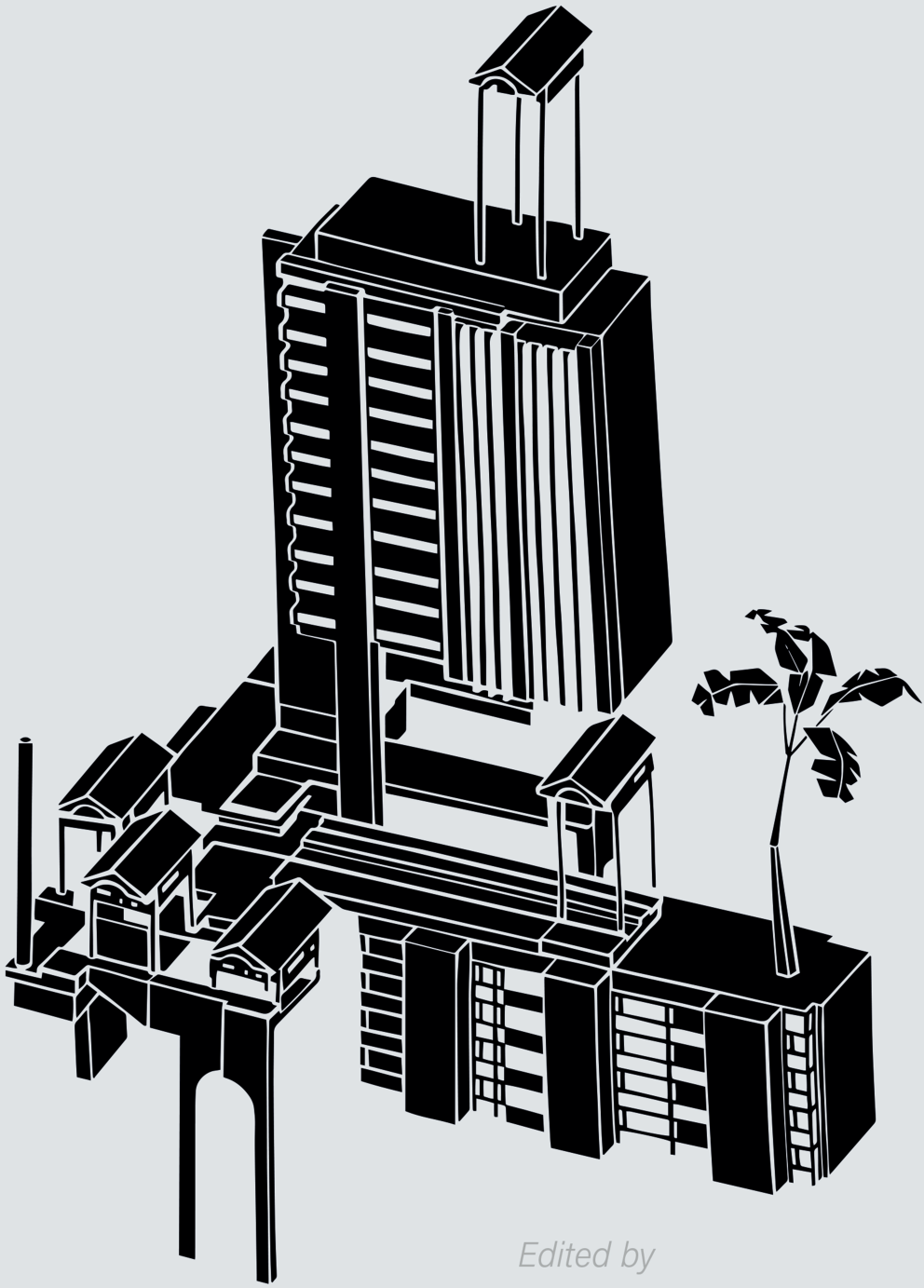
Architecture and Politics in Africa

Making, Living and Imagining Identities through Buildings



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This anxiety over the security limitations in the chamber has an indirect impact on making the chamber truly accessible to members of the public. For instance, in February 2020, parliamentary proceedings were halted after some MPs objected to the presence of prominent activists, Timothy Mtambo and Gift Trapence of the Human Rights Defenders Coalition (Kadzanja, 2020). Apart from the security dimension, other users feel constrained by the building. Staff in the printing press are stuck in the basement and, as indicated above, grapple with toxic fumes from the heavy-duty machines.

A senior official rationalised this anomaly by highlighting that the Chinese-built structure is the first phase and the second will house the printing press and other auxiliary offices.[57] Until that comes to pass, the user experience of the printing section remains clouded in smoke. Others also pointed out that the way the library was designed is not suitable for a parliamentary library.[58] This is because it was allocated one 'large' room too small to partition. This scenario has forced parliament management and officers and large stacks of books to share space with their clients. This shortage of space occurs in the context of a building that is designed with vast corridors which could have been reduced to optimise work areas. These are examples of the experiences of working in the building. The positive feelings of a separate and friendly work environment for the Legislature are tempered by uneasiness due to its limitations.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I leveraged the Chinese-funded parliament building in Malawi to explore China-Africa relations, Chinese foreign aid delivery in Africa and the extent of African state agency in engagements with big powers. I have shown that the implementation of this building project highlights the asymmetrical power between the donor and the recipient. Whereas the motivation for the building implies a mutually beneficial arrangement, the same cannot be said about the method of executing the project. The disproportionate power that China had in project management through exclusively determining the contractor, materials procurement and labour recruitment brings to the fore the larger question of the position of African states in determining the course of their development. Here, this is brought to bear through the ways in which Malawian companies were pushed out of the project to make exclusive way for those from China. In the chapter I have shown that, whereas the mind that conceived and initially designed the parliament building was Malawian, Chinese foreign aid had the effect of expunging this fact from history. This is

57 Interview with a senior parliament official, 26 July 2019.
58 Interview with a parliament official, Lilongwe, 5 July 2019.

why the extant materials related to the parliament building project incorrectly suggest the idea as Chinese – a version found even within official Malawi Government literature. I have also shown that the limited participation of Malawians in shaping the final product has had far-reaching implications. While it is a positive development that at least Malawi now has a purpose-built Parliament building that looks stunning from the outside, the users grapple with a dysfunctional structure that impacts their work. From the leaking chamber, the poorly designed library, the peeling tiles and the foul smell from the plumbing system, to the fume-filled printing section in the basement, the building simply is not as functional as the exterior veneer suggests.

