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**TRANSFORMATION OF BUKUSU VERNACULAR
ARCHITECTURE**

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BAR 613: WRITTEN THESIS

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DECLARATION

This thesis is my original work and to the best of my knowledge has not been presented in any other University or Institution for the purpose of awarding a degree.

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This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of the examination requirements for the award of the Bachelor of Architecture degree in the Department of Architecture and Building Science at The University of Nairobi.

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God: For being my all, He has brought me this far in my career.

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DEDICATION

To My Family

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

Bulokho- finger millet

Kamaemba- sorghum

Kamakhalange- fermented sorghum

Lusuli- astick protruding from the top of a hut which symbolised the man's private parts

Elusiro- inner section in a house designed for the husband and wife

Lifumbukho- parts of a river where there was a whirlpool

Khulia silukhi- adultery

Ekegeno- an unmarried girl's hut

Isimba- a hut belonging to a boy who has just been circumcised

Elilago- a rule of custom

Endebe- a stool or chair

Elidula- a yard that is formed in between granaries

Omukhebi- the person who circumcises the boys

Endubisi- colobus monkey skin

Chitiang'u- a rare root

Omuruchi- dried soil

Mulusingakhubaala- foreskin

Omutili- the person who assists the omukhebi

Omutilingi- the tutor who guides the circumcised boys

Khubalimia- cleanse their hands

Enguu- medicine

Omufulu- a circumcised person

Likombe- circumcision hut

Kamalwa kekukhwiyalula- alcohol which is drunk when the initiates leave the likombe

Namakhala- guardian

Batembete- the initiates after they have healed and can now go back to their father's house

Khulielo- when the initiates are given a lot of food till they get satisfied, usually cooked bananas

Bibingilo- age grades for circumcised groups

Liakha- marriage with full wedding procedure

Libeya- marriage by elopment

Likhwesa-marriage by abduction or capture

Kamalwa kekhusuta-the beer for carrying home

Khocha- maternal uncle

Senge- paternal aunt

Kukhu- grandmother
Sisielo- first visit by the bride to the bride grooms place
Kamafura/ Sifororo- second visit by the bride to the bride groom
Nasikoko- divorced wife
Lisali- open area
Likhese- sheep
Khubekana- shaving ceremony that takes place 3 days after a persons death
Mulufu Iwarurire- the sickness has left
Omusenimuse- a comforter to the bereaved ones
Kamalwa kekhusinga likokhe- beer of washing the ashes
Khuosya- killing of a sheep
Khukhala kimikoye- cutting the ropes
Kamalwa kekhusinga silindwa- beer of cleaning the grave
Omukimba- rain maker
Sirekere- village
Lukoba- a ditch
Waluchi-a piece of wood between the wall and the roof
Kamasindakusi- ulenge gras
Lubembe- spear grass
Chinjeko -pillars supporting the house
Kamachote- partitions
Omusalisi- the sacrificer
Omubimbi- the person who thatches the hut
Wele Khakaba- God
Bang'osi- prophets
Namuima- shrine
Ekokwa- a raised area, like a hill

ABSTRACT

Modernism and western influence has seen major erosion of authentic values and cultural heritage of many communities. For Bukusu people, it started after the introduction of religion and the early colonial rule. To date, the original Bukusu house does not exist since the structures have transformed and in light of this, the author was able to study and document the traditional architecture of the Bukusu in this era since most literature is based on anthropological study. The author undertook an exploratory research where case study method was extensively used for a period of four weeks. Observation, photography and unstructured interviews were the most appropriate methods used in collecting the data.

Purposive sampling and cluster random sampling were used in selecting the major areas of investigation and presented using measured drawings and photographs. The collected data was later on compared and analysed to find patterns that reveal the architectural constants. Existing structures too follow the same planning principles though they have different forms, materials and technology. The study recommends application of Bukusu architectural constants in future developments so as to have regional identity that the locals can be identified with.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1.1.1 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Bukusu are a Bantu people who are part of the larger Luhya ethnic group and are regarded to be the Largest Luhya sub-group estimated to be 34% of the Luhya and are found in the Western region of Kenya and some parts of Uganda. They are found in two counties mainly; Trans Nzoia and Bungoma but have generally spread to other counties in the Western region. In Uganda they are found in Mbale region which is on the Eastern side of Uganda.

The Bukusu have a very rich tradition and culture in form of performing arts; dances like esukuti, practices like the traditional circumcision, political organization and social organization.

Anthropologists believe that the Bukusu did not become distinct from the rest of the Luhya population until the late 18th century at the very earliest. They moved into Central Uganda as part of a much larger group of people, many forming the eastern extension of the great Bantu migration out of central Africa. The Bukusu sub tribe includes a sub clan called 'ekholo'. This subdivision includes the Bakiabi, Bamoyayo, Batasama, Bakibeti, the Bakibumbi, the Batilu, the Bameme, Baloncha, Bayundo, Bakimweyi, Bakongolo, Babhichachi, the Baengele, the Batukuika, the Batecho, the Bachemai, the Bakoi, the Basekese and the Balunda.

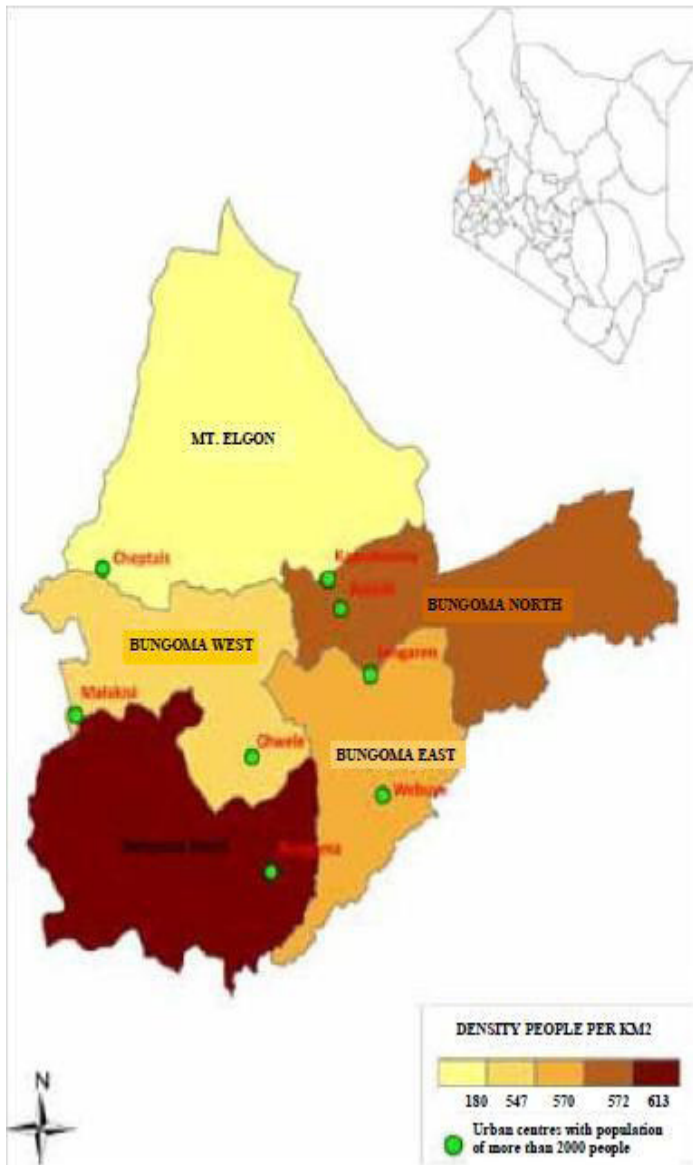


Figure 1.1 A Map showing the old Bungoma County with the old districts.
Source: Google Maps



Figure 1.2 A Map showing the present Bungoma County showing how it has been divided into sub-county wards. Bungoma as a whole is made up of 9 constituencies namely; Sirisia, Kabuchai, Kanduyi, Webuye East, Webuye West, Tongaren, Bumula, Kimilili and Mount Elgon Constituencies.

The Bukusu occupy 7 out of the 9 constituencies excluding Mount Elgon and Webuye East which are occupied by The Sabaot and The Tachoni respectively.

Source: Google Maps



Figure 1.3 Architecture has been identified as one of the principle elements of cultural identity. By incorporating elements of imagery and symbolism in their built form, many tribes were able to derive a sense of pride and identity from their built form.
Source: Paul Oliver (2003)



Figure 1.4 A traditional homestead in China showing the use of symbolism in their designs.
Source: The Encyclopedia of Vernacular Architecture by Paul Oliver (2003)

1.1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The Bukusu Vernacular Architecture was rich and appropriate for the way of life then, but would be inappropriate for the contemporary Kenyan society if reproduced wholesale due to changed socio-cultural and economic circumstances.

But one wonders, whether the Vernacular Architecture does not have some aspects that could be incorporated in contemporary architecture. Some of these aspects are form, planning or organization of built forms, building materials, construction techniques etc. In the face of these changes, it is important to identify principles in African Vernacular Architecture with a view to applying them in the modern context while maintaining the identity of Vernacular Architecture. This investigation is aimed at establishing if any principles of Vernacular Architecture exist and how they have transformed (assimilated and blended other architectural values) and also their relevance in a modern context.

With the emergence of new technologies and innovations, most rural areas are growing at speed to be part of the developing world as envisioned in the vision 2030 where architecture will be manifested in achieving this. This has also led to the erosion of the culture with people slowly moving away from it.

Since knowledge was rarely documented on paper during this pre-colonial era, information was passed down from one generation to another through word of mouth resulting in distorted information and lack of detail in knowledge transferred. Over time the knowledge passed down changed due to lack of means of authentication, abrupt migration of break-away individuals and sudden death of knowledgeable individuals resulting in lack of proper documented material for continuous reference in the future.

Vernacular architecture needs to be documented so as to extend the knowledge as well as to learn and understand it so that in future Architects can borrow ideas from Vernacular Architecture hence the need to document the Architecture and establish the constants for that region and also be able to differentiate it from other regions.

Currently, the traditional concepts have been affected by the interest of the Bukusu people to embrace modernity. This has led to them abandoning some of their traditions and cultures like the circular huts, use of mud to construct and are now becoming modernized and there is extensive use of brick for construction. This has led to watering down of the vernacular architecture.



Figure 1.5 A Traditional Luhya Homestead
Source: National Museums of Kenya



Figure 1.6 A Traditional Luhya Homestead
Source: National Museums of Kenya

1.1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To document the architectural constants in the authentic architecture of the Bukusu community.
2. To understand the cultural values, beliefs and way of life that influenced the architecture of the Bukusu.
3. To trace the development and transformation of Bukusu Traditional Architecture from external influences as a result of the interactions with the outside world.

1.1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How did the culture of The Bukusu influence their built forms?
2. Do the traditional Bukusu built forms still exist?
3. Are there any transformations in the architecture of The Bukusu?

1.1.5 JUSTIFICATION OF STUDY

It is through studying vernacular architecture that we will be able to understand the design principles, building techniques and building technology that was used in the construction process and how they achieved certain things like what materials they used in construction and how they were able to achieve proper heating and cooling of the buildings, the structural integrity of their buildings and how it is achieved and the use of locally available material.

The study is meant to show how the external influences have impacted the Bukusu Vernacular Architecture and how this led to its evolution and transformation over the past 40- 50 years to what it is at the moment. This will be able to show what values have been lost over that period of time and what values have been borrowed and the incorporation of the old and borrowed values to form what defines the Bukusu Architecture of today. This study is done for around 40- 50 years and is also able to identify the original values of the Bukusu in their original built forms.

1.1.6 SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

The architecture, art, culture and economic activities of those areas will be studied. The unit of analysis is a traditional house. The study may be limited to;

1. Limited time allocation for the study may not be enough to gather the required information.
2. Insufficient funds which could limit the number of times the site is visited.
3. Insufficient information on the topic of study since the people have intermarried and embraced the western world hence eroding the culture.