

Anna Bruna Menghini
Sub-Saharan Africa. Identity, Tradition, Memory

Abstract

Aside from economic and social questions, the African Continent is also now confronting the delicate question of cultural identity. The historical process marked by the phases of colonisation/decolonisation/globalisation-global colonisation, has had, and continues to have, a profound influence on African architectural culture, in which it is possible to recognise diverse attitudes. Urban culture is generating a complex and articulated reflection by artists and architects tackling the effects of contemporary globalisation, as well as the contradictory legacy of colonialism and stereotypes linked to African identity. Rural contexts, instead, are witnessing a renewed emergence of an approach that considers the needs of dwelling expressed by local communities, re-elaborating architectural culture and traditional construction.

Keywords

African architecture — Tradition and innovation in architecture — Globalisation — Architectural identity

Identity: cross-views between Africa and the West

Confronting the theme of new architecture in Africa implies a necessary reflection on current processes of globalisation, in an era that risks replicating, albeit in a diverse form, the colonial era of the past century. Today there is little doubt that the “global village” in which we are all interconnected has amplified, rather than resolving, material questions and inequalities resulting from past imbalances and exploitations at the global scale. In particular, in sub-Saharan areas, the migratory flows of populations in movement, which questions the very concept of “belonging to place”, is exposing the criticalities of rural development, further aggravated by shortages of food and water.¹ Coupled with exponential population growth, this phenomenon is generating the uncontrolled growth of urban concentrations and informal settlements, and accentuating social disparities and housing emergencies, all exacerbated by environmental and health crises².

The understanding of these situations, which feel distant from the Western world, push us to reflect on now generalised and global questions, whose effects reverberate across the globe: the pandemic crisis and climate change offer dramatic examples.

Faced with primary needs and the problems arising from a situation of emergency, the question of how to properly approach indigenous cultures of dwelling to understand local identities may appear rather specious. Instead, it is as necessary as ever, considering that on the one hand these territories are subject to pervasive forms of economic neo-colonialism by European, American, and above all Asian superpowers, and that, on the other hand, through the “culture of cooperation”, there is a risk of intervening in



Fig. 1
A Fulani village, Nigeria (from Oliver 1971)



Fig. 2
Kano Village, Nigeria (from Oliver 1971)

these contexts with a questionable attitude of charity, imposing, even with the best of intentions, models foreign to local cultures. Fortunately, “cooperation for development”, which once tended to make choices that did not always bring impulses to the growth of communities, in recent experiences demonstrates a more territorially integrated approach, more attentive toward identity, to natural resources and to local systems of production.

The geopolitical, economic, cultural, social and humanitarian reasons driving the Western world to deal today with the African Continent, to the point of direct involvement, have deep roots.

There are still visible traces of the Western presence that began in the early 1900s with the overpowering colonisations imposed by nations destined to become the planet’s richest powers. However, there are also positive and fecund legacies of that cultural and scientific attention toward the African Continent that developed thanks to the work of Western explorers, geographers, ethnologists, anthropologists, sociologists, architects and engineers, in contrast with colonial policies that fostered a consideration of Africa as a virgin terrain, ready to be exploited and lacking its own history (La Cecla 2019).

The most significant experiences include those of the German ethnologist Leo Frobenius. Using material gathered during the course of his twelve expeditions, he demonstrated to Europeans the multiplicity and richness of African arts and traditions. Frobenius interpreted ancient civilisations, and those of the so-called primitives, as a vast repertory of experiences, comprehensible only by assuming the “symbol” as the base of any culture



Fig. 3
 “Maputopia”. Models of colonial buildings in Maputo made by local artists. AAMatters and Bernard Groosjohan Collection (from Folkers).

and the origin of knowledge founded on “commotion” at the base of civilisation (*Ergriffenheit*) (Frobenius 1933).