Regarding the study of African states in their relation to China and other global players I have shown that the Malawi Parliament building project is a microcosm of China's new strategy of concrete investment in African governance architecture. There are already fifteen parliament buildings constructed and refurbished by the Chinese Government across the continent. Each has its own nuanced story, but I contend that the rudiments remain similar. This finding ignites an important discourse on the character of the ruling elites and the malleability of African states' institutional architecture. I have shown that the bureaucrats and attendant structures in Malawi were given less room to exercise their functions in a project whose conception was secret, and implementation laced by high politics. From this perspective, this chapter has modestly contributed to the age-old debate of the presence, utility and effectiveness of institutions in African states.

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New homes for a new state: Foreign ideas in Ghana's public housing programmes

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> All sorts of plans have been introduced since the so called crusade to Holland but one stubborn fact remains. The houses intended to ease the sufferings of our people have yet to be built. (*Daily Graphic*, 1954: 5)

This was the criticism Kwame Nkrumah, the leader of the Convention People's Party (CPP) and later first President of Ghana, received for his unsuccessful attempt at addressing the country's housing situation and for his decision to adopt the prefabricated Dutch housing method. Prefabricated housing had been touted as a quick way of producing housing for the teeming masses who were daily trooping to the urban centres for employment opportunities as the development of industries, mines, railways and harbours gathered momentum. As well as failing to meet growing needs, the Dutch-constructed houses did not reflect the cultural living arrangements of the people and they did not feel Ghanaian enough.

Public house-building became an important objective during the transitional and early independence years of Ghana due to three political agendas; Africanisation, industrialisation and modernisation. The Africanisation agenda required that African senior civil servants eventually occupy the management positions of government businesses as the Europeans departed the then-Gold Coast. Thus, there was the need to provide living accommodation for the African officials, public sector workers, and formal and informal sector workers. Next, the industrialisation agenda resulted in the establishment of pioneer industries and businesses in urban centres across the country, leading to mass migration of workers from the rural areas.[1] Meanwhile, the housing

[1] The urban population which was estimated at 570,597 in 1948 (13.9 per cent of the total population) increased to 1,547,700 in 1960 (about 23.1 per cent of the national population) (Songsore, 2020: 6; GSS, 2014: 6, 19).

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dynamics in the urban centres – high rents, poor quality housing and limited rental units – were inadequate for such large numbers of migrant workers. The third agenda, which was the new government policy to modernise and improve the standards of housing, propelled massive house-building projects across the country. All three agendas combined to introduce a situation where public housing demand outstripped supply in the urban centres of the new state.

The demand for 'adequate' public housing was so compelling that foreign assistance in terms of loans, technical assistance, construction materials and technology, and housing policies had to be incorporated into the development plan, thus creating a disconnect between 'dependent' house-building and 'independent' state building during the transition to independence. It is also noteworthy that the transitional years had foreign expatriate technocrats at the helm of the building industry.

In this chapter, I argue that the new state's sense of responsibility for housing the growing urban population made it dependent in new ways on foreign actors, recreating and reimagining its dependency and showcasing the tension of the independence state-building project. Using existing literature and information collected from the archives and newspapers, I discuss the state of public housing and the housing-building agenda during the transitional and early independence years, and draw out the challenges, contradictions and new kinds of dependencies to which it gave rise. I discuss the formation of foreign partnerships to address the housing situation by citing two examples – the Schokbeton and the Ghana National Construction Corporation housing programmes. The chapter concludes with a discussion on the ubiquitous architecture produced as a result of these engagements. In order to set the scene, I begin by describing state building and the modernist planning approach adopted by African states as a vehicle for industrial growth and development.

Modernist planning, post-colonial state-led projects and ambitious state building

Core to the project of state building is the aspiration to make independent decisions about managing internal institutions without external interference, and the construction of identity through international recognition and access to international resources. This statement is in line with Julia Gallagher's (2018: 883–84) definition that statehood or state-subjectivity is analogous to selfhood or self-consciousness, a situation where both 'a sense of self – the degree to which the state can embody the identity and aspirations of its population – and its ability to act, its agency … beyond itself, on the international level'. According to Freek Colombijn (2011), public housing involves highly political

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choices where the high expectations of a young nation are realised. Thus, house-building is an expression of the pride and product of state building.

So modernist planning by post-colonial governments, optimistic about the possibilities for the comprehensive planning of human settlement and production, was expected to act as a flagship of state building, and house-building was a core part of this project. According to Sibel Bozdogan (2001), the modern movement ideology, referred to as a 'revolution in architecture', was closely linked to house-building. Otherwise referred to as 'architecture in revolution', house-building projects conveyed a political message that legitimated new states and defined their identity. The ambitious post-colonial developments and optimistic state-led projects created a 'false' belief in the transformative potentials of state-led massive modernist projects. This was because post-colonial modernist planning was based on grand plans and programmes developed by experts and implemented using top-down approaches often leading to a hegemonic planning mentality that excluded the role of local knowledge and tradition (Abubakar and Doan, 2017). Furthermore, the size of these programmes undermined core aspects of independence as new states' sovereignty was inevitably challenged when they attempted to engage external actors in state building (Chandler, 2010). James Scott (1998: 22) explains that 'miscarried or thwarted' projects of the new state resulted in 'miniaturisation' and 'controlled micro-order in model cities'.

