

A HISTORY OF AFRICAN HOUSING IN NAIROBI c.1900 - 1960:
A STUDY OF URBAN CONDITIONS AND COLONIAL POLICIES

BY

OSAAK A.L.A. OLUMJULLAH

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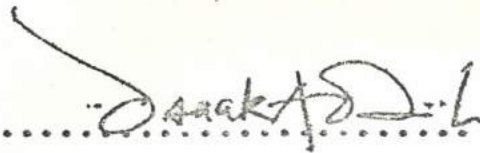


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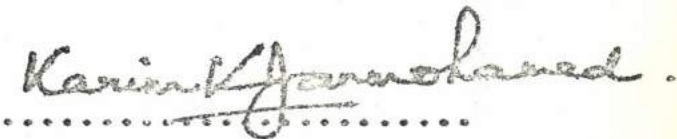
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VII
ABSTRACT

The problem of housing, especially for the low-income groups, is as old as Nairobi. To many observers Nairobi, often described as the "City in the Sun" is in the throes of a crisis. The city is^s trying to grapple with a wide array of problems, the lack of adequate decent housing being probably the greatest: it has come to be seen as the single most important fetter on the further development of the city as investment in housing is now not only valued for the shelter and facilities it provides but also for its contribution, both directly and indirectly to increases in employment and output.

In this study, an attempt is made to analyse the structural roots of the problem between c.1900 and 1960. At its broadest, the study is an investigation into African housing, urban living conditions and colonial policies in Nairobi during colonialism. Though the geographical focus is Nairobi, the approach taken to appreciate the problem is based on an investigation of the effects of the integration of Kenya into a world-wide system of capitalist relations of production and exchange.

At the close of the last century the geographical entity known as Kenya today was a mosaic of pre-capitalist societies; by 1939 these societies had become part of a colonial state which was fully integrated into the expanding world capitalist system.

In the first forty years of the present century the country was transformed as a result of this integration. Therefore, inland urbanization and its concomitant problems such as lack of housing in Nairobi are inexplicable without an understanding of this dual process of integration and transformation. In other words, the origins and development of Nairobi have been analysed not only as aspects of an evolving colonial urban hierarchy in Kenya but also as outcomes of the processes of integration and transformation.

In a wider spectrum, the investigation into the processes of integration and transformation has been an attempt to understand the development of capitalism in Kenya and how Africans got both involved in and affected by it through concrete historical processes. This study has sought to do so through an examination of the manner in which capitalist penetration transformed the countryside, leading to the emergence of squatters and urban workers. The contention here is that the creation of a wage-labour force in Kenya, whether in the former White Highlands or in towns, was essentially a product of white settlement and the establishment of European colonial administration. Thus in the study it is argued that while between c.1900 and 1940 merchant capital was the crucial agency of the transformation of Nairobi, the period from around 1940 onwards was characterized by a

move towards finance and industrial capital. In the former period (1900-1940) primitive accumulation of capital dictated the relationship between the White settler elite and African labour. Two issues were important here. First, the organization of Kenya society ensured that whites were to remain dominant over other races. Second and more importantly, this arrangement was meant to ensure access to cheap African labour without the settler elite having to pay the heavy social costs of urbanization. Rationalized in terms of diseases and epidemiology, this arrangement was worked out into a policy whereby African labour had to be reproduced in the reserves. Hence, throughout this period the question of the provision of housing for Africans in Nairobi was a far cry.

So long as labour for pax-colonia could be reproduced in the "native reserves" where the network of kinship relations provided both subsistence and welfare functions for migrant workers, the Nairobi urban authorities were content in basing primitive accumulation of capital not on the separation of labour from the means of production (land) but on the maintenance and transformation of pre-capitalist relations of production. Thus the period c.1900-1940 in Nairobi was characterized by the growth of scattered shanty dwellings which acted as septic fringes for Africans who had come to the town in search of better means

of livelihood. In addition, the African areas of Nairobi suffered from a general state of poor sanitation, overcrowding and debilitating diseases.

However, in contradiction to its own objectives, primitive accumulation of capital was a powerful catalyst of change in European conceptualization of the urban African and the African labour force. By 1939 urban and country had become so irrevocably linked that diminishing means of subsistence in the latter increasingly came to place demands on the former. This generated conflicts which were centred on the question of cheap labour and its reproduction and, by extension, on the question of the policy of control and segregation which had characterized the period c.1900-1940. In other words, through its operations primitive accumulation of capital came to undermine the social relations of production it had set in motion and in so doing altered dramatically the manner in which Nairobi was to reproduce itself.

The period from 1940 onwards became a crucible in which the relationship between capital (finance and industrial) and African labour became transformed to take cognizance of post-war developments both globally and in Kenya. In this period the major contradiction in the Kenyan social formation shifted from the relationship between two modes -- pre-capitalist and capitalist -- to that between capital and labour

within one mode-capitalist. Here the questions of stabilization, labour efficiency and labour output became key factors in African urbanization. It has been argued in this study that, first, in this period the maintenance of a system where Africans were seen as sojourners in Nairobi fell into contradiction with the character of the post-war British policy towards her colonies. This policy emphasized the promotion of industrialization and social welfare to cope with the post-war world geopolitics in which the United States of America had emerged as a global power politically, economically and militarily. Secondly, stabilization programmes in the post-war periods were a response to labour and market requirements of Britain which were based on a rational calculus of costs. And central to this was the importance of family housing as a stabilizing factor in the African urban population.

By 1950, however, the central government and Nairobi urban authorities had not fully come to grips with the forces the development of capitalism had unleashed. Their procrastination over the urban wages, poor African living conditions and other several facets of the African urban life led to labour unrest. Demands for higher wages and better living conditions became linked, for the first time, with demands for equality with Indian and European workers and for

African equality with other races generally. Here class consciousness became mixed with race consciousness, and labour protest became linked with African nationalism. Before the authorities could resolve this crisis, the Mau Mau uprising broke out in 1952. Both these developments, by 1956 had forced the authorities into yet another crucial stage of thinking over African living conditions. To combat social unrest and potential revolution, the authorities embarked on extensive housing development schemes which were to be used to reclaim the "respectable" working classes, while segregating the "residuum" of the "unregenerated" poor in the city. The period 1956-1960 witnessed the implementation of this policy as Nairobi moved from social (i.e. racial) to economic (i.e. class) categorization. And this is what independent Kenya inherited, intact, from the colonial authorities at independence in 1963.

INTRODUCTION

A large proportion of Nairobi's population lives in sub-standard housing in areas which have variously been described as slums, squatter, spontaneous or unauthorized settlements. A major characteristic of the situation is both the qualitative and quantitative lack of housing for which demographic, political and socio-economic factors are responsible. To pinpoint these three factors as the main causal factors of the housing problem in Nairobi does not in the least mean that the problem is of recent making. Indeed, slums or squatter settlements, like antiquated transport systems, blight and inadequate planning and the accumulation of solid waste in our towns are in most cases "the heritage of ignorance, mediocrity, and the unbridled pursuit of self-interest of a minority at the expense of the majority. These errors might be avoided by a knowledge of the social forces which (have) create(d) them".¹

Though a commentary on urban experiences in Western industrial societies, the above statement by Leonard Reisman appropriately summarizes two pertinent issues about the Kenyan urban situation. First, it draws our attention to the fact that the current problems towns like Nairobi are going through are not recent phenomena which can be approached and solved "out of a present mindedness". Secondly, these phenomena are not beyond redemption; they can be solved but this demands a carefully executed invest

investigation into the social forces that created them. In either case what Reissman is appealing for is the appreciation of the root causes, the genesis of the phenomena, that is the history of the problems.

Our readers might ask: why should historians want to study urban poverty and the urban poor? The answer to this question lies in the historical projection of current concerns with growing social insecurity, the great numbers living below the official poverty line, the problem of low wages, unemployment, and the relationship between these concerns and sub-standard housing in towns. Current changes in the international division of labour and the impact of structural changes on the nature and extent of poverty are thought to invite comparisons with similar experiences in the past. And in that regard, Nairobi in the period chosen for this study affords an excellent and startling example: a city suffering an acute problem of housing, the adverse consequences of which were only slightly alleviated by its growth to importance as a regional commercial and industrial centre in the post-Second World War years.

The understanding of such changes from both a local and global perspective and their impact on Africans in the town can not be fully deciphered if one confined oneself to the study of, say, a single ethnic community or "location." Most literature on

African cities has in the past tended to emphasize the African as an immigrant without much attention being paid to the Africans' experiences in towns during colonialism. Thus, instead of looking at or dealing with the whole town, the whole urban structure, the whole network of social, economic and political relations, the boundaries of interpretation were often drawn very narrowly around what was mostly a partially segregated African "location", "compound" or ethnic category. While it is understandable why this was so, this categorization failed to broach the historical specificity in which the Africans moved to towns and consequently got segregated against. Based on such narrowly defined parameters like "location" or "compound", this literature's analyses relied on general impressions of parts of the totality rather than on empirical analysis of whole urban situations in Africa's historical development. A good example which defies locational or ethnic categorization is the "Thuku Riots" of 1922 which were a clear manifestation of nascent signs of collective consciousness of permanent degradation. These riots began to reveal the attitudes and priorities of the African poor themselves and, at a higher level, the organizational origins of the disturbances revealed that the Nairobi Africans were beginning to transcend their ethnic backgrounds.²

By quantitatively and qualitatively outlining a marked deterioration in the African living conditions with special reference to housing and the policies adopted to deal with the situation in Nairobi between c.1900 and 1960, this study ventures into urban history. We hope that by drawing inevitably towards life in the town we are not only significantly contributing to this area of study but also giving a pointer to the fact that there is more to the process of urbanization than the mere process of rural-urban migration. Underlying this hope is the belief that by focussing on the town, we are suggesting an urban variable which can be used to explain certain historical developments in Kenya. This, we hope, will significantly contribute to our knowledge of the process of urbanization and its concomitant problems in Kenya and beyond.

This study has six chapters in total. Chapter one contains an introduction to the general question of urbanization and a statement of the problem being investigated as well as a justification for the choice of the area of research. It also contains a review of related literature and the search for a theory of urbanization and its concomitant problems in peripheral capitalist social formations. After this it looks at the theoretical framework which has provided the general guidelines for the study, methods used in collecting

data and the problems encountered and, finally, the objectives and scope of the study.

Chapter two is concerned with the historical origins and development of Nairobi between c.1900 and 1960. This involves the examination of a number of things. First, we have sought to depart from the views of some scholars of urbanization who have seen the permissibility of divorcing the growth of the so-called primate cities from the dynamics of modes of production. The gist of the argument here is that the historical origins and development of Nairobi cannot be understood without reference to the overall structure of the political economy of peripheral capitalism as it is articulated in the Kenyan social formation. The historical roots of the city and the various phases it went through as the forms of capitalist development changed have been discussed. Secondly, it is within the framework of the above contention that Nairobi's role in the Kenyan political economy during colonialism has been discussed. The consequences of this developmental pattern on the African residents are examined in chapters four and five. But before looking at the consequences per se, chapter three discusses the factors which were responsible for the creation of surplus population and the spatial displacement of labour from the "native reserves" to either the "White" Highlands or to towns.

After this the movement of Africans to Nairobi and their accommodation in the city is considered in chapter four. Here, epidemiology as a powerful social metaphor which was used as a rationale for early segregationist and control policies has been examined. Also, the African living conditions in the town and the factors which contributed to the collapse of the policy of control by 1939 have received attention.

This theme is continued in chapter five where it is argued that as the interwar period came to an end there was the demise of paternalism and the move towards the introduction of joint determination of employment standards for the purposes of appreciating the interdependence of housing, stabilization of labour and the promotion of efficiency in industrial production. The gist of the argument is that the failure of the policy of control is to be found in a new appreciation of the social and economic importance of the African population in Nairobi. Based on a review of selected arguments for and against "higher" and "low" wage policies as well as arguments for the maintenance of stability between the agricultural and industrial sectors, we maintain that the first step towards stability and efficiency was the general adoption of a living wage for an African divorced from his rural home. We further maintain

that though the question of stabilization of labour and the promotion of efficiency was often justified in purely economic terms, there was a glaringly powerful social and political dimension to it.

These views are developed further in chapter six where the examination of labour stability and labour efficiency as chief goals are linked to labour unrest in the colony. That unrest, together with the Mau Mau uprising, shaped the last phase of a colonial housing policy for Nairobi. We have in this chapter sought to suggest that developments which went into the improvement of African housing in the postwar period were a reflection of both London's and Nairobi's concern with the provision of "safety valves" for stemming radical political agitation in Kenya. On the question of Mau Mau, for example, we contend that the colonial authorities' move to improve on African housing in Nairobi constituted a non-military response to the political problems of 1950-1956. This move had its counterpart in the Swynnerton Plan in the countryside. Hence the move to improve on African living conditions in the postwar period was a pre-emptive measure which was borne out of the fear that discontent and "irresponsible" political agitation could easily arise and develop in slum conditions. Indeed, there was in both official and non-official circles the constant reference to the

"concrete forest" meaning African living quarters in Nairobi were as important in the organization of "subversive" activities as were the Aberdare Mountains.

The last two sections of the thesis form a conclusion to our discussion and attempt to establish as to whether there have been changes in housing policies since 1963. This was necessitated by the fact that writing in the 1980s, and bearing in mind the contention in chapter one that the housing problem in Nairobi today has its roots in the colonial period, it would be unfair not to look at how the situation has been since independence. The basic question which we have attempted to answer in the epilogue is as to whether there have been any marked changes in housing policies since 1963.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 Leonard Reissman, The Urban Process: Cities in Industrial Societies (London: The Free Press of Glencoe, Collier-Macmillan Ltd., 1964), P.154.
- 2 Harry Thuku, Harry Thuku: An Autobiography (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1970) PP.21-24.

URBANIZATION AND THE URBAN HOUSING PROBLEM.

1.1: Introduction and Statement of the Problem

Both political and economic experts of the changing international scene have seen the 1970s as a period which saw a radical change in the way certain international agencies had hitherto perceived the problems besetting Third World countries. From a position of blaming these countries' leadership for the political and economic woes that had become the rule rather than the exception while at the same time looking to increased transfer of technology and foreign investments from the developed to the underdeveloped world, the World Bank, for example, started urging for a broader concern with the question of absolute poverty. The problem with the Third World was not one of economic growth per se; it was first and foremost one of the eradication of absolute poverty and the promotion of "redistribution of wealth with growth".

The United Nations Environmental Programme took the cue and started moving away from its hitherto mainly ecological approach to Third World problems to one which had to first recognise basic human needs. The International Labour Organization on its part broadened its earlier emphasis on unemployment to embrace a commitment to the fulfillment of basic human needs. The one overriding factor which brought about this new outlook was the question of absolute poverty in the urban areas of the developing countries.

Signalling this shift in a series of speeches in 1972, the former President of the World Bank, Mr. Robert McNamara, decried the "unspeakably grim" world of the urban poor in these countries. To him natural increases, combined with the rapid rate of migration from the rural areas, guaranteed that the problem was bound to grow in magnitude if governments were not to take appropriate measures to deal with it.

Available data show that the rate of urban growth in Africa ranks with the world's highest. According to a 1972 report by the Economic Commission for Africa,¹ between 1940 and 1960 Africa's overall rate of urban growth of about 5% per annum was the highest in the world. This trend gained momentum with the attainment of political independence bringing it to between 9 and 15% or between four and eight times the rate of rural increase. This startling development is brought out by the fact that while the Population of Kinshasa (Zaire) rose from 1,100,000 in 1970 to about 3,300,000 in 1985 that of Accra (Ghana) grew from 600,000 in 1970 to about 1,600,000 in 1985. Nairobi (Kenya) had its population rise from 550,000 in 1970 to about 1,700,000 in 1985 and Lagos (Nigeria) moved from 3,500,000 in 1975 to about 4,500,00 in 1980. If this trend continues, by the year 2000 an estimated 28% of the African population will be living in urban areas. This figure is not too far below the projected world total of 38%. Africa thus will be the most rapidly

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urbanizing region of the world by the end of this century².

Perhaps the most unique observable feature of this development is that the bulk of the rural migrants settle and eke out a living in the slums and spontaneous settlements in and around the towns and cities of these countries. Indeed, this—the question of urban housing—poses perhaps the greatest challenge to economic planners in these countries.

Urban housing, whether in the developed or developing world, represents not only the one major single physical element around which the social and productive economic life of individuals revolves; it also represents the single largest investment which provides the sole mitigating factor when it comes to the legal status as well as the residential permanence of such individuals in any town. In other words, it symbolizes not only security but also achievement and status. It is not surprising, therefore, that the struggle for shelter represents probably one single factor in the urbanizing world which has generated a multiplicity of problems with varying degrees of response from those concerned.

Given the above observation and comment on the importance of urban housing, the question that comes into one's mind immediately is: why is it that a large proportion of the developing world's urban populations

live in substandard housing in areas which have variously been described as slums, squatter settlements, shanties, spontaneous or unauthorized settlements? These are terms which describe a variety of conditions with respect to the standards of housing and services which are determined by environmental conditions (drainage, sewers, neighbourhood desirability, aesthetics, economic obsolescence and absence of crime) and accessibility (roads, streets, both quantitatively and qualitatively). But what are the historical roots of this problem?

The basic aim of this study is to inquire into the problem of urban housing as it related to Africans in colonial Nairobi and to analyse and determine both the Colonial and Municipal authorities response to it. In other words, the study seeks to understand the historical origins of the problem of urban housing as we know it today as well as to determine the types of response in terms of policy directives which went into the improving of the situation in the period under study. This forms the basis of our explanation of what colonial authorities came to describe as the "Native Question" and the evolution of a housing policy for Nairobi.

As part of the understanding of the issues involved, this study goes further to explain the extent to which immigration of Africans into Nairobi

was a reflection of the changing nature of capitalist relations of production in the countryside and how the eventual settlement of these migrants in Nairobi was determined by the same relations but under different forms. The political and economic set-up within which this process took place has been examined with a view to understanding the social, economic and political character of the housing problem for Africans in the town.

1.2: The Significance of this Study.

Scholars from all disciplines—economists, historians, political scientists, political economists, sociologists and even the perennial anthropologists—have studied and still study urbanization in Kenya and the problems this process has brought with it. On the whole, however, most of these scholars have carried out their researches with one thing in mind—the immediate applicability of their findings to the tasks of solving these problems. Thus in conceptualizing overall development and its urbanization trajectory, urban problems like lack of decent housing have been seen in terms of their being a post-colonial phenomenon. This stance has tended to establish a dramatic break with the Past. Thus assuming that the attainment of independence marked a radical break with the colonial past, the idea of development, whether in urban or rural areas, must be seen and tackled as it is, as it presents itself. This "present

mindedness" cannot be seen as being completely out of context considering the urge to do something to improve "our people's welfare". However, it is also true that scholars have always found it necessary to understand the history, the dialectic of change from the past without which an understanding of the present is static and a plan for the future wrought with the potential for farce. The historian in the 1980s is perhaps in a better position to analyse the phenomena in the context of the historical developments which not only led to the migration of Africans to towns but also the problems this migration posed for them once in the towns. Thus a study of the problem of urban housing and how it related to Africans in Nairobi during colonialism is of considerable interest and significance. This is ~~the~~ more so because, apart from contributing to the bridging of the gap that is so glaringly apparent in the urban historiography of Kenya, it is our belief that it is possible to discover in both recent works on urbanization in Kenya and the expanding work on the Political economy of Kenya insights and approaches which may enrich the study of Kenya urban history, pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial.

This study is of interest and significance for other reasons. Apart from arguing that the present problem of urban housing in Nairobi has its roots in a colonial past (and bearing in mind that independent Kenya inherited this past intact), this study attempts

to demonstrate the fact that the Africans who suffered from lack of adequate housing constituted the majority of the population in the town and that the development of what we see today in form of slums was not just an outcome of colonial negligence and the enactment of wrong policies for the urban African; they are a clear manifestation of the intimate relationship between the character of economic development in the country as a whole and the transformation of pre-capitalist African economies during colonialism. This is of significance as it establishes the historical context within which cityward migration took place. In conceptualizing the problem this way, this study attempts to go beyond the existing sociological, demographic, anthropological and economic literature on urban housing particularly and urbanization generally in that first, it treats housing for African urbanites in Nairobi within the historical specificity of peripheral capitalism. Secondly, it treats political and economic forces of change as determinant factors in urban change and human settlement. Lastly, it concerns itself not only with the capitalist relations of accumulation but also with the reproduction issues of the colonial urban system. In short, the study focuses on the political economy of Kenya to explain the economic history of urbanization with specific reference to urban housing in Nairobi.

1.3: Review of Related Literature.

In a move reminiscent of colonial municipal brutality in dealing with Nairobi subsistence urbanites, the Nairobi City Council askaris backed by bulldozers, crushed into the destruction of slum dwellings in the Valley of Nairobi River behind Kirinyaga Road in the dawn of October 13th, 1977. Indeed, like in 1923 when the Municipal Council of Nairobi razed down the African villages in Mombasa, Kaburini, Kileleshwa and Maskini³, a colossal sum of money in form of personal effects was lost to its owners, numbering over 10,000. In November 1970, 49 shanty settlements containing about 7,000 dwelling units worth about \$300,000 and accommodating about 40,000 people were pulled down or burned by the Council's askaris⁴ in a similar manner. According to an official statement released by City Hall explaining the 1977 incident, this was but the tip of the iceberg in a new and unprecedented move to rid the city of ugly and disease prone shanty dwellings. And in a leader article commenting on the staging of a six week course on the improvement of the urban habitat organized by HABITAT (the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements) in Nairobi in November 1982, The Standard newspaper commented that

... despite all the commendable efforts that HABITAT has done since its inception in 1978, the conditions of those living in urban areas especially those below what is considered to be

the poverty line—have worsened and the problem has grown in magnitude.

According to this newspaper:

people should start looking towards the rural areas as the places of opportunity for the future instead of flocking into urban centres in search for non-existent jobs—a trend which only condemns them to live in an environment with sub-standard amenities.... The logical solution ... is to make life economically attractive in the rural areas so that people do not have to flock into urban areas in fruitless search for opportunities to better themselves.

It concluded that the uplifting of rural areas to economically viable levels would very much check on the spatial displacement of rural labour to towns and this would be a major strategy in the overall development planning in the country⁵.

While to City Hall the solution to slums and slum development in Nairobi lay in the massive destruction of shanty dwellings, to The Standard, which was echoing the Kenyan political expedient and alarmist tone, the solution lay in the improvement of economic conditions in the rural areas. As to how these improvements were to be effected the newspaper did not say. What emerges from these two not so diametrically opposed views is, at best, an oversimplification and, at worst,

is the height of the continuous mystification and obfuscation of the root causes underpinning the process of urbanization and its concomitant problem of slums and slum development in Kenya.

The reality is that a large proportion of Nairobi's urban population has for a long time now lived in substandard housing. Commenting on this fact, the 1979-83 Kenya Development Plan puts this at a conservative figure of 1/3 or 33.3% of the total Nairobi population. For a long time now the Kenya Government has opted for squatter clearance than squatter improvement. Sessional Paper No.5 of 1966 on housing policy is quite clear on this. It states, inter alia, that

If towns are not to develop into slums and centres of ill-health and of evil social conditions, low-income urban housing and slum clearance must continue to form the major part of the nation's housing programme 6

(Emphasis added)

What contribution have scholars made to the solution of this problem? Research into housing in Kenya in particular and in the developing world in general has taken tremendous strides in the last 20 years or so. Indeed, since the late 1950s there has been a proliferation of literature on this subject so that by the end of the 1970s and the start of the 1980s one can with certainty point at an increasing polarization of

the literature into two diametrically opposed schools of thought. On the one hand there is the New Orthodoxy which has consistently emphasized not only the desirability but also the profitability of self-help housing in Third World urban areas while on the other there is the Marxist Approach.

Writing against the backdrop of an almost universally recognised policy of slum clearance in the Third World, John Turner⁷ and William Mangin⁸ put a strong case against slum clearance, arguing that the urban squatter was not a temporary migrant, socially deviant and a threat to established law and order. Rather he was in most cases a long-term resident with middle class aspirations. The type of dwelling he put up, usually in temporary materials, for himself and his family was not only a reflection of these aspirations but also the limited financial means with which he had to operate. The urban squatter to these scholars was therefore not the precursor of urban evil and despondency but rather a hero who in his own way contributed to the solution of the housing problem in urban areas.

This approach can be found winding its way in a new sociological and anthropological thrust in Africa in the 1950s when scholars began to emphasize the positive aspects of life in urban slums and criticized any government policies which aimed at slum clearance

and redevelopment. In a pioneering study of two African suburbs of Kampala, anthropologists Aidan W. Southall and Peter Gutkind paid particular attention to housing conditions and policy saying that

The lack of alternative accommodation can only be blamed upon the (Uganda) Protectorate Government which is at present the only authority with resources adequate to the task of providing for the need of urban populations. To sweep away Kisenyi under present circumstances could only lead to disaster, depriving some thousands of people of accommodation and forcing rents still further up elsewhere?

The circumstances these two scholars were referring to were "the level of rent" which depended "on the availability of alternative accommodation, and criteria adopted by urban Africans in choosing one type of accommodation rather than another"¹⁰. A study of Mombasa in Kenya at about the same time came to similar conclusions. Sociologist Gordon Wilson pointed out that the formal institutional atmosphere of the Municipal housing estates, with so many restrictions on visitors, noise, movement of petty trade lacked "the community spirit and feeling of belonging" to be found in the African-built Swahili housing layouts¹¹. He pursued this point in his article on Kongowea when he said that Swahili-style housing, if properly planned, could "not only provide the African with something which he understands, but ... is within his financial

grasp ... costs him less in capital and rent, and costs the taxpayer nothing in subsidies".¹²

In the late 1950s Peter Marris¹³ gave a greater impetus to this kind of thinking. Using a cost/benefit analysis of the factors involved in a slum clearance in Central Lagos, Nigeria, he pointed out that in any slum area, social and economic patterns hinged on an intricate texture of family relationships and a local economic system which depended largely on trade within the neighbourhood itself. Thus any move towards the clearance of the slum would be hazardous socially, economically and politically. The geographer, Kenneth McVicar,¹⁴ seems to have built on this thesis when he put across a strong case against the demolition and redevelopment of Old Pumwani in Nairobi. Searching for purpose and community in the lower-class neighbourhood of Old Pumwani, McVicar emphasized the importance of Islam in "Minimizing inter-tribal conflict among a large group of culturally heterogenous residents" and in fostering "a sense of community loyalty". Developing on this thesis, he argued that opportunities for economic development were invariably linked to and fostered by the harmony created by Islam and that the demolition of the slum would not be in the interest of the community¹⁵. Islam as a mitigating factor in inter-tribal harmony is also noted by Richard Stren¹⁶ and Regina Solzbacher¹⁷. Writing on the social history of Kibuli in Uganda, Solzbacher found a

continuity of political leadership based on Islam in an ethnically heterogenous community for a good seventy years. Hence she cautions very strongly against any move towards Kibuli's redevelopment or clearance as a solution to either physical or social conditions. This was so because "by disrupting the existing social equilibrium, by destroying a viable community, much more serious damage could be done. The forced separation of extended families and neighbours can only heighten anxiety, instability and mistrust."¹⁸

Adrew Hake and Marc Ross¹⁹ have put up a similar case against the demolition and redevelopment of Mathare Valley in Nairobi and have gone further by presenting a detailed proposal for aided self-help in the area. Their thesis is that it is morally, sociologically and economically expedient to promulgate a policy which advocates the removal of the people of this area to a new location.

Operating within the academic neighbourhood of the John Turner-William Mangin School of thought, researchers like Etherton, et. al²⁰, D. Haldane²¹, G.G. Maina,²² and Marja Hoek-Smit,²³ like the above-mentioned scholars, have been just too willing to legitimize squatter settlements in the eyes of the Kenyan government. For example Etherton, et. al, inter alia write:

The main purpose of describing

Mathare Valley is to bring the problem of uncontrolled settlements into focus in the hope that it will no longer be regarded as socially marginal and physically insignificant but rather as one of the most crucial aspects of the city's (Nairobi) future development.

These works have found their strongest criticism in the Marxist Approach which starts off with a critique of self-help housing and squatter improvement programmes. The gist of this approach is the view that more than anything else, the New Orthodoxy is an obscurantist blue-print for the eradication of poverty in the developing world. Rod Burgess²⁴ and Harris Harms²⁵ point out that the John Turner-William Mangin school of thought not only provided the powers that be with an ideological blank cheque for the maintenance of the status quo but it also rationalizes poverty under the cover of laissez-faire policy.

Harris Harms takes issue with John Turner's and Fichter's²⁶ ideological slogans of "Freedom to Build" which he says confuse "Freedom to Act" with the "Necessity to Survive." Drawing evidence from Latin America, he posits a strong case against self-help housing as a policy solution to housing problems in capitalist societies. This has occurred with great regularity throughout history especially when there is a crisis in capitalism. Thus, after the Cuban Revolution, the United States of America, in an

attempt to stem further revolutions, set up the Alliance for Progress which was to spearhead strategies with emphasis on land reforms and housing programmes for rapidly developing cities of South America.

This approach finds its parallel in Colin Leys' ²⁷ work conducted against the International Labour Organization's ²⁸ recommendations on how the informal sector could be improved in Kenya. To Leys the identification of the informal sector as a productive object of policy does not work out as an alternative to the malaise afflicting the Kenyan urban situation. Arguing that though these recommendations were ostensibly set within a Marxist framework, they nonetheless failed to go beyond ILO's thinly-veiled attempts at removing the basic contradictions inherent in the Kenyan social formation. Thus instead of going to the root of the problem, ILO's aim was to reform capitalism by giving it a human face.

Apart from these works, there are those which have dealt with urban problems in a more generalized way. Here interest has mostly been centred on the practical (or applied) aspects of urban knowledge with more emphasis being placed on the provision of detailed information which may assist in the formulation of policy (e.g. in town planning). Thus unlike Herbert H. Werlin²⁹ who emphasizes the fact that the process of colonial urbanization needs the

understanding of the "body politics" of the urban centre, region, or country in question, technocrats like L.W. Thornton, et. al.³⁰, Richard Woodley³¹ and scholars like W.T.M. Morgan³² and Ramesh E. Tiwari³³ have concentrated on the encyclopaedic and journalistic approach, that is the documentation of the process of the urbanization of Nairobi. Though the credit of these works lies in their importance as source material, they nonetheless fall short of a theoretical understanding of the dynamics involved in this process. Thus, in trying to keep pace with the rapid expansion of the town, "Planning has frequently been more concerned with the physical layout of the land, rather than with giving expression to channelling the forces that shape the human urban environment."³⁴ Forgetting that urban growth implies physical, economic and social change through time and space, these works have lost sight of the motor force behind the rise of urban problems in Kenya. But to plan or rather to control or direct change as Nikos Georgules puts it "is not possible unless we understand the process and forces of change within society."³⁵ For the planner, a knowledge of the historical development of towns and the genesis of current problems are important in that they explain how growth patterns can be affected through artificial control.³⁶

Authors like R.A. Obudho,³⁷ M.P. Todaro³⁸, J.G. Blacker³⁹ and H.R. Camminos, et. al.⁴⁰ have in their analyses of urbanization placed a lot of emphasis on the spatio-demographic level of analysis; that is the emphasis on such phenomena as the spatial pattern of urban growth, the evolution of urban hierarchy, variations in the rates of urban in-migration and the occupational structure of towns. These authors, especially M.P. Todaro, have chosen the Behavioural Approach to explain why people move from rural to urban centres. Their thesis is grounded in the considerations entering into an individual's decision to migrate thus taking as given the existing spatial and social distribution of opportunities, and as problematical only the specification of the factors entering into a person's rational response to this historical reality. There they stop, without realizing that this structure of opportunities, which largely though not entirely determines individual migration decisions, in itself needs explanation.

As the foregoing review of selected works on urbanization and the problems this process pose show, concern has been focused on questions to do with the factors to which rural-urban migration can be attributed, the search for purpose and community in lower-class neighbourhoods, the importance of planning in the physical layout of towns and the pattern of urban growth combined with the evolution of urban hierarchy,

variations in the rates of urban immigration and the occupational structure of towns. These considerations, as we pointed out in section 4.0 of this chapter, are borne out of a "Present mindedness" whose overriding concern is the solving of urban problems as they presented themselves. The selection of these works does not mean that there is a complete dearth of historical research on these phenomena. Indeed, to any student of urban history in Kenya the omission of the works of Mary Parker⁴¹ and Kenneth McVicar⁴², two scholars whose research contains invaluable information on the history of Nairobi, would be to do injustice to the discipline. These works, alongside those of scholars like Andrew Hake⁴³, Richard Stren,⁴⁴ Pyarali A. Memon⁴⁵ and Roger M. Van Zwanenberg⁴⁶ can be credited with the broaching of the question as to whether the study of towns like Nairobi in time and space could be a pointer towards urban history as an academic discipline which could stand alongside economic or social history. The work of the historical geographer P.A. Memon on mercantile trade and its influence on the Kenyan colonial spatial system goes even a step further to prove the permissibility of this point. Writing on the development of an entrepot function at Nairobi during the interwar period, despite the existence of a similar function already at Mombasa, Memon articulately pinpoints some of the most important issues one has to address when talking about colonial

urbanization in Kenya. In the process, he highlights the place of Nairobi in the evolving colonial urban hierarchy.

Thus by drawing inevitably more towards life in towns themselves, these scholars have not only given research on towns a basic viability but have also given a pointer to the fact that there is more to urban history than the mere accident of geography. Furthermore, these scholars have demonstrated that there is a strong relationship between Nairobi as a town and the process of urbanization in the entire country. Thus in offering an insight into the wider process of urbanization, these scholars have shown that the city exercises some dynamic influence upon historical development and that on the stage of history Nairobi is more than mere backdrop scenery and profoundly affects the actors. So the concentration of population, the physical layout, the forms of employment, the type of accommodation, the social relations, all of which progressively acquire distinctively urban characteristics, exercise a dynamic force upon people who live out their lives in the town. Underlying this belief in the urban as a shaping force in social development is the fact that the urban is a potential causal factor. In short, by focussing on the town, these scholars have suggested an urban variable which may be a means of explaining important processes and developments.

Indeed, credit must go to these writers for bringing to the fore the often intractable question of whether Nairobi has never been a real independent entity but a mere social construct explicable only in terms of the society and, by extension, the political and economic forces that produced it.

Thus in writing on the growth of the town from its inception to 1948, with particular emphasis on the relationship between this process on the one hand and the formation of social and political structures that served in various ways to perpetuate white domination over other races on the other, Mary Parker introduces us to some important historical issues which were to persist in Nairobi even in the post-colonial period. Among these issues are racial segregation and the physical layout of estates according to race, an issue which took on new forms of economic (class) segregation after independence and the role of settler power politics in the shaping of the Nairobi local government administrative machinery. As Marc Howard Ross says about the former issue,

Africans have moved into positions formerly held by Europeans and Asians in the city, and in contrast to the stratified racial system which dominated Nairobi throughout the colonial period, the barriers to African mobility are gone. The elite now includes a significant number of African

businessmen, politicians and highly trained professionals, many of whom have made their fortunes in a few short years. While formerly this amassing of huge wealth by Africans was difficult ... today it is becoming a cause of mass resentment.⁴⁷

Thus, from policies of racial segregation, each neighbourhood in Nairobi after independence is "scored in terms of being a lower, middle or upper class area"⁴⁸.

Like Andrew Hake and Richard Stren, he argues that there seemed to be a realization among the powers that be that the restructuring of political and economic power relationships within Kenya was a prerequisite to a genuine pursuit of development strategies which could benefit both the whites and other races. But despite this realization, the intransigency of settler power-- which from the earliest period had notched for itself a dominant position in Nairobi Politics despite strong protestations by Indians--could not allow movement towards this goal. This was due to the belief, often flexed by racial prejudice, that the African first needed tutelage before he could be introduced to the intricacies and mechanisms of Western European politics and economics. This is what lay at the heart of colonial paternalism as it played out in the economic and political arena of not only Nairobi but the country as a whole.

Andrew Hake pushes this view further when he reviews what could be described as the basic-needs approach to the African plight in Nairobi in the colonial and post-colonial period. Saying that the railway had transformed East Africa, bringing with it traders, settlers, colonial administrators and soldiers and, as "an agent of centralism had placed Nairobi ... in a position to dominate the entire country",⁴⁹

The people (African)... showed great resilience in evolving responses in the face of enormous difficulties and frustrations which ... produced a particular pattern of family life in the city.⁵⁰

Population growth, more than often taking place in proportions unexpected by the authorities, led to mounting social problems which manifested themselves in the form of illegal shanty buildings and in the threat of violence and robbery in the streets. This, coupled with the growth in the Indian population, aroused fears in the minds of the European minority spurring them to ensure that their position of political power was not threatened. This move, quite ironically, encouraged the Indians, with increasingly radical leadership, to press their claims to proper representation commensurate with their numbers and the proportion they paid of the town's rates. These factors caused an ever-widening rift between Europeans and the other races, a rift which manifested itself

businessmen, politicians and highly trained professionals, many of whom have made their fortunes in a few short years. While formerly this amassing of huge wealth by Africans was difficult ... today it is becoming a cause of mass resentment.⁴⁷

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These two works, however, raise some important issues which if properly probed, can help in elucidating the dynamics behind the changes that were taking place in Nairobi during colonialism. Mary Parker, for example, raises the issue of there being a shift in the Nairobi Municipal authorities' perception of the "Native Question" from around 1940 onwards. But is it true that the 1939 Mombasa labour disturbances, liability to infectious diseases which poor housing encouraged and the need to improve the African as a labourer⁵¹ led to the pursuance of a "progressive policy" in the town? Is it not true that diseases had been a major issue which preoccupied the Municipal authorities in the period before 1939, an issue which indeed played a central part in the promulgation of the pre-war segregationist and control policies? If the question of labour efficiency was broached in 1940 what factors were involved? Andrew Hake on his part raises the issue of the cyclic nature of the economic fortunes of the town and how this had a lot of influence on the pattern of social provisions in the colonial period. Was not this a reflection of the fact that Kenya as a peripheral edifice in the world capitalist system was bound to be affected by changes in the world market whenever there was a crisis in capitalism? These questions demand the understanding of the nature and extent of the unfolding pattern of peripheral capitalism which has a lot to tell us about either

in the unequitable allocation of resources.

Hake's views are based on the conservative anti-poverty programmes which usually propose piecemeal reforms within the existing economic order; he gives no prescription of a mutually reinforcing set of policies which could entail structural change at the colonial as well as the post-colonial level. He posits his views against the background of a benighted and devious oversight of the trends in the phenomenal demographic growth of Nairobi and how this growth has, through time, been inextricably linked to economic changes in the countryside. Furthermore, he fails, in his insistence on the amelioration of the problem of poverty at the sectoral level (basic needs provision to satisfy demand), to see that the problem was not isolated from what was happening in the entire country as it appeared at face value; the problem was intrinsically linked to the political-economic fabric of the colonial social formation in Kenya. That it hinged on the need for a systematic strategy, premised upon structural economic and political change in the entire country eludes him as he fails to see that high rates of rural-urban migrations were, in large part, a consequence of the official neglect of rural economic conditions and that urban problems could not be solved in isolation from the problem of rural poverty. Otherwise why has the problem persisted up to today?

the shift or changing nature of colonial attitudes towards African subsistence urbanites in Nairobi.

If these two works fail to locate this important point within the neighbourhood of their major theses it is to Roger M. van Zwanenberg we have to turn to for the concretisation of the argument of this study. Though van Zwanenberg's first work focuses on the relationship between economic and social change in Uganda and Kenya covering the 19th and 20 centuries, his chapter on urbanization with reference to Kampala and Nairobi pulls a few punches on the colonial economy and its urban trajectory. He is even more emphatic in his second work on the theory of urban poverty in Nairobi. Like Edward Soja and Clyde E. Weaver⁵² he points out that the emergence of towns in the 20th century East Africa has to be seen within the wider framework of the spatial expansion of capitalism on a world scale and, consequently, East African urban ecology has to be seen within these parameters.

The gist of these works' thrust is that rapid growth of the so-called primate cities in East Africa has to be explained in terms of the changes that were taking place in the world economy and imperial policy during the era of colonialism. In the immediate post-war period the high world demand for primary products and a sustained imperial effort to promote colonial development fuelled an urban employment boom. Indeed,

before the Second World War or specifically the period spanning the imposition of British rule (1895) up to the end of the First World War in Kenya was marked by British attempts at establishing effective administration hence "the key urban foci... were the major ports and their location directly reflected the central strategic and exploitative objectives of the colonial powers."⁵³ These ports were the basing points for colonial penetration and the centres for the export of commercial products from the interior: Mombasa was at the head of the railway line through the Kenya Highlands to Uganda. In this period therefore, Nairobi was just a collecting and distribution point for exports and imports which went and came through Mombasa. Although Mombasa was in subsequent years to lose its administrative function to Nairobi, it continued to grow as the major Port for both Kenya and Uganda as well as a large section of northern Tanganyika. Indeed, it remained the largest urban centre in the region until surpassed by Nairobi in the 1940s and then by both Dar-es-Salaam and Kampala since independence.⁵⁴ To Edward Soja, Clyde Weaver and Zwanenberg therefore, urbanization in the colonial period cannot be divorced from capitalist penetration and the kind of economic system this brought about. Hence urban marginality cannot be understood in isolation from the vagaries of colonialism in the country as a whole as well as the move

towards incipient industrialization which was almost invariably located in Nairobi.

In discussing the problem of rural-urban migration, the three scholars point out that the historical context in which the process was conceived, nurtured and executed was the penetration of capitalism into the pre-capitalist set-up of the East African economies. This penetration took one or both of two forms: first, there was the establishment of capitalist enclaves in the form of estates, plantations and mixed farms worked by cheap African labour, second there was the commercialization of household production, a process which tended to accentuate rural differentiation as some households were in a better position to respond to market opportunities than others. Both forms generated an uneven development that provided the framework within which cityward migration took place.

This line of reasoning finds its relevance in the Rod Burgess-Harris Harms Marxist critique of the New Orthodoxy on the question of housing in Third World Urban Centres. This is so because, first, it provides us with an historical understanding of the origins of the marginalized poor in African towns. Secondly, it re-emphasizes the fact that the people who suffered from this marginalization came to be in towns not through natural increase but rather through

rural exodus. Thirdly, and most important, it establishes that oft elusive fact that town and country are not mutually exclusive and therefore when talking about urban problems this link must constantly be borne in mind.

Indeed, related to the issue of urban history in Kenya is the problem of the political economy of the African subsistence urbanites in a peripheral economy. The relationship between different forms and period of capitals (e.g. commercial, finance and industrial capitals) and the African workers in Kenyan towns has only recently started receiving serious attention from historians.⁵⁵ The works which we have mentioned, albeit representative, have limitations at both the level of theoretical interpretations and the understanding of the roots of urban poverty, not to mention periodization. Most of them, operating within the John Turner-William Mangin school of thought, display numerous lacunae and hiatus and this is most apparent where underdevelopment, urbanization and urban poverty (whose correlate is substandard housing) overlap.

There are two possible reasons as to why this has been so. First, urban history in Kenya has remained a decidedly diminutive enterprise among historians and second, this seemingly permanent cold storage of negligence has led to the lack of a .

systematic attempt at the formulation of a theory which would provide the framework in which a general historical understanding of the phenomenon could be made. Yet urban problems like slums and slum development in Kenyan towns, general urban poverty, prostitution and crime must surely be some of the most striking and extraordinary socio-economic phenomena of our history!

1.4: A Critique and some Suggestions for a New Approach

As pointed out above, literature on urban history and the genesis of urban problems in Kenya displays a lot of hiatus. Handled within the framework of disciplines like demography, geography, anthropology, sociology and economics, it is not by sheer coincidence that the bulk of literature on themes like the rural-urban push-pull syndrome and the emergence of marginalized human settlements on the outskirts of Kenyan towns, housing, pollution and the accumulation of solid waste in towns have been studied within the parameters of these disciplines. As pointed out earlier in this chapter, there is absolutely nothing wrong with looking at these themes as they present themselves given the urgency with which they have to be looked at to find corrective measures. But the literature lacks in an historical perspective which can help in explaining the dialectics of change with a view to understanding and, in retrospect, solving

the problems it is addressing. In other words, it underplays the fact that Kenya has a colonial past and that most of the urban problems there are cannot be appreciated unless a sense of history is imparted to demographic, sociological, economic and anthropological analyses. This is the more so because the urbanization of inland Kenya is a 20th century phenomenon and is quintessentially the product of British imperial imperatives. Thus, to talk about urban problems as they are now and at the same time hoping to catalogue a programme for their solution is at best an abstraction of the whole problem from its socio-economic realities. This abstraction has more than often been compounded by this literature's emphasis on the Kenyan post-independence period where the assemblance of data to both gauge future trends and help urban planners seems to be the rule than the exception.

It is of course in order to assemble and examine statistical data, say, at the spatio-demographic level of analysis but it becomes hard to develop an appreciation of urban poverty if we remain at this level. Indeed, it can be argued that the strength of M.P. Todaro's model on rural-urban migration lies in the recognition of the undoubted primacy of economic motivations in migration decisions and its reduction of those motivations into several quantifiable dimensions. But the basic shortcoming of this model derives from its ahistorical econometric methodology:

this is incapable of taking into account some of the complexities of the migration process in Kenya. If the logic of decisions to migrate flows from the evolving patterns of social differentiation and regional inequality, then these patterns require more explanation than the rather obvious logic itself.

When it comes to the destination of the migrants in the urban areas, their housing becomes even more crucial. G.G. Maina could put forward strong presentations for squatter improvement programmes at the HABITAT conference in Manila, the Phillipines, in 1981 and one can say he was morally justified in doing this. But was he justified in putting across his arguments without understanding the genesis of the squatter problem in Kenyan urban centres? By putting his case across the way he did was he not obscuring the real suffering experienced by the urban poor while at the same time making self-help housing a blue-print for the continuance of this suffering as the government adopted a laissez-faire policy?

Our point of departure in this work is the assertion that the seventy years or so of colonial rule in Kenya espoused of dramatic effects on the Kenyan urban scene. For example, starting from around 1940, industrial finance capital as well as international forms of capital began to play an important political and economic role in the historical development of

Kenyan towns. However, no major works with a full historical reconstruction have been carried out and common sense interpretations of historical events have been given credence by sociological, demographic, economic and anthropological monographs. Explicit in this academic conjuncture is the invariable treatment of urbanization and urban problems in isolation from any analysis of

1. the structure and forms of the incorporation of Kenya into the world capitalist system;
2. the internal contradictions of capitalist development in colonial Kenya and
3. the possible relevance of social transformation for a solution to these apparently immutable urban problems.

What this means is that there has been the treatment of these phenomena outside the mainstream of history. Consequently, this has blurred the essential meaning and content of the phenomena. Hence their discussion in academic and political circles has attained an explicit theoretical status through the transmission of ideological notions that conceal the real nature and specificity of understanding the history, the dialectic of change which the process of urbanization and pervasive urbanism has undergone within the past eighty or so years.

Though this study deals only with one of the many urban problems Nairobi is experiencing, it is nonetheless hoped that it will act as a pointer

towards what is needed to be done for Kenyan urban history. This is doing what scholars like Peter Anyang' Nyong'o, Michael Chege, Michael Cowen, Mukaru Ng'ang'a, Apollo Njonjo and Shadrack Guto⁵⁶ and Atieno-Odhiambo⁵⁷ on the one hand and Kaplinsky, et. al.,⁵⁸ Colin Leys⁵⁹ and Nicola Swainson⁶⁰ on the other have done for the Kenyan peasant (agrarian) and industrial questions respectively. This study will try to look at the peasant counterpart in the Kenyan urban areas through

1. the location of African urban migration and the problem of framework of the development of capitalism in Kenya in the colonial period and
 2. the giving of historical dimension to the contemporary and post-colonial literature on the subject.
- These objectives find their relevance in historical materialism which correctly situates the question of urbanization in the context of the wider theme of imperialism, dependency and the internal dynamics of the development of capitalism in Kenya.

Writing on capitalist development and the territorial division of labour, E. Mingione states in a general statement that "the exploitation of the working class and the process of accumulation of capital require a continuous process of urbanization; that is to say the amassing of population in large industrial cities" (emphasis added). In underdeveloped countries,

he adds, " ... the demographic build-up of movements of refugees and immigrants following work, continually boost the population of the great cities."⁶¹ Writing on the same issue D. Houston⁶² argued that to understand contemporary urbanization and urban processes one would of necessity need to investigate the general properties and processes of the socio-economic formation and their specific manifestations in spatial agglomerations of capital and labour. Building on this thesis J. Lojkine located the process of capitalist urbanization in a more detailed Marxist framework when he wrote:

The concentration of means of production and exchange ... is in no way a specific characteristic of the capitalist city in so far as even in the medieval city productive and commercial activities were brought together What does characterize the capitalist city is on the one hand the growing concentration of the totality of the 'collective means of consumption' ... and on the other hand particular modes of concentration of the totality of means of reproduction (of capital and of labour) which itself becomes an increasingly determinant factor in economic development.⁶³

Lojkine's thesis is that the city—"The concentration of population, instruments of production, capital, of pleasures and needs (emphasis in original), is in no sense an autonomous phenomenon (emphasis added)

governed by the development laws which are divorced from the dynamic contradictions of capitalist accumulation." The concepts he uses—"means of consumption" and the "Particular modes of concentration of the totality of means of reproduction of capital and labour power"—are quite important in the analysis of peripheral urbanization. However, these concepts which were developed in the context of advanced capitalism, preclude the necessity of showing how capital accumulation encompasses both town and country in a combined and unequal process of contradictory development in the periphery. Thus when we talk about rural-urban migrations, the question here is not with the cityward movement per se the problem is that of the imbalance between town and countryside. As Van Zwanenberg notes when talking about lack of housing in Nairobi,

Even if vast quantities of housing had been built, it would merely have served to render urban life yet more attractive, by contrast to conditions in the rural areas. The main problem was the continued growth of the European sector and its burgeoning demand for labour. The form of rural European capitalism which was being developed required a large infrastructure of services, banks, entertainment, servants, transport and government administration. The more the settler economy developed, the more likely it was that the concentration in the urban sector would increase at a similar rate. The urban problems of the past could

not in fact ever have been settled because of the lack of recognition of the needs of rural development.⁶⁴

To van Zwanenberg, therefore the colonial urbanization of Nairobi was not the expression of a process of modernization, that is, "the increase and spread of those values and institutions that enhance the ability of a society to generate and successfully cope with continuing change".⁶⁵ Rather Nairobi's experience was, to use Manuel Castells' words, "the manifestation, at the level of socio-spatial relations, of the accentuation of social contradictions inherent in its mode of development—a development determined by a specific dependency with the monopoly capitalist system."⁶⁶ (Emphasis added).

