Chapter 2

The Pan African Parliament: Vision and Downfalls
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In the first chapter, we concluded that the AU is primarily viewed as an elitist top-down organization. The founding leaders of the AU realizing this chose to differentiate the AU from its predecessor, the OAU, by including in its organs platforms for grassroots level interaction in the decision-making processors of continental politics. The Pan African Parliament is one of these envisioned platforms. (Raheem: 2006)

This chapter explores the vision of this vital organ of the AU, and its downfalls in achieving in achieving it core mandate of becoming a common platform for debate and discussion amongst the politically powerful and powerless at a continental level.

Whilst this chapter aims to explore the and familiarize ourselves with the Pan African Parliament, the main objective is to critically analyze the competition brief for the PAP’s permanent home, against its mandate, thus showing the inappropriateness of an architecture emerging from such a brief in fulfilling the mandate of the PAP.

A challenge to this brief will be introduced and justified, to be fully explored in ensuing chapters. This challenge is based on two arguments namely the argument against the proposed competition site and secondly the argument against the perpetuation of existing paradigms pertaining to political and governmental architecture as embodied in the brief. “The masses are interested in what this brand new institution will mean to them. They want to know whether whether you will meet their dreams and hopes, to give birth to the humane Africa that has eluded us for so long.” (Thabo Mbeki’s address to the P.A.P, le Roux:2004)

What is the Pan African Parliament?

"The PAP is one of the most important institutions in the AU that distinguishes it from the old Organisation of African Unity. The latter was statutorily and in practice a leaders' forum, whereas the former seeks to be a pro people and people-driven organization, hence the inclusion of democratic and potentially democratizing institutions like the Parliament, ECOSOC, African Court of Human Rights, etc" Raheem (2006)
How does the Pan African Parliament work?
The PAP is an important organ of the African Union and envisaged legislative authority for the continent. It is one of two organs in which civil society and grassroots organizations can get involved in decision-making processes of the AU. In the future it is envisaged that there will be continent wide elections for PAP members however for the time being the PAP consists of 5 elected members from the national legislatures of the AU’s 53 member states.
(after Harsh: 2002) The top diagram illustrates this.

Internally the PAP is divided into the Bureau and the permanent committees of which they are 10. The Bureau is responsible for the management and administration. The Permanent Committees are responsible for the development and harmonization of regional policies. This is illustrated in the bottom diagram. The ten permanent committees are:

- Rural, Agriculture, Natural Resources and Environment
- Monetary and Financial Affairs
- Trade, Customs and Immigration Matters E
- Co-operation, International Relations and Conflict Resolutions
- Transport, Industry, Communications, Energy, Science and Technology
- Health, Labour and Social Affairs
- Education, Culture, Tourism and Human Resources
- Gender, Family, Youth and People with Disability
- Justice and Human Rights
- Rules, Privileges and Discipline Natural Resources

(www.pan-african-parliament.org, cited 10 May 2007)
What is the PAP’s mandate?
The current mandate of the PAP sees the body acting in an Advisory role to the AU. This is so that the body can establish all its organizational structures and procedures in the 4-year interim period. It is envisaged that continent wide elections will be held for the PAP every 5 years and when it becomes feasible in terms of the political and logistical situation across the continent sometime in the future. At that point, the PAP will become the legislative authority for the continent with all other national parliaments falling under it. (www.dfa.gov.za, cited 4 June 2007)

Currently the PAP’s primary mandate is:
- "To examine, discuss or express an opinion on any matter, either on its own initiative or at the request of the Assembly or other policy organs and make any recommendations it may deem fit relating to, inter alia, matters pertaining to respect of human rights, the consolidation of democratic institutions and the culture of democracy, as well as the promotion good governance and the rule of law under the AU.
- Promote the co-ordination and Harmonization of policies, measures, programmes and activities of the Regional Economic Communities and the parliamentary fora of Africa


How is the PAP viewed in the press?
In our discussion of the AU and the press, it was found that the overall view of the press is that of cynicism. The same can be said of the Pan African Parliament. While leaders hailed the launch of the Pan African parliament as a continental breakthrough, the press seems unimpressed.

Afrol news reports critical voices being heard in the PAP’s host country, South Africa. “It is generally assumed that the South African tax payers will have to assume financial responsibility of the parliament, which has led to many South Africans questioning the purpose of this new body without powers.” (www.afrolnews.com, cited 23 May 2007)

Commenting on the 7th ordinary session of the Pan African Parliament, Raheem asks: “How many Africans know about this meeting? Of those who know how many amongst those care, how many can influence the process?” (2007)

Zvomuya of the Mail & Guardian, reports that even the President of the PAP had to voice her opinion over the cynicism of civil society. He quotes President Mongella: “Civil society organizations and the Pan African Parliament should realize that they are not in contradiction, our relationship should be complementary
...the PAP and NGOs should work together to oversee those who govern” (2007)

Thus, we see that the cynical view of the PAP is as true as the cynical view of the AU, as such in the public eye the PAP is viewed as little more than a continental subcommittee of national parliaments, and hence it is perceived as a top-down institution. The question that remains to be answered is: Will the design competition yield an architecture that reinforces the top-down perception of the PAP or will it encourage a meeting of civil society and the political entity on a more inclusive basis?

