POST INDEPENDENCE DEVELOPMENT OF NAIROBI CITY, KENYA

Samuel O. Owuor[1] & Teresa Mbatia[2]

Paper presented at Workshop on African capital Cities
Dakar, 22-23 September 2008

1. Urban Geology of Nairobi

1.1 Pre-colonial patterns of urbanity and rurality and the European colonial legacy[3]

The city of Nairobi is situated at the southern end of the agricultural heartland of Kenya. The present administrative boundary covers an area of 696 square kilometres, expanding from 3.84 square kilometres in 1910. Other official physical expansions occurred in the years 1921, 1926 and 1964. It is by far the smallest administrative province in Kenya, but also the most important in terms of the activities and functions it performs. Apart from being the capital city of Kenya, it is the largest urban centre not only in Kenya, but also one of the largest in Africa as a whole. Currently, there are eight administrative divisions in Nairobi. These are Central, Makadara, Kasarani, Embakasi, Pumwani, Westlands, Dagoretti and Kibera.

Nairobi is in many ways an archetype of the African colonial city, having purely colonial origins, which shaped its structure and management at the time of Kenya's transition to independence. In fact, Nairobi was born of the European colonial project and was a means of entry into newly colonized land: the railway line (Blevin & Bouczo 1997). Like other African cities, after independence Nairobi was characterised by a rapid increase in rural to urban migration, accompanied by the proliferation of small-scale trade and petty commodity production, including unserviced and unauthorized housing (Lee-Smith 1989).

Nairobi was first established as a transportation centre, which later grew to become an administrative centre. The site was chosen by the Kenya-Uganda Railway (KUR) constructors in June, 1899 (when the rail line reached Nairobi) because it offered a suitable stopping place between Mombassa and Kisumu. There was adequate water supply from the nearby Nairobi River and the Mbagathi River; ample level land for railway tracts, sidings, quarters; an elevated cooler ground to the west suitable for residential purposes; an apparently deserted land offering freedom for land appropriation; and the area was free from tropical diseases (Blevin & Bouczo 1997; Boedecker 1936; Foran 1950; Owuor & Obudho 1997; Wamsley 1957).

By the end of 1899, the colonial government of Kenya had selected a site on the high ground north of the Nairobi River and away from the railway station to be the administrative headquarters. This marked the beginning of Nairobi's growth into an

---

[1] Department of Geography & Environmental Studies, University of Nairobi, samowuor@uonbi.ac.ke
[2] Department of Architecture and Urban Design, Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (JKUAT), teresambatia@yahoo.com
[3] This section is partly based from Agwanda et al (forthcoming)

administrative and transportation centre (Achola 2002; Morgan 1967). Once the railway depot was established, certain spatial patterns began to emerge – the railway station, a shopping centre, housing quarters and the Indian bazaar (Obudho and Owuor 1991). This layout basically followed the *1898 Plan for a Railway Town* and the *1899 Plan for Railway Staff Quarters* (Nevanlinna 1996). Nairobi was going to be a railway town for Europeans with a mixed European and Asian trading posts. It laid the foundation of the physical appearance of Nairobi as it is today, directly expressing the notions of segregation of the towns functions as well as segregation by class and race (Emig & Ismail 1980).

During the pre-mercantile period, the caravan route which linked the East African interior to the Indian Ocean passed on the eastern side of Nairobi through the present day Kariokor (Anyamba 2004). At this time, there was a thriving trade in ivory, bees wax and hides and skins, among others. Exploitation of resources by different communities through time and space led to local trade exchange, initially involving small scale exchanges within and between neighbouring interior settlements. In the case of Nairobi, the resources were water and pasture. In fact, Nairobi is a *Maasai* word, '*Enkare'*, meaning a place of cold waters. Due to its resources, Nairobi was used by the Kikuyu and *Maasai* to water and graze their livestock. As the two tribes exploited the natural resources in the region, they interacted in other forms, especially to trade, exchaching grain, copper (jewellerly), pottery and iron products.

Thus, Nairobi did not start as an African village (Hirst 1994). The bulk of the region appears to have had no permanent settlements. Occasionally, the nomadic *Maasai* built their *manyattta* (cow dung huts) on the higher grounds from time to time (Emig & Ismail 1980). As such, Nairobi's pattern of pre-colonilal urbanity was not in the Western concept of towns, as we might expect, but as a location where functions of a town were carried out, but where there are few if any permanent structures associated with this functions. Based on the economic and socio-cultural functions it performed spatially and temporarity, pre-colonial urbanism existed in the region.

The transfer of the provincial offices from Machakos to Nairobi first and later the protectorate headquarters from Mombasa to Nairobi contributed to the change in perception of Nairobi from a railway town to an administrative and commercial centre within the British protectorate. Cultures of urbanism began to emerge for the first time. However, even so, after the initial bursts, rates of urban growth tended to be slow somewhat and the African societies remained overwhelmingly rural in orientation (Nevanlinna 1996).

The city was first incorporated in 1900 as the township of Nairobi. This marked the birth of local government in the town (Tiwari 1981). By this time, the city had already become a large and flourishing area with settlements consisting mainly of the KUR buildings, separate residential areas for Europeans and Indians, and a small African settlement in Eastlands (Owuor & Obudho 1997). In 1905, Nairobi was confirmed as the capital of the country (Nairobi Urban Study Group 1973) with seven distinct zones. These were the railway centre, the Indian bazaar, the European business and administrative centre, the railway quarters, the dhobi or washerman's quarters, the European residential suburbs, and the military barracks outside the town (Tiwari 1981). The zoning of the city was a

result of the *Plan for a Settler Capital*, which further enhanced segregation, enclaves and spatial limits to the interest and advantage of the European settlers.

By 1906, the original KUR depot and camp had grown to an urban centre of 11,000 people with definite land-use zones, but no spatial planning. Nairobi's urban form was by any standards incoherent, with un-built plots and areas interrupting any buds of urbanisation. After the completion of the KUR and the influx of more non-African settlers, the city expanded rapidly, both in size and population (Odada & Otieno 1990). By 1909 much of the internal structure of Nairobi, especially the road network in the Central Business District (CBD) was already established (Obudho & Owuor 1991). In 1919 a municipal council with corporate rights was appointed thus making Nairobi a municipal council (Lee-Smith 1989).

In these early years, the growth of the town had been controlled only by economic forces, with no co-ordination of development other than by the layout of a gridiron street pattern in the CBD. In an attempt to order the situation, a town-planning consultant was appointed in 1926 to make recommendations on zoning arrangements (Nairobi Urban Study Group 1973). However, little was done to curb land speculation, and development occurred in an uncontrolled manner. In 1928, the powers and responsibilities of the Municipal Council of Nairobi (MCN) were considerably extended by a new municipal ordinance.

The first comprehensive plan of the city (*Nairobi Master Plan for a Colonial City*) was commissioned in 1948 but was never adopted fully. The plan laid down guidelines for Nairobi's future development and earmarked land for major uses as well as making important proposals for extensions to the road network. Using the concept of functionalism, the plan was to create a modern national city to cater for industrial expansion and the growing numbers of African wage-earners working in the industries. The plan also used the garden city concept to divide residential areas into neighbourhood units.

