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# EXCERPT: 'ARCHITECTURE IN GLOBAL SOCIALISM' BY ŁUKASZ STANEK

Author: Paweł Wargan

In his latest book, Polish architectural historian Łukasz Stanek tells the story of socialist architectural development across the Global South—and reexamines the prevailing history of the Cold War.



One of the defining conflicts of our time is between the processes of decolonization and the forces of imperialism. Through financial and trade regimes—enforced by multilateral institutions and backed by the threat of military force—former colonial powers have maintained their grip on countries across the Global South, with devastating effect. This tension has manifested as clearly in the domain of ideology as it has on the terrain of lived experience. In the second part of the twentieth century, the contest between capitalism and socialism would shape the structure of cities and designs of buildings for generations to come—and leave a legacy of architectural praxis that is only now being unearthed by scholars in the West.

During the Cold War, architects and planners from socialist Eastern Europe played a decisive role in shaping cities in states across the Global South. From Accra to Baghdad, Lagos to Abu Dhabi, vibrant collaboration between local practitioners and experts from the USSR, Yugoslavia, Poland, East Germany, and other states would bring new modes of development to nations seeking alternatives to Western expertise. In *Architecture in Global Socialism*, UK-based Polish architectural historian Łukasz Stanek carefully excavates these histories, tracing the influence of socialist construction, urban planning, and development models on nations within the Non-Aligned Movement.



Nikita Khrushchev and President Sukarno inspect the model of the National Stadium in Jakarta (Indonesia), 1960. R. I. Semergiev, K. P. Pchel'nikov, U. V. Raninskii, E. G. Shiriaevskaia, A. B. Saukke, N. N. Geidenreich, I. Y. Yadrov, L. U. Gonchar, I. V. Kosnikova

Contrary to prevailing narratives about the Cold War and socialist architectural development, Stanek reveals a flowering system of international cooperation that

was respectful not only of local architectural heritage, but also of the architects themselves. “I remember very well these Eastern European architects,” recounts a Ghanaian architect in the opening line of the book, “because it was the first time and the last time that a white man had an African boss in Ghana.” Working within a complex and adversarial geopolitical environment, non-aligned states were keen to take advantage of the Soviet Union’s support for decolonization—and what Stanek describes as its drive for “justice-oriented welfare distribution”—to break free from Western political and economic influence.



Housing estate in Jijel (Algeria), 1971. Közti (Hungary), Ildikó Halmágyi

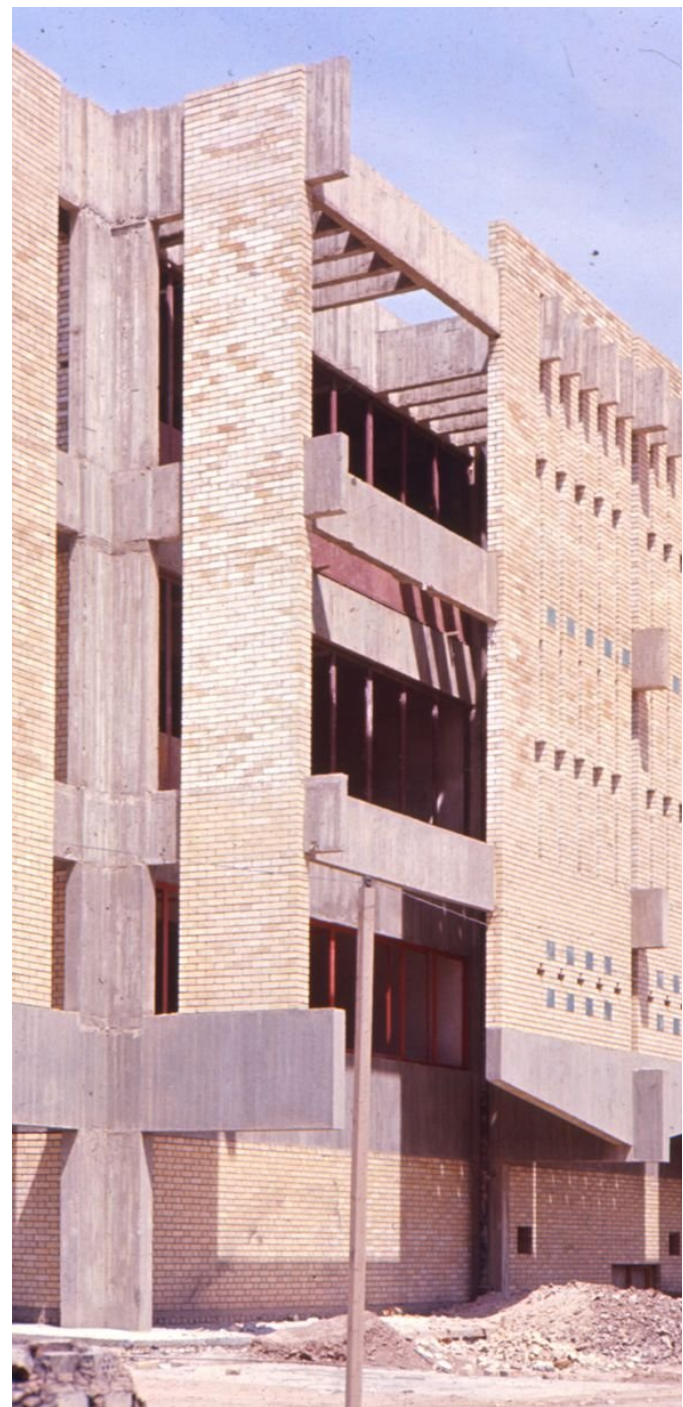
This is a narrative that has largely been written out of history. “As a consequence of the reliance on Western archives,” Stanek writes, “publications that discuss the work of foreign architects in Cold War Baghdad, for example, are limited to several years in the 1950s and later in the 1980s, while omitting the two decades in between, during which Iraq was allied with socialist countries.”

