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The Architecture of nation-building in Africa as a development aid project: Designing the capitols of Kinshasa (Congo) and Dodoma (Tanzania) in the post-independence years

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ABSTRACT

After independence in the early 1960s, new nation states in Africa started a long and often ambiguous process of nation-building. This process of nation-building was also literally a process of building as the newly independent states initiated large-scale building projects by which they aspired to represent their power in the urban space, as well as break with the material legacies of the colonial past. Yet, even though the new regimes strived for new norms and forms to express their identity as new and independent Africans states, because of a lack of expertise and funds, they mostly commissioned foreign architects within the framework of development programs, thereby clearly mirroring colonial practices. This article retraces the intricate web of foreign development experts and networks of aid underpinning the 'architecture of nation-building' in two post-independence capital cities: Kinshasa (DRCongo) and Dodoma (Tanzania). This comparative analysis brings to the fore the various motives behind the foreign investments in the African nation-building projects in an era dominated by Cold War antagonism, as well as the diverse strategies deployed by African states to turn the competing networks of Cold War solidarity to their own advantage. Considering the vast reliance on development aid, I argue that the 'architecture of nation-building' in Kinshasa and Dodoma is not primarily representing national identity, but is foremost an expression of the new 'partnerships in development' concluded in the post-independence years, as well as the failure of these partnerships in terms of achieving the initial development goals. Moreover, bearing in mind China's role in the implementation, I state that while the 'architecture of nation-building' in both cities clearly represents the regime of development aid, it does so in a way that profoundly differs from what was originally intended.

1. Introduction

A strong process of nation-building characterized the post-independence years in sub-Saharan Africa. Apart from a clear wish to modernize and break with the material legacies of colonialism, such as racial segregation, the nation-building aspirations of the newly independent states can also be described as a rather ambiguous process of uniting different ethnicities, races and religions within the framework of artificial borders drawn in the process of decolonization (Cooper, 2002; Young, 1994). The process of nation-building was also literally a process of building and the resulting 'architecture of nation-building', used here as container for various architectural, urban design and urban planning projects, is well epitomized in the ambitious plans of many African regimes in the optimistic years following independence for a new 'capitol'. With this term I mean, parallel to Lawrence Vale's definition, the site that houses government buildings, such as parliaments, ministries and public administrations (Vale, 1992b). Mostly these new capitols were planned in the existing capitals, the inherited locus of power. Yet, sometimes, and for different reasons among which historic, strategic, economic, nationalistic, and to some extent, ethnicity 'neutral' reasons, they were part of a project for a new capital, as was the case in Abuja (Nigeria), Gaborone (Botswana), Lilongwe (Malawi) and Nouakchott (Mauritania). Consequently, the capitol design was often paralleled with a masterplan for a new

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capital, but even in the case of existing capitals new capital masterplans were developed, not in the least because of substantial demographic pressures in the years after independence.

In this paper I will compare two rather unexplored sub-Saharan African cities in which the nation-building aspirations of the new post-colonial regimes crystallized during the 1960s and 1970s, thus in particular highlighting the material outcome of the nation-building process. First, Kinshasa, the capital of the Democratic Republic Congo (hereafter Congo, a former Belgian colony, under Mobutu renamed 'Zaire' in his quest to erase the colonial toponymy), known as Léopoldville under Belgian colonial occupation. Second, Dodoma, from 1973 replacing Dar es Salaam as the capital city of Tanzania, then Tanganyika, a former United Kingdom administered League of Nations mandate. Both cities significantly differ in size and scope, but are chosen because they reflect two distinct types of capitol-building projects mentioned above: in Kinshasa the capitol project was incorporated in the existing city, whereas in Dodoma the capital shift to an entirely new town reached its culmination in the capitol project. Yet, even more important in light of the article's objectives are the contrasting landscapes of aid underpinning the capitol projects in both cities. In this article I will dissect the intricate web of foreign experts and networks of aid operational in Kinshasa and Dodoma in the post-independence years, as well as their complex interrelationship with local actors and policies. By opposing these two radical differing cases, I will bring to light, from a comparative perspective, the various motives behind the foreign investments in the architecture of nation-building in sub-Saharan Africa during an era dominated by Cold War antagonism, as well as the diverse strategies deployed by African states to turn the competing networks of Cold War solidarity to their own advantage. Complementarily, I will scrutinize to what extent the capitol projects developed within the framework of development aid programs have been implemented, as well as highlight the decisive role of China in this process. Therefore, while there exists an extensive literature on both the 'architecture of nation-building' and the rise of development aid in Africa in the post-independence years, on which I will come back later, the main contribution of this article is relating both topics to one each other, thereby arguing that the 'architecture of nation-building' is offering a valuable, though largely unexploited, angle to better understand the mechanisms of development aid in post-colonial Africa during the Cold War era.