Like others before, this plan was to some extent responsible for the present layout of the built-up area of Nairobi. In March 1950, Nairobi became a city by the Royal Charter of Incorporation. Up to this period, Nairobi was not free from rapid urbanization problems, which have persisted to date. Some of the earliest urbanization problems in Nairobi include transportation (Hake 1977), housing (Blevin & Bouczo 1997, Obudho 1987), drainage and sanitation (Tiwari 1981), water and sewerage (Nairobi City Council 1974), overcrowding, poor sanitation and unhealthy living conditions (Achola 2002).

The racial character of different Nairobi locations still depicts the racial segregation brought about by the spatial organization in the early stages of the development of the city. Europeans resided to the north and west of the railway. These areas were located at higher altitude with richer, volcanic red soils. Africans and Indians were mostly confined to the plains east and south of the railway line where non-porous black cotton soils prevailed. These areas were unhealthy in terms of frequent flooding, high incidence of malaria and neglect of municipal services such as refuse and sewage collection (Achola 2002).

English colonialists built the city in the early 19th century along the lines of a racial segregation both for housing and employment, much in the same manner as was used

later in South Africa's apartheid (Blevin & Bouczo 1997). The city still bears the marks of this organisation, although independence and some sort of economic development brought about more subtle social divisions, particularly among the African population. This resulted in a city organised as a social patchwork with very high territorial segregation (Rodriguez-Torres 1998).
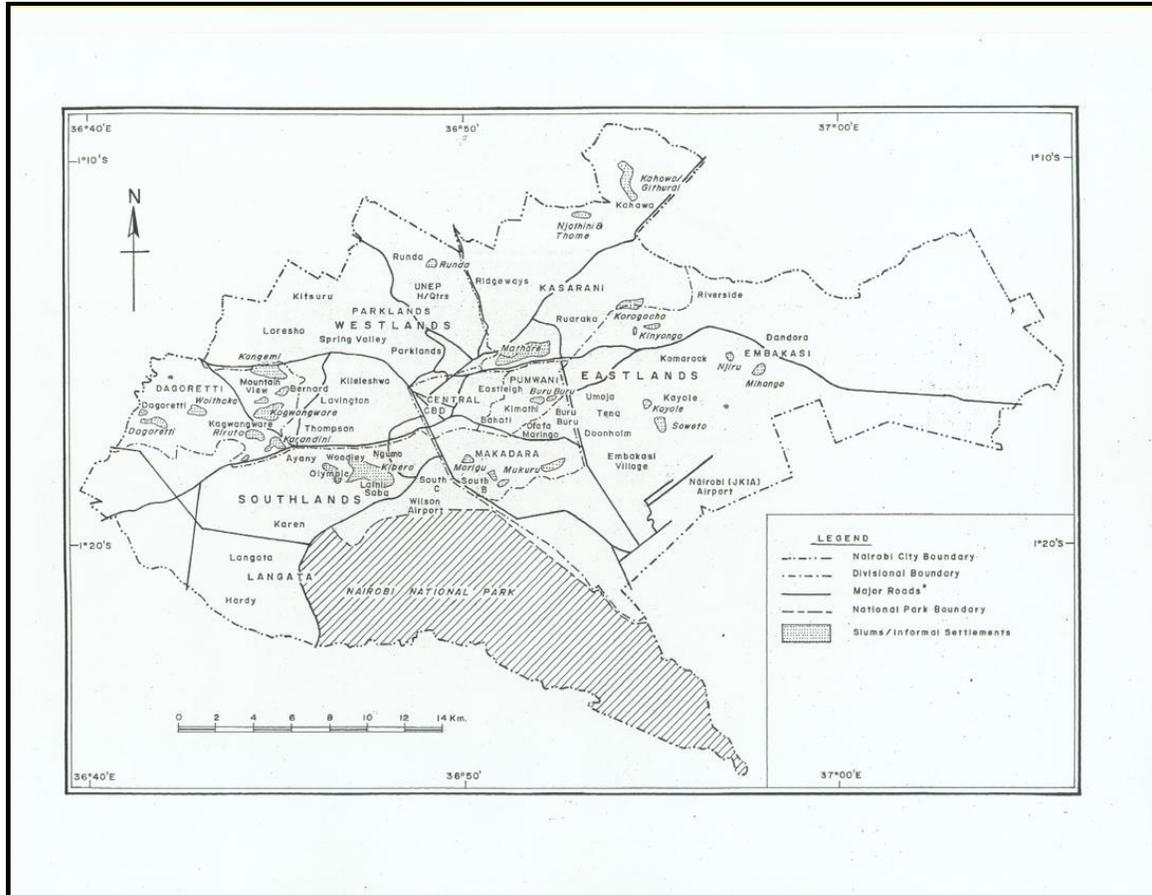
1.2 Urban (planning) efforts of the independent Kenya

At the time of Kenya's independence in 1963, the boundary of Nairobi was extended to 680 square kilometres. From the colonialists, the new nation inherited the existing resources and infrastructure as well as challenges. In Nairobi, one of the challenges demanding immediate action was a population growing at an explosive rate. Just before and immediately after independence there was an unlimited influx of the African population into the city following the relaxation of the colonial rule of restricting Africans to the city. In fact, between 1962 and 1969, the population of Nairobi increased at a very high rate (12.2%) further complicating the urban problems and challenges of the city (Agwanda et al forthcoming).

Faced with a series of sectoral pressures in 1967, a number of *ad hoc* study groups were set up to deal with specific aspects of the growth of Nairobi. There was need for planning, housing, transport, business and the desire to integrate urban residents into developing one city as opposed to the segregated colonial city. As a result of these

sectoral pressures, the Nairobi Urban Study Group (NUSG) was formed in 1973 to develop the *1973 Nairobi Metropolitan Growth Strategy* to guide the growth and development of the city to the year 2000 (Nairobi Urban Study Group 1973). The NUSG consisted of local Nairobi City Council staff and consultants from Britain, while the metropolitan growth strategy was funded by Nairobi City Council, the government, World Bank and the United Nations. However, very little was achieved in terms of implementation of the recommendations given by the NUSG.

The *1973 Nairobi Metropolitan Growth Strategy* recommended, among others, decentralization and development of alternative service centres; modifying, upgrading and extension of the road network; formulation of realistic housing programmes; and extension of the city boundary to the west and northeast as and when required, as well as encouraging the growth of satellite towns surrounding the city, i.e. Thika, Athi River and Machakos (Nairobi Urban Study Group 1973). As much as the *1973 Nairobi Metropolitan Growth Strategy* was a tool for state intervention, it supported the interests of the hegemonic class alliance of the local bourgeoisie and the multinational corporations (Anyamba 2004; Emig & Ismail 1980). The interests of the urban majority seem to have been neglected as segregation was enhanced based on economic and class lines as opposed to racial and class lines. In the process, the urban majority were marginalized further and informalization thrived since the late 1970s to date (Anyamba 2004).

The second notable urban effort of the independent state was the *1984-1988 Nairobi City Commission Development Plan*, which outlined the development needs of all sectors: housing, health and environment, sewerage, social services, transport and public works, manpower development and financial management (Nairobi City Commission 1985). Again, nothing much was achieved as regards its implementation.

In 1993, the Nairobi City Council organized a stakeholders open forum (the Nairobi City Convention) comprising of stakeholders, professionals and ordinary citizens to map out strategies and practical actions towards a better Nairobi, i.e., *"The Nairobi We Want"*. The recommendations of this (non-academic) convention were broadly organized around four areas, namely, (1) issues dealing with the use of space and the physical environment; (2) problems pertaining to provision of services; (3) issues relating to the social sector; and (4) administrative, legal and political issues (Karuga 1993). Again, much of these ideas were not taken into account in the planning of the city.