Another milestone is represented by Claude Lévi-Strauss, the French anthropologist, sociologist and ethnologist who approached “primitive” cultures from a structuralist vantage point. His studies also questioned the presumed superiority of Western societies and revealed their link with tribal societies, consisting in those universal intellectual and atemporal structures underlying the identical psycho-cognitive dispositions adopted by diverse societies to develop myths, practice rituals, root themselves to territories and preside over social organisations. For Lévi-Strauss, “savage thinking” was a mental form peculiar to all humans – though characterising, for historical and structural reasons, above all of non-Western cultures – based on a particular attention toward the sensitive properties of what is real, and their capacity to function as signs, rather than abstraction and logical classification of ideal qualities and classes (Lévi-Strauss 1962).

As regards architecture, when occupying nations began urbanising and building infrastructures in African territories, they became one of the privileged means for affirming the civilising superiority of Western culture. In Africa, as in other colonial endeavours, the architectural language imposed by diverse foreign powers initially attempted a subtle penetration, by mixing with “exotic” idioms, aligned with the eclecticism found in Western architectural culture of the late 1800s; the colonial style was later progressively substituted by a normalised code, an emblem of a new imperialism, between monumental classicism and rationalist overtones.

Between the 1950s and ‘60s, in correspondence with the gradual process of decolonisation, a conspicuous demand developed in Africa for public works and infrastructures, essential tools for modernising expanding territories and cities. Responses were offered by architects, engineers and technicians from colonising as well as African nations. Renewed images and new symbols were offered to a post-colonial project, borrowed from the legacy of Western modernism, though revisited through local references³. In parallel, during the post-war period, Africa acquired a certain visibility in Western architecture and art, a role it had already played during the

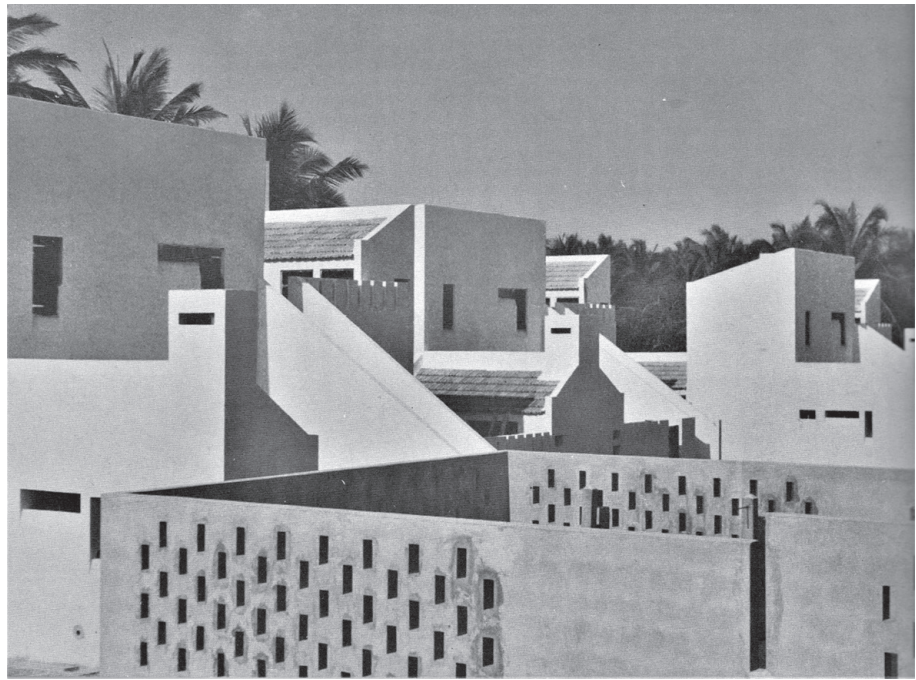


Fig. 4
Pancho Guedes, Residences
“Leão que Ri”, Maputo [Lourenço
Marques], Mozambique, 1954-
58 (from Kultermann 1969).