Nkrumah argued that Ghana needed a technological and scientific great leap forward to create a new and thoroughly modern state and escape the grip of colonialism. Thus, professionals from Eastern Europe and America were contracted to assist in Ghana's state building. The foreign countries introduced Western modernist planning ideology to Ghanaian dwelling cultures thereby stagnating the traditional forms of architecture in the country (d'Auria, 2014). For example, Constantinos A. Doxiadis's reconceptualisation of the Tema master plan and his model city of Akosombo presented visions of high modernist planning and state building and were seen as a guarantee of emancipation, although they could also be described as a form of neo-colonialism, based as they were on a very generalised, Western model which took little account of local aesthetics, norms and needs (Bromley, 2003; d'Auria, 2010; Miescher, 2012; Jackson et al., 2019). In terms of architecture, foreign modernist architects such as James Cubbit, Jane Drew, Maxwell Fry, Leo De Syllas and Otto Koenigsberger served as advisors in Ghana's town planning and designed many modernist buildings (Uduku, 2006). By hybridising traditional dwelling practices and context-sensitive neighbourhood layouts in housing design, colonised territories were posited as sites for experimentation as the ambivalent modernist tenets of the late-colonial and post-independence architectural production were re-articulated

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(d'Auria, 2014). This led to a major contradiction between 'the idea of a national style based on tradition' and 'the revolutionary principles of the new nationbuilding' (Bozdogan, 2001: 61). For Paul Collier and Anthony Venables (2014), governments in Anglophone Africa, on independence, inherited building standards that were inappropriate for their level of income since the British Government was experimenting with the principles of tropical architecture in its colonies. Yet the new African political elite had no African alternative with which to compare it. Modernism offered the kind of abstraction and formal novelty devoid of historical associations that matched nation-building ideological aspirations (Bozdogan, 2001: 61).

Formation of a new state

The transitional and post-independence years (1950–1966)

The period leading to 1950 was regarded as one of urbanisation in the Gold Coast as people migrated, especially to the mining towns and agricultural producing areas. This was driven by Ghana's post-Second World War economic boom, which led to the establishment of state-owned enterprises and the introduction of pioneer companies as government sought to promote industrialisation. Public health policies coupled with taxation, urban slum clearance and rehousing programmes were used to address the 'insanitary' conditions that prevailed as a result of overcrowding and high densities in Accra (Patterson, 1979). Information at the Ghana Public Records and Archives Administration Department (GH/PRAAD) in Accra indicates that a meeting held on 5 January 1950 to discuss sites for new government and quasi-government bungalows in the Cantonments area noted the 'grave shortage of houses in Accra between 1950 and 1951', and advocated housing construction to address the situation, particularly the use of prefabricated building components.[2]

As part of the preparations towards self-government from 1951, the CPP government undertook massive development of economic and social infrastructure in the country. Under Nkrumah's leadership, between 1951 and 1957 it introduced measures for internal self-government and the establishment of administrative ministries (Biney, 2011), including Nkrumah's Africanisation agenda, a 'tactical action' to work with the colonial administration and other countries to firmly establish the new state.

Nkrumah in 1951 decided to implement a development plan to promote massive industrialisation, previously formulated by the British colonial

2 GH/PRAAD/RG 5/1/50. Notes of a meeting held in the Secretariat on Thursday, February 23 1950 to decide on the question of sites in the Accra government residential area for government requirements and those of quasi-government building.

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administration. The war years had made it impossible to export raw materials or import building materials and other basic supplies. This gave rise to plans to set up manufacturing industries to produce the country's needed commodities. So-called 'pioneer' companies were established to produce everyday needs such as liquor, cigarettes and clothing. The brick and tile roofing industry was set up in part to address the shortage of roofing sheets. Railways were constructed to enable the transportation of goods between urban centres. Marine transport was developed for import and export activities as well as to promote goods transfer from Akosombo and Accra to Takoradi and vice versa. These developments occurred in tandem with the spread of the modernist urban planning agenda from Europe to the Global South. The development of these industries drove the need for further housing development schemes.

By 1951, a sharp rise in cocoa prices led to an increase in private housing building among wealthy cocoa farmers (Seers and Ross, 1952). This, along with the government's industrialisation agenda, the housing shortage and increased rents, induced further private building activity and speculative building, driving up demand for building material imports. Dudley Seers and Claud Ross (1952) have stated that cement imports rose from 53,000 tonnes to 117,000 tonnes between 1938 and 1950, but by 1951 they had risen to 240,000 tonnes. Within the same period the demand for corrugated roofing sheets increased from 1,600 tonnes to 8,300 tonnes. The economy of the Gold Coast was described at this time as 'fragile', with material and labour shortages posing inflationary risks (Seers and Ross, 1952: 1). One initiative to offset these risks and ensure local production of goods and services involved the establishment of a cement grinding plant, the Tunnel Portland Company Limited at Takoradi in 1957. The company was co-owned by a private British firm and the government of Ghana.

A second Five-year Development Plan (1958–63) was formulated during the post-independence period. The plan proposed to spend about £20 million annually. However, there was a drop of £28,410 in the budgetary allocation for the housing sector after independence in 1957 (from about £800,000 the previous year). The plan also sought to pursue an Africanisation agenda; however, the government acknowledged that 'efficient government administrative and technical personnel will be recruited from abroad if the need arises' (*Ghana Today*, 1958a). This decision created leeway for foreign participation in Ghana's development agenda. While providing housing was not specifically addressed in the new plan, several committees were set up to deal with Ghana's housing effort and issues of building techniques, cheap forms of construction, building costs and design (*Ghana Today*, 1958b). In 1958, Nkrumah personally

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introduced a new housing policy to address increasing public dissatisfaction with regards to housing allocation in the new state.[3]

Traditional housing and Ghana's housing system

Prior to the provision of public housing in Ghana, the main housing source was self-built traditional family houses, otherwise known as compound houses. These houses were usually large and belonged to families instead of individuals (Amole et al., 1993). They were rent-free and they provided accommodation for less privileged members of the extended family (Korboe, 1992). In the rural areas, most family houses were constructed with locally accessed building materials such as earth, stones, sticks and thatch, using traditional building techniques such as wattle and daub and rammed earth, which were tailor-made to address the climatic conditions of a locality (Addo, 2016). However, as Ghana became urbanised in the 1950s and wealthy cocoa farmers and elite members of society built themselves European-style houses, the traditional family houses also metamorphosed. Now cement-based materials were used for wall-construction while metal roofing sheets were introduced. European architectural ornamentation – such as columns – was incorporated into the design of building frontages. Traditional family houses became more stately, although continuing to have the attributes of shared housing.

