for ornamentation of buildings mirror the practice during the Greek period, when pediments were embellished with relief sculptures and sometimes paintings reflective of the background culture (Getlein, 2002; Kleiner, 2011). Ornamentation of Yoruba domestic buildings were formerly applied to walls, carved wooden veranda posts and doors, which were decorated with impressive forms that reflect the wealth and social status of the owners of the buildings. With colonialism and Afro-Brazilian advents came more locations for embellishments, such as enriched balustrades, lattice fretwork above beams, portal elaborations, carved fascia boards and ornamental stucco columns. Globalisation ushered in more elaborate ornamentation of pediments, as well as enrichments of entablatures, cornices, ceilings, and floor tessellations.

Although ornamentation of pediments was noticed in some Afro-Brazilian buildings, the upsurge and expansion of their embellishments was proliferated by urban insecurity arising from the economic recession triggered by the 1970 concluded Biafra war (Marenin and Reisig, 1995; Osasona, 2006). The unemployment and poverty incited by the war, as well as the contrasting extravagance from sudden oil boom, cum Udoji welfarism award of 1975, resulted in high socio-economic fragmentation and larceny (Siollum, 2009; Osasona, *ibid*). This led to individualised territorial segregation with high gated fences as anti-burglary barriers, which later became associated with class, affluence, and modernisation (Ilesanmi, 2012; Fadamiro *et al*, 2015; and Osasona, 2006). However, the ceiling up of ornamented buildings with fences facilitates the embellishment of the upper spaces on gated buildings. These are spaces on the buildings that are visible outside from above the high fences since images on other areas of the buildings can only be seen by people inside the fortification walls. Ornamentation of pediments of domestic buildings is thus highly important due to its conspicuousness and visibility from afar, which makes it significant for the showiness prevalent in Yoruba culture.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are studies on various aspects of the Yoruba ornamentation practices, (Osasona *et. al.* 2003 and Osasona and Ewemade (2010), studied the embellishments on balustrades of domestic buildings, while Igbaro (2011) and Dada (2014) studied the embellishments on domestic buildings in Akure and Ilesa respectively in the 20th Century, generating locations of ornamentation on domestic buildings.

Similarly, Adegoke (2015), and an excerpt from the work in 2016, focused on ornamentation of contemporary domestic buildings in Osogbo. Both Adegoke (2015:86) and Adegoke (2016) alluded to pediments as elements for ornamentation in

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buildings. Nevertheless, the study and analysis of the images on pediments is out of their focus, as they have different objectives from this study. Adepegba (2014) and Oyeniyi (2016), account of motifs and forms on vernacular/domestic buildings in Ijebu-Ode and Abeokuta respectively, generated symbolic walls embellishments, as well as Afro-Brazilian stucco portal reliefs and balustrades.

Oşaşona (2005) in a discussion of decoration found in some parts of Yorubaland, included the enhancement of walls with relief and polished stone, which are part of the materials found in the ornamentation of pediments in the study area. Likewise, Osasona (2007) recorded that decoration of buildings in traditional Africa is spontaneous and institutionalized, starting as communal craft, but with the spontaneity giving way to status related factors, leading to their becoming a specialised craft. Ornamentation of pediments is status related in line with the observation; however, the gap left by these studies is the pre-occupation of the current paper.

METHODOLOGY

Data was derived from both primary and secondary sources. The target buildings for the study were elicited using the referral or respondents driven snowball sampling technique. The primary data were generated through physical observation and purposively elicited photographic survey of images that feature on relevant pediments. Out of these, fifteen (15) models of ornamented pediments were selected for discussions. Structured interviews were conducted with landlords of relevant domestic buildings to extract their history of the images. The data generated were subjected to descriptive, historical, and contextual analysis. Secondary data were also used to aid the definitions and understanding of pertinent terms. However, the choice of Osogbo, as the study area emanates from its position as a cultural town with significant history in modern Nigerian Art.

TYPES OF ORNAMENTED PEDIMENTS

Forms on pediments can be classified into two: those used for aeration of ceilings and pediments with solid aesthetic ornamentations.

PEDIMENTS WITH AERATING FORMS

Pediments with aerating forms vary from ordinary simple aerating holes or perforated blocks (sealed with net or glass), which sometimes illuminates the ceiling (Fig. 1), to those with the holes of aeration arranged skilfully in distinctive decorative patterns.