But these projects had a profound effect on the lived experiences of millions of people. Focusing on five cities—Accra, Lagos, Baghdad, Abu Dhabi, and Kuwait City—Stanek shows that the development of large parts of the Global South can be attributed neither to the legacies of colonial rule nor to the impacts of globalized capitalism. Instead, they were, in many cases, expressions of a need to break free from a colonial logic of development—and a pursuit for economic and political emancipation through the framework of socialist internationalism.



Africa Hall (Women's Hall 6), Kumasi (Ghana), design 1964–65. Architects Office UST, John Owusu-Addo/ Miro Marasović (chief university architect), Niksa Ciko (architect in charge)

The world socialist system advanced by the Soviet Union and its allies was, Stanek writes, “neither an ideological smokescreen nor a utopian vision,” but “an existing reality of foreign trade.” Its outputs continue, he says, “to provide frameworks for everyday lives” and “are sometimes celebrated as monuments to decolonization and national independence.” In his retelling of the history of architectural practice during this period, Stanek reveals that the ultimate victory of imperialism over the forces of national liberation was not one built on merit, but on erasure. This is nothing less than a rewriting of the history of the Cold War.



In the excerpt that follows, Stanek writes about the legacy of Polish architect and scholar Zbigniew Dmochowski, the author of the *Introduction to Traditional Nigerian Architecture*. Published posthumously in London in 1990, this three-volume book resulted from a comprehensive survey of Nigeria's vernacular architecture, carried out by Dmochowski and his Nigerian and Polish collaborators from the 1950s to the 1970s. This work was vital in decolonizing architecture in Nigeria by supporting the emergence of a local architectural pedagogy that, rather than imposing Western architectural norms, drew on the Nigerian vernacular—and helped prepare a cadre of local architects to advance it.

