

The Origin of The Swahili Stone House and The Dual Nature of Swahili Urbanism: *A Case Study of Lamu*

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Abstract

Swahili architecture is characterised by grandeur stone houses on one side and earth-and-wattle houses on the other. By considering the concept of transculturation as introduced by Felipe Hernandez et al. (2005), and employing hermeneutic research methods in the critical analysis of historical data, this paper explores the factors that contributed to the transformation of Swahili material culture and perceived dual nature of the urban morphology. Key findings point towards a broader range of socio-cultural issues namely; trade, market competition among merchants, increased population densities, practices of sponsorship, involvement and the adoption of immigrants as the motivations for the transformation from earth-and-wattle to stone building technology. The author recommends an analysis of Swahili architecture that extends beyond the widely-accepted traditional symbols in order to uncover the underlying intangible heritage.

Keywords: House form, Settlements, Swahili culture, Transculturation.

INTRODUCTION

The key developments surrounding the political and economic setting of the East African coast have influenced the form and evolution of Swahili architecture and particularly that of the residential typology. While the history and origin of the Swahili stone house remains contentious, scholars of culture and house form have in the past acknowledged that there is an obvious difficulty in attempting to transfer ideas and concepts from one culture to another. Swahili culture and its subsequent architecture is seen to display a myriad of influences producing an integrated mix that is different from its antecedents, something Deetz (1977), a historical archaeologist and anthropologist, termed as creolization. Historical archaeological studies of the East African coast are relevant in providing a solid ground for the concept of hybridity or creolization in material culture. Much of the literature concerning Swahili architecture is hinged on the work of early archaeologists, anthropologists and historians visiting the East African Coast in the 19th and 20th centuries. As regards the Swahili stone house, conclusive published literature that

has commanded authority and continues to be referred to today is based on the earlier works of Prins (1961); Chittick (1974); Garlake (1966); Ghaidan (1975); Allen (1993); Horton (1994).

The controversy that surrounds this debate and from which arguments have stemmed is the shifting paradigm between academic imperialism and afrocentrism. This study does not attempt to determine who introduced stone and mortar (a material that already existed in the coast) to the East African building technology; without scientific evidence, such debates have proved futile. In an attempt to take the debate forward, this paper considers the concept of transculturation, which is the antithesis of the notion of acculturation, as introduced by Hernández et al. (2005), an architect specialised in translation theory and translational architectures.

THEORY

The kind of ambivalence that exists in the definition of Swahili identity, based on the merging of an

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African-Bantu and an Arab community during the advent of Islam, is the genesis of the contention and the perceptible dual nature of Swahili culture. Referencing Homi K. Bhabha - a notable figure in contemporary post-colonial studies, who has developed concepts such as hybridity and ambivalence - Hernández et al. (2005) and Hernandez (2010) note that architectural history is in most cases concerned with the disciplinary agendas of architects and historians, not with the interests of the people in general. The awareness of this ambivalence in the discourse of Swahili origins - a simultaneous inclusion and exclusion of either Persian, Arab or African influence in the material culture of the Waswahili is relevant in providing a solid ground for the notion of cultural hybridisation.

While acculturation implies the unidirectional imposition of one dominant culture upon another, transculturation is held to overcome these hierarchical implications and means that a process of mutual interaction exists between cultures, despite the unequal distribution of power characteristic of transcultural relations (Hernández et al., 2005).

Transculturation, as used in the context of Latin America, is concerned with the inherent complex socio-political processes that transform a culture, society or geographical context. This offers numerous possibilities to connect architecture with a broader range of cultural and political issues (Hernández et al., 2005). Using this concept, this study seeks to analyse the factors that influenced the transformation of Swahili culture, the origins of the stone house and the perceived dual nature of the urban fabric.

Further to, Rapoport (1969) - an architect and one of the founders of environment-behaviour studies and the relationship between house, form and culture - urges that the materials and construction technology available is not the determinant of the building form or size, but is rather a modifying factor. The decision of what to build is in most cases decided on other grounds that have to do with socio-cultural values, religious views and economic status. The materials and construction

techniques available either limit or enable the predetermined decisions.

Where culture and behaviour is concerned, Rapoport (1969), further argues both for the view that perception and behaviour are culturally linked, and therefore changeable, and for the view that they are inborn and hence constant. The distinction of what is constant and what is changeable is helpful in understanding the form and motivations of both houses and settlements (Rapoport, 1969).

The benefits of these approaches to architectural analysis is not merely to dismantle hierarchical structures, but to urge the engagement of marginalised practices beyond the merely widely accepted representative forms. The aim of this study is to accord validity to the intangible heritage inherent in both Bantu and Arab cultures.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research is qualitative, employing theory and a methodology of interpretation of a broader range of cultural issues. Data was collected from secondary and primary sources, through literature review and observation, respectively. Reference is also made to the author's earlier work (Mutonga, 2019), which explored the determinants of house forms in Lamu through a comparative analysis of various house typologies. The data is presented through text, photographic images, architectural drawings and maps. With a focus on the period preceding the mid-tenth century, when stone technology is deemed to have been introduced, the study employs hermeneutic research methods in the critical analysis of historical data, publications and visual ethnography to build a case for a transforming typology. **Figure 1** sets out the history and chronology of external influences by early visitors to the East African coast.

