

ANGLICAN ECCLESIASTICAL ARCHITECTURE IN COLONIAL CITIES IN KENYA, 1844-1963

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ABSTRACT

There is already rich scholarship that explores the diverse ways in which colonial states and architects employed the classical style across the British Empire, paying careful attention to local and imperial influences upon building design. Ecclesiastical architecture in Kenya is a vital source through which to understand the particular nature of colonial entanglement in the region. As colonial architecture and urbanism played pivotal roles in shaping the spatial and social structures of African cities during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the first earlier twentieth century, missionary activities in was at its zenith at the East African Coast and the thus Anglican ecclesiastical architecture began to appear in the mainland dominated and inspired mainly by Early English Gothic architecture. The Anglican Church of Kenya started mission stations in urban areas such as Nairobi, Nakuru, Kisumu and Eldoret in English-like homes, cathedrals and parish offices. The study reveals how the architectural and technological transfers from the West continued synchronously with evangelism to create the prescribed image of the Anglican Church in Kenya. In the context of the international relations, these discourses played a significant role in consolidating British imperial power, as happened elsewhere in the British Empire. We argue that certain architectural elements have long been recognized internationally as symbolic of state power.

Keywords: Colonial, Cathedral, Gothic, Identity, Nationalism, Power, Symbol

INTRODUCTION

Colonial architecture in Africa became the subject of sustained inquiry since the 1980s. Research has been growing slowly. Since the Middle Ages, Cathedrals have represented important urban landmarks that shaped the space and identity of world cities (Murphy 2001). During the Nineteenth Century these places traditionally associated with power and prestige were transformed through romantic nationalism into national symbols (Bargellini, 1991). In the words of the famous French architect and pioneer of the restoration movement Eugène Viollet-le-Duc, "Cathedrals...were religious monuments, but also national edifices, the symbol of French nationality, and the first and most powerful attempt to achieve unity (Rafferty, 2008)." Scholarship on Sub-Saharan Africa's colonial Anglican ecclesiastical architecture has lagged far behind the rest of the British colonial world.

Studies on writings on the notion of mimicry in

both colonial and post-colonial discourse abound (Cooper & Stoler (1997). Alex Bremner's notable studies shed light on the role of Anglican clergy members and architects in transferring the Gothic Revival style to the British colonies in Central and Southern Africa. However, scholarship analysing ecclesiastical architecture in Kenya is relatively thin. What is needed is to explore the formal, spatial, and societal contexts in which Anglican ecclesiastical space emerged, and the ways in which these buildings were transformed and visually represented during and after the colonial period.

According to Tiffin (1995) the idea of identity formation was not a one-way street in the shaping of Britain's imperialist past and its relationship with its subject peoples. Some writers are struck by the concept of 'hybridity' as a means of describing and analysing the relationship between the metropolitan centre and the colonial periphery. Kenya, while not conforming in all its characteristics to a definition of the colonial norm, nevertheless exhibits sufficient degrees of peripheral eccentricity to be considered an integral part of the colonial history of Britain. The article reveals how the architectural and technological transfers from the West continued synchronously with

evangelism to create the prescribed image of the Anglican Church in Kenya. This played a significant role in consolidating British imperial power, as happened elsewhere in the British Empire (Hawkins, 2013).

One of the most interesting features of the hybrid idea as applied to Kenya ecclesiastical identity, given the quintessentially Protestant nature of British self-identification, is of course the role of Anglicanism in the social, cultural and political landscape of Kenya. This is especially true in the period from the establishment of colonial rule in 1890 until the granting of independence to Kenya and of course in the postcolonial period. Kenya, in the course of the long nineteenth century, was a significant part of the new British political reality but certain aspects of its government and culture made it completely distinct not only from the metropolitan norm but from other colonies (Reed, 2013).

