



EMBODIMENT OF UGANDA'S HISTORIC BUILDINGS

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Abstract

This paper presents the findings and experiences regarding the Uganda's buildings history, architectural education and production of building spaces in Uganda during the nineteenth and twentieth century. It investigates how local low-tech, attitudes, norms and values in Uganda architecture have been presented and represented in changing high-tech innovations, social structures, which they, in turn, can be seen to reproduce. The starting point is that the shift in building space itself reflect patterns of contemporary technological, socio-economic, cultural and power relations in Uganda in general and globalization in particular. It would seem, therefore, that the results of this paper lead us to attempt to account for previous technical knowledge dispositions, specific to economic, social and cultural history, in Uganda and the wider humanity. In other words, it would seem that the past local technology has left its mark on both recent and present activities and attitudes to building spaces. With effort from the existing building space groups and institutions of higher learning, the trends of in building spaces will continue to change but that there is need to conserve those unique historic buildings.

Key Words: Conservation, Built Environment., Reconstruction, Heritage buildings, Sites, Design history, and Education.

Introduction

The notion of building practices and networks as 'personification' within Uganda's largely oral economy, not only changes our understanding of architectural studies, but also our understanding of individuals' and communities' relationship to the built space. Based on this premise, the paper explores the different *registers* that inform building practices in Uganda, supposing that contemporary foreign-influenced buildings exploit a different *register* ('commercial' or 'Western') from that of traditional practices in a historical as well as a more recently-renewed context. The questions that arise, from this point of view, include how architecture conditions and is conditioned by practices specific to the people who produce and consume it in Uganda and beyond.

Drawing on both Saussurean and Derridean theoretical contributions to the understanding of cultural practices as structured on the basis of similarity and difference, and such meanings are produced through a semiological model (signifier-signified; absence/presence), which structures our thought and classification of the material world in binary terms (Fuery and Mansfield, 2000). Such oppositions tend to prefer one term to another, so that cultural values are linked with particular choices: for example local and international architecture; old and new.

From the point of view of orality and literacy, it is clear that, traditionally, in Uganda, individual dwellings predated communal housing and it may be assumed that community abode was not required until the introduction of formal education in Uganda at the turn of the nineteenth century. Thus, most communal building came to Uganda from the outside, via contact with the place of worship (Christianity/Islam) and the regal tradition, and was, in Bascom and Herskovits (1959: 3) terms "elements from outside, accepted generations ago, have been adopted to African traditional patterns."

While it is true that the ownership issues in Uganda of cultural monuments in still a daunting issue, the historical landmarks and sites in Uganda are spread all over the country. Generally these cultural sites are located in towns, kingdoms, chiefdom's and rural areas of Uganda as well. These kingdoms have not been at the same page with the central government and one could adduce that their destruction has not been well fitted in the national agenda of support and development.

The Issue at Hand

Issues of historic building in particular and architecture can visibly be compare to one figure in Uganda's history when in November 2006, Prof Merrick Posnansky made an emotional plea in the opinion pages for the Commission of Historical Monuments to be revived. This challenge of revival should not be the work of one person or even a commission; rather it should be the work of every Ugandan population and community. Uganda has had a moderate history in terms of its communities' appreciation of its histories and conservation in most aspect of activity and practice. In this article, we are not looking for someone or a system to blame. We should start with ourselves. The self in Uganda has continued to lead as the goal for living. But Ugandans forget that the self is made of a history and a culture which has to be observed and conserved.

It is this basis that the Historic Buildings Conservation Trust (HBCT) compiled a humble but revitalizing exhibit of works that reveal the nature and importance of historic spaces. These spaces are now largely in private hands as opposed to traditional national institutions. These significant buildings are at risk because their owners or managers are unaware of their importance.

The stories of the interference in some of the best historic buildings are abound. Monuments like Fort Lugard (see pix) were lost to the Uganda Muslim Supreme Council mosque (see picture) and the Mengo government without a protracted protest by the central government. We should not be afraid to mention the state of out historic buildings for the gazetted sites and monuments are in shambles.