Though Van Zwanenberg's and Castells' positions are important in this study, some weaknesses can be identified. Van Zwanenberg fails to develop the outlines of a theoretical and methodological treatment of imperialism and the internationalization of capital in the contemporary period while Castells grants too much explanatory significance to the dependency thesis, thus failing to develop a sufficiently well-articulated analysis of the internal development of capitalist production in Latin America. This is quite apparent in his interpretation of migration and the so-called rural exodus where no concerted effort is made to combine an increased spatial concentration of the

means of industrial production within an examination of the concomitant trend of an extending spatial circulation of capital and the subsequent production of surplus population in the countryside.

This study contends that any urbanization theory should consider both questions of dependency and the development of capitalism in the countryside for the purposes of bringing out the relationship between dependency, social change and urbanization with its concomitant problems like substandard housing in the area under study.

1.5: Theoretical Framework

The study of urbanization in Africa has within the past few years attracted a wide array of scholars who have tried to understand a variety of questions which are related to the exploration of a number of interpretation themes. Some of these themes are primarily sociological and are related to the urban social structure, planning, race relations and, in connection with post-colonial societies, cultural dependence, development and modernization. However, demographers, geographers, economists and environmentalists have also taken a keen interest in this area of study with the aim of not only understanding the process of urbanization but also to find solutions to its concomitant problems. Perhaps one major overriding factor in these studies is the concentration on what we may call the spatio-demographic level of analysis where emphasis has more than often been placed on such

phenomena as the spatial pattern of urban growth, the evolution of the urban hierarchy, variations in the rates of urban in-migration and their articulation with various aspects of urban life and the occupational structures of cities. As we pointed out in the section on literature review in this chapter, there is nothing wrong in examining these issues. However, it becomes difficult to develop our appreciation and explanation of the urbanization process if we only remain at this level of analysis: there is need to develop a theoretical perspective which is not only necessary for the purposes of explanation but also for laying the groundwork for planning.

This is not to suggest that those scholars who have written on urbanization in the Third World in general and in Africa in particular have not attempted to work out a theory on which they have based their works. W.A.Hance⁶ has, for example, developed a theory of urbanization in Africa whose basic tenet is the assertion that the emergence of primate cities on the continent since the 1940s is the result of metropolitan-injected stimulants in administrative services, commerce and industry. Building on the ideas of the School of Sociology of Development current in the 1960s and early 1970s, he argues that because of the concentration of resources in these cities by metropolitan governments, they (cities) became centres of modernization as intellectual and social as well as political and economic activities were to be found there.

During the time of his writing there was a debate going on as to whether cities were generators of economic development, a process which was itself dependent on a larger and more comprehensive process of "modernization".⁶⁸ Though variously defined, this concept was taken to comprehend notions such as "the increase and spread of those values and institutions" which enhanced the "ability of a society to generate and successfully cope with continuing change", a process with which urbanization was supposedly linked.⁶⁹ The question as to whether economic development depended primarily on such institutional changes in Africa or on the need for a fundamental restructuring of the international economy to eliminate basic inequalities did not arise in discussions by this School of the Sociology of Development. And this is understandable.

Based on the Parsonian functionalist epistemology which conceptualized social systems as the institutionalization of a set of core values into norms and rules which, through the process of internalization and social control, were seen to regulate human behaviour,⁷⁰ this school saw social change and development in terms of role and institutional differentiation. African societies were seen as developing from simple (traditional) to complex (modern/western) levels of social organization and the major mitigating factor in this development was colonialism. To W.A. Hance

who developed the "theory of contact" with regard to African urbanization, the state of affairs in African societies before colonialism was characterized by particularistic values, and non-differentiated roles and institutions, while the West which espoused of modernism was characterized by the possession of universalistic and specialized roles and institutions functioning with greater effectiveness in a more developed setting. The process of urbanization in Africa was, therefore, the outcome of the contact between African societies and the western world during colonialism. This is why Hance concludes that even the little urbanization there was in Africa before colonialism was the outcome of not African initiative but that of first the Arabs and then the Portuguese.

The problem with this kind of conceptualization of the process of urbanization in Africa is that, apart from its glaring ahistoricity, it fails to address such issues as dependency, underdevelopment and socio-economic differentiation in the African urban setup. Indeed, it fails to appreciate that under conditions of capitalist production wealth and poverty, employment and unemployment, private affluence and public squalor, etc. are the combined results of the dynamic contradictions that lie at the heart of the accumulation process. This criticism is well borne out by the fact that when talking about the forces influencing rural-urban migration one need not establish the

unnecessary duality between on the one hand "factors of change" (which the sociology of development associates with the West) and on the other "factors of stagnation" (which are African), contending that whilst the former relate to the restructuring of relations of production consequent upon an integration into the market economy, the latter are formed by a lack of development of the productive forces which when combined with demographic growth lead to a general impoverishment and the subsequent spatial displacement of labour to towns. In fact the concept of dualism raises three important questions. First, how do we incorporate an analysis of demographic growth into a political economy of peripheral urbanization? Secondly, how do we examine changes in the countryside as regards the spatial displacement of labour? Lastly, how do we link these changes to an analysis of urban industrial accumulation?

The acceleration of urbanization and its specific variant of metropolitanization (which in demographic terms at least can be defined as an increasing concentration of urban population in a few agglomerations) has been commented upon by many writers but, as we saw in our literature review, not much has been done to give a detailed analysis of the actual social forces responsible for this acceleration in Kenya. Any such detailed analysis must begin with an appreciation of the changing form of Kenya's incorporation into the

world economy and of the manner in which such change is a reflection of new tendencies in the global development of the dominant metropolitan capitals. Most crucially, such a discussion ought to throw light on the internal impact of the new interrelationships and draw out the implications for internal changes within the particular area under study.

In setting out to explain the problem of urban housing, for example, one is faced with two questions which have been conventionally studied in mutual isolation. First, what are the factors responsible for the spatial displacement of labour from the countryside to towns? Secondly, how do we account for the growing spatial concentration of capital and labour-power in a limited number of urban places? Conventionally these questions have led into a discussion of the so-called "push" and "pull" factors and the employment of a dualism which supposedly account for the determinants of the rural-urban migration process. These questions can be answered if we can integrate them into the consideration of the mechanisms of change in the countryside during a specific period of time. This can help in identifying the forces responsible for the production of surplus population. Therefore question one involves a discussion of the uneven development in agriculture, the production of relative surplus population in its latent form, and the related tendency towards the spatial displacement of rural labour

to towns. In this discussion there is need to first identify the varying forms of agricultural production (whether capitalist, peasant petty-commodity production or semi-feudal). Secondly, in analysing the spatial extension of the circuits of capital there is need to distinguish two major components: the diffusion of means of production and the diffusion of means of consumption. After this it becomes possible to examine the forms of agricultural economy identified in terms of these two kinds of commodity diffusion.

The extrapolation of the above facts will not only explain the emergence of surplus population in the countryside but will also help in answering our second question: how do we account for the growing spatial concentration of capital and labour-power in a few number of urban places? Because in the accumulation of capital production and circulation are united in opposition, and from the point of view of accumulation the circulation of commodities is simply the sphere in which commodity-capital is realized as money-capital, the uneven expansion of commodities into the countryside is a reflection of a process of industrial accumulation in towns. The corollary of this process is the accelerated spatial concentration of the means of production and exchange. The reasons for this accelerated concentration are reflected in Nairobi which since the end of the Second World War has continued to account for a very high percentage of Kenyan

industrial production most of it directly connected to international firms.

It is after understanding these processes that one can be in a position to appreciate the movement of Africans to Nairobi and the conditions—both social and economic—under which they lived during the period of our study. For the purposes of this study, therefore, we place the problem of urban housing within the conceptual framework of peripheral capitalism. Framed this way, we posit the argument that housing as a necessary component in the reproduction of labour-power (what was otherwise seen in terms of the stabilization of labour through the provision of family housing) became increasingly recognizable from 1940 onwards and this was a reflection of the changing forms of Kenya's incorporation into the world economy. It was a reflection of the internal impact of the new interrelationships globally after the Second World War. In their liberalist language the Ernest Vasey, Carpenter and the East Africa Royal Commission reports of 1950, 1954 and 1953-55 respectively were but a formalization of the ideas which had been fermenting since 1940 over the question of family housing which was seen as a major component in labour stabilization, efficiency and therefore labour output.

The role of the colonial state in this situation increasingly became that one of aiding the expansion

of the mechanisms of the reproduction of labour-power under the guise of the generally accepted principles of stabilization and labour efficiency. Put in a wider perspective, one major dimension of the relationship between the colonial administration, however intransigent, on the question of African urbanization and the Kenyan peripheral capitalist economy was the provision of "public goods" with the colonists collectively constituting the public. This is well brought out in the administration's concern over diseases and epidemiology in Nairobi, its response to labour unrest and the Mau Mau uprising and how these three factors influenced the evolution of the concept of a stabilized African urban middle class. This is generally treated in this study as an aspect of the general contradictions inherent in the Kenyan colonial economy, not of peripheral capitalism as such but of collective action to realize a collective optimum. However, the principle is applicable to any collectivity and when the colonial and metropolitan capitalist class is considered collectively the analysis reveals an aspect of the contradictions of peripheral capitalism.

We might indeed be accused of over-reliance on what the local white capitalist clientele did over the question without also critically looking at the object of their action (the Africans) but it is our belief that when an activity by any single capitalist group produces a positive external effect, it may not be

undertaken so as to prevent other capitalists from becoming "free-riders". The composition effect of decisions taken by either London or Nairobi over the problems of housing was at times imperative so as to avoid the undermining of the general conditions of dynamic capital accumulation. And in this the colonial state's intervention became important in its "harmonizing role" for the realization of a collective capitalist benefit.

To summarize this section, we can say that

1. the contradictions which characterized Nairobi between 1900 and 1960 were not only, or even mainly, internal to the Nairobi urban setup; they appeared in many ways as facets of the colonial urban and rural life as well as that of the metropolitan world;
2. the change in colonial attitudes towards African subsistence urbanites in the war and postwar period had as its major mitigating factors
 - 1) class and class conflicts in the urban edifice. Class and class alliances and conflicts in the postwar period comprised the dialectic process by which change took place. The emergence of new forms of production created new class interests and threatened those interests tied to an established pre-war form of production. The struggle of different classes to expand and defend their interests resulted in social and political institutions (political parties, trade unions, new forms of legal contract or of the regulation of work) that contributed to the form of later economic

development and the framework in which this could take place.

ii) During the wartime years and beyond, the classic colonial pattern of part-time participation in wage employment by Africans began to change for the urban segment of the African labour force. For many workers in Mombasa and Nairobi, for example, the pattern of a period of one or two years stint at wage-earning followed by an equally long return to the status of peasant was beginning to give way to one in which wage-earning occupied almost the whole of their working lives.

3. The urbanization of Nairobi during the war and postwar period entailed a profound process of social and economic transformation as well as an increasing territorial division of labour whereby as the countryside specialized in the production of cash crops and foodstuffs for the increasing urban populations, Nairobi apart from being the seat of the colonial government, started specializing in services and industrial production activities.

The above propositions were a reflection of the changing nature of capitalism globally and they all came to bear heavily on the search, formulation and execution of urban policies which by 1960 had transformed Nairobi from the pre-1939 social i.e. racial ecology to one in which economic i.e. class forces increasingly became important.

1.6: The Major Hypotheses of the Study.

From the way we have stated our problem with regard to urban housing as it related to Africans in colonial Nairobi and how the authorities responded to it, the theoretical framework and the literature review, the following hypotheses were formulated:

1. The urban question in Kenya with specific reference to the problem of housing in Nairobi during colonialism was first and foremost the product of capital accumulation in a combined and unequal process of contradictory development in both the countryside and the town.

2. The urbanization of Nairobi was not the expression of modernization but rather the manifestation, at the level of socio-spatial relations, of the accentuation of social contradictions inherent in a development determined by a specific dependency within the monopoly capitalist system.

3. The failure to develop or rather formulate an African housing policy before the Second World War was partly due to the colonial policy of preserving the African traditional way of life but mainly because Africans were regarded not as town dwellers but as migrant labourers who came to the town for only short periods and would return to their wives and children in their rural "native" land units.

4. Africans were included in the Nairobi urban system not for their own social interests but because they

satisfied the aims and interests of the politically and economically dominant minority white population of the town.

5. From around 1940 onwards the maintenance of a system where Africans were seen as sojourners in the town fell into contradiction with the character of the postwar British policy towards her colonies which emphasized the promotion of industrialization and social welfare to cope with the postwar world geopolitics where U.S.A. had emerged as a global power politically, economically and militarily.

6. The use of migrant labour and perfunctory stabilization programmes in the postwar period were a response to labour and market requirements of Britain based on a rational calculus of costs.

7. The African pressures in the form of labour unrest and political violence as manifested in the Mau Mau uprising of 1952-1956 speeded up the formulation of a consistent housing policy for Africans in Nairobi.

1.7: Objectives and Scope of the Study.

The general objective of this study is to further an understanding of the processes which led to the phenomenon of the urban housing problem in Nairobi during colonialism and how the people affected, the Africans, and the urban authorities, responding to various circumstances in the historical development of Kenya came to grapple with the problem. This study was prompted by one major consideration: the possible interrelation

between the changing rural living conditions and their effects in terms of the spatial displacement of labour to urban areas in Kenya. Despite the amount of scholarly work that has emerged on this aspect, it seems that an understanding of this relationship has not yet fully been clearly formulated apart from the general recognition that people move from the countryside to towns in search of better means of livelihood.

At a more particularistic level, the objective of this study is to provide an analytical explanation and conceptualization of the problem of housing shortage in Nairobi particularly with reference to the historical processes which have shaped it as it is now. Not only is it the objective of the study to understand the nature and evolution of the problem, but also why it persisted on in the period under study. The long and persistent strands found in the nature of the problem indicate that historical events—both local and international—greatly influenced the shaping of the pattern of housing in Nairobi and experience and tradition were important causal factors in the determination of the urban housing ecology in the town. For this reason, the study is structured within a socio-economic and political framework commencing from around 1900 at which time Nairobi was beginning to emerge as a town.

The structural changes that took place in the

evolution of an urban housing policy for Nairobi since that time to 1960, as covered in this study, emphasize further the need to adopt an unusually long time perspective in studies dealing with the urban problems that now characterize our towns. Housing has a functional aspect to the process of urban growth whether in social, economic or political terms and, in fact, an important indicator of these indices of growth. Hence, the growth in magnitude of the housing problem in Nairobi during the period under study was inextricably intertwined with the changing political, economic and social relations of the town in particular and the country in general. In this study the evolution of a housing policy for Nairobi during colonialism is therefore interpreted largely in terms of the organizational adaptations resulting from the need to constantly adjust to the ever-changing patterns of development in a peripheral capitalist social formation.

1.8: Methodology

Fieldwork for this study began in December, 1984 and went on until June, 1985. Research work began with a period of exploratory reading on the general idea of what urbanization was all about but more specifically to understand what kind of urban problems beset contemporary Africa. After this we came down to literature on urbanization in Kenya with specific reference to urban problems and how they related to Africans in towns. The purpose for doing this was to find

meaningful ways of framing questions for further in-depth inquiry into the problems and for framing more specific questions to be used in later stages of the research. At this stage we had the opportunity to review literature official documents on housing and to establish the necessary contacts within Nairobi who were to help in the identification of informants. Through the questions posed at this stage, coupled with the use of other instruments of research, aggregate and survey data were gathered to demonstrate the change that took place in Nairobi during the period of study, the social and economic status of the Nairobi African population as compared to that of other races as well as the process of economic change in the whole country before 1960. This method was employed to collect data, statistical or otherwise, from official and non-official written records as well as from oral interviews which involved informal discussions and participant observation of living conditions in low-income estates in the town. Informal discussions and participant observation as a method prompted on-the-spot questions which were put to carefully selected informants. Although slightly over one hundred individuals were identified only fifty interviews were obtained. These were mainly elderly people who were selected on the basis of the duration of their stay in Nairobi.

These people supplied basic information about themselves, where they came from, why they came to the town and the conditions of living in the estates they stayed in on arrival in the town. Though only fifty individuals were interviewed we believe our sample was not systematically biased, and that this collection about whom data were gained were representative of the population of Africans who went through the problem of housing in the town.⁷¹ The advantage of this data-set, we believe, is that it provides data which range widely both geographically covering all of Nairobi's low-income areas — and in time, including people who have been in Nairobi for long and gone away. This method, which was basically quantitative, was thus used for

1. bringing out associations of social and economic characteristics which called for some historical explanation and,

2. testing and refining our basic hypotheses.

Apart from the use of the above method, a qualitative approach to data analysis was also used. Here theory was used to act as a guide in analysing historical materials and data from various sources. Thus theory was used to explain and interpret the nature and phenomenon of the penetration of capitalism in the countryside, the consequences of this process, the role of industrial and finance capital in colonial Kenya and the-effects of all this on Africans especially in terms

of their urbanization. In short, this method was used to relate theory and hypotheses to appreciate the relationship between social, political and economic development and history in the process of Nairobi's urban/ industrial growth and the genesis and character of the African urban housing policies during colonialism.

Data was mainly collected from library research (documentary observation) for the purposes of ascertaining as well as putting into perspective what the colonial government, the Municipal authorities and other interested parties tried to do about the problem between 1900 and 1960. Sources included the Nairobi University Main Library, Institute of African Studies Library, the Faculty of Architecture, Design and Development Library as well as the Nairobi City Council McMillan Library.

The carrying out of research in any area of study is not without its problems. In the course of this research a number of problems were encountered which revealed to us how the discussion of certain issues can generate suspicion as well as evoke certain deep-rooted sentiments in our society. Perhaps the most difficult problems we encountered revolved around the discussion on the role of the Mau Mau in bringing changes in African living conditions in the town and the question of house ownership in estates like Shauri Moyo. Our research happened to take place at a time when there was a resurgence in the debate on as to

what was the Mau Mau and most of our informants were quite unwilling to talk freely for fear that, so we came to learn, they thought we were agents or spies working for the government. On the question of house ownership, most of our informants thought that we were carrying out an inquiry into the real owners of houses in certain estates on behalf of City Hall. This was more so in Shauri Moyo where one informant later on confided in us that there has been a controversy between city authorities and the estate's tenants over the issue as to whether the houses in the estate belonged to the City Council or the tenants. This controversy had been going on since the 1940s to early 1970 when the tenants took City Hall to court and it was decided that the houses were legally theirs (tenants). However, despite this court ruling, City Hall had continued collecting rent from the tenants. This has made them quite suspicious of anyone who goes there asking questions about the houses.

This problem could easily have been verified if there was a systematic way of organizing files for purposes of reference at City Hall. The problem was exacerbated by the fact that in 1939 there was a huge fire which destroyed the government's Secretariat documents. This is why there is very little information on Nairobi in the Kenya National Archives before 1939. This also applies to the period from 1956 onwards but this is mainly due to the 30 years' rule which stipulates that

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FOOTNOTES

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THE HISTORICAL ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF NAIROBI TO 1960.

2.1: The Origins and location of the Town.

Nairobi, the capital and chief urban centre of Kenya, is situated in the Kenya Highlands. It is 330 miles by railway from the port of Mombasa in the east and 257 miles by railway from Kisumu on Lake Victoria in the west. Its present boundaries were drawn in March 1963 along with all the other Kenya provincial boundaries. Before then the town's boundaries encompassed the urban area only: some 30 square miles (20,544 acres) extending about 6 miles east to west and 5 miles north to south. Though there were minor excisions and additions here and there, these boundaries had remained unchanged since 1927.

There is ample evidence to suggest that present day Nairobi used to be a centre of flourishing trade in commodities like grain, flour, vegetables and fruits, which were brought by the Kikuyu in exchange for sheep, skins and hides from the Maasai. The Ogiek (Ndorobo) on the other hand are said to have bartered forest products and game trophies in return for livestock and hides. Andrew Hake describes the area thus:

There were some stepping-stones across the Nairobi River at the point where the little stream left the Kikuyu forest and began to cross the Athi Plains; they marked a local folkway used as the frontier between the Kikuyu, Maasai and Ogiek peoples.¹

During the 19th century there was the development of the long distance trade and among those caravan routes that left the coast for the interior was the northern route which passed through Ngong just close to Nairobi. With only three places between the coastal fringe and Mumias—Kibwezi, Machakos and Kikuyu—where the caravans could rest and receive replenishment,

The point where caravans touched the southmost tip of the Kikuyu homeland in the Ngong-Kikuyu-Nairobi area became the scene of a large-scale trade in commodities. ... In this way, long before the arrival of the (Uganda) railway, the Kikuyu had built up a tradition of trade and commerce, not only with foreigners, and their market places were set-up in the area where the city of Nairobi now stands.²

However, there is no evidence to suggest that these two factors—local and long distance trade—had anything to do with the rise of Nairobi and its development on the present site. The town had a railway encampment as its pre-urban nucleus. Thus it is to the Uganda Railway we have to turn to when explaining the origins of the town.

The construction of the railway started at Mombasa in 1896 and by 1899 it had reached a point 327 miles from the coast. Initially Kikuyu had been chosen as the site for the changing railway station on the Mombasa - Victoria Lake Railway survey of 1893³ but because of the distance between the policy-makers in London and the implementers of the project as well

as the intransigency of the Chief Engineer, Sir George Whitehouse, the site was changed to Nairobi. This change was not communicated to the Railway Committee which was appointed by Lord Salisbury in 1895 in London.⁴

The major deciding factor in the choice of Nairobi seems to have been geographical. That between Mombasa and Nairobi the railway had to climb 5,400 feet in a about 330 miles (an average gradient of 1 to 323) and that it had to climb over the Kikuyu plateau to the Uplands Station seems to have been an insurmountable task to the engineers. Indeed, in the course of surveying the route, it was found that the altitude of the Uplands Station was 7,600 feet, a rise of 2,237 feet which could be accomplished in 35 miles by the railway. This was an average gradient of 1 to 83. This was a steep gradient for a railway train; thus to pull a train over the Kikuyu plateau an extra engine was needed. It therefore seemed logical to establish a locomotive depot just below the first hill. This is how Nairobi came to be chosen by Sir George Whitehouse.

The other geographical feature which commended Nairobi to the engineers and surveyors was the climate and general terrain of the area. Writing after the inspection of the route the railway was to take, Sir Guildford Molesworth said that

Nyrobi (sic) has, with great judgement, been selected as the site for the principal workshops. It is about 5,500 feet above the

level of the sea, which ensures a comparatively salubrious climate; there is ample space of level ground for all sorts of requirements, and excellent sites for the quarters of officers and subordinates. On higher ground above the station site there is a fairly good supply of water but reservoirs and tanks will have to be constructed.⁵

That Nairobi owes its origins as a modern city to the railway is vividly brought out by Colonel Patterson, the then District Engineer of the railway. He wrote that

There was an immense amount of work to be done in converting an absolutely bare plain, three hundred and twenty-seven miles from the nearest place where even a rail could be purchased, into a big railway centre. Roads and bridges had to be constructed, houses and workshops built, turntables and station quarters erected, a water supply laid on, and a hundred and one other things done which go to the making of a railway township. Wonderfully soon, however, the nucleus of the present town began to take shape.⁶

The date of founding the town is therefore considered to be the 30th May, 1899 when the railroad arrived there. After making the site their headquarters, the railway authorities established the residential pattern which is so familiar in Nairobi today: on one side of the track they paced the higher-income European houses and on the other side were the low-income groups.⁷ As a self-contained unit with its legality derived from the Foreign Office, the Uganda Railway brought with it its own police and magistrates with a jurisdiction extending

a mile on either side of the line. By 1901 both the Colonial Governor, Charles Elliot and the Provincial Administration for Ukamba under Colonel Ainsworth had moved their respective headquarters from Mombasa and Machakos to Nairobi.⁸

The choice of Nairobi as the Protectorate's headquarters was influenced by a number of factors. First and foremost it was at the "centre of gravity" of the populated areas of the territory: to the immediate north were the Kikuyu, Embu and Meru; to the north-east were the Akamba and beyond the Rift Valley to the west lay the densely populated present Nyanza and Western Provinces. To the far east were the coastal areas with a large population and to the extreme north was the semi-desert extending to the Ethiopian Highlands and the Juba River, some parts which were a long way from the capital- not a bad thing in case of a war. Secondly, unlike Njoro which one section of the administration favoured, the geographical location of Nairobi was of greatest importance as it afforded a central place from which the execution of punitive expeditions against the Kenyan people during the period of pacification⁹ could be organized. Thirdly, Mombasa, which had been the headquarters upto 1901, was perceived as a basically oriental town and, like the rejection of laws derived from India in consequent years, was therefore antithetical to colonial settler aspirations which envisaged the establishment of a

whiteman's city in whiteman's country.

The plan of Nairobi in this year (1901) shows that the settlement consisted of railway buildings and two bazaars, one for Europeans and the other for Indians. Indeed, in the course of the advancement of the railway in the interior from the coast, the thousands of Indians who worked on it as labourers formed a market which their kith and kin who had been at the coast for many years found just too ready to exploit.¹⁰ These coastal Indian merchants followed the labour camps on the railway, bringing with them small, temporary bazaars into existence at each of the major stops.¹¹ Thus when the railway line reached Nairobi and a major depot built there the Indian community of traders established their businesses alongside railway activities.

This plan was not without its problems whilst the original intention was to lay the official portion of the town on the north east bank of the Nairobi River, this was changed when the site was pronounced unsuitable by the town's medical authorities. In consequence in 1900 a new town was laid out on the southwest bank of the river.¹²

In 1902 an epidemic of plague broke out in the Indian bazaar where 69 cases were recorded with between 50 and 60 deaths. The fact that the government had to pay about £23,000 in compensation and other expenses prompted Sir Charles Elliot to request the

five medical officers in Nairobi to report on the sanitary aspects of the site chosen for the town. The five officers unanimously condemned the site and recommended that it be moved to the high ground behind the official quarters. This idea was supported by all except the Railway Authorities. In 1903, though the medical authorities continued to be dissatisfied with the site, they appear to have accepted the fact that it was too late to move it. This is borne out of the fact that in May, 1903, Dr. Moffat, the Principal Medical Officer (P.M.O.), submitted a report in which he made various recommendations with regard not to the transfer of the site but to the disposal of nightsoil and refuse, water supply, drainage, and other sanitary matters. Although in October the same year Major Pringle was still recommending that a new site for the town be selected from one to three miles from the present one, and that a gradual transfer be made in May 1904 Lieut. Col. Will, the Principal Medical Officer (P.M.O.), in his report gave it as his considered opinion that it was too late to move it.¹³

In 1906 a heavy rainfall, combined with unrepaired roads, bad drainage, and a rapid growth of traffic, made the streets practically impassable. A second epidemic of plague broke out with 25 cases and 21 deaths. This alarmed the colonial office which sent G. Bransby Williams, a Civil Engineer, to British East Africa to report on the sanitary conditions of Nairobi.

He spent over two months in the town and the result was a lengthy report in which he proposed:

- 1) The rearrangement of the town (including, inter alia, the removal of the Indian bazaar to a new site near the Railway landhies);
- 2) the drainage of the central portion of the municipal area and of the western valley;
- 3) the increase of water supply;
- 4) the construction of new dhobi quarters;
- 5) the putting up of a new "native" location on the southwest boundary of the Township area and
- 6) the introduction of fresh public health "legislation."¹⁴

The total estimated cost of the works thus proposed by Williams amounted to £115,000 which he suggested be spread over three years.¹⁵ These early developments seem to have continued apace in the subsequent years of the town's growth. Indeed, the sanitary question which was revisited in 1915¹⁶ continued to plague the town with, -as we shall see in chapter three, the subsequent effect of being used by the town's policy-makers as the major organizing factor in the promulgation of both segregationist and control policies for the town.

2.2: A Brief Administrative and Political History of Nairobi

Writing about Nairobi in 1961, Aidan W. Southall

described it as a "type B" town whose basic characteristics were rapid development, domination of foreigners careful control of African urban settlement and the development of a pattern of segregation and stratification along racial lines.¹⁷ These four characteristics quite aptly summarize the social, political and economic dimensions of colonial Nairobi. Established for the economic and administrative convenience of Europeans, the town throughout this period remained "the most European of the East African cities" and this was notwithstanding the fact that Europeans never formed much more than 10% of its population at any one given time.¹⁸ The manifestations of these characteristics took place side by side, at least in the early years of the town's growth, with the outbreak of severe epidemics of plague which were brought by poor drainage, lack of water and improper sanitation arrangements. The lack of amenities in these early days gave the town the appearance of a frontier town which Elspeth Huxley in her book The Flame Trees of Thika quite graphically described as "a single street of Indiandukas, made of corrugated iron, and Government offices on wooden piles of the same harsh material, which used to creak and crack, like a man pulling his finger-joints in the hot sun".¹⁹

Just as the railway brought modern commercial enterprise to Nairobi in its wake so did it bring white settlers who made the town their commercial, cultural

and political centre. In the initial stages of the establishment of an administrative machinery and notwithstanding the fact that the railway authorities derived their powers from the Foreign Office in London, Nairobi looked to Bombay in India for a model. This can be explained in terms of the fact that first, being the de facto authority in the town, the railway increasingly started to experience difficulties in coping, unaided, with the social consequences of the development they had initiated in Nairobi. Secondly, the transfer of both the provincial and protectorate's headquarters from Machakos and Mombasa respectively to Nairobi in 1901 entailed the government's involvement in the organizing and running of the town. This latter factor led to the necessity of associating at least the expatriate communities with measures of political organization, social control and social provision.²⁰ These two factors led to the search for a formula to make the administration of Nairobi a shared responsibility. The consideration of these two factors led to the constitution of a Municipal Committee under the Regulations (No.20) of December 1, 1901. At first this consisted of one Protectorate official, two railway officials and three local merchants with the sub-commissioner as chairman. This committee was vested with the powers to make by-laws, with the approval of the commissioner and to levy rates. The sub-commissioner was to submit, in December each year, estimates of

expenditure to the committee, and after the estimates had been approved, a rate could be levied. These rules were however repeated by Ordinance No.20 of September 15, 1903 though provision was made that they should remain in force until ammended rules were issued. The revised rules appeared in the Official Gazette of June 1, 1904.

By these new rules the Committee was now to consist of the Collector as Chairman, two railway officials, two European residents, and two Indian traders. But by the rules of 14th February, 1905, another change was made in the constitution of the committee with the Collector as chairman, three Protectorate officials, three railway officials, four European residents and two Indian traders with the Medical Officer of Health and the Town Clerk as ex-officio members. The latter two soon afterwards ceased to be members.²¹

In October 1909 an Ordinance (No.11 of 1909) was promulgated to provide for the establishment of Municipal Councils. By this enactment the existing Township Committee of Nairobi was to be replaced by a Town Council consisting of not less than 8 councillors, to be nominated by the Governor, and to hold office for a period not exceeding two years.

Meanwhile, though white settlement in Kenya began well after 1902, the decision to encourage settlers to come to the territory started after the declaration

of a protectorate under the British Crown in 1895. This move led to a considered if not deliberate reorientation of the whiteman's perception of not only his role in the protectorate but his search for a legal framework within which this role had to be carried out and accomplished. It is within this new outlook that from around 1903 Nairobi started looking less and less to Bombay and more to the Union of South Africa and Southern Rhodesia for a model for Nairobi as a settler capital. In South Africa and Rhodesia lay the natural models to be applied by the settlers when suggesting legislation as well as the definition of the role and place of the various races in the Protectorate. Consequently, the application by the railway authorities of the Indian Evidence Act, the Indian contract Act and Indian Post Office Act became anathema because, as the settlers came to argue, they had "the greatest objection in principle to placing whitemen under laws intended for a coloured population despotically governed" i.e. the Indians²².

Herein lay the racial question that was to have an impact on the history of Nairobi throughout the colonial period. Herein, too, lay the long association between the Nairobi policy-makers and the Union of South Africa, an association which was not weakened until the 1950s when there was renewed imperial presence during the emergency. This association with South Africa is well brought out when it is viewed at within the wider

perspective of the Kenyan Colonial economy. This is important because, due to its central geographical location, the history of Nairobi can only be understood in the context of Kenya.

Kenya's colonial history is not simply the history of the establishment and maintenance of a colonial regime whereby foreign agents administered it on behalf of Britain. Rather it was the history of a settler regime which for almost seventy years was dominated by a European elite which was determined to establish a whiteman's country.* The understanding of the problems which plagued Nairobi - racial segregation, the marginalization of the African urbanites, the struggle for control of the Nairobi political machinery between Europeans and Indians, etc. - must be done within the parameters of this desire to establish a settler regime all over the territory. ~~If race relations was~~ the characteristic feature of Kenya politics in the colonial period, land, not only in the Highlands but also in Nairobi, formed the issue around which it revolved.

The completion of the construction of the railway to Uganda in 1902 gave rise to the desire to justify economically such an expensive venture and, indeed,

*A fuller analysis of the broader picture of Kenya's colonial economy is given in section 2.3 of this chapter and chapter 3

land through which it passed had to become a factor in this justification. To be fully exploited and help in the covering of the costs for the construction of the railway a decision was taken to invite settlers. This was initially presented in 1901 as a parliamentary paper by Sir Harry Johnstone, the then special Commissioner for Uganda.²³ This was followed in 1903 when in a public speech Sir Charles Elliot, the then newly appointed Commissioner for the East Africa Protectorate, gave shape to the idea of White Highlands when he guaranteed exclusive rights to Europeans to the land between Machakos road station and Fort Ternan.²⁴ Consequently Elliot, with the enthusiastic support of Delamare and a small group of like-minded adventurers, soon began to seek settlers from England and South Africa. With only a population of 579 in 1906 which increased to 799 in 1909 and 968 in 1911 out of a total population of 13,514, 14,161 and 16,107 respectively,^{25*} the Europeans in Nairobi wanted, just like the settlers in the White Highlands, a South African policy on cheap labour without expensive housing and welfare programmes.

This search for a South African policy was reinforced by the politics of the 1930-1940 period. Characterized by the depression and political unrest, the

*A full demographic analysis for all the races in Nairobi is given in Section 3.2 of Chapter 3.

main features of this period were the White Highlands, the securing of control over finances, the need to increase the number of settlers and the settlement of the squatter problem. But it was the definition of the White Highlands which occupied centre stage: the debate over land, particularly during the hearing of the Kenya Land Commission, dominated the thinking of European and African leaders through much of this decade. What this meant was that labour as well as the continually worsening living conditions of the Africans both in towns and in the reserves became relegated to a secondary position, population increases having virtually removed the question of labour shortage.²⁶

One may ask why the search for a South African link was reinforced in this period. The answer to this question lies as much in the relationship between the Kenyan settler elite and Britain in the light of their conflicting interests as in the settlers' desire to establish a Whiteman's country. While the one brings out the contradictions between the settler drive towards the establishment of a free reign over the processes of internal accumulation and the imperatives of metropolitan capital, the other, quite significantly points to the strivings on the part of the settlers to get free from the control of the home government.

At the turn of the last century Kenya was inextricably linked to the world market through the agency of British colonialism. The period between 1895 when a protectorate under the British Crown was declared over much

present-day Kenya and 1939 when the Second World War broke out roughly coincided with the twilight of Britain's free-trade imperialism. In Kenya this imperialism concerned itself with the extraction of raw materials and foodstuffs. Imperial interests in primary production was accompanied by the assumption that Kenya would provide a "captive market" for British industrial products. It was precisely because of the assumption that the colonial office was indifferent and often hostile to colonial attempts to develop manufacturing industries. The so-called development agencies like the Empire Marketing Board before 1939 gave no assistance to any forms of manufacturing. Indeed, it limited itself to the marketing of colonial foodstuffs and raw materials. As E.A. Brett points out, the Colonial Development Advisory Committee in theory placed no limit on its spheres of activity, but in practice it totally ignored the industrial sector. By 1939, it had for example allocated just under £8 million to the colonies, of which only £151,000 was for industrial development. Of this amount, only £23,000 or 0.3% of the total allocations had been disbursed.²⁷ What this tells us is that the encouragement of manufacturing in the colonies before 1939 would have been a contradiction in terms; Kenya, like any other British overseas colonial possession, was considered as a market for British

industrial products as well as a source of raw materials for the manufacture of these products.

Indeed, according to available evidence, the metropolitan government played no meaningful role in economic development in the country in this period. Of course it can be argued that the provision of loans for infrastructural development would serve to stimulate the production of British goods for colonial markets. But from the evidence there is one can concretely argue that initial metropolitan grants-in-aid were aimed not at the stimulation of the production of British goods for colonial markets; these grants were aimed at the development of overhead capital such as ports and railways which were to facilitate the export of foodstuffs and raw materials from their areas of production to Britain. Available statistics in this early period attest to this. For instance by the end of the 1920s government investment in East African infrastructure had been considerable: almost 1300 miles of new railway tracks were opened in strategic raw material producing areas and they were linked to five deep-water berths which were built at Mombasa between 1920 and 1930.²⁶ These ventures were carried out by CDA, an agency which had been set up in 1929 to help in alleviating Britain's unemployment problem through the stimulation of exports to colonial territories. Designed to provide funds for territories which would, in the first place, service the interest on loans raised by

the colonial governments that gave contracts to British firms, this agency's first move was to encourage the construction of railways.²⁹

These set aims, however, did not meet with success. This can be attributed to, first, the fact that by 1929 there was the collapse of international commodity markets and, secondly, there was the setting in of the depression.³⁰ This meant that if Kenya was to develop to viable standards within the framework of the British colonial Empire, then the settler regime had to shoulder the necessary expenses. It is not, therefore, surprising to note that consequent infrastructural developments, especially during the interwar period, were not financed by the metropolitan government but by finances generated locally.

As much as one would like to contend that the Kenya colonial government met all the expenses for subsequent developments in this period, available evidence suggests the contrary. Indeed, in the first three decades of colonialism the nature of settler agriculture (which was envisaged to be the mainstay of the settler economy) was precarious as many farmers were ruined by bad planning, blight and fluctuating international prices for commodities. In these circumstances the colonial state in its efforts to prop settler agriculture took measures to confine African agricultural production within limits that would

complement but not compete with Europeans. But the situation was the reverse as most of Kenya's export revenue before 1920 was raised from African produce. Although by the mid-1920s the flow of labour to European estates had caused a shortage of labour in the reserves, thus causing a relative stagnation for African agriculture, the quantity of commodities from this sector increased between 1922 and 1938. It has, for example, been estimated that African subsistence agriculture accounted for about 60% of Kenya's Gross National Product (GNP) in 1929. This was an uncomfortable reality for the settlers that African farmers were subsidizing their production indirectly.

These developments provided the Kenyan settler regime with a blank cheque in matters of political and economic development and thus the regime was wont to detest any interference in these areas by the Colonial Office. If there was to be any development-social, economic and political-in Kenya from 1930 onwards, this was to be within the reserve of the colonial settler elite. It is interesting to note that it was in this period that the question of closer union in East and Central Africa found its ramifications. Thus General Smuts told Kerr how he expected the union and the Rhodesias to form a league which would guarantee local control as well as to ensure that certain problems would be dealt with jointly. Kerr was certain that this scheme would eventually include East Africa

as well:

The more you examine it the more obvious it is that it is the experience of the union (of South Africa) which gives the most valuable information about policy and that it is the policy of the union (of South Africa) which is most likely to set the pace in determining the relations between...white and black.³¹

Though this is an idea which was being expounded outside East Africa in general and Kenya in particular, it nonetheless caught the imagination of the Kenya and Tanganyika settlers. Indeed, it was during this decade (1930-40) that the Joint East African Board ruthlessly pursued the question of closer union. For instance in March 1935 there was a meeting of Kenya and Tanganyika settlers at Arusha to press further for this goal. One of the confreres, F.J. Joelson who was also the editor of East Africa and Rhodesia, dreamed of a truly British white dominion in Africa which would embrace both East Africa and Rhodesia.³² In a letter to Ormsby-Gore in 1936 Lord Francis Scott (who had taken over as leader of the settlers after the death of Lord Delamare) told him that "Rhodesia is the nearest country on similar lines to ourselves...."³³

Though a closer union between Kenya and the Rhodesias never materialized³⁴ this did not prevent the Kenya settler elite from pursuing policies similar to those ones which obtained either in South Africa or the

Rhodesias. Indeed, though the Colonial Office in London was quite averse to the moves, the settlers went ahead and embarked on a development programme in Kenya along the lines of the union and the Rhodesias. As Clayton and Savage put it,

while it is true that the more brutal and eccentric of the pro-South African party remained out of power in this decade and that the colonial office refused to accede to demand for closer union or for the formal devolution of power, nonetheless the main lines of development in Kenya were patterned on the union and the Rhodesias.³⁵

Indeed, this refusal forced the settlers to adopt a different line of action. Having been denied home rule, their first instinct was to secure a de facto influence within the structure of government particularly on financial matters.³⁶

The implications of this were far and wide. First and foremost, the kind of administration that evolved in Kenya was not simply one that could be characterized as a typical colonial regime, one which was administered by foreign agents on behalf of the Metropolitan government, but rather it was a settler regime which came to be dominated by a European elite determined to establish a whiteman's country. Secondly, the reservation of land in the "white" Highlands exclusively for European ownership came to contradict the British traditional policy of equal rights and opportunities for all.³⁷ This was antithetical to the metropolitan

government's determination to pursue the "free enterprise" position and to uphold Lord Lugard's dictum of native paramountcy which had for a long time been seen as the principle under which protectorates were to be governed.

Explicit in this development was the white settlers' uncertainty over the sanctity of the white Highlands as long as they remained ultimately under the jurisdiction of the British government. Aware of this contradiction, as well as lacking the assurance of perpetual domination that independence from colonial rule would supposedly bring, the settlers sought in various ways to gain a formidable political position within the colonial framework. By 1906 the 600 resident settlers had succeeded in obtaining a Legislative Council, prompting Churchill the then Under Secretary of State to exclaim in Nairobi 1907 that "Never before in colonial experience has a council been granted where the number of settlers is so few".³⁸

Settlers soon started to demand elected representation based on a franchise restricted to those of European origin, arguing "that at this stage of the protectorate's development when the coloured races outnumber the whites it is not desirable that the franchise should be extended to Asiatics or Natives".³⁹ In 1919 this demand was granted to the extent that the constitutional arrangements in the interwar years were

that the Europeans elected from rural constituencies in the Highlands dominated the proceedings of the Legislative Council. By the time of Sir Edward Grigg (Governor 1925-30) the settlers were extremely influential in all aspects of administration having been given control of different boards or committees set up for departments like education and roads.⁴⁰ This control, mitigated by their high level of organization and unity soon gave them the opportunity of exhibiting "some of the propensities of a political machine!"⁴¹

The fastening of the settler regime was further given leverage by the fact that these settlers came from the influential ruling class of England as their social ties with the administrators coming from the same class were naturally close and cordial.⁴² It was this alliance which necessitated not only the political conditions for preserving exclusive European possession of the Highlands but also the economic conditions for the prosperity of this European settler elite.

These developments were of greatest significance for the growth of Nairobi to which we must now return. Notwithstanding the fact that there were different fractions of settler capital, the local administration sought to preserve the monopoly of services and the protection of the settlers against the African population both in town and in the countryside. Because of Nairobi's geographical location, it became quite

central in the process of establishing a settler regime in the country. Indeed, it was after their consolidation in Kenya that the settlers embarked on a deliberate move to gain an even greater degree of political control in Nairobi. As Mary Parker points out, this control had to be established within the parameters of the settlers' expansion of their powers in the government of Nairobi while at the same time minimizing undue interference from the central government and the colonial office in London.⁴³

The question of closer union with South Africa and the Rhodesias, though a failure as we have already seen, did influence the pattern of development Nairobi took. For example, when the idea of creating a "native location" in the town was mooted, the plans for its realization were based on examples drawn from South Africa. Town Planners, from F.W. Jameson of Kimberley in 1926 to L.W. Thornton White, L. Siberman and P.R. Anderson in 1946, were almost invariably drawn from South Africa. So was Justice Feetham, a former Town clerk of Johannesburg, who chaired the Local Government Commission of 1926 which not only drew Nairobi's urban boundaries but also instituted the type of Municipal government which remained in force almost unchanged till 1963. The salient feature of this government was its role of shaping Nairobi as the settlers' administrative, cultural and economic centre with the characteristic outcome of it growing up basically as

a non-African city "built for the needs of the white Highlands and in conformity with the predilections of the European settler elite".⁴⁴

Justice Feetham's position was that

...it is essential that the European community should, under the present circumstances, be entrusted with the larger share of responsibility for the municipal government of Nairobi, and the proportion of European representation on the council should be in uniformity with the obligations of this trust.⁴⁵

This contention was not different from the one advanced by the settlers when they were demanding elected representation based on a franchise restricted to those of European origin.⁴⁶ The history of Nairobi since this date through 1946 when an aldermanic bench was established and 1949 when the Municipal Council gained a unique privilege to borrow directly on the London market to 1950 when the town became a city by Royal Charter, was the story of efforts by the colonial settler elite to achieve wider powers, to divest itself of central government control and, within this struggle, of further efforts to maintain European numerical preponderance.⁴⁷

2.3: The Economic Development of Nairobi

The fact that Nairobi has grown from a mere railway depot at the turn of the last century to the present modern city it is today tells us quite a lot. It tells us that its life is not that of an organism, but of an organ. It has become the heart, the brain,

perhaps only the digestive system of Kenya. Thus its history, so inextricably lodged in the womb of the Kenya Highlands cannot be understood without reference to the more comprehensive community of which it became a part.

Indeed, the distinctive feature of the city is its unique pattern of relations to the region within which it is situated. Large enough to have a character of its own, Nairobi through time and space became linked to, dependent upon, the society outside it; and growth in its size has increased rather than diminished the force of that dependence. Out of this relationship, first with the capitalist world and second with the Kenyan peripheral capitalist social formation, spring the central problems of its history—those of the organization of space, of the provision of accommodation, of the adjustment to the ever changing patterns of Kenya's political economy, and of the failure to reconcile its commercial and administrative tasks with the emergence of an urban population explosion relative to productive employment. This is more so because the forces that made the town what it is today took from outside its own limits. Despite the fact that it had the railway as its pre-urban nucleus, the dynamics behind its growth and development were based, as it were, first in the "white" Highlands before the Second World War and secondly in the inflow of industrial and finance capital after the war. We can indeed argue here that

the direction of its expansion in terms of population increase was not foreseen because its generative impulses were not contained in its borders; unlike West Africa where there were pre-industrial towns, it did not have an indigenous urban society of merchants, artisans and functionaries. These spring from three profound and inter-related changes in the society external to it: the development of a colonial settler regime and its racial overtones; the transformation of the Kenyan economies from a pre-capitalist, traditional and household to a rational, capital - using basis, and the development of modern means of communication, especially the railway. Thus unlike Western towns, Nairobi emerged not from an economic metamorphosis that characterized the relationship between agriculture and industry in the western world; its rise and growth was not based on industrialization.⁴⁸ In other words the rise and growth of Nairobi as a primate city has to be understood within the wider concept of dependent urbanization. This is not only because the incorporation of Kenya into an imperial division of labour manifested itself in this pattern of urbanization; it is, more importantly, because imperial priorities determined its location as well as its functions. Like other several African primate cities it expanded in response to imperial imperatives.

Thus unlike Zanzibar and Mombasa in East Africa, Aksum and Addis Ababa in Ethiopia or Benin city on the

Guinea Coast which was first visited by the Portuguese in 1486, Nairobi followed a spatial distribution of raw material availability. Hence unlike European urbanization it did not originate and expand in response to technological changes which supplanted agricultural workers while enlarging an urban manufacturing base. This fact is important for the purposes of reinforcing its service and administrative functions. In other words Nairobi during most of the colonial period can be characterized as a typical primate city, whose salient feature was a high consumption rate as compared to the production rate.⁴⁹ Occupying a distinctly central position in the four-layer Kenyan political economy, where primary producers were almost invariably located in agriculture, processors and traders handling their products, metropolitan export industries established within the colonial market and colonial administrative and political apparatus responsible for managing the entire colonial edifice, Nairobi's role became that one of the coordinator of the entire colonial system. The way in which these layers interrelated and affected the allocation of both human and capital resources in turn affected the patterns of the town's development. This is well brought out by the fact that each layer was hierarchically structured and geographically focused around the town, making it function during the colonial period to concentrate the wealth produced in its increasingly expanding hinterland and

to channel this accumulated wealth for the primary benefit of the colonial elite, both within and outside Kenya.