## DECOLONIZATION OF ARCHITECTURAL EDUCATION IN POST-INDEPENDENCE NIGERIA

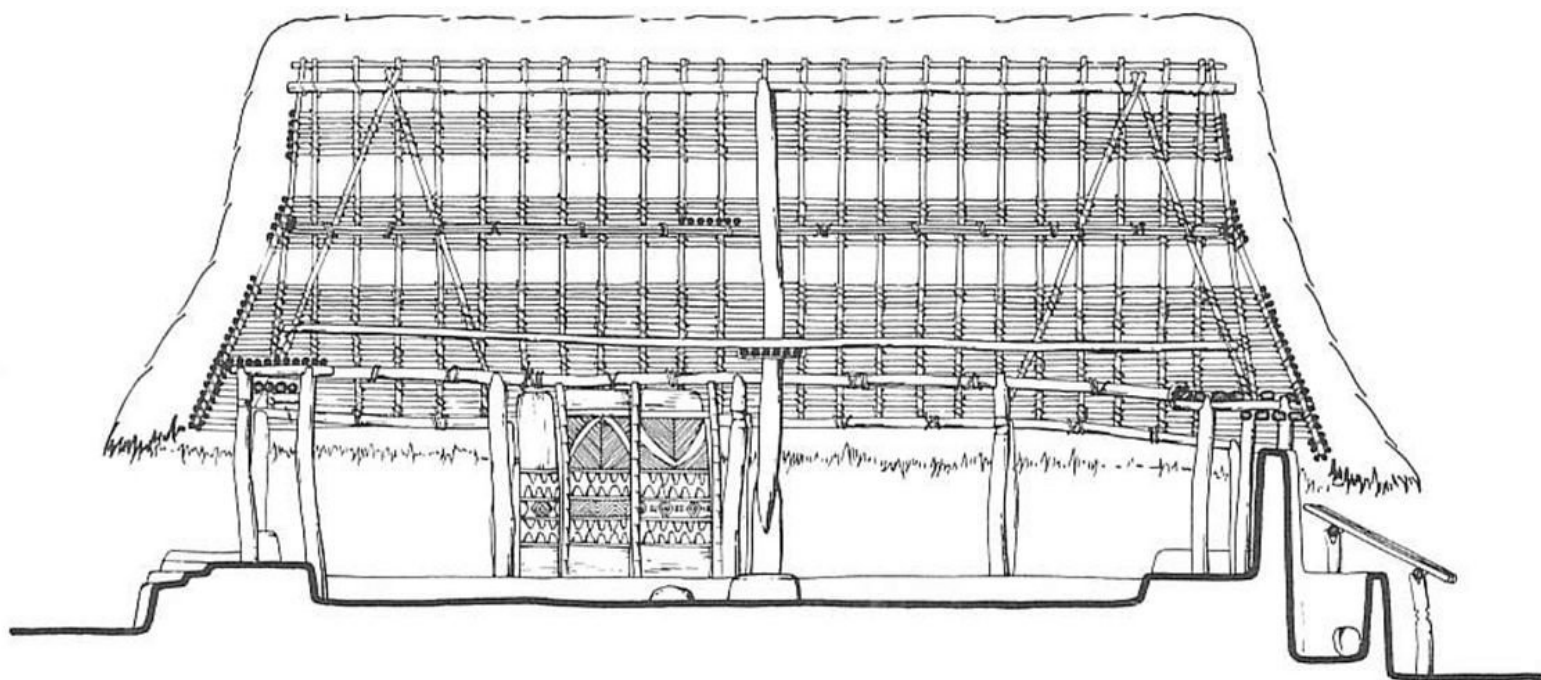
Dmochowski's work debunked colonial oppositions that had served to devalue colonized cultures: it emphasized the aesthetic and technological creativity of indigenous builders (rather than attributing innovations to European influence), and it showed vernacular buildings as part of an evolving society (rather than seeing them as ahistorical and immutable). It was in architectural education, and specifically in the curriculum building of the Zaria School of Architecture, that this potential of Dmochowski's surveys for the decolonization of Nigerian architecture came most forcefully to the fore.



"Pategi. The Katamba of Etsu Pategi." Photograph by Zbigniew Dmochowski. Published in Zbigniew Dmochowski, *An Introduction to Nigerian Traditional Architecture* (London: Ethnographica; Lagos: National Commission for Museums and Monuments, 1990), vol. 2, 3.41

Established in 1952 as part of the Nigerian College of Arts, Science, and Technology and relocated to Zaria in 1954, the Faculty of Architecture was the first to offer architectural education to Nigerians who, until then, could be trained in the country only as draftsmen and needed to go abroad for an architectural degree. In this way, the school in Zaria ushered in the way for the profession's establishment in a country where, on gaining independence, there were only two Nigerian private offices, including Oluwole Olumuyiwa (educated at the University of Manchester) and Alex Ekwueme with S. I. Kola-Bankole (educated at the University of Washington and the University of Minnesota, respectively). The rest of the tiny group of Nigerian architects, educated in Britain or the United States, went into public service, including Michael Olutusen Onafowokan (University of Glasgow) and Adedokun Adeyemi (Architectural Association in London), the older brother of Ekundayo Adeyemi (himself educated at Zaria).

The School of Architecture was organized according to the British model by the predominantly British teaching staff, and at independence they secured the accreditation of the Board of Architectural Education at the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA). That accreditation followed complex negotiations in which the board at first resisted deviations from RIBA's standard curriculum. In the end, the board yielded to political pressure, notably that of the Colonial Office in London, and accepted that the curriculum in Zaria could include courses specific for Nigeria as long as they were introduced in addition to RIBA standard requirements.