Interpretation of Building in Uganda

The building, like so many of the central concepts we use on a daily basis in conservation, is a somewhat nebulous one. In Uganda it is also one we rarely stop to think about in abstract. Not only is it hard to define but it shares with related concepts such as integrity and honesty, a family resemblance by employing what Ruskin termed 'the pathetic fallacy'. That is to say we apply concepts properly belonging to human beings to inanimate objects. This in Uganda raises the question whether a building can really be 'compromised,' its 'integrity' questioned, its 'character' altered especially in Africa communities?

Africa in general and Uganda in particular is probably the best known of all earth walled building types. Their thick walls are made by piling a mixture of subsoil and straw, about 600mm thick, on the wall and paring the rough edges flush with the wall. The next layer is put on when the previous work has dried enough to bear the weight. At an international level, this method of building extends east as far as Basingstoke where the subsoil used is mainly chalk. Similar forms of construction can be found in the South West and in North West Wales.

The new appeal in market forces of global trade and culture transition has meant that the spaces which had held historic significance in Uganda were seen as an obstacle by a cross section of policy makers and business community who have since 2000 scrambled to occupy all spaces in Kampala and on a more conservative approach the upcoming township, some of which have been promised municipality status.

The famous Nakasero Fort on one of the prime areas of Uganda has succumbed to the new development by Ayaa Group of companies who have elected a massive hotel which was slated to be used during the CHOGM meeting delegates a cultural event of foreign glamour and participation. Fort Lugard on the opposite hill facing the Nakasero monument could not compete with the massive mosque at Old Kampala. Fort Lugard building is famous as being the first space to accommodate museum collections of Uganda material culture in an organized manner by Margaret Trowell,(Trowell, 1957). While Fort Lugard still survives, its prominence has been overshadowed by the gigantic mosque and the accompanying shopping outlets.

While we can't fully identify Uganda's architectural with the likes of the forts mentioned above, we cannot ignore the fact that such architectural dispensations in building styles in Uganda is represent and mirrored in these historical monuments.

Table 1: The perception of issues of historic Monuments conservation (N120)

Level of education	Score	%	No Attach Value	%	Involved In Business	%
Primary	24	20.0	2	8.3	20	83.3
Lower Secondary	52	43.3	21	40.3	52	100.0
Upper Secondary	20	16.7	16	80.0	20	100.0
Tertiary	21	17.5	21	100.0	7	33.3
None	3	2.5	0	0.0	0	0.0

From the data table 1 above underscore the values of levels of education and the level of appreciation of historic building in the major city of Kampala where a mixture of migrant population for a milieu of what is now the business district of Uganda. Traditionally, Kampala had been occupied and developed by the main ethnic grouping of largely Baganda. With new changes and historical settlements, Kampala is now a cosmopolitan of various groups not only from Uganda but also across the borders and a considerable Asian community. While the latter were largely the architects of the old Kampala landscape, they have also joined into creating a new more modern construction where old building have fallen victim.

While the appeal to have the old building is largely supported by the elite, the numbers have not been substantial to cause action against demolition of old building. This is largely due to the low levels of education with large chunks of semi-literate individuals with very low regard for appreciation of history and its spaces. It was also noted that the majority of the business community is comprised of semi-literate entrepreneurs whose exposure to the business models are determined by what they have observed abroad with limited exposure to places like art galleries and museums. One very interesting example was when in 2011 a majority of the business community did not see the need to conserve the only Uganda Museum including its present collection. They had planned a move to replace the museum with a shopping mall. While a small group of individuals fought had to save the demolition and give away, the business community has already encroached on the neighboring spaces.

What is at Stake?

Historic buildings in Uganda may achieve the best attention when they are in full protection of an institution or community that owns it. But with a unpredictable governance systems in countries like Uganda, some communities and or institutions have had to give up their built possessions to new governments that in most cases has not been able to respect and maintain them. A good number of such historic buildings belonged to the traditional monarchies that have never fully recovered from woos of majestic governance which eventually transformed into democratic and capitalistic states.

After realizing this decay and neglect of some of the important historic buildings, a non governmental organization made up of a cross section of conservationists from within and outside Uganda, started the Historic Building Conservation Trust (HBCT). The going has not been easy for the terms and reference of the trust and membership has been fluid. This fluidity in a way has been fruitful and working with the local media the trust has been able to achieve some considerable goals.