To argue that Nairobi's emergence and growth had nothing to do with industrialization does not mean that the town was completely devoid of any form of industrial activities. Before 1945 Europeans and Asians established a number of manufacturing enterprises. For example, apart from the railway workshops which included a foundry, blacksmiths and machine shops, there were a soda water and brewery company, a bakery, the East African Standard printing press, Uplands Bacon factory, the Unga flour mill, timber and saw mills, etc.⁵⁰ There were also cab makers, safari equipment producers, tailors and outfitters and other small scale work-shops. These were, however, not large employers of labour hence "their presence d(id) not alter the basic assessment that Nairobi, throughout the period to 1939, was developing as a service centre for the inhabitants of the city and for the rest of the colony" as well as an inland "outport" for raw material and foodstuffs.⁵¹

This assessment is well brought out when one looks at the proportion of the number of people involved in industry within this period. According to the Native Affairs Department report for the year 1927 6,654 African employees were categorized as servants of various kinds

and another 8,460 as gangers, navvies or factory hands. How many of the 8,640 Africans were working in areas of industrial production is difficult to estimate. Suffice to say that these two groups accounted for just over 15,000 employees in the same year. It was not until 1939 that a rather better occupational census of the town was taken. In this census 8,457 Africans were categorized as domestic servants, 9,049 as employees of the central administration, the municipality and the railway, 4,756 as skilled workers and 5,507 as headmen, garage hands, etc. The total number of African workers in this year was therefore 27,769⁵² what emerges from this data is the fact that the number of workers who were employed in industry was comparatively small to that of those engaged in administrative and domestic service. From this one can conclude that within this period Nairobi grew up as an urban centre designed to service the rural economy and not as a centre of economic stimulus.

This point is borne out of the fact that although settler supremacy was founded on primitive accumulation whose basis was land and agriculture, development in this period of trade in commodities was quite marked. Here finance capital mitigated through commercial banks like the National Bank of India, Barclays (Dominion Colonial and Overseas) and the Standard Bank of South Africa played a leading role. These banks which were

meant to lubricate the flow of money capital into productive enterprises came to Kenya in the wake of the expansion of trade in commodities like hides and ivory as well as agricultural products like coffee and sisal. As capitalism expanded in Kenya, the functions of these banks were extended in scale to provide credit (derived from British funds) for the financing, collection and export of these primary goods. Located in Nairobi as early as 1906 - 1910, the functions of these banks were therefore to link up not only production areas with Nairobi as the centre for the grading of the goods but also Kenyan economies with the world commodity markets. This development with time and before 1945 brought to the fore one unique development in Kenyan political economy- the merging of settlerdom, politics and commerce with Nairobi as the headquarter of this alliance.⁵³ This is well brought out in the activities of some of the major actors in the drama of early settler capitalism in the country. Before 1922, commercial business formations and land were largely controlled by the politically dominant fraction of the settler elite. This group of individuals, although small in number, had powerful influence of state policy which was invariably bent to support their accumulation. Among these individuals were Lord Delamere (who was a member of the Legislative Council for Rift Valley and a member of a multitude of government committees) who owned controlling shares in the capital of

Unga Limited and the Times of East Africa and Captain E.S. Grogan who was a prominent timber concessionaire and property speculator had shareholding in a total of six companies the most important being Upper Nairobi Township and Estate Company. W. Hunter, a company secretary, settler and Grogan's brother-in-law had on his part shareholdings in nine companies several of which overlapped with Grogan's. W. Fletcher was a law clerk and had shares in eleven companies among which was the Nairobi Motor Transport Company. Finally there were the Mackinnon Brothers who established themselves in land development through the Nairobi Prospecting and Acquiring Syndicate(1907) and the Mackinnon Brothers (1911). In total between 1900 and 1922 there were some 35 companies whose major concern was in the export/import trade, land and farming. Characterized by the scarcity of investment in manufacturing enterprises and their overemphasis on areas which guaranteed the quick reproduction of capital, these companies were unstable and did not have long lifespans. For instance out of a total of 35 public firms, 25 were involved in land, property development and agriculture with the remainder in trading or small-scale servicing such as printing, repair work and newspapers. The average lifespan was only nine years with five of them surviving for less than one year. For example the co-operative society of B.E.A. went into liquidation only 9 months after its formation in 1907 while the

Nairobi Printing and Publishing Company collapsed in the year of its formation, 1904.⁵⁴

The interwar period (1922-1945) was, however, characterized by a measure of stability and by an increase in the number of companies. This was a period when there was a steady though measured expansion into small processing, a process which was accompanied by and expansion in the size and activities of both local and foreign firms. This can be attributed to the fact that there had been in the colony two decades of commodity production and capitalist circulation. According to the table below, there was a constant expansion in the total number of companies with a corresponding decline in those struck off over the period between 1927-1945.

Table 2.1: Company formation 1927-1945

Date	Companies on Register.	Cos. struck off	struck off as % of total
1927	289	19	6.6
1930	399	37	9.3
1933	472	30	6.4
1936	593	29	5.0
1939	641	25	4.0
1942	679	18	2.6
1945	811	16	2.0

source: Nicola Swainson, The Development of corporate capitalism in Kenya 1918-1977 (London: HEB., 1980)P.51

A look at a sample of private companies registered between 1922 and 1945 by enterprise and ownership shows that the largest category of all communities together was that of wholesale and retail (30%) followed by import/export and building, construction and real estate with 18% and 15% respectively (see table below).

Table 2.2: Sample of private companies Registered between 1922 and 1945 by Enterprise and ownership

Enterprise	Euro- pean	Foreign	Asian	Total No.	Total %
Agricultural Pro- duction and Ancil- lary services	8	3	5	16	19
Food & Beverages, manufacture of chemicals, clothes and Textiles	1	1	5	7	8
General Enginee- ring & Milling	1	-	-	1	1
Transport	-	2	2	4	5
Investment & Finance	1	-	2	3	4
Real Estate Pro- perty Building and construction	6	1	6	13	15
Import/Export	1	2	12	15	18
Wholesale/Retail (including cater- ring & printing	1	7	18	26	30
Total companies	19	16	50	85	100

Source: Nicola Swainson, Ibid., p.53

From the above table it can be seen that European firms predominated in agriculture which was exclusively a settler preserve. The next largest sector they predominated was property and real estate. There seemed to be few European firms in manufacturing. This can be attributed to the fact that the settlers in most cases processed their commodities collectively through state-sponsored bodies such as the Kenya Farmers' Association, Kenya Co-operative Creameries and the Kenya Planters' Union. Co-operative marketing organizations such as these were the best way of ensuring the survival of the settler economy.⁵⁵ Most of these companies, needless to say, were situated in Nairobi. Though there is little reliable statistical information on the exact quantity and composition of the companies in the town we can say that most of those dealing in estates and primary processing, trading, and manufacturing were located in the town. For example Mitchel Cotts, a leading South African merchant and shipping organization moved into East Africa, in 1926 and 1927 had extended to Nairobi. As far as the import trade was concerned, this company held a wide variety of agencies for manufactured goods such as the weighing machines of Messrs Pooley and sons and products of the California spray chemical corporation which provided insecticides for the coffee-growers in East Africa. Another company which was based in Nairobi was the British East Africa corporation. It had been

incorporated in England in 1906 by a syndicate with interests in East Africa. All the primary processing and trading agencies of this company were acquired by Mitchell Cotts in 1945.

Perhaps of the most interest was Gailey and Roberts. Though this company was directly concerned with the export of primary commodities, it was a local firm established by settlers but was later taken by a branch of international capital. When setting up the company after the recognition of the early need of the settler farmers for farm tools and equipment, James Gailey, one of the partners said that "if Delamere persuades the settlers to take up land here they will need ploughs, spades, buckets, nails and building materials".⁵⁶ It was in response to the demand for such items of equipment and servicing that an engineering workshop was set up in Nairobi in 1904-1905. Before the First World War this workshop had been enlarged through the acquisition of another settler company, the Nairobi Engineering Company Limited. By mid-1930 and because of increased demand in both Kenya and Uganda for farm machinery, it needed more capital for its expansion. One of its chief suppliers of agricultural and engineering equipment from Britain, the United Africa Company (which was a trading subsidiary of the British Unilever company) took over 100% of the share capital on the death of the partners, James Gailey and D.O. Roberts, in 1937.

Another company which we would like to quote to illustrate our point is the East African Power and Lighting Company. In 1906 a Mombasa Indian Merchant, Esmailjee Jivanjee in partnership with some European engineers set up the Mombasa Electric Light and Power Company. In 1907 this company set up power facilities, in Nairobi with a hydroelectric station at Ruiru. Due to the rapid expansion of the town and the recognition of the importance of power generation in the expansion of production, two steam generators were constructed at Parklands. But lack of capital for further expansion forced the formation of a London board of this company, which was reconstituted as East African Power and Lighting Company in 1922. In 1925 the company became associated with power securities Limited and Belfour Beatty and Company. These two British companies provided the technical assistance and management services for EAPL which in 1929 had purchased the Tanganyika Electric Supply Company.⁵⁷

From the foregoing examples of company formation in Kenya, we can say that before 1945 economic activities in the country revolved around agricultural production, ancillary services and primary processing. But this notwithstanding, there was a clear trend whereby the settler economy and patterns of corporate growth showed an upward trend of the expansion of the capitalist mode of production. Though factory production was limited in this period, products like sisal

twine, flour, fats, dairy products, soap, beer, jams, tobacco, Cigarettes and mineral waters were being manufactured before 1945. The second point to note here is that from around 1920 to 1945 there was a tendency of the historical movement of capital from trade into production and this was mitigated by the penetration of international capital mostly from companies which had been incorporated in Britain but with world-wide concerns. The role of Nairobi in this development was important. The town's geographically central positions with its location at the point where the railway entered the highlands made it - despite the companies which set up here - to evolve into a geographical "middleman" between the agricultural producers in its hinterland and the metropolitan world. It was the "outport" of Mombasa as it became the collecting centre and distributing point for the colonial import and export trade. Indeed, all export commodities were collected and graded here while all imports after their unloading at Mombasa passed through the town to their destinations. It was in this sense that Nairobi emerged not only as the capital centre of the European colonial economy but also as a service city.

From 1945 Nairobi, however, started to develop two important distinctive features. There was on the one hand the development of secondary import substitution industry which led the town to become a major magnet for international finance capital. On the other

the town started becoming the centre of Eastern Africa for the international community with the setting up of offices for journalists, United Nations personnel, diplomatic missions and foreign agencies. The latter feature is well illustrated by the fact that since the 1920s two related matters, import duty and railway rates, had established Kenya on a path of economic ascendancy in East Africa⁵⁸ to the extent that upto 1945, apart from the common market, a number of centrally organized services like the East African court of Appeal, East African Posts and Telecommunications and the East African Airways came to be based in Nairobi.⁵⁹ Because of the number of settlers Kenya as compared to Tanganyika and Uganda, Kenya colony became the chief beneficiary from the common market. As Van Zwanenberg points out, in the final analysis it was

...Kenya's international companies⁹ (which) derived the greater benefit from the common market. The majority of the firms who (sic)... invested in East Africa since the formation of the common market (were) branches of international companies. These industries, with their modern technology,... found the East African common market very profitable for them. It may be argued that without the common market most of these firms would not have found it worthwhile to begin production in East Africa because, taken separately, the markets within each country were too small. But... they... based themselves in one country only and (chose) the one offering the best services - the best trained personnel, the best staff accommodation and communications services, in fact, the wealthiest

city, offering the largest local market.⁶⁰

Thus Kenya, particularly Nairobi, became the centre of development for industries producing consumer goods in East Africa with Tanganyika and Uganda providing the markets for these goods.

But why were international firms concentrated in Kenya and not Uganda or Tanganyika? The answer to this question is closely linked to the reasons which led to the development of secondary import substitution industries in Nairobi in the post-war period.

Up to 1940 the British imperial policy had been straightforward with regard to the development of industries in its colonies. Operating within the laid down principles of colonies acting as sources of raw materials and foodstuffs as well as captive markets for British industrial goods, Kenya, like any other British colony had to do with a colonial policy which discouraged industrialization. But after 1940 this remarkably conservative approach to colonial economies changed and economic development on a number of levels, particularly in industry, began to be encouraged. The reasons for this shift in policy have to be sought in both endogenous and exogenous factors. According to van Zwantenberg, the second world war put Europeans living in East Africa in a difficult position in the sense that they could not obtain goods they had earlier

imported by sea from Europe as all ships were in danger of attack during the war. The only alternative they had was the setting up of the Kenya Industrial management Board in 1940/1 whose responsibility was the encouragement of local manufacture of some of the goods previously imported. The plant and equipments of the Board were bought up after 1945 by the East African Industries Limited, a company which was co-financed by the British Government and Unilever, one of the world's largest International manufacturing complexes.⁶¹

After the war this policy of encouraging industrialization in East Africa continued. According to Van Zwanenberg, the war, as a major stimulus behind the shift in the pre-1940 colonial policy, had led to the rise of gigantic international firms with branches in East Africa. After the war many of these firms opted to continue with the war-generated trends because, first, the level of wages in Britain in this period were at least 400% higher than in East Africa. Secondly, the coming to power of the Labour Party in Britain after the war played a leading role in this option. Because of its socialist leanings, van Zwanenberg concludes, the party was anxious to encourage the growth of new industries in British colonies. This is reflected in its institution of special investment banks like the Commonwealth Development Corporation (C.D.C.) whose function was to provide

government-backed cash loans to private firms like Unilever. In this way it was hoped to encourage and subsidize the giant British international firms.⁶²

This line of argument is weak especially when one puts into consideration the second world war and post-war political and economic developments on the international scene. That the Kenyan political economy in this period began to undergo a long-term shift from local forms of ownership and control of capital in favour of international capital cannot be disputed. It seems that the option by international firms to remain in East Africa after the war was a response to a long-term decline in the British competitiveness on the world market due to changes which took place in world economy in the immediate post-war period. This was a new era of capitalism which was not only "...marked by the hegemony of the United States in political, economic and military spheres" but one which also witnessed the inauguration of a two-sided phase of "concentration and centralization" of capital on a world scale. Indeed,

By 1940 there had been a huge advance in United States industry which led to a fundamental upheaval in technology, organization and dramatic increases in labour productivity in all capitalist monopolies. These changes completely altered the tendencies of international capital export. The tradition of concentration of foreign investment in the field of plantations and raw materials extraction changed in favour of concentration of investment in manufacturing⁶³ (emphasis original).

At the economic level, this meant that the emergence of the dominance of U.S.A. capital in the world economy went ahead to undermine the British hitherto unmitigated dominance in it. From being a net creditor of \$21.6 billion before the war, U.K. emerged in 1945 owing about as much as it was owed but within two years it had become a net debtor to the tune of \$2.6 billion. This dramatic change in Britain's position in world money market can be attributed to an increase in long-term obligations of \$7.1 million owed to U.S.A and Canada. This position was aggravated by an increase in her short-term liabilities, almost entirely in sterling balances of 14.1 million.⁶⁴ At the political level, British global predominance was undercut by the U.S. rising hegemony when there was the generalization of commodity production and the free movement of capital across national boundaries. Under these circumstances

The existence of a large number of colonial territories controlled by Britain was clearly an impediment to the long-term expansion of the capitalist mode of production. In this respect, it (was) significant that the United States continuously pressed Britain to grant independence or self-government to its colonial territories. After the Second World War, therefore, the (British) state was to play a more active role in bolstering British investment in the colonial areas. Indeed, this was the basis of the emergence of a new British 'development policy' towards the colonial territories after 1945.⁶⁵

Finding itself in such a weak position at the level of global competition with the US., Britain saw it as being logical for laissez-faire capitalism to give way to a higher level of state intervention in its colonies. Thus, by the end of the war the formulation of a new colonial development policy became imperative as part of the measures of state intervention in colonial economies. The chief tool in implementing this policy was the Colonial Development and welfare Act of 1940 whose central concern was the improvement of standards of skills and education among the colonized. The commonwealth Development Corporation was the chief executor of this set aim.

Thus unlike prevalent attitudes towards industrialization in Kenya in the 1920s and 1930s among both imperial and colonial government officials, the 1940s saw a marked expansion of the war-generated trends in the sector. This is reflected in the number of companies incorporated in Kenya as well as those with foreign parentage in this period. In 1946, for example, there were 280 private companies valued at £40 million. This was well over double the number and value in Uganda and Tanganyika. Over the next twelve years another 3380 private companies were established valued at £120 million as against 2650 valued at £18 in the other two countries.⁶⁶

Available statistics show that these developmental

trends brought about a rapid expansion in both agricultural and industrial production which was accompanied by a comparative decline in European agriculture as a proportion of total output. For example by 1954, for the first time in the history of the colony, the gross national product (GNP) attributed to manufacture was greater than that attributed to agriculture. While before the Second World War the largest proportion of capital formation had been in European agriculture, the post-war period showed trends whereby more private capital investment was directed into secondary and tertiary industries which yielded larger and quicker returns. For instance, approximately half the private capital formation between 1946 and 1952 involved import of plants and machinery and only 5% involved construction work on European farms. There was a large absolute increase in capital formation attributed to "other private sectors" (which included industry) from £64.7 million to £123.8 million in the periods 1946-52 and 1953-58 respectively. The amount of capital formation attributed to European agriculture declined, not in absolute but in proportionate terms, from 16.8% of the total in 1946-52 to 9.8% in the 1953-58 period.⁶⁷

These changes are also reflected in employment figures for the same period. As we shall note in detail in chapter three, there was a decline in agriculture as a net employer of African labour as the

growth of non-agricultural enterprise led to a shift in the principal locus of this labour from rural to urban areas where these enterprises were mostly to be found. Thus though the African population in Nairobi doubled between 1923 and 1931 and nearly doubled again in 1939, it was not until the post-war period that most of the Africans started being employed in manufacturing industries. Indeed, by 1947 over 40% of the private non-agricultural African labour force was employed in the municipalities of Nairobi and Mombasa alone. It was also in this period that many of these workers underwent a change in their pre-war pattern of one to two-year stint at wage-earning followed by an equally long return to their rural homes. These two factors meant that the number of those Africans engaged in agricultural labour started going down in favour of urban labour. This trend is reflected in figures of the adult male African employees in 1947.

Table 2.3: Adult Male African Employees by occupation, 1947.

<u>Occupation</u>	<u>Number employed</u>
<u>Private employers</u>	
(Non-Agricultural)	
Clerical Staff	3,049
Shop, office and storeboys	8,848
Domestic servants	21,917
Mechanics	1,097
Carpenters	716
Masons and stone dressers	2,834
Drivers (motor vehicles)	2,353
other trained skilled workers	3,463
Factory skilled workers	3,414
Semi-skilled workers	6,297
unskilled labourers	40,087
(Agricultural)	
office staff	938
Domestic servants	5,603
skilled workers	3,518
Labourers	96,492
<u>Government Services</u>	
clerical staff	3,226
office and store boys	2,752
Domestic servants	1,617
Artisans and Mechanics	5,095
Other skilled workers	21,561
Labourers	47,010
Grand Total	281,857

Source: Kenya Colony and Protectorate, Department of Labour, Report of the African Labour Census, 1947

From the above table one can clearly see that though agriculture remained the single largest employer of African labour in 1947 with 106,551 employees, the non-agricultural and government service employed accounted for the largest labour in the colony with 175,306 employees. The bulk of these were located in Nairobi. According to Table 4 in the census report, there were 30,525 adult males on books with 29,794 adult males, 489 females and 113 juveniles monthly paid workers working on the census date, 28/11/47. In addition to this were 433 casual males and 36 juveniles.

From the foregoing we can say that investment in industry in the postwar period was strongly encouraged by the metropolitan government. This was quite in contrast with the pre-war period when emphasis had almost exclusively been put on primary processing. This new direction in the economic development of the colony was aptly brought out in a press release in early 1949 by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. According to this release,

Kenya (was) on the eve, as indeed (was) all of Africa, of large scale industrial development...this era began during the war, when abnormal conditions closed the usual sources of supply of many articles, and compelled

East Africa to look more closely at its own industrial potential... there (was) no lack of capital. In 1948 alone, £23 million was invested in new private and public companies and nine-tenths of this money went into industry ... between 1945 and 1949, at least £54 million was invested in the equity of new companies in Kenya.⁶⁸

This new direction had the backing of the administration. This is well brought out in the fact that from around 1945 Kenya was required to play its part in the defence of sterling by reducing its non-sterling expenditure in 1952 to 85% of the total figure for 1951. The administration also embarked on a programme of curbing imports from Japan to certain "Minimum essentials" which did not include cotton textiles. Indeed, there was a general restriction on the number of goods which could be imported from the non-sterling areas. These measures collectively led to the reduction of the value of trade with non-sterling areas by approximately £2 million. This was an overall strategy to remove any threat of competition to British capital in overseas markets.⁶⁹

From the foregoing one can conclude by saying that from around 1945 Nairobi became the centre of light, capital intensive industry. By the same token bearing in mind the large number of settlers there compared to either Kampala or Dar-es-Salaam, it also became the centre of Eastern Africa for the International community, diplomatic missions and all sorts of

foreign agencies. The growth of the town in this period reflected a tendency on the part of the colonial authorities towards the centralization of development in East Africa in Nairobi. Whatever indices one takes, they will show that Nairobi continuously drew in people from the countryside, foreign capital and personnel as well as light industry from abroad. This trend continued throughout the post-war period. In a sense therefore, just as Britain functioned as the centre of the economic system which East Africa was the periphery so Nairobi acted as the centre for the East African colonial economic system and the other towns and cities in the region functioned on its periphery. Nairobi thus reproduced on a smaller East African scale the international pattern of the occurrence of wealth and poverty. In the 1920s and 1930s the town did not act as the kind of economic magnet as it did in the post-war years. Eldoret, Naivasha, Nakuru and other smaller towns also provided the kind of services required by the export-oriented farmers in the colony. Indeed, since 1945, there developed a tendency for the town to absorb more and more of the country's development potential. By the time of the attainment of independence it had become the focus not only of capital but of labour as well, as there was a tendency towards the drift of manpower toward whatever opportunity there existed.

One of the major features in this period was therefore the large number of Africans who flocked into the town. What were the main reasons for this influx? What were the implications of the developments we have outlined above for these Africans especially in terms of their being absorbed as labourers? These questions, and many others, form the basis of the next chapter.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 Andrew Hake, African Metropolis: Nairobi's Self-Help City (London: Sussex University press, 1977), p.19
- 2 Ibid., p.20
- 3 Mombasa-Victoria Lake Railway survey, quoted in R.A. Obudho (Ed), Urbanization and Development Planning in Kenya (Nairobi: K.L.S., 1981), p.125
- 4 George Whitehouse in his correspondence with the Railway Committee in London continued referring to the Loco shops situated at Nairobi as "the Kikuyu Loco shops". For example see George Whitehouse to O' Callaghan, "Further Correspondence Regarding Construction of Ugand Railway" quoted in Ibid., p.125
- 5 Guildford Molesworth, quoted in Andrew Hake, op. cit., p.22
- 6 Colonel Patterson, District Engineer, quoted in Ibid., p.23
- 7 For a detailed background information which necessitated this arrangement see KNA: DC/NBI.1/1/1, Political Record Book, Nairobi District; PC/CP. 1 1/8/1, Political Record Book, Nairobi District 1899-1915 and DC/MKS.1/4/1, Nairobi District Annual Report 1910-1911.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 See R.W. Walmsley, Nairobi: The Geography of a New City (Nairobi: The Eagle Press, E.A.L.B., 1957), p.19.
- 10 Sir A. Hardinge to Lord Salisbury, quoted in R.A. Obudho, op.cit., p.125
- 11 For a full exposition of this development see D. Ghai (Ed.), Portrait of a Minority: Asians in East Africa (Nairobi: E.A.P.H., 1965); J.S.Mangat, A History of the Asians in East Africa c.1886-1945 (Oxford: The clarendon Press, 1969) especially chapters II and III and Charles M. Good, "Rural Markets and Exchange Institutions in Ankole, Uganda," Chicago, University of Chicago, Dept. of Geography Research Paper No.128, 1970.
- 12 KNA: DC/NBI. 1/1/1, Political Record Book, Nairobi District and PC/CP. 1/8/1, Political Record Book, Nairobi District, 1899-1915.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Ibid. Also see KNA: DC/MKS. 1/4/1, Nairobi District Annual Report 1910-1911.

- 16 See J. Simpson, Report on Sanitary Matters in the East Africa Protectorate, Uganda and Zanzibar (Africa No.1025, Colonial Office, 1915).
- 17 Aidan W. Southall (Ed.), Social Change in Modern Africa (London: Oxford University press, 1961), Passim.
- 18 Aidan W. Southall, "The Growth of Urban Society" in Stanley Diamond and Fred G. Burke, The Transformation of East Africa (New York and London: Basic Books, 1966), p.467.
- 19 Elspeth Huxley, The Flame Trees of Thika (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1959), p. 238.
- 20 Andrew Hake, African Metropolis, p. 35
- 21 Official Gazette, 1-1-06, p.11
- 22 Cited in Andrew Hake, op.cit., pp.25-26
- 23 See Margery Dilley, British Policy in Kenya Colony (New York: Thomas Nelson and sons, 1937), p.6.
- 24 Ibid., p.13
- 25 For the census returns (estimates) for the three years see KNA: DC/NBI. 1/1/1, Political Record Book, Nairobi District and PC/CP. 1/8/1, Political Record Book, Nairobi District 1899-1915.
- 26 Anthony Clayton and Donald C. Savage, Government and Labour in Kenya 1895-1963 (London: Frank Cass, 1974), pp.164-165.
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- 28 Ibid., p.142.
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- 30 Ibid.,
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- 32 F.J.Joelson, "East Africa and Rhodesia: Some Impressions of a Long Tour", East Africa and Rhodesia 18th September, 1936.
- 33 Francis Scott to Ormsby-Gore, 12th December, 1938, quoted in Clayton and Savage, op.cit., p.165
- 34 For reasons as to why it failed see R.M.A. Van Zwanenberg with Anne King, An Economic History of Kenya and Uganda, 1800-1970 (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1975) pp.236-241.

- 35 Clayton and Savage, op.cit., pp.165-166.
- 36 See George Bennet, "Settlers and Politics in Kenya" in V.Harlow, et.al., (ed.), History of East Africa: The Colonial Period (London: Oxford University Press, 1965).
- 37 Norman Leys, A Last Chance in Kenya (London: The Hogarth press, 1931), p.10.
- 38 Quoted in George Bennet, Kenya: A political History. The Colonial period (London: Oxford University press, 1963), p.22.
- 39 Quoted in Margery Dilley, op.cit., p. 6.
- 40 Norman Leys, op.cit., p.11.
- 41 McGregor Ross, Kenya from Within (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1927) p.311.
- 42 Margery Dilley, op.cit., pp.176-177.
- 43 Mary Parker, "Political and Social Aspects of the Development of Municipal Government in Kenya with Special Reference to Nairobi", London: R.H.S.D. Thesis, 1948, pp.210-254.
- 44 Herbert Werlin, Governing an African City: A Study of Nairobi (New York: Africana publishing Co., 1974), p. 47.
- 45 Justice Feetham, Chairman, Report of the Local Government Commission, 1927, Vol.1, Nairobi and its Environs, Mombasa and its Environs (London: Colonial office, 1927), p. 53.
- 46 See footnote 39 above.
- 47 Mary Parker, op.cit., p.210. For a full account of the constitutional development of Nairobi see pp.210-254 of this source. The source gives a good account of the struggle between Indians and Europeans during this development. African interests in this development were not catered for. For indeed it was not until 1944 that an African was appointed to the Legislative Council (three others being nominated by the Government in 1948). No African was appointed to the Executive Council until 1951 or elected to the Legislature until 1957. The Nairobi City Council was even slower than the Central government to give Africans any representation.
- 48 For a comparative analysis of the urbanization of Nairobi and that of the Western World see R.M.A Van Zwanenberg, "History and Theory of Urban Poverty in Nairobi: The Problem of Slum Development" in Journal of Eastern African Research and Development, vol.2 No.2, 1972, pp.165-169; Kingsley Davis and Hilde Hertz Golden, "Urbanization and the Development of Pre-Industrial Areas," Economic Development

- and Cultural Change, 3(October 1954), Brian J.L. Berry, "City size Distribution and Economic Development," Economic Development and Cultural Change, 9(July 1961), p.573-88. For the relationship between industrialization and urbanization see Bert F. Hoselitz and Wilbert E. Moore (Eds.), Industrialization and Society (Paris and the Hague: UNESCO and Mouton, 1963); Wilbert E. Moore and Arnold S. Feldman (Eds.), Labour Commitment and Social change in Developing Areas (New York: Social Science Research Council, 1960) and Richard L.Meier, Science and Economic Development: New Patterns of living (New York: John Wiley and sons, Inc., 1956).
- 49 For Typologies of Third World towns see Gerald Breeze, Urbanization in Newly Developing Countries (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, 1966), pp.46-49.
- 50 For the Performance of some of these early enterprises in the town see KNA: DC/MKS.1/4/1, Nairobi District Annual Report, 1910-1911.
- 51 R.M.A. Van Zwanenberg, "History and Theory of Urban Poverty....", op.cit., pp.170-171. On the development of an entreport function at Nairobi during the interwar period, despite the existence of a similar function already at Mombasa, see Pyarali A. Memon, "Mercantile Intermediaries in a Colonial Spatial System: Wholesaling in Kenya, 1830-1940" (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Western Ontario, London, Canada, 1974), pp. III-V and pp.8-9, 177-178, 181-189. On the organization of the sale of agricultural produce Memon quite correctly argues that Nairobi through time emerged as the organizing node for the marketing of European settler produce such as Arabica coffee, sisal, maize and wheat from the White Highlands and adjacent Arusha region of present day Tanzania (pp.223-230). On the organizing agencies for marketing the settler produce see same reference, chapter 7.
- 52 Ibid., p.170.
- 53 Delamere's and Grogan's prominence in the Protectorate and how they could manipulate state machinery can be gleaned from McGregor Ross, op.cit., pp.159-162.
- 54 I am indebted to Nicola Swainson, op.cit., for the information on this early company formation especially chapter 1 pp.48-50.
- 55 Ibid., p. 53 Also see R.M.A. Van Zwanenberg, Colonial capitalism and Labour in Kenya 1919-1939 (Nairobi: E.A.L.S., 1975), chapter 1.
- 56 "The History of Gailey and Roberts in Kenya", East African Standard, 15.3.54.

- 57 "East African Power and Lighting Comapny", East African Standard, 5.5.65.
- 58 R.M.A.van Zwanenberg with A. King, op.cit., p.239.
- 59 Ibid., p. 240.
- 60 Ibid., p. 244.
- 61 Ibid., p.126
- 62 Ibid., p.127.
- 63 Nicola Swainson, op.cit., p.99
- 64 Ibid., p. 102
- 65 Ibid.,
- 66 R.M.A. van Zwanenberg with A.King, op.cit., pp.128-129.
- 67 Nicola Swainson, op.cit.pp.107,110.
- 68 East African Standard, 21.6.49
- 69 Nicola Swainson, op.cit., p.117.

CHAPTER THREE

CAPITALIST RURAL TRANSFORMATION OF KENYA AND THE EMERGENCE OF SQUATTERS AND URBAN WORKERS UP TO 1939

3.1: Introduction

The creation of a wage-labour force in Africa is essentially a product of white settlement and the establishment of European colonial administration.....¹

A large number of Nairobi's residents today live in slums, spontaneous or unauthorized settlements or what a colonial Medical Officer of Health for Kampala in Uganda once described as "the septic fringe" of the city. Whatever indices one takes show that all those slum-dwellers are invariably Africans. Where did they come from? Why did they come to the town in the first place? Why did they, during the colonial era, have to settle in such abysmal and degrading conditions?

There is a wide corpus of literature on the African city and the characteristics of African urbanization. This literature, mostly by anthropologists and sociologists, in the past tended to focus upon the African as an immigrant playing into the background the marginality of the townsman's experience under colonial administration. This anomaly can be attributed largely to the fact that the literature rarely dealt with the whole town, the whole urban structure, the whole network of social and economic relations. Instead, the boundaries of interpretation were usually drawn very narrowly around what was often a partially segregated African "location," compound or ethnic

category. Thus the African urban dwellers came to be categorized as "Migrants and proletarians," "Townsmen or Tribesmen," or "peasant workers."

Writing in 1958 on the politics of a Copperbelt town in Zambia, A.L. Epstein contended that there had been, pulls of tribe and class; that there was a kind of an "alternation model" of social change whereby a class or tribal identity was activated in appropriate circumstance. The African workers' identity was thought to be situationally specific with selectivity taking place as various "social fields" were encountered and different "social networks" activated.² P.C. Lloyd,³ J.C. Mitchell and A.L. Epstein⁴ and Walter Elkan⁵ concretize this contention by pointing out that status and prestige lines were frequently based on factors extraneous to the relationship between capital and labour.

This categorization of African urban dwellers finds winding its way in H.J. and R.E. Simons' work.⁶ These two scholars referred to African workers in the South African mines as "peasant workers." This is not different from Jack Woodie who suggested that "The migrant worker is also a migrant peasant."⁷ It is, however, Richard Moorson who succinctly highlights this argument. He says that

Labour migrants, members of a social stratum in transition from small-scale agrarian production to wage-labour, possess an objectively divided class interest. In the former, they control the product of their labour until consumed or exchanged; in the latter, they sell their labour-power as a commodity.⁸

Africans in towns were thus presented as a category of the peasantry, men who straddled the logical chasm of the dual economy - men of two worlds. This assessment of migrant workers poses questions about the degree of their proletarianization, of the structure of the African working class, and of the forms of action which were taken by workers who had been forced to maintain their families in the rural areas through being denied urban residence by the colonial urban authorities.

Implicit in this assessment, and notwithstanding the rather distorted view of class formation and class action in Africa during the colonial period, are two related facts. On the one hand there is the assumption that lack of the evolution and/or formulation of a developmentally consistent housing policy for Africans in towns was to be blamed on the Africans themselves. In other words it was assumed that by maintaining a dual identity, the Africans were not enough a force to stake a claim in urban residence. This view is well articulated by J.C. Mitchel who, when talking about the migrant labour system dominant among blacks in Central Africa, said that

...tribesmen needed money and were prepared to accept relatively rude living conditions and a rate of pay which represented the marginal utility of their labour since the economic support of their families and themselves in their old age or infirmity was carried by the rural community.⁹

This means that the African workers tolerated day-to-day exploitation in exchange for future security in their peasant communities.

Secondly, and logically flowing from the first assumption is the fact that the colonial urban authorities were not to blame for the misery the Africans suffered because of lack of proper accommodation. How could they be blamed if the Africans were not, never were, permanent urban residents? This view overlooks certain basic historical facts, the most important being that the emergence of towns like Nairobi was the result of deliberate European policies which were meant to develop such centres into non-African towns of habitation. As the East Africa Royal Commission Report of 1953-55 points out, modern towns in East Africa grew up mainly as a result of non-African enterprise and that

For many years Africans were regarded as temporary inhabitants of the towns, in which they worked as unskilled labourers. They lived in traditional huts either inside or outside the township boundaries, and when urban authorities found it necessary to provide them with accommodation, it was on the assumption that they would work for short periods in the towns, unaccompanied by their families, and would then return to their areas of origin.... They (were) regarded socially and financially as a liabilities for whose housing and welfare the urban authorities (were) responsible. 10

The town was thus seen by the Europeans as "not a

suitable habitat for a permanent African society"¹¹
because the Westernized African or an African exposed
to Western cultural traits became a "displaced person"
in a sociological sense and thereby, somewhat
degenerate.¹²

The kind of explanation given by scholars like
J.C. Mitchell has, in all fairness, limitations for
anyone who is anxious to understand the problems
Africans experienced in towns during colonialism. That
a large segment of the African urban labour force in
the early period of colonialism remained migrant or
semi-proletarianized, gaining part of its livelihood
from land in the rural areas cannot be denied. How-
ever, this alone does not justify the assumption made
by the above-cited authors that the Africans were to
blame for their misery in towns. Indeed, the plurali-
ty of the social and cultural worlds through which urban
Africans moved acquires a historical position if we
remain at the level of understanding given by the above
authors. This is more so because the assessment given
by these authors does not demand a stance on such a
fundamental question as when and in what measures did
the Africans accept this duality out of their own
volition.

By a detailed consideration of capitalist deve-
lopment in the countryside before 1939 we intend to
demonstrate the validity of one major proposition.

First, it will in this chapter be suggested that the migration of Africans to towns has to be understood within the parameters of the process of agricultural change in the countryside. This is important because the increase in African urban population in towns like Nairobi in this period was through not natural increase but rural exodus. This posed the major problem of urban labour absorption and housing. The historical context of this cityward migration was the penetration of both the means of production and consumption which polarized the countryside into capitalist and peasant petty commodity production.

3.2: Factors Responsible for the Creation of Surplus Population and the Spatial Displacement of Labour from the Reserves to the "White" Highlands and to Towns.

The African section of the population of Nairobi between 1900 and 1939 was characterized by endemic poverty in horrid unplanned villages of huts made of paraffin tins and thatch far removed from the more permanent dwellings of the railway and colonial administration. These villages were the result of the tendency on the part of the colonial authorities to initially allow Africans to "fend for themselves" either on the boundaries of the town if there were "reserves" near enough to accommodate them or in the town itself.¹³ The reaction of the Europeans within the first decade was to look the other way; they ignored the shanty dwellings, the

filthy conditions, the inadequate sanitation, the limited and expensive water supplies and so on.¹⁴ However, the urban authorities began to respond to the situation not in terms of improving it but rather to control the influx of Africans into the town or to isolate those "Legitimately" there in locations. This move was taken against the background of tremendous strides in the development and population growth of the town between 1900 and 1919. The first record of the non-African population made in 1906 showed that there were 642 Europeans and 3,581 Asians living within the town's borders. By 1921 the numbers had risen to 2,339 Europeans and 8,915 Asians, an increase in 15 years of 1,697 Europeans or 264% and 5,334 Asians or 147%. In 1926 there was a slight increase in the European figure from 2,339 to 2,665 and in Asian from 8,915 to 9,199. There were no precise figures of the African population but estimates showed an increase from 9,300 in 1906 to 12,000 in 1923 and 18,000 in 1926.¹⁵ This increase raises* one fundamental question: why were these Africans coming to the town and where were they from?

In setting out to explain the dynamics of the influx of Africans into Nairobi, even in this early period of the town's development, one is faced with two major

~~statements that are based on the following data:~~

*see Table 3.2, Page 153 for details on population increases for the period under study.

questions which have been conventionally examined in mutual isolation. These are: what were the factors responsible for the spatial displacement of labour from the countryside to the town? How do we account for the growth of the spatial concentration of capital and labour-power in Nairobi during the colonial era? Conventionally, these questions which are invariably raised in a different language can lead into a discussion of the so-called "push" and "pull" factors and the employment of a dichotomy between town and country for the purpose of explaining the determinants of the rural-urban migration process.¹⁶

The two questions posed, coupled with the issue of population growth, can only be adequately answered if we intergrate them into one unified method of analysis. For the purposes of restructuring the argument, we can begin by considering the mechanisms of change in the countryside during colonialism, attempting to identify the forces responsible for the production of surplus population. The first question involves a discussion of the uneven development of capitalism in agriculture, the production of surplus population in its latent form, and the related tendency towards the spatial displacement of rural labour to towns.

In looking at the uneven development of capitalism in agriculture in colonial Kenya, one finds that there developed two "regimes" of agricultural production - capitalist production which was almost invariably identified with European farmers and peasant petty-commodity production which was based in the "reserves". The reality of

the conditions responsible for rural out-migration was found in the forms of existence of these two regimes, forms which were based on the material characteristics of the organization of the labour process.

After the construction of the Uganda Railway for the provision of access to the strategic head-waters of the Nile between 1896 and 1901, the colonial administration of the time started to think seriously about the reorganization of production in the Protectorate. The questions: what was to be produced, by whom and what were to be the relations of production received top priority. As early as 1900 a new land tenure and land use system was contemplated throughout the Protectorate. Under such a system it was thought that the government could decide who was to use land and how this land could be used. The colonial policy-makers on the spot — Hardinge, Elliot, Stewart and Sadler — had already convinced themselves beyond any doubt that agricultural development was to be the sine qua non of economic development.¹⁷ While the execution of this development strategy was to be the work of settlers, its success was seen to depend on the interaction between the settlers, concessionaires and local and London officials on the one hand and on the role of Africans on the other.¹⁸

Having made the complex of decisions that established European immigrant settlers as the chief agents of economic development, the problem of production

was to depend on what kind of commodities were to be produced to meet imperial needs. Decisions on this question were made through an independent sequence of official and private acts.¹⁹

Starting with land alienation and the introduction of cash crops such as coffee, cotton and sisal as well as the promulgation of new concepts of land tenure, the colonial settler regime in Kenya formulated new land regulations which by 1939 had turned Kenyan agriculture into the two regimes mentioned above. Indeed, it was in this year (1939) that the area which came to be known as the White Highlands got its legal demarcation when land in the area could not be purchased by non-whites. It was also in this year that the Native Area Order in Council defined the boundaries of African lands and provided that "... every African tribe, group, family and individual shall have all the rights (within this area) which they enjoy... by virtue of existing law and custom". This was just the formalization of the restriction of Africans in the infamous "reserves" which had been made into law in 1926. Until then African rights under Kenya's colonial laws were defined by occupation, cultivation and grazing. By 1939 land in Kenya could thus be categorized as Native Reserves where particular ethnic communities had exclusive rights; the White Highlands which were protected and controlled by the Highlands Board for the exclusive use of whites; and the Northern Frontier

and Turkana District.²⁰

This marking out of district regions by the colonial settler regime for Europeans and Africans not only so graphically established the framework within which both capitalist and peasant petty-commodity production could be carried out but also undermined the foundation of the old system of land tenure and land use in Kenya. As Dr. W. Allan puts it,

one of the first effects of the division of Africa among European administering and colonizing powers was to solidify the population-land patterns which had previously been, to a considerable extent, fluid. When a community increased until the numbers on the land it occupied exceeded the critical level for the system of land use, sections hived off and settled elsewhere or the land area was increased by occupation of unclaimed tracts, or by peaceful agreement...or by aggressive expansion. Natural checks, warfare, and customs limiting fertility, probably restricted the general rate of population increase to a relatively low level and as communities waxed and waned there was a continuous rough and ready adjustment between population and land. The peace of the suzerain powers disrupted this mechanism.²¹

This meant that first, and notwithstanding the important implications of the reserve boundaries, most African communities continued to base their land use and tenurial practices on the old pre-capitalist pattern: their agricultural production both for market and for internal consumption was carried out in a fairly

traditional way as there were few, if any, innovations in terms of farming techniques or farm inputs. Second, the reserve boundaries and new laws governing land ownership stopped all pre-colonial migratory movements which had occurred in the event of population increases, soil exhaustion, epidemics or intra-ethnic conflicts. Third, a new phenomenon, that of the institutionalization of clan land emerged from the persistent conflicts over the question of which clan was to own what land in the reserves. Giving evidence to the Kenya Land Commission in 1933, for example, a divisional chief, Waruhiu wa Kungu said that among the Kikuyu of Kiambu there was

continued bickering, strife, and difficulties... between native and native as to who shall be allowed to cultivate patches of land because we are so short of land we have great provocation and we are afraid because we see that now even our own seniors and elders have started quarrelling among themselves over the small bit of land that is left to them.²²

The most conspicuous consequence of these developments was the problem of land shortage as population increased leading to the intensive cultivation of existing and equally diminishing holding per capita. The net result was the continuous exhaustion of the soils which finally led to a general impoverishment of the people. This problem which affected agriculturists and pastoralists alike became the major mitigating factor in the widespread adoption of squatting

both on white plantations and in urban areas. Writing in the Journal of the Royal African Society in 1939, Mrs. E. M. Ward noted that pastoral districts where there were vast stocks—far in excess of the numbers that the land could economically support—overgrazing and overtrampling of the pasture reducing it to dust had become the rule than the exception.²³ This observation is corroborated by the statistics D Storrs Fox, the District Officer for Machakos, gave in his memorandum to the Kenya Land Commission. According to Fox, overstocking was a major problem in Machakos and this, coupled with the high rate of population growth, threatened to turn the district into "an agricultural slum". He pointed out that between 1919 and 1931 the average annual increase of population in the district stood at 3.6%.²⁴ The case was not any different in Kitui where population increased by exactly a third between 1921 and 1931.²⁵

The situation in the whole of Ukamba province was well brought out by the Provincial Commissioner, T. D. Butler. He estimated that of the 5,023 square miles which was the area of the province, 2,866 belonged to non-Africans. This left the Africans with only 2,166 square miles. This area was about 1,384,960 acres of which only 240,000 were of any importance as cultivatable land. The remaining 1,174,960 acres were meant for grazing some 248,805 head of cattle and 340,389 sheep and goats. But, the P.C. noted, most of the

area was useless for grazing due to the spatial distribution of tsetse flies. Only some 300,000 acres could be said to be suitable for grazing. In 1928 the Veterinary Officer estimated that the grazing area available in the "native reserve" was sufficient for only 60,000 head of cattle.²⁵

The problem of land shortage in this period was also having its toll in other areas of Kenya, especially in Central and Nyanza provinces. While in 1932 the Nyanza-based Native Chamber of Commerce was asking to be allowed to purchase European-owned land,²⁷ in the central province Dr. L.S.B. Leakey could declare:

I don't think the reserve as it is now is capable of supporting the number of goats they (the Kikuyu) need. I think they have more now than their reduced lands will carry, and that is why the country is being spoiled. I am speaking of the Kiambu area. I agree that they (goats) should be reduced as regards the number per acre, but I must say the only solution I can see at the moment that would be fair would be to make available a further amount of land for their grazing with the restriction that the number of goats must not exceed a fair and reasonable number.²⁸

Linking land shortage with squatting he said:

Most Kikuyu from Nyeri and Kiambu in Nekuru and Elmenteita area are natives whose family land is now occupied by Europeans. The vast majority of squatters are people who have no family land of their own.²⁹

Chief Waruhiu wa Kungu, when addressing the Commission, said:

If you were to go out with me and see with your eyes the land which we now cultivate and in which we are over-populated, you will be able better to understand what we are saying to you here. Could you but see cattle and sheep belonging to us which we now have to graze by going to European land you will begin to appreciate how sore is our straits and how little place we have for reserves and our stock generally; could you see, Sir, unenviable sites right down on sloping banks of hills, near rivers where we are now forced to build our houses, in many cases because of lack of space, you would begin to appreciate how great our need is. Seeing that we have come to such sore straits of overcrowding during a mere thirty years can you conceive what our position will be like in the next thirty years if we are not helped(?) Seeing that we are not now allowed to go out as we used to and buy more land as the needs require, what sir are you going to tell His Majesty the King, the kikuyu should do, or the other natives who are lacking land?30

We have elsewhere in this section suggested that though land shortage was a major factor in the decisions Africans made to migrate from the reserves, there were other equally, if not more important, factors which made these people to elect to move out of the reserves. Perhaps the most important development in Kenya in the period before 1939 was widespread socio-economic change which was precipitated by the extension of the cash-

based market economy. While in the White Highlands the capitalist impulse was strong enough to supplant pre-capitalist relations of production in the reserves the need to earn cash to pay taxes and to respond positively to the diffusion of means of consumption (household goods, clothes, shoes, radios and other miscellaneous items of personal consumption) into pre-capitalist African households modified pre-capitalist modes of productions towards peasantization. This modification was to a large extent, if not wholly, the result of the necessities of the expanded reproduction of capitalism whose basic denominator was the progressive socialization of labour through the separation of the African from land as the immediate objective of condition of production and the growth of a commodity economy in which production was no longer in order to satisfy a direct need of the producer but to create and realise exchange-value. This process created the context within which Africans entered the market as sellers of both raw materials and cheap labour.