By paying relevance to the theories of transculturation and cultural motivations of houses and settlements by Hernández et al. (2005) and Rapoport (1969) respectively, the study extends beyond the limits of analysing buildings, towards the motivations of forms and settlement

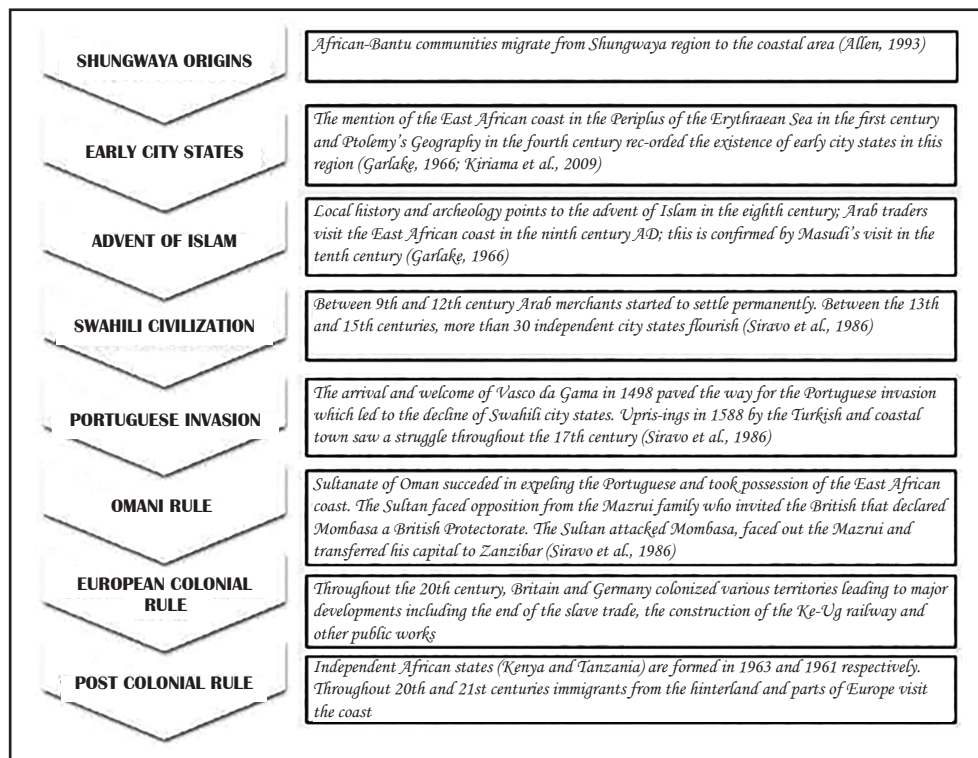


FIGURE 1
Summary of history and chronology of external influences by early visitors to the East African coast
Source: Author 2020

patterns. The aim of this study is to connect architecture with a broader range of cultural and socio-political issues and urge engagement with hierarchical notions in architectural theory. It is supported by field analysis of present day Lamu as a case study of the origins of the Swahili stone house and the dual nature of Swahili urbanism. Lamu is selected because it is the oldest and best preserved Swahili settlement along the East African coast with continuous occupation to date. The traditional Swahili stone house is selected as an enigma which represents, both architecturally and historically, the most important part of the evolution of Swahili architecture.

RESULTS

Swahili History

Spear (2000) - a pre-colonial historian and theorist - notes that the Waswahili have long stressed differences between themselves and their neighbours, emphasizing their putative descent from Persian and Arab immigrants and their own civilized ways - *uungwana*. According to Garlake (1966) - an archaeologist and art historian who

made an influential contribution to the study of East African Islamic architecture - Swahili culture is guided by Islam at its core, includes fundamental bases of cultures from abroad, and has its language and materials of everyday life coming from a strong local African influence. Allen (1974) - an anthropologist and historian who wrote extensively about Swahili origins - describes Lamu, the oldest Swahili town along the East African coast, as a seasonal or year-round trading site for the Bantu-speaking people of the interior.

