Rethinking Colonial Africa

Investigating indigenous African architectural practices and cultures

Idumota Roadway [Lagos 2081 A.D.]
Olalekan Jeyifous

Tukul, Ethiopia

Church of Saint George
Lalibela, Ethiopia

Idumota Market [Lagos 2081 A.D.]
Olalekan Jeyifous

Murial relief façade design
Zaira, Nigeria

Dogon Cliff Villages
Bandiagara, Mali


Fictional city "Wakanda"
Hannah Beachler

When African nations were colonized, the colonizers used the "International Style" to lead the colonies into their version of the future. The modernist approach is characterized by the use of concrete and steel with minimal ornamentation. The problem is the African aesthetic culture, on the otherhand has an abundance of ornamentation, vibrant colours and textured materiality. After decades of colonization and European occupation, the top architectural landmarks and urbanisation on the continent bear little resemblance to their indigenous roots. This led me to wonder what architecture in various African communities would be like had the continent never experienced colonization.

Colonization brought an influx of International architects into the continent. Experiments in architecture and urban planning were carried out across Africa by Western architects such as Le Corbusier and Aldo van Eyck. Cities were treated as tabula rasas, a blank slate with no meaningful architectural history to consider. Architecture designed during this period treated the African colonies as natural extensions of European countries rather than stand-alone entities. Post-independence, the trend continued and rather than returning to indigenous building practices, there was as surge in neo-colonial architecture which became an aspirational aesthetic for most of the continent's elite class. As a result, this approach was endlessly replicated across the continent perpetuating the disconnect between the culture of peoples and their connection to the built environment.

The current renaissance of other spheres of African culture hint at possibilities for researching sources for indigenous African architectures. Art, music and fashion have all seen a resurgence in recent years both on the continent and globally with great success, but very few architects see the value in traditional African aesthetics. To fill this gap, modern artists and filmmakers have begun to imagine what futuristic African cities would look like. In a series of drawings Olalekan Jeyifous imagines Lagos, Kenya and Johannesburg in the year 2081 A.D., there are touches of "futuristic" elements like elevated roads and new modes of transportation but an absence of Western modernism with the high rises depicted in materials other than glass, steel and concrete. Similarly, in the film "Black Panther", production designer Hannah Beachler was tasked with designing the fictional country "Wakanda" which escaped colonization and instead developed a **vibrant afrofuturist aesthetic** removed from European ideals.

Cultural identity attained through architectural expression has been distorted in Africa and with this Fellowship, I intend to delve into the historical layers embedded within the fabric of various African countries. I would like to study traditional methods of craft and fabrication, cultural and social customs and practices like storytelling inscribed into building façades, in order to discover possible points of departure for an architecture of Pan-Africa. As Tanzanian born architect David Adjaye has said, "the building practices of traditional African architecture offer some useful lessons in working with climate, topography and **cultivating a sense of place.**"

The research done with this travel fellowship will be used as a precursor to my upcoming Thesis centred on the same theme, which looks into the importance of architecture as a cultural identifier in post-colonial Nigeria.

ARRIVAL

DEPARTURE
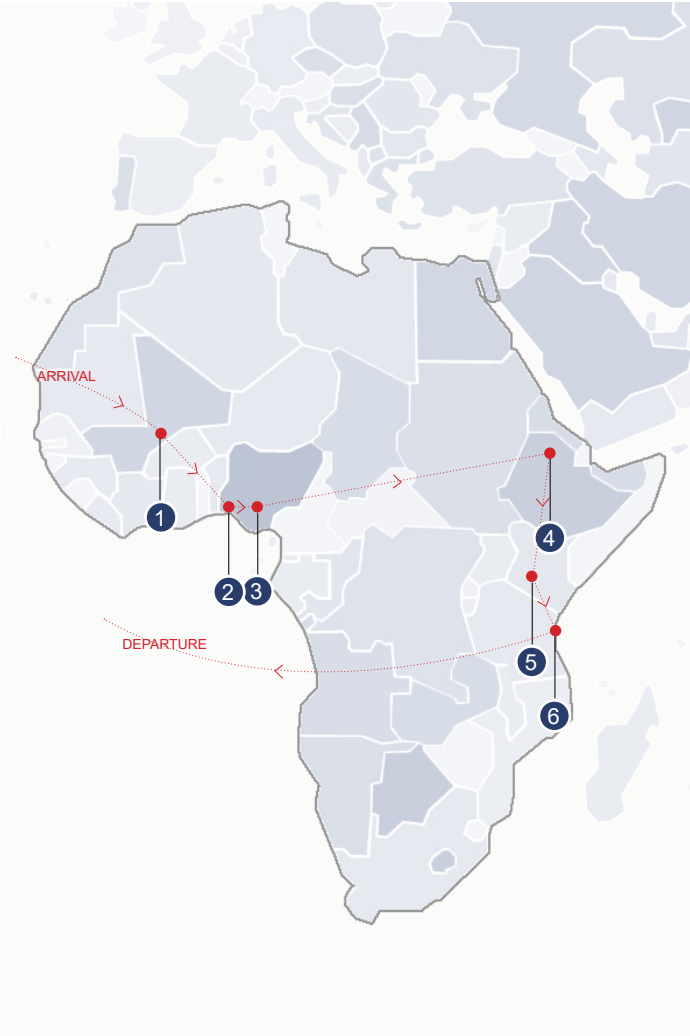
Expenses

Flight (USA>Mali)	
Flight (Tanzania>USA):	$1100
Flights (1>2>4>5>6):	$1750
Food ($25/Day X 30):	$750
Hotel ($140/Night avg x 30):	$4200
In-City Travel:	$2000

Total:
$9,850

Itinerary / 30 days

Bandiagara, Mali – 1
6 Days
    Cliff Villages (Dogon)
    Great Mosque of Djenné
    Grand Marché
    Pama Sinatoa (Mud Cloth)

Lagos, Nigeria – 2
3 Days
    Makoko floating village
    University of Lagos
    Jakande Market

Benin, Nigeria – 3
3 Days
    Great Wall of Benin
    Benin Bronze merchants
    Oba Market

Lalibela, Ethiopia – 4
6 Days
    Rock-Hewn Churches
    Tukuls (houses)
    Castles of Gondar
    Lalibela Market

Nairobi, Kenya – 5
6 Days
    Borma Village
    Maasai Camp (Amboseli)
    Maasai Market

Zanzibar, Tanzania – 6
6 Days
    Stone Town
    Bagamoyo
    Spice Plantations
    Jambiani Village
    Darajani Market