**The Design Competition: Vision and Downfalls**

News of the Intercontinental design competition of the permanent home of the Pan African Parliament was first made in an address by Sue van der Merwe, the South African deputy foreign minister, on the occasion of the announcement the hosting rights of the PAP being awarded to South Africa. (18 August 2004)

“We are excited about the prospect of a permanent purpose-built Pan African Parliament building being constructed in the longer term. For this building to be the pride of Africa and our nation, its architecture ought to be appropriate for the identity of a new Africa.” (www.dfa.org.za/speeches.html , cited 23 May 2007)

Three years later, on the 23 April 2007, the continent-wide competition was launched. The South African government invited interested African architects and to submit proposals for the construction of a “uniquely African parliament.” (www.architectafrica.com , cited 25 May 2007)

A 50-page design brief outlines the requirements for entries

**Competition vision**

The competition brief, which will be discussed in further detail in chapter four, outlines the characteristics the proposed PAP complex should fulfill:

“The new PAP complex will symbolize the coming of age of the African continent… it will be a building of distinct presence, conveying an atmosphere of rationality, security and humanity… it must be a place to challenge and uplift the spirits of parliamentarians and visitors alike …it must strive to create a sense of place that will make everyone aware of the beauty and potential of a unified African spirit.” (www.papcompetition.com , cited 31 May 2007)

The brief also outlines stringent security requirements:
“The separate circulation of parliamentarians and public should be achieved unobtrusively...perimeter protection will be the first line of defense and will be essential for the deterrent of perpetrators...it is highly recommended that access to public galleries be separated from access to the chamber.”
(www.papcompetition.com , cited 31 May 2007)

While acknowledging the pragmatics of security measures and the like, these requirements makes one question the ‘open door policy’ portrayed by the PAP to the press & civil society; recalling the statement of Bheki Moyo, a researcher with Trust Africa in Dakar:

“Institutions such as the PAP lack sufficient transparency...African peoples should be engaged, we should have a union of peoples not that of governments” (in Zvomuya:2007)

One needs to ask critical questions regarding such requirements that seem to reinforce existing hierarchies within political architecture. These favor the parliamentarian over the citizen creating an unequal platform for interaction.

One needs to ask whether the architectural brief that relies on the perpetuation of existing hierarchies, can ever hope to produce an architecture that truly creates a level platform for civil society to be involved in the decision-making processors of the continent.

It is thus the opinion of this thesis that it is more likely than not, that the architectural result of such a brief would while trying to symbolize inclusion, actually reinforce civil society’s perspective of the PAP as an exclusive, elitist organization.

As such, the challenge to the brief made by this thesis is against the perpetuation of existing paradigms regarding political architecture. This will be further pursued in chapter four.

The competition site
The competition site is located in Midrand, approximately 11km away from the PAP’s temporary home at Gallagher Estate.

Midrand is a town located halfway between Johannesburg, the largest most populous city in South Africa, and Pretoria, which serves as the executive and official capital of the country, along the N1 highway. Midrand is characterized by industrial and business functions with many factories and businesses having relocated there due to its proximity to good highway links and its location in the economic center of Gauteng province.
The competition site is a 20 hectare land parcel located adjacent to the N1 highway. North of the competition site is the Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA), to the east the N1 highway and Sage business park, to the west the higher income Midrand Countryview residential area.

The site has access to local bus routes and highway linkages provide good links to Johannesburg, Pretoria and O.R Tambo International Airport.
The site is 10km away from the proposed gautrain station, the gautrain being a rapid rail link between Johannesburg, Pretoria and the airport, and falls out of the range of the proposed dedicated bus routes to the station. As such, a secondary mode of transport will have to be used to commute between the station and the site, which also has little linkages to minibus taxi routes. (www.papcompetition.com, cited 31 May 2007)

The following site images have been included to get a sense of this context.

Photo 2: View looking towards competition site and intersection between Ben Schoeman Highway (N1) and Road R562

Photo 3: View looking towards competition site and Ben Schoeman Highway (N1)

Photos of PAP competition site (www.papcompetition.com cited 23 May 2007)
Is the proposed site valid from the perspective of this thesis?

Let us take a step back to look at the proposed site, in order to assess whether this site is applicable for such a building.

- Firstly the intended users would be delegates and parliamentarians from the African continent, thus ease of access to the airport and proximity to hotel accommodation are essential. Since this is only 10km away from the PAP’s current home, the site does comply with this requirement.

“A dedicated venue to serve as the temporary seat of the PAP has been identified at Gallagher Estate, which is easily accessible from Johannesburg International Airport. Adequate, affordable and suitable hotel accommodation is available in the immediate vicinity of Gallagher Estate.” (www.dfa.org.za/documents, cited 23 April 2003)

- Secondly the site is midway between Johannesburg and Pretoria and this geographically allows for ease of access from both cities, the adjacency of the highway is important and gives visibility to the site and potentially this would add to the awareness of the building and thus the PAP.

- However the centrality of the institution is only geographically accessible, meaning that it is viable as a destination. We have already established that the PAP wishes to engage with civil society and NGO’s in carrying out it’s work. The vast open plains of Midrand and the current lack of a public sphere and ‘cityness’ means that the building would only be accessible for people wanting to visit it. Hence discouraging the majority of ordinary Africans access to it.

- The site may be visible from the highway but this visibility is limited to viewing the building as landmark or image as one drives pass. People are not afforded an opportunity to interact with the site and thus the PAP and any interaction is merely visual.

- The site is a ‘greenfield’ site and falls outside of political and urban histories. When viewing the context of Midrand, one realizes that the site falls within a neutral plateau. This reinforces existing postcolonial spatial practice of building outside of the political and historic context. In the view of this thesis, the site is deemed to be escapist and exclusive in nature.
As such, the second challenge made by this thesis to the competition brief is against the proposed site. This will be further explored in the ensuing chapter.