In the late 1990s and early 2000 most local authorities, including Nairobi, were faced with increasing unresolved debts, reliance on the central government for capital investments, poor leadership and economic governance and poor services delivery. To address these problems, the Kenya Local Government Reform Programme (KLGRP) embarked on policy and legal framework changes aimed at decentralization and local authority empowerment. The Local Authorities Transfer Fund (LATF), introduced in 1999/2000, through an Act of the Kenyan Parliament, is a grant from the central government to equip local authorities with means to provide their citizens with basic services. The key objectives of LATF are to (a) enable local authorities to improve and extend service delivery; (b) resolve municipal debts; and (c) improve local revenue mobilization, accountability and financial management (Owuor et al 2006). Within the same reform framework, the government in 2001 introduced the Local Authority Service

Delivery Action Plan (LASDAP), which is a participatory planning and budgeting tool for identifying local priority needs in the local authorities.

As the city grows both in size and population, the provision of urban services has not been, and will not be able to keep pace with the demand despite the numerous policies, plans and strategies that have been adopted to date. Faced with the problems of poor services or lack of it in some areas, city residents have resorted to self-help efforts or community-led management initiatives as a means of accessing such services as sanitation, water supply, garbage collection and security in their neighbourhoods. Participation and partnerships of all kinds have emerged towards improving the urban environment – more often than not leading to new forms of urban governance. Nairobi City Council is therefore encouraging public-private partnerships in urban management and provision of urban services to its residents. Examples of such public-private partnership initiatives in Nairobi include the Nairobi Central Business District Association (NCBDA), neighbourhood associations, and community policing.

Most recently (in 2008), the (coalition) government of Kenya created a Ministry of Nairobi Metropolitan Development charged with the development issues of the Nairobi Metropolitan Region, aiming at area-wide governance interventions. Specifically, the Ministry is in-charge of roads, bus and rail infrastructure; creating an efficient transport system; replacing slums with affordable low-cost and rental housing; enforcing planning and zoning regulations; facilitating efficient water supply and waste management infrastructures; and promoting, developing and investing in sufficient public utilities, public services and infrastructure.

Vision for a World Class Metropolis – Nairobi Metro 2030

Responding to urban growth projections and in an attempt to address current and future Nairobi metropolitan region challenges, the Government of Kenya is preparing an ambitious Nairobi Metro 2030 vision to spatially redefine the Nairobi Metropolitan Region (NMR) and create a world class city region envisaged to generate sustainable wealth and quality of life for its residents, investors and visitors. The plan's elaboration and implementation falls under the responsibilities of the newly established Ministry of Nairobi Metropolitan Development. The vision of the NMR is to create the best managed metropolis in Africa, providing a dynamic and internationally competitive and inclusive economy supported by world class infrastructure and a skilled labour force. Based on the core values of innovation, enterprise, sustainability, co-responsibility, self-help and excellence, the strategy is to optimize the role of the NMR in national development by building on existing strengths, including Nairobi's hub function in air transportation, the large number of regional and international bodies already present, and its educational and research institutions. Nairobi Metro 2030 seeks to brand and promote Nairobi as East Africa's key gateway city by creating a framework for comprehensively addressing a broad range of policy areas, including the economy, trunk and social infrastructures, transportation, slums and housing, safety and security, and financing. The proposed NMR covers the 3,000km^2 that depend on Nairobi's regional core functions for employment and social facilities. Planning will initially involve a 40km radius, despite Nairobi's functional outreach covering 100km or more. Apart from Nairobi Municipality itself, the NMR vision affects 14 other adjacent independent local authorities.

Source: Nairobi Metro 2030: A Vision For a World Class Metropolis, First and Foremost in Africa and the World. Ministry of Nairobi Metropolitan Development, 2008.

1.3 Urban manifestations of nationalism in the built environment

The built environment of contemporary Nairobi contains not only the present but also fragments of colonial Nairobi. During the first two decades following independence of Kenya, the European character of Nairobi which had been established earlier was strengthened. From its past, the capital of the newly independent country inherited a pattern of built forms which had been produced by the cultures of the dominant Europeans and to a much lesser extent, of the Asians.

Ingrained in its built forms, were urban practices and meanings which continued to reproduce the past cultures despite the end of colonialism. Moreover, the new elites of the country had largely adopted the notion of modernity and Western values of Europe. As such, Nairobi emerged as a modern metropolis modelled on the Western principles of planning, a leading city in East Africa, a gateway between the first and third worlds and an internationally important centre (Nevanlinna 1996).

Nairobi was also seen as a symbol of uniqueness of the country and its people, not so much in terms of the urban forms in totality, but in terms of individual public buildings which were identified as symbols of the city, both in theory – as the general request for the development of a national architecture for the newly independent African countries indicated – and in practice.

According to Nevanlinna (ibid) expression of nationalism is most evident in the built environment of most national capitals. These include institutional buildings such as parliament and government departments to express democratic and sound administration, a business and commercial centre with high rise office buildings and hotels to indicate modernity, the university to imply interest in the advancement of the society, modern planned residential areas to show social consciousness, and the demolition of conspicuously situated squatter settlements to denote the will to erase underdevelopment.

In Nairobi, expression of nationalism in the built environment has mostly been in the form of naming and/or renaming important buildings, popular streets, roads and parks, replacing English colonial names with names of nationalists, freedom fighters and words that signify principles of unity and love among citizens.

*Buildings as manifestations of nationalism*
Several administrative buildings have become a landmark and manifestations of nationalism in the city of Nairobi. Some of these include, the Kenyatta International Conference Centre (KICC), Parliament building, the Law Courts, Nyayo House and Harambee House, among others.

The KICC became the new landmark of the city after independence, not only because of its location next to the law courts, or for its easily identifiable built form, but because it was perceived as an expression of the new international role of Nairobi and Kenya, the meeting point of people from all over the world on common concerns ranging from global problems of habitat to women's issues and the yearly safari rally. Other recently built commercial and business buildings include Times Tower, Cooperative House and Nation Centre, amongst others.
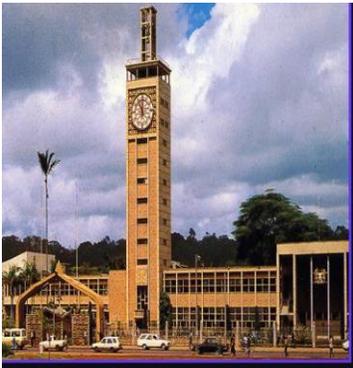
(a) Kenyatta International Conference Centre[4]	(b) Parliament Building	(c) Nyayo House

Monuments as manifestations of nationalism
Public monuments have been used to shape the symbolic landscape of Nairobi since colonial times. The attainment of independence witnessed the removal of some of the colonial monuments from the landscape of the city and marked a shift in the nature of Nairobi's iconography. They differ greatly in form to those erected during the colonial period and represent a transformation in Nairobi's post-independence symbolic space. Currently, the city is dotted with public monuments that celebrate the achievement of independence and the Kenyan nation-state.
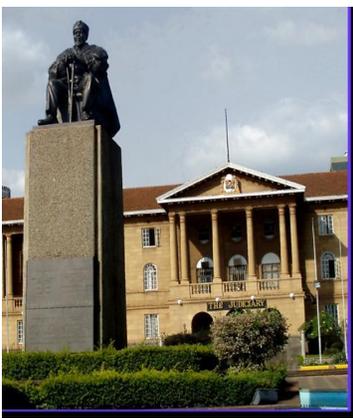
(a) Fountain of knowledge at the university of Nairobi	(b) Mzee Jomo Kenyatta, the first President of Kenya	(c) Dedan Kimathi, a freedom fighter

The public monuments are commonly erected in squares, gardens and recreational parks in and around the city. Uhuru monument, signifying internal self governance and manifesting nationalism stands on Uhuru Gardens along Langata Road. The Nyayo monument, celebrating several years of Moi's rule of peace, love and unity, is located in

---

[4] The authors are grateful to Lydia Muthama for the pictures used in this section

Uhuru Park in the city centre. The Dedan Kimathi monument which was recently erected (2007) in honour of his contribution as a freedom fighter is located in Kimathi Street.