It can also be argued that the expansion of capitalism and its consequent reproduction in the Kenyan social formation generated uneven development on both the regional and structural level. Regionally, the establishment of the White Highlands which was characterized by high grade land with appropriate climate and overhead capital and where a cash-crop economy could flourish vis-a-vis the reserves polarized

Kenya into two regions of unequal development. Indeed, the absence of appropriate climate and infrastructure in the latter obstructed development hence to find means of sustenance people had to migrate to the former or to towns.* Structurally, uneven development also manifested itself in the form of rural social differentiation which influenced migration in complex ways. The acceptance of a person's right to alienate his land, for example, allowed some individuals with political clout to accumulate large holdings at the expense of other members of the community. Evidence from central province suggest that while there was in principle no land shortage, there was, in practical terms, a great difficulty in gaining access to land for some members of the community "as reactionary chiefs and elders refused to allow them to cultivate or build houses".³¹ Indeed, it seems that pioneer squatters in central province were displaced Kiambu Kikuyu who first of all moved to become ahoi in Fort Hall.³² This development gives us probably the best explanation of economic differentiation among the Kikuyu where right holders retained access to their land to push off the ahoi or tenant farmers from land to which they held rights. Canon Harry Leakey in February 1919 pointed out this anomaly when he said that the Kikuyu

*A couple of case histories of individuals who migrated for these reasons are cited on pp. 156-159

squatters were almost invariably not "Githaka owners"; they were "merely the floating population who (had) gone to look for space to make gardens and graze sheep, because their own families did not possess enough to let them settle permanently on their land".³³

L.S.B. Leakey summarises this point aptly when he says:

Possibly 90% of those who became squatters in the settlers' areas were landless shoi who went to the farms because they decided that the chances of ever ceasing to be shoi and finding someone who would let them buy even two acres of land in their own region was so small that it seemed better to live on virgin land owned by a European farmer with the permission to cultivate it.³⁴

Growing landlessness in the face of rapid growth of both human and animal populations, regional differentiation as well as structural differentiation and the diffusion of means of consumption into the African households were not the only factors which led to migrations. There were other less overt responses to the colonial situation in the reserves which made movement to either European farms or towns palatable to Africans. Some students of African nationalism and trade unionism have for sometime now tended to see the 1922 Nairobi "Thuku Rising" as an overt expression of these two strands in the historical development of Kenya.³⁵ While we generally agree with this contention, it is, however, important to note that economic and political oppression as it was in this period cannot be seen as the only,

or even major, factor in the people's response to the situation. The rising was just one of the many responses Africans displayed in the face of the factors mentioned above. Available evidence shows that in their reaction to some of these factors Africans chose not to fight but to migrate from the reserves to white plantations or towns. Among the other issues which led to this varied response was forced recruitment of labour and taxation. This movement had started during the First World War when many young Kikuyu avoided enlistment for carrier corps and went as far as Lumbwa District where they were welcomed as squatters by local farmers.³⁶ It was also noted, in 1920, that Kikuyu were emigrating from their reserves to escape tax and other obligations and were settling on European farms" right down the line from Lumbwa to Nairobi.³⁷

We have dealt at length with the Kamba and the Kikuyu, not because they were the only ones affected by the factors mentioned above. Communities like the Nandi were equally affected. According to the Native Affairs Department in Nairobi the number of able-bodied male Africans in employment between 1927 and 1931 showed an upward trend with June 1929 recording the highest (167,661) and November 1931 recording the lowest (129,195). In Nandi District the highest and lowest employment were recorded in November 1930 (6,431) and April 1928 (3,564) respectively. Which means Nandi District formed about 3.84% of the

highest employment and 2.78% of the lowest in the colony between 1927 and 1931. Hence on the basis of monthly averages, the District had 3.04% of the colony colony's total highest monthly average and 2.30% of the total lowest monthly average. According to the Chief Registrar of Natives, if 4,000 Nandi were at work, it represented 50% of the working male population. This was higher than any other district in the colony.³⁸ However, he pointed out that the figures on which the assessment was based were

...fallacious as the % is based on the population residing in the reserve and does not include the families of natives resident on farms, which probably total 40,000 souls, though it does include some resident native labourers amongst the Nandi male workers who are not counted in the total population.³⁹

In 1929 alone labour figures throughout the year consistently showed that over 50% and at times 80% of able-bodied Nandi males were at work. In 1931 it was recorded that they led in terms of percentage in the list of able-bodied males in employment in the colony. The figure had risen from 50-80% in 1929 to 90% with the average for the year being 69%. This was only slightly above Kiambu District which recorded 68%.⁴⁰ They were still topping the list in the Chief Registrar of Natives' statistics of the % of able-bodied males in employment in 1932.⁴¹ These figures point to the fact that the extension of the cash-based market economy, the land expropriation of 1906

and 1919,⁴² taxation and the question of labour put a lot of strains on the Nandi pre-capitalist economy.⁴³ According to available evidence there was both overstocking and overpopulation following the 1906 and 1919 land expropriation in Nandi District. These two factors had, by 1939, made the Nandi to comprise the second largest group numerically as squatters in the colony. To add to their difficulties, their "reserve" was in quarantine against rinderpest, pleuro pneumonia and East Coast Fever annually from 1908 to 1924 and 1931 to 1936. This meant a prohibition on stock movement outside the reserve without inoculation and which precluded trade in cattle of any kind. Opportunities to obtain cash were thereby badly curtailed, particularly in cases of making payments for cattle inoculations which many of the Nandi simply refused to pay for;⁴⁴ as well as getting cash for the payment of taxes and for buying household essentials.

From the foregoing, we can conclude that though landlessness was an important determinant in emigration, it had its roots not only in population explosion but also in both regional and structural differentiation in colonial Kenya before 1939. Thus just as the institution of taxes, forced recruitment of labour and landlessness forced vast numbers of Africans into wage-labour, so did uneven regional development, the creation of reserves and uneven development in the form of rural social differentiation

coupled with the diffusion of means of consumption play determinant roles in taking the decision to move to either white farms or to urban centres.

The question of taxes and forced recruitment of labour have been alluded to. As a matter of clarity it should be pointed out that the use of force and taxation were two major characteristics of early 20th century Kenyan colonial economy when it came to the provision of labour. While the use of force can be said to have been more direct than taxation, in either case both methods put arbitrary powers in the hands of chiefs who were generally out of the sight of the white administration. According to the 1920-1921 Annual Report of the Nyanza Provincial Commissioner "the chiefs were undoubtedly resorting to undesirable methods of keeping up the labour supply" and as a direct consequence, there were a "large number of desertions and a growing feeling of discontent" among the local population.⁴⁵

Although the African population between 1900 and 1939 was not fully proletarianized and fully divorced from the means of production (land), by the mid-1920s that well-known Fabian critic of the colonial regime in Kenya, Norman Leys, estimated that more than half of the able-bodied men in the two largest agricultural communities in Kenya (the Kikuyu and the Luo)⁴⁵ as well as such small communities as the Nandi were working

on European farms. Indeed, between 1920 and 1931 the average labour units per month on European farms more than doubled (see table 3.1). This observation does not mean that African emigration was only to European farms. Although up till 1948 there were no proper censuses in the colony, a glimpse at the available evidence strongly suggests that towns also received their share of these refugees from rural poverty, taxation and the general harassment of the colonial administration and their agents.

Table 3.1: The African Agricultural Labour Force in Kenya between 1921-1930

Year	Average labour units per month on European Farms
1920	53,709
1921	67,388
1922	61,649
1923	70,957
1924	87,092
1925	78,527
1926	84,611
1927	102,074
1928	114,320
1929	110,697
1930	125,885
1931	120,210

Source: Agricultural census and annual reports, quoted in M.R.Dilley, British policy Towards Kenya Colony, (London: Cass, 1966), p.235.

The scanty statistics available show, for example, that Nairobi's population more than doubled between 1914 and 1934, then doubled again in the following ten years. Between 1948 when the first colony-wide census was taken and 1963 the population of the town increased by over 15 per cent (see table 3.2).

Table 3.2: Area and Population of Nairobi, 1901-1963

Year	Area		Population			
	Acres	Sq.Miles	Euro- pean	Asian	African	Total
1901	4,480 ^a	7.0 ^a	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
1906	N.A.	N.A.	642 ^b	3,581 ^b	9,300 ^b	13,523
1909	N.A.	N.A.	799 ^c	3,836 ^c	9,524 ^c	14,161
1911	N.A.	N.A.	968 ^c	3,366 ^c	11,773 ^c	16,107
1921	N.A.	N.A.	2,339 ^b	8,915 ^b	N.A.	-
1923	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	12,000 ^b	-
1926	N.A.	N.A.	2,665 ^b	9,199 ^b	18,000 ^b	29,864
1929	N.A.	N.A.	4,479 ^d	10,978 ^d	32,000 ^d	47,457
1934	N.A.	N.A.	5,400 ^d	15,000 ^d	27,000 ^d	47,400
1936	N.A.	N.A.	5,600 ^d	16,000 ^d	28,000 ^d	49,600
1940	N.A.	N.A.	6,800 ^d	17,700 ^d	41,000 ^d	65,500
1944	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	108,900 ^a
1948	20,542 ^a	32.4 ^a	13,500 ^d	38,000 ^d	77,000 ^d	128,500
1951	N.A.	N.A.	15,000 ^d	54,000 ^d	80,000 ^d	149,000
1953	N.A.	N.A.	16,000 ^d	60,000 ^d	100,000 ^d	176,000
1962	22,400 ^a	35.0 ^a	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	266,794 ^e
1963	170,364 ^a	266.0 ^a	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	342,764 ^e

Notes:

a - Dorothy M. Halliman and W.T.W. Morgan, The city of Nairobi in W.T.W. Morgan (ed.), Nairobi: city and Region, (Nairobi: OUP., 1967), p.100.

b - Report of the Local Government Commission, 1927, Vol.1. Nairobi and its Environs. Mombasa and its Environs (London: The

Crown Agents for the colonies,
1927), p.7

c - KNA: DC/NBI. 1/1/1, Political
Record Book , Nairobi District
commencing 1899.

d -Nairobi Municipality, Annual Reports
of the medical officer of Health.

A look at tables 3.1 and 3.2 shows that during the periods 1920-1931 and 1926-1936 the number of Africans moving either to European farms or to Nairobi more than doubled in a space of about ten years. It is significant to note here that these two periods correspond to the time when there was, as we saw in our analyses on the economic conditions in the reserves increased forced recruitment of labour, taxation and the general need to satisfy newly created consumption tastes among the Africans. In the case of towns, it was not only Nairobi where these Africans were moving to. Indeed, according to available statistics, there were even larger numbers of Africans moving to other towns like Mombasa and Nakuru. For example, Dr. Kerim K. Janmohamed estimates that in 1921 there were 2,484 African labourers in employment in Mombasa. This number had swollen to 8,440 in 1933 and 20,950 in 1946.⁴⁶ This is compared to the African population in Nairobi (whether in employment or not) of 23,176 in 1933 and 60,800 in 1946⁴⁷ respectively. As Janmohamed notes, these figures for Mombasa were just a section of the total African population which was estimated at 27,000 in 1921, 57,000 in 1948 and 111,847 in 1962. In this year (1962) almost half of the African population was from upcountry districts.⁴⁸ Nakuru town displayed a similar picture. The growth of the African population which was composed of mainly Kikuyu, Luo and Luyia from upcountry districts was: 1915/16-400;

1919/20-1,200; 1926-2,200; 1931-3,500; 1936-3,150; 1940-8,041; 1946-9,000; 1948-12,845; 1955-15,000 and 1962-30,189. In this year (1962) the African population of the town consisted of 13,937 Kikuyu, 6,345 Luyia and 5,908 Luo.⁴⁹

As we have already pointed out, the growth of these urban populations had the same roots as the populations on white farms. Recent research on economic conditions in reserves during colonialism has shown that as early as 1918 the land situation was pathetic. By the 1930s this had become so acute in Kiambu, Fort Hall and Northern Nyanza that a landless class had become a reality.⁵⁰ The same problem, compounded by overstocking, had created a similar situation among the Kitui and Machakos Kamba. Cucu Esther Ngima, 73, who came to Nairobi in 1934 and did odd jobs here and there first as an ayah and then as a cleaner at Nairobi Hospital in the 1950s, pointed out that in Nyeri where she was born, taxation and forced labour were so intolerable that many young men left for either towns or white farms. Asked why she came to Nairobi in 1934, she said that though her parents and other members of the family could still work the small piece of land, they had, they could not raise enough money for taxes and buy items of personal consumption. There was a general feeling in the reserve that it was in Nairobi where money to meet all these demands could be found:

My parents and other members of the family worked the small piece of land we had and occasionally harvested enough for home use only. At times we could harvest enough for use and for sale but money raised this way was not enough to pay taxes, buy clothes and other things. Those who had been to Nairobi and came back were always smartly dressed. They also brought nice things to the members of their families. We who were in the reserve decided to find out how we could also get these things in Nairobi.⁵¹

Another informant Mr. Gachara Ndong'a, who came to Nairobi in 1939 and worked for a long time as a caddy related the same experience. He said that Africans did not come to Nairobi for raha but because of the "terrible" living conditions in the reserve. In Fort Hall there was not enough land to be divided among members of a family, so that since their wealth lay in the accumulation of cows, goats and other commodities that could be exchanged for money, they had to come to Nairobi to look for jobs which could enable them to have decent lives and to accumulate live-stock.⁵²

The rate of outmigration from the reserves to towns was even higher in subsequent years during and after the Second World War. Apart from the squatter crisis of the 1930s which was precipitated by the need to introduce mixed farming on European farms, there was also the modernization of European agriculture and

the establishment of secondary industries in the colony. The Second World War period created conditions favourable to these developments. Unlike the pre-war period when European agriculture was characterized by lack of technology which could make profitable utilization of alienated land possible (see table 3.3) coupled with the availability of only short-term high interest rates as well as the farmers' little control over world prices, the second world war period created conditions in which mechanized agriculture and all that goes with the process of modernization in the sector could take place.⁵³

Table 3.3: Uncultivated and Available land on European-owned Estates (in acres)

European owned alienated land.	Land alienated but not owned	Land beneficially occupied under crop stock.	Land owned but not beneficially used.	Land owned but not occupied or cultivated.
A	B	C	D	E
6,847,000	845,440	2,828,000	2,562,000	1,457,000

Source: East African standard, 11.9.31 quoted in R.M.A. van Zwanenberg, Colonial capitalism and Labour in Kenya 1919-1939 (Nairobi, E.A.L.B. 1975), p. 216.

According to van Zwanenberg, land owned but not occupied or cultivated (E in the table) had never been visited; therefore there was no question on its

development by the owners. The most interesting thing was that 4.0 million acres (D and E in the table) was owned but not used, and "of this 1,061,833 acres was said to be used for squatter crops or cattle, that is, roughly one-sixth of the total of alienated land or 40% of the land that was beneficially used was in fact used by Africans."⁵⁴

Indeed, according to the 1942 special agricultural census, there were 43,175 male squatters on European farms. This was a considerable increase upon the 1934 figure of 28,939. When the first economic survey of squatter labour was taken in 1948, it was found out that there was a total aggregate figure of 202,944 squatters of whom 42,813 were men from seven of the most populated districts in the colony.⁵⁵ This development began to come into direct contradiction with the developments the war had initiated in Kenya. As we have pointed out above, in this period there was the introduction of mechanized farming on European farms. This can be attributed to the Lend Lease Agreement between Britain and the United States of America where the latter provided the former and her colonies with credit for the period of the war for the essential war-time needs. The colonial government used this to increase her purchases of farm machinery by tenfold.⁵⁶ In 1941 the mechanization of European agriculture began at a fast pace. To add to

this, and quite unlike the pre-war period, the colonial Government started granting credit to white farmers as well as organizing production through District Committees. These committees operated under the umbrella of the Board of Agriculture which "directed the committees as to the quantity and type of farm produce required as contribution to the war effort". The government also offered white farmers fixed prices for bulk purchases of their crops, a move which had the consequence of not only sheltering them from the world market but also of assuring them of both sales and profits.⁵⁷

As Colin Leys puts it, "The war reprieved the colonial economy" through not only these changes but also through the sustained demand which the war had created and which unexpectedly continued after it. By 1947 the country had already experienced seven years of continuous demand which had been created by the Ethiopians campaign. In this campaign large numbers of Italian prisoners came to be held in Kenya and refugees from Poland and elsewhere were subsequently sent there too. This led to the rapid rise in the local purchasing power "while the shortage of shipping had led to a call for Kenya to become not only self-sufficient in foodstuffs, and a source of supply for other theatres of the war, but also as far as possible a manufacturer of its own consumer products."⁵⁸

The years 1945-1960 saw a rapid expansion of the agricultural sector. As after the First World War, so also after the Second, more white settlers were sought for settlement in Kenya to put to profitable use the large tracts of land that lay unutilized or underutilized in the highlands. In 1946 an agricultural settlement Board was established with a loan of £1.2 million from London to encourage new settlers. The success of this Board can be seen in the increase of the number of settler farmers from 1,700 in 1938-1939 to 3,600 in 1962,⁵⁹ As shown in the table below (Table 3.4:), this increase corresponded with the increase in the number of acres occupied and beneficially utilized.

Table 3.4: White settlement in the Kenya Highlands.⁶⁰

Year	Settlers	occupied acreage
1903	100	?
1915	1,000	4.5m
1920	1,200	3.1m
1934	2,000	5.1m
1939	1,700	?
1942	3,000	6.3m
1953	4,000	7.3m
1962	3,600	?

These developments were given leverage by the continuation of the wartime policies of market stabilization, controlled prices and the extension of government credits to the farmers.

These changes in European agriculture had far-reaching consequences on African squatters on the farms. Apart from beefing up the European position in terms of efficiency, hence preventing African agriculture from direct competition, the diffusion of new means of production, or more specially, new instruments of labour (tractors, improved seeds, fertilizers, etc.) meant a move towards labour-saving techniques or the development of forces of production. This meant a contradiction in the prevailing nature of the relations of production whose solution lay in the repatriation of African farm labourers back to the reserves. Though there are no precise statistics showing the number of Africans who were thus forced out of the Highlands in this period, there is however evidence to show that the move towards, first, the establishment of an European dairy industry and then the mechanization of agriculture signalled a reversal in the demand for African labour on the farms. As Wokabu wa Mungai whose parents moved from Kiambu in the late 1920s in search of land in the Elmenteita area puts it,

The 1930s were indeed bad years for squatters. At first we were welcomed by wazungu to work for them. But this was not to last for long because while our labour was good and worth having, our animals were not wanted. To the wazungu they were a hinderance to the development of beef and dairy industry.⁶¹

In the 1930s there had been a move towards the

reform of the squatter system in the colony. Though the 1923 Master and Servants Ordinance contained clauses for the control of squatters, its applicability was made difficult by European settlers who wanted African cheap labour in large numbers. According to this ordinance, if a person wanted to be a farm labourer he not only had to show that he genuinely needed the job but he also had to have a proper contract of service to warrant his stay on the farms. In 1925 the Native Residents' Ordinance was promulgated but it seems that it too failed to achieve any of the two aims contained in its predecessor. The failure of these two ordinances can be attributed to the continuous need of cheap African labour. However, starting this year (1925), there emerged a controversy over the issue of the value of squatter in the Highlands. To the European stockowners squatters were an indispensable factor in the development of their industry so long as no more squatter cattle was allowed into the highlands and that those already there be gradually removed.⁶² To the European cash crop growers there was no point to talk about squatter cattle as they ran no risk of the introduction of disease. Indeed, to this group of settlers, better and more stable supply of labour was commensurate with their squatters keeping stock.⁶³

This controversy led the Chief Veterinary Officer in 1929 to declare that "the welfare of the stock

industry in the settled areas greatly depends on the elimination of native-owned stock from the farms." The argument here was that initial steps taken to develop a livestock industry in the colony had been hindered by the presence of "native stock" which spread rinderpest, bovine pleuro pneumonia and East Coast Fever, diseases to which imported stock had no resistance and diseases which were caused by animals with no economic value at all. The resolution of this controversy was pegged on two alternatives. First, there was the suggestion that European stock be kept in isolation from African stock. Secondly, there was the feeling that since the presence of African livestock on European farms was the direct result of the quest for African labour, both the types of stock be treated equally. But with determined efforts, the government, through the Veterinary Department, the second alternative was abandoned and African stock had to be removed from the farms in large numbers, a move which had been sanctioned by the Hall Commission in 1929 and was given the stamp of approval by the Carter Commission Report in 1934.

Whatever the controversy and its ramifications, for the European settlers, whether cash crop growers or ranchers one thing was clear: if the need for pasture was one of the major factors which led the Africans into squatting, then any move to eliminate stock from white farms meant the returning of these

Africansto the reserves. Indeed, as Field Jones put it in 1929,

The native has never properly understood how insecure his tenure as a squatter has been, nor has he been able to visualize the possibility that the time would come when he would be called upon to withdraw his cattle from the farms.....The pity of it is, of course, that now through his refusal to take advantage of the opportunity to sell, he is going to loose through the almost certain death of his cattle, practically all the wages which he has earned during the time he has been squatting.⁶⁴

Earlier on, in 1919 when some 100 square miles of Nandi land was alienated for the New Nandi Allotments (NNA), on the advice of R.A. Hempsted, the Provincial Commissioner for Nyanza, Field Jones, the District Commissioner at Kapsabet, pointed out that only 50% of the 654 square miles (209,280 acres) of land left to the Nandi was suitable for grazing. He added that whatever the rights of the situation

... there can be no doubt whatever that the Nandi, as a tribe, are of the opinion that the amount of grazing left to them in the Reserve is not sufficient for their needs.⁶⁵

what R.A. Hempsted had not understood was that the Nandi moved their herds over large tracts of land partly in order to obtain fresh grazing and partly as a prophylactic against disease.

Looked at closely, these two quotations from a colonial officer illustrate the kind of dilemma the

African squatter found himself in. On the one hand he had left for the white farms in search of pasture; on the other he was now being asked to leave and, if not, sell his cattle. It seems evident that most of the squatters opted not to sell their stock and, from around 1930, started to return to the reserves. This aggravated the problem of congestion to the extent that most of them had either to move back to the farms or to towns. Giving evidence to the Kenya Land Commission, Dr. Arthur said that by 1934 the return to the farms had begun to manifest itself. This was because, as Dr. L.S.B. Leakey told the same commission, "there is no room for him in the area to which he really belongs, so he is forced to give up and stay where he is despite conditions being against him."⁶⁶

Throughout 1935 and 1936 squatter movement was from the farms to the reserves. As Fazan (though he did not have ready statistics on which he based his conclusions), the secretary of the 1929 Kikuyu Land Tenure Report and of the 1933-34 Kenya Land Commission, pointed out, between 1921 and 1927 the movement of squatters was from the reserves to the settler farms.⁶⁵ This movement was static between 1928 and 1929 and from 1930 onwards the process was reversed with the movement being from the farms back to the reserves.⁶⁷ This created more problems in a situation whereby population pressure on the limited land resources was already acute. We have elsewhere in this section

pointed out that finding conditions so intolerably harsh in the reserves, these returnees moved either back to the farms or to towns. Looking at the African population of Nairobi in this period (see table 3.2) we see that while between 1923 and 1931 it increased by 14,000 (from 12,000 to 26,000) between 1940 and 1948 it shot up by 36,000 (from 41,000 to 77,000).

Putting the whole issue into perspective, a major observable result was two interconnected processes: on the one hand there was the aggravation of peasant struggles and peasant structural differentiation. It is important to note that these processes had been going on as the gradual intergration of the Kenya rural districts into the capitalist circulation process had created, encouraged and nurtured peasant differentiation where the richer strata through the purchasing of additional land had moved towards the employment of more modern methods of cultivation which required less labour. Indeed, on the eve of the "squatter crisis" of the 1930s, the growing commercialization of land and the utilization of new farming methods had already created relative surplus population in the reserves. On the other hand there was the spatial displacement of labour.

These processes were interconnected because the relative absence or failure of peasant struggles and differentiation intensified the spatial displacement

of labour. The letter, when it directly related to the movement to towns and the acquisition of a consciousness had a feedback effect on the former since the links between town and country were rarely irrevocably broken.

To conclude this chapter, we can say that between 1900 and 1933 there were a number of processes taking place in Kenya which had a direct bearing on the Africans in the countryside. The most important of this was the pauperization of the Africans which took place within the wider context of the penetration of capitalism into agriculture, a penetration whose manifestation in this period was the changing nature of labour relationships as the capital owning class, the settlers, monopolized and controlled access to the factors of production and distribution. This changing nature of labour requirements can thus be explained in terms of the particular circumstances of capital and development which determined the type of relationship which the settlers required. Thus, while after the First World War, when the conditions of labour shortage and the low capital development of farms directed settlers to seek squatter labour to satisfy their labour needs, the subsequent economic problems which arose and the gradual move towards mixed farming altered the labour needs of some of the farmers. The proposed amendments to the Draft Bill to regulate the residence of African labour on farms

in 1934⁶⁸ signalled a move towards the provision of a legal framework within which a new relationship between settlers and African labour could be regularised. In other words, the shift that occurred in the 1930s was one in which the encouragement or even coercion of squatters to come and settle on white farms was discarded in favour of the removal of African stock and the retaining of their owners as labourers. This displayed the nature of capitalism in its move to subordinate Africans to the needs of capital. The time at which this change took place is significant; the move towards mixed farming was occurring at a time when the growth of non-agricultural enterprise, in particular secondary industry in towns, was becoming manifest with a shift in the principal locus of African employment from rural to urban areas. Thus, whereas in 1936 the ratio of agricultural to non-agricultural employees was 60:40, by 1944 these figures had been reversed.⁶⁹

In other words the development of mixed farming in the Highlands and the consequent removal of Africans from European farms led to the creation of what Karl Marx and Lenin in their studies on British as well as Russian agriculture called the "reserve army" in the Kenyan rural areas. According to Karl Marx, the formation of a reserve army of unemployed is an integral part of the process of the accumulation of capital and the development of capitalism. Although serving

to keep down wages and to allow sudden expansion of capitalism to absorb and dispose of labour, the reserve army of labour is generated out of the technical changes involved in the attempt to increase the productivity of labour.⁷⁰ The accumulation of capital involves not only quantitative, but qualitative changes as well, concerned with the increasing weight of machinery which increasingly is not so much put to work by labour, but puts labour to work as the labour process becomes rationalized at a higher level of organization. Although more and more labour is employed in the capitalist production process, in relation to the magnitude of total capital fewer and fewer workers are employed because the extension of production involves economies of scale and centralization of production. Thus, to paraphrase Karl Marx for the purpose of our study, Kenya's agricultural industry's whole form of motion depended on the constant transformation of a part of the working African population into "unemployed or semi-employed" 'hands?'⁷¹ This led to different forms of existence for the reserve army of what Marx called the "latent surplus population" - a most primitive form of existence. This was the agricultural population which was once forced into wage labour by the development of the capital wage labour on land and which was, by 1939, constantly but "latently" on the point

of moving into centres of industry. It seems that in Kenya, there was the unfettered development of the urban and rural capital, the latter separating the smallest land holders from their land, their means of production generating a supply of dispossessed population which in subsequent years became a "floating" or urban-based surplus population.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 Richard Sandbrook and Robin Cohen, "Introduction," The Development of an African Working Class: Studies in Class Formation and Action (London: Longman Group Limited, 1975), p. 13
- 2 A.L. Epstein, Politics in an Urban African Community (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1958), chapter VII.
- 3 P.C. Lloyd, The New Elites of Tropical Africa (London: Oxford University Press, 1966).
- 4 J.C. Mitchell and A.L. Epstein, "Occupational Prestige and Social Status". Africa, 29(1959).
- 5 Walter Elkan, Migrants and Proletariens (London: Oxford University Press, 1969).
- 6 H.J. and R.E. Simons, Class and Labour in South Africa (Penguin African Library, 1969).
- 7 Jack Woods, The Roots of Revolt (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1960), p. 252.
- 8 Richard Moorson, "Underdevelopment, Contract Labour and Worker Consciousness in Namibia, 1915-1972" in Journal of Southern African Studies 4, 1, October 1977. p.54.
- 9 J.C. Mitchell, "Wage Labour and African Population Movements in Central Africa" in K.M. Barbour and R.M. Prothero (Eds.), Essays on African Population (London, 1961), p. 234.
- 10 The East African Royal Commission Report 1953-1955 (London: HMSO, CMD 9475, 1955), pp.200-201.
- 11 Ibid., p. 201
- 12 F.D. (Later Lord) Lugard, The Dual Mandate in Tropical Africa, 3rd Edition (Edinburg and London: Blackwood, 1926), pp.79-80.
- 13 Mary Parker, "Political and social Aspects of the Development of Municipal Government in Kenya with Special Reference to Nairobi. (London: Ph.D. Thesis, 1948), p.75. Behind the Government offices ran the Nairobi River through a swamp cultivated almost entirely by Indians. On the borders of the swamp were, by 1910, to be found several houses some of which were occupied by labourers on the various Indian "Shambas" and some by prostitutes who paid rent to Indian canars. The earliest known African villages were on the

further side of the swamp a distance of about half a mile. These included the Somali camp, Somali Village, Mombasa village, Maskini, Pangani and Unguja. There was also a Kikuyu settlement in the Municipal Forest Reserve of Parklands. The Nairobi District was bordered on the South and East by the Athi River, on the North by the Getathuru and Nairobi Rivers and on the West by the Ngong Road and the Western boundaries of the Roman Catholic Mission lands. In the area were situated some 30 farms, besides large numbers of small holdings and building sites. Coffee and sisal plantations as well as livestock farming were to be found on these farms. It is possible that most of the early African settlers in Nairobi were farm labourers and quarry workers on the aforementioned farms and building sites. For further information see KNA: PC/CP.1/8/1, Political Record Book, Nairobi District KNA: DC/NBI. 1/1/1, Political Record Book, Nairobi District and KNA: DC/MKS. 1/4/1, Nairobi District Annual Report 1910-11.

- 14 Anthony Clayton and Donald Savage, Government and Labour in Kenya 1895-1963 (London: Frank Cass, 1974), p.XX.
- 15 Colony and Protectorate of Kenya, Report of the Local Government Commission, 1927, vol.1. Nairobi and its Environs. Mombasa and its Environs (London: The Crown Agents for the Colonies, 1927), p.7.
- 16 On the "Push" and "Pull" theory of urbanization see P.M. Hauser, "Introduction" in P.M. Hauser and L.F. Schnore, The Study of Urbanization (New York, 1966), pp.37ff; J.C. Caldwell, African Rural-Urban Migration: The Movement to Ghana's Towns (Canberra/London, 1966) and J.C. Mitchell, "The causes of Labour Migration" in CCTA, Migrant Labour in Africa South of the Sahara 6th International Labour Conference, Addis Ababa, 1961.
- 17 Richard D. Wolff, The Economics of Colonialism. Britain and Kenya 1870-1930 (Vale University Press, 1974), pp.63-64.
- 18 Ibid.,
- 19 Ibid., p.68
- 20 R.M.A Van Zantenberg with Anne King, An Economic History of Kenya and Uganda 1800-1970 (London and Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press 1975), p.34

- 21 Dr. W. Allan, quoted in Ibid., pp.34-35
- 22 Great Britain, Kenya Land Commission: Evidence vol.1 (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1933), p.132
- 23 E.M. Ward, "Kenya Greatest Problem" in the Journal of the Royal African Society, 38, 1939, pp.370-380.
- 24 Great Britain, Kenya Land Commission: Evidence Vp.II (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1933), pp.1297-1298.
- 25 Ibid., p.301
- 26 Ibid., pp.1317-1320
- 27 Great Britain, Kenya Land Commission: Evidence Vol.III (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1933), p. 2145.
- 28 Great Britain, Kenya Land Commission: Evidence vol.I. (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1933), pp.668, 670.
For his comments on Land shortage and the ever increasing number of goats and sheep brought into Kikuyuland from the Northern Frontier District as well as from Maasailand and Kisii, see KNA: PC/CP.4/1/2, Provincial Annual Report, 1922, p.26.
- 29 Kenya Land Commission: Evidence vol.1, p.670.
- 30 Ibid., p.131. Evidence shows that in the 1920s pasture for Kikuyu livestock in the southwest of Kiambu generally referred to as the Ndeiya grazing grounds were not only far for the people they meant to serve but were also climatically poor for stock. By the end of the 1920s this area had become practically useless hence most Kikuyu started taking with them their stock to European farms. To them the Ndeiya was "insufficient, for many people have taken their cattle on private farms, where they pay for their grazing by milk, labour, money, oxen and cows." see KNA: DC/KBU. 1/15, 1/22 and 1/23, District Annual Reports, 1925, 1929, pp.5-8, 1930, p.6 and KNA: DC/KBU.22 District Annual Report.
- 31 Land Commission of Kenya: Evidence vol.1, Memorandum by Fazan, p.964. The Leader of 8.2.1919 also mentions this tendency.
- 32 M.P.K. Sorenson, Land Reform in the Kikuyu Country (Oxford University Press, 1962), chapter 1, gives perhaps the best explanation of ahoi.

- 33 See KNA: PC/CP. 4/2, February, 1919.
- 34 L.S.B. Leakey, "The Economics of Tribal Life" in The East African Economic Review, 3,1, July 1956, p.180.
- 35 see for example C.S. Rosberg and J. Nottingham, The Myth of Mau Mau: Nationalism in Kenya, (Nairobi: E.A.P.H., 1966), pp.4755 and Makham Singh, History of Kenya's Trade Union Movement to 1952 (Nairobi: E.A.P.H., 1969), pp.9-17.
- 36 KNA: PC/CP.1/1/4 and KNA: PC/NZA.6/4/2.
- 37 KNA: PC/CP. 4/1/2 Provincial Annual Report, 1920.
- 38 KNA: DC/NDI. 1/3 District Annual Report, 1925, p.13.
- 39 Ibid.
- 40 KNA: DC/NDI. 1/3 District Annual Report, 1931, p.10.
- 41 KNA: DC/NDI. 1/3 District Annual Report, 1932, p.16.
- 42 On the issue of Land shortage in Nandi Reserve see KNA: PC/NZA. 3/23/7/1, Field Jones to P.C., Nyanza, 7.2.1922 and further details on the 1919 "Londiani Notes"; KNA: PC/NZA. U1/1/4 and PC/NZA. U1/1/6, Provincial Annual Reports 1918-1919, p.4 and 1919-1920, p.5.
- 43 For a detailed analysis of these elements in the Nandi Colonial Economy as well as a general description of the contemporary situation in the Nandi "Native" Reserve before 1940 see Osaak A.L.A. Olumuallah, "Economic Transformation among the Nandi of Western Kenya 1900-1935" (B.A. Dissetation, University of Nairobi, 1981).
- 44 KNA: DC/NDI. 3/2, Nandi Political Record Book, "Cattle Disease: Veterinary Department Activity Among Nandi Cattle", 1908-1942 and KNA: DC/NDI. 1/1/3, District Annual Report, 1923.
- 45 KNA: PC/NZA. 1/16. P.37.
- 46 Karim K. Janmohammed, "African Labourers in Mombasa, C.1895-1940" in H.A. Ogot (Ed.), Hadith 5: Economic and Social History of East Africa (Nairobi: E.A.L.B., 1975), p.159.
- 47 Municipality of Nairobi, Annual Reports of the Medical Officer of Health, 1933 and 1946.

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CHAPTER FOUR

AFRICAN LIVING CONDITIONS AND COLONIAL POLICY IN NAIROBI, 1900-1939

4.1: Introduction.

The movement of Africans to Nairobi was, in large measure, occasioned by capitalist penetration and transformation of the countryside. What were their living conditions like in the town? Through an analysis of the Kenyan social formation before 1940, it will be suggested that from the very earliest years of the founding of Nairobi, African living conditions were dismal as both the colonial and town's urban authorities adopted epidemiology and sanitation as motives and rationalizations for not only the policy of control and segregation but also for maintaining the African dual identity. The main reason for doing this was the need to lower the long-term costs of reproducing labour power for pax-colonia. By physically separating Africans from the place where labour occurred, the generational reproduction and maintenance of labour power could be carried out mostly in the pre-capitalist sector- in the reserves - at minimal costs. Secondly, it will be suggested that the Nairobi urban policy-makers' response to what came to be known as the "Native Question" in this period was inspired by what had taken place in Victorian England when London became a focal point for the deepening fears and anxieties of the Victorian elite about the endemic

poverty and potential violence of the casual labourer. Just like in London, these twin phenomena were viewed in the image of contagion as a threat to the white settlers' expectations of progress and social order in the seat of white colonial domination in Kenya - Nairobi. Thirdly, it will be suggested that the policy of control and segregation adopted towards Africans started to disintegrate at a time when there emerged basic contradictions between the requirements for the establishment of a pax-colonia and the need to organize society to provide for the mutual access to African labour without having to pay for the heavy social costs of urbanization or losing the dominance of white over black.

4.2: Epidemiology: Rationale for early Segregationist and Control Policies in Nairobi.

The settlement of Africans in Nairobi is as old as the town itself. Initially, these Africans were left by the Protectorate Government to fend for themselves either on the outskirts of the town, if there were "reserves" near enough to accommodate them, or in the town itself. In these areas could be found unplanned settlements with huts made of mud, paraffin tins or thatch. However, with the outbreak of an epidemic of plague in the Indian bazaar, when between 50 and 60 and 21 deaths were recorded in 1902 and 1906 respectively,¹ coupled with the need to maintain

"law and order" made the urban authorities to start contemplating the provision of special accommodation for Africans. Suggestions put forward for this were, however, not acted upon as there emerged the contention that Africans were not an integral part of town life. Thus, as a solution to the continued proliferation of unplanned and scattered settlements, the authorities endeavoured to maintain a degree of control, formulating pass laws which, like the suggestions for the provision of special accommodation, were not implemented due to the lack of a definition of the area in which those subject to the laws could reside.²

The shelving of the question of pass laws does not mean that the situation was left to continue, unabated. Ways and means were sought whereby the authorities wanted, in a more subtle way, to bring the process of African movement to the town under close supervision. The official view at this stage transcended the idea of pass laws as it came to encompass a more racially articulated argument that

...the districts in which Africans have settled may be required for other races; they may be foci for disorder, theft, or disease; or buildings erected or those who inhabit them may be aesthetically displeasing to those who have to live in proximity to them. Hence definite areas (have to be) set aside within the town for African residence.³

The above views were developed between 1900 and

1918 when, despite the authorities' initial indifference towards African accommodation, there was a desperate search for a legal framework in which urban Africans could be defined. This search culminated in 1919 into the definition of an African location along the reserve lines in the countryside. Indeed, the creation of such a location had been under discussion for a long time. For example, the Report of the Land Committee for the East Africa Protectorate had by May 1905 recommended separate locations for separate races.⁴ In the following year the East African Standard was advocating for both locations and passes for areas where there was a large "floating" population of Africans.⁵ In that year a Nairobi Sites Committee actually chose a site for such a location which the Municipal Committee decided to bring within the Municipality once it was realized. The Municipal Committee- and this is important- also decided that the inhabitants of the location were to erect their own houses provided they conformed to the municipal specifications of such erections.⁶

Considering that Somalis were to erect their own houses in 1908 and the Special Committee working on "Native Locations" plans in that year did not mention the provision of municipal housing in the location⁷ is important in itself. It is important in the sense that housing was to be provided by the Africans themselves and this was to be carried out within the

framework of laid down municipal specifications. This introduced a very significant element in the lives of Africans who were to settle in Nairobi in subsequent years. The period 1900-1918 thus saw the eventual isolation of Africans in their own locations (though one did not come up till 1921-22) and the erecting of their own houses as a settled urban policy for Nairobi.

Thus from the beginning Africans were not considered as permanent residents of Nairobi, and all laws pertaining to the town came to be based on the premise, universally accepted in British Africa, that an African's permanent home was in his village.⁸ The justification provided for this was that uprooted in a heterogeneous collection of employees, the Africans would lose the traditional morality and behaviour which appealed to European officials of the day. This was the official view, but available evidence suggests that the establishment of an African location was not an expedient or even a punitive move; it was not even out of a compassionate desire to preserve African traditional morality (whatever this meant). It was above everything a necessary policy goal because, like its equally degrading counterpart in the "Native Reserve" in the countryside, it was a means of storing unskilled African labour for the urban pax-colonia. Indeed, after the demolition of early villages like Mombasa and Maskini and the move of

the African population to the only legal place in Nairobi where Africans could reside - Pumwani which was built in 1921-1922 on what was later admitted to be the poorest soil in the town⁹ - their (Africans') legal access to adjacent arable land was curtailed. Here the Africans could stay for a short time and then go back to their rural homes. Lord Lugard could pontificate that this was in the interests of the Africans as it preserved their traditions. But the logic of the whole arrangement was a reflection of the early 20th century colonial capitalist formation in Kenya whereby the colonial state was not ready to voluntarily pay for the reproduction of labour power which was regarded as "natural" among non-whites. In fact, labour was only mentioned when the African birth rate appeared to decline in the early 1930s.¹⁰

At a higher level, the increase in the technology of health was far too important to be given to a colonial people: it was a resource that was to be allocated for specific gains to colonial and metropolitan economies. For example, the Director of Medical Services suggested in 1939 that:

...the Masai now appreciate that the sterility of their women is due to the high incidence of gonorrhoea As a result, babies are of more importance to them than cattle and it would be a very easy matter, I think, to persuade them to put up considerable funds for ... maternity services as well as for the prosecution of a

venereal disease campaign...¹¹

X It is not surprising, therefore, to find that the organization of labour in Nairobi was strictly in the hands of Nairobi's Principal Medical Officer, the Medical Officer of Health, and the Municipal Native Affairs Officer. It is to the offices of these three that the control of Africans in the town was assigned. While these officials did not always manage to finance their sometimes ill-conceived programmes - for example, "it is to be considered the utmost importance that married Africans should be entirely separated from African bachelors"¹² - they defined the priorities they established for African urban life.

The issue of the creation of an African location in Nairobi was closely tied to the question of not only control but also the segregation of races in the town. Talking about the need to control the African entry into Nairobi, the Chief Native Officer declared before the Feetham Commission in 1927 that

X I consider that it is important, in the interests of the Native generally as well as of other communities, that the ingress of natives to towns and their residence therein should be strictly controlled. Land for occupation of native tribes has been definitely set aside by Government, and natives should not be encouraged to come into towns except for the legitimate purpose of employment or trade.

To him

x those to whom a town naturally offers attractions are idle, vicious, or criminal natives, who seek to avoid tribal control or indeed any control at all.

These Africans had to be controlled because they came to the town not to work

but rather to live 'on their wpts'... either (through) begging or stealing, and they become not only a menace to public security but a definite incubus upon the honest working natives.... 13

Some fourteen years earlier, in 1913, the Simpson Report had pointed out that

x In the interests of each community and of the healthiness of the locality and country, it is absolutely essential that in every town and trade centre there should be well-defined and separate quarters for Europeans, Asiatics, and Africans.... 14

+ Although the White Paper of 1923 prohibited the separation of races in townships by means of legislative enactments, the same effect was gained through restrictive covenants and policies followed to preserve the "White Highlands". Thus in 1926, the land set aside for use by Europeans (comprising 10% of Nairobi's population) encompassed 2,700 acres of the total municipal area of 6,400 acres, leaving the far more numerous Asians (30% of the population) with only 300 acres for residential purposes. 15

X The policy requiring Africans (except for domestic servants who comprised about 1/6 of the African population) to live in segregated areas was implemented through a variety of by-laws, including those which prohibited Africans from leaving these areas at night and those which pledged the local authorities to erect housing in the African Locations.¹⁶ For example By-law 187 made under the Municipal Corporations Ordinance, 1922, and the Local Government (Municipalities) Ordinance, 1928, declared that

The Municipal Council with the approval of His Excellency the Governor may by notice published in the "Gazette" at any time and from time to time declare any area in the Township of Nairobi to be an area in which natives (other than servants housed by their non-native employers) shall not reside after a date to be specified in such notice except with the special written permission of the Town Clerk, who shall take all reasonable and practicable steps to communicate the terms of such notice to all natives resident in the area referred to therein.

From and after the date specified as aforeside in any such notice any native who shall be found between the hours of 10 p.m. and 5 a.m., in the area referred to in such notice, unless possessed of written permission as aforeside or unless he shall be able to prove that he is not residing in such area, shall be guilty of an offence.¹⁷

And By-law 195 stated that

No adult native except natives

being servants housed by their employers, shall reside elsewhere within the Township Area than in the Native Location....

Any native who shall be found elsewhere within the Township than in the native location or on the premises where he resides on any night between 10 p.m. and 5 a.m. shall unless provided with a pass signed by the Superintendent of the Native Location, the D.C., the employer of such native or the responsible agent of such employer be guilty of an offence against this By-law.¹⁸

The idea behind the formulation of these by-laws was, ostensibly, as set forth in the 1933 Carter X

Commission Report:

Having regard to the widely different standards of living observed by natives in Nairobi as compared with other races, we are convinced that considerations of health as well as social amenities demand separate areas. We are, therefore, satisfied that special residential areas for natives are needed in which they should be required to reside unless exempted.¹⁹

From the above quotations one can see that recurrent themes in official circles, when it came to the place of the African in Nairobi, were those to do with crime and diseases. These made it necessary to formulate regulations which could deal with the influx of Africans in the town and their residence once there. But were these the main policy objectives which led to the policy of control and segregation? It is true

that in the period preceding the outbreak of the Second World War, both the central government and the Nairobi urban authorities dealt with African urbanization as essentially a problem of control. It is also true that those Africans who arrived in the town were segregated not only in terms of residence but also in terms of security of tenure. The contrast between European areas and those occupied by Africans was glaring. This, however, does not mean that European residence in the town was characterized by a kind of homogeneity in location, luxury and related matters. There were gapping differences between the Railway and non-Railway personnel residences. As a visitor to Nairobi before the outbreak of the First World War noted in a vivid and clearly emotional description of these differences,

The palatial residences of the railway officers, with tiled roofs and graceful structures lining the lovely flower-spangled and tree-crowned hills, have awakened a sense of injustice in the hearts of men that no plausible speech can eradicate....20

But whether non-railway personnel occupied or lived in less palatial houses compared to those occupied by railway staff is not the issue here. Though the above quotation tells us quite a lot about class cleavage among the whites in the town it tells us nothing about other races. According to eye-witness reports African locations, for example, were

characterized by poor lights on the streets and "public lavatories were very very dirty." Some of them did not have running water. In most cases they had "hard tins like dustbins in which people 'eased' themselves" and they gave "an inescapable offensive smell when (they) were full of faeces, and especially when the municipal workers who removed them were late (as they always were). One public lavatory was used by over a thousand people."²¹ There were no lights, water supply or gas for cooking in what passed as their (African) houses. "The Africans used paraffin or kerosene oil lamps, charcoal fires for cooking, and water drawn in tins or emptied oil drums."²² Giving a comparison between this and areas occupied by Europeans and Asians, Mugo Gatheru says:

The more I saw of those dirty and filthy lavatories in the African locations in Nairobi, the more I felt I should take up the challenge. The more I noted that most of the Europeans and Asians in the city had owned or hired private houses which were built of stone or concrete, tile-roofed, surrounded by beautifully cut fences, lawns of green grasses, trees, and flowers, in cool and healthy sections of the city - the more I became embittered.²³

This observation gives a vivid though emotional description of the idea of the "garden city" with suburbs far removed from the commercial centre of the town. The idea appealed to Europeans as early as the founding of the city. "When the residential area of

Parklands was first opened up," notes the Feetham Commission Report, "most of the people here were people who had been accustomed at home to living in rather confined conditions, and it appealed to them that at least four or five acres around a house would be desirable....."²⁴

Thus giving disease and crime as the basic reasons for the institution of different residential areas, racial segregation was very early insisted upon by the politically dominant European settler elite in Nairobi. As Aidan Southall points out in a general statement on urban growth in East Africa, segregation was inevitable at this stage though it was undoubtedly taken for granted and desired by all. It was only the quality of facilities that was in dispute.²⁵ It is quite clear that the colonial state X gave full backing to these moves. Indeed, it very openly prevented non-whites from buying plots in certain areas of the town. This is indicated in a 1908 advertisement quoted by Mary Parker:

The auctioneers have been requested to give notice at the auction that although it is open for any person to bid for any of the town or residential plots in Nairobi, Parklands, or on the Ngong Road, Asiatics or natives will not be allowed to reside on those in the New Post Office Road, Parklands, or on the Ngong Road.²⁶

Discussing the major mitigating factors which led

X to the inauguration of the policy of control and racial segregation, K.G. McVicar and Mary Parker, two scholars who have studied Nairobi, suggest that the main motives which spurred the decision to isolate Africans in their own locations and hence the promulgation of segregationist policies were, first, the desire to reduce the health hazards which were associated with urban squatter villages in the town and, secondly, there was the urgent need to increase the physical security of the Europeans as well as to improve the efficiency of the African labour force.²⁷

X In refuting this assessment as the "rationale given by Europeans themselves," Van Zwanenberg suggests that the main motive behind the move towards the creation of "native locations" was neither the need to reduce health hazards associated with African dwellings nor was it the need to increase the physical security of Europeans. Rather the whole move was motivated by a racist view of the European who wished to see the colonial community divided at every level along boundaries of race. To him, therefore, the Simpson Report of 1913 gave the necessary articulation to this view thus justifying racial stratification, a stratification which was meant to ensure that the choicest of land was reserved for the privileged "race" and the "native" groups could be controlled since they were only required in the town in their function as labourers.²⁸

Van Zwanenberg is not correct when he dismisses the question of European security. The correct question to pose here is what type of security did the Europeans want? Was it security against disease and crime? We would like to agree with McVicar and Parker that the question of sanitation, whether real or imagined, was quite important in the formulation of segregationist and control policies. It was important not because epidemics created abnormal situations but rather because they sharpened existing behavioural patterns. The perception of the African as a rural dweller who only came to town occasionally betrayed deeply rooted and continuing contradictions in the Kenyan colonial economy. The problem here was that the needs of the Nairobi urban economy were mutually incompatible: while on the one hand the urban authorities needed cheap labour, on the other they needed an urban area free of Africans to avoid the high costs of reproducing this labour. From the time of the founding of the town, diseases like tuberculosis came to be associated with Africans who, because of their habitat, displayed all those characteristics that can be associated with poverty. That the Europeans also contracted these diseases and died from them seemed only to underline the danger of living near the Africans. For example, in 1947 when a thorough analysis of the health situation of the town was done, it was found that the rise in infant mortality rate

*You mean
1000 live
births?*

among the Europeans, Asians and Africans was 42%, 63% and 215% respectively and among the causes of this were gastroenteritis, lung T.B., pneumonia and prematurity. The first three were diagnosed as being closely related to overcrowding while the fourth was related to poverty.²⁹ But this does not mean that it is this occurrence which led to segregation.