Understanding Historic Preservation in Uganda

As Uganda entered the twentieth century, a new administration and leadership, came with it new thinking and planning of community settlement that took root, mostly in central Uganda (Buganda). Today, Uganda has thriving city and towns with historic buildings standing alongside sleek modern built areas, diverse entertainment spaces, strong business, government and educational infrastructure working towards a kind of concerted future. It must be noted that the planning has not been systematic for this buildings of all styles are show cased as a manifestation of Uganda's unique history. The traditional architecture alongside eastern (Asia) and western (European) foot prints began to take root. Traditional architecture was gradually improving as communities began to rub shoulders with cosmopolitan living spaces.

The suburban exodus soon left Uganda's local community to the least and largely illiterate communities. While the levels of human welfare and education have increased, the state of affairs has not taken root like most other developing nations.

Designation of Historic Landmarks

The identification of national historic buildings by the HBCT has been adhoc in a sense that there are not preservation design guidelines. The national register criteria for evaluation should be developed. In reaching its decision to designate a building as historic, criteria should be considered. These should include the quality of significance in Uganda's history, architecture, archaeology, engineering and culture. These in addition should also have integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association.

The associations should also carry a great deal of events that have made a significant contribution to the broader patterns of Uganda's history; lives of persons significant to the past history, that embody a distinctive characteristics of type, period, or method of construction, possesses high artistic values, significant or distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction, and sites that have yielded or are likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Planning to preserve can be seen elsewhere, and for Ogena (2012), whatever the sociological reason for our obsession with all things new, it is high time we started preserving our old building. A town or city in which old buildings stand alongside new buildings is, of course, a veritable, outdoor museum of history, as by studying the oldest to the most recent buildings, one gets an idea of what sort of people have resided there over the years, how prosperous the residents have been, what sort of technology and materials have been available to them.

Places like Old Kampala now, contains several of these structures, rich in history and multiple values – artistic, aesthetic, stylistic, harmony, spiritual, social, symbolic, educational, religious, political, economic, commercial, and technical architectural achievement. Collectively, most of Old Kampala's buildings represent a significant and distinguishable entity as reflected in the 1972 UNESCO Convention, which would otherwise lack individual distinction.

The efforts have received recognition from far and wide, U.S. Ambassador to Uganda and Historic Building Conservation Trust Program Officer Robert have jointly signed a grant agreement for a project to research, document and eventually disseminate information about historic buildings in Uganda (2006). Project funding for the Trust's survey of historic buildings in Uganda was made available through the U.S. Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation. The survey was completed in a 10-month period.

Kampala and its Historic Buildings

The HBCT has come up with a list of important buildings and sites. While this might not be comprehensive, it is a start in a right direction. These include but are not limited to Nakasero Fort, Fort Lugard, Twekobe Palace, The Art School, The Main Building – Makerere University, Ham Mukasa House, Namirembe Cathedral, The High Court, Sir Apolo Kagga House and Church, The National Laboratory Building, The Clock Tower, Art Décor Corner House and Nakasere Market. The Kasubi Tombs one of the traditional Kabaka (Buganda king's) burial place was razed down in an inferno soon after I submitted this abstract for this paper. There are also a number of gazetted buildings in Jinja and Entebbe townships. Like elsewhere, there is need to create an additional Special List to use the Baltimore City Conservation Guidelines example

as a mechanism for interim protection while documentation for final conservation is being processed. The criteria for selection of what entities should appear on this special should be similar to those for the conserved sites as listed above.

More recently, Ogena (2012) argues that over Uganda's burgeoning cities and towns, old, beautiful colonial bungalows, housing estates, etc., are being routinely razed, pulled, knocked down, not in some post-colonial fit of misdirected rage against the inarguable evils colonialism, not because the buildings have been 'condemned' by building surveyors as health-and-safety risks — as was claimed by Kampala City Council (KCC)¹, not entirely persuasively, when it decided to demolish the entire 1750, colonial housing units in the Nakawa and Naguru estates, dating from the 1950s.

Recommendation

There is also the issue of building permits which are handled by the city and town councils. All new buildings should go through a rigorous review before plans are approved and where there also listed buildings, plans should be put in place to preserve the features of such buildings. Applicants should comply with the provisions of that city or town Historic Conservation and Preservation guidelines in planning and executing the projects. Consideration should be put on the appropriateness of the proposed work with regard to historic structure and context, taking into consideration the historical and architectural character of the structure and of other historic structures in the immediate area.