Although there is no archaeological evidence to confirm this, the mention of the East African coast in the Periplus of the Erythraean Sea in the first century and Ptolemy's Geography in the fourth century recorded the existence of early city states in this region (Garlake, 1966; Kiriama et al., 2009). Local history and archaeology points to the advent of Islam in the eighth century; this is confirmed by Masudi's visit in the tenth century. According to Nnamdi Elleh - an architectural theorist and historian in culture, politics and religion - Lamu

was first and foremost an African town; the process of Islamization took place long after the town had prospered and attracted Muslim settlers from the Arabian Peninsula (Nnamdi, 1996). Pointing to the distinction between the Islamic architecture of the East African coast and that of Arabia, Nnamdi (1996) describes Swahili culture and architecture as a true representation of African triple heritage architecture with an indigenous origin and Islamic influence;

Further evidence for the African origin of Lamu is the fact that funerary inscriptions on tombs are rare in East Africa, except for those in Arabic after the 19th Century. This suggests late Arabian influence in architecture.

Citing Garlake (1996), a more recent study by architect Steyn (2002) notably states that the story of the Swahili stone house and the historical setting in which it existed for nearly a thousand years cannot be neatly packaged. Garlake (1966) suggests that the standing architecture had little African influence;

Its forms are entirely alien to those of the hinterland.

Although academically imperial because of the focus on stone buildings on the basis that they are the only true definition of architecture, Garlake's work is of great value to the history of the East African coast. Albeit descriptions and inferences such as 'a slow and subsequent decline in design and technique of imported architecture', and 'little African influence', Garlake (1966) noted that 'it is characteristic of Islamic architecture that in every region local building materials are exploited and architectural style adapted to them', implying that coral, mortar and plaster were local building materials adapted to Islamic architecture. It follows then that the mosque was the first building to use these materials and the residential typology might well have borrowed the technique from the religious typology. Archaeologists like Chittick (1974) - who set out views on the history and chronology of the Arab settlement before the fourteenth century based on archaeological evidence from excavations at Kilwa, - and Horton (1994) - a maritime and historical archaeologist - show that the stone towns were preceded from

the ninth century by slowly expanding local communities of farmers, fishermen and traders who capitalized on their location to trade with visiting merchants (Spear, 2000). Horton's archaeological evidence at Shanga has confirmed the reconstruction of earth buildings using stone laid on the existing foundations;

These new stone walls are often built directly over the foundations of the earlier walls. It is this period of building that the present ruined town largely belongs with buildings which can be directly compared to the Waungwana houses of Lamu but whose plan can be traced back directly to pre-stone daub houses (Horton, 1994).

Horton's critical analysis of the early Swahili settlements i.e. excavations at Shanga - a site on the south side of Pate Island near Lamu - reveal that while the earliest occupation dates to the mid-eighth century, stone building technique was deemed to have been introduced in the mid-tenth century i.e. the period which followed the advent of Islam (Horton, 1994). However, acknowledging the controversies surrounding these archaeological studies and the fact that historians working with colonial milieu sought to stress the Arab roots of the Swahili, Horton (1994) concludes that;

The archaeological evidence provides a model of a society whose basic structures have remained largely unaltered for a thousand years, but have remained flexible enough to incorporate major changes such as Islam, (Indian ocean trade), colonization, and latterly westernization.

Social and Spatial Transformation

Horton's definition of the early Waswahili is economic-based; 'a trading people, who live between southern Somalia and northern Mozambique as well as on the offshore islands of Zanzibar, Pemba and Mafia' (Horton in Pearson, 1994), while that of Allen (1993) is purely geographic and points to the liberalism that existed in Swahili culture; 'a person who has made his/her home in or around one of the traditional Swahili settlements of the East African coast; whose lifestyle conforms to those of his neighbours; and who has adopted Swahili as his preferred language'. A common feature to traditional Swahili settlements is the clan structure, whose membership, (in Lamu), was

established through patrilineal descent (Prins, 1971 as cited in Ghaidan 1975; Horton, 1994).

There were few women among the early waves of Arab migrants, which meant that most men would have married African wives and as a result, nobility in Swahili society is patriarchal; the father kept his pedigree for his offspring irrespective of the ethnicity of their mother. The situation is not the same in the case of a Mwarabu (Arab) wife with a non-pedigree husband (Ghaidan, 1975).

Horton (1994) highlights that for such an origin within a clan-based system, those Arabs who did marry into the society must have done so within the existing structures; the Bantu community had an established clan system. Trade and exchange of commodities across the Indian Ocean was to the benefit of both communities and the socio-political and economic order that resulted from this engagement must have been to the benefit of the high society in both lineages. According to Prins (1971) and Zein (1974) as cited by Horton (1994), clan membership indicates an individual's hierarchical position. Consequently, Swahili settlement patterns were organized in this hierarchical and clan-based order.

The manifestation of this social order is in the character of Swahili towns. Prins (1971), as cited by Ghaidan (1975), describes a tendency for patrician family heads to move to the northern half of the town with advancing years. The evidence of this relationship between social order and spatial character can be seen in Lamu Island. The group to the north, Mkomani, is made up of large mansions which are quarters of the town's influential lineages. The southern one, Langoni, is the poorer section whose houses are built of earth walls and thatch roofs of coconut palm (Ghaidan, 1975). Lamu was divided into a large number of small wards (*mitaa*), each being a group of buildings where a number of closely related lineages live and who depended on this neighbourhood for much of their social and economic development (Ghaidan, 1975). This explains why there are over thirty mosques, which is a large number for such a small development.