1947

x It seems logical to argue that the question of disease was but an excuse, a rationale, for the policies of control and segregation as Van Zwanenberg says but, by hindsight, it seems there was a real fear on the part of the Europeans that Africans who broke away from the traditional forms of control would be encouraged to challenge, at some future date, the existing forms of European control.³⁰ Even the oft cited reason that extensive public housing for African family life would encourage an excessive influx of Africans into Nairobi resulting not only into additional crime and disease but also in an undesirable economic burden on the town had the same force behind it - fear.

y Disease and crime were thus used as a cover-up of the fear Europeans had that if Africans and the African influx into the town were not strictly controlled, there would be a development of feelings of resentment, suspicion and blame against the Europeans

for failing to provide suitable accommodation. Indeed, apart from avoiding the social costs of African urbanization, the Europeans felt threatened by the menace of social disorder and revolution. This fear was to be articulated later by E.R.S. Davies, the African Affairs Officer in the town. In 1941 he said that

We do submit that lack of native housing is a major evil in Nairobi today, and that further delay over the provision of housing may result in the demoralization and undermining of the Nairobi native community which will take many years to redress. We mention also the possibility of serious discontent.³¹ (Emphasis added)

Whereas in Western European societies presentations against epidemics stimulated pre-existing social reform movements and tended to enhance governmental assumption of responsibility for social conditions, the response of the colonial urban authorities in Nairobi remained essentially repressive in character, consistent with their policy of control throughout the pre-1939 period. Across-section of those interviewed maintained that though diseases were rampant in the early years of the town, this had ceased to be a major issue by 1939. There were diseases, but their occurrence had been minimized with time. Disease occurrence in the interwar period could be attributed not to African unplanned settlements but rather, in large part, to overcrowding in the few housing

estates which had been built for both municipal and central government employees. Though there had been a move from mud houses to permanent buildings, these later-day houses were based on the "bed-space" concept and were thus too small for family accommodation. They were not designed for family living but because of the ever-increasing African population they came to accommodate more people as new-comers sought out kinsmen with whom to stay.³² An informant who came to Nairobi from Murang'a in 1939 and started staying in Kariokor explained that the situation was so bad and dehumanizing not purely in terms of health risks the surroundings posed but in terms of deprivation the Africans suffered for lack of privacy. An ayah throughout her stay in Nairobi in the colonial period, Mama Anastansia Wairimu pointed out that a room could accommodate as many as six to seven people with parents sleeping on bed while children and relatives slept on the floor, even under the bed! As rooms were small, ventilation was poor, hence cooking had to be done outside.³³

Israel Mutoka Makomere Amboko, a dhobi-turned-tailor who came from Kakamega in the early 1930s, said that diseases were so prevalent in the early years of the town's history that settlement there was always a risky venture. Those who had been to the town before the First World War used to go back to the rural areas with disheartening stories about diseases like

tuberculosis, malaria, pneumonia and dysentery. But despite this people were always ready to come to the town and try their luck.³⁴

Indeed, from contemporary descriptions of the African habitat in Nairobi in the interwar years, a picture emerges which portrays areas like Pangani, Mombasa, Maskini and Pumwani as areas which exceeded in wretchedness and squalor. These were areas which were characterized by ill-ventilated, mushroom-like rickety, waterless and dilapidated houses. According to our informants, whole streets and many lanes were neither paved nor supplied with sewers nor other drains: in these refuse, debris and filth of every sort lay accumulating, festering and rotting, and that, nearly everywhere, stagnant water accumulated in pools, in consequence of which dwellings were inevitably bad as diseases arose and threatened the health of the whole town. The houses in these estates consisted in most cases of single rooms which, while subject to the worst ventilation, were yet usually kept cold by the broken and more than often badly-fitting windows, and were sometimes damp, badly furnished and thoroughly decrepit. These were houses in which men and women, young and old, slept in revolting confusion. In these localities all considerations of health, morals, and even the most ordinary decency were utterly neglected. Most of these informants concluded that these conditions generated moments of depression which were often

ventilated through drunkenness and debauchery.

These observations are corroborated by a vivid description of one of these localities in a letter to the Town Clerk by E.B. Hosking, the Nairobi Municipal Native Affairs Officer, in 1930. According to Hosking, the Municipal African housing was in "a state of affairs I consider deplorable" because, due to lack of space, residents were keeping their food and wood (firewood) under their beds. This occasioned a situation whereby the rooms could not be properly cleaned. The alum bath was incapable of dealing with "the eggs and deep burrowing vermin" and 24 buckets for about one thousand inhabitants displayed a scandalous state of affairs in the locality.³⁵

But despite the fact that until the 1940s the housing stock for Africans was at best slowly built and inadequate in size, ventilation and other facilities, that though at worst they were badly and haphazardly built and vermin infested, they increasingly became better as the colonial urban authorities continually fought diseases and epidemics. More important, perhaps, than the poor standards of housing in this period was the fact that Africans had no security of tenure, nor had they control over the improvement of their living conditions except in private locations and squatter villages; and even here the fact that they did not own the land on which they built militated against

their making significant improvements. Indeed, the security that might have come with the right of Africans to own property in the town did not exist.³⁶

If diseases were a major issue in the early years of the town's growth and that the colonial authorities had progressively reduced their incidence as the 1930s came to a close as our informants assert, then an explanation as to why the authorities continued to invoke them throughout the interwar years must be sought elsewhere. We would like to argue that the interwar years' policy of control and segregation was not unique to Kenya or any other colonial situation for that matter. For Van Zwanenberg to say that it was entirely an upshoot of colonialism motivated by the desire to divide the colonial community along racial lines between the privileged "race" and the "native" groups is to overlook not only the class character of the colonial settler elite but also the historical origins of the sanitation syndrome in Nairobi. In his study, Outcast London, Gareth Stedman Jones shows how London became after the 1850s a focal point for the deepening fears and anxieties of the Victorian elite about the endemic poverty and potential violence of the "casual worker". These twin phenomena were viewed in the image of contagion as a threat to Victorian expectations of progress and social order. Theorists eventually concluded that urbanism had developed a pathology which endangered society in

Darwinist terms. Their prescriptions for social policy were influenced by epidemiology and sanitary science, but were also developed as an exercise in moral philosophy. The early approaches to perverse urbanism thus employed sanitary legislation to attack overcrowding and slums, which were identified as the "rookeries" or haunts of a criminal class and the "hotbeds" of social decay, "cholera, crime, and chartism."

The general failure of urban renewal policies to eliminate the social problem led to later proposals - which were never realised in law - for reclaiming "respectable" working classes for progressive society while segregating the "residuum" of the "unregenerated poor". The latter would be removed, by compulsion if necessary, to labour colonies outside the imperial metropolis. There social discipline might be instilled and the "imperial race" by saved from contamination.³⁷

The responses to Outcast London by the Victorian elite in the 1850s as analogues to the subject of this section might look far fetched. Indeed, it is possible that the reader might argue that these responses were not identical in origin or conception nor even directly linked to the question of control and racial segregation in Kenya in general and Nairobi in particular. It is true that the responses to the casual worker in London and to the "Native Question" in Nairobi did not have the same origins as one lay in

a rapidly industrializing society while the other had its roots in the articulation of a pre-capitalist mode of production with a capitalist mode. However, it seems reasonable to argue that separated with only about 50 years, the colonial settler elite in Nairobi was an offspring of the 1850s Victorian elite and, therefore, its historical origins lay in that same class that was responding to the casual worker and his revolutionary potential - the English aristocracy. With the theme of law and order implicit in the fear of disease and crime and the association of the two with the African urban residents in Nairobi, we can say that the Nairobi policy-makers found a major source of inspiration from their progenitors in the London of the 1850s. They were the immediate inheritors of an aristocratic culture whose survival amidst rapidly changing economic conditions depended on the elimination of slums which implicitly were seen as rookeries or haunts of a criminal class and hotbeds of social decay, crime, disease and potential revolution. We shall want to show, in chapter six of this study, that the failure of the policy of control led to, like in London, the policy of reclaiming the "respectable" African class (the middle class) which benefitted from the erection of such estates like Maringo, Jericho and Jerusalem while the residuum of the unregenerated poor were relegated into such estates like Kunguni (literally meaning bedbug).

What we are saying in the preceding pages is that Medical Officers and other public authorities in Nairobi before the outbreak of the Second World War were, like their fathers in England, imbued with the imagery of infectious diseases as a societal metaphor. This metaphor powerfully interacted with European racial attitudes to influence the policies of housing and to shape the institutions of segregation. The Nairobi urban health department was of considerable importance in shaping the racial ecology of the town. Overcrowding, slums, public health and safety, often seen in the light of class and ethnic differences in the developed societies of the West, were in Nairobi perceived largely in terms of colour differences as urban race relations came to be widely conceived and dealt with in the imagery of infection and epidemics. It is this sanitation syndrome which can be seen as the major strand in the creation of abysmal African living conditions as it is the one which came to be translated into the policy of control and segregation manifest in the Native Locations. In this context the accident of epidemics became a compelling opportunity for those who were promoting segregationist solutions to largely social problems before 1939.

Maintaining that towns were not meant for Africans while at the same time needing these Africans for the

purposes of pax-colonia, the Nairobi Urban authorities backed by the colonial state found themselves in a contradictory situation. The solution to this contradiction before 1939 lay, as it were, in the use of epidemiology and sanitation as motives and rationalizations for the denial of African permanent residence and/or control in the town. It was also the rationale for avoiding the costs of reproducing the required labour force which could easily be reproduced, at no cost to the settler elite, in the pre-capitalist sector in the rural areas. The underlying question was thus one of overall social control: how to organize society to provide for the mutual access of African labour without having to pay the heavy social costs of urbanization or losing the dominance of white over black. This question arose before the outbreak of the First World War as increasing numbers of Africans came to the town. It continued through the interwar period as the white settler elite increasingly raised the classic complaints of theft, loafing, drunkenness and disease. But these issues, which were articulated into the policy of control and segregation, came to fall into sharp contradictions with developments in the Kenyan social formation as urban and country became so irrevocably linked in the interwar years. What were these contradictions? How were they resolved and with what consequences for African living conditions in Nairobi? The answering of these questions

of necessity requires a brief examination of the Kenyan social formation in this period. This is important because, first, the survival of the policy of control and segregation before the outbreak of the Second World War had its material basis in the nature and character of developments in the Kenyan social formation. Secondly, the analysis of contradictions in this period requires one to move beyond chapter three where our discussion revolved around the examination of rural capitalist transformation and the creation of conditions for the ejection of surplus population into either the "White Highlands" or towns. The necessity for doing this is to try to embrace the question of the relationship between labour and capital on the one hand and between the system of capitalist exploitation and the structural conflicts it generated on the other. After this we shall attempt to establish the relevance of these relationships to African protest and mobilization within the centres of the capitalist mode of production and how it helped in the articulation of new approaches to African living conditions in Nairobi.

4.3: Developments in the Kenya Social Formation and their Relevance to African Living Conditions in Nairobi before 1940.

The policy of control and segregation which was promulgated before 1940 by the Nairobi policy-makers

had its material basis not in colour. Propagated by an elite which comprised solely of the direct descendants of aristocratic Victorian England, control and segregation were historical products which were used at various levels as agents of a system of exploitation* designed primarily to facilitate rapid capital accumulation and was historically used thus by the whites in Nairobi by virtue of their access to state power. The Colonial State, historically perceived as an instrument of racial oppression, was also an instrument of class rule which was used both to entrench and develop a capitalist mode of production and to redistribute surplus between the white settler elite and the metropolis. Any analysis of the policy of segregation and control in Nairobi between 1900 and 1939, must thus go beyond the concepts of sanitation and disease to embrace the specific relations of production of capitalism as well as the manner in which racial laws and policies enacted both effected and effectively operated to disguise the nature of these relations. The central question in our analysis must, therefore, revolve around the nature and extent of the basis of exploitation in the Kenyan social formation before the outbreak of the Second World War.

*The term exploitation is used here in the technical sense of surplus expropriation and appropriation.

Simply put, the question is: how was surplus value extracted: Between 1900 and 1939 the extraction of surplus value rested on the articulation between the pre-capitalist and capitalist modes of production within the overall colonial economic system. In this period production in the so-called "Native Reserves" and the network of kinship relations within their redistributive economies were seen to provide both subsistence and welfare functions for the migrant workers, thus furnishing the bulk of the necessary product for the reproduction of the labour-power needed in the capitalist mode of production. Indeed, it is only within these parameters that an examination of the nature of the migrant labour system in relation to Nairobi and the requirements of metropolitan interests can be made. The use of migrant labour and perfunctory stabilization, though rationalized in terms of disease outbreaks and sanitation problems, were a response to the labour and market requirements of the colonizing power-Britain - based on a rational calculus of costs. Karl Marx, in his study of capitalist organization, explains that workers are included in its system not for their own social interests but because they satisfy the aims and interests of the capitalist system itself.³⁸ Laws and policies were promulgated and administered in such a way that, only those Africans whose labour-power was needed in the town were admitted. The policy of seeing Africans

as temporary residents of the town meant that the basic interests of the African workers and those of the white settler elite were antagonistic. It is this that led to the various laws and regulations referred to in the previous section specifying the conditions of African entry into the town as well as of work and residence.³⁹

The policies of control and segregation were used as a rationale for freeing the white settler elite from the responsibility of providing for the reproduction of labour-power. The provision of inadequate accommodation and the fixing of wages at the subsistence level of the individual worker facilitated a high level of surplus value appropriation. This system of cheap labour was premised on the workers' access to the means of production (Land) in the reserves. In other words, the migrant labour system was not simply a way of bringing worker and employer together: it was a way of realizing immediate super profits necessitated by the development of capitalism in Kenya.⁴⁰ Primitive accumulation in Kenya thus depended not on the separation of labour from the means of production, leaving it with no other means of subsistence than the sale of labour-power as it happened in Europe, but rather on the maintenance and transformation of precapitalist relations of production in the reserves. Labour migration together with

the "native reserve" were the form in which the social transformation required by expanding capitalism was accomplished in Kenya before 1939.

The producers in the precapitalist mode of production, the Africans, were exploited and oppressed not because they were blacks, but because the surplus value created by their labour was required for accumulation in the capitalist mode which was organized and coordinated in Nairobi which was a specific form of bourgeois organization. The major contradiction lay thus not between undifferentiated European and African populations, but between labour in the precapitalist mode and capital in the capitalist mode. This relationship between the modes, however, produced conditions which in the 1930s started to gradually dissolve the pre-capitalist relations of production in the reserves which was later to lead to the development of a single capitalist mode of production. The basis of exploitation was thus shifted from the relationship between two modes to one within one mode, the capitalist mode, and the major contradiction shifted to that between capital and labour within this mode. In chapter three we saw how this process occurred: starting with land alienation followed with the establishment of native reserves, there was not only overpopulation and overstocking but also the continuous process of the diminishing per capita holding in these areas. Much has been written on the outcome of this

for the African population and we need not go into it here. Suffice to add, for the purposes of the major thrust of this chapter, that the squatter crisis which was referred to in the previous chapter created a situation whereby the direction of migration from the reserves was city-ward.

According to the Annual Reports of the Medical Officer of Health, except for the early 1930s when there was a slump in the estimated population of Nairobi, the period 1900-1939 was characterized by an upward trend of population growth which continually posed real insurmountable problems for the town. In 1930 the population fell from a peak of 49,000 to 47,000 in 1931 and to 41,685 in mid-1933. The 1935 figure showed a decrease of 11.9% compared to the mid-1932 estimates. All races showed a decrease: Europeans by 6.4%, Asiatics by 11.5% and Africans by 13.4%.⁴¹ The African population dropped from a 1929 peak of 32,000 to 28,000 in 1930, 26,761 in 1931 and 23,176 in 1933. This, however, climbed to 28,000 in 1936 increasing by leaps and bounds to an all high of 41,000 in 1939.⁴² This trend continued so that by 1948 when the first colony-wide census were taken, the African population of the town had reached 77,000.⁴³ And this was so notwithstanding the strict laws which governed their entry and residence in the town. This movement increasingly came to be characterized by a

high degree of urbanization. A significant index to this was the ratio of women to men. Taking 1931 and 1948 for comparative purposes, we find that while in the former year the ratio was 1:5.7, in the latter this had come down to 1:3.7.⁴⁴ This is an indication that the barriers which separated men and women, that is the tendency for men to work for short periods leaving their wives in the reserves to whom they could return when the need arose were beginning to break down.

Moving to Nairobi before the Second World War was one thing. Finding employment was another. However, as to how many Africans were employed in industry, commerce or government service between 1900 and 1939 can not be ascertained due to lack of statistics. But given the fact that the organization of the agriculturally-based Highlands economy was based in Nairobi coupled with the establishment of processing industries (for coffee for example) in the town, it can with some degree of certainty be said that a substantial number was absorbed in these sectors. By 1939 a substantial African proletariat (in the classic sense, "freed" from the means of production and forced to sell their labour-power to subsist) was in the making. Nairobi as a focal point for the coordination of metropolitan interests in Kenya had introduced a clear notion of labour as a commodity.

For as Karl Marx says,

In themselves money and commodities are no more capital than are the means of production and of subsistence. They want transforming into capital. But this transformation itself can only take place under certain circumstances that centre in this, viz., that two very different kinds of commodity-possessors must come face to face and into contract; on the one hand, the owners of money, means of production means of subsistence, who are eager to increase the sum of values they possess, by buying other people's labour-power; on the other hand, free labourers, the setters of their own labour-power, and therefore the setters of labour. Free labourers, in the double sense that neither they themselves form part and parcel of the means of production, as in the case of slaves, bondsmen, etc., nor do the means of production belong to them, as in the case of peasant proprietors; they are, therefore, free from, unencumbered by any means of production of their own. With this polarization of the market for commodities, the fundamental conditions of capitalist production are given. The capitalist system pre-supposes the complete separation of the labourers from all property in the means by which they can realise their labour. As soon as capitalist production is once on its own legs, it not only maintains this separation, but reproduces it on a continually extending scale (Emphasis added).⁴⁵

These developments affected Africans tremendously in Nairobi. Before we can look at their day-to-day survival, especially in terms of their housing, let

us briefly examine the effect of these developments on the pre-capitalist relations of production in the "Native reserves" on which the cheap labour system rested. In drawing the distinction between a proletarian and a peasantry scholars have correctly pointed out that whilst the latter may supply various quantities of labour as form of rent, they retain possession of the means of production. It is from this that they derive the source of the relative economic independence. But if this capacity to put the means of production into operation is reduced or completely removed, the independence is destroyed and peasants are forced to sell their labour-power in order to subsist even if they may still live on the unproductive land.

The declining productivity and rapid impoverishment of the reserves before 1940 and the increased tempo of outmigration did not mean that the migrants would get heaven on earth in towns. This is not to say that this was quite clear in their minds. Available evidence shows cash wages in urban areas remained for a long time virtually constant, or even declined, while real wages fell. According to an estimate by the Medical Department in 1933, the minimal diet on which an African adult could subsist cost sh.14.40 per month; when to this was added a minimum rent of about sh.5 per month "the necessary expenditure for adequate living was sh.19.40 per month without taking into account of any expenditure upon

clothes, beer, tobacco or the shilling per month taxation".⁴⁶ The average wage for an African in Nairobi in this year according to a cross section of those interviewed was sh.18 per month. This situation had changed little in 1939. Commenting on housing and employment returns called for in Nairobi in February 1939, E.R. St. A. Davies, the Municipal Native Affairs Officer pointed out in a memorandum to P.de V. Allen, the Principal Labour Officer, that while a single man needed sh.6.60 for food alone to subsist, a married man with two children needed about sh.14.60.⁴⁷ When all other expenses were added, the officer continued, the cost of living in Nairobi for a single man was about sh.21 and for a married man with two children was sh.38 per month.⁴⁸ The consideration of both single and married men emerged out of the fact that the proportion of men to adult female dependants was beginning to show its effects on the workers. According to the survey the ratio of dependent women on men in various employment categories was as shown in the table below:

Table 4:1 Ratio of men to adult women dependants in 1939⁴⁹

Type of Employment	Men	Women	Ratio
Government service	2,469	479	5:1
Railways	5,850	1,654	7:2
Municipality	1,333	128	10:1
General Public	17,072	1,095	31:2

The main wage groups and wage rates in the same year were as follows:

Table 4:2 Wage Groups and wage rates in 1939⁵⁰

Wage Rates	Number affected
Sh.1 - Sh.10	1,786
Sh.11 - Sh.20	15,661
Sh.21 - Sh.40	9,069
Sh.41 - Sh.80	1,727

Davies points out that although the African employee was given about sh.23.50 per month, nearly 16,000 were receiving less than sh.21 per month.

From the above tables it is clear that Africans in Nairobi went through a lot of problems in order to survive. This trend, as we are going to see in subsequent chapters, continued throughout the 1940s and 1950s as prices for starch foodstuffs (maize and potatoes) which were the staples for the average

African family increased at an annual average rate of between 6 and 8%⁵¹ starting from 1938. This was inspite of the fact that cash wages remained almost constant.⁵²

What emerges from this assessment is the fact that the rise in the number of Africans who moved to Nairobi in the period before the outbreak of the Second World War was not dictated by an increasing attractiveness of wage labour in the town. Rather, when subsistence requirements and the fiscal demands of the state could no longer be met through the consumption and sale of commodities produced in the precapitalist sector, wage labour changed from a discretionary to a necessary activity regardless of whether real wages rose, fell or remained constant.⁵³

The impoverishment of the "Native Reserves" so widened the gap between productivity in the capitalist and precapitalist modes that even those with access to the means of production were forced to sell their labour-power on a continuing basis in order to subsist.⁵⁴ By 1940, it can be said with justification, primitive accumulation (the process which takes away from the labourer his possession of the means of production) was far advanced. Whereas this process rested on the use of state machinery to maintain precapitalist relations of production in the reserves the development of the economy and the inherently contradictory

nature of this policy led to their erosion, and the peasantry were proletarianized, i.e. incorporated into capitalist relations of production. The path of capitalist development in Kenya had thus produced, by at least 1940, both rural impoverishment and intense urban poverty as the decreasing amount of the necessary product provided by the reserve was not replaced by significantly higher wages in the capitalist mode. This development thus generated conflict not only over wages, but all facets of urban and rural life. This structurally induced conflict centred on cheap labour, bringing into question the structure of the system of exploitation. These conflicts came to a head towards the end of the 1930s in urban areas. Here, especially in Nairobi, the conflicts emerged when the problem of control over the African population became acute. It is thus significant that in this period African protest and mobilization occurred within the centres of the capitalist mode of production, themselves the sources of structural conflicts.

4:4 African Housing Overcrowding and the Failure of the Policy of Control.

At the outbreak of the Second World War, conditions for Africans with regard to income and housing were little better than they had been a decade earlier. Indeed, between the two World Wars, policies involving expenditures for housing development in the entire

colony were distinctly secondary to policies involving control over the African urban population. This is well brought out by the fact that by 1925 the Municipal Council of Nairobi had spent overally some £116,000 on capital works, about half of which was on water supply within the town. In 1926 plans to spend a further £155,000 on water supply, sewerage and road works and a proposed first permanent estate for Africans in the town were afoot.⁵⁵ Out of the proposed expenditure of the £155,000 only £13,000 were to be spent on the African estate, to be built in Quarry Road on the old carrier corp's Camp. Built in 1929; this estate was a conspicuous move away from the original Pumwani "wattle-and-daub" type of African accommodation in Nairobi. In that year the net capital debt of the Municipal Council was £59,496, rising to £282,847 in 1931. Its annual revenue on the other hand rose from £67,000 in 1926 to £97,000 in 1929, an increase of about 50% in three years.⁵⁶

Apart from the initiative taken by the Nairobi Municipal Council, the Central government on its part built the first phase of Starehe estate for its employees in this period. But, like the Municipal Council, it was not only cautious in its approach to the problem of African accommodation but also showed a lot of bias for Europeans. For example, in the period before 1930 the white controlled

Legislative Council voted £40,000 and £586,430 for the development of African and expatriate housing respectively.⁵⁷

The building of these two estates for Africans has led two scholars, Mary Parker and Andrew Hake, to argue that even in these early years of the town's development the policy-makers had started showing signs of relenting their policy of control. While according to Andrew Hake this was due to a most decisive upswing in the country's economy following the gloomy and rather unpredictable conditions of the early 1920s, to Mary Parker the move was occasioned by the anticipated demolition of Pangani some ten or so years later. According to her

There was here some fear of competition by private lodging-house keepers with municipal provision, for the council still found one third of the beds it provided unoccupied, the principle use made of them being by the larger firms that employed labour.....⁵⁸

It is our contention that Quarry Road (Kariokor) and Starehe estates were put up in this period not because of an economic windfall in the mid-1920s or because private lodging house-keepers were defeating the municipal's policy of social provision to Africans. There was no such policy at this time. It is quite significant that it was at the time these estates were built that the Nairobi policy-makers had started talking about "legitimate" African town

residents. The migrant labour system brought what Andre' Gorz calls "ready-made" workers⁵⁹ into Nairobi where their labour-power could be efficiently exploited and return them to the reserves whenever they were no longer needed. Africans were, like implements, units of the urban pax-colonia that could be discarded when they had outlived their usefulness. But despite the fact that they were temporary sojourners and not permanent residents of the town, they did need the infrastructural facilities that would require an outlay of social capital. So long as their usefulness lasted, minimal requirements had to be met to enhance their productivity provided the burdens of reproducing their labour-power and supporting the non-productive elements of their families (the very young, the very old, the infirm and those who could not be sufficiently productive in European enterprise) continued to rest on the so-called the "traditional African economy". And herein lay the problem of housing, overcrowding and control in Nairobi. Indeed, it was here that the contradictions between the need to pursue effective control policies and the desire to have a labour force whose reproduction process lay in the precapitalist relations of production were to eventually lead to a more explicit approach to housing development. Urban and country had become so irrevocably linked that diminishing means of subsistence in the latter increasingly came to place

demands on the former, demands which had to call into question policies which had hitherto held sway in the early years of Kenya's development.

The area that received increasing strains was that of housing. When the idea to have a "Native Location" in Nairobi was mooted and Pumwani was built in 1921-22, the original scheme had been designed to house at most 4,150 people at the rate of not more than 15 persons per stand. This was to be in 115 plots with a density of about 120 people to an acre. By 1931 the population of the location was estimated at 7,173 and by 1939 the official capacity of the estate was put at 5,306 people with overcrowding adding a further 60% to this figure. This put the population of the estate at over 8,000 people in 1939.⁶⁰ The same condition obtained in the municipal compound of the Quarry Road (Kariokor) the same year. E.R. ST. A. Davies described the situation thus:

In the Municipal Compound of the Quarry Road Housing there are 47 dormitories with legitimate accommodation for 516 men. The compound is usually overcrowded to the extent of 60 to 100 men. The numbers vary with fluctuations of the municipal labour roll. Wives may be found in these dormitories on almost any night as well as numbers of children, most of whom sleep on the floor. These no doubt are not legitimate occupants of the dormitories, but as the proportion of municipal employees with female dependants in Nairobi to those without is 1 to 100,

the presence of visiting wives and children cannot cause surprise....61

According to the Superintendent of Native Locations, the problem of overcrowding was not to be blamed on the authorities; it arose through the wives of "employees of, the scavenging, refuse and a few Road Department" workers appearing from the "reserve at intervals complete with families." Owing to "their mentality" they thought nothing about "communal sleeping."⁶² Displaying that true racial arrogance of the white settler elite in Nairobi, the Superintendent, however, made a very interesting observation about the African urbanite at this time. He said that moves to check the situation through the eviction of the women and children had led to the "scavengers and refuse employees" to boycott duties. Hinting at the fact that Africans were showing disapproval of the action, he recommended that authorities adopt the "least line of resistance" which would involve the addition of cubicles and the permission of employees who had completed nine months' service to have their wives in the compound. He concluded that

If this is carried out, I am sure that it will eradicate the discontent which is fermenting among the employees at the present moment.⁶³

This development is of great significance as it, first, marks the first public admission of there being pressures exerted by Africans over their rights to remain in Nairobi. It also hints at the problem which the

administration had to face when it came to enforcing control policies. Though these two officers never directly addressed the question of the ineffectiveness of the policy of control in the absence of elaborate African housing, they were nonetheless admitting to the fact that there was a close relationship between the two.

Indeed, writing on the problem of housing vis-a-vis the policy of control in the previous year, the MNAO observed that the first step towards the solving of the "Native Question" lay not in punitive measures stipulated in by-laws which dealt with control. Rather the solution lay in the isolation of those Africans who were working for wages or engaged in some legitimate occupations like hawkers or shopkeepers from those who were visitors or job-seekers and the "undesirables." He contended that the elimination of the "undesirables" by police action, though highly desirable, could only be effected if those Africans who were employed and those who were visitors or job-seekers were accommodated:

It is natural that a town containing 31,000 employed natives, situated close to the Native Reserves inhabited by nearly a million, will attract numerous native visitors. There is no reason to assume that these must of necessity be contemplating an offence because they have the temerity to visit the town.

A fluid labour supply also is essential to a town of this size, particularly as sudden demands

for seasonal labour are likely to occur.

A number of unemployed, honestly looking for work, must be admitted to the town.

It is necessary, however, that visitors of both these classes be controlled; to that (end) By-laws providing for passes have been made and should be applied.

This cannot be done until proper accommodation exists; for it is manifestly absurd to order a native to reside in a Native Location if there is no accommodation available for him therein.⁶⁴
(emphasis added).

He strongly recommended the building of houses for Africans in Nairobi, both employed and looking for employment or visitors, after which the police would have not only an easy way of dealing with the "undesirables" but also, through a campaign launched by the council, in eradicating "the disgraceful erections now doing service as Native accommodation."⁶⁵

This recommendation was made against the backdrop of the demolition of Pangani in 1938, the first and certainly the biggest "uncontrolled settlement" in Nairobi's early history. Though the official reason for its demolition was that the area had been earmarked for the absorption of the rapidly expanding Indian population in the town, there is evidence to suggest that its activities as a centre of early African nationalist political agitation made it to be viewed by the authorities with a lot of suspicion. According to Omari Suleiman and Mama Tofi, two of the inhabitants of historical Pangani before its demolition,

the Indian expansion was used as an excuse, a rationale for its demolition.⁶⁶ Cucu Esther Ngima, a political activist since the Harry Thuku days, corroborated this when she said that since 1921 there had been a lot of political activity in Pangani which culminated in the formation of the Young Kikuyu Association.⁶⁷

Being the only major African village in Nairobi at this time, it is not hard to find reasons as to why African political activity was concentrated here. Neither is it hard to decipher the reasons as to why 1921, the year our informants cited as one of a lot of political activity, marked a watershed in the politicization of the hitherto seemingly apolitical Africans in the town. In this year there was a slump in world agricultural prices and for the European settlers to cushion their position decided to bring a uniform reduction of all African wages by one-third.⁶⁸ In June there were meetings of Africans numbering from 3,000 to 9,000 to protest this reduction. Threatening to return to the reserves if their grievances were not listened to, the protests picked momentum when on 3 and 5 June rickshaw drivers went on one-day protest strikes. It was two days later that some of the speakers at the meetings formed the Young Kikuyu Association. At a Young Kikuyu Association "sub-committee meeting held at Pangani village on ...1st July, it

was unanimously resolved that the style 'Young Kikuyu Association' be changed to 'East African Association' as the latter term is of a more comprehensive nature."⁶⁹ To Wokabu Wa Mungai this was important because Pangani was not only a multi-tribal village but also because the reduction in wages had affected all the Africans in the town and most of these Africans were living in the village. The East African Association was born in Pangani.⁷⁰

The village was demolished in 1938 mainly because of this reason. This act was highly detested by the inhabitants who had to be dispersed most of them being forced to move to the Pumwani Extensions (present day Shauri Moyo). According to our informants, those Pangani residents who were supposed to move to the New Pumwani Extensions detested it because the new location was built on the old site of the municipal's human refuse disposal. Being Muslims, their forced removal to the location amounted not only to an abuse of their personal dignity as people who had been in the town for a long time and did not know any other home; it was above all a naked affront to their religion.⁷¹ Indeed, when a survey of the village was done in 1931, it revealed that there were 312 houses with 3,177 inhabitants. In the event of its demolition the MNAO had suggested that of the 293 inhabitants, 104 be moved and rebuild in Pumwani where they could live by renting rooms, 44 be taken to the same

location where they could earn by other means while 145 families be sent to a "detrribalized native village in the reserve". According to this survey 146 of the families had been in Pangani for 10 years and 233 earned their living as "lodging house-keepers." Culturally and socially the composition of Pangani showed that 105 family heads were Kikuyu and only six were Swahili (45 Tanganyikans and 25 Nandi), no less than 247 were Muslims, 34 "Pagan" and 12 Christian.⁷² It is no wonder then that Muslims protested the move saying that if it was a question of going to the new, Pumwani Extensions this was to be at the individual's discretion. This popularized the name Shauri Moyo (literally meaning do what your heart wishes).⁷³

These protests were well articulated when three African Muslims, representatives of the Pangani residents, claimed that "Queen Victoria gave us Pangani to live in" through the person of a Mr. Jackson, the Deputy Commissioner, and that Mr. Ainsworth and Mr. Trail had marked out the village for the original inhabitants.⁷⁴ It seems that this presentation amounted not only to refusal to move from Pangani but also raised the issue of the Africans' rights to stay in Nairobi as legitimate residents of the town. That the village was all the same demolished is, therefore, not the issue; occurring in 1938 when Kenya was set for a transition from one phase of development to another, the African protests at their forceful removal from Pangani were

quite significant. While on the one hand the protests displayed the fact that the spirit of the early 1920s when African politicization in the town started in earnest was still a flame, on the other the events surrounding the demolition of the estate made it all too clear that Africans could no longer be conceptualized in the same old image of their being temporary sojourners who could not stake a claim to permanent residence in the town.

In this respect, the events which occasioned the demolition of Pangani as well as the Africans' reactions to the move should not be seen as isolated happenings involving Muslims in a sea of hard-core conservative indifference to the African plight in Nairobi. They were an extension, at a much higher level, of what had started in the early 1920s as a political response to the economic and social changes in the "whiteman's city" in the Kenya Colony. Certainly this level of response was dictated by the kind of social structures in which the Africans existed at this time. It is possible, given differing social structures, to talk of different levels of African urbanization by 1938 with the ultimate criterion being one of having certain limited rights in the precapitalist sector in the reserves and in the types of jobs in the town, although such rights also involve other rights and obligations in the wider Nairobi colonial economic system. In Nairobi at this time, it is

possible to observe certain features of African urbanization which suggest more of a potential African working class if the politico-economic preconditions for its survival were not to be removed. They were not.

Thus by 1939 the colonial authorities had built three permanent estates for Africans—Quarry Road (Kariokor), Starehe and the New Pumwani Extensions (Shauri-Moyo). According to a 1953 summary of housing in the Nairobi African locations, these three estates had a reasonable capacity holding of 1,850, 1,800 and 3,250 people respectively.⁷⁵ Given the fact that Nairobi's African population was always on the rise, these three estates cannot be said to have in "their reasonable capacity" housed even a quarter of this population. We have elsewhere in this chapter shown that the population of the town which had held steady at about 49,000 between 1930 and 1936 had suddenly jumped to an estimated 59,000 between 1936 and 1937 and was rising fast. In 1939 the total population was estimated at 65,500 with Africans having an all high of 41,000.

Apart from the above accommodation provided by the Municipal Council and the central government, by 1939 the Railway Administration had provided 1,683 married quarters for Africans and was engaged in the construction of 600 units and hoped to complete a further 600 by 1940.⁷⁶ Given this high population

vis-a-vis what passed as the provision of accommodation by the authorities concerned, it becomes all too apparent that at the outbreak of the Second World War Africans suffered really acute moments of deprivation.

This deprivation is well brought out in the memorandum by E.R. St. A. Davies, the MNAO to P. de V. Allen, the Principle Labour Officer, in 1939. According to this memorandum, the total number of Africans employed in Nairobi and their dependants was 36,147. of this total 18,772 were employed in the public sector and had 2,244 dependants. Of this number (21,016) domestic servants and their dependants (9,359) were legitimately housed by their employers outside the "Native locations". In addition to this group that resided outside the locations were employees (546) and those who had received passes to legitimately reside out (54). The total number which was thus legitimately residing outside the locations was 9,959. In other words of the 21,016 employees in the public sector, 9,959 were accommodated outside the locations. This left 11,057 to be catered for in the locations. To this was added 649 employees and dependants not housed by the government and 169 employees and dependants not housed by the municipality. In this year accommodation was necessary for about 308 hawkers monthly, 112 shopkeepers and their

dependants, 1,061 householders and dependants, 861 tailors, shoemakers, dhobis, painters, carpenters, stonemasons, etc. working privately and their dependants and 500 unmarried women who were not dependants. In 1939 the locations were supposed to provide accommodation for 14,717 people. But housing available in the locations was Quarry Road (Kariokor) 568, Pumwani 5,306 and Shauri Moyo 3,042.⁷⁷

The MNAO correctly estimated that overcrowding in the locations stood at 5,801. This did not include any provision for the legitimate visitor to the town or for a minimum number of the unemployed "who are necessary in Nairobi to maintain a fluid labour supply".⁷⁸ Neither did these figures give any indication of the type of housing provided by employers for their domestic servants or of overcrowding therein. The MNAO continued to point out that in the event of authorities addressing themselves to this problem, seasonal fluctuations in labour had to be taken into consideration. For example, figures of labour employed by the main contractors in the town showed a maximum of 3,961 in January and a minimum of 2,547 in April, 1939.⁷⁹

To the MNAO, besides the mere housing position evidenced in the above figures, other factors were disclosed which suggested themselves to be root causes of several of African urban problems, and each

in their turn affected the question of housing. Among these factors were the imbalance between the male and female populations which was a proportion of just over one woman to eight men. This imbalance almost immediately led to a demand of "a large number of native prostitutes... a demand which materially affected native life in the Kiambu and Fort Hall reserves and to a lesser extent in the Nyanza Province."⁸⁰ The position here was seriously aggravated by the lack of housing: "whereas the needs of 8 men could be served by the provision of two rooms for the men and one for the prostitute, were housing provided for these natives with their families six rooms would probably be required."⁸¹ The other major factor was that of the health of the Africans. Quoting the Medical Officer in charge of clinics to show that the imbalance between men and women was a major causal factor in the incidence of venereal diseases, the MNAO pointed out that

Although there is a large population in the Railway Landhies, there is comparatively little venereal disease. This is probably accounted for by the fact that the vast majority of houses are occupied by families, married quarters being available for railway employees.⁸²

The natural consequences of this situation were not only the encouragement of prostitution and the urban African to "live on his wits"; it also meant

- 1) a continuous change in personnel of the labour force;
- 2) malnutrition and decreased capacity of the labourer for work;
- 3) an absence of sound African public opinion or urban consciousness insisting on certain standards of social behaviour. This was partly the result of a low standard of living and partly an outcome of (1) and, finally,
- 4) a fundamental lack of control.

He concluded that there was need for an African policy in Nairobi whose basic objective was to be the encouragement of a better African worker through the provision of accommodation for him and his family in the town:

Fewer natives, better fed, properly housed, constituting with their families a permanent and controlled native population, should be our aim.⁸³

Though E.R. St. A. Davies is not the first colonial official to write on prostitutes in Nairobi as occupying housing that would be better utilized by someone else,⁸⁴ his observations, coming at the time they did, constituted a fundamental and indeed serious questioning of the pre-1939 African policy of urbanization. Opening his memorandum thus: "Recent

disturbances at the coast (Mombasa labour unrest of 1939) have emphasised the necessity for a careful inquiry into the social conditions obtaining amongst urban native populations,"⁸⁵ Davies became the first colonial official to publicly admit that the pre-1939 policy of control of urban African populations had been a failure. In pursuit of the search for a corrective, he pointed out certain fundamental issues which had become quite central to the formulation of a new policy, a policy which informed the war and postwar years. Among these issues the most important are the centrality of family housing and better wage levels in any policy that was aiming at not only labour stability but also labour productivity. Davies' memorandum thus is a milestone in the development of Nairobi's urban economy. It is a milestone in the more fundamental sense that he was the first colonial officer to address himself to that principal element in the matrix of urban labour: family life. Though he addressed the question of the imbalance between men and women and how it featured as a causal factor in the incidence of diseases, his concern was not with prostitution per se but rather with the failure of past policy to apportion the tasks of hygiene and the stabilization of a workforce to women in the early history of Nairobi. Women as the backbone of domestic labour, which in turn is the reproducer of daily labour-power, were taken cognizance of in the

The debate seems to have been started by one Major Yarker Davies who had the misfortune of losing his mother, in his opinion he was rushing her to hospital.

Western world during industrialization and we can argue here that Davies's recommendations in 1939 (when the Second World War had just broken out and Nairobi was on the threshold of secondary industrialization) were a logical stage in the path of the development of capitalism. It was something more than admission of the failure of past policy. It was a recognition of the crucial role which could be assigned to the nature of "unpaid" labour provided by the house worker, the privatization of domestic labour and the similarities between social life and the generational reproduction of labour-power. In other words, with the deteriorating situation of life in the reserves which had hitherto provided the means for the reproduction of labour-power for the pax-colonia, the need for family life was recognized so that the workforce residing in Nairobi would remain in Nairobi, and not go from factory to factory or from town to country because of lack of stability. This is precisely why Davies blamed previous policies for the creation of "a continuous change in personnel of the labour force" and the decreasing "capacity of the labourer for work."

Thus by the end of 1939 the Colonial Administration in Nairobi had come to grips with the heart of the matter about African urbanization. Briefly this is reflected in three fundamental developments. First, the debate within official and non-official circles over who was to provide housing for Africans

took on important proportions. Unlike the railway administration which had as early as the 1920s developed a paternalistic approach to the problem, the Municipal Council and the Central government were still bogged into the vexing question of who was really to be responsible for housing provision for Africans in the town. But unlike the 1920s the late 1930s were characterized by really serious discussion on how the problem could be approached. This discussion veered into the question of the concept of building in permanent materials forming the second most important aspect of the problem of housing and African urbanization. From the earliest time of the founding of Nairobi, municipal authorities had insisted on Africans who wanted to build to do so in permanent materials. This was quite different from what obtained in Mombasa where Africans had as early as the 1920s been allowed to live in privately built Swahili houses in numerous planned village layouts. Thus in Nairobi authorities were quite averse to any building in temporary (local) materials. Worked out into a policy objective, this intolerance was translated into the demolition of such structures as could be found in Kileleshwa, Maskini and Pangani the rationale as we saw in section 4.2 being the fear of diseases.⁸⁶ A cross section of those interviewed pointed out that while the idea of building in permanent materials was a good one, no African could afford it. This was not because there were

no Africans in the town with enough capital to put up permanent houses; one could always go back to one's rural home and sell livestock for the purpose. The colonial government's insistence, according to these informants, on building in permanent materials was a cover-up for its declared policy of looking at Africans as temporary members of the town.⁸⁷ It seems, however, that the insistence on building in permanent materials, though based on the idea that any move which allowed Africans to have permanent homes in the town would mean a permanence of a race which did not belong to it, as a policy objective was an outcome of the question of landownership in Nairobi.

As The East African Royal Commission Report of 1953-1955 was later to point out, the colonial urban land policy was closely tied to the policy of the non-permanence of Africans in towns; it gave a kind of legal stamp to the demolition of African villages as a policy objective.⁸⁸ The Report recognised that while theoretically land in towns was to be held by members of all races it was only holders of the land in private title or leases or licences who had a secure tenure of their land. The consequences which derived from this situation and which lay at the root of the whole urban problem with regard to building in permanent materials and therefore permanence of residence were numerous.⁸⁹ The most important, however, was that land policy in Nairobi meant that all urban

expansion was at the expense of those Africans who had settled either inside or on the edge of the town and who were, because of town replanning with high-grade and costly development, consequently evicted when land inside the town was developed or the township boundaries enlarged. Although theoretically they could acquire leasehold plots elsewhere but within the boundaries of the town, few had the resources to do so and the majority had therefore to live without security of tenure.⁹⁰

This meant the rise of numerous unplanned settlements put up by Africans and the authorities' response to them by demolition. It was a situation which came to be characterized by what a United Nations organization expert on housing in Kenya later termed as an "illicit consequence of the struggle for shelter, the trespass of desperation."⁹¹

In summary one can say that before 1939 two interacting ideas governed the African policy of urbanization with regard to African housing in Nairobi. First, all housing within the town had to conform to the building and health rules under municipal ordinances. Secondly, the African population was not regarded as a permanent element of the town, hence the problem of who was to provide for their accommodation remained largely unanswered in this period. Though the Municipal Council and central government

authorities half-heartedly assumed this responsibility, the majority of Africans still lived in houses built and owned by them. In other words, although the emphasis was on building in permanent materials, there was no policy which would have both relieved congestion and at the same time raised the housing standards progressively for the whole of the African urban population while also taking into account the rapidity with which this population was likely to increase. It is this lack of a coherent policy that led to the failure of the policy of control. This was the last major issue which pre-occupied the urban authorities in the last years of the 1930s.

By the end of the interwar period contradictions of the African policy of urbanization in Nairobi were becoming quite clear. While upto 1923 the fear of theft and burglary and the need for a clean, healthy and contended labour supply were the operative motives behind the search for an enduring African location in the town, the demolition of Mombasa and Kileleshua villages in 1923 and 1925 respectively brought into the the limelight not only the question of overcrowding and the reappearance of the old problem of public health which the establishment of Pumwani African location had hoped to solve but also threw into doubt the whole concept of control and the long-held axiom that the denial of elaborate African housing was a major factor in the control of African influx into the town.

Though official records are silent on which new African villages came up and where, Annual Medical Reports and the Nairobi Council minutes in their discussion of the problem of African housing give us a glimpse into how the situation was like. Indeed, these reports and minutes are between 1924 and 1930 strawn with the concern on the part of the authorities with the problem of overcrowding and the increasing tempo of the construction of shanty dwellings.

As Richard Stren points out the weakest point in the policy of control was the administration of pass laws for Africans. Meant to serve three major objectives - the keeping of African wages low through the judicious regulation of labour supply in relation to employers' demands; the keeping of the African "undesirables" or the permanently unemployed out of the town for the maintenance of established order; and the separation of African and European areas of habitation⁹² - the implementation of pass laws had started to show serious cracks by the end of the 1930s. The three pply objectives were embodied in the Native (Urban Areas) Act of 1923 of the Union of South Africa and was advocated for the Kenyan scene by the Feetham commission in 1927. One important factor which this Commission pointed out was that there was a reciprocal relationship between the responsibility for housing provision and control of the

African influx into Nairobi. It is this question of reciprocity which was to later form the first major contradiction between the need for African labour and the accommodation of this labour in the town. As the 1930s came to a close the problem which faced the authorities was how to reconcile this contradiction. Indeed, throughout the interwar period the MNAO found himself in a position where he had convict* thousands of Africans whom the authorities considered undesirables and this was always against the background of employers refusing to honour their legal obligation of providing housing for their African employees.

Commenting on this contradiction, the Central Provincial Commissioner in his 1938 report observed that

The urban population of Nairobi is a growing problem. The destruction of the old villages in Pangani has accentuated the acute native housing problem. To give some idea of this, it is recorded that in Pumwani on one night 492 natives were found sleeping in eleven houses which were not reasonably suitable for accommodating more than 163 persons. In fact, there is no doubt that accommodation is quite insufficient for the normal population and this is swelled by numberless visitors for whom no accommodation but of the most disreputable nature is available(at the Quarries natives) are living in huts,

*The Municipal Native Affairs Officer was also the Municipal Magistrate who dealt with cases involving Africans.

sheds, cow houses, and goat pens near their work, with few or no sanitary facilities. Such settlements are a shelter for criminal characters who can stay a day or two while carrying out their anti-social operations. There are ample bye-laws to remedy such unsatisfactory conditions, but until housing is available it is impossible to apply these laws. 93 (emphasis, added).

This report was saying that while Nairobi needed African labour which did not place a lot of strains on the urban economy this labour could be maintained at the exclusion of the unemployed through the provision of decent housing. In other words, the implementation of the policy of control highly depended on the provision of housing to those Africans the authorities considered as legitimate residents of the town. Writing on the same issue, the MNAO in the same year said that

By-laws 557/2a and 557d are framed largely to control the unemployed native (emphasis in the original). Under 557/2a, 12,000 natives were convicted in the last five years (1933-1938); practically all received extremely light sentences. And 70% of these are legitimate visitors come to see their friends. No accommodation for this is available, hence they sleep where they are visiting; 12,000 natives now have previous convictions of this offence. The laws have become a farce 94 (Emphasis added).

In his view, there was an apparently glaring gap between the laws of control (in terms of their purpose) and their target, the African undesirables in

the town. To him, if these laws were ever to be effective, the "legitimate" Africans in the town had to be properly housed.

What emerges from our analysis in this section is that by the end of the 1930s a combination of factors - the continued influx of Africans in Nairobi and their low standard of living, lack of adequate housing and its concomitance of overcrowding, the concept of building in permanent materials and the denial of Africans access to security of tenure - led to the failure of the application of the policy of control. All these factors taken together especially poor living conditions and lack of housing set the stage for a major confrontation between the African urban population and the colonial government. In other words the development of capitalism had by 1939 generated conflicts not only over the question of urban wages but over all facets of urban life. As noted earlier, these structurally induced conflicts centred on cheap labour and its reproduction. This brought into the limelight the question of the structure of the system of exploitation in colonial Kenya. As Nairobi entered into the age of import-substituting industrialization during the Second World War, the question of labour and the stabilization of the African urban population could no longer be avoided. The policy of control had been shaken and, as in the

crisis of the 1930s in the "White" Highlands, it became imperative on the part of the colonial authorities to seek for a new relationship between African labour and capital from 1939 onwards. This search could not harmonise well with the policy of control as there was a shift from the emphasis on the use of migrant labour to one which insisted on family life and the stability of the African urban population. Central to family life and stability was the question of housing. How did the authorities go about it? The answer to this question forms the next chapter.