With the steady migration into the urban centres after the Second World War and Ghana's preparation for self-governance, the housing stress experienced in the urban centres increased. The grave shortage of houses in Accra between 1950 and 1951 remained a big subject in the discussion of political and social policies in the Gold Coast.[4] Ministers of state, African senior civil servants and workers of quasi-government organisations – for example, those of the West African Airways Corporation and Air Services, the Gold Coast Industrial Development Corporation and the Gold Coast Agricultural Development Board – had to be housed.[5] So in January 1950 a meeting was held in Accra to discuss government bungalow requirements for the 1950–51 fiscal years. They included six houses for the new ministers, eight T2[6] bungalows for the

3 The dissatisfaction was caused by perceived malpractice and nepotism (Werlin, 1972; Agyapong, 1990).

4 GH/PRAAD/RG 5/1/50. Notes of a meeting held in the Secretariat on 23 February 1950 to decide on the question of sites in the Accra government residential area for government requirements and those of quasi-government building.

5 GH/PRAAD/RG 5/1/50. Residence for Ministers C/50-Type Bungalows. File no. BC. 228.

6 T2 bungalows are public houses built specifically for ministers and under secretaries of state.

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new under-secretaries and twenty-five A49[7] bungalows for officers paying less than £150 per annum in rents.[8] The initial cost of the T2 bungalows was approximately £3,500 in 1949.

However, the T2 buildings' cost increased to £5,000 by 1950. Some parliamentarians in the Gold Coast expressed great dissatisfaction when the government decided to build ministers' bungalows at a cost of £10,000 as against the initial ceiling of £5,000. Their objections were based on the fact that other social services had not been met. The MPs questioned the whole principle of providing official residences for ministers at the public expense.[9] Still others questioned why a £10,000 building for ministers was considered extravagant noting that the Cocoa Marketing Board was constructing junior overseas officers' houses with two bedrooms for £5,950. The T2 buildings were described as houses that 'appear to provide accommodation which is likely to be required by a minister and his family'.[10] The house type titled 'Houses for the Ministers of Gold Coast Government' went on display at the 1952 Royal Academy Summer Exhibition in London (Hughes and Lomax, 1952). It was adapted from the British Council house type designs. Comments from unofficial African advisers[11] led to revisions in the design. The T2 bungalow was further revised to include a room for storing boxes and baggage, an additional stoep on top of the garage, a laundry room and a 'boys' (staff) quarters with a wide verandah and kitchen facilities. The additions portrayed a form of elitist living where the quarters of the assistants to the African officials were separated from the main bungalow, as they had been in colonial officials' bungalows. In the end, a revised T2 building costing £71,903 for the construction of eight ministers' bungalows were approved and awarded to British Firm Messrs George Watson and Company in December 1950. By

7 A49 bungalows are public houses built for African senior staff working in the colonial administration.

8 Ibid.

9 GH/PRAAD/RG 5/1/50. Secretary of State. Telegram No. 693. Parliamentary Question. 2 May 1950. Residence for Ministers C/50 – Type Bungalows. File No. BC.228 – 6/11/53: 23.

10 GH/PRAAD/RG 5/1/50. Parliamentary question. Dissatisfaction in the Gold Coast over the decision of the government to build a bungalow at a cost of £80,000 and why the ceiling of £5,000 per bungalow agreed on last year, in view of the need for expanding social services, has not been maintained. Telegram No. 693. Secretary of State, 2 May 1950.

11 GH/PRAAD/RG 5/1/62. Note of a meeting held in the secretariat on Thursday 23 February 1950 to decide on the question of sites in the Accra government residential area for government requirements and those of quasi-government building.

22 September 1951 only 124 housing units had been constructed, without any electricity supply, while one-hundred units were yet to be constructed.

Other discussions in cabinet meetings dealt with acquiring appropriate sites and suitable lands for new government, non-government and quasi-government bungalows in the Cantonments area.[12] Some of the considerations for a suitable location were easy accessibility to a main road and bus route, proximity to the new Cantonments restaurant[13] and distance from the centre of Accra.[14] Several housing programmes including the introduction of prefabricated housing construction methods were considered options necessary to address the critical housing situation in the new state.

The Development Plan of 1951 for the Economic and Social Development of the Gold Coast provided an outline of what the country hoped to achieve in all fields of development (Government Printing Department, 1951: 1). The objective was 'to ensure that the progress of development proceeds in an orderly manner on a firm economic basis and also to ensure that effort is directed towards the attainment of a higher standard of living for all' (ibid.). The inadequate and substandard public housing situation in the new state was considered to be a result of (i) high costs of building materials and labour, (ii) shortage of skilled building craftsmen, (iii) lack of mechanisation in the building industry, and (iv) the steady drift to the towns (migration) leading to a severe shortage and overcrowding of available accommodation in these. According to the Development Plan, both experts and unskilled manpower were needed to achieve the plan's objectives. In addition, 'a proportion of the materials required for development projects must be imported and this meant a dependence on world conditions of supply' (ibid.). This meant that both the availability and conditions of importation were likely to impact supplies and cause delays. Finance was also a critical issue. Financing of the projects were projected to be from Ghana's reserves, taxation and loans. Objective six stated that '[i]f men and materials are available, there remains the question of finance. This must be found from reserves, future taxation and loans' (ibid.). The sum of £2.5 million was earmarked for the development of housing programmes (Government Printing Department, 1951: 20–21).

To improve the standard of housing in the Gold Coast in 1951, and to appear modern, Kojo Botsio, then-Minister of Education and Social Welfare, requested

12 GH/PRAAD/RG 5/1/50. Notes of a discussion regarding sites for new government and non-and quasi-government bungalows in the Cantonments Area. Meeting held in the Secretariat on 5 January 1950.