Another way to join this society was through blood-brotherhood rituals between traders and

large numbers of the local population. As observed by early visitors to the Swahili coast, such as Ibn Battuta AD 1331 (Horton, 1994), this system, referred to as sponsorship, was a common method of trade. It included a merchant being housed with one of the locals, and sponsored in all his dealings. The house typology, as seen in **Figure 2**, became a facilitator for this activity.

*The architectural evidence for this, found in eighteenth-century Lamu houses as well as Shanga houses, is a separate guest room, attached to the courtyard of the house, which was known as the *sebule*. A result of this was that the house became the focus of trading activities, and that ownership of the house was the mechanism of monopolistic control, not that of the gateway into the central enclosure. (This idea of a central communal enclosure is not confined to Muslim groups but also occurs in a modified form among the Mijikenda). If one did not own a stone house, then trade was impossible. Stone houses were constructed and occupied as a symbol of aristocracy and permanence. Permanence implied creditworthiness and in a society based on trade, this was essential to the successful merchant (Horton, 1994).*



FIGURE 2

Coral and earth houses, Shanga, dating to the late the late thirteenth century, representing an intermediate stage in the evolution of the stone Waungwana house
Source: Horton 1994

Transformation of the Swahili Stone House

Swahili culture has been seen to display a myriad of influences from the wider Indian Ocean, producing an integrated mix that is different from its antecedents. While scholars of culture and house form acknowledge that there is an obvious

difficulty in attempting to transfer ideas and concepts from one culture to another, the history and origin of the Swahili stone house remains a contentious issue among architectural scholars. Garlake (1966) suggests that the architecture had little African influence, while Nnamdi (1996) notes that the architecture of Lamu is distinct and contrasting other Islamic architecture which goes to show that Swahili stone houses suggest African roots for some features of their structure and planning.

According to archaeologist Pearson (1994), change and transformation of traditional houses in developing countries is, in most cases, associated with external influences. Pearson (1994) adds that change traverses through various aspects of the culture, which in turn manifest themselves in the built form. **Figures 3a** and **3b** show stone and earth houses in Lamu town.

This view is supported by Ghaidan's inferences. Ghaidan (1975) suggests that increased densities from the increased intermarriages, coupled with scarcity of land available for expansion, led to the vertical expansion of houses; and where possible they bridged over streets. These bridges, known as *wikio*, belonged to one house but depended for structural stability on the external walls of another. **Figure 4** is an example of a *wikio* in Lamu. There are twenty-three *mawikio* in Lamu, the longest one being eighteen metres long. While this urban ideology is linked with cultures of South Arabia



FIGURE 3a
Langoni, the southern section of Lamu town featuring mud and thatch buildings and a coral stone building in the foreground
Source: Thesiger 1892



FIGURE 3b
Lamu waterfront showing thatch and wattle houses in the waterfront and coral rag stone structures (Lamu Fort at the centre) in the background
Source: Thesiger 1892



FIGURE 4
Image showing a *wikio* connecting two buildings in the enclave of Mkomani in Lamu
Source: Author 2016

and the Gulf region, the author observes that planning modes in traditional Bantu settlements of the Agikuyu, Akamba, Taita, Mijikenda of Shungwaya (Allen, 1993) - where the early Swahili migrants are deemed to have hailed from - and the Somali to the north, express similar ideologies of involvement and incremental housing. **Figure 5** shows the boundary of the Shungwaya region. In the Mijikenda *kaya* complex, a cluster of houses belonging to various clans is arranged in a perfect circle facing a common centre called *moro*. The common centre served similar functions to the