Street and place names as manifestations of nationalism
As a sign of nationalism, many streets and places in Nairobi were renamed after independence. The colonial names were replaced with Kiswahili names and/or with names of Kenyan nationals who fought for independence. The table below gives an example of some streets and places which have been renamed.

Colonial name	Nationalistic name
Dalemere Avenue	Kenyatta[1] Avenue
Donholm Road	Jogoo[2] Road
King Georges Hospital	Kenyatta National Hospital
Princess Elizabeth Highway	Uhuru[3] Highway
Victoria Street	Tom Mboya[4] Street
Government Road	Moi[4] Avenue
Government House	Jogoo House
Louis Leakey Memorial Museum	National Museums of Kenya
Royal Technical College	University of Nairobi
[1]The first president of the republic of Kenya; [2]A Kiswahili word for cockerel, an impression on the then ruling party's (KANU) flag; [3]A Kiswahili word for independence; [4]Notable personalities who fought for independence	

Some streets have also been named or renamed after admired nationalists of neighbouring countries: Nyerere Road (after the former President of Tanzania, Julius Nyerere) and Haile Selassie Avenue (after Mengistu Haile Selassie of Ethiopia). In addition, several residential estates in the city, especially those in Eastlands where the majority of Africans lived during the colonial (now occupied by the middle-to-low income groups) have acquired symbolic names, most of them expressing nationalism. Some examples are given below.

Estate name	Meaning
Umoja Estate	A Kiswahili word for unity
Buru Buru Estate	A Kiswahili connotation for bullets, used by the colonialists on freedom fighters
Harambee Estate	A Kiswahili word for "pulling together" or "working together" to build our nation
Kimathi Estate	Named after Dedan Kimathi, a freedom fighter
Madaraka	A Kiswahili word for freedom, self rule or independence

1.4 Donor effects on the urban landscape

The contribution of donors on the urban landscape of Nairobi is evident in housing and infrastructural development. To donors involved in development aid and cooperation programs in the 1960s and 1970s, Nairobi was seen as an urban conglomeration in an underdeveloped or developing country that needed intervention, financial resources and

expertise to help in addressing the urbanization challenges of the city (Nevanlinna 1996). For example, the period after independence witnessed a massive shortage of housing, due to the rapid influx of the African population into the city. As such, the Government of Kenya, the National Housing Corporation, the Nairobi City Council and funding organizations such as Housing Finance Corporation of Kenya with financial support from development partners and donors such as the Commonwealth Development Corporation, United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the World Bank and International Development Agency, devised development funding plans where families with middle range incomes could gain ownership of a house (Ochieng 2007).

Within this kind of frame, a large number of housing schemes were built in Nairobi, among them, Kibera, Umoja, Buru Buru, Dandora and Kayole − complete with related infrastructural facilities and unique planning (Nevanlinna 1996). The larger Kibera, currently one of the largest informal settlements in Africa, has also witnessed a number of interventions in terms of slum upgrading programs from UN-Habitat and national and international NGOs. The Chinese government are currently involved recarpeting and redesigning the road linking Jomo Kenyatta Internal Airport and UNEP Heaquarters.

1.5 The impact of globalization

Although globalization is a combination of economic, technological, socio-cultural and political forces and processes, it is more often than not used to refer to economic globalization, that is, integration of national economies into the international economy through trade, foreign direct investment, capital flows, migration and the spread of technology. While some countries and their cities are incorporated into the global world, others are not or incorporated but at huge social costs.

Cities are traditionally engines of social modernization and economic growth and at the same time the theatres in which globalization stages its actions. Most large African cities are centres of national economies, although they are connected to the world economy through (unequal) trade, investment and aid relationships (UNHABITAT 2005). For Africa, this has meant fuelling the already unprecedented urban growth phenomenon and increasing the challenges that go with it. One key challenge is the creation of segregation and polarization.

Globalization has been found to play a role in increasing the gap between the rich and the poor, thus creating more isolation, apprehension and division between people. Segregationist global forces that impact Nairobi have their origins in the colonial period where the political, social and economic system favoured the white minority and subsequently the richer Africans and Asians who inherited political and economic power after independence. This has been worsened by the rapid urbanization of the city in a situation of continued economic development, which has outpaced the financial and administrative capacity of the government to ensure that the city provides efficient locations for economic activities and satisfy basic needs of all citizens.

According to Rakodi (1995), the character of the effects of globalization spurred by the colonialists has continued to evolve and its differential effects have become more marked resulting to a number of challenges. In fact, it would be erroneous to attribute the current

trends in urbanization in Nairobi solely to the relatively recent globalization process. The initiation and development of the city emerged from processes of gradual incorporation of the economy into the world economic system.

Just like in other African cities (UNHABITAT 2005), globalization has resulted in significant economic, social, political, spatial and demographic impacts in Nairobi. On the economic front, advances in communication and information technologies, improved transportation and deregulation of capital markets (but not labour markets) have enabled private investors to take advantage of national differences in tax rates, labour costs and environmental restrictions to maximise financial returns by moving development, production and marketing functions to the most profitable locations. It has also been observed that globalization reinforces urban primacy thereby increasing the sheer scale of urban growth.

The global recession and economic reforms (under structural adjustment programmes) in the last two decades has also affected the city of Nairobi in several ways: urban poverty appears to be increasing; life in the city has become more expensive; employment in the formal sector has gone down; many residents have turned to self-employment or informal employment; real wages have not kept up with price increases or even declined in absolute terms; standards of living have deteriorated and unemployment has increased.

Further consequences of globalization occur through spatial segregation and unequal access to urban services, infrastructure and housing. At the societal level, inequality has not only affected the political and social stability, but also productivity and poverty levels. Though it has its origin during the colonial period, globalization has enhanced the segregation and polarization of Nairobi. The gap between the rich and poor has continued to increase while increased incomes (for the rich) have led to changes in lifestyles and consumption patterns for a minority population of city dwellers. This group has been the beneficiary or user of facilities such as the malls, located in strategic (high income) areas of the city. Examples of such malls include Village Market, Yaya Centre, Nakumat Junction, Nakumat Westgate and Sarit Centre, among others. These malls or shopping complexes stock competitive and relatively expensive goods from multinational and transnational corporations, as well as cheap imports at the expense of the local products. As a result, the local urban economy of Nairobi suffers due to the effects of liberalization and globalization. Segregation is also most evident in the gated communities of the middle and higher income neighbourhoods of Nairobi.

In the political realm, the most significant impact of globalisation on Nairobi has been the weakening of national and local public institutions relative to external private economic power. The privatisation of public services in many cities is one outcome of this process, in which investors pick the more profitable services and, further eroding urban revenue and leaving the poorly performing services.