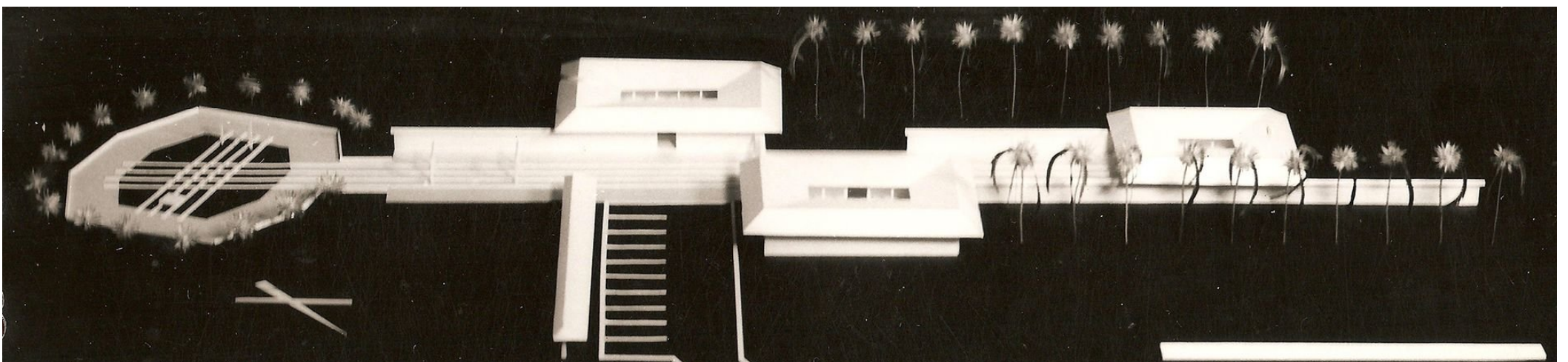


"Compound of Isiebue Nwakwa, House 1," section. Drawing by Zbigniew Dmochowski and collaborators. Published in Zbigniew Dmochowski, *An Introduction to Nigerian Traditional Architecture* (London: Ethnographica; Lagos: National Commission for Museums and Monuments, 1990), vol. 3, 92

By the mid-1960s, this curriculum became a bone of contention, with tension escalating between students, the university administration, and the (mainly British) staff. The students saw the curriculum as unsuitable for an African school,

and challenged the lecturers on the very high attrition rate. As an example of the latter, Ekundayo Adeyemi recalled that in his cohort of twenty-five fellow students enrolled in the 1958/59 academic year, only six graduated in 1963. In response to the situation, students accused British lecturers of blocking access of Nigerians to the British-dominated profession. In this way, they were hurting the economy of the independent nation, which was in dire need of professionals—a concern echoed by Nigerian officials. The lecturers countered that the drawing skills of the majority of students did not match RIBA requirements, which centered on “the ability to observe or think in three-dimensions and reproduce this in drawing.” W. J. Kidd, the British head of school (1965–69), offered an explanation and argued that the “lack of three-dimensional appreciation” of Nigerian students resulted from “a lack of playthings and mechanical contacts during childhood.” Accordingly, and in spite of university-wide protests, high rates of students continued to be removed from the course.

One consequence of Kidd’s reasoning was to plead tolerance for the students and call on the teachers to lower their expectations. Such a call was made by Ishaya Audu, the university’s vice chancellor, who repeated after Kidd that Nigerian students were “obviously disadvantaged” since they “did not normally grow up with three-dimensional toys and therefore might not grasp complex three-dimensional problems.” Evidently, this would not have been Dmochowski’s conclusion. His isometric drawings, which revealed spatial concepts in vernacular Nigerian architecture, eloquently refuted the purported lack of spatial imagination among Nigerians. Dmochowski’s core argument about the country’s vernacular architecture as a product of three-dimensional thinking would reverberate in the School of Architecture’s newly revised curriculum, which followed recommendations of a panel headed by Augustine Egbor of the Federal Ministry of Works and Housing (1969). Revisions to the curriculum were initiated by the inter-national team of lecturers headed by Robert R. Ferens, visiting professor from the University of Oregon (1969–71), and were implemented by Adeyemi as head of school (1974–86) and his team, the majority of which consisted of Polish, Hungarian, and Czech architects.