13 GH/PRAAD/RG 5/1/50. Notes of a meeting held in the Secretariat on 23 February 1950 to decide on the question of sites in the Accra government residential area for government requirements and those of quasi-government building.

14 The city centre of Accra was regarded as having insanitary conditions.

the Colonial Secretary of State to supply him with housing documents from the UK to guide him in the standards being adopted in public housing, the methods by which the provision of housing was allocated, the proportion for letting or sale and the relative cost of different types. It was anticipated that the information provided would guide the formulation of the country's national housing policy. The Colonial Secretary, E. G. G. Hanrott[15] in his response, gave the minister a series of documents on UK housing conditions and policy, noting, however, that they might not be suitable for low-cost housing in the tropics.

These documents formed the basis for the formulation of Ghana's first building regulations which were thus premised on foreign design guidelines.[16] Housing programmes including (i) the Accra rehousing schemes, (ii) the subsidised housing scheme, (iii) village improvement and rural housing, (iv) rehousing in connection with slum clearance, (v) plant and experimental work, community centres on housing estates, (vi) railway housing estate (in Takoradi), and (vii) the housing loans scheme were implemented in the new state. The total cost for all the programmes was estimated at £6 million (Government Printing Department, 1951). In addition, a broad range of approaches was used in constructing the houses (Owusu-Addo and Bond, 1966). They included swish buildings which were constructed from earth rammed into a wooden formwork to form bricks as shown in figure 4.1, and prefabricated post-tensioned structures. The construction of the experimental swish buildings increased during the early years due to the introduction of a rotary hydraulic block moulding machine which could produce up to 140 swish blocks per hour (Nartey, 1954: 1). The Gold Coast Women's Federation also submitted a three-point resolution to the government in 1954 advocating that the lack of adequate housing was the 'cause of broken homes and juvenile delinquency' (Akua, 1954: 1). The CPP government responded by tasking the Department of Housing to develop experimental 'scale models of moderately furnished prefabricated houses' which would be shown to the public in an exhibition to be transported from 'place to place' (ibid.).

The housing situation remained critical for the new state. Inadequate housing conditions continued to feature prominently in the newspapers and several editorials were written on the subject. The *Daily Graphic* in July

15 Letter dated 10 July 1951 in response to Kojo Botsio's request.

16 A new Ghana Code was recently released in 2018. The Building Code GS1207 of 2018, is a 1,700-page and thirty-eight-section document comprising requirements, recommendations, planning, management and practices of construction in Ghana. It incorporates the use of traditional local materials in building construction. It is also Ghana's first-ever building code.

Figure 4.1 An experimental swish building for the Forestry Commission at Kibi, built in the 1950s (Iain Jackson, 2018; reproduced with the permission of Prof. Jackson).

1954 cautioned the government that 'time was being wasted on planning and talking' and that this had resulted in a worse housing situation where over 500 persons had been rendered homeless in Cape Coast and Takoradi following flooding. Meanwhile, the Department of Rural Housing had completed designs and models for twenty types of house to be constructed in the rural areas under the Self-help Housing System with the first batch of housing under this system to be built in the Akim-Akuapem district while preliminary work for the construction of sixty-four different types in the Akoroso New Township were underway (Peregrino-Peters, 1954: 5). A housing grant proposed by the Salaries and Wages Commission in 1957 for all pensionable African officers and civil servants to assist them build and own houses was rejected by parliament because 'it was not the Government's policy to confer preferential treatment on Civil Servants' in the matter of housing (*Ghana Today*, 1957c: 2). The cost of undertaking such a project was going to have serious implications for the economy. Instead, deductions were to be taken from the salaries of civil servants and deposited in a building society. An article by Kwabena Mensah appearing in the *Evening News* newspaper in 1965 complained about 'the systemic

concentration of almost all the nation's industries in big cities, especially Accra'. The resulting migration had led to severe social problems, of which the '[h]ousing problem is the most acute' (Mensah, 1965a: 3).

Even after Nkrumah was ousted in 1966 the housing problems in urban centres in Ghana remained a major social problem. Tenants complained about 'sky-high rents' that could be as much as one-third of a worker's salary while describing the landlords as 'Shylocks'.[17] Tenants and landlords were constantly at loggerheads and the Rent Control Office,[18] always flooded with litigations, was perceived to be more sympathetic towards the cause of the landlord and landlady (Mensah, 1965b). There were calls for a comprehensive housing project to address workers' acute housing issues (Olympio, 1966: 2). Cilly Olympio went further to ask the government 'to fight [shyness and] to ask for long term foreign aid for housing project' (ibid.).

Foreign relations in Ghana's housing development

Ghana's foreign policy outlined by Nkrumah on the eve of independence in 1957 was premised on the fact that the government did not intend to follow a neutral policy but to preserve its independence (*Ghana Today*, 1957a), working with others to achieve an African personality in international affairs, in line with Nkrumah's pan-Africanist agenda. This view was articulated by Nkrumah when he decided to welcome foreign investment and private capital for the development of the country (*Ghana Today*, 1957b). For Nkrumah, maintaining foreign relations meant that the government would be able to mobilise resources to develop the country including the housing sector but would avoid the need of seeking 'free gifts of aid' from other countries in the Commonwealth.

A bilateral agreement with Czechoslovakia on agricultural development and industrialisation was established in 1957. Yugoslavia also offered fifty-seven scholarships to Ghana to support economic development and progress (*Evening News*, 1966a: 6). Ghana also established financial ties with Germany, America and Canada. The Americans and the Canadians were first involved in the establishment of an aluminium smelting plant at Kpone as part of the Volta River Project. Nkrumah's tactical action propelled him to maintain ties

17 Shylock was the Jewish usurer and antagonist of Antonio in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*. Here the term is colloquially used to describe a landlord or landlady who is regarded as relentless, hard-hearted and taking advantage of desperate tenants who needed accommodation in the urban centres.

18 The Rent Control Department was established in 1963 to work with landlords and tenants to promote optimum peaceful coexistence through education, reconciliation and economic development in the country (Rent Control Department, 2020).