Under globalisation, the spatial structure of Nairobi is changing as new economic production patterns require more horizontal integration between functions in different sites. As industries in Nairobi shift their attention to external locations and activities, this has resulted in new geographies of the region and a breakage of earlier urban spatial patterns. The associated decentralisation has major implications for investments in

infrastructure development and maintenance. Such investments have been highly uneven, which in turn has significant impacts on access to urban services necessary for liveability.

At the metropolitan level, important changes can be seen as well. Nairobi has expanded well beyond its boundaries. These changes have spatial, institutional and economic dimensions. One of the most visible aspects of recent metropolitan development has been its spatial expansion, spilling over to the adjacent jurisdictions and incorporating them within the larger municipality of the central city. Decentralisation of jobs in the manufacturing sector and people is an important part of this process, in many places leading to polycentric forms, with economic activities clustered around transportation nodes.

In the institutional realm, spatial expansion has been accompanied by a proliferation of administrative entities with responsibilities for different aspects for metropolitan government including a metropolitan planning authority and the newly created Ministry of Nairobi Metropolitan Development.

1.6 Structure of the housing delivery system

According to Ochieng (2007), there are several housing delivery systems which have been used or are in use in Nairobi. These include provision of housing by the employer, government and Nairobi City Council; tenant purchase, site and service schemes and self-help housing; private tenement; conventional and non-conventional housing delivery systems. While the rest deliver between 20,000 and 30,000 houses annually it is estimated that the non-conventional housing delivers more than 120,000 houses. As such, the government recently started supporting this type of housing delivery system.

Development in housing delivery is increasingly getting support from the government through encouraging the creation of relevant housing institutions, developing relevant by-laws and regulations and putting in place an appropriate framework for housing delivery. The government has recently formulated a new housing policy after over forty years without one. The policy, among other things, is concerned with nurturing an environment that would prompt potential investors to engage in housing delivery. This includes facilitating the private sector by enacting relevant Acts of Parliament on housing and finance, promoting housing development, and enabling both the low and middle income to access housing. In other words, the government has changed its role to that of an enabler, facilitator and catalyst in the housing delivery system (ibid). Furthermore, the government has embarked on upgrading slums and urban informal settlements under the Kenya Slum Upgrading Programme (KENSUP), currently in its first phase in Kibera slum of Nairobi.

Provision of housing by the employer, government and Nairobi City Council
Urbanization policy during the colonial period was racially discriminatory, restrictive and control-oriented. The Employment Ordinance Act required Africans to have passes and salaried employment before they could be permitted to reside in the city. This policy not only discouraged the stabilization of the African migrant labour force in the city, but also discriminated against African men from bringing their wives and children to live with them in the city (Macoloo 1998). Employers were required to provide suitable housing

for their employees at all times and where housing was not provided, housing allowance was to be given in lieu. As such, employers provided accommodation suitable only for single men – which came to be popularly known as bachelors' quarters.

Despite the growing demand for housing, the colonial administration was intolerant of attempts by Africans to provide shelter for themselves. Residential structures constructed of temporary materials were violently demolished. For example, the largest of these settlements, Pangani Native Village, was demolished in 1937 under the pretext that it housed criminals and fear that such settlements would be centres of political dissent and agitation for political liberation (Ibid).

To absorb the residents of the demolished Pangani Native Village and to maintain control and surveillance over the African urban population, the colonial administration constructed the first public housing for the Africans in Nairobi in 1939 at Shauri Moyo (Ibid). This was to be the start of exclusive African residential areas. Other housing schemes that followed during this period were Ziwani (1940), Bondeni (1942), Kaloleni (1945), Bahati (1950), Gorofani (1952), Makadara (1954), Mbotela, Maringo (1955), Jerusalem (1958) and Jericho Lumunba (1962). These were planned in a neighbourhood concept with common sanitary facilities, shops, schools, hospitals, social halls and open spaces. All these estates are now under the Nairobi City Council.

With the attainment of independence in 1963, the restrictive colonial policies were relaxed resulting into a rapid influx of people in Nairobi. This situation further worsened the problem of housing, especially in Nairobi – in terms of supply and demand, resulting in overcrowding and the proliferation of informal settlements. The government and major employers in Nairobi (for example, Kenya Railways, Kenya Post and Telecommunications, University of Nairobi) continued to provide housing for their employees. However, this could not be sustained for a long period. These employers were, therefore, forced to provide house allowance for those that they could not provide housing for. On the other hand, Nairobi City Council built a few more estates for its citizens where subsidized rents were charged. This method of housing delivery was not sustainable and was subsequently stopped. The last city council rental houses were built in 1978.

Tenant purchase and site and service schemes
During the 1970s, the government changed the housing delivery strategy and adopted the tenant purchase and site and service schemes methods for housing provision, especially for the low income groups. However, this delivery system could not satisfy all the demand as the resources invested were inadequate. Furthermore, the target group – the low income group – was not able to access this type of housing. With time these houses were taken over by the middle income group. The low income groups were therefore pushed out of the formal system into the informal realm. Examples of site and service schemes are Dandora and Ayany estates.

Private tenement housing
These are houses that are for rent and are delivered by largely by private developers (individuals or companies). Depending on the economic abilities, one has a choice for different kinds and types of rental units – ranging from single rooms with shared facilities to three bed-roomed self-contained units. In Nairobi, private tenancy is common in the

middle and low income neighbourhoods, where the large majority of citizens reside. Most of these rental units are in high-rise flats to maximize both space and profits for the landlords. Even those that started as low-rise abode have been transformed into high-rise flats (Anyamba 2004).

Monitoring this housing delivery system is a difficult task for the city authorities. As much as they provide a substantial share of somewhat affordable housing to the poor city residents, some of them are clearly substandard, disregard city housing by-laws and regulations, ageing, congested, poorly lit and ventilated, lack in basic services and charge relatively high rents. Densification is the order of the day and demand has taken control of the process with no spaces being left to accommodate and facilitate any necessary development and services (Ochieng 2007). Examples of residential estates in Nairobi where this housing delivery system is common include Tena, Zimmermann, Mathare North and Umoja I Innercore. Although housing delivery by the private sector has helped to improve the housing supply for both the poor and the middle income groups it needs regulation and standards.

Conventional housing delivery system
After independence, a number of housing institutions were licensed by the government under the Building Societies Act to facilitate the buying and/or construction of houses. Except for the East African Building Society (EABS) and the Housing Finance of Kenya none of these exist any longer. While some have gone under, others, for example, Equity Building Society and Family Finance Building Society have since been established and allowed to become banks. Main financial institutions (both private and public) are also increasingly playing an important role in facilitating individual house ownership for those who are willing.

Commercial banks such as Barclays Bank of Kenya, Kenya Commercial Bank, Stanbic Bank and Standard Chartered Bank have since embarked on housing mortgage schemes for interested borrowers – more often than not targeting the middle and upper income groups. These financial institutions have different mortgage offers and conditions to their customers, most of which cannot be met by the poor city residents (ibid).