Fig. 1: Pediment with ceiling illuminating hole,
Photograph: F.M. Abejide, 2020.

The decorative aerations are those with deliberately enhancing perforated ornamental forms. Images in this category can be further classified into two: aeration with decorative prefabricated designed bricks such as abstracted acanthus leaf pattern in the pediment aeration in *Fig. 2* and those with painstaking planned aeration. In the second category are aerating images derived from meticulously and skilful assemblages of perforated bricks or blocks that are put together for both functional and aesthetic purposes. Examples can be found in the image of a cross from arranged bricks in *Fig. 3* and fruit design composed from arranged perforated bricks in the form of an apple (*Fig. 4*).



Fig. 2: Prefabricated acanthus leaf pattern in pediment
aeration. Photograph: F.M. Abejide, 2020.

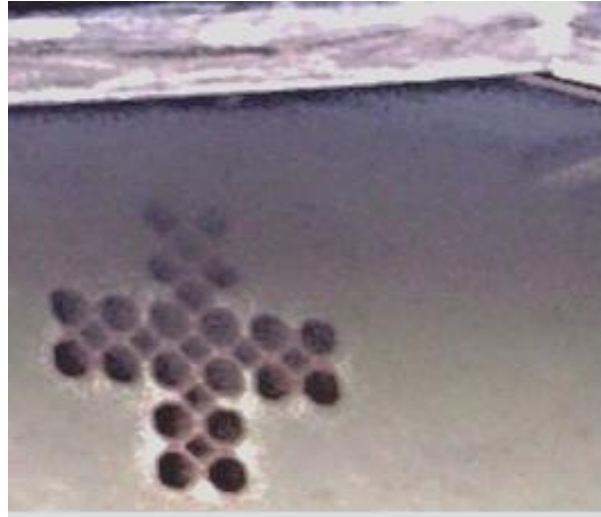


Fig. 3: Pediment in form of a cross from arranged bricks.
Photograph: F.M. Abejide, 2020.



Fig. 4: Pediment with fruit design from arranged stucco blocks, at Onward area, Osogbo. Photograph: F.M. Abejide, 2020)

ORNAMENTATION OF PEDIMENTS WITH SOLID FORMS

After using perforated aerating forms for aesthetics of pediments, came the conception of solid forms which are informative and enhancing. These vary from the use of relief geometric forms (Figs 5 and 6), to more serious and elaborate compositions in relief (Figs 7-11), murals (Fig 12), and in mosaics or add-ons (Fig. 13).



Fig. 5: Pediment decorated with relief geometric form at No 1, Queen Mother St, Osogbo. Photograph: F.M. Abejide, 2020.

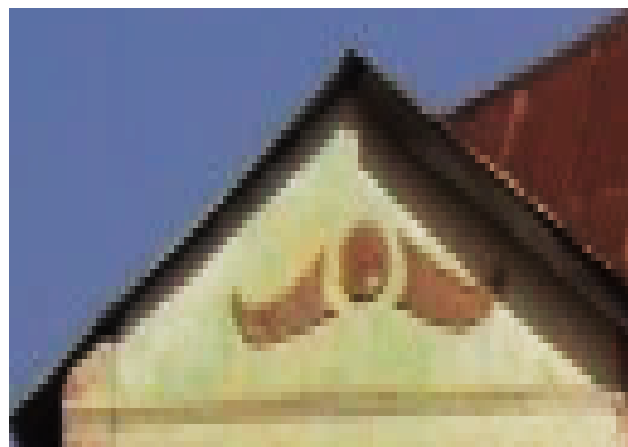


Fig. 6: Pediment with relief form of ribbon at No.51 Odiolowo St, Osogbo. Photograph: F.M. Abejide, 2019.