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with Britain during the early transitional years of self-government (Biney, 2011). Being in West Africa, the Gold Coast's relative geographical proximity to the UK meant that mail boats could make the trip in around two weeks. Thus, the nation benefited from relatively fast access to British products, design expertise, and building contractors (Jackson et al., 2019). As the British ties waned, the government extended invitations to Dutch and West German financiers (Biney, 2011).

Foreign involvement in achieving the housing needs of public workers was part of this consideration. On 27 July 1966 the front page of the *Evening News* (1966b: 1) reported that the Germans were going to build houses in Accra because they had confidence in Ghana's economy. The newspaper mentioned that contracts between the Ghana Housing Corporation (GHC) and the German Trade Union Confederation had been signed and they were to build 820 moderately priced houses for workers in Accra. Four prototype houses comprising one-storey and two-storey 'luxurious' buildings were built in Kaneshie, a suburb of Accra. This was after the first contract of the scheme known as 'satellite city' signed in 1964 was abandoned after the overthrow of Nkrumah in 1966.[19]

The Schokbeton housing programme

As part of the economic and social development of the Gold Coast, the need for an improved and high standard of housing featured prominently in the policy as the government's vision was to 'see every family living in its own comfortable home' (Government Printing Department, 1951: 20). Hence, individuals were to be offered personal loans in a maximum amount of £1,600, to be repaid over thirty years (ibid.: 21). Improved rural housing conditions were regarded as reward to the farmers and miners who were thought of as drivers of Gold Coast revenue generation, and such a policy was designed to prevent rural-urban drift of the youth as services improved in the villages. Hence, the government proposed to introduce power machines and experimental housing that would enable mass-housing production. Schokbeton prefabricated housing was part of this strategy. So in a meeting held on 23 February 1950, the Acting Director of the Public Works Department (PWD) and part of the colonial administration,

19 *Evening News* (1966b: 1). The initial contract was abandoned due to hostilities that developed between Ghana and the German Trade Union Confederation, and attacks from the *Spark* newspaper. The ongoing Cold War tensions between American capitalism and the expansion of socialism as well as the decolonisation agenda and the politics of non-alignment strained relations between Ghana's trade union confederation and the international trade union organisations (Sackeyfio-Lenoch, 2017).

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W. Dempster,[20] announced that 'he was hoping to arrange for prefabricated bungalows to be built by contractors from 1950–1951'.[21]

The Schokbeton method of construction in Ghana and globally was mainly championed by the Dutch. During the 1950s it was described as having superior structural strength, rapid erection, insulating value, fire resistance and affordability. After introducing this 'superior' technology to the Gold Coast, a proposal was made to establish a prefabricated construction firm in the country in 1952 which would start local production in four years. Tools and building materials were to be imported from the Netherlands. The Gold Coast Government was required to provide £4 million to build the factories. According to the *Daily Graphic* (1952: 1), the first of four prototype factories to be built by N. V. Schokbeton was to be sited in Kumase. The newspaper records that the firm had received serious criticisms of the initial house designs because up to thirty-two different prefabricated components were to be used in their construction. However, the design had been modified to comprise only twelve prefabricated components and also to incorporate the climatic and cultural traditions of the users. Hence, the new design 'would be extendable, have a mosquito proof mesh, allow for sufficient ventilation, and could stand tropical humidity'. Above all, they would be about 15 per cent cheaper. The new extendable type would comprise two bedrooms, a living room, verandah, kitchen, store and garage. On 9 July 1952, Nkrumah, accompanied by the Minister for Housing, Ansah Koi, laid the first slab of eighteen units at Kaneshie in the Greater Accra Region. Present was the general manager of N. V. Schokbeton, Mr N. F. Wilmar who mentioned that ten houses had been completed and were awaiting occupation (*Daily Graphic*, 1952: 3).

What is interesting is that Daniel Chapman mentioned that the designs would be sent to Holland for approval and if given, component parts would be made there and shipped to the Gold Coast where an experimental building would be constructed. In Chapman's opinion the new design was 'more suitable and also superior' to the earlier designs (*Daily Graphic*, 1952: 1). With industrialisation, a real attempt was made to encourage foreign firms to operate in the country through the provision of sites, buildings and utilities (Ghana Information Services Department, 1960). The desire to adopt international architectural styles by seeking approval from Holland was in contradiction to Ghana's state realisation and recognition agenda. On one hand the country

20 W. Dempster was an assistant director who was promoted to the position of deputy director of Public Works, Gold Coast in 1951.

21 GH/PRAAD/RG 5/1/50. Note of a meeting held in the secretariat on 23 February 1950 to decide on the question of sites in the Accra government residential area for government requirements and those of quasi-government building.

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wanted to boldly proclaim its independence and self-identity yet it was quick to imbibe foreign ideas and build foreign relationships to address the 'infant-state' in which the country found itself (Gallagher, 2018).

The Schokbeton prefabricated housing programme was suspended following a visit to the Gold Coast by experts from the United Nations Technical Assistance team on housing (*Daily Graphic*, 1954a: 1). They asserted that it was more costly to build a prefabricated house in Ghana than to construct a self-built house because almost all the components were imported and such an action would negatively impact the traditional self-help methods practised throughout the territory (Jackson et al., 2019). Instead, the experts suggested that the £2 million grant be split between two programmes: £890,000 invested in a mortgage bank, and the rest to start a 'roof loan program' (Arku, 2009). They proposed a four-level restructuring of Ghana's housing provision system, encouraging those who could afford it to build their own homes, and providing loans and subsidies for those who could not.

The Schokbeton housing programme was generally considered a failure: it did not promote existing traditional housing, required a lot of importation and did not provide jobs for African labourers; moreover, only sixty-four of the estimated 1,698 housing units were completed by 1954. Its failure was partly attributed to the fact that it was planned by the colonial government and did not fit Nkrumah's state-building and identity-formation agenda of Gold Coast's early years.

Ghana National Construction Corporation /Ghana Housing Corporation building projects

Even after independence in 1957, house-building was incredibly difficult and politically contentious. The government ventured into new foreign partnerships to assist it address the housing demand. The Ghana National Construction Corporation (GNCC), which was established in 1956, was later renamed Ghana Housing Corporation (GHC) and went into a joint venture with an Israeli Construction Company – Solel Boneh in 1958 (Stanek, 2015). The Corporation was the main government organisation responsible for the construction and maintenance of public houses and government official buildings. It was required to build about 800 housing units for both government and non-governmental organisations by September 1958, at a cost of about £1 million (*Ghana Today*, 1957c). In addition, a Housing Research Bureau was established for the purposes of researching low-cost housing (*Ghana Today*, 1958c). The Corporation experimented with landcrete, where proportions of one part cement to five parts earth were mixed to construct low-cost buildings. By November 1957 the Corporation had completed a sample prototype landcrete dwelling in Accra costing only £300. According to the

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then-Minister of Housing, Ashford Emmanuel Inkumsah, the buildings, which were designed for nuclear families, were to be rented out at low rates to poor households. The building cost could be further reduced if ten parts of earth was used (*Ghana Today*, 1957d).

According to *Ghana Today* (1957c), the government housing measures resulted in a total expenditure of £4 million, providing housing for about 50,000 people staying in industrial urban areas and in larger towns such as Accra, Kumase, Takoradi, Tamale and Oda. In all, 450 houses of different sizes and more than 2,000 single-room units for industrial and labouring workers were completed. By 1958, a year after Ghana's independence, the GHC and the PWD had embarked on massive housing development by constructing variations of the DH 121 type houses costing between £3,950 and £4,025 in North Osu and South Ring Road in Accra (figures 4.2 and 4.3). The GNCC depended heavily on a foreign workforce, especially British architects based in Accra or overseas, and only occasionally involving the African workforce in the PWD. Most of the construction materials were shipped from Britain due to shortages in the Gold Coast (Stanek, 2015). Such dependence influenced the kind of architecture produced. For example, Modesto Apaloo commented that the various 'foreign expert advice' on housing did not incorporate the use of local building materials and local builders, which often led to expensive construction. This resulted in A. K. Conduah (the State Construction Corporation Engineer), strongly advocating the use of bricks and roofing tiles in construction because of the ability of burnt bricks and tiles to resist dampness and heat in the tropical weather, their aesthetic appeal and the affordable cost of construction because the earth could be accessed locally (Conduah 1966a, 1966b).

Conclusion: ubiquitous architecture, hybrid foreign styles, a form of statehood

Having gained independence, the leaders of the country wanted to showcase the new and modern Ghana and demonstrate to the population that it could support itself and solve its own problems. The development agenda was based on economic and social development for state building and higher standards as the country strode towards modernity, in line with an approach then trending in the West. The Ghana Information Services Department (1960) intimated that the trend in architecture so familiar during the first ten years of self-government was only perceived through the pages of 'magazines'. So Ghana, in its preference for modernism and its reconceptualisation of urban development under the Nkrumah administration, implemented a distinctive worldview that was consistent with colonial priorities and a worldview that

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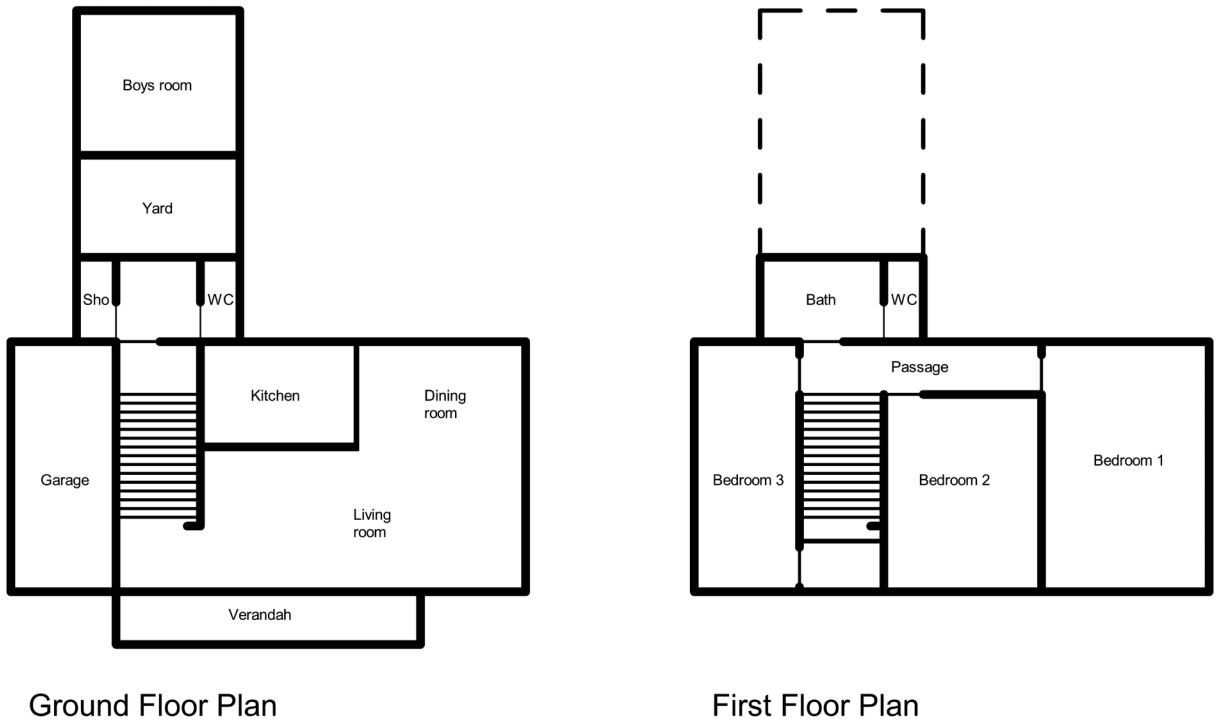

Figure 4.2 House Type DH 121E. Built by Ghana Housing Corporation; Architect: E.G.D. (April 1958). (Archival records GH/PRAAD/RG 5/1/120. BC 393; Staff Housing Ghana National Construction Corporation, 3 July 1958; reproduced with permission of the Archive).