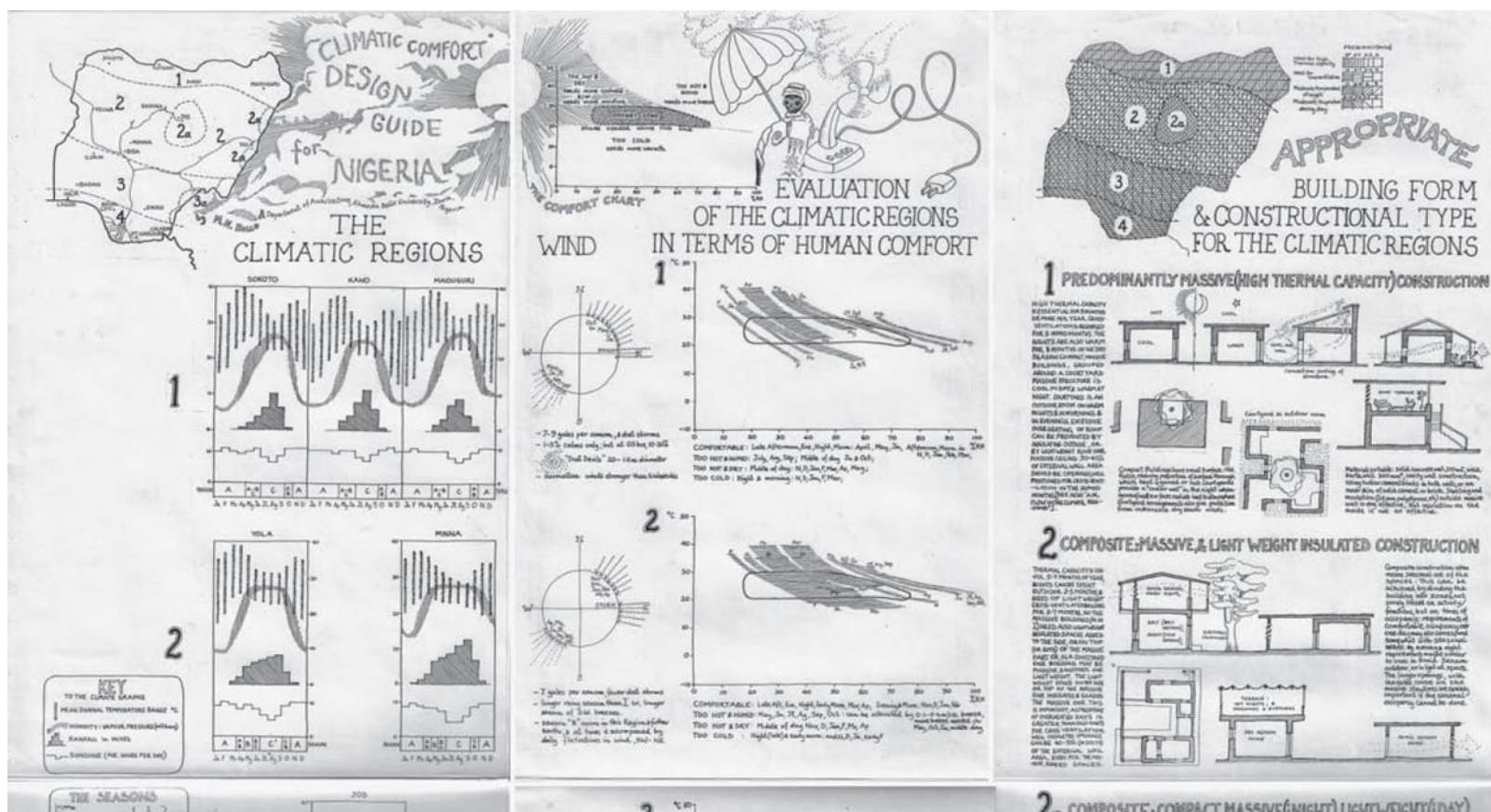


Regional Museum in Esie, design 1969, model. Federal Ministry of Works and Housing, Lagos; Augustine Egbor (director), Marian Łyczkowski (project architect)

In the framework of the new curriculum, studies of vernacular buildings became a way of introducing students to “architectural and three-dimensional thinking.” Such studies were included in the freehand drawing course, led by Ewa Oleszkiewicz, and the introductory course, first conceived by Ewa Podolak and developed by Hubert Dąbrowski, three lecturers coming from Poland. The new focus conformed with the call from prominent Nigerian architects to give vernacular buildings a predominant place in the training of architects, and was then followed in the curricula of newly opened architectural schools in Nigeria, modeled on the School of Architecture in Zaria, including Nsukka (1963) and Lagos (1970). The inclusion of Ibo, Yoruba, and Benin buildings to the Zaria curriculum was praised by governmental officials, one of whom, at the opening of an exhibition of students’ designs at Zaria (1972), called for buildings that would be “architecturally satisfying, culturally harmonious and economically within the reach of ordinary man.” Building on the work of the first generation of British lecturers at the School of Architecture, and in line with the Egbor panel’s recommendations to introduce research-led teaching that would respond to the needs of the Nigerian economy, vernacular building traditions were studied at Zaria. These surveys straddled both architectural and urban scales, and paid particular attention to technological solutions.