- 1 KNA: DC/NBI. 1/1/1 Political Record Book, Nairobi District Commencing 1899.
- 2 Even by 1938 the colonial urban authorities were still grappling with this question. For example in a memorandum prepared by Mr.A.E.T.Imbert, Chief Registrar of Natives on the subject of a municipal pass system for Africans in Nairobi, it was pointed out that "it must be a prerequisite condition to the formulation of any pass system that sufficient accommodation must be provided for the persons to whom it is intended to grant permission to reside within the Municipal Area. The second desideratum is that the persons to whom the pass system is to be applied must be closely defined" See "Inauguration of a Municipal Pass system for Nairobi memorandum by Mr. A.E.T. Imbert to sub-committee appointed to consider the establishment of a Native Labour Exchange for the registration of unemployed natives in Nairobi, 6.7.1938, KNA: LAB:9/1051, Legislation on Casual Labourers, Nairobi Municipality 1918-1938
- 3 Quoted in Mary Parker "Political and Social Aspects of the Development of Municipal Government in Kenya with Special Reference to Nairobi" (Ph.D. Thesis, London, 1948), P.76.
- 4 See East African Pamphlet No.32 (Folio), PP.21-22
- 5 The East African Standard, 12.4.1906.
- 6 Nairobi Council Minutes, Vol.2, PP.178, 1908
- 7 Ibid., P.253.
- 8 See Guy Hunter, The New Societies of Tropical Africa (London: Oxford University Press, 1962 who on Page 25 explains the colonial policies' commitment to the non-African settlement in Towns." The dominant vision of African development in British eyes", he writes, "was of an agricultural society, based on the village, technically improved, wisely guided by more educated chiefs and later by democratic councillors. This would least disturb the cultural pattern of Africa which they (British) found".
- 9 KNA: MD 40/1131 Vol.1, A.R. Patterson to Chief Secretary, Nairobi, "cost of Native Housing," 12.4.1940.
- 10 See Norman Leys, "Appendix to the 1909 Nakuru Annual Medical Report" and S.H. Fazan, "Memo on the Rates of population increase of the

- Kikuyu Tribe," Cyclostyled, KNA: DC/KBU.6/2, Nairobi, 1932.
- 11 A.R. Patterson to Chief Secretary, Nairobi, 11.12.1939, "Ref: Colonial Development Fund: Medical work in the Maasai, Particulary a Campaign for the Treatment of Venereal Disease", KNA: MD 28/1420/15 and Venereal Disease in Kenya, KNA: MD 28/854 Vol.IV.
 - 12 A.R. Patterson to Director, Medical Services, "Ref: Proposed New Native Housing Scheme," 23.3.1940, KNA: MD.40/1131/HOU.20/40.
 - 13 Quoted in Justice Feetham, Chairman, Report of the Local Government Commission, 1927, Vol.1 Nairobi and its Environs, Mombasa and its Environs (London: Colonial Office, 1927), P.157.
 - 14 Quoted in James Smart, A Jubilee History of Nairobi (Nairobi: East African Standard, 1950), PP. 24-25.
 - 15 Mary Parker, op.cit., P.239
 - 16 cf. Report of the Senior Medical Officer of Health and the Municipal Native Affairs Officer, 1941, P.5
 - 17 See Booklet on Municipal By-laws, P.20, in KNA: LAB.9/1051, op.cit.
 - 18 Ibid., P.22
 - 19 Great Britain, The Kenya Land Commission (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1933), P.165
 - 20 James Smart, A Jubilee History of Nairobi, op.cit., P. 21.
 - 21 R. Mugo Wa Gatheru, Child of Two Worlds (London: H.E.B., 1966) P. 73
 - 22 Ibid., P.74
 - 23 Ibid., P.77
 - 24 Report of the Local Government Commission.... op.cit., P. 9
 - 25 Aidan Southall, "The Growth of Urban Society" in Stanley Diamond and Fred G. Burke (Eds.), The Transformation of East Africa (New York and London: Basic Books, 1966), P.486.

- 26 Quoted in Mary Parker, op.cit., P.68.
- 27 Mary Parker, Ibid., P.183 and K.G. McVicar, Twilight of an East African Slum: Pumwani and the Evolution of African Settlement in Nairobi. (University of California, Ph.D. Thesis, 1968), P.106.
- 28 R.M.A. van Zwanenberg, "History and Theory of Urban Poverty in Nairobi: The Problem of Slum Development" in Journal of Eastern African Research and Development 2,2(1972), P.185.
- 29 Nairobi Municipal Council, The 18th Annual Report of the Medical Officer of Health, 1947, PP.7-8.
- 30 Carl Rosberg and John Nottingham, op.cit. P.143.
- 31 Quoted in A.T.G. Thomas, "Some of the Practical Problems about African Housing," East African Standard, 24-25.1.1955.
- 32 Oral Interview, Gachara Ndong'a, Pumwani, 28.4.85.
- 33 Oral Interview, Mama Anastansia Wairimu, Dandora Phase 3, 4.5.85.
- 34 Oral Interview, Israel Mutoka Makomere Amboko, Shauri Moyo, 3.2.85
- 35 E.B. Hosking to Town Clerk, Nairobi, 29.1.30, KNA: LAB.9/1707, Public Health, Municipal Employees: Housing and Sanitation (General File).
- 36 The East Africa Royal Commission 1953-1955 Report, op.cit., P.248.
- 37 Gareth Stedman Jones, Outcast London: A study of the Relationship between classes in Victorian Society (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), PP.13-16, 167, 188-93, 256ff., 289-98, 306-12, 330-2
- 38 See Karl Marx, Genesis of Capital (Moscow: Progressive Publishers, 1969).
- 39 For example By-Law No.557A (1) stated that "The Town Clerk may issue any native applying to him for permission to remain in the municipality a resident's or visitor's Permit. (2) A resident's Permit in the form of schedule "A" hereto may be granted to a native by the Town Clerk for a period of 12 months. Such permit shall be granted to any native whom the District Commissioner may

recommend in writing to the Town Clerk and shall be revocable after seven days' notice given to the holder in writing....(3) A Visitors Permit shall be in the form of schedule "B" hereto and be valid for seven days from date of issue to such person as may apply to the Town Clerk to remain in the municipality on his lawful occasions...."

By-Law No.581 stated that "No person shall ply for hire or engage himself as a casual labourer until he shall have been registered as such by the Town Clerk and the maximum number of licences to be granted for persons to ply for hire as casual labourers shall be fixed from time to time by the Municipal Council."

By-Law No.582 on the other hand stated that "The Town Clerk may register as a casual labourer for a period not exceeding one month any person upon the payment of a fee of 1 shilling and a deposit of 2 shillings for a badge...."

- 40 The necessity and meaning of superprofits is explained by Ernest Mandel, Marxist Economic Theory, Vol.II, Trans. Brian Pearce, (New York: monthly Review Press, 1968), PP.453-454. He says:
"The export of capital and the colonialism associated with it are monopoly capital's reaction to the fall of in the average rate of profit in highly industrialized metropolitan countries, and the reduction in profitable fields for investment of capital in these countries. In this sense they are only the expression at a particular moment in the history of a general characteristic of the capitalist mode of production, of the way it grows and spreads: capital moves towards spheres in which the rate of profit expected is higher than the average. Colonial super profits are thus to be defined as profits higher than the average profits obtained by capital in the metropolitan country."
- 41 Municipal Council of Nairobi, Annual Reports of the Medical Officer of Health, 1930, 1931, 1933.
- 42 Municipal Council of Nairobi, Annual Reports of the Medical Officer of Health, 1929, 1930, 1931, 1933, 1936 and 1939.
- 43 Municipal Council of Nairobi, Annual Report of the Medical Officer of Health, 1948
- 44 Municipal Council of Nairobi, Annual Reports of the Medical Officer of Health, 1931 and 1948
- 45 Karl Marx, Genesis of capital, Ibid., P.6

- 46 Quoted in R.M. Van Zwanenberg, "History and Theory of Urban Poverty in Nairobi: The problem of Slum Development," Journal of Eastern Africa Research and Development, 2,2, (1972), P.181.
- 47 KNA: LAB.9/1972, Public Health, Municipal Employees; Housing and Sanitation (General File), E.R. St. A. Davies, MNAO, Some Problems Arising from the Conditions of Housing and Employment of Natives in Nairobi, Memorandum to P. de V. Allen, 22-8-39, P.5. This memo can also be found in KNA: LAB.9/1972, Housing and Sanitation.
- 48 Ibid., PP.6-7
- 49 Ibid., P.4
- 50 Ibid.,
- 51 Louis White, "Women's Domestic Labour in Colonial Kenya: Prostitution in Nairobi, 1909-1950," A paper presented to the ASC, Boston University, 24-4-80, P.15.
- 52 Ibid., P.18
- 53 See G. Arrighi, "Labour Supplies in Historical Perspective: A study of the Proletarianization of the African Peasantry", Journal of Development Studies, VI(1970), PP.197-234.
- 54 A cross section of those interviewed showed that there was a disproportionately high number of those who came to Nairobi because of harsh conditions existing in the reserves. There was, however, a small number who still had land to which they could survive.
- 55 Andrew Hake, African Metropolis: Nairobi's self-Help City (London: Sussex University Press, 1977), P.45.
- 56 Ibid.
- 57 Ibid.
- 58 Mary Parker, "Political and Social Aspects of the Development of Municipal Government in Kenya with Special reference to Nairobi" (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, London, 1948), P.86.
- 59 Andre' Gorz, "Migrant Labour" in New left Review, 61, P.39.
- 60 E.R. St. A. Davies, Some Problems arising from

the Conditions of Housing and Employment of
Natives in Nairobi, op.cit., pp.1-2.

- 61 NMA 33/2, Native Housing, Municipal Native Affairs Officer to Town Clerk, Nairobi, 23-8-39
- 62 Ibid., Superintendent of Native Locations to Town Clerk, Nairobi, 25-8-39.
- 63 Ibid.
- 64 E.R. St. A. Davies, Memorandum for the 3rd Meeting of the Subcommittee on Native Housing in Minutes of Proceedings of the Council and of Several Committees thereof for the month of December, 1938, p.193.
- 65 Ibid., pp.194-195.
- 66 Oral Interview, Omari Suleiman, Outside Broadcasting House, 11-4-85 and Mama Tofi, Dandora Phase III, 20-4-85.
- 67 Oral Interview, Gachara Ndong'a Pumwani, 28-4-85 and Cucu Esther Ngima, Dandora Phase III, 4-5-85.
- 68 For a detailed discussion of this point within the framework of early nationalism in Kenya see F. Furedi, "The Development of Kikuyu Political Organizations," M.A. Thesis, SOAS, 1970.
- 69 East African Chronicle, 9-7-21
- 70 Oral Interview, Wokabu wa Mungai, Riruta Sätellite, 5-5-85.
- 71 Oral Interview, Omari Suleiman, op.cit., Luanda Isundwa, Shauri Moyo, 3-2-85 Wanjau Gichuki, Makadara, 27-4-85. and Sualeh Bin Ali, Pumwani, 40-4-85.
- 72 Quoted in Andrew Hake, op.cit., pp.48-49. For a detailed official discussion of the issues involved in the demolition of Pangani See KNA: LAB.9/1707, Public Health, Municipal Employees: Housing and Sanitation (General File), especially A.W. Sutcliffe, D.C. to Town Clerk, Nairobi, 20-8-36.
- 73 Oral Interview, Israel Mutoka Makomere Amboko, Shauri Moyo, 3-2-85.
- 74 Quoted in Andrew Hake, op.cit., P.49
- 75 KNA: LAB.9/1752, African Housing (General File),

Chairman, Wages Advisory Board to the Hon. Deputy Chief Secretary, on African Housing in Nairobi, 13-4-53

- 76 Andrew Hake, op.cit., P.51. Also See KNA: PC/CP.4/3/2, Central Province Annual Reports, 1939-1948, PP.33-36 and KNA: PC/CP.4/4/1, Central Province Annual Reports, 1939-1941, PP.133-134.
- 77 E.R. St. A.Davies, KNA: LAB.9/1707, op.cit., P.3.
- 78 Ibid., P. 3
- 79 Ibid.
- 80 Ibid.
- 81 Ibid., P.4
- 82 Ibid.
- 83 Ibid., PP.7-8
- 84 For example see KNA: MD 35/537/222, Common Lodgings Housing Amendments 1914-1916, 30-10-16 and KNA: MD 40/443, H.R. Tate, MOH To P.C., Nairobi, 2-3-14.
- 85 E.R. St. A. Davies, op.cit., P.1
- 86 See Janet Bujra, "Pumwani: The politics of Property", Unpublished Report, 1973, especially chapter 1 and NMA 33/1 and 33/2, Minutes of Proceedings of the Council and of Several Committees thereof, 1937 and 1938
- 87 Oral Interview, Gachara Ndong'a, Pumwani, 28-4-85, Elphas Mbeya, Ofafa Jericho, 3-5-85 and Luka Omutiti, Bahati Ministry of Works Quarters, 4-5-85.
- 88 The East Africa Royal Commission 1953-1955 Report, (London: HMSO, CMD.9475, 1955), P.215
- 89 Ibid., P.216.
- 90 Ibid.
- 91 C.Abrams, "Urban Land Tenure, Problems and Policies", UNO, Housing and Town Planning Bulletin, No.7, P.12.
- 92 Richard Stren, Housing the Urban Poor in Africa: Policy, Politics and Bureaucracy in Mombasa

(Berkeley: University of California, 1978)
PP.189-190.

- 93 KNA: ARC MAA 2/3/1, VI, Central Province,
Annual Provincial Report, 1938, PP.17-18.
- 94 NMA 33/2, op.cit., MNAO to District Commissioner
Nairobi, 5-10-38.

CHAPTER FIVE

AFRICAN HOUSING AND THE POLITICS OF STABILIZATION OF THE AFRICAN URBAN POPULATION, 1939 - 1945

5.1: Introduction

On the eve of the Second World War in 1939, both the Central government and the Nairobi urban authorities were faced with a number of issues which directly came to bear on the evolution of an urban housing policy for Africans in Nairobi. This chapter will, by developing on arguments in the previous one, try to establish three conclusions about the history of Nairobi and the changing perception of the "Native Question" in the period 1939-1945. First, it will be argued that unlike the pre-1939 structure of African urbanization which emphasized the non-permanence of African residence in towns, the 1939-45 period marked an important break with the past and signified a new phase in the growth of Nairobi, a phase which can be seen as the start of the modern urban economic history of the town and the role or place of Africans in the emerging setup. Our organizing idea of this view is that by the end of the interwar period it was becoming increasingly clear to the colonial authorities that the contradiction between the town's needs for African labour and the avoidance of the social costs of the reproduction of this labour, could, at least, partially be resolved by the development of public housing for Africans. Second, it will be contended that the fight for shelter for Africans

between 1939 and 1945 translated itself into a strategy to expand markedly the utilization and productivity of the African labour force in the town. The major mitigating factor in this approach, it will further be contended, was the changes that were taking place within the structure of production in the colony and the composition of the African labour-force, and the relationship between these changes and the forms of political struggle before the outbreak of the Second World War. Formulated as a response to a series of labour unrest, central to the strategy was the overriding need to understand the basic facts about African urbanization vis-a-vis the changing economic, social and political topography of Kenyan towns. Third, it will be suggested that the strains involved in the review of the pre-1939 policy of control and segregation combined with the changing structural base of the town's economy are central to an understanding of the move away from social i.e. racial segregation to economic i.e. class segregation in the postwar years.

In discussing the issues involved with regard to these conclusions, it would be fitting to start by examining, albeit briefly, what was happening at the Colonial Office in London and how this has been interpreted by scholars of African history. This is significant because the issues raised and discussed took place at a time when there was the rise of new thinking over the question of the effectiveness of policies

hitherto adopted for colonial administration and development. In his discussion and critique of the liberal-nationalist and dependentista theories of decolonization, John Flint asserts that contrary to the view that Britain during the movement for decolonization used 'new social strata ... which had an interest in organizing and facilitating the new economic activities' created in the period of formal imperialism", from around 1938 the Colonial Office in London experienced a sweeping wind of change which ushered in a new and progressive colonial development policy. At the core of this change was the consideration of the viability of emergent classes in Africa in terms of what was to be their role in political and economic development and what was to be the relationship between political, economic and social change. According to Flint, this development was a negation of the pre-1938 indirect rule objective of, on the eve of decolonization, returning sovereignty to African pre-colonial nations controlled by precolonial social elites. To the Colonial Office, this objective was totally impractical and it amounted in fact to a disguised resistance to the very concept of self-government and decolonization.² In short, it was a rejection of the use of a new social strata, the comprador, and the encouragement of the emergence of different classes on which new social and economic development strategies could be based.

To John Flint this change in colonial thought was precipitated by increasing doubt about the indirect rule philosophy which had been developed entirely outside the Colonial Office by colonial service personnel and, coupled with the economic doctrine that colonies should live off their own resources, had had virtually unmitigated sway for almost 40 years. Before 1938 the aim of colonial rule was the preservation of pre-colonial social and political organizations hence new developments like urbanization were not only viewed as anathema but were to be discouraged by all means. Thus instead of encouraging settled working African populations with their families migrant labour was preferred. The same vigour with which permanent African residence in towns was opposed came to bear on the discouragement of the emergence of clerical and professional groups who were seen as alien in spirit and even in nationality to Africa itself.³ In indirect rule parlance, "detrimentalization" was a ghost which haunted colonial regimes throughout this period.

These "Lugard Assumptions" about colonial life began to be undermined by quite new attitudes and sentiments in London*. This shift in attitudes in

*By London is meant British members of Parliament, the Fabian Colonial Bureau, British Trade unions and interest groups like the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society, institutions of higher learning especially Universities, etc.

London, Flint further contends, can be attributed to three specific events in the late 1930s. First, there were widespread riots in West Indies during 1937 and 1938 which shattered the complacency of the Colonial Office and in their aftermath destroyed the long-held axiom that colonial territories must live off their own resources on laissez faire principles. Second, there was the almost simultaneous publication of Lord Hailey's African Survey in 1938 which exposed the futility of indirect rule as a harbinger of social, economic and political development in the colonial empire. Third, there was the appointment in the same year of Malcolm Macdonald as Secretary of State for the Colonies.⁴

These three events brought about a complete shift in colonial policy, a shift whose organizing principle was colonial reform planning whereby instead of looking at detribalization as an evil, it became a major factor in the progress of colonial territories. The business of colonial policy was now the business of social change. Hence the emergence of social classes had to be encouraged by all means. As Macdonald proudly proclaimed to a Commons Committee, the local populations (in the colonial empire) were

Producing more and more of their own doctors and nurses, their own school teachers and agricultural officers, their own civil servants and lawyers, their own leaders in

every walk of life. More and more, also, they are producing their own legislators and their own executive officers and that ultimately is the crux of the matter.⁵

The changed attitude embraced countryside and town alike in the colonies. While on the one hand there was the feeling that "... British policy must prevent the transformation of traditional chiefs into a great landlord class controlling cash crop exports" like what was already happening in colonies like Uganda under the encouragement of indirect rule,⁶ on the other there was need not only to recognise the African urban working class but to also stimulate and protect it. To Flint this last point is borne out by the detailed trade union legislation written into the Colonial Development and Welfare Act of 1940. Enacted to officially "promote the prosperity and happiness of the peoples in the Colonial Empire",⁷ the assumption was that the empire no longer existed exclusively to serve the mother country. But, as Lord Hailey notes, the Act also recognized that to promote Britain's war interests, more investment overseas was wanted from London.⁸

To John Flint, therefore, the promulgation of the Colonial Development and Welfare Act in 1940 signalled the jettisoning of laissez faire and its replacement with an enlightened colonial development policy based on the principles of welfare. It is true that by 1945 classical development theory had

been abandoned in favour of one stressing growth and planned economic development in the colonies. It is also true that the war period, and beyond, witnessed a continuous process of massive infusion of metropolitan public investment in these colonies, a process which served as a coup de grace to the doctrine of self-sufficiency in the colonies. Developing on D.K. Fieldhouse's⁹ and A.G. Hopkins's¹⁰ arguments that what was happening at the Colonial Office was a conscious change of heart which took cognizance of the need for benevolence towards the colonized peoples, Flint falls pray to the structural-functionalist idea that any change in the underdeveloped world must be seen as having been initiated in the so-called developed world. Though he takes note of the West Indies riots of 1937 and 1938, he, however, devotes little consideration to what was the impact of the riots to the formulation of the ideas he is wont to put across. This is further borne out of his brushing aside of similar riots in other colonies and his over emphasis on the need to jettison laissez faire and the mechanism behind it - indirect rule.

We would like to agree with Tiyambe Zeleza that the period prior to the outbreak of the Second World War was characterized by deepening national and class struggles within and between the colonies and Britain. These struggles were exacerbated by the intensification of social struggles in the colonies which unleashed forces which called upon London to re-examine its approach to

the entire colonial question.¹¹ The West Indies riots, like the Mombasa labour unrest in Kenya in 1939, could be seen as isolated events but their causes and significance to the changing nature of both colonial administration and development cannot be underrated. It is, therefore, the contention of this chapter that the Mombasa event which sent shock waves throughout the entire colonial edifice crystallized the contradictions and conflicts of social development in Kenya before the outbreak of the war and the response (s) to it pointed the way to the future development of the Kenyan social formation. Taking place at the end of a particular phase of development, the Mombasa labour unrest (which was followed by a series of others throughout the colony during the war) brought to the fore the contradictions and alignment of forces in the social formation and forced all groups involved into a re-examination of their positions. This produced important political shifts and social considerations. For example, it profoundly affected the direction and thrust of African trade union organization whereby often disorganized and isolated protests gave way to mass action which was to remain an immensely important feature of Kenya's political development till 1963. In the European political arena, the unrest produced arguments and counterarguments on the African urban labour force and how this could be reproduced in the phase of limited though important secondary industrialization. In either case the

emergent situation was a move towards the evolution of a positive policy of African urbanization whose central principles were the stabilization of the African urban family and the need to increase the productivity of labour. The core of this was adequate and decent urban housing.

5.2: Confrontation between the African Urban Population and the Colonial Government

The confrontation between the African urban populations and the colonial government in Mombasa in the form of a general strike in 1939 provided a sobering foretaste to the European community all over the country. It provided a moment for realization and for stock-taking. This strike, as we are presently going to see, had far reaching effects in Nairobi. What were the major issues in 1939?

Labour unrest in Mombasa did not start in 1939. Neither was this the last. The first major labour unrest among Africans in this town occurred in July 1934 among port workers over a government proposal to reduce wages. It involved 600-700 employees of contractors, stevedoring and shipping companies. Between 1934 and 1938 more labour was employed in the town but this development was taking place against the background of a continuous rise in the prices of consumer goods in the face of either lagging or

stagnant wages. The squeeze this placed on workers triggered off a series of strikes with the Kenya Landing and Shipping Company employees downing tools in 1936 and the Shell Company employees in 1937 and 1938. These developments culminated in the 1939 general strike which involved nearly all Mombasa workers.¹² By looking at these activities in Mombasa and not Nairobi, our unit of study, does not mean that all was good in the latter town. Indeed the question of the tendency for prices of goods bought by Africans to rise during 1935 and 1937 and for wages to remain stationary affected Nairobi as it did Mombasa. Coupled with the increase in African consumption, these forces predisposed Africans to strike. Thus in May 1937 African Stone Masons and semi-skilled artisans employed by Indians in quarries near Nairobi went on strike for ten days.¹³ But compared to Mombasa, which experienced four general strikes between 1939 and 1957 (1939, 1947, 1955 and 1957), Nairobi had only one in 1950. This can be explained by the fact that Nairobi in this period had not fully developed as a centre of industrial-based labour concentration as in Mombasa. With a fully developed shipping industry, the African labour force in Mombasa was formed in conditions that were vastly different from those that obtained in Nairobi. The history of labour movements in not only Kenya but the entire Eastern Africa shows that the pressures Africans came to exert on the authorities for better working and living conditions were the result

of the organization of Africans themselves due to the nature of the work they did and the changing nature of this work. As John Iliffe points out in his discussion of group consciousness among the Dar-es-Salaam dockworkers,¹⁴ industrialization or a colonial economy creates only workers who become agents in the creation of group solidarity, consciousness and action in response to their common status. Thus it is not surprising that in Kenya it was the railwaymen and dockers who were often in the forefront of protest when it came to working and living conditions in the colonial period. Railwaymen's and dockers' occupational bonds, social contiguity and easy lines of communications along the track or in the harbour provided the basis for an industrial union action as early as the 1920s.¹⁵

The major issues in Mombasa at the time of the 1939 strike seem to have been the steadily rising cost of living with rent levels as a disproportionate element in this rise as well as poor housing for the African employees. The Willian Commission¹⁶ which was appointed by the government to inquire into labour conditions in the town was quite clear on this when it pointed out that among the problems which "provided fertile ground for the seeds of discontent to be sown"¹⁷ were

- 1) low wages paid to Africans which did not enable them to afford decent housing and other basic necessities;

- 2) the miserable wages paid to casual labourers; and
- 3) the large numbers of the irregularly employed or unemployed who suffered an immense inability to obtain decent housing or any housing at all.

In his submission to the Commission, Makhan Singh, the General Secretary of the Labour Trade Union of East Africa, gave a detailed analysis of the relationship between the African working conditions, wage levels and housing in Mombasa.¹⁸ When the Commissioners examined this issue they concluded that the problem of housing in the town had two major though not mutually exclusive causes. First, low wages were the basic cause for the misery African workers had to endure. This was more so because although the cost of living varied considerably according to the ethnic origins of the workers the minimum amount needed for food alone by a single man was sh.19 per month.¹⁹ Those in regular employment at the Port such as dockers earned considerably more than this while "roadboys" (sic) working for the Municipality received only sh.16 per month and had been evicted from condemned houses in 1939. Wages were not very high for many regular railway workers 52% of whom earned only sh.20 per month. Many workers had had their wages reduced during the depression in the early 1930s and they had never been restored to their previous levels. Since

the going rate for the cheapest private room in places like Majengo was sh.5 per month, most workers could barely afford to share rooms, let alone bring their families to live with them.

The second factor was the lack of standard wages for African urban labour. Refusing to address themselves to this factor, the Commissioners pointed out that any move on the part of the government to introduce a standard wage for African urban labour would be detrimental to the Colony's economy which at this time was mobilizing for war. Instead they decided to focus their attention on administrative remedies as they had earlier argued that the strike was very much the result of a breakdown in communication between the urban Africans and the administration. To the Commissioners, the labour unrest in the town came about not because of racial prejudice or poor living conditions. Though poor wages, lack of adequate housing and general poor working conditions obtained in the town, the disturbances emanated from the fact that the Coast Province had gone without a Labour Officer for four years. This situation was compounded by the fact that Mombasa had had a rapid turn-over of District Officers since 1938. For example in the 18 months since the beginning of 1938, there had been twelve District Officers.²⁰ In addition to this the Provincial and District Commissioners were "too much occupied with other matters to come into

constant contact with the natives to achieve that personal touch which is so invaluable in the administration."²¹ Though the D.C. acknowledged this fact he however blamed it on the African headmen whom he said were not keeping "in close touch with their areas."²²

Though the Commission did not make any recommendation about fixing a minimum wage, it however emphasized in its proposals that the government, railways, the municipality and the stevedoring companies should house their staff or give house allowance in lieu of this. This aside, however, what emerges from the assessment of the causes of the unrest is a predictable response of the mainstream of white institutional political opinion of the pre-1939 period which saw the hope of curbing such instances in the strengthening of the machinery of control of urban Africans. The effects of the disturbances on Nairobi were, however, quite different. Having taken place after the strike of African railway apprentices in Nairobi between 17th and 27th June, 1939 which was followed a few days later by the African railway firemen, the municipal and central government authorities feared that unless something was done there could easily occur a repeat-performance of the Mombasa troubles in Nairobi.²³

This fear became even more manifest when the Labour Trade Union of East Africa called a meeting of its Bureau on 1st August to consider the strike situation

in Mombasa. During the meeting it was decided that a meeting of Nairobi workers be called to express solidarity with the struggle of Mombasa workers. This was duly done on the 5th August, 1939, in Desai Memorial Hall. Writing on this towards the end of the Month, E.R. St. A. Davies, the MNAO for Nairobi, said:

Recent disturbances at the Coast have emphasized the necessity for a careful inquiry into the social conditions obtaining amongst urban native populations As a result of the Housing and Employment return called for (in Nairobi) in February, figures are available which disclose to some extent these conditions in Nairobi.²⁴

We have already looked at his observations and recommendations and need not go into them here. Suffice to add, in support of our contention that the Mombasa disturbances provided a sobering foretaste of the consequences of the neglect of urban African populations, that though in terms of its objectives the strike was a dismal failure, its significance and results far transcended this failure. This largest strike in Kenyan history had been undertaken by what authorities had hitherto considered as basically migrant labour. It was these very workers on whose backs the edifice of the cheap labour system had rested, these supposedly still peasant migrants, who had organized the strike. Their action came to spotlight the erosion of the economic base of cheap labour and the shift in the

basis of exploitation to relations of production within the capitalist mode itself. Recognizing their proletarian role, they delivered a challenge to the system of exploitation far stronger than any hitherto offered by any organized African group in the colony. The structural conflict of the period 1930-1939 culminated in the strike, which threw the problem of control into sharp relief, accentuating the growing debate over the future pattern of control. The strike was brought to an end by unprecedented police repression and hundreds of arrests.²⁵ This not only indicated the degree to which the state felt threatened, but also foreshadowed a rethinking of the African urbanization policy in the country.

Having highlighted the contradictions of the pre-1939 African urbanization policy, the strike prompted a vigorous response from the authorities. Indeed, by reflecting the structural changes in the colony since the late 1920s, the strike immediately prompted desperate efforts to improve African urban living conditions in Nairobi. Thus to pre-empt a repeat performance of Mombasa in Nairobi, the Governor made a formal request to London for approval for Nairobi to raise a loan of £30,000 for African housing.²⁶ This was followed by the Governor urging the Municipal Council to prepare outlines for a new housing policy for Africans. The Governor's concern about the need

to have a policy which took cognizance of the relationship between African wage levels and housing is well brought out in a note by the Commissioner for Local Government to the Town Clerk:

His Excellency the Governor-in-Council has recently had under consideration certain aspects of the native problems arising out of urbanization and reached the conclusion that the ultimate solution was the provision of adequate and suitable housing at rents properly related to native income....²⁷

5.3: African Housing and the Politics of the Stabilization of the African Urban Populations

If African housing policy in Nairobi in the interwar period was characterized by a predisposition toward control, having as its major ramifications the failure to formulate meaningful policy guidelines for the rapidly growing town, the years during the Second World War witnessed the evolution of a more sophisticated appreciation of the relationship between development and administration. It was an appreciation which was brought about by the structural changes which had been taking place in the colony since the late 1920s. Writing on this in 1951, Sir Phillip Mitchell (who was Kenya's Governor from 1944 to 1952) pointed out that a revolution had been going on in the economic and social basis of African life and that

This revolution (raised) a wide range of problems at present unresolved,

agrarian, economic, industrial and social; for example, the East African low wage economy, labour efficiency, to which is related training and education, health, nutrition, housing, recreation, and security in old age 28

had become only too apparent. Taking cognizance of the fact that in "effecting a radical transformation of the subsistence society in which the masses are still enmeshed,"²⁹ Mitchel adopted a pragmatic approach towards the advocacy of a political partnership between the races in Kenya, observing that

No doubt it is true that the foundation for human, social development were neglected, that we did not foresee nor provide against the consequences of a vast increase in production stimulated by undreamed of price levels, by a sudden willingness to invest in new enterprises on a scale which would have seemed fantastic upto 1939 - a scale running into hundreds of millions of pounds.... we have terrible arrears of urban housing to overtake....³⁰

Writing on these structural changes later in 1953, Alderman George A. Tyson submitted that the root cause of the wide range of problems experienced by Africans living in towns had all through been the lack of adequate housing. Put in a nutshell, these problems ranged from low wages which did not permit an African to pay more than sh.6.50 per month in Nairobi for a bedspace if and when he could find it, lack of food and housing which led to lack of labour efficiency,

lack of industrial training which in any modern society was an indispensable element in increasing the standard of labour efficiency and output to lack of organized recreation facilities which were quite important in keeping a staff fit and contented. He agreed with Lord Beveridge that "where labour is cheap it is often wasted in brainless unassisted toil" and with the Building Societies Association of Great Britain who wrote that

One's imagination shrinks from contemplating the picture of the misery and frustration, the strains and stresses upon health, the demoralization of children, the undermining of family life and innumerable broken homes that can be attributed to the housing shortage.³¹

The issues which this appreciation of the African urban living conditions raises can be numerous. Put into question form, these issues can be enumerated thus: How did the views of these two colonial officers hope to reconcile Kenya's racial chasm with the new mood of optimism which they accurately located within the neighbourhood of the new economic upswing which characterized Kenya in the war period? How did the colonial authorities hope to reconcile the contradictions which the development of capitalism had generated, bringing into sharp focus the structurally induced conflict over the question of cheap labour and, by extension, the question of the system of exploitation which rural impoverishment and urban poverty had by

1939 laid bare? Central to these questions was a new colonial perception of the African rural realities and how these realities had come to influence urbanization trends in the colony. Rural impoverishment and intense urban poverty, two structural changes which had been brought about by decreasing production in the reserve sector, came to bear on the policy makers and the quest for a new socio-economic and political structure which could provide the framework within which a stable African urban population divorced from its pre-1939 dependency on the rural areas became all too imperative. And in this new perception arguments for labour efficiency and increased productivity became catch-words for the search of a system which could significantly adjust the system of exploitation to the structural changes in the colony. Thus groping for alternatives to the pre-1939 policies, Sir Phillip Mitchell in 1944 brought into the Legislative Council the first African representative, Eliud Mathu.

Believing that economic growth was the main vehicle through which Africans could be brought to a level of civilization and skills where they could work on an equal basis with other races, he embarked on a programme of structural differentiation of the Kenya Government to bring it into line with his economic objectives. The idea here was that if land and agriculture were important to this new strategy of

development, so was urban labour. The link between the two was well articulated in the 1946 Report of the Development Committee which stated:

We feel that the great difficulty concerning Kenya will be to maintain a full employment policy...for we consider that, if Kenya is to survive, then there will have to be radical changes in agricultural policy which must result in a lesser number of people being employed in on land....There is, therefore, no reason to fear that industrial development will be retarded by lack of labour supply. We do feel, however, that it is important that industrial undertakings should not be erected on unsatisfactory labour conditions and that employees will become completely urbanized with their families.... This in turn means the provision of adequate and suitable housing and health services, and the payment of adequate wages to maintain family life.³²

This was a policy statement which threw to the fore a number of things. First, the old view that the African urban communities comprised of temporary visitors having their homes in the rural areas to which they could return in old age or when their usefulness was spent was beginning to disintegrate. Second, the question of African housing on bachelor basis was beginning to be questioned in favour of the provision of housing on family basis. Third, in view of the actual facts as they obtained in the war period, family housing came to be seen as a major mitigating factor in the stabilization of the African urban

population which in turn came to be perceived in terms of it being a functionary of labour efficiency hence increase in productivity and output. This was a recognition, though couched in terms which were based on the changes brought about by a war economy, which can be traced back to the lessons learnt from the 1939 Mombasa labour disturbances. They are lessons which forced the colonial authorities to re-examine the system of exploitation in the country. The fall in the reserve contribution to the subsistence necessary for the reproduction of labour power put pressure on wages presenting capital with the problem of declining profit levels. Though there are no statistical data to substantiate this claim, it can be argued that the structural conflicts which we pointed out when discussing the labour disturbances were distinctly unhealthy for business. By 1946, for white settler secondary industry, the process of primitive accumulation appeared to have reached a stage where direct state coercion and control of labour was no longer necessary. The huge expansion and increasing capital intensity in industry during the war accelerated the need for both skilled labour and high productivity. Industry seemed ready to invest in both, and the migrant system with its attendant social and political costs appeared uncondusive to both. Indeed, after the strike, a move towards a stable, urban labour force became a major concern with the non-agricultural

bourgeoisie and sections of the government. In a burst of effort rivalled only by the Municipal Native Affairs Office in Nairobi, the Department of Labour throughout the war years publicly ruminated on the economy and state policy.

If the relationship between agriculture and industry and its labour trajectory came to be understood between 1940 and 1945, there yet still remained one fundamental question to answer: how was the link, the relationship between physical needs on the one hand and social and economic objectives on the other going to be established in Nairobi? The Willan Commission Report and the E.R. St.A. Davies memorandum had tried in 1939 to answer this question. But while the latter gave an elaborate proposal on how the authorities could go about it, the former fell short of indicting the government directly for its failure to address the question of social provisions for Africans. Indeed, the Willan Report was conspicuously silent on the question of the relationship between African poor living conditions and African wage levels.

In trying to answer this question, the Nairobi MNAD, T.C. Colchester and the Senior Medical Officer of Health, Dr. K.A.T. Martin made strong presentations in 1941 for a £150,000 investment in low-cost housing for the estimated 6,000 Africans needing accommodation

in the town. Noting the dangers arising from substandard living conditions - theft, prostitution, diseases and psychological maladjustments - they pointed out that "self-respect turns on privacy and private possessions," and an African worker, if he could live decently with his wife and children in the city, would "give a greater return for his cost." Looking at the formation of a Nairobi "urban working class," they wrote:

The means of creating a permanent Nairobi urban native community with its own institutions and its own sense of responsibility and communal pride exist; they should be used but cannot effectively be taken up unless the fundamental unit of association and community, the home, is materially created in bricks and mortar.³³

This could be done through the local authorities building houses and letting them at subsidized rents, Employers including the government housing their employees, the allowing of Africans to build in temporary materials whereby "the council should be contented with the good and not seek only the best", and the establishment of "semi-rural village or garden city lines outside the Municipality".³⁴

The period between 1939 and 1941 saw very little in terms of the provision of housing to Africans. This can largely be attributed to the outbreak of the war. Though there was an influx of new-comers into the town, there was a drop in the number of African men employed

in the town from 23,000 in 1939 to 18,000 in 1940, recovering slightly to 21,000 in 1941. In this year it was estimated that the population (African) jumped by nearly 30,000 to an all high of 70,000.³⁵ Though there was little progress of a practical nature in these three years, there was, however, a considerable recrudescence of interest in the subject by almost all the sectors of the town - the Municipality, representatives of commerce and industry and educational bodies. Commenting on this the Senior M.O.H. pointed out that

This is of great value, and has shown that interest has not been confined merely to academic discussion, but had evinced a desire to come to grips with a serious problem which has become much more pressing during the last two or three years.³⁶

concluding that "in all it is clear that for great numbers of Africans in Nairobi the conditions under which they live are deplorable and unsound and that a state of affairs exists which demands the application of extensive remedial measures,"³⁷ the recognition of the inadequacy of housing and other matters which required rectification had led the council to apply for a loan of £30,000 which was granted late in the year on easier terms than in the previous years. The money was to be used on a housing scheme which was to show a radical and revolutionary improvement on existing schemes. It was to be designed completely to obviate any of the undesirable features which were seen

in Shauri Moyo and Pumwani and was to accommodate married persons only. With this in mind, several types of permanent semi-detached family houses of a practical and pleasing nature were designed fitting in a layout which exemplified the best principles of town planning. These houses were completed in 1945 in Ziwani. They were "a complete break away from the present barrack, dormitory and lodging house type of building, which it is hoped would now be regarded as anachronisms."³⁸

In 1942 a sum of £7,500 was provided in a general purposes loan for the building of a lodging house for the accommodation of visitors while the council voted the sum of £6,000 to provide further housing for their own employees. In addition to this the government set up a committee to advise on the expenditure of £20,000 for the provision of housing for their own African employees. But, as the M.O.H. put it,

The aggregate of these sums, while it will do much to drain the existing ocean of slum, is entirely inadequate for the purpose. This will require the provision of finance on a very large scale if the housing and welfare needs of the African population are to be met fully.³⁹

This was quite an insurmountable task. According to the M.O.H, though the desire for a scheme for considerable alleviation of the "disgraceful conditions" was there, the advocacy of the "application, with

government approval of the sub-economic principle of finance" which had emerged out of a series of discussions on the topic was quite encouraging. This system had successfully been applied in the Union of South Africa where the government lent money at a very low rate of interest on the condition that any loss on housing schemes where cheap rentals obtained was shared between the two authorities.

This proposal was, however, rejected because, according to government circles, "economic" housing could only be provided if the necessary adjustment in wage levels were made. The M.O.H. did not agree with this view saying: "It is, however, a corollary to this that a rise in wage levels is to be brought about by training and education which is unlikely at the moment and which further depends on (the) absorptive capacity of commerce and industry".⁴⁰ Whatever the arguments about lack of finances and the refusal to allow construction in temporary materials as a short-term solution to the problem, the officer concluded that

It should be realised that considerable difficulties may be encountered by the native who elects town life for himself and his family, and that he is in need of guidance and assistance in the adjustments that become necessary. The hygienic, social and economic problems presented by the establishment of large African population in Nairobi are matters which, for a number of reasons have become very acute and require serious considerations. It is evident that a

comprehensive policy governing questions of Native Housing and welfare in the municipality is urgently required, not only in the interests of the total urban community but as a matter of considerable political and social importance to the colony as a whole.⁴¹

The Senior Medical Officer of Health and the MNAO's report of 1941 had drawn the attention of employers to the relationship between labour productivity and living conditions and the evidence which shows their increasing interest in African housing came to the surface at a meeting on the 12th September 1941 when representatives of the Nairobi Chamber of Commerce met with the Mayor to discuss the length of lease which could be granted to companies who were prepared to build houses for their workers on land set aside by the Municipality. Indeed, the question of lease had been a vexing one. For example, in 1937 the Town Clerk had reported to the Native Affairs Committee meeting that employers of African labour who wanted to build houses in Pumwani had been reluctant to do so because of security of tenure. By-law 197 limited the period of lease of any plot within the Native Locations to ten years. Though this period had been extended to twenty years⁴² the question still remained: what was to be done to such houses which the employers intended to build in permanent materials after the expiry of lease?

From a statement submitted to the September 1941 meeting by A.C. Tanahill for the Chamber of Commerce, there was the feeling that "The need for adequate and better accommodation for natives employed in Nairobiis greatly overcrowded(?) and that a very great deal of it is either not designed for the purpose or the design used is rapidly becoming obsolete; such overcrowding must adversely affect the health and working capacity of the native. So great is the need for increased accommodation that its provision cannot be delayed even in this time of World War and increased building costs...."⁴³ (emphasis added). This was an indirect reference to the economy of the country and state policy. Setting out a series of steps designed to increase national productivity, the Chamber primarily called for increasing the productivity of labour which involved the elimination of interferences in the free market such as the traditional attitude which prevented certain classes of the population from making their full contribution to productivity.

This discussion culminated in the appointment of a Committee by the Governor in 1942 to look into the African housing situation in Nairobi and a bill was introduced to set up a Central Housing Board and a special fund to make loans to local authorities. By the time the New Housing Ordinance became law in December 1943 there was general agreement in official circles on the broad objectives and high priority

of African urban housing. Henceforth Nairobi followed a "progressive policy" when it came to dealing with African urban problems. In his speech to the Legislative Council outlining the background to the Housing Bill, the Commissioner of Lands and Settlement, C.E. Mortimer, touched on many of the themes that had already been raised by the advocates of improved African housing - that slum areas bred disease which spread to other communities, that bad housing fostered social and moral despondency, and that better living conditions would hasten "the day when we shall have an urban population of Africans with some kind of civic pride."⁴⁴

For the first time the Commissioner pointed out how it was almost impossible to build "reasonable housing" without some form of subsidization.⁴⁵ Whatever the doubts, the principle of government responsibility for African urban housing now came to be embodied in administrative machinery; a situation had been established whereby future housing decisions would be dealt with within the parameters of specific issues of subsidies, regional allocation of funds, house types and standards, and estate planning. The Housing Ordinance of 1943 became an important milestone in the evolution of an African urban housing policy in Nairobi.

These developments must be seen in relation to

a number of factors within and without the colony. Between 1942 and 1943 there was a sudden climb in the number of registered jobs to a new peak of 43,000. This phenomenal rise can partly be attributed to the registration of existing workers as a result of the tightening up of war-time labour control regulations and partly to the government's introduction of stringent new repatriation measures by which thousands of "surplus" or unregistered Africans were sent home to their rural areas to save food during the acute food-shortages of 1942-1943. This is well brought out in the Government's annual report of 1946 in which it was pointed out that

In Nairobi, the number of African consumers were reduced by restricting the number of domestic servants, by redirecting to other employment, conscripting or repatriating urban unemployed, and by limiting the employment of juveniles under sixteen years of age.⁴⁶

Between 1944 and 1946 registered African male wage-earners was constant at 38,000 to 40,000 while the African population was steady at 63,000 to 66,000. It seems that it was the fear of conscription for civilian work under war-time regulations which kept those who had been ordered out of the town from returning.⁴⁷

The period 1942-1943 also witnessed a series of labour unrest in Nairobi. A look at the correspondence between the Director of Intelligence and Security

and the Chief Secretary towards the end of 1942 and early 1943 shows that there was an average of six strikes or labour unrest episodes per day in Nairobi and the causes were high cost of living, low wages and high rentals. As one Inspector of Labour put it after 100 casual workers at the Unga Limited went on strike on 12th October, 1942, African workers had to do fairly heavy work and were finding it difficult if not impossible to "make ends meet." For instance, one of these workers, a Mr. Kamau, complained that he earned sh.27 per month and had to pay sh.12 rent for a room at Pumwani. The companies which were most affected by these strikes and unrest were Elliots (Bakers), Unga Limited, Kenya Farmers' Association (vegetable section), East African Power and Lighting Company at Parklands, Kenya and Uganda Railway and Harbours, Marshalls Factory, etc.⁴⁸

These strikes and unrest introduced a very important factor on the Kenyan socio-economic and political scene—the Colonial Office's (London) direct intervention in the formulation of policies which could govern labour in Kenya. We have elsewhere in this chapter argued that the changes in London in the period 1938-1940 had a lot to do with changes in the colonies. The period 1939-1946 in Kenya witnessed a resurgence of some of the gross forms of labour exploitation reminiscent of the earlier phase of primitive colonial

accumulation. It was a period which was characterized by new legislation giving the colonial governor power to order its administrative functionaries to produce quotas of workers for military, essential services and sometimes even private agriculture and industry. That about 98,000 Kenyans served in the armed forces alone and that many of them were conscripted makes the extent of conscription all too apparent.⁴⁹

But perhaps of the most importance in this period was the removal of manpower from peasant economies, economies which were at the same time meant to serve as major suppliers of foodstuffs and other raw materials to the metropolises. As Tiyambe Zeleza notes, such substantial removals of manpower and the expansion of production for the war effort produced an explosive combination whose observable ramifications were the severe food shortages of 1942-1943. This led to considerable deaths in Central and Nyanza Provinces. These were grim but eloquent testimonies of not only the harsh conditions generated by the war but also of the cumulative effects of dependency on an export-oriented agricultural production.⁵⁰ Apart from this, there was the increase in magnitude of the problem of housing in urban areas which, coupled with spiralling inflation, falling real urban wages and inadequate provision of other social services created an acute situation of poverty and marginalization. All these factors combined and produced among Africans a sense of deprivation whose outlet was a wave of

strikes and labour unrest in 1942-1943. The intensity of the situation and the threat it posed for the colony can be understood in terms of the dispatch of Major G. St. J. Orde Browne to East Africa to look into the employment of African labour. A man with vast experience in colonial affairs—he had served as an administrative officer in East Africa from 1909—1931 and for several years was Labour Commissioner in Tanganyika as well as a substitute member of the International Labour Office Committee of Experts on Native Labour—Orde Browne was the Labour Advisor to the Secretary of State for Colonies since 1938. ✓

In a letter detailing him on his pending visit to East Africa, the Secretary of State said the object of the visit was "...to enable you to acquaint yourself, as fully as the time available will permit, with the present situation ... regarding the employment of African labour, as effected by the war conditions..." In Kenya and Tanganyika he was to inquire into "the working of present arrangements for the compulsory recruitment of labour" which had been considered by His Majesty's government in October 1943 when it was decided that "in view of the need for maximum production of foodstuffs and of certain essential civilian purposes must be continued both in Tanganyika and Kenya...."⁵² The issue at hand was not the question of forced labour per se; it had a lot to do with

labour productivity. As the Kenya Weekly News was to point out in the following year,

ver The visit of Major Orde Browne had drawn attention to the several problems of African labour and provoked a more acute realization that the present quality of labour is one of the greatest deterrents to economic progress of the colony.⁵³

It is arguable that if the colonial authorities in Kenya had, by 1946, realised that there was a close link between agriculture and industry on the one hand and poor living conditions and lack of a stable African urban population on the other, that "reasonable housing" was not only the solution to the dual existence of the African but also to labour efficiency hence increased productivity and output, it was the debate which raged on in London over developments in the colonies which sobered them to this realization. What still eluded them and what was central to the Colonial Office's debate was the question of the structural changes in the colonial social formation which had created urbanization as an irreversable process. In other words, if the Willian Commission Report (1939), the E.R. St. A. Davies Memorandum (1939), the Dr.K.A.T. Martin and T.C. Colchester pamphlet (1941) and the Legislative Council debate on the Housing Bill (1943) had failed to convince the government directly on the question of the relationship between labour efficiency, wages and housing, it was a deliberate act of omission, if not

outright negligence.

The Secretary of State for Colonies, picking his cue from the enthusiasm with which the East Africa and Rhodesia had welcomed a report by G. St. (later Sir Granville) Orde Browne on labour in Rhodesia whose central theme was housing, came to the conclusion that there was a clear link between labour and housing. The East Africa and Rhodesia had remarked in one of its issues that "That drastic measures are needed for the improvement of the native quarters in and around many of the towns... of East Africa and the Rhodesias will be denied by nobody."⁵⁴ Agreeing with this remark in principle, he set on gathering information from his officers in London for a very detailed and significant despatch which went far beyond the immediate subject of housing in Nairobi. The three officials who were to gather the information - F.J. Pedler, J.L. Keith and G.St.J. Orde Browne - in their response to the situation of housing in Nairobi pointed out that the whole issue was not confined only to housing.

