Chapter 4

The Challenge against the perpetuation of existing political architecture paradigms
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This chapter explores the second challenge against the competition brief. This challenge is against the perpetuation of existing political architecture paradigms.

The intention of this chapter is to firstly explore the architectural visions of the brief and situate this within the appropriate theoretical context. Secondly, by exploring a variety of provincial, national and international political buildings highlight current and historic thinking regarding political architecture. Thirdly, and most importantly illustrating how these paradigms cannot fulfill the core mandate of the PAP of becoming an inclusive continental platform for discussion and decision-making.

The architectural vision of the brief

In chapter two, an introductory architectural vision of the competition brief was discussed. According to prominent figures at the South African Department of Foreign Affairs, the proposed new home of the PAP will be “the pride of Africa and our nation”, being “a truly uniquely African peoples parliament.”


The following is an account of the general characteristics the proposed PAP design should fulfill:

“The new PAP complex will symbolize the coming of age of the African continent and must be subsequently capable of representing the diverse cultures, and ideals of Africa, it must be a building of distinct presence, conveying an atmosphere of rationality, security & humanity. As the complex will house the leadership of the African continent, it must be a place to challenge and uplift the spirits of parliamentarians and visitors alike. In this manner, the space, structure, form and enclosure of the complex must strive to create a sense of place that will make everybody aware of the beauty and potential of a unified African spirit, whilst ensuring the safety and protection of its inhabitants.”

(www.papcompetition.com, cited 31 May 2007)

The brief further describes general points that should be considered in the design:
• “The complex will be physically rooted in South Africa, but representative of the African continent.
• The complex should be a landmark building reflecting the aspirations of the African continent. Therefore, the complex should have a resonance of quality, value, durability and civic importance, which the African people can be proud of.
• Visibility in the evening is important, therefore the complex should be beautifully lit at night.
• The approach to the complex should command respect and contribute to the enhancement of the urban environment and emphasize the importance of the buildings.
• The parliament is a changing organization, which over time will reflect different attitudes and aspirations. The PAP complex must be flexible and have the capacity to accept changes in the organization, space requirements and management. The chamber building should be designed to enable future expansion to accommodate 500 parliamentarians.”

(www.papcompetition.com, cited 31 May 2007)

The brief also outlines the following security measures, which should be integrated into the design:

• “The separate circulation of parliamentarians and public should be achieved unobtrusively
• It is essential that the physical security of the parliament site is maintained at all times careful attention must be given to:
  - Perimeter protection will be the first line of defense and will be essential for the deterrent of perpetrators.
  - Access control at the entrance to buildings is important and will serve as the second line of defense
  - Supplementary screening of persons gaining access to buildings will need to be considered”

(www.papcompetition.com, cited 31 May 2007)

The distinct separation of public from the private is also noted:

• “To ensure orderly, secure and non interference of the House, it is recommended to provide on a different level from the floor of the chamber, a public gallery, possibly a level above. This level should be sealed off with transparent security sheets... It is highly recommended that access to the galleries be separated from access to the chamber.
• At each sector of the complex there is a need for a visitors’ lobby where visitors are received and made to wait till escorted to their destinations.”
(www.papcompetition.com , cited 31 May 2007)

The theoretical context of the architectural vision
This discussion places the architectural vision of the brief within an appropriate theoretical context. From understanding, the characteristics that the PAP complex should fulfill four main theoretical issues present themselves. These are:
• The use of architecture to construct ‘nationalism’
• The role of the elite in political architecture
• The postcolonial assimilation of colonial spatial paradigms
• The use of architecture as an icon of economic development

The use of the word ‘nationalism’ here is similar to its usage in Earnest Geller’s Nations and Nationalism, where it is defined as “a theory of political legitimacy.” (in Vale 1992:45) The use of this word also reflects on the purposeful construction of commonality through symbolic means. This includes music, popular imagery and architecture, used to justify the intended political position.

When looking back at the prescriptions of the brief , a key phrase sticks out, in this regard: “The space, structure, form and enclosure of the complex must strive to create a sense of place that will make everybody aware of the beauty and potential of a unified African spirit.” (www.papcompetition.com , cited 31 May 2007)

This illustrates how architectural expression is intended to highlight a particular political position, and it is called upon to emphasize this revealing the “beauty and potential of a unified African spirit.”

