

WHAT HAVE YOU DONE DURING THIS EMERGENCY?

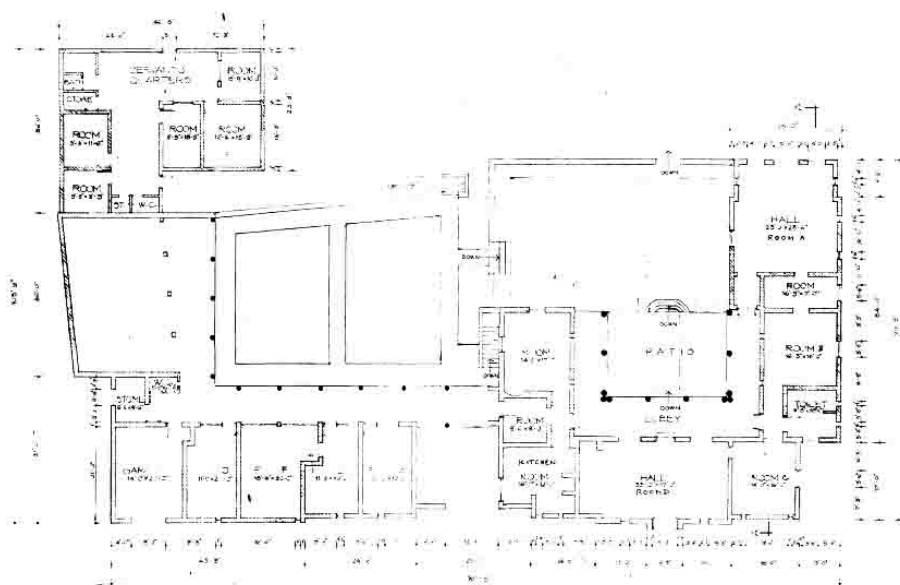


Figure 1.
PLAN MURUMBI HOUSE

A story is narrated by Murumbi, where during his days as the Foreign Minister he once told off an Under-secretary in his office. It was regarding an incident where an old friend of Murumbi, fresh out of detention had showed up at his office looking like shit had happened to him. Murumbi took it upon himself to help him including dispatching a call to the then president, Jomo Kenyatta; because the man had been a true patriot. When Murumbi asked his under secretary to find a job for his friend, his under-secretary proceeded to ask the man what kind of job he could do. This infuriated Murumbi so much that he turned to his secretary and snapped, “Don’t ask this man what kind of job he can do. ¹What have you done during this emergency?”

We are not so much interested in the collection of Murumbi as we are of what the existence of these and other archives affect our existence (if at all). I am interested in what the Murumbi Institute of African Studies would have looked like today. What kind of discourse would be delivered and shared here? To be denied access to our history that has been told and lived by us was always the oppressor’s plan.

We are approaching this dig as a form of speculative practice. A dig that re-introduces us to Joseph Murumbi as both truth and myth and what a newly independent Kenya must have looked like through his eyes. We’re also speculating about his life after politics, when his collecting scope expanded, who else might have been doing the

¹ *A Path Not Taken: The story of Joseph Murumbi.* By Anne Thurston

same thing in the country? How was it crossing paths with other African intellectuals at a time of great debates on Pan-Africanism?

A man of science and a man of the Arts

The 2nd quarterly *Chronic* book by Chimurenga was recently launched in Dakar to coincide with the Dak'Art biennale under the title, "What African Writers can learn from Cheikh anta Diop." I draw a lot of parallels between Diop and Joseph Murumbi. An imaginary dialogue between these two men allows us to conceive of a new man who is both a dreamer and a general in the realm of Art, Science, politics and philosophy. Embracing Diop's thoughts on science I would also say, that the lesson of Art is not about certainty³. "... It is about precariousness-the precariousness of what we consider to be the external world and the precariousness of the mental structures and categories through which we endeavor to know the world."

While Diop turned his ordinary lab at IFAN into an alchemists den, Murumbi's house became a private museum while holding space for The Murumbi Institute of African Studies. Souleymane Bachir Diagne while applauding the many advances enabled by Cheikh Anta Diop however counsels,

⁴"...a laboratory should not be the territory of a king. By definition, a laboratory is a network that is endlessly open, like science itself; and like science itself, it is meant to survive the exit of any scientist."

Spaces of excellence for black excellence

Space invites community. A shared platform where everyone gets to engage actively in matters that raise awareness about their own immediate world & the universe. Without oxygen for the agitators and saboteurs on the inside the struggle cannot triumph. We are dealing with the resurrection of memories, distribution and access to knowledge in a country where that education has long been denied or expunged. We need labs, studios and libraries that are treated like living things; needing constant nourishment and purpose.

⁵The University of East Africa (1963-70) is considered the most ambitious pan-African academic experiment. Medical & Agricultural teaching & research was to be a specialty of Makerere College in Uganda, University College-Nairobi was to take care of Engineering-teaching & research while the University College-Dar es Salaam specialized in law

² *Chronic books, Chimurenga, April 2018*

³ *What African writers can learn from Cheikh anta Diop.by Boubacar Boris Diop, Chronic books, Chimurenga. April 2018*

⁴ *What African writers can learn from Cheikh anta Diop. Souleymane Bachir Diagne, Chronic books, Chimurenga. April 2018*

⁵ *General history of Africa, VIII: Africa since 1935*

& later expanded to agricultural & economics. The mandate of these & other institutions was to solve some of the most vital scientific & sociological problems confronting the black world. Perhaps an organization of Scientists & Artists of the black world?

The looting of memory

The bulk of what has been & is being siphoned from the continent cannot be compared to the looting of its memory. With increased disappearance and distortion of culture, the more precarious our memories become. The inheritance of memory is imperative now more than ever compared to the inheritance of wealth and preserving archives falls here. Civilizations are remembered by their culture, not by their economics or politics. What is it that we're preserving to be discovered by the future? It is here and now that we must position ourselves.

Decolonizing libraries

Decolonization is the process through which colonial rule is ended, colonial values and styles abandoned and colonial institutions dismantled. It would be fantastic if the McMillan Memorial Library were to get rid of a lot of reading material from the main reading area. A space for archiving a painful & shameful past ought to be created outside of the main space that exists so that we may continually abolish the colonizers version of accounts. The more one digs, the less one likes what one finds.

-The decolonization of libraries should be addressed in the same urgency applied to repatriation demands.

-A fair and equal selection of different ages in archive management hierarchies should also be considered. It is vital that different generations work and exist side by side while acting as custodians of our spaces of excellence.

Accessing an Archive

How does one enter, access or position a collection and by extension an archive? The interest in seeing, exhibiting and collecting data on a newly colonized Kenya began as far back as 1928 when Henry Balfour, the curator of Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford University, visited Kenya. The museum has one of the largest collections of archaeological and anthropological artifacts belonging to Kenya. Some other interesting material tucked out of the country include, a copy of *The Taveta Chronicle*; the first newspaper published in East Africa, records about the hushed Mau Mau oath ceremonies, Black and White photographs, one depicting Chief Sendeyo of the Maasai, papers and books on the Kikuyu & a Xerox copy about the origins of Kenya as the name of the country.

⁶Audiovisual archives at Kenya National Archives and Documentation Service

- Reel Films
- Audio /Visual tapes
- Optical media
- Transparencies (slides and negatives)
- 15,000 Photographs
- 4,000 Maps, plans and chart

The Murumbi Africana Collection: consists of a rare collection of books belonging to the late Joseph Murumbi

Building the Institute

While tracing all these threads I have also unearthed a few things. I discovered a report prepared by ⁷UNESCO in 1981 detailing the extent of Murumbi's collection. The team was able to take an inventory of things that were damaged and even managed to repair some. Plans for *The Murumbi institute of African Studies* were also extensively discussed and arrangements were made to find a suitable place for them. The document features architectural plans of Murumbi's house in Muthaiga as well as a proposed pavillion at the Kenya National Archives that was to permanently house Murumbi's collection.

⁶ Kenya National Archives website

⁷ *Conservation of the Joseph Murumbi African Art Collection, Nairobi*. Report by Alexandra Trone