early 1900s with neo-primitivism, which recognised the foundation of a modern sensibility in the aesthetic of archaic forms, beyond the limit of a cultural Euro-centrism that had yet to be questioned⁴. With the decline of the most avant-garde elements of the Modern Movement and the programme to spread the International Style, people began to look with new eyes at spontaneous autochthonous experiences, as the more authentic and rational origin of the modern language, arriving at a sort of “invention of tradition” as an expression of a new cultural *koine*⁵. In this context, the traditional architecture of sub-Saharan Africa had a significant influence on post-war modernism in Europe and North America; however, less for linguistic aspects – that of Arab origins in North Africa lent itself more to evoking the rational “white volumes under light” – than for structures of composition recognisable at the base of models of dwelling. For example, Team10, with the *Charter of Habitat* drawn up in 1953 during the CIAM IX, in particular through the research of Aldo Van Eyck, Georges Candilis, Alexis Josic and Shadrach Woods, all referenced traditional African architecture. Its particular, morphologies of settlement stimulated the search for new urban structures capable of guiding spontaneous developments, together with the experimentation with compositional systems of clusters and cells capable of growing through self-regulation and germinating spaces suitable for communities (Dainese 2020).

In the late 1970s, in the midst of the global oil crisis, the products of modernist technocracy, which continued to prosper in Africa, also drawing on postmodern architecture, began to slowly give way under the pressure of so-called “appropriate technology”, a theory that questioned the Western paradigm centred on consumerism, big industry and centralised organisation. For new architecture it proposed making recourse to “intermediate” technologies, anticipating many ecological themes (Shumacher 1973).

It would be necessary to wait until the 1980s, and the arrival of Critical Regionalism theorised by Kenneth Frampton, partially a child of the “Unfinished Project of Modernity” of Jürgen Habermas, to recognise the role of the environment in architecture – intended in its ecological, historical and cultural dimension – and to discover and give value, without

**Fig. 5**

D. A. Barrett and D.P.C., Dwelling Houses at Christiansborg Government Building, Accra, Ghana, 1962 (from Kultermann 1969)

forced ideologies and in response to postmodern eclecticism, the authentic contents and richness of regional schools (Frampton 1983; Frampton-Kultermann 1999).

The 1990s were characterised by a double register, accentuated the following decade and demonstrating with greater evidence the imbalances in territorial development; on the one hand, the exponential growth of megalopolises and medium-sized cities and, on the other hand, the abandonment of rural areas and villages.

With a creativity as visionary as it was standardising, gigantic master plans began to design virtual new towns, satellite cities and new insertions, for example the Cité du Fleuve in Kinshasa, Eko-Atlantic City in Lagos, Tatu City and Konza Techno City in Nairobi. They were accompanied by the construction of speculative projects by leading international practices, advertised under the banner of *smart* and eco-sustainable, based on the models of megalopolises like Dubai, Shanghai or Singapore and driven by real estate investments for society's mid to upper classes (Albrecht 2014).

The new face of Africa's megalopolises – the visible manifestation of vast economic capital – is taking shape in images influenced by Asian models, almost tribal in their paradoxical and hyper-coloured expressions, projected toward the future in search of a non-conventional “African identity”⁶.

These operations, increasingly more tenacious and larger in scale, are cancelling informal areas, at least on paper, to make room for gated urban communities, islands and enclaves separated from the city of the poor. Yet, the flexible spaces of informality, modelled directly by inhabitants and with indefinite boundaries between public and private use, paradoxically appear to be a better representation of the authentic and contradictory nature of the contemporary African city (Sennett 2018). In opposition to the cultural and morphological standardisation that defines the growth of large cities, today we are beginning to confront the problem of what model of dwelling should be proposed in alternative to slums. A model that does not follow the logics of globalisation, but is born of local cultures, evaluating hypotheses of urban regeneration and the revisitation of spontaneous mod-

els of land occupation.

What is more, in antithesis to large urban concentrations, in the immense informal village spread across the territory – the sum, or better yet fractal development, of infinite micro-villages – we are now witness to small though widespread interventions connected with strategies of humanitarian aid, through *not-for-profit* projects, above all in the field of assistance, such as schools and healthcare facilities. The objective is to support the development of rural situations by involving local communities, also to help dissuade the mass exodus of populations toward metropolises where they find few real prospects for subsistence.

Tradition and Memory: The New Generation of African Architects

Beyond economic and social questions, actively being confronted through international cooperation, the African Continent is now facing the question, apparently less pressing though more delicate, of cultural identity. The multiplicity of many “Africas” present on the continent does not correspond with a geographic and political situation, nor does it coincide with national borders; instead it is the fruit of cultural and ethnic stratifications that make for a particularly complex and articulated identity of this continent, where we can recognise indigenous, Islamic and Judaic-Christian components (Holm-Kallehauge 2015).