Elleh referred to the sought legitimacy of the particular political paradigm as a stabilizing social action, in his comparison between the Hassen the second mosque, Casablanca and the Our Lady of Peace Basilica, Yamoussoukro: “the collective unconscious of certain groups obscured the real condition of society both to itself and to others thereby stabilizing it.” (2002:161)

In an essay entitled Architecture and Power in Africa: Unveiling the Monuments that mask the real condition of Living experiences of the masses, Elleh reaffirms his earlier position referring to monuments and recently constructed monumental architecture in Africa: “The visual rhetoric of the monuments project that everything is/will be alright in the society. This is how the monuments mask the real experiences of hardship in the current state of existence of millions of African people” (in Low ed. 2006:72)
Thus it can be seen that architecture, through fulfilling the needs of legitimizing political positions in fact seem to simultaneously create the illusion of commonality that acts as a stabilizing social action and mask the reality of the social conditions that exists on the ground. By the brief stipulating that the architecture should communicate the “beauty and potential of a unified African spirit”, be symbolic of the “aspirations of the African continent”, and become an architectural expression “the African people can be proud of”, the brief perpetuates nationalist tendencies that promote the rhetoric of unity although they are products of the politically powerful. (Vale 1992:50)

The decision to build, decisions on where and how to build, and most importantly why are the reserve of the elite. The role of the elite in Africa was highlighted in a previous chapter. They were the privileged few who received a colonial education, in order to assume jobs in government service and foreign firms. The elite spearheaded the liberation struggles, and nationalist movements culminating in colonial ‘independence’. The same class took the reigns from the colonial power, and through struggling with its legacies either sought refuge in business, corruption, neo-colonial relationships or were ousted by new colonially backed elite. (Nafziger 1988:50)

From the perspective of an architectural thesis, the role of the elite in political architecture is of extreme importance, especially after establishing that the proposed PAP site was based on elitist criteria

Vale refers to the role of political and governmental architecture as seeming to be “ready purveyors of national identity since they are ostensibly built to serve and symbolize a nation-state as a whole. Frequently however, since their sites and appearance are chosen by the leadership rather than the populous, the resultant place hardly resembles true national identity.” (1992:48)

This is highlighted by both the general characteristics that the PAP complex should comply to as well as the security and hierarchy of space that the brief projects.

“The approach to the complex should command respect”

“The separate circulation of parliamentarians and public should be achieved unobtrusively…to ensure orderly, secure and non-interference of the House, it is recommended to provide on a different level from the floor of the chamber, a public gallery…this level should be sealed off with transparent security sheets…it is highly recommended that access to the galleries be separated from access to the chamber.”

(www.papcompetition.com, cited 31 May 2007)
From this, we see that the PAP’s design guidelines reinforce hierarchical relationships favoring the parliamentarians over the public. The public enters into the complex not as an equal but as a client. The use of the word client implies a “relationship between patron and clients, commanding unequal wealth, status or influence based on conditional loyalties.” (Nafziger 1988:90-91)

Spatially the implication is that “to a large degree many postcolonial complexes are like ancient citadels, a refuge for rulers rather than a vehicle for the sharing of political power.” (Vale 1992:51)

The argument that underpins this thesis is against elitist space making exercises that would invalidate the potential of the PAP. It is in the opinion of this thesis that the aforementioned condition that the brief prescribes falls within such an elitist space making agenda. The thesis does however acknowledge the context of the well-intentioned postcolonial discourse.

This discourse refers to effort to overcome the legacies of colonialism. However, in the process of realizing this program, it often recoups the characteristics and the methodologies of the postcolonial project. (Elleh 2002:162)

Elleh records the spatial strategies of the colonialist in Africa:

- “The application of imported colonial architectural forms for the specific purpose of subverting the colonial subjects’ cultures, and for tools for creating centers to ‘domesticate’ colonial subjects.
- Using architectural ideology as a tool for formulating collective, colonial memories amongst distinct ethnic groups of Africans, binding them into pseudo colonial subjects through verbal, visual and symbolic processors. (processors that often took advantage of practices of ‘neutralization’, re-creation and rearrangement of a site of its geography, and of its values by which tradition distinguished it.
- Using architectural ideology, creating a metaphorical ‘citadel’ of hope, a symbolic motive for fudging postcolonial national identity and unity, as a template for structuring national development policies." (2002:16)

The significance of this is that the PAP architectural brief seems bear strong resonance to the colonial spatial strategies listed above. If one compares the brief against this the following is seen:
• The brief affirms the first principle of the use of a differentiated architectural language/methodology to that of the context: “the complex should be a landmark building, reflecting the aspirations of the African continent”, also “it must be a building of distinct presence.
• The brief affirms the second principle of using architecture to form collective memories. This ties in to the earlier discussion of attempting to create nationalism through architecture. The brief states: “The space, structure, form and enclosure must strive to create a sense of place that will everyone aware of the beauty and potential of a unified African spirit.”
• The third principal is the use of ‘neutralization’, re-creation and rearrangement of the site in contrast to existing values and perceptions of its geography and landscape. The brief and site selection affirm this. Firstly, neutralization is achieved by the choice of site that is in the hinterland away from the existing political and historical contexts. Secondly, re-creation involves the design of the complex that is “physically rooted in South Africa but representative of the African continent.”, an attempt to re-conceptualize the site into a complex that should reflect the “rich diversity of Africa.” Thirdly, by pursuing the design of the complex whose “approach should command respect and contribute to the enhancement of the urban environment and emphasize the importance of the building”, re-conceptualizing existing values associated to the site and its geographic nature.