Non-conventional housing delivery system
A few organizations such as the National Cooperative Housing Union (NACHU), National Christian Council of Kenya (NCCK) and Pamoja Trust are involved in housing delivery especially for the socio-economically disadvantaged groups – be they in formal or informal employment. To achieve their aim, these non-profit making organizations undertake negotiations, on behalf of their clients, with the relevant authorities for terms, standards and other lending conditions that would favour housing. They also source for funding from various categories of national and international donors as well as assisting with land acquisition and technical support. Through such efforts, affordable low income housing has been delivered to different organized urban groups. Non-conventional housing delivery system is mainly concentrated in the slum and informal settlement areas (ibid).

1.7 Slums/informal settlements

Many people in Nairobi have no access to cheap and affordable conventional housing. It is this lack of access to cheap and affordable conventional housing that has driven the majority of low to very low-income earners to seek rental dwelling units in the Nairobi slums. While the public and formal sectors cannot build enough houses to cater for the need arising from an increase in population, the private sector has for a long period mainly targeted the middle and upper class. The only window open for the majority of low to very low-income population has been the unregulated and unplanned for slum settlements where rents are relatively affordable (Agwanda et al forthcoming).
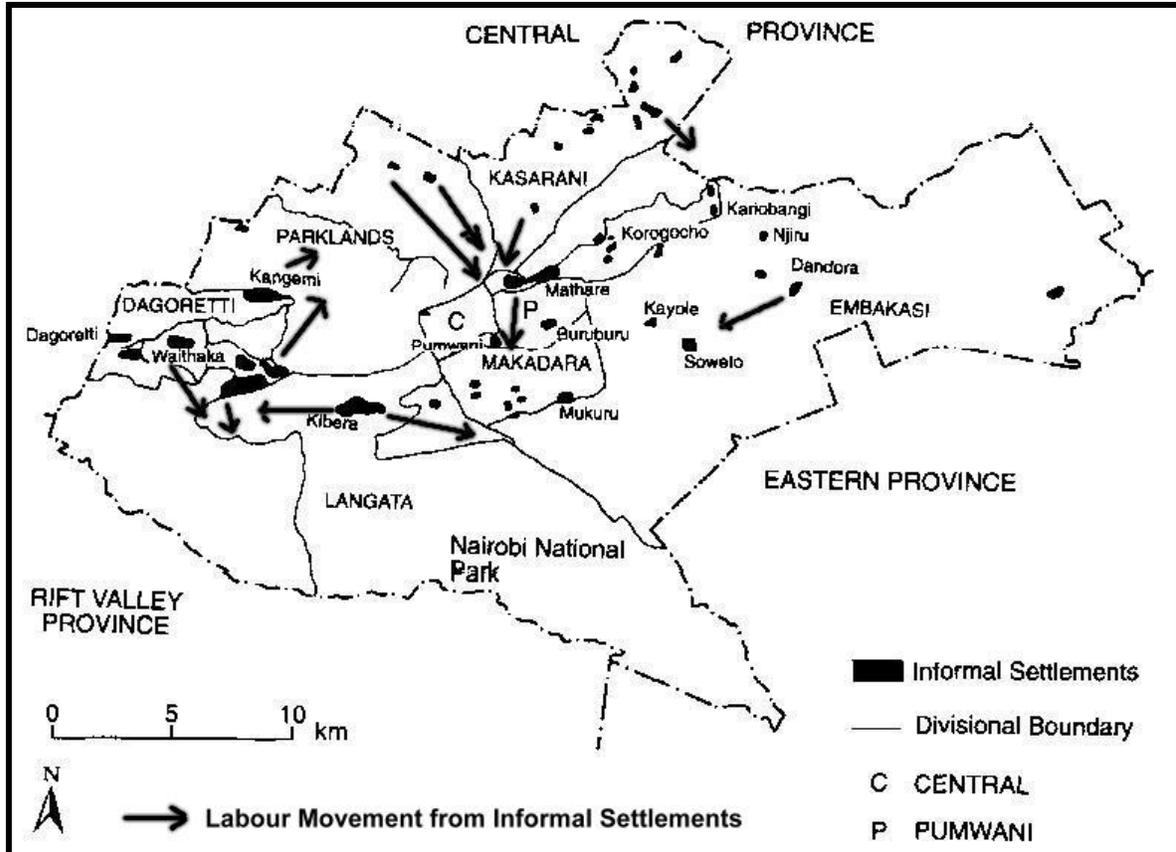
The map[5] shows the location of informal settlements in Nairobi. Although dwellings in the slum settlements as supposedly cheaper, during the past few years, Nairobi has witnessed demonstrations by slum dwellers who maintain that the rents currently charged are still relatively higher compared to the conditions they are living in and that they are being exploited by the wealthy and well-connected landlords and landowners. This has mainly occurred in Kibera, Kariobangi and Mathare, the main slum locations in Nairobi (ibid). Based on UN-HABITAT's shelter deprivation factors, 38.5% of the households in Nairobi can be considered slum households. Out of these slum households, 26.9% experience at least one shelter deprivation.[6] However, due to a lack of official figures, it

---

[5] Sourced from Mitullah (2003)
[6] Data from Global Urban Observatory, UN-HABITAT

is estimated that over 60% of Nairobi's population live in slum settlements (UNHABITAT 2006).

Up-grading efforts such as Kenya Slum Upgrading Programme (KENSUP) and Kenya Slum Upgrading and Low-cost Housing Infrastructure Trust Fund (KENSUF) are currently taking place in Nairobi. KENSUP has started with Kibera in Nairobi (and is partly funded by UN habitat). The objective is to improve the overall livelihood of the people living and working in slums through targeted interventions to address shelter, infrastructure services, land tenure and employment issues, as well as the impact of HIV/Aids in these settlements. KENSUF is a central depository of all mobilized financial resources for slum upgrading and it draws its funds from donors, community-based-organizations, private sector and government budgetary allocations. The fund is meant to pool resources from all potential donors, to a substantial amount enough to carry out significant slum upgrading activities.

2. Nairobi in the National Fabric

2.1 Ethnic history and composition

The citizens of early Nairobi had come from different parts of the world. During the colonial period Nairobi consisted mainly of Europeans (colonial administrative officers, railway workers, shipping agents, business people and commercial game hunters) and Asians (railway workers, clerks, masons, leather workers, tailors, dukawalas, etc). The few Africans were mainly labourers employed by the railways, colonial government or working as domestic servants or shop assistants (Nevanlina, 1996). In 1962, just before independence, the African population had increased to 59% of the total Nairobi population. Asians formed 33% while Europeans were 8% of the population.

Due to rural-to-urban migration after independence (in 1970), the European population dropped to 4%, the Asian to 14%, while the African population increased to 83%.[7] The African population is currently of mixed ethnic groups in Kenya. Most immigrants in Nairobi come from Central Province (dominated by the Kikuyu), Nyanza (dominated by the Luo and Kisii), Eastern Province (dominated by the Kamba, Meru and Embu) and Western Province (dominated by the Luhya). The war in neighbouring countries of Somalia, Rwanda and Burundi has also increased the population of these country's citizens in the city.

As such Nairobi is a cosmopolitan city with foreigners working in various international organizations based in the city; Europeans, Asians, Somalis and Nubians who are citizens of Kenya; citizens of various African countries working and/or living in the city and Kenyans from all parts of the country. Even with its cosmopolitan nature, it is interesting to find residential neighbourhoods dominated by a particular ethnic group, especially in the low income areas. For example, Kibera and Kariobangi is dominated by the Luos, Kawangware and Kangemi by the Luhyas; Embakasi, Ongata Rongai, Ngong and Ruai by the Kisiis, Mathare, Githurai and Zimmerman by the Kikuyus and Eastleigh by the Somalis.