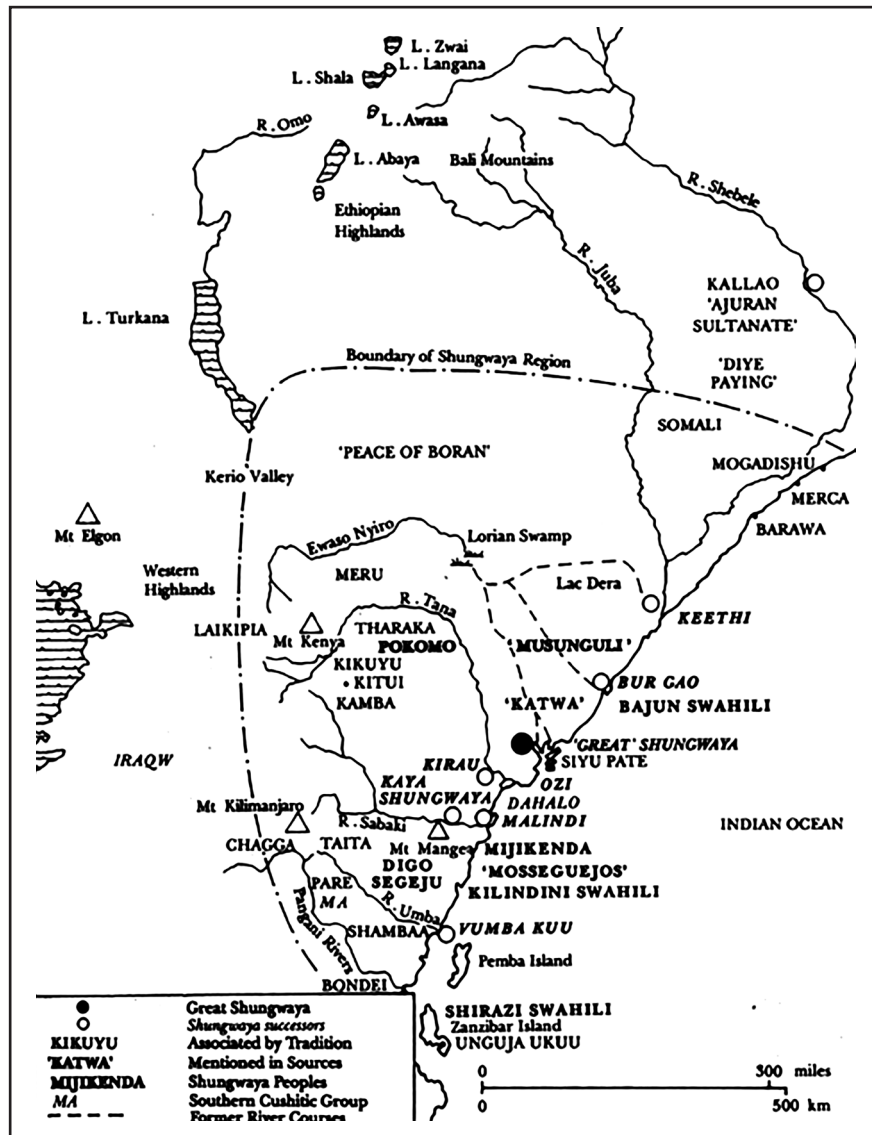


FIGURE 5
Boundary of Shungwaya region, and associated Shungwaya people, including the Mijikenda, who settled along the coast
Source: Allen 1993

homestead's centre; both were situated in a central courtyard around which the dwellings were arranged (Anyamba et al., 1994). These cultural relationships and practices of sponsorship, involvement and the adoption of immigrants, have helped sustain the built environment of Swahili settlements, providing spaces with contextual meaning.

As the towns began to flourish, immigrants, both from the hinterland and the new coastal arrivals, acquired a new definition. The terms Waungwana- implying the civilized urban dwellers that were

already living in stone houses- and Washenzi- referring to the new comers and uncouth villagers- became distinctive terms. All the major decisions concerning the town, war, marriage, trade and religion were made in the stone section; even the decision of who could build in stone, where to build and how, became inherent complex socio-political processes that transformed the society. According to Sheriff (2010)- an emeritus historian- the dual nature of Swahili urbanism was rooted in the historical material context of merchant capitalism and plantation slavery as the urban areas grew. Tracing the Indian

Ocean trade along the East African coast and adjacent Asian world, Sheriff (2010) alludes to a symbiotic relationship between the mainland and maritime worlds. The basic division was spatially constituted in the kinds of homes people built and where they built them. Stone residential areas were built up by merchants and plantation owners, while the day-labourers, servants and domestic slaves built using earth (*udongo*) and wooden poles (*fito*) with a thatch (*makuti*) roof outside the town proper. Although constructed of so called temporary materials— earth, mangrove poles and palm thatch – the construction techniques were highly developed such that the houses found in uncontrolled settlements at the coast were often vastly superior to those surrounding most African towns. The stone houses, which were considered to be more advanced, incorporated coral rag and limestone technology and applied modern conveniences such as in-house baths, water wells, toilets and sewer systems. Smooth white lime plaster finish was used for exterior walls on stone houses, creating purist, minimalist and austere forms (Sheriff, 2010). The minimalist exterior facades contrasted the elaborate and intricately decorated interiors, which is symbolic of the intangible heritage of the people.

An example of an 18th Century traditional stone house is the Swahili House Museum (Figure 6) which is characterised by an entrance porch -*daka*- that leads directly into a foyer -*tekani*- which faces a courtyard -*kiwanda*. The presence and size of the courtyard was determined, particularly by

the affluence, and size of the family. From the courtyard, a set of arches leads into a series of galleries -*misanaa*- which run parallel to the width of the building. The linear order of galleries signified a hierarchical privacy gradient with the inner most room -*msanaa wa ndani*- being the master bedroom where conception, birth and death rituals were conducted. Like in most traditional houses, there were two bathrooms—the first near the entrance and the second in the innermost room. The kitchen -*kidari cha meko*- is located on the rooftop to allow for the escape of smoke and heat and to prevent small children from accessing the fire and its associated hazards. The most outstanding element is the contrast between a plain white pure exterior facade and the intricate interior plaster carvings and articulation (Mutonga, 2019). Figure 7 illustrates the intricate interior plaster carvings of an old house in Lamu under reconstruction.