In addition to the introductory and freehand drawing courses, surveys of vernacular architecture also became integrated into design modules at Zaria. During Dmochowski’s employment at the Faculty of Architecture in the early 1960s, his research already included “experimental designs...for buildings that would combine modern technology and planning with the traditional Nigerian ways of architectural composition.” A decade later, such an approach can be seen in the “Climatic Comfort Design Guide” (1979), which Hungarian-born architect and artist Nick Hollo developed during his teaching at the school in Zaria (by then renamed Department of Architecture at the Faculty of Environmental Design). Hollo used the guide to teach his Building Science course, as well as in the Rural Development Module, which he cotaught together with Hungarian architect Peter Magyar. While many of the lecturers actively studied vernacular architecture in the region, it was Dmochowski’s drawings that were used as teaching aids, as Magyar recalls.

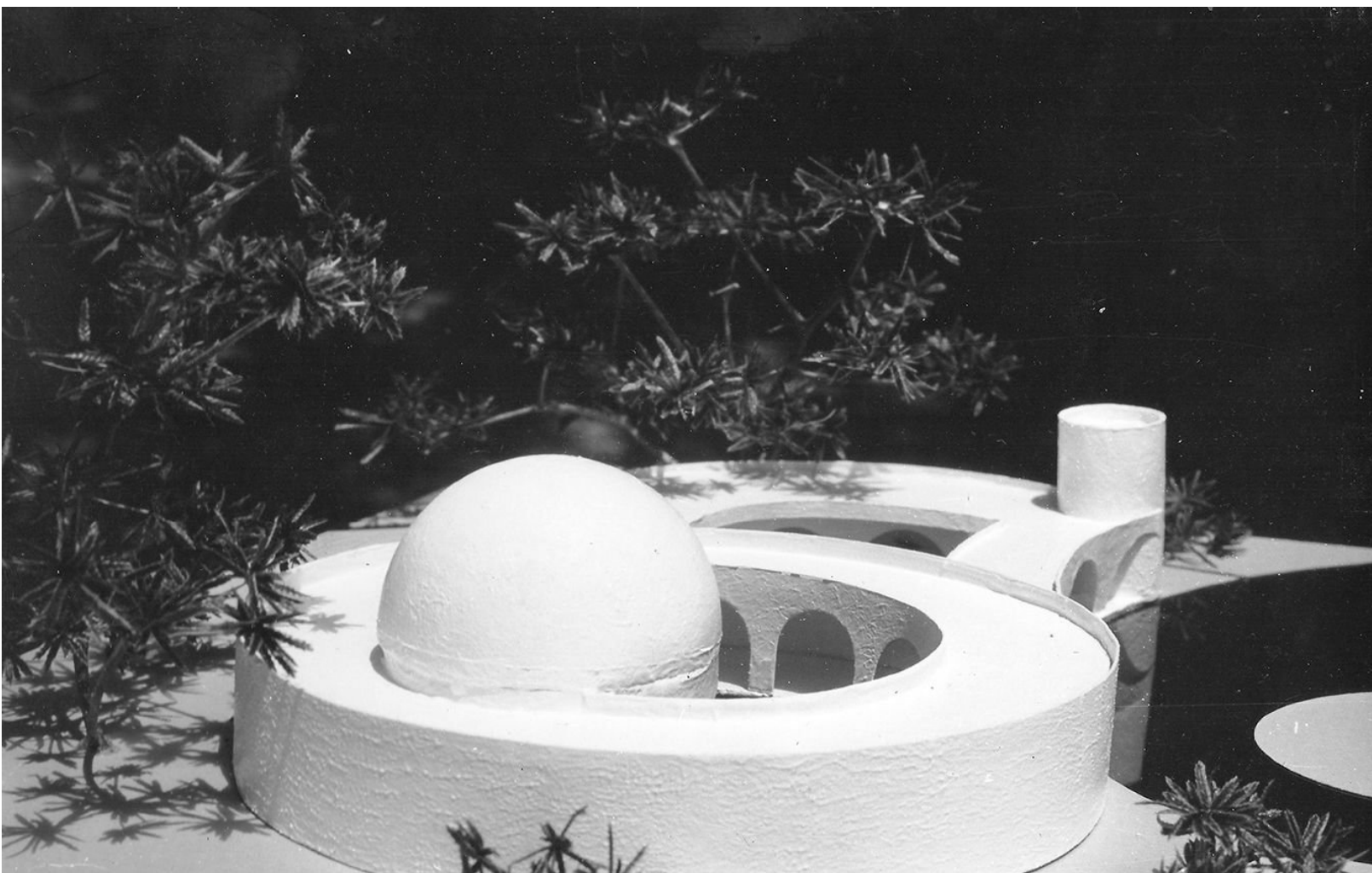




Nick Hollo, "Climatic Comfort Design Guide for Nigeria," 1979. Department of Architecture, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria

More generally, drawings were the main unit of the circulation of Dmochowski's work before the posthumous publication of the *Introduction*, and that circulation facilitated the continuous infiltration of his work into architectural practice in Nigeria. His drawings were disseminated among students at Zaria and other Nigerian architectural schools. They infiltrated public design offices, such