To compare both cases, this article richly draws on new archival sources and unpublished reports from the *University of Guelph Library* (Macklin L. Hancock – Project Planning Associates Fonds, hereafter Guelph) in Guelph (Canada) and the *Archives of the Bureau d'Études d'Aménagement et d'Urbanisme* (hereafter BEAU, the former MFU) in Kinshasa. Additionally, various interviews with experts involved in the capitol projects of both cities, in particular with Marc Pain (MFU) for the Kinshasa case and Matthias Nuss (PPAL) for the Dodoma case.[1] Furthermore, this article also builds upon a critical reading of both French and English secondary literature. With regard to Kinshasa, literature on post-colonial urban planning is extremely scarce. Consequently, the research presented here is filling a deep scholarly gap.[2] However, some geographical studies exists in which the urban planning of the city is treated in the margins (De Maximy, 1984; Pain, 1983; Piermay, 1997).[3] In contrast, a wide range of articles has been written on Dodoma (see further), most of them published in the decade after the publication of the Dodoma masterplan. Yet, Dodoma also recently attracted some new scholarly attention, which is however, in general, not paying much attention to the topic of development aid, the central focus of this article.

2. The 'architecture of nation-building' in Africa and the profession of the development expert

Notwithstanding significant differences in postcolonial ideologies, on which I will expand below, the discourse underpinning the nation-building efforts of both Congo and Tanzania can be considered an ambivalent mix of often conflicting elements, three in particular. First, the revival of the colonial, and thus typically western, development discourse installed after the Second World War, characterized by a strong belief that socio-economic change could be engineered and that experts were indispensable in this process (Cooper, 2002). Second, the return to 'authentic' pre-colonial norms and values, and the related 'invention of tradition', as defined by Eric Hobsbawm (1983). And finally the inauguration of a socialist ideology, inspired by Chinese examples (Taylor, 2006).

After gaining independence in 1960 Congo first faced a turbulent period. The country achieved relative stability after a military coup in 1965 by Mobutu Sese Seko, as well as a harsh dictatorship (Ndaywel è Nziem, 1998; Stengers, 1989; Young, 1965). In 1971 president Mobuto introduced the 'Recours à l'Authenticité' ('The return to the Authentic'), even though the Congo was (and still is) characterized by a myriad of ethnicities. Hence it was foremost a process of invention of tradition, with Mobutu chiefly favouring his own ethnicity. The 'Recours à l'Authenticité' included the *zairanisation* of names and the obligation to wear 'authentic' clothing, the so-called *abacost*, and later also the nationalisation of foreign properties and companies. This ideology was explicitly inspired by the cultural revolution in China under Mao Zedong (Ndaywel è Nziem, 1998; p. 684). At the same time Mobutu promoted a modernization discourse that in many ways echoed the colonial development discourse implemented by the Belgians after the Second World War, among others through the Ten Year Plan for socio-economic development in 1949, in which urban centres were devoted much attention (Vanthemsche, 1994).

In Tanzania (independent in 1961) Julius Kambarage Nyerere, and his one-party state in which TANU (Tanganyika African National Union, from 1977 Chama Cha Mapinduzi, CCM) was supreme over all the other organs of the state, applied a politics of self-reliance and *ujamaa* ('rural development and socialism'). This state ideology was drawn up in the Arusha Declaration of 1967, Tanzania's socialist charter (Nyerere, 1967).[4] The objective was to create a self-supporting socialist nation with an emphasis on rural development (Brennan, 2012; Iliffe, 1979). Although Nyerere often referred to pre-colonial modes of life, this model of rural development was above all inspired by its Chinese equivalent and was thus largely an invented tradition.[5] Part of the policy of *ujamaa* were the compulsory movements of peasantry to collective *ujamaa* villages, the so-called 'villagization campaigns', as well as

[1] I interviewed Marc Pain, geographer and former member of MFU, in Paris in 2009, where he also showed his private collection to me. Afterwards until present day, we regularly corresponded via e-mail. With Matthias Nuss, urban planner involved in the capital design of Dodoma for PPAL, I conducted an e-mail interview, consisting of 72 e-mails, between July-October 2016. Matthias Nuss also allowed me to read the private letters (in German) he sent to his parents while living in Dodoma in 1977. He also shared with me photos and other visual material.

[2] Some of my research findings on post-colonial urban planning in Kinshasa, and in particular the functioning of the MFU have been presented in: Beeckmans and Lagae (2015), Beeckmans (2010).

[3] On colonial planning in Congo: see De Meulder (2000).

[4] *Ujamaa* is described by the Africanist Myers (2011; p. 65) as 'one of the most significant "alternative visions" of urbanism and human settlement that has emerged from postcolonial Africa'.

[5] Nyerere visited China five times during his presidency, and 8 times after 1985 when he voluntarily resigned from office.

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