Thus, we explore the conception and construction of Anglican Cathedrals charts the evolution of the Christian project in the context of religious and political “tensions of empire” in Kenya (Njoki, 2010). The Anglican Church of Kenya billed the Cathedral project as a patriotic memorial to the British who had died colonizing Africa and, after World War I, to all the African and British troops who had died fighting for England in Europe (Towle, 2009). The cathedral formed part of the missionaries' sustained and unsuccessful effort to convince the colonial administration of the value of their Anglican “civilizing mission.” The Cathedrals erected in almost all parts of Kenya were thus an ambiguous monument that represented two uneasy pairings: that of the Anglican Church and the colonial state, and that of British colonialists and the Africans they ruled.

The paper thus aims to explore the relationship between Anglican Cathedrals and British national identity through a detailed examination of religious architecture and its transportation across the globe.

The study focuses on the intellectual origins and motives underpinning the transformation that occurred in ecclesiastical design during this period, reassessing the ways in which Victorian theory affected attitudes towards the role of Anglicanism and its ecclesiological manifestations in the non-European world. The artistic design and meaning of the buildings the missionaries and administrators constructed represented the interweaving of the British culture and the indigenous cultures.

This combination of architectural forms can clearly be seen in Nairobi, the present-day capital of Kenya, where colonial churches and structures still stand. The layout and façade of the All-Saints Cathedral in Nairobi represents British colonists' attempt to connect the British influence and Anglican with traditional African domestic styles to promote conversion and compliance from the people of the Kenya colony. To contextualise Anglican ecclesiastical architecture in Kenya, we will first briefly review the context of the visual imagination and transposition of the idea of the Anglican church from the centre of the British Empire to its colonies.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study utilizes a qualitative, historical-interpretive research design grounded in post-colonial architectural history. The primary empirical approach relies on historical case studies of prominent Anglican ecclesiastical structures built between 1844 and 1963, with a particular focus on the All-Saints Cathedral in Nairobi. Data collection involves a dual approach: archival research utilizing historical texts, missionary records, and colonial administrative documentation to contextualize the socio-political motivations of the British “civilizing mission”; and visual-morphological analysis of the physical structures themselves. This architectural analysis examines structural layout, styles (specifically Early English Gothic and Gothic Revival), entryways, and exterior ornamentation to identify elements of Western architectural transfer. Furthermore, the study applies post-colonial theoretical frameworks—specifically the concepts of hybridity, mimicry, and cultural hegemony—to analyze how these spatial designs functioned as tools of imperial power and how they interwoven British traditions with indigenous African cultural elements.

Colonial Hegemony and Power

In this section I investigate how everyday interactions with British in Kenya determined the norms of power, as well as how that power was negotiated and contested. Focusing on uses of cathedrals and other religious symbols as a site of power and language hierarchies, we see how in the nineteenth century such norms were appropriated by the colonial state for purposes of social control, but how in the twentieth, they were contested by a new generation of Kenyan nationalists who refused to accept the colonial hegemonic exercise of cultural appropriation and the specific racial and gendered inequalities it imposed.

From the onset, the administration of all British colonies, in general, was guided by the principles of indirect rule (Crowder, 2023). Officially this principle had not been introduced until 1934. Indirect rule refers to the imposed government of Africans through their own institutions. The policy was based on the assumption that Europeans and Africans were culturally very distinct and that the institutions which had locally developed in the African communities were the best suited for their government under British control. However, there was never a whole-scale adoption of local African practices. Rather, the acceptance of native political authority always implied a British redefinition and limitation of the role of African political powers and radical mutations of traditional practices whenever they were considered repugnant in light of European conceptions. Further, the principle of indirect rule was considered secondary to the overall political and economic objectives of colonial rule.