PEDIMENTS ORNAMENTATION OF WITH RELIEF COMPOSITION

These are pediments embellished with stucco relief mouldings. In this category is the pediment ornamentation at No. 46 Adetunji Estate, Overcomer area, Ring-road, Osogbo (Fig. 7). The relief image depicts a dove (àdàbà) holding a cup of wine, with the content spilling from one side of the wine glass. The image is accompanied by a bold caption behind the picture that reads: *PEACE!* The complementary caption harmonizes the function of the dove in this picture, as a universal symbol of peace, while the spilling content of the cup symbolizes wine poured in celebration and to entreat peace. It is customary of Yoruba and Igbo people of Nigeria to first spill wine in homage to ancestors before people drink during

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celebrations. However, both the held glass and the spilled contents also connote celebration of laudable achievement such as the completion of the new magnificent building where the image is found.



Fig. 7: Pediment decorated with iconic dove at No.46 Adetunji Estate, Overcomer area, Ring-road, Osogbo. Photograph: F.M. Abejide, 2020.

A related depiction of birds in pediment embellishment is found at No.22 Adetayo Street, Ogooluwa, Osogbo (Fig. 8). The image here is of a perching eagle *asa*, (*Elanus Caerulenus C*), accompanied by a text that reads: “THOSE WHO WAIT ON THE LORD, MOUNT UP WITH WINGS LIKE EAGLES.” This is an allusion to the biblical book of Isaiah, chapter 40 verse 31; it thus mirrors the religious belief and the philosophy of the owner of the premises. The importance of eagles also stems from their nature, been energetic, fast in flight and soaring very high always, which makes them to be associated with power, strength, and speed. This is the basis for the metaphorical qualifier of people who act or move fast in Yorubaland with eagles and is reflected in the excerpt: *A yára bí àsá*, meaning: One who moves as fast as eagles.



Fig. 8: Pediment with a perching eagle at No. 22 Street, off Ogooluwa, Osogbo. Photograph: F.M. Abejide, 2020.

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Fig. 9 shows the depiction of a burst with hand clasped in prayer in GRA, Osogbo. The image alludes to Christ the advocate interceding for the people (who in this case will be inhabitants of the building). Similarly, there are also pediments embellished with only two clasped hands folded in prayer.

Fig. 10 has a standing male figure holding a sword, alluding to the protective role of Angels in the bible. The depiction highlights the belief in Angles' capability of helping people in fighting enemies in line with Psalm 34 verse 7, which says "*The angel of the Lord encamps all around those who fear Him and delivers them.*" It equally echoes Psalm 91 verse 11, which reads "*For He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways.*" However, the use of anthropomorphic image with sword stems from (1 Chronicles 21:27, 29), which reads: "the Lord commanded the angel, and *he returned his sword to its sheaths.*"



Fig. 9: Depiction of a burst with hand clasped in prayer at No. 2 Abiola-Oloke Street, GRA, Osogbo. Photograph: F.M. Abejide, 2020.



Fig. 10: Pediment with image holding sword at No. 2 Afolabii Abikoye Street, Ogooluwa, Osogbo. Photograph F.M. Abejide, 2020.

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The pediment in Fig. 11 depicts an iconic cross hooked to a ribbon, below a caption which reads: *'Unless the Lord builds'* This is another Biblical allusion to Psalm 127 verse 1, which implies that: without God's help, no one can succeed in any undertaking, hence erecting a house like the one in the image successfully, takes God's grace. The fusion of the iconic ribbon and cross is metaphorical of the successful completion of the building, its opening and dedication to the Christian God. In addition to giving glory to God, it by extension highlights the philosophical belief that anything dedicated to God cannot fail nor be ruined.



Fig. 11: Pediment decorated with iconic dove at No.47 Adetunji Estate, Overcomer area, Ring-road, Osogbo. Photograph: F.M. Abejide, 2020.

PEDIMENT ORNAMENTATION WITH MURALS

In this category are pediments painted in pigments. One of such can be seen in Figs 12a and b which are two segments of a flat multi-coloured surrealist figurative mural in oil pigment, embellishing the residence of an artist at No. 2 Adewale Avenue, Osogbo area, Ede road Osogbo. The contents painted around six aerating blocks, show drummers, jubilant dancers and jumping fishes (icon of the goddess of Osun). They all point to the happy celebrations and festive moods of the people, gods, and goddesses during the annual Osun festival in the town. The jumping fishes express the approval of the festival by the gods.