Using examples from what the Union Minière had been doing in Katanga for settled urban workers since 1927, Pedler pointed out that "the Nairobi Municipality is finding... that if you withhold political representation from the common people it costs you a lot to keep them contented."⁵⁵ Among his recommendations

was the suggestion that the Colonial Office should solicit more information on the causes of labour unrest in Nairobi. He disputed the proposal that African housing should be subsidized saying "if wages are not enough to enable economic rents to be paid for decent accommodation, then wages will have to go up and Government should do all it can to assist the process, starting with raising its own rates for unskilled labour" instead of the Governor being "optimistic in expecting to calm the troubled waters with so little oil."⁵⁶ Still on the question of wages, he pointed out that many people in East Africa (Employers?) had very fixed ideas about the amount of money which was to be paid to an African worker thus being oblivious to the fact that the law of supply and demand could also work in connection with African wages. The situation which obtained in East Africa was one which stubbornly still clinged to "a legacy of the time when African labour was usually more or less forced labour and when consequently a very low standard of performance was expected and given."⁵⁷ This kind of perception had the inherent danger of changing suddenly "because once equilibrium is on the balance between low wages and low performance, there will be no stability until a new equilibrium is found on a different basis."⁵⁸ He concluded by saying that it was possible for the governments of East Africa raising their rates for unskilled labour without spending any

*Order
Bourne*

money than they were spending then. This could be done by getting more work from each man after reducing the number of men who would receive high wages.

J.L. Keith on his part pointed out that his experience with the Municipal compound at Ndola had showed that "attempts to increase the rental of houses resulted in riots, but the outcry was not so much that rents were increased but wages ought to be increased so as to allow the people to live under better conditions." Like Pedler, he thought that the fundamental problem was low wages and insufficient work. To him, a general housing policy, unlike the ad hoc solutions such as those that obtained in Nairobi, was the hallmark to a stable urban population. What the Nairobi policy-makers were doing only aggravated "the situation where evil conditions exist by dividing the African urban community into an upper class earning good salaries and a lower class living in slum conditions." This was not different from Pedler's assessment that "the unrest is caused not by absolute degrees of poverty but by the width of the gap which exists between the comforts people have and those they think they ought to enjoy. If the municipality provides really good housing for 902 Africans, will not the thousands of Africans who cannot enjoy the new houses become more restive when they see, by contrast, how wretched their own accommodation is". To both Pedler and Keith wage levels and good housing were inseparable.⁵

Orde - Browne on his part (though not different from Pedler and Keith) recommended the need for a comprehensive and far-sighted housing policy.

In a despatch (which grew out of these views) to colonial governments Macdonald reiterated the Colonial Office's support for the development of a consistent policy which reflected the changing nature of the social and economic conditions in the colonies. He recognised the fact that it would probably be necessary to provide housing at less than economic rent, although he felt that "...it is unsound for public bodies to subsidize the wages of persons in private employment, particularly when, as in Kenya, those wages are very low."⁶⁰ He announced the formation of a common pool of experience in London concerning colonial housing and the cooperation of the Kenya Government in this regard. His conclusions are quite revealing on the relationship between labour efficiency, wages and housing:

If for financial or other reasons it should prove impossible during war time to proceed with the housing scheme, it may be that the alternative of raising wages will have to be faced. At present there is a tendency for employers to acquiesce in a very low standard of performance by their native labourers, and the general wages level is correspondingly low. A change-over to a higher level should automatically bring a very great increase in performance by stabilizing labour, achieving increased discipline, and

enabling workers to live and support families on their wages instead of reserving much of their energies for independent cultivation.... I do not wish to suggest that either the government or private employers can afford to pay higher wages for the same amount of work, but if the view is accepted that higher wages will pay for themselves in improved performance, this difficulty will not arise. If the exceptional conditions of war time should afford an opportunity for encouraging a general adjustment of wages policy in this direction, I trust that the opportunity will be carefully studied and not be allowed to pass.

He concluded that

At present the urban centres are probably unnecessarily crowded by the large numbers of persons who are only intermittently employed. A policy of grading up wages and performance concurrently might so far reduce the number of African employees as to make it possible to ease the housing situation, through the return of large numbers to the native areas. It should also have the effect of alleviating any general shortage of labour that might exist in the colony.⁶¹

Though the Nairobi Municipal Council had shown the most initiative in African public housing during the war period,⁶² it was the Phillips Committee Report,⁶³ completed in June 1945, which stressed the inadequacy of wages and housing for Africans. Presented to the Labour Commissioner, the report analysed the causes of unrest among African railway workers in Mombasa.

The members of the committee sought to determine the minimum wage at which a single unskilled worker could have "a reasonable opportunity of achieving a healthy, decent, and not uncivilized life."⁶⁴ They arrived at the figure of sh.40 per month underlining the fact that the sh.30 per month workers received was quite inadequate to support a man, let alone a man with his wife and children. The sh.30 per month, the Committee observed, retarded the stabilization of labour. They thus urged movement towards stabilization since "ensuring to the married worker a living wage, adequate for the support of a family, is vital to the colony's development, and presents a challenge which it would be folly to disregard."⁶⁵

The growing concern on the part of both London and Nairobi with regard to the stabilization of African urban labour since 1939 was rooted in a new appreciation of the political and economic forces which structural changes in the Kenyan social formation had unleashed in the pre-1939 period. This was compounded by an increasingly industrialized economy which had brought many Africans in the town. The 1939-1946 period led the government to strive to formulate an economic policy which recognized the fact that many of the assumptions of the old "dual system" whereby Africans and non-Africans were administered separately had disintegrated as the 1930s merged into the 1940s.

Central to this recognition was the fact that if Africans could not be denied entry into towns, for political reasons they had to be controlled and new, stable patterns of urban life had to be encouraged.

As Richard Stren notes,

This emphasis on localized, stable populations was related to (the later) postwar policy in Kenya of encouraging the growth, in powers and responsibility, of local authorities. If Africans were not constantly moving between their reserves and towns, it followed that they would be less likely to seek national, as opposed to district-wide, political solutions to their problems.⁶⁶

The second reason for encouraging the stabilization of the African urban population had to do with the promotion of labour efficiency in productivity and output. Again, as the 1930s came to an end there had accumulated a considerable body of evidence from all over Africa purporting to show that African industrial labour was less efficient than that of Asians or Europeans doing similar jobs. This view was an off-shoot of the problem that confronted the newly installed colonial regimes and foreign capitalists who had the problem of prying labour out of the African pre-capitalist societies. The view then was that reluctance of Africans to enter (or stay) in employment was due to their economic irrationality inasmuch as they worked only to earn a set sum and generally put leisure before work. Africans were, according to this

view, indolent hence raising wages would merely encourage them to leave their jobs sooner. This was the infamous theory of the "backward-sloping labour supply function."⁶⁷ The exponents of this theory suggested that this phenomenon included malnutrition and physical disabilities, the whole range of cultural factors in adaptation to new industrial situations, the lack of adequate supervision on the job, low level of education and training for the labour force and the persistence of the migrant labour system.

We have in this chapter pointed out the factors that contributed to African labour insufficiency and how officials both in London and Nairobi increasingly came to identify them between 1939 and 1946. Indeed, it was the location of these factors within the changing Kenyan social formation by colonial officers like Sir Philip Mitchell which started swaying colonial thinking into the realities of the whole situation. Though stabilization of the African urban labour force came to be justified purely in economic terms, there was an important social dimension to it. G. St. J. Orde-Browne quite clearly brought this out when he wrote that

...there appears to be little doubt that there must gradually be a readjustment of population to bring the workers nearer their place of employment, and thus to eradicate the energy represented by the journey to and from the industrial centres. This will of course entail heavier charges on industry for the social

services at present lacking or superfluous; but the great economy effected, and the resultant increase in efficiency should counter-balance this expense, and eliminate any increase with trade rivals in other countries.⁶⁸

Indeed, though the Labour Department in Kenya based its ideas on economic criteria alone, at the national level it pursued most vigorously the housing needs of the urban working Africans and in its annual reports, commissions of inquiry and bulletins the inter-dependence of housing, stabilization and labour efficiency could not be mistaken or taken for granted between 1939 and 1945.

FOOTNOTES.

- * 1 John Flint, "The Failure of Planned Decolonization in British Africa", African Affairs, 82,328 (July 1983), PP.389-411
- 2 Ibid., PP.391-392. In his footnote 3 he says that "An elaboration of indirect rule institutions could, at most, have led to 'self-determination' of small units and the creation of a permanent need for a cadre of colonial service personnel to co-ordinate these units, maintain transport and technical services and organize relations, economic and political, with the outside world. The concept had a good deal in common with that of the 'Bantustans' in South Africa today"
- 3 Ibid., PP.393-394
- 4 Ibid., P.394
- 5 Quoted in Ibid., P.395
- 6 Ibid., PP.396-397
- 7 Great Britain, Statement of Policy on Colonial Development and Welfare (London:Cmd.6175, 1940).P.8.
- 8 Lord Hailey, An African Survey, Rev.1956, (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), PP.1322-24
- 9 D.K. Fieldhouse, "The Economic Exploitation of Africa: Some British and French Comparisons" in P.Gifford and Roger Louise (Eds.), France and Britain in Africa (Yale University Press, 1971), PP.600ff.
- 10 A.G. Hopkins, An Economic History of West Africa (Longmans, 1973), PP.267-8.
- * 11 Tiyambe Zeleza, "The Political Economy of British Colonial Development and Welfare in Africa," in Transafrican Journal of History, 15(1985), P.145.
- 12 Sharon Stichter, "The Formation of a Working Class in Kenya" in Richard Sandbrook and Robin Cohen (Eds.), The Development of an African Working Class: Studies in Class Formation and Action (London : Longmans, 1975), PP.32-34.
- 13 Ibid., P.34.
- 14 John Iliffe, "A History of the Dockworkers of Dar-es-Salaam", in J.E.G. Sutton (Ed.), Dar-es-Salaam City, Port and Region (Dar-es-Salaam:

- Tanzania Society, 1970), PP.119-148.
- 15 Sharon Stichter, op.cit., P.31
 - 16 Report of the Commission of Inquiry Appointed to Examine the Labour Conditions in Mombasa, 1939 (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1939).
 - 17 Ibid., P.39
 - 18 Makhan Singh, History of Kenya's Trade Union Movement to 1952 (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1969), PP.88-92.
 - 19 Report of the Commission of Inquiry, op.cit., P.31
 - 20 Ibid., P.40
 - 21 Ibid., P.41
 - 22 Ibid., P.64
 - 23 These Nairobi strikes were mainly over high rentals for the Commissioner of Local Government informed the Nairobi Town Clerk that the Principal Labour Officer had "found it necessary to inform the strikers that the Government would consider their complaints and that immediate steps would be taken to reduce rents." The Principal Labour Officer considered the situation to be very serious as there was "no doubt that the supply of housing in Nairobi (did) not meet the demand....." NMA 33/2, Commissioner for Local Government to Town Clerk, Nairobi, 12-7-39.
 - * 24 E.R. St. Davies, Some Problems arising from the Conditions of Housing and Employment of Africans in Nairobi, P.1. In KNA: LAB 9/1707. Public Health-Municipal Employees: Housing and Sanitation (General).
 - 25 East African Standard, 4-8-39.
 - 26 Anthony Clayton and Donald C. Savage, Government and Labour in Kenya 1895-1963 (London: Frank and Cass, 1974), P.215. Also see KNA:LAB.9/1707, Malcom Macdonald, the Secretary of States' despatch Confidential (3) of 18.11.39 to the Kenya Governor on the subject of Housing Programme of the Nairobi Municipality and how the loan could be raised.
 - 27 NMA 33/2, Commissioner for Local Government to Town Clerk, Nairobi, 20-8-39.
 - 28 Phillip Mitchell, Despatch No.193, 16-11-51 to Secretary of State for Colonies, quoted in Alderman George A. Tyson, The African Housing Problem, a

memorandum to the Nairobi Chamber of Commerce, February, 1953 (not paged).

- 29 Phillip Mitchell, African Afterthoughts (London: Hutchinson, 1954), P. 220
- 30 Quoted in Clayton and Savage, op.cit., P.298
- 31 Alderman George A. Tyson, The African Housing Problem, op.cit.
- 32 Report of the Development Committee (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1946), Vol.II, PP.192-193.
- 33 Dr. K.A.T. Martin, Senior M.O.H. and T.C. Colchester, MNAO, Nairobi, "The Housing of Africans in Nairobi," East African Standard, 1-8-41, P.5. This report had earlier been submitted to the Native Affairs Committee of the Municipal Council of Nairobi on 30-4-41 under the Title Report on the Housing of Africans in Nairobi with Suggestions for Improvement.
- 34 Ibid.
- 35 Municipal Council of Nairobi, The 12th Annual Report of the Senior Medical Officer of Health for 1941, P.4
- 36 Ibid., P.40
- 37 Ibid., P.42
- 38 Ibid.
- 39 Ibid.
- 40 Ibid.
- 41 Ibid., P.44.
- 42 Municipal Council of Nairobi, Native Affairs Committee Meeting, 12-11-37 in Minutes of Proceedings of the Council and of Several Committees thereof for the Month of November, 1937, P.178.
- 43 NMA 33/2a, Housing of Native Employees in Nairobi, P.1
- 44 Legislative Council, Debates, Vol.XVII, 9-11-43, Col.678-690. Also see G.C.W. Ogilvie who summarizes the findings of the Mortimer Committee which had investigated the need for African Housing in Nairobi in 1942 in his The Housing of Africans in the Urban Areas of Kenya (Nairobi: Kenya Information office, 1946).

- 45 Legislative Council, Debates, op.cit., P.53.
- 46 Colony and Protectorate of Kenya, Annual Report, 1946, quoted in Andrew Hake, op.cit., P.53
- 47 Andrew Hake, Ibid., P.54
- 48 All this information can be found in KNA:LAB. 9/59, Labour Conditions: Strikes and Labour Troubles: General and Native Labour.
- 49 See J.E. Shiroya, The Impact of World War II: The Role of Ex-Servicemen in Kenyan Nationalism, (unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Michigan State University, 1968).
- 50 Tiyambe Zeleza, op.cit., PP.144-145
- 51 Ibid.;, PP.149-150
- 52 KNA: LAB.9/348, Confidential Despatch No.248 of 18-9-44 from Secretary of State for colonies to Governors of East African Dependencies.
- 53 Kenya Weekly News, 16-2-45
- 54 East Africa and Rhodesia, 13-1-38 quoted in Clayton and Savage, op.cit., P.196.
- 55 Ibid.
- 56 Ibid.
- 57 Ibid., P.197
- 58 Ibid.
- 59 Ibid.
- 60 Ibid.
- 61 Ibid., P.198. This Correspondence and others between Nairobi and London on African Housing in Nairobi can be found in KNA: LAB.9/1707, Municipal Employees: Housing and Sanitation (General File).
- 62 It started the Ziwani Housing Scheme in 1942 and in 1943 there was the inauguration of a more ambitious project aided by substantial Colonial Development and Welfare funds. In August 1945, under pressure from the government, it decided to build a village of 1,170 temporary houses for African workers at Marurani. See KNA: LAB 9/1778, The Central Housing Board, Vol.1, MNAD, memorandum on Housing shortage in Nairobi to the C.H.B., 3-8-45, P.2

- 63 Report of the Committee of Inquiry into Labour Unrest at Mombasa (The Philips Committee Report) (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1945).
- 64 Ibid., P.37
- 65 Ibid., P.68
- 66 Richard E. Stren, "The Evolution of Housing Policy in Kenya" in John Hutton (Ed.), Urban Challenge in East Africa (Nairobi: E.A.P.H., 1972), P.66.
- 67 For a full exposition of this theory see E.J. Berg, "Backward Sloping Labour Supply Functions in Dual Economies: The African Case", Quarterly Journal of Economics, LXXV, 1961, pp.468-492 and M.Miracle and B.Fetter, "Backward Sloping Labour Supply Functions and African Economic Behaviour", Economic Development and Cultural Change, XVII, 2(1970), PP.240-241.
- 68 G. St.J. Orde Browne, Labour Conditions in East Africa (London: HMSO, Colonial Office No.193, 1946), PP.15-17. This document is available in KNA: LAB.9/348, Major Orde Browne Report.

AFRICAN PRESSURES AND THE SEARCH FOR A NEW HOUSING
POLICY, 1945-1960

6.1: Introduction:

The Government of Kenya declared a state of emergency in the country on October 21, 1952 and it was not until 1960 that this emergency was lifted. This act began a period in the country's history commonly known as the Mau Mau uprising. The causes and impact of this uprising have been subject to much controversy, the main bone of contention being the exact role the uprising played in the process of decolonization. We have had scholars of various shades and ideological leanings who have not only tried to decipher the causes of the uprising but also to determine its dynamics¹. What emerges from this wide array of literature is one overriding factor: the political rurality of the movement among the Kikuyu of Central and Rift Valley Provinces. Thus we came across arguments that

...economic conditions, however salient, were only incidental. To be sure economic discontent did exist; but this was not the motivating factor which drove the Kikuyu into the forest. The movement to the forest might be described as a "withdrawal," stimulated in the main by fear of Government repressive measures and reprisals. In order to survive in the forests, the Kikuyu had to devise a means of obtaining the necessities of life, they chose social banditry.²

Though the movement eventually moved from social banditry to social rebellion, the major overriding factor was

...the sense of freedom provided by the security of the forest or mountain hide-aways. In this environment, peasants were not constrained by the oppressive colonial power domain. They organized into independent communes similar to those of tribal tradition. The fact that the peasants were able to retreat to the forests, and once there to remain virtually unchallenged for a time, did much to increase their sense of freedom.³

It is not the purpose of this chapter to offer a critique of this literature. Neither is the chapter intended to go into arguments seeking the validity of the Literature's overemphasis on the political and rural aspects of the movement. Rather our main concern here is with two major though not mutually exclusive questions. First, was there any relationship between the Mau Mau uprising and the African living conditions in Kenyan major towns? This question has been prompted by the fact that the movement was originated by a radical militant group within the Kenya African Union (KAU) which was composed of Kikuyu radicals who had lost their faith in the organization's constitutional methods of handling the colonial question. Almost invariably based in Nairobi, this group comprised mostly of ex-servicemen who enjoyed a very cordial relationship with the Anake Wa 40, or the 40

Group , an underground organization of young radicals which was founded in Nairobi (but had strong links in the countryside) as an urban movement of petty traders, the unemployed and the lumpen-proletariat of the town.

This assertion . . . negates, as we are going to see, the much glorified and talked about idea in some Kenyan historical and literary writings that the Mau Mau was a peasant revolt, a revolt originated, organized and executed by peasants in the two provinces. In our attempt to answer the above question we shall try to contend that although there were great overcrowding in the Kikuyu Reserves resulting to some extent from general land shortage, and grievances arising from the squatter system, Mau Mau was not a peasant revolt in its inspiration and leadership. ✓

It was a brainchild of a section of Kikuyu politicians who wanted to seize power and in this way they needed the militant muscle of the peasants. It was an urban political creation insofar as its organizers used the hardships arising from overcrowding in the Kikuyu Reserves, the discontent and poverty due to unemployment in Nairobi, the grievances of squatters on European farms and the ill-feelings so often deriving from European and Asian racial attitudes to forge a weapon to be used for the attainment of their political purposes. As Sir Andrew Cohen noted in the late 1950s,

"The mass of Africans is still not modernized, and urban leaders can only gain support by appealing to the suspicions of the illiterate as well as the aspirations of the educated".⁴

The second question we shall try to answer in this chapter is: If there existed such a relationship how much did Mau Mau speed up new approaches to African living conditions, especially the problem of housing, in Nairobi?

In trying to answer these questions Richard E. Stren⁵ suggests that the rapid development of housing for Africans in the town from 1952 onwards constituted a non-military response on the part of the colonial Government to the threat of Mau Mau and that this response was a reflection of the prevailing official analysis of the basic root causes of the disorder with which the uprising was associated.⁶ While we are fully in agreement with Richard Stren's assessment we would, however, like to put the whole question in more wider parameters by contending that the declaration of the state of emergency in Kenya in 1952 took place against the backdrop of a number of developments between 1945 and 1952 both in Kenya and internationally. Among these developments were the unprecedented increase in the tempo of the movement of labour into towns and its concomitance of overcrowding and the increase in the incidence of diseases, the transition

of the African labour movement from a class-conscious interracial activity to one which came to embrace nationalist rebellion and, finally, there was the changing political and economic scene internationally after the war.

These developments, as we are going to see, albeit briefly, paved the way for the terrain on which Kenyan independence struggle and eventual decolonization was to take place. They are developments which like the Mau Mau rebellion, emerged from the basic contradictions which characterized both Kenya and the world at large after the Second World War.

As Dr. Zeleza puts it,

Decolonization in Kenya was part and parcel of a bitter, complex and continuing struggle between imperialism, on the one hand, and on the other, all those forces that are objectively in contradiction to imperialism, including the national liberation movements of peoples under imperial domination.⁷

6.2: The Changing International Political and Economic Scene after the War and its Impact on Kenya.

The period 1945-1952 saw a resurgence in the demand by European settlers for a "government of Kenyans under European leadership" and "the transfer of responsibility from London to Nairobi." Taking place against the background of a re-assertion of

control of Kenya by Whitehall, Michael Blundell, the member for Rift Valley and leader of the European Elected Members Organization summarized this demand thus:

I believe that there is only one constitutional advance and that is self-government with a European pre-dominance.^e

Michael Blundell

This is also a period when the settlers renewed their age-old desire to fashion the Kenya Colony and their predominance therein along the lines of the Union of South Africa. The reason advanced for this was that the Union of South Africa presented a situation which for all intents and purposes had evolved a socio-political structure, thanks to successful benevolent paternalism, which needed emulating if Kenya was to have a future. To the settlers South Africa presented a serene picture which could be explained in terms of a socio-political and economic structure formulated and maintained by whites.

This view was based on the fact that unlike the settlers' expectations of keeping Africans tied down to their rural backgrounds, the forces of capitalism which had been around for almost fifty years had produced an irreversible situation whereby instead of remaining docile and perpetually in the service of colonialism, the Africans were beginning to make their presence felt, especially in towns. This was clearly manifested in the 1947 Mombasa general strike and the same forces at work were beginning to assert

themselves in the threatened Nairobi general strike in 1950. As we are going to see, this trend was a reflection of the changing patterns of African participation in wage labour which is readily discernible in the Labour Department's assessment of the changing ratio of African labourers in agriculture to those in employment in urban centres. For example in 1950 the Department estimated that of the 400,000 Africans in wage employment, only $\frac{1}{3}$ were still in agriculture. This was contrasted with $\frac{3}{4}$ of 125,000 (31,250) in 1925. Putting a case across for a "new urban society" that was beginning to emerge, the Department explained that lack of family housing was "a powerful contributing factor to the lag of the African's social progress behind social changes".⁹ To the Department the lack of family housing had led to the African worker to "strive desparately to maintain a foothold in native land unit with the result that he has become an efficient and economic worker neither in town nor country."¹⁰ This situation had created not only instability in the African home but, due to the bitterness it caused especially when it came to the conditions in which the African had to live in town, also the potential for dissent.

When the government was confronted with this kind of reasoning it sought to find out how the union of South Africa had managed to maintain a racist

political edifice with the whiteman as the dominant figure. It was realised that the South African scene was a creation of successful benevolent paternalism which, in the urban areas, had as its basis an elaborate housing policy for Africans. Thus when the government rushed to investigate housing policy, it

early in 1949 sent T.C. Colchester, a senior administrative officer, and Frank Carpenter, the Deputy Labour Commissioner, on a study tour of South Africa and the Rhodesias.¹¹ These two officers found that South Africa's low-cost housing was at the time the most advanced in Anglophone settled Africa¹² and on their return they stressed in their report the importance of economic housing and the physical planning of estates which could go far in minimizing the distance and expense of workers travelling to and from work.¹³

In this same year two memoranda by the Commissioner of Lands dealt with some of the administrative issues that he thought were central to a reorientation of a housing policy for Africans. These were: the proper term of lease of government land; the division of responsibility among the municipalities, the employers and the central government; and appropriate building standards. The central assumption in these memoranda was that, with some exceptions, "the African is not a town dweller"¹⁴ thus it followed that the burden of

providing housing would continue to fall on the public sector and accommodation would have to be subsidized. There was thus the continued sidestepping of the fact that there were in Nairobi far more individual Africans who were willing to build their own houses. More emphasis continued to be placed on making grants of land to employers and to encouraging African lodging houses than making grants of urban plots to individual Africans. In comparison with the position taken by the Labour Department and the Local Government, however, the approach taken by the Lands Department was more cautious and tentative. But neither approach was comprehensive enough publicly to justify any significant policy decisions. This had to await the Ernest Vasey Report of 1950. Before we can look at this report in detail, let us briefly look at what was happening in the world after the Second World War and its relevance to Kenya.

They were not popular among the Africans.

The year 1945 marked not only the end of the Second World War but it also heralded a number of events which had real adverse effects on both the political and economic fronts world-wide. Whatever the colonial settler elite was doing in Kenya met with a world which was rapidly changing. As Clayton and Savage have aptly put it, there was, first, the coming to power in Britain of the enemy of the settlers the Labour Party, in July 1945. Secondly, the United Nations was born in San Francisco and gave an early indication

that it would be more militantly anti-colonial than the League of Nations. Thirdly, the Pan-African Congress in Manchester in October 1945 heralded a new and more vigorous African nationalism. Fourthly, in the same year the World Federation of Trade Unions (W.F.T.U) was created and took a strong anti-colonial stand. Lastly, in September 1946, Jomo Kenyatta returned to Kenya from England and in 1947 took over the leadership of the main nationalist party, the Kenya African Union.¹⁵ These developments were quite important in as far as they affected what was happening in Kenya. The Europeans, despite their political and economic predominance in the country, became aligned against forces that were soon to challenge this position. As A.T. Steele put it in the New York Herald Tribune,

The early British settlers had visions of making Kenya a white-man's country for all time, but the present generation of colonists is not sure. Despite accelerated immigration, the whites are losing ground in the competition of numbers....The growth of African nationalism, the Indian problem and the ambiguous colonial policy of the British government have raised uneasy doubts as to the country's future.¹⁶

As to how the Europeans were going to extricate themselves from this crucible remained to be seen. Indeed, a section of the white community still envisaged a wholly white solution to the question. This stance was well articulated by none other than Sir Phillip

Mitchell, the Governor, who in 1948 said that

...Kenya was marching inevitably towards the creation--by leadership, friendship, co-operation and mutual confidence--of a new Dominion of Commonwealth, in which British people for a very long time ahead would be the controlling and directing force.¹⁷

Though these views present the situation as it was, they are, however, not located within their correct problematique : the theme of the collapse of the "New Imperialism" in general and the withering away of the British Empire which had before 1939 manifested itself in the emphasis on the extraction of raw materials to supply British industries; it was the beginning of the breakup of the "Empire Development" philosophy which had been promulgated by Milner and Amery at the colonial office in the 1920s, a philosophy which consisted of encouraging the development of colonial raw materials to service British industry.¹⁸ It is only within this framework that we can appreciate the change in British colonial policy in the postwar years. It is equally in this framework we can understand why right from the beginning of the Second World War, a number of influential British thinkers, particularly the Socialists and the Fabians, had begun to complain that formal empire was an economic and moral burden. A section of the British ruling class had also begun to appreciate that independence should be expedited for those colonies which had shown

that they could economically stand on their own. The contention here was that Britain was, in fact, doing better business with Canada, Australia, the United States and South Africa, her former colonies, than she was doing with her empire. It was with this outlook in mind that in 1947 Britain granted political independence to India. Malta, too, was promised self-government. Jamaica was granted full adult franchise for her House of Representatives in 1944, and Trinidad and British Guyana got their new constitutions in the same year. In Africa Ghana became independent in 1957 while Kenya got her first African representative in the Legislative Council in 1944. *Mun. Council in 1946*

But if these political developments took place against the background of an emergent new philosophy which perceived British survival globally in the disbandment of formal empire, it was, however, the rise of the U.S. in the postwar period as a political, economic and military world power which sobered the British on the odds of being a global power. This became a challenge to the almost unmitigated British control of half the world and if there were any stakes to be protected — and there were many — there arose an urgent need to formulate a new colonial policy which could take in the new world geopolitical dimensions. Pivotal to this was the urgency to seek ways and means within which long-standing contradictions between Whitehall and local colonial

administrations could be solved. For example, before 1939 there had always been in Kenya a dichotomy between the official British policy toward the colony and that actually implemented by a local administration under pressure from the settler clients. Even Lord Lugard's philosophy of "native paramountcy" which stressed the organic growth of native peoples and had dominated official British policy towards other territories in the 1920s had proved a contradiction in terms to settler interests in Kenya which involved the forcible curtailment of indigenous capitalism and coercion of the population in order to ensure supplies of labour for the settler estates.¹⁹

Thus before the war these bottlenecks imposed by the Kenyan colonial settler elite made it almost impossible for Whitehall to develop for Kenya a kind of central policy for development and for full-scale state intervention in the colonial economy. The Second World War made all the difference: It unleashed new forces which fell into direct contradiction with the pre-1939 world geopolitics. The most important of these forces was a new era of capitalism which was marked by the United States' hegemony. There emerged a phase of concentration and centralization of capital on a world scale which involved the transformation of industrial organization and dramatic increases in labour productivity in all the capitalist

metropolises which completely altered the tendencies of international capital export. The traditional concentration of foreign investment in the field of plantations and raw material extraction changed in favour of a concentration of foreign investment in industry and manufacturing. The U.S., having emerged from the war stronger than any other capitalist country, came to despise the empire mentality as it stood in the path of this new world capitalist development. Indeed, the American President, Franklin Roosevelt, called the Second World War "a war to make the world safe for democracy" and, as Vice-President, Richard Nixon reported to the Foreign Relations Committee following his 1957 African tour that

American interests in the future are so great as to justify us not to hesitate even to assist the departure of the colonial powers from Africa. If we can win native opinion in this process the future of America in Africa will be assured.²⁰

What Roosevelt and Nixon were in effect saying was that the Empire should be dismantled to make the world safe for America's role in the new brand of capitalist development. Indeed, this period was characterized by a huge increase in the absolute amount of capital exports from major capitalist countries. For example, between 1946 and 1950 the net inflow of private longer-term capital from traditional capital exporting countries (Britain, U.S.A., France and

Germany) averaged 1.8 billion dollars per annum. Between 1950 and 1960 this rose to 2.9 billion dollars reaching a peak of 3.6 billion dollars in 1958.²¹

One conspicuous thing in these changes from the prewar to the postwar period was both the quantitative and qualitative differences between capital export in the two eras. Nicola Swainson summarizes these in three main tendencies. First, the significance of official government loans and grants as a proportion of the total capital exports increased from the 1950s onwards. This tendency was a reflection of the fact that the state in the advanced capitalist metropolises was now playing an increasingly significant role in paving the way for private productive investment. This gave rise to a new form of both national and international finance capital, where both national and internationally based agencies combined state and private funds to support large-scale investment projects abroad. Secondly there was the growth of multilateralism in foreign investment and the generalization of the capitalist mode of production globally. For most of the postwar period America and Britain supplied between 80% and 90% of the world's international capital. Nevertheless, during this period, Britain's dominant position as a capital exporter was gradually eroded by the U.S. This decline is brought out clearly in the fact that of the average total net exports of long-term private capital (1902 billion

dollars) between 1951 and 1955, 65% and 25% were from U.S.A. and Britain respectively. Between 1951 and 1964, of 2,523 billion dollars, America claimed a share of over 75% and Britain only 15%. Thirdly, there emerged the predominance of the multinational corporation in larger units than before as the medium for conducting the flow of private capital overseas. Of the total figure of all private capital between 1951 and 1964, at least 4/5 took the form of capital for the establishment and operation of overseas enterprises and branch plants. It was in this era that the export of capital rather than commodities became the dominant tendency.²² It is against this background we have to understand the changes in British colonial policy from 1945 and the effect of these changes on the Kenyan scene.

From around 1945 the British state started playing a more active role in bolstering British investments in the colonial areas and this formed the basis for the rise of a new "development policy" towards her colonies. Unlike the period during the war when her prime objective in view of her colonies was the preservation of the gold and foreign exchange reserves, the period starting 1945 made it imperative to formulate a new colonial policy which could act as part of the measures of state intervention in colonial economies. As Swainson says, the official version of

the postwar "new deal" for the colonies simply asserted a new version of Lord Lugard's "native paramountcy" where money and specialized personnel were to be provided for every colony to promote "development and social welfare".²³

The British government's immediate need after the war was to reduce the larger dollar deficits which amounted to around £311 million by 1948. One way of doing this was the encouragement of British firms to channel government resources into colonial primary and secondary production. The idea was to increase the exports of primary products from British colonies to America and other dollar areas and to cut down imports of manufactured goods from those areas. The latter aim was to be achieved by the encouragement of British firms to manufacture goods within colonies themselves.²⁴ The chief instrument for the implementation of this new development policy was the Colonial Development and Welfare Act of 1940. This superseded the C.D.A. of 1929 which had only provided a small trickle of aid to the colonies before 1939.²⁵ In other words to rebuild a war-shattered economy Britain set itself on a course of investing in the sterling area particularly Africa. The assumption was that this would, first, increase production of raw materials in the colonies and, secondly, it would benefit both the British and the colonized. In

the Kenyan context this philosophy meant an attempt to ensure that Africans would have a share of postwar prosperity, that minimum standards of wages, safety and social services would be enforced.

Though the programme for social welfare for Africans had begun before the Labour Party came to power (it had its legislative origins in the Colonial Development and Welfare Act of 1940) from 1943 onwards investment under the programme began to increase rapidly. In this year London announced a programme of £2,000,000 of development assistance, the largest amount going to soil conservation and African housing in urban areas. The Kenya government planned to raise another £2,000,000 on the London market for construction projects.²⁶ Between 1943 and 1947 the government built housing in Nairobi for its African employees at Starehe, erected temporary houses at Marurani, and later built a number of permanent estates for African workers to be let at sub-economic rentals. By the end of 1946 £325,370 had been spent on housing alone in Nairobi. About 10,000 to 15,000 Africans were housed in the new estates. New housing was built in Pumwani and a further 10,000 to 15,000 lived there and in Shauri Moyo.²⁷

But there was never enough housing. Major Orde Browne, although recognizing the progress made in Nairobi, commented in 1946 that "the disastrous

legacy of the past" was still haunting the town.²⁸ Indeed, although at the close of 1943 200 dwellings had, for example, been occupied in the Karikor African housing scheme which had virtually been completed and that plans had been completed and a contract let for the erection of the initial portion of a further scheme at Makongeni estimated in all to house 3,000 people, the Medical Officer of Health commented that

If the total projects can be considered reasonably satisfactory in existing circumstances, they yet constitute a minor part of the requirements for housing urban Africans.²⁹

This discrepancy between housing needs and housing provision can largely be explained not in terms of Government and Municipal negligence as it was in the pre-1939 period, but rather in terms of an unexpected jump in the African population in the town. As soon as war restrictions were eased, the population of Nairobi rose rapidly, perhaps as much as 40% in 1946 and a half after the end of the war (see table below).

Table 6.1: Population of Nairobi, 1942-1947

Race	1942	1943	1944	1945	1946	1947
European	8,591	9,421	10,431	10,257	10,377	10,500
Asians	28,530	30,829	31,877	36,517	37,191	39,000
Africans & Others.	54,453	59,022	66,592	66,040	63,183	64,000
All Races	91,574	99,272	108,900	112,814	110,751	113,500

Source: Municipal Council of Nairobi, 17th Annual Report of the Senior Medical Officer of Health, 1946 p.5.

According to the Senior Medical Officer of Health, the figures in the above table were only estimates and it is possible that the population of the town went up by over 17,000 in 1947. There was an increase of 16% compared to 4.3% in 1943, 9.7% in 1944 and 3.6% in 1945. The problem of housing became even more acute after the war. This is well brought out in the Senior Medical Officer of Health's report for 1947. He noted that.

In African Locations there is terrible overcrowding. It is estimated at present, whilst nearly 40,000 Africans live in overcrowded conditions about another 5,000 ...have no accommodation at all at night. They find for themselves some sort of shelter in insanitary and unauthorized structures dotted about such areas as the swamp and parts of Eastleigh, and, as may be imagined when people, and particularly primitive people, live in such unsatisfactory conditions, many turn to a life of crime³⁰ (Emphasis added)

In 1951 the Labour Department remarked on the deterioration of the housing situation between 1949 and 1951 even though by then there were six housing estates for Africans in the town. For many Europeans social welfare still remained "...the simple postwar remedy ... of giving natives sufficient amusement

of a healthy type to afford an outlet for their energy and canalize it into fruitful and uplifting channels".³¹ Despite this, however, the observations made by the Labour Department and the Senior Medical Officer of Health forced the City Council of Nairobi to carry out a thorough study of the problem in 1950.³² According to this study the distribution of the African population in the town showed that while 37% of Africans were living outside the Locations, 63% were housed in the Locations. From these statistics it deduced the future trends of the growth of the African population in the town (see table G.2)

Table 6.2: The 1950 and the projected Nairobi African Population to 1960

Year	Total African population	63% in Locations	37% outside Locations	Locations	
				Council	Railway and P.W.D.
1950	84,000	52,920	31,080	37,920	15,000
1951	86,000	54,507	32,013	39,007	15,500
1952	89,000	56,142	32,973	40,142	16,000
1953	91,000	57,826	33,962	41,576	16,250
1954	94,000	59,559	34,980	43,059	16,500
1955	97,374	61,345	36,029	44,595	16,750
1956	100,293	63,185	37,108	46,185	17,000
1957	103,302	65,080	38,222	47,830	17,250
1958	106,401	67,032	39,369	49,532	17,500
1959	109,593	69,043	40,550	51,318	17,725
1960	112,878	71,113	41,765	53,113	18,000

Source: City Council of Nairobi, "Report on African Housing" P.2 in KNA:
 LAB: 9/1752. African Housing General File, 1950

From these statistics the study established that the position of available accommodation in Council Locations alone was 27,700 bedspaces. This meant that out of a population of 37,920 requiring accommodation in the Council Locations, 10,220 were shelterless. To this number was to be added an almost similar number in Locations other than the council's (e.g. Railways and Public Works Department).³³ Given the rate at which the population was growing, the council needed, by 1960, to have built 25,413 more bedspaces if it hoped to solve the problem.³⁴ This, however, was not an easy task. Among the problems that were to hinder a steady progress, the study pointed out, was the structure of landownership in the town. In 1950 there were approximately 1,800 acres in the area to the South and East of the Locations which had been earmarked by the Master Plan for future African housing. Since much of this land was in private ownership expansion had stalled creating an abnormally high population density in the existing Locations (see table 6.3)

Table 6.3: African Population Densities in existing Locations, 1950

Location or Scheme	As planned	Population in 1950	Gross as planned	Density per acre	Net persons as planned	Density per acre	Area acres		% street and open spaces
							Total	plots	
Pumwani	9,450	14,000	132	194	510	870	72	20	72
Koriakor	1,760	3,000	176	300	224	382	10	75	25
Makongeni	7,503	-	103	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ziwani	2,180	1,800	90	-	178	-	24	12	50
Starehe	2,890	2,600	63	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bahati	3,400	-	61	-	91	-	56	37	34
Shauri Moyo	3,171	4,000	57	71	176	223	56	18	68
African Built	2,814	-	47	-	132	-	60	24	60
Kaloleni	3,060	2,800	40	-	75	-	76	40	48
P.W.D.	2,000	-	40	-	65	81	50	31	39
Thornton White (suggested)	10,000	-	20	-	50	-	500	200	60

Source: Worked out from table in Ibid., P.4.

This Municipal Council study demonstrated that between 1945 and 1950 the situation in Nairobi was one which was characterized by an ever increasing African population, lack of housing which led to an acute problem of overcrowding and, by implication, poor sanitary conditions. This almost inevitably led to an acute sense of deprivation among Africans. This in turn set the stage for confrontation between the colonial government and the Africans. This confrontation manifested itself in labour unrest.

6.3: African Urban Living Conditions and the African Labour Movement.

The event which shocked the colony and forced the government to allow the Labour Department to proceed with many of its suggested innovations for African urban labour was the Mombasa strike of 1947. This strike which "paralysed work at the docks and on the railway and practically all hotels, offices, banks and private houses"³⁵ was seen in official eyes as a communist-inspired disturbance. To colonial officials therefore, the strike was political; they forgot that it grew out of the economic and social discontent among the African working class in this port town. It was not political in the sense of being organized by nationalist politicians for political ends. Indeed, the period 1939-1947 had witnessed in Kenya the shift of the principal locus of African

employment from rural to urban areas as well as an increasing industrial and occupational differentiation in the work force. These two trends had differing effects on the character of working-class protest in Kenya. Among these effects were, first, the concentration of African workers in urban areas, a factor which made it possible for town-wide strikes; second, there was the emergence of organizations representing all or most of the workers in the town and, finally, there was specialization in the work force which led to the formation of occupationally and industrially specific workers' associations.

During the wartime years (1939-1945) the classic colonial pattern of part-time participation in the labour force began to change for the urban sector of African wage-earners. For many workers in Nairobi and Mombasa, for example, the pattern of a periodic one or two-year stint at wage-earning followed by an equally long return to the status of peasant was beginning to give way to one in which wage-earning occupied almost the whole of their working lives. The Phillips Committee of 1945, for example, divided Mombasa's workforce into two groups. On the one hand there were those African wage-earners who had reached the state of "temporary urbanization" and on the other there were those who had not. The former planned to stay in Mombasa for a large part of their working lives. Of these, railway workers formed the largest group.

On the railway in Mombasa, more than one half of even the unskilled employees were men with over two years' continuous service; about 20% had over five years' service and about 10% more than ten years' service. At least 50% of all the railway workers in the town (Mombasa) were reported to be married and were living with their families.³⁶ For Nairobi, the Municipal Native Affairs Officer noted in 1941 that

...labour has passed from the migrant stage to that of temporary or permanent urbanization. It is becoming less mobile and more stable and in fact growing amount of industrial work proper, which much increased with the war, offers a field of employment where that desirable figure, the stable skilled or semi-skilled African worker, can emerge.³⁷

Among the workers who lived in Kariokor and Shauri Moyo, two housing estates for Municipal employees, it is reported that in 1941 from 22% (Shauri Moyo) to 58% (Kariokor) were married and accompanied by their wives in the town.³⁸

From the above assessment we can conclude that first, there was in the wartime period in Kenyan urban areas an emerging social aggregate, a small but gradually crystallizing working class with some continuity of membership over time. Secondly, this development was a pre-condition for the rise of the first African labour organizations which between 1945 and 1952 were in the forefront in the articulation of

African working class grievances in the urban areas. The historical context within which these developments took place was a colonial social structure in which racial and economic divisions largely but not completely coincided. Class categories, in particular the working class, might encompass several racial groups but within each class, occupational and status specialization according to race was very much marked in Kenya. Besides the virtual exclusion of some races from certain occupations (in the working class, for example, there were no European manual workers; there were very few African skilled workers or artisans, the majority of these being Asians), there persisted within those occupations which were open to more than one race (for example clerks and artisans) a racial hierarchy in the form of differential remuneration for the same job. On the railway, for example, the ratio between African and Asian salaries for corresponding posts was 50:100, and Asians made only 55% of European salaries for identical jobs.³⁹ Overall, average income differences between the races were probably even wider. One study of the race/income structure indicates that there were some income overlaps between races, but income equalities did not convey mutual social acceptance or prestige. Given this structure, economic organizations in the colony, both of workers and of employers, were initially formed along racial lines. This largely explains why there were separate Indian and African labour movements. Thus, as Sharon Stichter concludes,

between 1939 and 1947 African consciousness of the larger social structure grew as demands for higher wages and better living conditions became linked, for the first time, with demand for equality with Indian and European workers and for African equality with other races generally. Class consciousness became mixed with race consciousness, and labour protest (which in large part had a ready backing from the urban unemployed and the numerous lumpen-proletariat) became linked with African nationalism.⁴⁰ It is within this framework that one can begin to appreciate the impact of urbanization together with a rising cost of living and stagnating wages. Indeed, these two factors led to the first major strike in Mombasa in 1934 and a general strike in 1939 and 1947 respectively.

Thus in refuting government allegations that the 1947 strike was communist-inspired the African Workers Union pointed out in a letter to the East African Standard that the causes of the strike were

- 1) the indifference towards paying the African workers less salaries as compared with the other workers of other races who performed identical or same duties;
- 2) the partiality and disrespect shown to African workers wherever they were employed;
- 3) deliberate devices which were used to keep the Africans poor so that they could keep at their work.

The letter described this device as "indirect slavery camouflaged by sweet words and such salaries as would be taken as tips."

- 4) Lack of family allowance and,
- 5) the indifference of the authorities to the high cost of living in the town (Mombasa).⁴¹

The strike was therefore meant to pressurize the government into increasing wages sufficient to meet the needs of the African worker and his family. It was also aimed at getting equal pay for equal work and for the removal of racial discrimination and "indirect slavery".⁴²

But if the period 1939-1947 was the formative period for the evolution of African labour organizing in Kenya the years from 1947 to 1952 formed what Sharon Stichter calls the militant phase as it marked the transition of the African labour organizing from class-conscious interracial activity to nationalist rebellion.⁴³ This is because while in the immediate postwar period labour organizing encompassed the Labour Trade Union of East Africa and the East African Trade Congress which were both interracial organizations under the joint leadership of Africans and the left-wing Trade Unionist, Makhan Singh, from around 1947 there was the movement of the main wing of African unionism into active participation in the Mau Mau rebellion. This transition can be explained in terms of, first, the connections between the soci-economic

situation of the wage-earners at this time in Kenya's historical development and, second, the connections between the colonial state labour policies and the pattern of the protest. This is important because while socio-economic conditions expressed the situation of workers directly within the mode of production, state policy decisions referred to the state of class struggle as it played out in the political arena. Though the principal occupations in this period (1947-1952) were grouped under agriculture, mining, forestry, industry, commerce, government service and domestic service with labour being described as casual,⁴⁴ there was a growing body of semi-skilled and skilled African labour in fields like masonry, dressmaking, blacksmithing and carpentry.⁴⁵ Thus increasingly dependant on wages, drawn into the modern capitalist economy but kept on the lower levels within it, the gradually forming urban African working class created a militant and nationalist labour movement which had far-reaching effects on the workers' living conditions. As one colonial annual report notes,

The African is becoming conscious of the considerable rise in the cost of living and, particularly in the towns, aspires to a higher standard of living. In the past the low rates of wages paid to urban workers were only made possible by the fact that the urban worker was mainly a casual worker, returning to his native area from time to time, where his wife or wives cultivated his land. Urban labour was thus to some extent subsidized by the native areas. Long-term policy is now directed towards the stabilization

of urban workers, with a consequent need for increased social services and higher wages.46

In this year (1946) the number of Africans employed in various groups or categories was as shown in the table below.

Table 6.4: Africans in Employment in 1946

<u>Group</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>% of total</u>
Domestic and Personal	27,431	11.05
Commercial and Professional	21,542	8.68
Industrial	13,120	5.29
Mining and Quarrying	6,954	2.80
Building and construction	4,830	1.95
Timber and fuel production	11,523	4.64
Miscellaneous	6,044	2.43
Agriculture	90,541	36.50
Public Services	<u>66,150</u>	<u>26.66</u>
Total	248,135	100.00

Source: Colony and Protectorate of Kenya,
Annual Report, 1946, p.26.

From the above table, one can see that while agricultural employment constituted of only 36.50% non-agricultural employment constituted of 63.50%. These developments were taking place against the background of an ever-increasing number of companies being registered in Kenya and their tendency to concentrate in

secondary and import-substitution manufacturing. From the table Below: (Table 6.5) one can see this trend whereby while in 1938 there were only 52 private and public companies with a nominal capital of £763,000 compared to 7 foreign ones with a nominal capital of £165,000, in 1948 these had increased to 287 with a nominal capital of £12,383,000 and 30 with a nominal capital of £11,397,000 respectively.

Table 6.5: Companies Registered in Kenya 1938-1948

Year	Local Companies Registered				Foreign Companies		
	Public	Private	Total	Nominal Capital £'000	Removed from Registered	Registered	Nominal capital £'000
1938	5	47	52	763	40	7	165 ^a
1939	3	37	40	297	25	43	111,582 ^{b b}
1940	2	20	22	240	26	10	5,492 ^c
1941	-	41	41	336	23	2	505
1942	-	50	50	389	18	4	209
1943	1	67	68	625	13	15	759
1944	2	63	65	1,147	11	5	15
1945	5	88	93	1,041	16	8	3,439
1946	12	151	163	3,518	15	22	14,087
1947	12	191	206	4,798	20	21	13,390
1948	19	270	289	12,383	17	30	11,397

Notes: a) plus 20,000,000 Yen b) Plus 4,000,000 Yen c) Plus 75,000,000 Yen

Source: Colony and Protectorate of Kenya, Notes on Commerce and Industry in Kenya (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1950), P.18

These developments had, as we have already pointed out elsewhere in this chapter, the effect of shifting the principal locus of African employment from agriculture to non-agricultural enterprises. It is important to note here that the total number of African employees given in table 6.4 comprised of only those who were on monthly contracts, otherwise there were 33,688 resident labourers, 9,696 daily paid employees and 11,795 enlisted in His Majesty's forces. This gives us the total number of 351,633 adult male Africans in employment on November 26th, 1948. The number of women and juveniles in employment on the same date were 30,589 and 44,904 respectively. The employment of these last two categories was almost entirely in agriculture.⁴⁷

At this same period the monthly wages for male Africans in selected occupations were as shown in the table (Table 6.6) below:

Table 6.6: Monthly Wages for Male Africans in Selected Occupations, November, 1948

Occupation	Agriculture	Private Industry		Public Service			
	Average Wage.	Av.Wage	% Rationed	% Housed	Av.Wage	% Rationed	%Housed
Domestic servants	Sh.37.50	Sh.58.00	44	80	sh.64.00	34	91
Clerical workers	86.00	150.00	28	36	186.00	3	32
Shop, office and store Boys	-	63.00	26	31	60.00	6	51
Carpenters	95.00	129.00	41	49	139.00	12	56
Masons	74.00	121.00	37	62	131.00	14	46
Drivers	84.00	129.00	35	46	141.00	21	51

- Notes:
- 1) The above figures are based on the 1949 Census Report plus 34% to cover rise in the cost of living index up to November 1951.
 - 2) The average wages given in this table do not include value of free housing and free rations.