as the Ministry of Works and Housing in Lagos, where they impacted on the work of Łyczkowski and his colleagues, as well as private ones established by Zaria graduates, such as Habitat Associates and Triad Associates, whose work was inspired by regional traditions. Dmochowski's drawings were also reproduced in the journal of the Nigerian Institute of Architects, which published numerous articles on vernacular architecture in Nigeria.

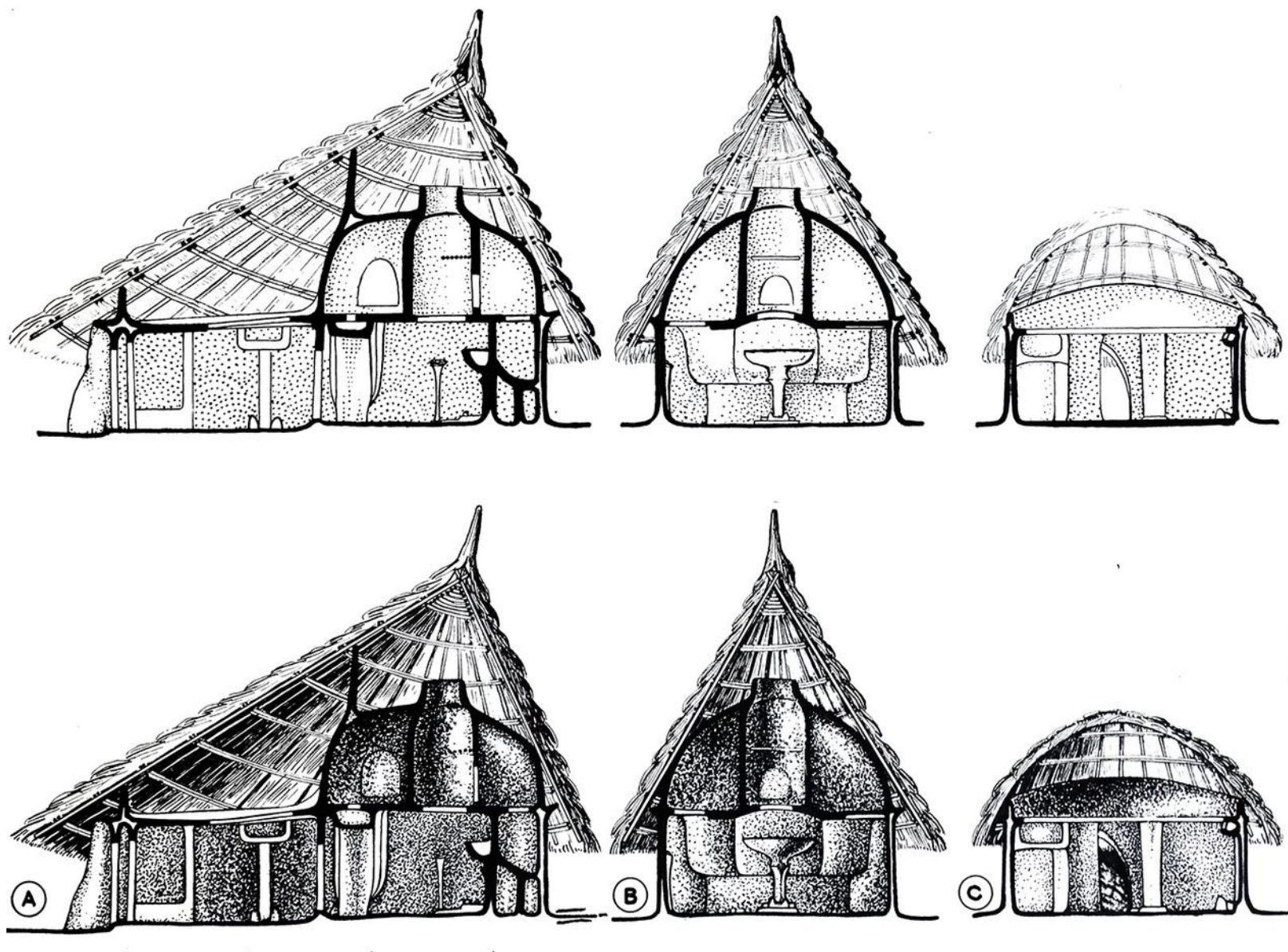
This introduction of vernacular buildings into architectural education in Nigeria was paralleled by the process of indigenization of Nigerian architectural practice. A decisive step in this process was the replacement of the colonial-era, British-dominated Society of Professional Architects in Nigeria by the Nigerian Institute of Architects, founded in the mid-1950s by the small group of Nigerians educated in the UK, and recognized by the government in 1960 with Onafowokan as president and Olumuyiwa as general secretary. Expatriate architects were often blocked from entering the new institute for prolonged periods. Further restrictions were introduced on expat architects in 1969, when the professional title of architect was reserved for Nigerian citizens and members of the Architects Registration Council of Nigeria (ARCON), thus forcing foreign architects to enter partnerships with Nigerians. ARCON was also put in charge of the supervision of architectural education in Nigeria, including the Zaria school, which decided not to continue with RIBA examination and lost the British institute's accreditation (1968).



Regional museum in Kaduna, design 1968, model. Federal Ministry of Works and Housing, Lagos; Augustine Egbor (director), Marian Łyczkowski (project architect)

These changes aimed at undoing the economic and institutional dominance of British architects, and they paralleled Dmochowski's attempts at undoing the Eurocentric hierarchy of value and prestige inherited from the colonial period. Eastern Europeans at Zaria's School of Architecture were instrumental in this process. They provided the workforce that bridged the gap between the departure of British educators, many of whom left in the wake of the student protests, and the period when Nigerians would take over. Supported by the "expatriate staff supplementation scheme" that allowed increasing the salaries of foreign nationals, architects from socialist countries bought time for selected Nigerians, such as Adeyemi, who left for Columbia University in New York City for additional training. On his return, Adeyemi took over from Polish architect Barbara Urbanowicz as the head of school, while working closely with Eastern Europeans who supported him in the implementation of the new curriculum. Most of them worked as designers, too. For example, Hubert Dąbrowski and Jan Gniadzik designed the new building of the Department of Architecture at Zaria, where they taught (1974–80), while the Project Office at Zaria's Department of Urban and Regional Planning was headed by Stanisław Juchnowicz.

Commenting on the large numbers of Eastern Europeans in architectural schools between 1963 and 1979, Nigerian scholar Zanzan Akaka Uji wrote that "Polish and other Eastern European nationals...virtually displaced the British founders." Uji's assessment may be supported by Foreign Trade Organization (FTO) Polservice statistics, which show that in Nigeria between independence and the 1980s, at least 107 Polish architects worked in the country, among them 28 at Nigeria's universities, including Zaria (10), Nsukka (6), Jos (3), and elsewhere. Because of this overrepresentation of Eastern Europeans, Uji calls this period in Nigerian architectural education "semi-colonial."





A house in Nok, two variants of rendering of the sections. Zbigniew Dmochowski and collaborators

His qualification was contradicted by Adeyemi, who emphasized that, in their transitory role at Zaria, the position of Eastern European architects was distinct from that of British professionals. Adeyemi recalled that in spite of being in the majority, Polish, Czech, and Hungarian lecturers at Zaria never posed a danger of dominating the School of Architecture in the way British lecturers had in the 1950s and early 1960s. This opinion would have pleased the authors of guidelines issued by socialist FTOs, who contrasted the work of Eastern European professionals with the “neocolonial” motivations of Western professionals. However, and departing from the explicitly postcolonial terms of Dmochowski’s work, in the next chapter I will argue that this loyalty might have had less to do with an imagined postcolonial proximity between Eastern Europe and the newly independent nations, and more with the political economy of foreign trade under state socialism and the contractual frameworks of socialist FTOs.

*Footnotes have been omitted.*

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