---

[7] The Kenyan population census reports no longer disaggregates it data by ethnic composition

2.2 Dynamics of population growth[8]

At the time of Kenya's first population census in 1948, there were 17 urban centres with an aggregate population of 285,000 people (Table 1). The urban population was proportionately small (5.2% of the total) but disproportionately concentrated in Nairobi and Mombasa (41.2% and 32.2% of the total urban population, respectively) with the majority of the urban dwellers being non-Africans. By 1962, the number of urban centres had doubled to 34 and the urban population increased to 671,000 people, with Nairobi accounting for 33.8% of this population. While the overall urban growth rate stood at 6.3% per year, Nairobi's growth rate was 4.6%.

Table 1: Trends of urbanization in Kenya and Nairobi (1948-1999)

Year	Kenya popn ('000)	No of urban centres	Urban popn ('000)	% urban	Urban growth rate	Nairobi popn ('000)	Nairobi growth rate	Nairobi % of total urban popn
1948	5,406	17	285	5.2	-	119	-	41.7
1962	8,636	34	671	7.8	6.3	227	4.6	33.8
1969	10,943	47	1,076	9.9	7.1	506	12.2	47.0
1979	15,334	91	2,314	15.1	7.7	828	4.9	35.7
1989	21,444	139	3,864	18.0	5.2	1,325	4.7	34.1
1999	28,159	179	5,429	19.3	3.4	2,083	4.5	38.4

Source: Compiled from the 1948, 1962, 1969, 1979, 1989 and 1999 Kenya Population Census Reports.

The growth of urban centres both in numbers and population accelerated after independence when Africans were allowed to migrate to the urban areas without any legal and administrative restrictions. The urban population grew to 1 million in 1969, growing at the rate of 7.1% per annum. This represented 9.9% of the total population with Nairobi and Mombasa accounting for 67% of the total urban population: Nairobi (47%) and Mombasa (20%). This period also saw Nairobi recording the highest growth rate of 12.2%.

By 1979, the overall level of urbanization had risen to 15.1% with 91 urban centres and an urban population of 2.3 million. Nairobi and Mombasa accounted for 51% of the total urban population: Nairobi (35.7%) and Mombasa (15.3%). Although the urban population increased from 2.3 million in 1979 to 3.8 million in 1989, the growth rate was only 5.2% compared to 7.7% in the previous decade. With 139 urban centres, the 1989 population results indicated that 18% of the population resided in the urban areas. Nairobi and Mombasa accounted for 46% of the total urban population (34.1% and 11.9%, respectively). In 1999, about 20% of the population lived in urban areas, of which more than half were in Nairobi, Mombassa, Nakuru and Kisumu. The urban growth rate reduced further to 3.4% but the number of urban centres increased to 179.

As a consequence, the urban primacy index[9] has shown an upward trend between 1979 and 1999 indicating that most of the Kenyan urban population lives in Nairobi. In other

---

[8] This section is based on Owuor (2006:3-4)
[9] Primacy index is the ratio of the population of the largest urban centre to the combined population of the next three largest urban centres.

words, Nairobi continues to be a major urban centre for socio-economic and political activities in Kenya.

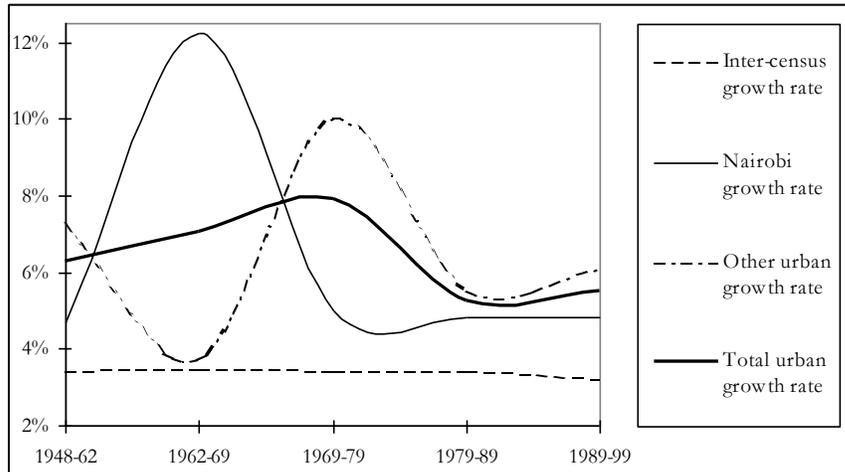**Figure 1: Trends of urban growth in Nairobi (1948-1999)**

Figure 1 shows that urbanisation was initiated by a first wave of growth in Nairobi in the 1960s, followed by a second wave in other urban areas in the 1970s. The high urban growth rates of the 1960s and 1970s are mainly due to the high contribution of rural-to-urban migration. This contribution fell from more than 50% to about 40% in the 1980s and 1990s. As a consequence, the growth of urban centres considerably declined in the 1980s and 1990s apart from that of Nairobi, which stayed remarkably constant (4.8% a year). Nairobi will continue growing much faster thus increasing the share of the urban population living in the capital city.

Nairobi grew at 4.6% per year in the 1950s. Independence in 1963 considerably raised the town's attractiveness, which was acknowledged by a change in its boundaries, to the effect that the Nairobi's population grew at 12.2% per year between 1962 and 1969. From the 1960s to date, Nairobi has been growing at a sustained and constant rate of a little less than 5% a year. This is a remarkably constant rate in Africa, where the capital cities usually grew much faster in the 1960s and in the 1970s. The population of Nairobi has always been growing at a lower pace than other urban areas, in the 1970s and 1980s, but more than the second largest city, Mombassa, which has been growing at 3% to 3.5% annual rate in the last half-century. The capital city inhabitants formed half of the urban population in the 1960s and still represent about 38% of total share in 1999. Whereas in the past rural-to-urban migration was the major contributor to the urban growth of Nairobi, natural growth and *in-situ* urbanization (the absorption of adjacent settlements in the spatial growth of the larger city) are increasingly becoming important factors.

2.3 Socio-economic context

Nairobi plays an important role in the global, regional, national and local economy. It employs 25% of Kenyans and 43% of the urban workers in the country, generating over 45% of national GDP (UNHABITAT 2006). However, the socio-economic conditions are deteriorating much faster, especially in the last two and half decades. The proportion of population living below poverty line increased dramatically, from 26% in 1992 to 50% in

1997. The dependency ratio is 71.3% for the poor, 48.1% for the non-poor and 52.75 in Nairobi. The total fertility rate is 3.5% for the poor, 2.6% for the non-poor and 2.8% for Nairobi as a whole (Kenya 2008).

In 2003, fertility is lowest in Nairobi (2.7 children per woman) and highest in North Eastern Province (7.0 children per woman).

2.4 National cultural images

The national cultural images in Nairobi can be seen in the National Museums of Kenya, Bomas of Kenya and Nairobi National Park. There is also literature, theatre, art and music. Most recently Nairobi has seen the increase in "cultural nights" where various ethnic groups come together to celebrate and be proud of their culture.