As such, between the 1870s and 1900, Africa faced European imperialist aggression, diplomatic pressures, military invasions, and eventual conquest and colonization. At the same time, African societies put up various forms of resistance against the attempt to colonize their countries and impose foreign domination. By the early twentieth century, however, much of Africa, except Ethiopia and Liberia, had been colonized by European powers (Falola, 2002). The European imperialist push into Africa was motivated by three main factors, economic, political, and social. It developed in the nineteenth century following the collapse of the profitability of the slave trade, its abolition and suppression, as well as

the expansion of the European capitalist Industrial Revolution (Falola, 2000). The imperatives of capitalist industrialization - including the demand for assured sources of raw materials, the search for guaranteed markets and profitable investment outlets - spurred the European scramble and the partition and eventual conquest of Africa. Thus the primary motivation for European intrusion was economic (Oyebade, 1885).

It is quite clear that most African societies fought fiercely and bravely to retain control over their countries and societies against European imperialist designs and military invasions. But the African societies eventually lost out. This was partly due to political and technological inadequacies (Prah, 2001). The nineteenth century was a period of profound and even revolutionary changes in the political geography of Africa, characterized by the demise of old African kingdoms and empires and their reconfiguration into different political entities. Some of the old societies were reconstructed and new African societies were founded on different ideological and social premises (Oyebade, 1885). Consequently, African societies were in a state of flux, and many were organizationally weak and politically unstable. They were therefore unable to put up effective resistance against the European invaders.

In the ten years between 1895 and 1905, Kenya was transformed from a footpath 600 miles long into a colonial administration. Territory which had taken up to three months to traverse could now be crossed in two or three days, and carriage by train cost a tiny fraction of the outlay which had been needed for a caravan of porters. A decade later it had been wrenched from its independent and peaceful traditional nation-states into a war zone as it was forced to appreciate the power of colonial rule. Their former cultural identities, which had insured them against natural disaster with a non-sectarian elasticity, were being hardened into new tribes by the functional politics of access to the narrow institutions of what Lonsdale calls 'conquest state'.

This transformation was the work of sheer force. The British employed violence on a locally unprecedented scale and their external force redefined internal power. Before the colonial conquest, African power had been stored in

unequal human relations which were underwritten.

Under the colonial authority, capital seemed fixed on property and racial identity. Both preserves were demarcated and protected by the state. Exclusive property rights and bureaucratic power laid the ground for an acquisitive differentiation rather than a rough parity in the enjoyment of resources. Propertied capital was designed to recruit labour by allocating resources to dependents. And taxation, which was levied on all, made it possible for public expenditure to subsidize the few, to make them more attractive to outside investors. At times of economic crisis organized force enabled the strong to squeeze the weak harder, giving an entirely new meaning to the repudiation of their claims (Ohaegbulam, 1977)

There was continuity as well as disruption. State building could not be a wholly destructive process. The British conquerors had to create a new high politics, a hierarchy of self-interest, out-of-the-existing-networks authority. African leaders may have been forced to carry unprecedented burdens, but they had also to be allowed new means to pursue old interests. Without obedient followers, they were as useless to their new rulers as to their old communities. And it was not only African notables who found much that was familiar in the unknown (Coleman, 1960). For the embryo state was built as a deliberate means to contain and direct power for the benefit of the few.

It was also formed out of the anonymous actions of many. In evading servitude, ancient and modern, the weaker members of African society used novel forms of association to regain old personal freedoms. However, unwillingly, the state protected these subversive young ways of common life and labour as much as it fostered fresh privilege. State-formation, the vulgarization of power, and state-building, its cultivation, were contradictory processes that complemented each other. This was because conquest was not only a political process but an economic force. It made room for both the oppressive and the corrosive tendencies of propertied capitalism (Fanon et al., 1963).

The power of the state had made room for the others. Missionaries, traders, officials, and landlords bid up the price for the productive allegiance of the poor, insisting that the state protect them from inflationary

consequences of their own competition. The violence of the conquest was thus never quite complete. It was to be repeatedly renewed in Kenya's subsequent history. Men of property and power would always demand new forms of protection whenever they discovered, yet again, that they could not appease the resentful ingenuity of the people except by letting slip some of the existing privileges by which capitalism was sustained locally and made profitable to backers overseas as noted by Easterly & Levine (1997).

The British urgently needed to convert internal, negotiable, and productive power. They had to emulate their own Roman governor, Agricola, of whom the admiring Tacitus had said that 'when he had done enough to inspire fear, he returned to mercy and proffered the allurements of peace'. Was Sir Arthur Hardinge, the protectorate's first commissioner, recalling his own school days in his echoed premise that, "these people must learn submission by bullets. It is the only school. After that, you may begin more modern and humane methods of education" (Ferguson, 2012).

To understand the politics of the British conquest, one must first grasp some idea of the philosophy behind and the motivation for colonization.

While maintaining the fundamental tenets of the Western nation, especially with regard to law, economics and political organisation the nation-state in Kenya became a tool of Western control, domination and exploitation of the Kenyan people (Peterson, 1987). Control, domination and exploitation were, in turn, consummated by powerful Christian religious principles which were propagated by various denominations including those within the Catholic and Protestant movements. At the heart of the teachings of these Christian denominations were deliberate efforts to denigrate African cultural values including the belief system of polygamy. The denominations assisted the state in privileging and recommending Western variants of development. In a sense, colonialism in Kenya failed to distinguish the state from the church. Like the case was in the pre-modern world, colonial Kenya witnessed both the state and the church playing complimentary roles.

All Saints Cathedral: The Expression of Ecclesiastical Hierarchy

Throughout the twentieth century, the ties between Anglicanism and nationalism were remarkably durable, even where it was not the Established Church. Anglicans commonly assumed their right to speak for all of the nation, despite the non-adherence to Anglican faith and practice of significant numbers of people. Circumstances—particularly two world wars and the continuance of the British Empire—reinforced these ties until the 1950s, but they were also partly the product of an inherited assumption that Anglican Churches were inherently national in character (Higgins, 2010). Only in the post-war decades, with decolonization, and US civil rights campaigns, did Anglicans become more critical of ethnocentrism and nationalism. Even then, their criticisms of state action were still often expressed in the name of the nation (Anderson, 1998). British clergy on the ground assumed the role of ‘civilising’ the African communities, using the architecture of ecclesiastical space to shape the communal perceptions of architectural propriety. By the 1920s, they introduced brick-walled and iron-roofed hall-type churches. By the first half of the twentieth century, Anglican ecclesiastical architecture in almost all cities in Kenya, Nairobi, Nakuru, Mombasa, Nyeri and Nanyuki were dominated by the Gothic Revival style in basilica typology, inspired mainly by Early English Gothic architecture (Williams, 2018). The design raises two key questions. First, is the design sacred in that it communicates the Divine to the mortal realm? Second, is it distinctly Kenyan in that it is relatable to the local culture and its customs? Or is it built from the outside of a culture, reflecting the history of colonialism?

As such All Saints Cathedral for example was designed by British Gothic architect, Temple Moore, in 1917 (Karanja, 1993). Moore was a Freemason, now a fraternal order, but originally a grouping of masons who were free to work anywhere. As they built the All Saints Cathedral along Kenyatta Avenue and Freemason’s lodge almost near each other. The erection of All Saints Cathedral spurred other worship places in Nairobi and its environs is informally known as ‘church island’ - the Lutheran Church, St Andrews PCEA Church, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (the Mormons) and St Paul’s Catholic Church call this stretch home (Ofula, 2019). Then there is the Nairobi Central SDA

Church along Milimani Road and the Jewish Synagogue along University Way, besides the Mamlaka Hill Chapel along Mamlaka Road. Such was the centrality of the All Saints Cathedral in the spiritual life of early settlers and the organic growth of worship places in Nairobi (Pirouet, 1998). Interestingly, the official residence of the head of the Anglican Church in Kenya was built opposite State House Nairobi for evidently spiritual reasons. Sir Evelyn Baring, the governor of Kenya during the State of Emergency, and his wife Molly, preferred receiving the Holy Communion during daily morning mass at State House, saving them the trouble of driving to All Saints Cathedral, just five minutes away.

