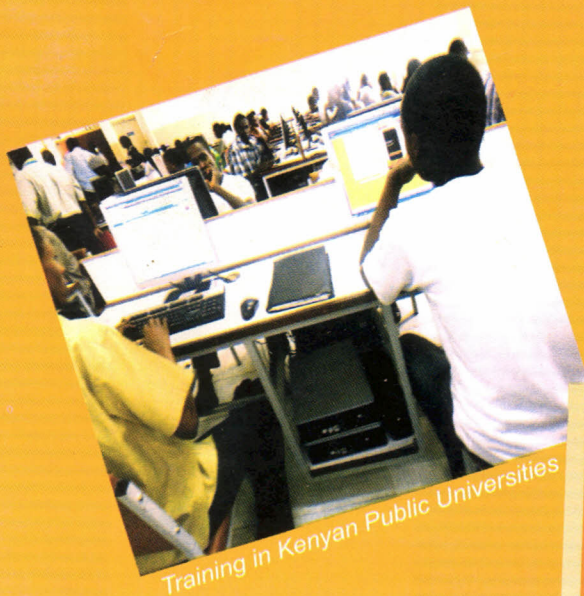


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An Architectural Model Presentation



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Developing an Authentic African Architecture

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Abstract

The idea of the existence of an African Architecture has been problematic over the years since the onset of European occupation. Early scholars of non-Western built forms saw them as not constituting architecture but as shelter or mere dwellings (Oliver, 1987). Others classed these built forms as primitive or indigenous architecture (Guidoni, 1987 Gardi, 1973) while others have classed built forms on the African continent as African Architecture (Kultermann, 1969). Globally, most indigenous societies build their structures using local resources and quite often adapted to the climate of the locality. In addition, traditional built forms tend to respect historical precedents and local customary practices. In this regard, it can be argued that traditional architecture is green architecture without the benefits of sophisticated technologies. The above notwithstanding, most Western architecture imported to the continent, had little regard for local practices and quite often ignored local climate. In attempting to train architects for contemporary practice, this paper argues for hybrid architecture. This is because there is no current pure African architecture in existence. What happened over time was the Africanisation of Western and Eastern architectural models to suit the African condition. The resultant architecture has been a hybrid of these various architectures, what Mazrui refers to as the Triple African Heritage. This architecture is a spatial counter form for the contemporary African society and can be seen to be authentic.

Key words: colonialism, africanisation, transformation, hybrid, traditional

INTRODUCTION

The idea of the existence of an African architecture has been problematic over the years since the advent of European occupation and colonization in Africa. Early scholars of non-Western built forms saw them as not consisting architecture but as shelter or mere dwellings (Oliver, 1987; Rudofsky, 1964). Rudofsky (1964) was the first scholar who first made use of the term vernacular in an architectural context and brought the concept into the eye of the public and of mainstream architecture. Others classed these built forms as primitive or indigenous architecture. While others classified built forms on the African continent as African Architecture (Kultermann, 1969).

In recent times, some scholars have seen built forms in Africa as traditional architecture (Anderson, 1974; Denyer, 1978; Anyamba & Adebayo, 1994). Elleh (1997) posited that the idea of an African architecture was a confluence of indigenous, Western and Islamic characteristics, hence "the triple heritage concept" as first

espoused by Ali Mazrui (1986). Lwamayanga (2008) has argued that African architecture is generated by the indigenous processes and skills which are specifically tied to cultural practices and environmental contexts among other things.

The architecture of Africa, like other aspects of the culture of Africa, is exceptionally diverse. Many ethnolinguistic groups throughout the history of Africa have had their own architectural traditions. However, one common theme in most traditional African architecture is the use of fractal scaling: small parts of the composition tend to look similar to larger parts, such as a circular village layout composed of circular houses (Anyamba & Adebayo, 1994).

Based on the above precedents, how can an authentic African architecture be developed? One way of developing an authentic African architecture is through training in the schools of architecture by

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