3. Sites of Power and Counter-Power

3.1 Manifestations of power

At the governmental level, the capital manifestation of power is situated in State House, Harambee House, Parliament Building and the Law Court. Except for State House, all others are located within the Central Business District of Nairobi. State House is the official residence of the President and also serves as an office where government meetings and business is often transacted. Harambee House is the official Office of the President – although all the three Presidents of Kenya rarely use it. However, it houses a number of governmental ministries and departments that are under the Office of the President. Parliament building is basically where the legislature operates from. It is here that legislative business is conducted on behalf of the Kenyan constituents, Nairobi included. The Law Court houses the judiciary. At the local level, Nairobi is governed from the City Hall. The City Hall, located within the Central Business District, houses all the Departments of Nairobi City Council. Besides, all the political party Headquarters are situated in various parts of the city.

3.2 Channels of mobilization and protests

Channels of mobilization and protests in Nairobi are as varied as the problems they are supposed to solve and the type of group involved. Political parties, Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Community Based Organizations (CBOs), the civil society, trade unions, formal and informal organizations, neighbourhood (or estate) associations and educational institutions (tertiary colleges and universities) have all been used as channels of mobilization and protests in Nairobi since independence to date. These are the groups who organize demonstrations for their groups depending on what is at stake.

3.3 Locations of marches, rallies, riots and protests

Marches, rallies, riots and protests are not a new phenomenon in Nairobi. Rallies and protests occurred during the agitation for independence. At this time the famous Kamukunji grounds in the Eastern part of the city provided an open space for gathering,

expression and agitation. Kamukunji is a Kiswahili connotation for informal meeting. It is widely used in the universities and in Parliament when an informal meeting has to be called to address a pressing issue. Kamukunji grounds is rich in historical significance as it is the site of Kenya's political mass actions.

The first multi-party mass rally was held on this ground on 7 July 1990 and this date is still commemorated to date. On 7 July 1990, which came to be called *saba saba*[10], the ruling elite mobilized the ruling party (KANU) youth wingers to reinforce riot police in dispersing a defiant crowd that attempted to gather at the Kamukunji grounds. Some politicians were detained, more than 20 people were killed, 1,000 arrested and between a few dozens and several hundreds injured in riots that rocked the city and several other towns.

After the introduction of multi-party politics in Kenya, Uhuru Park became another famous ground for rallies organized by, especially the major political parties, due to its central location in the city centre. Major declarations, affecting the political landscape in the country, have taken place on this ground. Riots and protests also occur in the streets of Nairobi, in the neighbourhoods and in the universities.

References:

Achola, M.A. (2002), Colonial policy and urban health: The case of colonial Nairobi. In A. Burton (ed.), *The urban experience in Eastern Africa c. 1750-2000*. Nairobi: British Institute in Eastern Africa, pp. 119-37.

Agwanda, A.T.O., P. Bocquier, A. Khasakhala & S.O. Owuor (forthcoming), *Biography of three generations of Nairobi residents: Thirty years of urban social history*. Dakar: CODESRIA.

Anyamba, T.J.C. (2004), Informalisiation of a planned neighbourhood in Nairobi. A paper presented at the international conference on "Future vision and developement for urban development", Cairo, Egypt, 20-22 December, 2004.

Blevin, C. & Bouczo, J. (1997), Nairobi: A century of history (1898-1997). *Les Cahiers de l'IFRA*, 5: 30-53.

Boedecker, C. (1936), *Early history of Nairobi township*. Nairobi: MacMillan Library.

Emig, S. & Ismail, Z. (1980), *Notes on the urban planning of Nairobi*. Copenhagen: School of Architecture.

Foran, R. (1950), Rise of Nairobi: From campsite to city. Phase in the history of Kenya's capital which is soon to receive a royal charter. *The Crown Colonist*, 20 (220): 161-5.

Hake, A. (1977), *African metropolis: Nairobi self help city*. London: Chatto and Windus.

Hirst, T. (1994), *The struggle for Nairobi: A documentary comic book*. Nairobi: Mazingira Institute.

---

[10] Kiswahili word for "seven seven" meaning 7th of July

Karuga, J.G. (ed) (1993), *Actions towards a better Nairobi: Report and recommendations of the Nairobi city convention*. Nairobi: Nairobi City Commission.

Kenya, Republic of (2008), *Economic Survey 2008*. Nairobi: Government Printers.

Lee-Smith, D. (1989), Urban management in Nairobi: A case study of the matatu mode of public transport. In R.E. Stren & R.R. White (eds), *African cities in crisis: managing rapid urban growth*. Colorado: Westview Press, pp. 276-304.

Macoloo, G.C. (1998), The relevance of Kenya's urban settlement policies for independent South Africa. *Southern African Geographical Journal*, 80 (2): 81-85.

Mitullah, W. (2003), Urban slums reports: The case of Nairobi, Kenya. In *Understanding slums: Case studies for the global report on human settlements*.

Morgan, W.T.W. (ed.) (1967), *Nairobi city and region*. Nairobi: Oxford University Press.

Nairobi City Commission (1985), *Development plan 1984-1988*. Nairobi: Nairobi City Commission.

Nairobi City Council (1974), *Master plan for sewerage and drainage. Volume I*. Nairobi: Nairobi City Council.

Nairobi Urban Study Group (1973), *Nairobi metropolitan growth strategy report. Volume I: Main report*. Nairobi: Nairobi City Commission.

Nevanlinna, A. K. (1996), *Interpreting Nairobi: The cultural study of built forms*. Helsinki: Bibliotheca Historica.

Obudho, R.A. (1987), Shelter and services of the poor in Nairobi, Kenya. A paper presented to expert group meeting on shelter and services for the poor in metropolitan areas, Nagoya, Japan, January 12-16, 1987.

Obudho, R.A. & Owuor, S.O. (1991), Urbanization and regional planning of metropolitan Nairobi, Kenya. A paper presented at the international conference on big cities of Africa and Latin America: Urban facilities and cultural practices, Toulouse, France, November 27-29, 1991.

Ochieng, C.C. (2007), A critical review of housing delivery in Nairobi: Different actors – different socio-economic groups. *ArchNet-IJAR*, 1(3): 140-152.

Odada, J.E. & Otieno, J.O. (eds) (1990), *Socio-economic profiles*. Nairobi: Ministry of Planning and National Development.

Owuor, S.O. (2006), Small and medium-size towns in the context of urbanization and development process in Kenya. *Les Cahiers d'Afrique de l'Est (Supplementary Issue)*, September, 2006: 1-12.

Owuor, S.O., B. Charlery, M. Chretin & B. Schaffner (2006), Urban planning and management in small and medium-size towns. *Les Cahiers d'Afrique de l'Est (Supplementary Issue)*, September, 2006: 23-48.

Owuor, S.O. & Obudho, R.A. (1997), Urban open spaces in the city of Nairobi, Kenya. In R.S. Melkote & S. Prasad (eds), *The third world city: Emerging contours*. Hyderabad: Delta Publishing House, pp. 57-80.

Rakodi, C. (1995), *Harare. Inheriting a settler colonial city: Change or continuity?* London: John Wiley and Sons.

Rodriguez-Torres, D. (1998), Entre informel et illégal. Survivre à Nairobi. *Politique Africaine* 70 : 54-60.

Tiwari, R. (1981), The origin, growth and the functional structures of Central Business District (CBD) of Nairobi. In R.A. Obudho (ed.), *Urbanization and development planning in Kenya*. Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau, pp. 123-40.

UNHABITAT (2005), *State of the world cities report 2004*. New York: Earthscan Publishers.

UNHABITAT (2006), *Nairobi Urban Sector Profile*. Nairobi: UNHABITAT.

Walmsley, R.W. (1957), *Nairobi: The geography of a New City*. Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau.