

## Malcolm Ebose (Architecture) –Nigeria, 2018

I went on a trip to Lagos, Nigeria and Benin City in Nigeria to ground, develop and explore my thoughts around a dissertation. I had previously been to Nigeria three times, although I was under the age of ten on all occasions. My intentions were to begin to immerse myself into the feeling, quality, density, dimensions of my surroundings. The ideas I had formulated before leaving the UK were largely around church architecture and ultimately the concept of the home within architecture – and what this ‘*home*’ might actually mean.

I was in Lagos for most of my stay, accompanying my uncle on various trips, dealing with property and land. I also visited some churches in the area, again looking mainly to observe and ask questions, to really begin to unpick this question of what the ‘home’ is. The notion of what the ‘home’ is varied between people, allowing me to recognise the scope of the topic, but also allowing me to recognise the lack of a spark, the lack of a focus for the piece of writing.

I was able to visit the University of Lagos Architecture department, glancing at student projects and writings on the subject of the home – to potentially gain new perspectives and views. Overall, I observed a significance in writings that looked at the *housing* situation in Nigeria and not necessarily what the *house* itself actually signified. This became a critical new factor in my research.

In visiting Benin City for about 48 hours I became particularly mesmerised, perhaps this was the moment I began to see a slightly new centre for my dissertation. I visited the Oba Palace, the centre of the Benin Kingdom – where the Oba (King) resides. Here wisdom, tradition, experience and knowledge about the Kingdom, the dynasty, the social and physical structure, was imparted upon me. I began to try to comprehend the depths of this home, establishment, system, that may not be widely known or understood.

I remember thinking: there is a Palace in Nigeria, how could I not really have known about this?

The trip was not without difficulties and time pressures, yet it allowed me to begin to root decade old memories and thoughts in realities and atmospheres where people currently live. I was forced to begin to think about the layers of perception I attached to everything I saw; the layers of architectural and western language that inevitably coloured my view – and this became essential to posing and developing my thinking towards the subject area in question. I was reminded of the need to (and the difficulty in) removing preconceived lenses and distortions on the truths of the ‘home’ in another environment – and ultimately this became the focus of my dissertation.

Perhaps the question I was asking was not ‘what is the home?’, but was actually ‘can the home be defined objectively, truthfully, universally?’ And there it was; the spark I was looking for. Dissertation, here we go.