The historical process marked by phases of colonisation-decolonisation-globalisation, to the current state of global colonisation, has had, and continues to have, a profound influence on African architectural culture. A culture that reveals diverse attitudes, the children of Pan-African pride and the revindication of pre-colonial cultural roots that characterised the *Négritude* movement.

On the one hand, metropolitan contexts generate a reflection that confronts the colonial legacy and the effects of contemporary globalisation, also using stereotypes linked to identity, or better yet, African identities. Contemporary artists and architects often refute the reference to “tradition” to produce works based on syncretism or hybridisation that, what is more, have always characterised this continent. Concentrating on the socio-cultural and geopolitical questions of our complex contemporary reality, they work with the contamination between cultures, including the “global village” and new metropolitan cosmopolitanism (Njami-Motisi 2018).

On the other hand, in rural contexts there is a renewed emergence of an approach, simple and authentic, to the needs of communities, founded on the relationship between architecture and place, and the revisitation of ritual, symbolic and archaic aspects of dwelling and building, still present in villages.

Beyond the historical-documentary attention toward architectural heritage in rural areas, concentrated for the most part in objects with aesthetic value and exceptional characteristics⁷, in the recent past there has been a drop in economic interest in the conservation, not only physical, but above all cultural, of heritage, for the most part immaterial; traditional building is gradually disappearing and with it the values of historical memory and identity, but above all the survival of material culture and the technical-building know-how passed down through the generations (Oliver 1971; Denyer-MacClure 1976; Silberfein 1998).

Fortunately, a younger class of African architects is emerging alongside the new professionalism linked to the world of volunteering and large international humanitarian institutions: a generation of architects educated in

Western schools who have returned home to work, with a new awareness and a new sense of pride and belonging.

Operating in sub-Saharan Africa, these architects propose a regional architecture which is not limited to dealing with the pressing problems of emergencies, but instead confronts the universal theme of the relationship man-nature; a dyad that appears to have been resolved by Western civilisation using a strictly anthropocentric and rational approach imposed on the complexity of reality, whose imbalances are now beginning to show (Lepik 2013).

These architects pursue a diverse “modernity as a return to origins”, in order to «revive an old, dormant civilisation and take part in universal civilisation» (Ricoeur 1965). They return to and reinterpret the vital and still actual characteristics of African traditions (Arecchi 1999) in projects linked to the specificity of place, morphology, vegetation and climate, and attribute a priority to the physical component of architecture and the expressive potential of building materials.

Their architecture is measured against the original elements of nature, which have always demonstrated their richness here, but also their indomitable force that even the most technologically advanced powers are struggling with today. Their buildings model the ground, collect water, manage the air, conserve fire. We can recognise the archetypes of the “enclosure” and the “roof” in their arrangement as simple diaphragm walls beneath large elevated coverings. They are works of architecture that offer an original interpretation of the continuity between interior and exterior, and the mixture between public and private space, returning to models of building and settlement derived from local dwelling traditions.

In reality these recent examples of African architecture are born of a primarily pragmatic objective: providing above all the public structures required by communities living in villages, and together, training craftsmen directly on site, using traditional or intelligently innovative techniques.

These architects often make use of assisted self-construction, critically proposing an updated form of “architecture without architects”, providing manuals and guidelines for those involved in both design and construction, in the wake of the passionate experience of Yona Friedman. They also experiment with entirely new models of dwelling and building, for certain verses closer to nomadic traditions, using lightweight and flexible structures built using industrial and standardised products or second hand materials.

They also introduce innovative elements in terms of environmental and energy sustainability, standards suited to contemporary well-being and lifestyles, always respectful of local socio-cultural characteristics and proposing solutions suitable for confronting ever more pressing hygienic-sanitary problems.