Today, the dual nature of the urban morphology is evident in the planning of Lamu town, a product of at least five centuries of uninterrupted building. The town started to take shape in its present location during the fifteenth century. According to local folklore as well as archaeological evidence, there were two earlier settlements, the first south of the present town, now buried under Hidanu Hill, and the second north of today's town. Both were abandoned in favour of the present site. The town first developed as a small settlement in Pangahari and Yumbe at the southern end of the present town. This is where the council's chamber

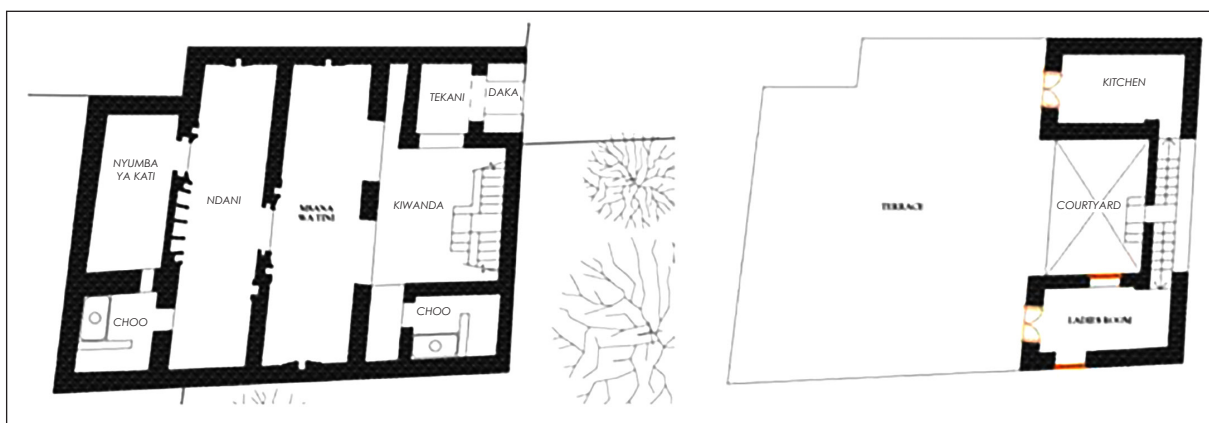


FIGURE 6
Spatial planning of ground and first floor, Swahili house Museum
Source: Author-modified 2014 (from Lamu Museum)



FIGURE 7
Elaborate interior designs of an old house in the enclave of Mkomani, Lamu under reconstruction
Source: Author 2016

was located and where the Friday Mosque still is. Rapoport (1969) suggests a multidirectional relationship between the physical environment, culture, house form and planning. Lamu's physical setting determined the town's narrow and elongated shape and gave rise to the network of streets which run parallel and perpendicular to the sloping sand dune underneath (**Figure 8**).

Rainwater and waste water run down into the sea along the inclined alleyways, which explains why there are few dead-end streets in Lamu, contrary to the pattern of most Islamic towns. As the town expanded from individual buildings to clusters of related houses, co-operation in planning and construction must have become increasingly important. A complex network of streets was needed to provide access to individual buildings. While the general orientation of houses along a north-south axis may have imitated mosques due to religious precepts that require all qibla walls face Mecca, climatic considerations must have played a role as well. Buildings are oriented to catch prevailing north-east monsoon winds which cool the town during the hot-dry season (Ghaidan, 1975; National Museums of Kenya, 2001).

Ghaidan (1975) notes that in Shela and parts of Pate Island, people could still be seen living in earth and thatch house containing within their fabric, the remains of fine old stone-built ones. The inhabitants of Shela, original escapees from Manda, being strangers to Lamu, were only given shelter on the condition that they did not build in



FIGURE 8
The narrow and elongated shape of Lamu town
Source: Lamu Museum 2013

stone; stone houses were considered a privilege of people of pedigree. These are only a few pieces of evidence to prove that stone and earth towns are basically part of one and the same thing, although accommodating richer and poorer sections of society respectively. Stone and earth houses in Lamu are merely opposite ends of the same cultural spectrum (Allen, 1974; Ghaidan, 1975). Today, while most developments have evolved to incorporate contemporary building materials such as quarry stone and cement mortar

for the more grandeur forms, one can still observe modest houses constructed in traditional thatch and wattle (Figure 9).