The brief affirms the forth principal of creating a ‘citadel’ of hope. This is embodied in the statement: “The new PAP complex will symbolize a coming of age of the African continent.”
(www.papcompetition.com, cited 31 May 2007)

This exploration reaffirms the faltering of the postcolonial project. Seen from a larger historical perspective we see the colonialist changing the collective memories of the indigenous people through such efforts, the postcolonial using the same to replace the colonial memories, and factionalism replacing memories of the liberation struggle. The strategy of rapidly reforming the collective memories are used today in the same way the colonialist used it to turn free people into colonial subjects.

Elleh (2002:162) identifies three core purposes for political architecture acting as a tool of historical remolding:
• It is used for cleansing the present of past memories.
• It is used for strengthening and constructing a desired future
• It is used for idealizing and representing the present as if it is perfect.

In the opinion of this thesis the brief for the PAP complex reinforces the above an essentially perpetuating postcolonial and colonial spatial practices in separating the building of power from the context of the everyday and treating it as a ‘citadel of hope’ and an icon signaling change.

Considering the construction of a nationalism through architecture appealing to the likes of mostly those who are intended to share within the constructed commonality (mostly locals), the iconic nature of the architecture would be used to change of form opinions on a wider field. This seeks to gain the building recognition both in terms of the global architectural culture and in terms of associating the iconic edifice with its patron.

“The government leadership may well want a building that is a revered museum piece and an alien intrusion as long as it can be promoted as a sign of progress.” (Vale 1992:52)

The brief regards the iconic nature of the building as one of the main requirements if not prime generator of form. The proposed complex should be a “landmark building reflecting the aspirations of the continent”, the brief also states that “visibility in the evening is important, therefore the complex should be beautifully lit.”

(www.papcompetition.com, cited 31 May 2007)

**Conclusion**

In analyzing the architectural vision and requirements of the brief four main theoretical issues were identified. These are:

- The use of architecture to construct ‘nationalism’
- The role of the elite in political architecture
- The postcolonial assimilation of colonial spatial paradigms
- The use of architecture as an icon of economic development

In understanding how the architectural vision of the brief was an attempt at constructing nationality, the use of architecture to legitimize the Pan African position, which simultaneously creates a constructed commonality acting as a stabilizing social action and masking the reality of the true social condition of Africa, was discovered. In understanding how the architectural vision coincided with the role of the elite in political architecture, the discovery of the perpetuation of spatial hierarchical systems that favors the parliamentarian over the people,
and results in a inequitable platform of discussion, was made. In the opinion of this thesis, this would invalidate the core mandate of the PAP.

In understanding how the architectural vision coincided with the role of the elite in political architecture, the discovery of the perpetuation of spatial hierarchical systems that favors the parliamentarian over the people, and results in a inequitable platform of discussion, was made. In the opinion of this thesis, this would invalidate the core mandate of the PAP.

In discussing the role of the architectural vision in the postcolonial perpetuation of colonialist spatial paradigms, it was acknowledged that this discourse is well intentioned; however they assimilated colonial spatial strategies. An exploration of the brief against the aforementioned colonial spatial strategies discovered a link between the architectural vision of the brief and these colonial paradigms. Political architecture is used as a tool of remolding the collective memories of citizens. An analysis of the brief reaffirmed this point.

In the discussion of the architectural icon as a symbol of economic development, it was discovered that while constructing nationalism through architecture related to the remolding of the collective memory of locals, the iconic discourse applied to a larger audience, including the global architectural culture and potential foreign investors. The use of an iconic building raises the stature of a nation state at an international level and signifies growth to locals, and potential investors. The brief of the PAP complex affirmed a connection to these ideals.

**Exploration of provincial, national and international legislative architecture**

Right: Photomontage of case study buildings
Shepard ed. 2006:10,17
Guirgola 1979:119
Frampton 1989:11
Bouman ed. 1999:56
This section of the chapter will look at various projects of a legislative nature in order to understand the architectural paradigms pertaining to this category of architectural projects. This exploration will be framed against the backdrop of the theoretical context relating to the architectural vision of the PAP.

The issues that come forward to this exploration are:

- The use of architecture to construct a commonality for the purpose of legitimizing a political position and reinforcing the status quo
- The role of the elite in political architecture and the resultant architectural edifice that reinforces an elitist position
- The postcolonial project that recoups colonial architectural paradigms in seeking to produce an architecture to be the antithesis of colonial spatial practices
- The use of architecture as a tool of novelty that produces a highly visible icon signaling change, progress and economic development

The following projects have been identified as valuable case studies in this regard

**Provincial Legislatures**

- Mpumalanga Provincial government Legislature and Office Complex; Nelspruit, Mpumalanga, South Africa; by Meyer Pienaar Tayob Schnepal Architects & Urban Designers
- Northern Cape Provincial Government Legislature; Kimberly, Northern Cape, South Africa; by Louis Ferreira da Silva Architects; completed 2004

**National Parliaments**

- The National Assembly Complex; Dhaka, Bangladesh; by Louis I. Khan, completed 1983
- Australian Parliament House; Canberra, Australia; by Mitchell Guirgola & Thorp Architects, completed 1988

**Continental Assemblies**

- The European Parliament; Strasbourg, France; by Architecture Studio, completed 1998