The architectural themes linked to the landscape, dwelling and building being explored by these are generating a common language, adopted also by non-African designers working in these territories. Models of settlement, typology and building, recurring and repeated with small variations and triggered by their integration with the site, adherence to material cultures and the needs of communities and individuals; they draw strength from the ritual of repeating ancient actions, renewed each time, thanks also to exchanges with other cultures, including Western.

These projects present us with a positive globalisation that shares essential



Fig. 6
Diébédó Francis Kéré, Extension
of the Primary School in Gando,
Burkina Faso, 2006-08 (© Iwan
Baan).

and original architectural languages in the name of a cosmopolitan vision. This is a much needed openness, considering that new projects cannot avoid dealing with the penetration and influence of contemporary global culture, to which communities aspire to belong because they are associated with the idea of economic wellbeing and social development.

In particular, since the early 2000s a number of very interesting, and now internationally recognised architects have been working in the rural territories of sub-Saharan Africa.

On the one hand, we find African architects fully inserted within the international panorama, who combine a multicultural approach with an introspective look at identity: David Adjaye, born in Tanzania, with offices in London, New York and Accra, Ghana whose works include the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, the Ruby City Contemporary Art Center in San Antonio, Texas, the National Cathedral and District Hospitals in Ghana, the Martyrs Memorial in Niamey; the Nigerian architect Kunlé Adeyemi, who worked at OMA before opening his own practice NLÉ in Nigeria and The Netherlands, designer of the Makoko Floating School in Lagos; the Ghanaian Joe Osae-Addo, with offices in Ghana and the United States, one of the leading promoters of current international debate on contemporary African architecture, through the organisation ArchiAfrika. Alongside them we find architects educated abroad and operating primarily in Africa: Diébédó Francis Kéré who re-invested what he had learned in Germany back home, experimenting with a renewal of local traditions beginning with the schools constructed in his native village of Gando in Burkina Faso; the Nigerian Mariam Kamara, a pupil of David Adjaye, who lives in Boston and runs an office in Niamey, author of the Niamey 2000 residential complex, the Hikma religious and laic centre and regional market in Dandaji, and the Cultural Centre in Niamey; Christian Benimana, director of MASS Design Group in Rwanda, the creator in Kigali of the first African Design Centre. Also interesting is the activity of such international groups as the Konkuey Design Initiative (KDI) whose primary office is in Nairobi, and Active Social Architecture (ASA) operating out of Kigali. Finally, other realities worthy of mention include the many architects working in South Africa, including: Peter Rich, Noero Wolff Architects, Makeka Design Lab, A4AC Architects, Local Studio, Tsai Design Studio, Studio[D]Tale, DesignSpaceAfrica.



Fig. 7
Diébédo Francis Kéré, Hight School Schorge, Koudougou, Burkina Faso, 2014-16 (© Iwan Baan).



Fig. 8
Diébédo Francis Kéré, Hight School Schorge, Koudougou, Burkina Faso, 2014-16 (© Iwan Baan).



Fig. 9
Diébédo Francis Kéré, Courtyard of the Center for Health and Social Care, Laongo, Burkina Faso, 2012-14 (© Kéré Architecture).



Fig. 10
Diébédo Francis Kéré, Teacher accommodation in Gando, Burkina Faso, 2004 (© Erik-Jan Ouwkerk).

Fig. 11

United4design-Yasaman Es-maili, Elizabeth Golden, Mariam Kamara, Philip Straeter, Residential complex "Niamey 2000", Niamey, Niger, 2016 (© Torsten Seidel).

**Fig. 12**

Toshiko Mori, THREAD Artist residence and cultural center, Sinthian, Senegal, 2015 (© Iwan Baan).



One of the most significant experiences is that of Francis Kéré, working to provide the services required by communities in small villages, involving them directly in the phases of design and construction. Using a sustainable and low-cost approach to design, he adopts principles that promote the material and human resources present in a given territory. Hybridising materials and adapting advanced technologies to local contexts, he substitutes the common use of concrete with blocks of packed earth or local stone, uses double roof systems with large overhanging metal elements detached from the main volumes to ensure passive ventilation and cooling, protect against rainfall and collect water and create large areas of shade and places to spend time outdoors. Never vernacular, his now numerous works fuse the language of modern architecture with the clarity of “primitive” examples. The majority of his work is can be found in Burkina Faso, his homeland: the Gando school complex – two primary and one secondary schools, a library and staff lodgings –, the Dano secondary school, the Léo Medical Centre, the Noomdo Orphanage, the Lycée Schorge in Koudougou, Opera Village in Laongo. In Mozambique he designed a settlement for Benga Riverside residential

**Fig. 13**

caravatti_caravatti architetti,
Jigiya So Psychomotor Rehabil-
itation Center, Mali, 2005-14 (©
caravatti_caravatti architetti).