At present, the two halves are known as Mkomani (north) and Langoni (south). The line between the 'northern' and 'southern' parts of Lamu runs just north of the Old Fort, and it is probably for this reason that the largest congregation of newcomers' houses is to the south of this line. As shown in Figure 10, the author confirms this, and notes that there are new developments both to the north and south of the old town, which can be attributed to the twentieth and twenty-first Century. The remains of earth-and-wattle houses are evident in the south near the Friday Mosque, while Swahili stone houses still stand in grandeur and permanence as a record of this dual nature.

According to Ghaidan, the Lamu stone house today does not date further than the mid-eighteenth Century and there is no evidence of earlier planning patterns from Lamu town. Older structures do exist below ground level; but until archaeological search uncovers earlier prototypes, it will not be possible to establish with any certainty



FIGURE 9
Image showing thatch and wattle structures in parts of Shela
Source: Author 2016

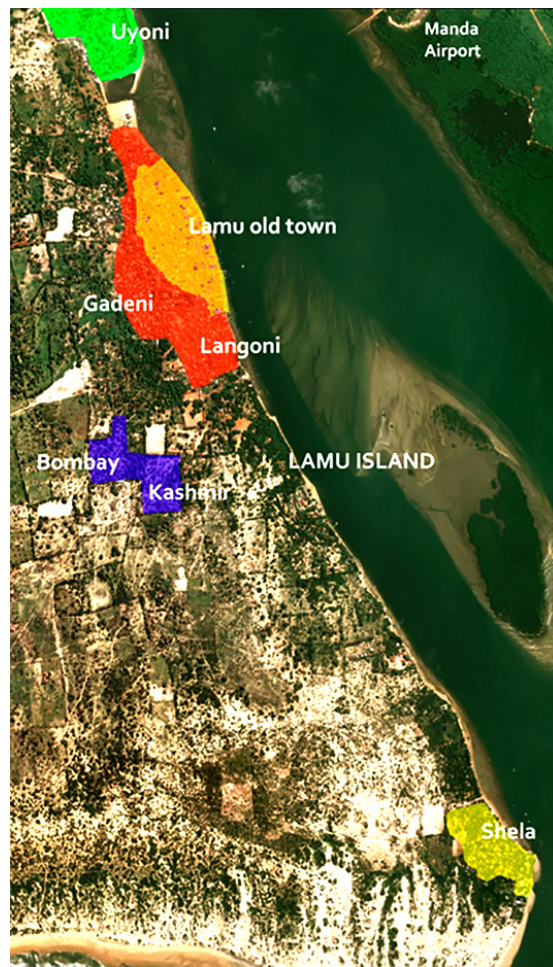


FIGURE 10
New developments North and South of the Old stone town
Source: Lamu Museum, Author-modified 2016

the lines the Lamu house has followed during the course of its development (Ghaidan, 1975). However, a comparative architectural analysis of four housing typologies built in different eras demonstrates that the stone houses are 'variations and adjustments of an otherwise expected model; adapted to meet the dynamic functions as the town grew with irresolute precepts' (Mutonga, 2019).

DISCUSSION

The bone of contention on the evolution of the Swahili Stone House is the simultaneous inclusion and exclusion of either Persian, Arab or African influence in the built form. The basis of these discussions is the shifting paradigm between academic imperialism and afrocentrism in the

documented history of the Swahili people. There have been debates as to whether the presence of the Arabs in East Africa was an invasion with strong views like Garlake's inference of colonization, against Allen's afrocentric position that the local inhabitants evolved, accommodated and adopted a new society. Notwithstanding, the theory of transculturation is useful in that it allows for the discussion of transcultural relations over changing conditions of interaction. The aim is not merely to dismantle hierarchical structures, but to accord validity to the contribution of both cultures. As mentioned before, transculturation implies that a process of mutual interaction exists between cultures despite the unequal distribution of power. This study argues for a process of mutual exchange; both the local inhabitants and Arab immigrants evolved and adopted new cultural practices, which is the basis of Swahili origin. The evidence of this is the strong, nearly balanced influence of both communities in the resulting language and material culture.

The author contends that at the height of Swahili civilization, in order to join the new society and facilitate trade, it became necessary to intermarry and adopt its cultural values. It is the author's contention that the intermarriages and clan-based system facilitated the 'swahilisation' process alluded by Allen (1993). External pressures to the society were exerted through increasing Indian Ocean trade, population rise and the development of the towns. Subsequently, the internal pressures to sustain merchant capitalism resulted in the changing material culture, which is implicit in the transformation of the built form. The author asserts that the stone houses are no more than the product of an evolution of architectural form.

The house became a facilitator of trade for visiting merchants, as evidenced by the layout of the 18th Century traditional stone house. The transformation of the Swahili House from earth to stone was influenced by market competition among Swahili merchants. Merchant communities were numerically small and depended on extensive intermarriage to maintain their economic and political positions. As trade grew, the house which was the facilitator and focus of trading activities became the physical manifestation of

permanence, which implied 'creditworthiness' both for individual merchants and the town as a whole. Not owning a stone house meant that one did not have the guestroom and trustworthiness necessary to host or sponsor a fellow merchant; if one did not own a stone house, then trade was impossible. As the towns developed, stone houses soon became a symbol of aristocracy for rich merchants and plantation owners. This transformation, as is with the case of the intangible heritage, must have occurred within the existing structures. Communities were organized around family lineages and economic strata. Ideologies of hospitality, involvement and incremental housing, inherent in the local culture, were pivotal to the growth of the early towns. The author argues that it is this intangible heritage which distinguishes Lamu, and particularly the enclave of Mkomani, from the latter developments. The streets resemble a series of individual self-contained volumes rather than a network of public thoroughfares. A similar spatial character is observed in what is conventionally termed as 'informal urban settlements' in modern day African cities.

It is clear that urbanisation, stone building technology, and socio-political system that resulted was a stabilizer for this form of capitalism; trade was indeed at the heart of Swahili culture while Islam and Kiswahili language were unifying factors. Some of the underlying truths of Swahili culture are deep-rooted in duality- a society split between two vast continents, whose complex social structure is yet to be fully understood. The physical manifestation and evidence of this transformation, from earth to stone, may well lie in the foundations of Lamu stone houses.

This social order, where prominent families built in stone, adopted exotic material culture and claimed prestigious Persian origins to distinguish themselves from both immigrant Arabs and mainland Africans, is one of the forms of this perceptible dual nature of Swahili society. It manifested itself in the stone-vs-earth building technology and the North-South divide of the urban morphology. The rise of the Indian Ocean trade in the period that was to follow saw the flourishing of Swahili 'city' states in what is considered the height of Swahili civilisation. As

plantations grew to support this trade and with new comers arriving to participate in trade, so did population densities increase; coral stone houses were continually built and occupied by merchants and plantation owners while labourers lived in earth houses in the southern part of the town. In the Omani Rule, a period that was to follow the Portuguese reign that saw the collapse of the Swahili towns, the civilised one (waungwana) adopted 'Arabness' (ustaarabu) which is evidence of the continuing transcultural relations. As a physical manifestation of this changing culture, the stone house continued to evolve, incorporating Arab, Indian and European styles in the latter years and drawing further from the earth house.

Further to, earth-and-wattle houses have evolved to incorporate contemporary building materials in a larger part of Lamu, south of the historic stone town. The north-south divide still exists and remnants of earth houses can be seen in parts of Shela as evidence of this dual nature of Swahili architecture and urban morphology.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study set out to connect architecture with a broader range of cultural and socio-political issues and urge engagement with hierarchical notions in architectural theory. Using the case of the Swahili stone house and the perceived dual nature of Swahili urbanism, the paper highlights a bone of contention underpinned by a shifting paradigm between academic imperialism and afrocentrism.

The study employs the theory of transculturation, which is held to overcome these hierarchical implications and means that a process of mutual interaction exists between cultures, despite the unequal distribution of power characteristic of transcultural relations such as those inherent in the Swahili culture. Through critical analysis, the discussion accords validity to mutual exchange of the intangible heritage and points towards economic and socio-cultural processes as the major determinants of the built form.

Indeed, change and transformation of traditional houses is in most cases associated with external

influences. In the case of the Swahili, trade, market competition among merchants and increased population densities are the motivations for the transformation from earth-and-wattle to stone building technology. As the towns began to flourish, practices of sponsorship, involvement and the adoption of immigrants influenced the need for grandeur houses and incremental housing. Single-storied houses transformed to double-storey, becoming increasingly modernized, utilizing new materials to bring a new sense of permanence, conspicuous consumption and individual accomplishment. The group to the north of Lamu, Mkomani, is made up of large mansions which are quarters of the town's influential lineages. The southern one, Langoni, is the poorer section whose houses are built of earth walls and thatch roofs of coconut palm. This is the origin of the perceived dual nature of Swahili urban fabric.

Swahili culture, like that of any other people, is not static; the social, economic and political structure, the way it organizes itself and the technology it employs is not static. It evolves, reacting to internal pressures and complex socio-political processes.

The paper recommends an analysis of Swahili architecture that extends beyond the widely-accepted traditional symbols in order to uncover the underlying intangible heritage. A comparative analysis of the traditional Swahili houses, those of the African hinterland and in the Gulf region, particularly Persian and Arab typologies, may uncover the underpinnings of their internal layout. Further to, an investigation of the houses situated beyond the boundaries of what is traditionally known as the stone section in Lamu is critical. Over the course of the town's development, the southern parts have changed drastically to incorporate contemporary building materials and technology. Furthermore, complex socio-political processes continue to exert pressure on the built form and development of Swahili towns like Lamu, necessitating an analysis of the urban development.

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