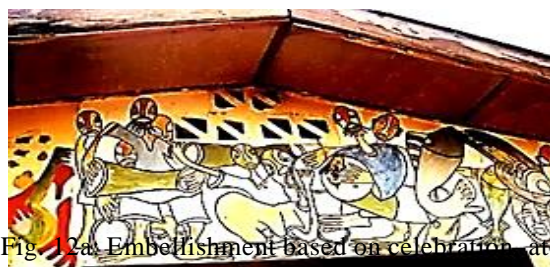


Fig. 12a. Embellishment based on celebration, at No. 2 Adewale Avenue, Ede road, Osogbo. Photographs: F.M. Abejide, 2020.



Fig. 12b: Embellishment based on celebration, at No. 2 Adewale Avenue, Ede road, Osogbo. Photographs: F.M. Abejide, 2020.

PEDIMENT EMBELLISHED WITH MOSAIC MURALS

Embellishing the pediment of No.1 Elebuibon Street, Osogbo, is an exceptional polychromatic mosaic in harmonious shades of Prussian blue, magenta, and purple, harmonising the wine-red background wall of the building. It is also spiced with red, sharp turquoise blue and yellow highlights, which on the contrary contrasts with the background wall, while creating a balance and points of interest (Fig. 13). The thematic focus of the mural is the myth of origin of Osogbo, depicting Oluwatimilehin the progenitor of Osogbo people, (held to be a valiant hunter) and a host of hunters. They were said to have shot a big elephant and brought its big head into the Ògun shrine, on their way back from an expedition search of water. Another account however has it that he led a life elephant into the town. The image shows approaching hunters accompanied by people carrying loads on their heads walking besides an elephant. The lead hunter holds a half-naked boy at the side, signifying a boy playing in the Street, who on spotting them on arrival and ran to welcome them the traditional way. This is reflected in the praise poem cognomen (oríkì) of Osogbo: *Ọmọ a mérin wá mọ'lú Òsogbo* meaning: descendants of the brave hunter who brought elephant into Osogbo. The placement on the pediment of a storeyed building makes it to be viewed from afar. However, the colour combination, artistic composition of the images and cubic textures of the colourful tiles used for the mosaic all unite to make it a symphonic piece, which creates a fascinating effect on the urban fabric.



Fig. 13: Wall figurative mosaic at Elebuibon's building, Ayetoro, Osogbo. Photograph: F.M. Abejide, 2018.

PEDIMENTS ADORNMENT WITH ADD-ONS

Apart from the mosaic mural, fig. 14 shows the use pebbles as add-ons in the beautification of a pediment, while trendy large decorative tiles and colourful stones are common in pediments embellishment in contemporary domestic buildings in Osogbo (Fig. 15).



Fig 14: Ornamentation of pediment with pebbles.
Photograph: F.M. Abejide, 2019.

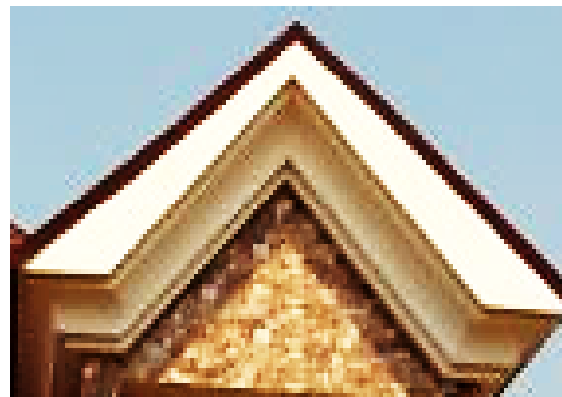


Fig. 15: Pediment decorated with wall tiles.
Photograph: F. M, Abejide, 2020.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

This paper has attempted to classify and analyze the images that feature in the ornamentation of pediments of domestic buildings in Osogbo. Ornamentation of pediments is observed to be a new development in locations of ornamentation and of artistic expression in Nigeria. It is erupted by the sealing up of domestic buildings with gated fences from the 1970s. Research findings also reveal that images in pediments

communicate the philosophies, socio-cultural affiliations as well as the religious and spiritual inclination of the landlords, while increasing the aesthetics of the building and the urban fabric. From the foregoing discussions, it could be realized that images that feature in artistic expressions and their locations expand daily, to accommodate the popular culture and trans-cultural ideals.

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