**Fig. 14**

caravatti_caravatti architetti,
Primary school in Kobà, Mali,
2006-07 (© caravatti_caravatti
architetti).

community and the Startup Lions Campus in Kenya.

In parallel, a growing number of foreign architects are working in African nations, sharing the same approach to design and using comparable languages. The most well-known include: Spain's Urko Sanchez Architects, with offices in Madrid and Nairobi, Albert Faus working out of Burkina Faso, Selgas Cano; the Dutch office LEVS Architecten in Mali; Portugal's ColectivoMEL; the German Studio Mzamba; New York-based Sharon Davis Design; the French Collectif Saga; the English Orkidstudio based in Nairobi; the Belgian practice BC architect.

Among Italian architects, TAMassociati is one of the most active professional practices in the construction of healthcare facilities in Sudan and Darfur, in collaboration con Emergency. The projects in Mali and Burkina Faso by the studio Caravatti, particularly attentive toward local context, introduce advances in technology such as, for example, the Nubian vault.

Each architect seems to read aspects of their own culture in the contexts presented in Africa: while Japan's Toshiko Mori (author of a cultural centre and school in in Senegal) and Shigeru Ban (who experimented

Fig. 15

TAMassociati, Pediatric Center, Nyala, South Darfur, Sudan, 2010 (© TAMassociati).

**Fig. 16**

FAREstudio, CBF_ Women's Health Center, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, 2007 (© FAREstudio).



with shelters for refugees in Kenya) confront the refined traditions of wood and bamboo construction, weaving and lightweight materials, their Italian counterparts tend to look more at the solidity of masonry construction.

This brief excursus demonstrates how the approach to African architecture by the West has been, and continues to be, influenced inevitably by a Western point of view, even when it attempts to change its vantage point. This is also true in the contrary when African architects look Westward. Nonetheless, this reciprocal conditioning, when assumed with awareness, is at the origin of that enrichment of civilisation that is generated through an exchange of cross-views, and consents an interpretation of the concept of identity as a shifting condition, open to hybridisations.

Above all, we in the West are becoming aware, as Frobenius and Lévi-Strauss noted, that when we look to Africa and its most original and authentic expressions we indirectly observe ourselves and our origins. In fact, we can retrace many of the characters common to diverse cultures, deriving from the human condition of “being in the world”. The study of African architecture consents us, for example, to approach the original and essential acts of dwelling and building, universal and at the same time linked to regional contexts. This same observation also directs us to reflect on forms of settlement and dwelling, alternatives to those consolidated in Western culture, founded on diverse ratios between public and private space and between spaces of dwelling and working.

Africa pushes, furthermore, toward even more radical considerations of the role of architecture as a “common good”, diffused throughout society: necessary evaluations for Western civilisation, where architecture and the

building industry, apparently prospering, express a crisis of common sense and the very meanings of dwelling and building.

Further still, the awareness of African cultures stimulates us to reconsider the anonymous and collective condition of design and the permanence of material knowledge rooted in simple principles and sustainable technologies integrated with the environment. It also focuses on the development of participatory processes that unite the figures of the creator, the builder and the user.

The encounter and exchange among Western cultures and autochthonous cultures can also favour a reciprocal enrichment in terms of methodology. Cultures of dwelling and building founded on primary needs and spontaneous technologies, handed down from generation to generation, when interpreted using Western analytical and scientific methods, can produce interesting and innovative results. On the one hand, local communities can improve how they live and build, thanks to environmental and hygienic-sanitary best practices and through innovations applied to materials and building processes. On the other hand, for Western culture, the constantly growing attention toward sustainability and ecological reconversion, the need to guarantee an equilibrium between natural and artificial landscapes and biodiversity in man-made habitats, the trend toward minimalism, the essential, authenticity, naturality and the sharing of architecture, can find non-conventional answers by observing non-globalised cultures.