One feature of the All Saints Cathedral that is clearly regional, is the colouring. Gothic cathedrals are normally like the Cologne Cathedral, built of stone or brick and not painted over. The use of red paint to decorate the exterior of a home “connect[s] the red of the soil to the colour of the sun...of blood, and thus of the ‘newborn’ (Karsanow, 2018). This means that the house is a product of the earth, connected to the life source of nature, the sun, and represents fertility and family which are all valuable concepts found in African societies. Another West African detail of the All Saints Cathedral is the lack of sculpture. African houses normally do not have sculpture on their exteriors unlike the highly ornamented façade of the Cologne Cathedral. The external decoration that is allowed is painting. This is translated into the façade of the Cathedral by the inclusion of sculptural niches that contain paintings of prophets and saints instead of a three-dimensional depiction of them. The importance of the entryway is also a vital aspect of Kenya vernacular architecture. When entering a house, it is as if the person is entering a new world, for “gaining access to the interior universe of dwellings means undergoing a transformation both physical and spiritual (Schnapp, 1985). The interior of domestic architecture is a completely separate space than the exterior land or compound on which it is situated.

So, all Anglican Archbishop Trevor Huddleston did was cross the road daily for the morning mass for the Governor Barings at State House. But that was just the obvious explanation. The real reason

was about the symbiotic power relations between the state and the church. Being close to one another, was symbolic to power relations. During the colonial era, it is indisputable fact that the Church and State shared power and authority. The symbols for such were manifested in architecture — the cathedral and the government building. Yet everywhere throughout the colony the former outrivaled the latter. Cathedrals were meant to impress the new subjects of Kenya as supreme examples of ultimate dominion. The Crown lavished its best talents and resources on their construction.

Anglicanism itself was a “global enterprise.” The church fought for self-preservation by contending that rival churches were “fraying the loyalty of British subjects and potentially fragmenting the empire, and that its moral authority alone could ensure the empire’s political stability, this quest for moral and political ascendancy was, furthermore, mediated through ecclesiological reform that mandated the ‘correct’ liturgical national dimension of cathedrals was emphasized through major restoration efforts and was also one of the central considerations in the projects to complete construction that were conducted during the nineteenth century. The success of these large-scale construction projects was such that it spread to other confessions, Protestant and especially Orthodox, which had taken little notice of the word “cathedral” until then, as it was foreign to their institutional structures. The term referred in this case to prestigious sanctuaries that translated regional architectural traditions onto a colossal scale (Nolan & Sandron, 2015).

Cathedrals were “international” sites par excellence due to the ambition of those who commissioned them, most frequently bishops and canonical chapters, princes, as well as town councils which often called on external architects, and thereby contributed to the increasing circulation of prestigious models and the emergence of highly novel buildings that in turn became Centers of influence. European art history can hardly overestimate the role of cathedrals, which illustrate the history of architecture better than any other type of building. Archaeology can help reveal the features of cathedrals from the high Middle Ages (Geneva) with a certain degree of clarity. More recent periods include a greater

number of buildings that are representative of an artistic movement, and this is not just true of gothic art, which stands as the emblematic style of cathedrals, thereby explaining the vigor of the “Neo-Gothic” movement during the nineteenth century (Turner, 1979).

Cathedrals were “international” sites par excellence due to the ambition of those who commissioned them, most frequently bishops and canonical chapters, princes, as well as town councils (in central Italy for example), which often called on external architects, and thereby contributed to the increasing circulation of prestigious models and the emergence of highly novel buildings that in turn became centers of influence (Kilde, 2008).

To deepen the understanding of East African ecclesiastical spaces, a comparative denominational analysis should be undertaken to contrast the architectural styles and spatial politics of the Anglican Church with other major colonial-era missions in Kenya, such as the Roman Catholic Church (e.g., the Holy Family Basilica) or the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA), to determine if different denominations utilized distinct spatial strategies to assert authority or integrate indigenous design.

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