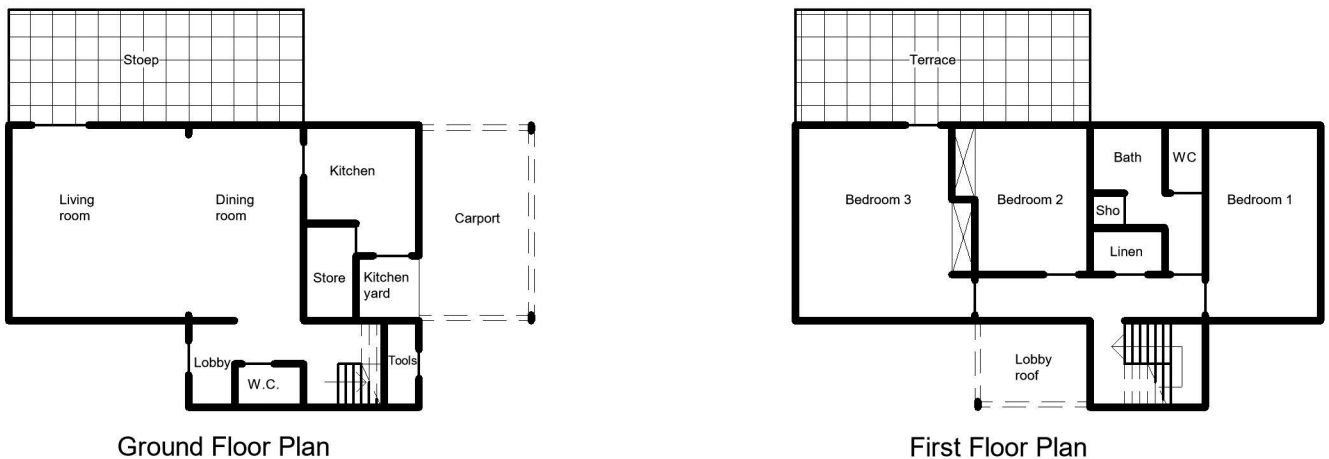

Figure 4.3 House Type 3 (DH 121). Built by Ghana National Construction Corporation; Architect: R.D. Norwood, 13 November 1958. (Archival records GH/PRAAD/RG 5/1/120. BC 393; Staff Housing Ghana National Construction Corporation, 13 November 1958; reproduced with permission of the Archive).

laid emphasis upon a new architectural style of construction with a suburban ideal (Hess, 2000: 53). Nkrumah's response to the colonial regulation of architectural space also reflected a distinctive 'imagining' of modernism, a vision which was allied to his heroicised vision of a culturally homogeneous 'nation' (ibid.).

Ghana's house-building during the post-colonial period also exposed broader tensions between state building and independence.[22] The new nation, with very few African technocrats, and limited financial capital, created an opportunity for foreign ideas to thrive in the state-building project. According to Anthony King (2015: 366), 'the neocolonial period [after 1951 in Africa] saw the implementation of development plans with cultural, political and economic links situated within a larger network of global communications and economic dependence and such an environment fostered the means to continue the transplantation of ideologies, values and planning models from the West'. King described such housing development as 'dependent urbanisation' (ibid.: 367) stating that the metropolitan governments in Africa, in developing low-cost housing programmes, generated and exchanged information on standards, costs, and design with other European powers with interests in Africa.[23] Ghana, being a member of the Commonwealth, was encouraged to exchange housing policies, programmes and ideas with other member states. Again, to enable the ministry responsible for housing and town and country planning to establish a Rural Housing Department and to fulfil its mandate in providing affordable housing, information on the 'methods of financing the scheme, terms of disposal of houses, degree of standardisation, systems of building construction and plans, as well as the composition of the self-help housing teams and headquarters organisation' (ibid.) in the provision of low-cost housing were gathered from other organisations. It is interesting to note that similar modernist and colonial ideals were circulated throughout the European colonies.

Nkrumah was looking for public housing projects that would lead to rapid industrialisation for his nascent country, but this was of limited importance to his foreign partners (Boakye, 2017). In most instances, Nkrumah was not able to expressly exercise agency, to the detriment of his nation-building agenda. His government wanted to dissociate itself radically from the colonial legacy yet

22 See, for example, Colombijn (2011) on similar developments in Indonesia in the 1950s.

23 For example, housing programmes such as the self-help housing concept adopted from the Jamaican Hurricane Housing Organisation Aided Self-help Rural Housing Scheme received a lot of attention in the 'New Commonwealth'. Telegram from the Governor of Gold Coast to the Governor of Jamaica dated September 1953, 'Self-Help Housing'.

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was heavily dependent on foreign loans. The involvement of foreign partners and the introduction of new ideas in the architectures of public housing led to the near collapse of Ghana's indigenous architecture.

Ghana's continuous engagement with international partners has introduced influential and ubiquitous architectures, rooted in a complex hybrid of foreign ideas and styles. Unfortunately, new African societies have not been able to recreate or reimagine their own shape and spirit and have been unable to claim their own birthright and independence in architecture and housing development because of the continents' continuous engagement with the Global North.[24] This observation is contrary to the expectations of the Europeans and John Lloyd's (1966: 40) conviction that although there was a strong influence of colonialism on Africa architectural development, 'there has also been a reaction to the challenge of alien pressure, thus this new society will have its own shape and spirit. It will be African and not in Europe's or America's or even Asia's image'.[25] Ghana's foreign policy and dependence on international relations for independent state building introduced neo-colonialism and defined a particular form of statehood that is evident in post-colonial architecture and housing development.

24 Tony Yeboah, Chapter 10 in this volume, discusses a similar problem with the rebuilding of a traditional chief's palace after the original was destroyed by the British.
25 Lloyd was a lecturer at the Faculty of Architecture in Kumase who became the principal of the Architectural Association in London in 1966.

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