Inserted in this framework of questions, “learning from Africa” becomes more than a simple slogan that serves to pacify guilty consciences. Instead, it represents a real opportunity for reflecting, indirectly, on our model of progress, now in a state of crisis, and for imagining a new shared direction for global development that passes through the local.

Notes

1 Cf. *Rural Africa in motion. A Dynamics and drivers of migration South of the Sahara*, report edited by the FAO, 2017.

2 It is forecast that by 2050 Africa’s urban population will account for 20% of the global population. African cities will be home to 950 million people more than today. Cf. *Africa’s Urbanisation Dynamics 2020. Africapolis. Mapping a new urban geography*, a research that produced “Africapolis”, an interactive online map that brings together information systems useful to the comprehension of the urban phenomenon of the African Continent (<https://africapolis.org/en>). Analyses and proposal for transforming Africa settlements are constantly documented in publications edited by UN-Habitat (<https://unhabitat.org/>).

3 Alongside the numerous architects active in North Africa (Fernand Pouillon, Roland Simounet, Jean Bossu, Louis Miquel, Pierre Bourlier and José Ferrer-Laloë, Oscar Niemeyer in Algeria, Hassan Fathy in Egypt, Michel Écochard, Jean-François Zevaco, Elie Azagury, Abdeslam Faraoui and Patrice de Mazières, Henri Tastemain in Morocco), many local architects also worked in sub-Saharan Africa, including: the Nigerian Demas Nwoko, the Tanzanians Anthony Almeida and Beda Amuli, the Portuguese-Mozambican Pancho Guedes, the Ethiopian Michael Tedros with the Israeli Zalman Enav, the Nigerian Oluwale Olumuyiwa, the South African Norman Eaton, and such European architects as: the French Henri Chomette, the Greek Constantinos Doxiadis, the English Edwin Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew –exponents of Tropical Architecture –and D. A. Barrett, the German Ernst May, the Italians Renato Severino, Marcello D’Olivo, Arturo Mezzedimi, as well as the more famous Pierluigi Nervi, Cesare Valle, Luigi Moretti and, some years later, Fabrizio Carola. In particular, the Italian interest matured during those years in new African architecture is demonstrated in the monographic issue dedicated to Africa of *Edilizia Moderna*, n. 89-90, published in 1967. Cf. Kultermann 1969; Folkers and Van Buiten 2019.

4 In 1905-06 the *Fauves* group began studying art in sub-Saharan Africa and Oceania, in part under the influence of the works of Gauguin acquiring visibility at the time in Paris. Pablo Picasso, in particular during his “African period” (1907-1909), explored traditional sculpture and masks, recognising their important formal potential.

5 In Italy, the interest in Africa came with the re-evaluation of anonymous and popular tradition that – following Giuseppe Pagano’s investigations of rural architecture – were affirmed in the 1950s. This interest culminated with *Architecture Without Architects*, published in 1964 by Bernard Rudofsky, which dedicates a great deal of space precisely to African architecture. In December 1954 Ernesto Nathan Rogers published a reportage in *Casabella Continuità* on traditional African architecture in equatorial Africa, commenting it in a critical text centred on the concept of “civilisation”.

6 A condition expressed in the early 1990s in the utopian urban visions of the Congolese sculptor Bodys Isek Kingelez, in a pastiche of large coloured objects now a source of inspiration for Africa’s megalopolises.

7 The study of the multiple forms of traditional dwelling is stimulated by the UNESCO action to protect *Indigenous peoples and intangible cultural heritage*. The concept of “heritage” as it is expanding in Europe, is well adapted to the African context. Cf. the framework Convention of the European Council for the conservation of cultural heritage from 2011. Known as the “Faro Convention”, it promotes a vision of heritage not as a collection of “objects”, but as a “group of resources inherited from the past which people identify, independently of ownership, as a reflection and expression of their constantly evolving values, beliefs, knowledge and traditions”.

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