Minor projects that largely involve routine maintenance and repair of existing historic building fabric, including painting, small scale alterations of buildings that do not change the overall appearance and integrity of the structure should comprise this type. A notice of Proceed Application should be that should involve a kind a neighborhood involvement.

Plans for the reconstruction, alteration, or demolition of any city/town owned structure should be reviewed by the Historic Conservation Group composed of stakeholders from the relevant organs. These structures that have a public use, including but not limited to schools, libraries, police stations, market buildings, government offices, courts, monuments, recreational facilities, and public spaces which are more than fifty years or have been identified by the conservation group to be historical or architectural significance should be of interest the review committee. Demolition of historic buildings should be avoided at all costs. Historic preservation guidelines should be divided in three sections – the Design Guidelines for Historic Neighborhoods and Streetscapes, Design Guidelines for Buildings and Design Guidelines for New Construction.

It is then that Uganda shall be able to uphold and support its historic buildings for posterity. For Ephraim Kamuhangire, We should arise and request the Government to appreciate the importance of our cultural heritage and promote it.

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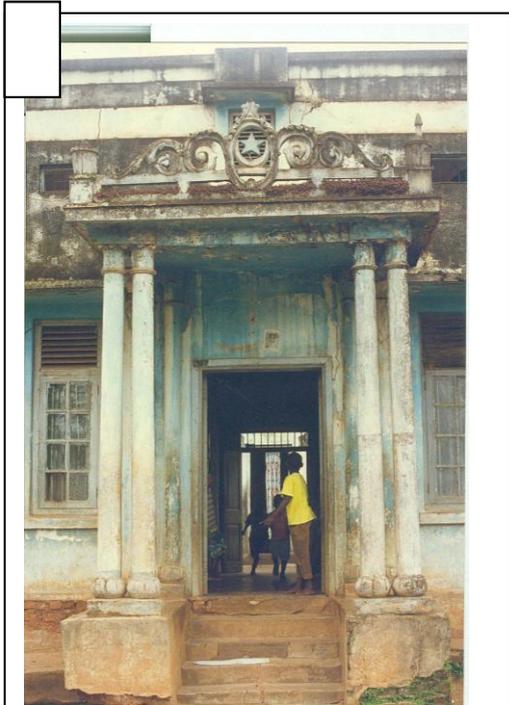
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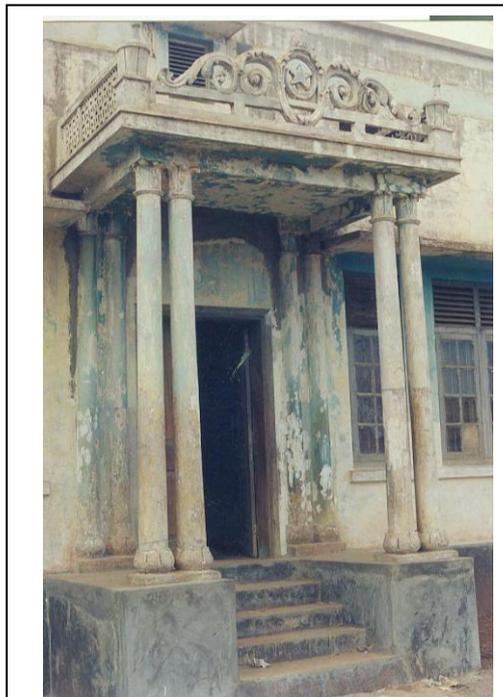
http://kampala.usembassy.gov/historic_building.html

Pictures





The porch before renovation that was destroyed to pave way for new development



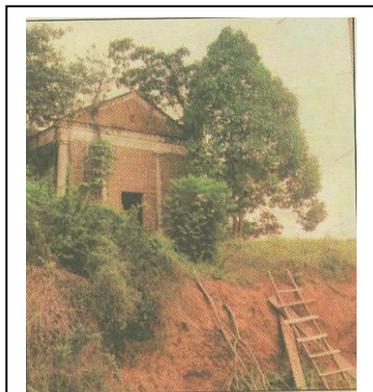
The porch after renovation that was destroyed to pave way for new development



The HBCT team in 1994



Destroyed: Butikiro House On the Royal Mile Mengo



Fort Lugard – Old Site



Structure demolished