Source: Colony and Protectorate of Kenya, Notes on Commerce and Industry in Kenya (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1952), P.17.

The minimum wage in urban areas at this time was sh.51.75 for ticket contracts, sh.43.50 for other contracts and sh.5 as housing allowance for Nairobi and sh.53.50 for ticket contracts, sh.45.75 for other contracts and sh.8.25 as housing allowance for Mombasa.⁴⁸

Up to 1946 there was no cost of living index for Nairobi or any other large town in Kenya. However, a Retail Price Index (R.P.I.) was calculated during the war for Nairobi with August 1939 as the base line. This RPI contained most of the articles consumed by Europeans and Asians and at December 31st, 1946, stood at 65 points above August 1939.⁴⁹ As would be expected, the rise in the cost of living had more effect on urban areas than in the agricultural areas. So far as Africans were concerned the reasons were that most employees in agricultural districts were provided with food and very often had plots of land which provided further subsistence. Urbanized Africans often had outlets to such small plots but very many were "detrribalized" and had lost this advantage. Clothing prices had been trebled as compared with before the war and food prices were approximately double.⁵⁰ Though there is a dearth of data, one can conclude that the current wages could not meet the needs of an African urban worker when it came to housing and other amenities.

Perhaps the most logical question to ask at this stage is: What was the situation like for these workers? First, it was in the main skilled and semi-skilled workers who experienced increasing stability/dependence as secondary industry expanded to serve the domestic market after the war. Secondly, though their real incomes were increasing,⁵¹ the other side of this coin was frequently long hours of work, demanding physical labour as well as job insecurity coupled with decreasing access to land as an economic alternative. Also, rising incomes were barely able to keep up with inflation, with the new consumption desires stimulated by urban life, and the new demands made by less well-off family and kin. In fact, this increasing stability/dependence affected one section of the wage-earning class. This is because there was that section which experienced low wages, low skill and part-time labour. Thus, whereas on the one hand wages for skilled and semi-skilled African labour rose steadily after the war, a large number of workers remained at or near the statutory minimum wage rates. A survey carried out by the East African High Commission on the pattern of income, expenditure and consumption of African labourers in Nairobi in 1950 found out that 58% of those employed in private industry and 30% of those in government service were in the minimum wage category.⁵² These workers spent about 70% of their income on food and thus they were nearly

always in debt by end of the month. Because the minimum wage barely kept pace with the cost of living in this period,⁵³ it would not be far-fetched to conclude that these workers experienced no gains at all.⁵⁴

This situation is reflected in these workers' living conditions. Perhaps the most concrete manifestation of urban poverty among Africans in Nairobi in the postwar years was the inadequacy of housing and the associated environmental and sanitary services. One obvious by-product of these conditions was the prevalence of certain diseases among the Africans. Diseases that posed special threats were those borne by excreta and passed on through the contamination of water, foodstuffs and so on and those borne by the air and spread by human contact. Diseases in the former category included gastro-entric ones especially diarrhea (which had the effect of lowering resistance to other diseases), and cholera and parasitic infestations especially in children. Tuberculosis was also prevalent in the African shanty dwellings as well as other African housing estates where overcrowding was the norm. Thus, like in previous years before the Second World War, the task of obtaining the demolition of the "unsound, over-crowded and obnoxious buildings" in the town was pursued and the Medical Department was always advocating for the "introduction of a Housing Act as well as endeavour to secure slum clearance along the lines adopted by local authorities

in England."⁵⁵ Using the relationship between the prevalence of Tuberculosis amongst Africans and African housing the Medical Officer of Health for Nairobi kept on reiterating the fact that improvement in housing conditions and increase in space remained the only way in which the authorities could hope to bring under control the incidence of diseases in the town.⁵⁶ In 1949, for example, the attack of Tuberculosis among Africans accounted for 40% of all diseases as compared to 12.6% in 1945. The disease in this year caused 11% of all African deaths in the town.⁵⁷ Indeed, a full picture of the increase in the occurrence of the disease among Africans is borne out of the fact that while in the preceding five years the attack rate was 18, this had risen to 41 in 1948 and 53 in 1950 (see table 6.7 below).

Table 6.7: African Tuberculosis Attack and Death Rates Per 10,000 population.

Year	Attack Rate	Death Rate
1945	13.0	7.5
1946	14.2	7.9
1947	29.0	11.0
1948	41.0	14.0
1949	40.0	15.0
1950	53.0	27.0

Note: These figures can be compared to attack and death rates among Europeans per 10,000 population of 50 and 1.4 respectively and Asians 5.4 and 1 respectively.

Source: City Council of Nairobi, 21st Annual Report of the Senior Medical Officer of Health, 1950, p.28.

Apart from Tuberculosis, infant mortality rate among Africans was highly marked. While this stood at 42% and 62% among Europeans and Asians respectively in 1947, the African figure was a staggering 215%. Compared to the Africans, infant mortality rate among Asians had been falling steadily since 1941 (see tables 6.8 and 6.9) below.

Table 6.8: Comparative Infant Mortality Rates for 7 years, 1941-1947

Year	European	Asian	African and Others	All Races
1941	20	146	180	149
1942	33	127	165	137
1943	36	95	207	135
1944	49	62	154	97
1945	33	56	131	86
1946	48	60	148	97
1947	64	98	224	148

Source: Municipal Council of Nairobi, 18th Annual Report of the Senior Medical Officer of Health, 1947, P.10.

Table 6.9: Infant Mortality Rate (Death of infants under one year per, 1,000 live births).

RACE	Comparative Rates for preceding 5 yrs					5 year mean	Infant mortality Rate for 1948	Variation of 1948 from mean of reading 5yrs
	1943	1944	1945	1946	1947			
European	36	49	33	48	64	46	75	63% increase
Asian	95	62	56	60	98	73	67	8% Decrease
African	207	154	131	148	224	167	187	12% increase

Source: Municipal Council of Nairobi, 19th Annual Report of the Senior Medical Officer of Health, 1948, P.6.

Among the causes of infant deaths, the principal increases in this period were found to be in gastro-enteritis (500%), T.b. lungs (200%), pneumonia (73%) and prematurity (48%). The first three were closely related to overcrowding and the fourth to poverty.⁵⁸ The Medical Officer of Health pointed out in 1947 that

It is now thoroughly accepted on all sides that the infant mortality rate is one of the best measures of the social conditions of a town or rural area, and it is impossible to escape the conclusion that the social conditions in Nairobi have very markedly worsened during the year despite the prosperity of the town.⁵⁹

The factors which embraced the phrase "social conditions" were domestic overcrowding, unemployment, low wages, proportion of women who had to work and the size of families. Quoting Woolf of the Edinburgh Institute of Social Medicine who had carried out a classical investigation into the relative influence of these factors, the Medical Officer of Health found out that the most important were overcrowding, low wages and the proportion of women who had to work (in that order).⁶⁰

From the above, it can be seen that ready explanations for the prevalence of tuberculosis and the high rate of infant mortality rate which suggested themselves were a high degree of overcrowding and low wages which existed side by side with a wide-

spread state of malnutrition. Indeed, tuberculosis, for example, is a disease which is commonly found in association with other diseases of the poor such as malnutrition, anaemia and malaria. Pneumonia also occurred as a poverty-generated disease because, together with bronchitis, it was one of the leading causes of death among Africans in the town.⁶¹ In other words, mortality rates from these diseases were highest in areas with overcrowded, poor-quality housing whereas they were almost negligible in the highest quality areas. There are the possibilities that the Nairobi urban poor also succumbed to psychogenic maladies than others due to their lack of privacy in conjunction with the stress associated with economic insecurity and self-disparaging comparisons with more successful members of their (African) own race. This group may have become a victim of mental illness. Though there is no evidence to prove this (as there has been no research in this area in Kenya) it is likely that some migrant labourers who were unemployed and lived alone were susceptible to this.⁶²

The question of overcrowding and its concomitant problem of the prevalence of diseases among urban Africans in Nairobi brought to the fore at least one important thing: the contradiction between the persistence of low-wage migrant labour and the moral negligence of the authorities to cater for this labour

in terms of social provisions. Noting in 1949 that overcrowding was a question which had always been "by-passed like dirt on a footpath", the Nairobi Senior Medical Officer of Health pointed out that

It is a murky reflection on any community when people are reduced to living in disused and converted latrines or in fuel stores, and to sleeping in their kitchens or permitting their servants to sleep in them overnight, whilst rent-paying tenants occupy the approved servants quarters. 'Turn them out' people say, 'demolish this and that' but no suggestions whatsoever are forthcoming as to where these displaced persons are to live. If we were quite (?) about it we would say these people should be given notice to remove themselves, not only from the shacks but from the town (as well) because there are no places available in which to dwell. For if they remain they must further overcrowd other overcrowded quarters. It becomes a question of whether these people should be permitted to continue in their slums with 300 cubic feet of air space or go to live in stores and kitchens with perhaps half that space, and double the risk of ill-health.63

These were perhaps among the first critical remarks in a series of considerations on the place of Africans in Nairobi. Coming at the close of the 1940s was significant in itself. Their significance lay as much in the fact that Kenya had had almost ten years of unmitigated capitalization, industrial development and imported technology as in the drying up of a free

grant from the Colonial Development and Welfare vote which in 1943 had prompted the colonial government to promulgate the first ever Housing Ordinance in the country. With these two developments in mind some influential colonial servants like the Nairobi Senior Medical Officer of Health were known to openly advocate for a change of course in dealing with urban Africans. Indeed, just like the end of the 1930s when indiscriminate exclusion of Africans from all aspects of urban life became highly questionable, by the end of the 1940s it was becoming increasingly clear that there was the need on the part of the authorities to attempt a comprehensive reappraisal of African housing policy in urban areas. It seemed, for the first time in colonial official thinking, that the solution to the problem of lack of housing for Africans and its by-product-overcrowding and diseases- lay in the formulation of a more comprehensive policy which would no longer be tied to the perennial question of the government being the sole agent in the process of looking for funds to meet the requirements of Africans in towns. It is against this background that Nairobi Alderman Ernest Vasey was given the task of inquiring into the problem of housing for Africans in Townships and Trading Centres. In 1950 Vasey came out with his report⁶⁴ which was to mark yet another milestone in official thinking over the question of African housing since his recommendations were eventually accepted as

the "basis and principle" of Kenya housing policy in the 1950s.

Starting off by pointing out some of the contradictions inherent in the pre-1950 African urban housing policies, Ernest Vasey for example argued that the provision of housing on the sub-economic basis* had from the start been doomed to failure. This was so because so long as wages for most Africans working in towns remained at or near the statutory minimum level, it was almost next to the impossible for them to afford economic rents on houses built to reasonable standards. Indeed, though most European unofficial town councillors and members of the Legislative Council were increasingly becoming opposed to continued subsidy on African urban housing, their reason being that Africans were not rate-payers, the need for a meaningful revision in African wages seemed to constantly elude them. Vasey addressed himself to both these questions and pointed out that though subsidies were necessary in the current situation the solution to the problem of housing lay not in rental schemes but rather in the government's encouragement of African

*This meant that rents paid by African tenants did not meet the combined fixed and recurrent costs borne by both the central and local authorities.

-owned housing. He reached two important conclusions on which he went on to base practical steps which he thought were necessary in any process for the implementation of large-scale African home-ownership. These conclusions were, first, that ¹ continued heavy public subsidization on African housing was impossible and, secondly, that ² employer-built schemes were only a marginal expedient.

Making a follow-up of the early 1940s arguments for the creation of a more modernized, efficient African labour force, Vasey pointed out that one of the major ingredients of such a move was the need for the establishment of schemes which encouraged African home ownership because, African-owned housing "would open the door to a stable urban population, inasmuch as the African who built his own house and owned property with its consequent chance of income would be more likely to let go his hold upon his native reserve."⁶⁵ Furthermore, African home-ownership involved a process of "economic education" because the African would use his own efforts which would lead him "to the realization that only in proportion to the efforts of the individual can the state provide services."⁶⁶

At the root of these proposals was Vasey's belief that the difficult problems of racialism and tribalism could best be overcome if all groups had access to the modern economic system. For Africans, security

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in the urban areas would reduce their dependence on the tribal institutions of the reserves, while at the same time enhancing their ability to compete economically with other races. Given his overall objectives, the constraints imposed by a lack of African capital resources, existing by-laws whose major component was the insistence on high standards of building by the authorities, Vasey's report was planned as a compilation of the practical steps to be followed in drawing up new housing schemes. Among his suggestions for the implementation of the recommendations were, first, that in every township the Land Department should set aside an area for African housing and zone it for employer-built, private, or public housing schemes. Secondly, he suggested that sizes of private plots in such schemes be 40'x50' and Africans who were granted land by the government be allowed a 40 year lease. If after 40 years the land was not needed for other purposes, the lease be extended by an additional 25 years. Thirdly, he suggested that rents on such land be held to a minimum, and that the maintenance of the property be left as the responsibility of the occupier although special public health regulations be applied. Fourthly, loans be made available as well as arrangements to cheapen the cost of materials. Initially, a permanent concrete plinth be required but at the end of ten years building in permanent materials be insisted upon. Lastly, he

investment, and imported technology were creating opportunities for higher skilled and semi-skilled employment, but only a relatively few Africans yet had access to the skills and training required for these jobs. So long as this contradiction remained, the problem of urban poverty and its concomitance of overcrowding and diseases continued. Indeed, the persistence of low-wage migrant labour in the midst of postwar prosperity led to a heightened sense of discontent among unskilled urban workers. As an East African Standard editorial put it in the middle of 1951,

The shortage of housing generally, and the low standard of much of the African housing in the urban centres of Kenya, continues to be the principal threat to social stability in the colony....The attitude of the Central and Local Government Authorities to the housing problems of all races in Nairobi has been disgracefully wasteful of the decreasing area of available land in the municipal area With the development of industrial areas and the emergence of the industrial worker, both skilled and unskilled, it is essential that housing policies should give the maximum aid to the town African in establishing not only himself but his family in decent living conditions, and doing so within his income.⁶⁹

To this paper the answer to social deviance lay in the recognition of the fact that "earlier types of council houses are now little better than overcrowded slums" which called for the urgent need of providing "adequate housing of decent and reasonable quality,

suggested that in the case of public housing estates, either individual African tenants or employers on long-term lease be required to pay economic rents.

In 1951 little was done to implement these recommendations save the beginning of a pilot tenant-purchase house scheme for 2,000 in Thika and the provision of loans in form of materials and cash by the City Council to Africans who wished to build or purchase their own houses in Shauri Moyo.⁶⁷ In the following month the City Council approved a proposal for Africans to start building their own houses in the town.⁶⁸

Although between 1945 and 1952 the City Council built some 12,000 housing units in Nairobi, this was far short of the housing requirements for the ever increasing African population in the town. What emerges from the above analysis is that the contradictions inherent in the Kenyan colonial labour migration system were becoming acute, and they had not yet been resolved by a transition to the new pattern of labour utilization required by limited industrialization of the post-war era. On the one hand, the crowded African reserves continued to supply large numbers of unskilled, partially proletarianized labourers whom the colonial economy could not absorb - especially in urban areas even at the prevailing low wages. On the other hand, increasing capitalization, industrial

both publicly and privately provided, properly sited, designed to provide the maximum social security".⁷⁰

Mr. Ernest A. Vasey, who had become member for Education, Health and Local Government, clearly saw the link between poor living conditions and revolution when he told members of the East Africa Institute of Architects at an annual dinner in Nairobi that one of the best defences against the growth of communism was "the installation of a sense of possession amongst people who had little opportunity to Possess and who, financially, would never be in a position to possess". The Council could continue with its programme of demolishing African shanties. but

... we must face the fact that one of the greatest causes of social discontent and, finally, revolution, is bad housing conditions. It is futile to talk about improving sanitation and health conditions while we have in our midst people living in conditions in which a large number of our African population is living. Believe me, disease knows no respect for race; when it strikes, it strikes equally at all. There is, therefore, the need to increase the pace of the building of African houses. There is, too, a social, economic and political need - and also a need to get away from the idea that in this city all urban Africans are going to live as tenants only. (The Africans need) a place into which they can walk, close the doors and say: 'This is ours', (emphasis added).⁷⁴

From our analysis in this section, we have attempted to show that the period immediately after the Second World War was one in which African living

conditions in towns continued to deteriorate. We have also tried to show that labour unrest in this period was a manifestation of African responses to these conditions. It was a period in which demand for higher wages and better living conditions became linked to the demand for racial equality and, consequently, to African nationalism. The colonial authorities' failure to grasp the dynamics of these developments despite E.A. Vasey's comprehensive report in 1950 was to eventually lead to the Mau Mau uprising. The activities of this uprising which were invariably based in Nairobi and the government's reaction to them were to later contribute to the evolution of a more consistent housing policy for Africans to 1956 and beyond. What were these activities and how did the government react?

6.4 Mau Mau and African Housing in Nairobi: 1952-1956.

In 1952 after the declaration of the state of emergency there was the roundup of the Kikuyu in Nairobi in an operation code-named "Operation Jack Scott." In 1954 there was another operation - "Operation Anvil" - which involved the roundup of an estimated 30,000 Kikuyu of whom 16,538 were detained and 2,416 of their dependants returned to their home areas. By the end of 1954 some 67,000 people were either in prison or in detention on charges relating to Mau Mau, and a total of nearly 90,000 were detained before the lifting of the emergency in 1960.⁷²

There were two themes which characterized this period in Kenyan History. First, there was the assertion of control by London and the gradual insistence by the Colonial Office that social and political reform must accompany repression in Kenya. Secondly, on the local scene, there was a significant shift in official colonial thinking which came to link the outbreak of the Mau Mau to psychological, socio-economic and political factors among the Kikuyu. Both these themes produced certain positive developments for Africans both in the rural and urban areas. While in the rural areas there was the inauguration of the Swynnerton Plan which gave the necessary guidelines for land reform, in towns and especially in Nairobi and Mombasa there was a new and more consistent approach to African living conditions. This latter move was contained in the Carpenter Committee Report on African Wages of 1954. That both the Swynnerton Plan and the Carpenter Report came out in the same year and in the middle of the emergency - 1954 - is therefore significant in itself.

The move on the part of Whitehall to assert its control over Kenya as well as to embark on a programme of gradual social and political reform between 1952 and 1956 was a reflection of the determination of the Colonial Office not only to keep power firmly in its hands but also to end the hitherto de facto veto of

the Kenya administration by a belligerent white settler elite. This move, though having its roots in the immediate postwar British attitude towards her colonies, had thenceforth to have a combination of the carrot and the stick. As Lyttelton said in 1952, the role of Whitehall was that one of discharging "responsibilities within the rule of law and the general humanitarian principles of Great Britain".⁷³ This meant that while on the one hand Britain had to continue with its postwar policy of development and social welfare in her colonies it had, on the other, to accompany this with the maintenance of "law and order" through the suppression of the Mau Mau rebellion. Indeed, gradually an increasingly new emphasis came to be placed on practical social reforms to secure the political momentum for the guerrillas in the forests and in towns. Central to this emphasis were three objectives - improvement in African urban housing, higher wages for African workers and land reform in the reserves.⁷⁴

Using expatriate firms with links in Kenya and especially through the London-based Overseas Employers Federation, the Colonial Office in London sought ways and means of understanding the hitherto elusive relationship between labour productivity, wages and wage levels, living conditions and the changing consumption habits of the African population in Kenya. The question became one of not only using these firms in its

(Britain's) interventionist postwar policy in the Kenyan colonial economy; it increasingly acquired new dimensions as it transcended the political chasm between London and Nairobi in its efforts to reconcile the above-mentioned relationship with an ultra-conservative white settler elite in the colony. It was a question which sought to accede to a modern system of social and political relations partly to ensure that welfare capitalism rather than radical socialism triumphed in the colony and partly to allow co-operation with labour in a form which could mitigate the colour-bar by transforming the local relationship from race to one of economic bargaining.

It was on ground not wholly unreceptive. The Colonial Office and the Kenya Government were able to appoint a series of Commissions to signpost the way to economic development and to a higher standard of living, particularly for Africans. Between 1953 and 1955 Whitehall-appointed East Africa Royal Commission reviewed economic circumstances of East Africa. Its views, those of the liberal capitalism of contemporary Western Europe, wished to banish traditionalism and paternalism insofar as it was possible to do so and to introduce into East Africa the modern economic arrangements and practices of "colour-blind" capitalism. It hoped to do this by eliminating the so-called dual economy and by integrating Africans into the European sector. The 1950s saw other local

inquiries and reports designed to make the necessary adjustments. The most important of these were the Carpenter Report on African Wages, the Lidburg Commission Report on the Civil Service, the Dolton Report on social security and the Swynnerton Plan on African agriculture. The major motivating factors behind this new zeal for the realignment of the Kenyan economic and social structures with its central theme of improving the African living conditions are not hard to find.

In chapter four we put across an argument that the Nairobi pre-1939 approach to African urbanization got its inspiration from the way the London Victorian elite approached the question of the casual worker in the 1850s when sprawling poverty and urban squalor came to be associated with disease, crime and the potential for violence. We further argued that just like in London where the general failure of the initial urban renewal policies had led to new proposals on how to eliminate urban poverty, the 1950s in Nairobi saw a move towards new ideas on how to modify segregationist policies to accommodate Africans not along racial but class lines. Thus in 1951 Mr. Ernest A. Vasey could declare that just like in England where the real stabilizing influence of the British nation had been built on the foundation of a great middle class with a strong sense of possession, in Kenya what was needed was the building of

... a stabilizing influence among the African population by the creation of an African middle class (through) some system whereby the enterprising and hard-working African can achieve the ownership of his own place If we are to tackle what is a serious problem of the urban population, we must bring family life into the town and create that property-owning middle class which is such a stabilizing factor in any economy.⁷⁵

To Vasey this was a sure way of creating "the best defences possible against unrest and discontent."⁷⁶

What Vasey was saying (and which became increasingly loud in official circles through the first half of the 1950s) was that the economic and political climate in the colony demanded that the respectable African worker should be reclaimed while the residuum of the unregenerated poor should be segregated against.

Building on the early 1940s labour stabilization policies which had come to replace the pre-1939 wholesale colour segregation in the face of limited industrialization, the rationale in the 1950s was generally that of increasing productivity of labour and to later isolate moderates from militants. The 1940s version of these policies had been overtaken by the events of the contradictions over land in Central Province and living conditions in Nairobi which came to a head in the form of the Mau Mau uprising. Between 1951 and 1956 there were thus explicit attempts to drive a wedge between militant and loyalist through the isolation of the former and the encouragement of the

latter. To this end the East Africa Royal Commission was central with its insistence upon colour-blind capitalism. Thus the arbitrary racial barriers were to be removed and replaced by economic and class ones in the country. In other words the system moved from social i.e. racial to economic i.e. poverty categorization by the colonial state.

The views of some colonial officials, which were obviously a poor imitation of the eloquent and brilliant Ernest A. Vasey the liberal, are quite illuminating on this transformation. Using urban housing as their organizing variable, these officials consistently called for the creation of a strong African middle class. In his opening speech to the East African Housing conference in Nairobi in January 1955, Sir Evelyn Baring, the Colonial Governor, called for the creation of a loyalist stable African middle class. Taking African housing as a central factor in this process, he put a cross a strong case for the formulation of "an essentially realistic approach" to solving the intermittent urban housing shortage for Africans because "in all countries services depended on the ability to produce and to produce at competitive prices." To formulate such an approach, he went on,

Let us rather have two aims-one to build a large number of houses of a passable standard for a large number of Africans, and the other to provide a number of well-educated Africans with really good houses and the chance of house ownership.⁷⁷

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Dr. A.T.G. Thomas, the Nairobi Senior Medical Officer of Health and Mr. Nahashon Mimano, the Sanitary Inspector in the Nairobi Public Health Department were even more candid when they addressed the conference. According to Dr. Thomas, the necessity for the realization of the Africans' housing needs were to be related to the means the Africans could themselves provide. This idea was taken further by Mr. Mimano who suggested that the authorities had a duty to build locations for the higher income group of Africans if the enthusiasm and sense of civic pride of the people was to be created and maintained. According to him family quarters needed to be provided with all facilities that were necessary for family life and that every class of Africans be housed separately "so that a form of cleanliness competition was set up".⁷⁸ Dr. Thomas's views were later in that month to be articulated in a two part article in the East African Standard entitled "Some of the Practical Problems about African Housing". In this article Dr. Thomas pointed out that it was imperative for the authorities to encourage permanent accommodation for Africans because

I regard as very important ...
that people in these conditions
can form the basis of an African
middle class. Observations in
places such as the Belgian Congo
show that if African society can
be moulded in this way, the
community becomes far more stable
and resistant to crime and
political agitation (emphasis added).

He went on to say that "the encouragement of the African householder to buy his house by instalments, to give him by all possible means a very real stake in the land and a personal interest in seeing that peace and order are maintained" was an indispensable element in the creation of a stable African middle class. This was even more so because "the building up of an African middle class in urban areas to some extent counters the evil effects of detribalization whereby the salutary discipline of the elders has lost its power and places the burden upon the police."⁷⁹

Mrs. E.M. Rayner, the chairman of Nairobi's African Housing and Public Health Committee, actually charted out a course of development which the creation of such a class would eventually take. In her discussion on the economic and human aspects in African urban housing in the town, she said that

It has always seemed...that a guiding factor in dealing with African problems is to take what is good in the old African way of life and weld it to the newer western methods so that the old idea, probably sound in itself, becomes modernized. In this way, too, the colour of life is not lost; a point we are apt to forget in our efforts to emphasize the advantages of wholesale westernization.

To Mrs. Rayner the African way of life was always merged as a result of the African's traditional outlook. If this principle was applied to housing planning, then the inherent contradiction between who was to be

housed - a family or a bachelor - in Nairobi would amicably be resolved. It was on this principle that she proposed a three-tier housing planning structure for Nairobi: at the bottom of her pyramid - like structure she suggested the establishment of community hostels where a man could rent one or two rooms with individual sanitation but where kitchen, laundry, playrooms and libraries would still be on a community basis. This corresponded to the low-wage earning Africans and was ideally envisaged to succeed the notorious barrack-like dormitories of the 1920s and 1930s. Above this lower stage she proposed a type of housing which could give those Africans who had taken "to an urbanized life and who, for one reason or another, do not want to return to their reserves" every encouragement to stay as they formed "the nucleus of the future structure of the urban population." She wished to see

...the extension of Council's tenant purchase schemes so that these people can take their place in the life of the city - and I cannot believe that a true sense of responsibility and civic pride can be based on anything but home ownership. Thus, this smaller higher layer in the pyramid would represent the needs of those Africans who are already beginning to establish an African middle class....

At the apex of this structure were to be those Africans "who are in what we are pleased to call the 'higher income groups' and in most cases they have their own

contributions to make to the life of the city."

To her this group was to be encouraged to build and to own their own houses throughout the city. She concluded that

while we recognise the vital importance of building houses for this smaller section at the apex of the Pyramid, our desire to cater for those Africans who are emerging as leaders of African society must not overshadow the demanding needs of the masses of Africans who form the base of the structure.⁸⁰

This shift in outlook towards African housing in Nairobi had its roots in the changing political atmosphere in the country in the postwar period in general but particularly in the events that led to the Mau Mau uprising. Though direct and overt references to the uprising are absent, it is not hard to read in the above statements that overwhelming political trajectory which can be deciphered from such phrases as "maintenance of law and order", "crime and political agitation", "civic pride", etc. Indeed, since 1950 there had been a growing concern in some circles that poor living conditions were bound to have really devastating effects on law and order in Kenyan urban centres. For example, G.R.B. Brown, a former African Affairs Officer to the City Council, wrote in August 1952 that the urgency of redressing the African poor living conditions in Nairobi manifested itself in the strike of 1950 which was carried

out by dwellers in the worst slums in the town. To him this strike was "a spasm produced by their (African) grim conditions. The inhabitants of the newer and better quarters did not join in."⁸¹

The fact that the authorities were increasingly getting concerned with "law and order" though they could not so overtly refer to the Mau Mau as a major destabilizing factor is borne out by the government's action in slum clearance. Imbued with a new zeal to destroy shanties in the town, the authorities razed down Mathare Valley in early April, 1953. The order to level the "rows of unsanitary mud and wattle huts" in this area followed evidence that they were being used as hideouts for Mau Mau suspects.⁸² Indeed, as a leader article in the East African Standard pointed out in May 1953,

If Mau Mau can be given credit for unexpectedly and unintentionally bringing good out of evil — as undoubtedly it will so be credited in the long run — the destruction of the shanty villages around Nairobi will be high on the list of the unscheduled achievements of the brutal gangsters and murderers now at work.⁸³

The paper should have added that the Mau Mau activities in Nairobi led not only to slum clearance but also to the speeding up of the implementation of the Ernest Vasey Report of 1950. On the previous day, with general acclamation, an important Bill was given a second reading in the Legislative Council to provide,

through a Housing Board, for the ordered development and encouragement of housing schemes with financial aid. This was the first time in so far as Nairobi was concerned to have firm dates by which steps would be taken to turn talk into action. It was equally on this day that the approval of a large housing estate provided with basic public services and where plots could be leased for an inclusive figure of sh.251 a month on which to build approved homes either of temporary or permanent material was given. This was the way in which the "good citizen" could be helped and this enabled a good start to be made to get to grips with a problem which has done more to contribute to the encouragement of social unrest than almost any other factor in urban life."⁶⁴ This is how Makadara, as the first African Estate, with African on-built houses was established. Known as the Doonholm Road Estate, the speed at which it was established was described by the East African Standard as "incredible".⁶⁵ This estate was to provide accommodation to 12,000 people in low-standard housing built of mud and wattle with corrugated iron roofs. As if this was not enough to prove how frantic the authorities were, at Bohati the City Council let a contract for an extension to the existing housing estate to provide another 1,000 people with homes on rental basis. And by mid-May 1953 building operations began on an extension to Gorefani estate which

consisted of employer-built housing. This was meant to provide houses for another 300 homeless Africans.⁸⁶

The speeding up of the destruction of shanties and the setting aside of plots on which Africans, for the first time in the history of Nairobi, could build their own houses was quite significant in itself. It was significant not only because of its uniqueness but also because of the time it took place. Indeed, the very concept of "good citizen" was not far-fetched in as much as it reflected current thinking on the concepts of "stability," "law and order," "banditry" and Mau Mau. It was wholly a question of separating the African militant from the African loyalist and later to use the latter to fight the former.⁸⁷ The policy adopted for doing this was, to put in the words of Palmerston when he wrote on the 1848 Revolutions in Europe, "separate by reasonable concessions the moderate from the exaggerated, content the former by fair concessions and get them to assist in resisting the insatiable demands of the latter." Thus in Kenya and especially in Nairobi a loyalist African middle class which could be relied upon in combating the Mau Mau had to be created by giving them concessions in form of recognition as members of the Nairobi urban set-up through that all elusive idea of home ownership and all the trappings that went with it. Housing became a powerful means of political co-optation of the Africans in Nairobi between 1952 and 1956.

Sir Charles Mortimer, Member for Health, Lands and Local Government, was quite explicit on this when moving the second reading of the African Housing Bill in the Legislative Council in May 1953. He said that

We hope to develop in the African residents (read African middle class) of our urban areas some kind of civic pride, but it is very difficult to develop civic pride if you happen to live in Pumwani, Kariokor or some of the unfortunate spots in our city.⁸⁸

What emerges from the above analysis is that, unlike current analyses which locate the causes, ideology and the spatial distribution of the Mau Mau uprising wholly in the countryside, the colonial reaction to the whole issue identifies Nairobi as the nerve-centre of the movement. While we concede to the fact that the above cited observations don't provide enough information to formulate a meaningful insight into what the Mau Mau was especially when it comes to its urban trajectory they are nonetheless suggestive that the movement had a strong urban base from which it directed forest operations until its destruction in 1954. For the authorities to indeed acknowledge the frequency of the movement's activities, the actual pressure it exerted on society, and the social, political, or economic effects of these activities upon the people (both black and white) concerned can be discerned from the evidence

of these observers. It can be assumed that the movement's disruptive tendencies were sufficiently high and sufficiently different from anything experienced before to require a physical and psychological adjustment to a seriously altered socio-political environment. This assumption is well supported by not only what later day colonial writers had to say about the movement and its urban connections but also by those Africans who participated in it. Recounting the significance of the movement to the urban African as well as giving the hierarchical structure of the Mau Mau, Cucu Esther Ngima remembered with bitterness that until the emergency the Nairobi African Advisory Council had done nothing for Africans as most of its members were in the pay of the whiteman. The only way to help the African was through conveying what the whiteman said. Thus they could come and say: "Mzungu amesema (the whiteman has said) do this and do that. This was not the type of people to help you." Things changed with Mau Mau as the freedom fighters caused terror and havoc among the colonial officials. They operated everywhere; in Eastleigh, Pumwani, Kariobangi, Kwa Ndururu (Mathare Valley), etc. In fact, while their political headquarters was in Kiburi House, their Court of Appeal was situated in a lonely house in Mathare Valley where all cases from minor courts in Kiambu, Murang'a and Nyeri had their final hearing. It was here where hanging verdicts were

passed.⁸⁹

This oral evidence is corroborated by that of Musa Musasia, a Luyia from Kakamega who during the Second World War saw action in Mackinnon Road and, during the emergency, was appointed headman for Mbotela after the liquidation of the Kikuyu population in the Location. To Musasia the idea behind the creation of Makadara estate solely for Africans stemmed from clear evidence that Nairobi had become a risky place to live in. African locations were teeming with suspicious characters and if the government had not moved first to hit at the backbone of the movement (the locations) then by 1955 Kenya could have been a different country. Unlike what has been said, the government only moved into clearing the forests of the fighters after it had secured its position in Nairobi in 1954. And this was only possible after there had been a careful screening of people the "good" ones ending up by benefiting from plots for houses in places like Makadara. Makadara "was carefully and strategically chosen for those who denounced Mau Mau although in public such people claimed that they were on the side of Africans but secretly they had acquired written documents from the government which showed that they were in good books. Some of us never benefited because the enemy was the Kikuyu and the Kikuyu had to be used to fight the Kikuyu."⁹⁰ Asked

who the Mau Mau fighters were in Nairobi, these informants said they were mostly young people, well educated but with poor jobs or no jobs at all.

These views tally quite well with the fact that between 1930 and 1950 there had been great strides in African formal education. This, coupled with African participation in the Second World War, brought to the fore an embittered African whose potential went unnoticed by the paternalistic and too static an attitude of the administration. Thus left outside the postwar economic and political mainstream, these Africans turned to anti-government activities and spent "much of their time in the political world and underworld of Nairobi where both anti-government and anti-European feelings were nurtured."⁹¹ Oswald Hughes, District Commissioner at Nyeri, reflecting on the events of those years, acknowledged the Government's mistake in failing to accommodate these Africans when he wrote that

The progressive young Kikuyu, both farmers and traders in the Reserve spent a great deal of their time in K.A.U. Headquarters in Nairobi, while others had become K.A.U. barrack room lawyers. K.A.U. gave them an opportunity largely denied to them in their locations by chiefs and elders who were out of sympathy with their aspirations. It was our fault - while we wasted our time trying to resuscitate the indigenous authorities, we should instead have been leavening the chiefs' Advisory Councils with this class and reorientating the chiefs themselves to cater more for

the educated young man.⁹²

According to I. Ryland, Officer-in-Charge of the Nairobi Extra-Provincial District, the period between 1945 and 1953 saw tremendous movement of Kikuyu labour into Nairobi. Thus while in 1948 of the 30,000 African workers in the town 17,000 or 56% were KEM (Kikuyu, Embu and Meru), in 1951 this percentage had risen to 64% or 32,000 out of 50,000 workers. In 1953 they numbered out of a total labour force of 60,000. This is well brought out in the table below.

Table 6.10: Tribal per cent of Africans in Employment in Nairobi: 1948-1958.

	1948	1951	1953	1954	1956	1957	1958
Nyanza	-	-	28	37	39	38	37
Kikuyu, Embu, Meru.	56	64	47	27	22	25	26
Kamba	-	-	18	25	28	27	27
Other Kenyan Africans	-	-	4	7	7	6	6
Non-Kenyan Africans	-	-	3	4	4	4	4

Note: There was a progressive decline in the KEM % from 1953 due to the reasons given at the start of this section of the chepter.

Source: Compiled from Frank Furedi, "The African Crowd in Nairobi: Popular Movements and Elite Politics", Journal of African History, XIV,2 (1973), P.288 and Colony and Protectorate of Kenya, Nairobi Extra-Provincial Dist. Ann. Report, 1954 (Nairobi: Govt. Printer 1956), p.176

To Ryland this overwhelming increase of the Kikuyu in Nairobi between 1945 and 1953 amounted to a "virtual seizure of the city by an unruly tribe" which acted

without restraint and capable of the foulest atrocities, (it) constituted a threat to the whole colony, for the city... provided a ready and rich supply of recruits, arms, ammunition, money and other comforts for terrorist gangs (sic!). It afforded a secure base for the planning and mounting of operations, not only within the city but also in the adjacent settled areas, and formed a focus for the dissemination of the Mau Mau doctrine amongst the loyal tribes.⁹³

This unabated increase of the Kikuyu labour force in Nairobi seems to have put them in an influential position over many issues concerning Africans in the town. This influence may be seen in several cases of collective actions. For example, in 1952 when Kenyatta called for the boycott of beer, there was a drop in the consumption of the stuff from 13,000 bottles in July to under 2,000 in September. Even more successful was the boycott of city bus services and European beer which was in protest against emergency regulations in the town. As Mau Mau activities picked momentum in the town, loyalist merchants in African locations were boycotted and more than often forced out business. Probably the most significant indicator of this process of radicalization of the Nairobi crowd was that in the locations they (the crowd) effectively shielded members of the 40 Group

from the police. On these developments, I. Ryland noted:

The overwhelming influence of the Kikuyu (in the town), demonstrated by their success in enforcing their various boycotts and their successful exclusion of works from other tribes, had been achieved by the murder of loyal Kikuyu, Government servants and leading African personalities who were unsympathetic to their cause. They had indulged in robberies of arms, money and other goods at all hours of day and night. Witnesses (were) intimidated and dared not give evidence. All craftsmen, clerks and even ordinary workers of alien tribes were subjected to constant intimidation and pressure to relinquish their posts in favour of Kikuyu, as also were shopkeepers and businessmen who were capable of competition with the numerous Kikuyu business partnerships acting as bankers and collectors for the terrorists (sic!). If these survived at all it was only through the payment of protection money.⁹⁴

There is evidence to suggest that between 1950 and April 1954 (when "Operation Anvil" was mounted) the colonial government did not have control over Nairobi. As Ryland admits, in this period "the rule of law had virtually collapsed" as "thuggery, robberies and murders occurred in the full light of day in the presence of numerous spectators." Indeed,

... large scale operations proved ineffective against the weight of numbers and the city was permeated by gangsters and other undesirables supposedly in unemployment Though extra troops were drafted into the city, crimes of violence

persisted and it was clear that even more drastic measures were imperative if the Kikuyu preponderance and virtual control of the African and much of the Asian areas were to be combatted....⁹⁵

Among the measures taken were the mounting of "Operation Anvil" which went hand in hand with a rejuvenated approach to the provision of "adequate welfare, and sanitation conditions for all those involved, a task which was willingly and efficiently performed by the staff of the City Council and Voluntary Associations whose efforts were appreciated both by the other participants and Africans...."⁹⁶ Thus combining the carrot and the stick, the process of reducing what was described as lawlessness went hand in hand with the improvement in the previously "appalling conditions" which had "inevitably bred discontent, crime and lawlessness".⁹⁷

The activities of the 40 Group both in Nairobi and the countryside (especially in Murang'a) have been noted somewhere ⁹⁸ and need not tie us here. Suffice to add that the development of militant trade unionism in Kenyan urban areas especially in Nairobi and Mombasa due to poor wages and deteriorating living conditions offered wide avenues for the emergence of means and ways of articulating African grievances. And this was seen to by people like Mwangi Macharia whose activities in both Mombasa and Murang had made him to be identified by the authorities as

an "intransigent militant." In Murang'a he single-handedly organized the Murang'a Peasant Revolt of July 1947. On the 15 August, 1947, he opened his Office Ya Maskini in Nairobi and in 1950 after the arrest of Chege Kibachia he was in the forefront of the organization of the threatened Nairobi strike. As David Throup says, between 1947 and 1950 militant politics in Kenya cannot escape being identified with this man. While in Murang'a in 1947 after being deported from Mombasa he quickly became associated with the 40 Group which was an "organization of young radicals with close contacts with Maina Heron's gang in Nairobi, which ran protection rackets, extorted money, and controlled prostitution in Eastleigh, the Asian area and neighbouring Pumwani." Macharia therefore,

spanned the rural-urban divide and by September 1947, had already emerged as one of the key militants in both Murang'a and Nairobi.⁹⁹

From the above discussion we can conclude this section by saying that what people like Mwangi Macharia did between 1947 and 1950 was the propagation of an anti-European and anti-authority stance which, having formulated it in Mombasa and Nairobi, they found necessary to further through the use of the hardships which had through the years arisen from overcrowding in the Kikuyu Reserves, unemployment,

poverty and the attendant poor living conditions in Nairobi and the squatter system in the Highlands. As we said in the opening pages of this chapter, these were urban --- bred leaders who, to further their goals, gained support through appealing to the misery and suspicions of the illiterate, semi-proletarianized peasantry as well as the aspirations of the educated and semi-educated in Nairobi. Unlike the African politicians on the Advisory Council who campaigned on the platform of more trading licences and more representation for themselves in the Municipal Council, people like Macharia and organizations like Anake Wa 40 addressed themselves to the day-to-day question of how to survive. Survival came to be identified with those who had denied it to them and by extension, anti-white feelings became anti-government agitation. Indeed, the immediate problems of the disadvantaged Africans in Nairobi became concretely linked to events in the reserves through districts' committees in Nairobi African Locations. This gave the African people the organizational opportunity to relate their political conflicts within the locations and the reserves.

6.5) 1955-1960: Policy Implementation and some of the Problems Involved.

The preceding section has attempted to show that the Mau Mau uprising which occupied the best part of 1952-1956 had as one of its major causes the poor

African living conditions in Nairobi. Before we can examine what kind of policy proposals emerged out of this upheaval and how they were implemented let us briefly look at how the colonial authorities interpreted the uprising in its urban context. This is important because to restrict the idea of policy formulation to what would look like an expedient move precludes the very reasons as to why such policies should be formulated at all and, by implication, why they should be implemented. What was done to improve African urban living conditions was not expedient. Colonial interpretations of the Mau Mau could have been biased or outrightly apologetic but that the movement had shocked the very foundations on which the colonial social, political and economic edifice had rested for well over half a century of necessity meant the need to re-examine the whole setup for future safeguards. This whole experience meant a re-appraisal of old policies, the formulation of new ones and their implementation.

Commenting on Alderman George A. Tyson's memorandum submitted to the Nairobi Chamber of Commerce on the African housing problem,¹⁰⁰ the Sunday Post in a rare outburst against the urban authorities pointed out that Nairobi for many years had been left to become "the breeding ground of the discontent on which Mau Mau thrive(d)" and that it was time for

the theories of the experts...to be related to the facts, and the facts (were) quite simply these: that there is no better forum on which real and imaginary grievances can be ventilated and enlarged, than an overcrowded hovel of "bedspaces" dimly lit by a flickering oil tin light, with nothing to do in the early hours of the evening after work but grumble.

In a vivid description of the decrepit nature of African residences and the activities that went on there, the paper pointed out that

In tumble down shacks, under parked lorries, in half-finished buildings, the nightly mutterings go on, broken once or twice a month after pay day with a drunken debauch which brings temporary relaxation but poverty for the next 28 days of the month.

To this paper the authorities could only hope to defeat the Mau Mau through a concerted effort to provide more houses as well as making life in the existing African locations more interesting for the workers. Drawing a direct link between Mau Mau activities in the colony and the squalor in which Africans were made to live in Nairobi, the paper concluded:

Why it may be asked, should Africans be given anything at the present time? The answer is that the native locations of Nairobi are centres of agitation throughout the colony, and reducing the matter to one of mere self-interest, it is essential for the well-being of other races here that something be done in the locations soon.

If the authorities do not make some recommendations, it is certain that the Royal Commission* will, and it and it is an easy way out to suggest waiting for the commission's report (emphais added), 101

These views by the Sunday Post were, explicitly or implicitly, an echo of what some senior Governemt officers were perceiving as the relationship between African living conditions in Nairobi and Mau Mau activities in the colony. In an attempt to link this relationship to the more wider question of economic development the Governor, Sir Evelyn Baring, in a speech to the Legislative Council in October 1953 paid particular attention to the development of a strong industrial base as a complement to the agricultural, administrative and security measures which were being implemented in the colony since the declaration of the state of emergency a year earlier. Of major concern to him was the fact that the growth of secondary industry in Nairobi had led to "increase in the number of Africans living under family conditions." This implied the urgent need for "the provision of more family housing" for the purpose of creating "a stable African working population" if productivity, skill and thus wages could be increased.¹⁰² However, if the authorities wished to strike a balance between the supply and demand of accommodation, Sir Evelyn Baring noted that strict control on the

* The East Africa Royal Commission Report, 1935-1955.

number of Africans entering Nairobi had to be maintained.¹⁰³

To show the urgency of the need for provision of more family housing the Central Housing Board was strengthened and put under the Deputy Governor while £2,000,000 was raised on loan from the Colonial Development Corporation for African housing in Nairobi in this same year. These views at once establish the relationship between the government's new zeal on the provision of family housing from 1953 onwards, the quest for the creation of a stable and loyal African middle class, and the Mau Mau uprising. This, again, at once makes sense out of the formulation of the policy of "separation and concessions" during this period and how it eventually came to be linked to the official interpretations of the root causes of the Mau Mau rebellion and how these interpretations came to influence the 1956-1960 approach to the problem of African housing in Nairobi. But what were these interpretations?

Within both official and non-official circles there was a consensus that in towns like Nairobi inadequate housing for Africans was a major contributing factor to the Mau Mau violence. The extent to which this was a valid inference has already been established in preceding pages. Perhaps what is hard to decipher is as to whether this interpretation emerged from an

understanding by the colonial authorities of the dynamics of the changing nature of capitalism in the Kenyan peripheral social formation. Whatever the case may be, one thing seems clear: Mau Mau uprising came to be perceived in terms of the relationship between the concepts of stability on the one hand and its antithesis, social unrest, on the other.

Thus in providing a recipe for the improvement of opportunities for African family life in towns the psychologist J.C. Carothers first diagnosed the African urban problem in terms of the psychological maladjustments which Africans experienced during that long and tenuous process of transition from "tribal" to modern ways of life. Taking place within the framework of the migrant labour system, he suggested, this transition had led to the accentuation of the differences between men and women with the disastrous effect of families experiencing additionally painful strains whenever men departed from home in search of employment. The Mau Mau violence thus was a clear case in point to prove that there had emerged within the African social fabric the perpetual problem of "loss of contact, physically and spiritually" between the men who were participating in wage employment on the one hand and their families on the other.¹⁰⁴ In other words the Mau Mau was the result of a psychological dislocation within the African family structure.

To rehabilitate the situation, Dr. Carothers suggested that there was an urgent need to create a stable urban population and family housing was the sole mitigating factor. Putting his case in a more wider conspectus he wrote that

European civilization largely depends for such stability as it possesses on a stable background in the family. Crime and mental instability in European and American cities are closely associated with those areas of the cities where there are floating populations and where parental influence is weakened and unsettled. If ever Africans are to develop, stably and ultimately creatively, within the framework of the civilization that we know, as is undoubtedly their wish, they must be given the opportunity to live as families in stable homes.¹⁰⁵

But if to Dr. Carothers Mau Mau had to be blamed on the psychological dislocations within the African family, to Dr. L.S.B. Leakey the phenomenon had to be understood within the framework of the colonial authorities' denial of opportunities to those Africans, especially the Kikuyu, who wanted to join the mainstream of modernization. Leakey's thesis was that if barriers placed in the path of Kikuyu participation in the colony's development had not been placed there in the first place, the question of congestion in the reserves could not have arisen hence there could not have arisen the Mau Mau violence. Indeed, given a participatory role within the colonial setup, productive use of wages which could be concentrated within

a more limited environment would have been realized and there could have been an improvement in productivity, satisfaction and career opportunities of the working population.¹⁰⁶ This assessment was carried further in the Legislative Council in May 1953 when the Member for Health, Lands and Local Government said that without the civic pride which came with ownership of property and the sense of accomplishment which came from "doing a job of work", Africans would be frustrated and act irresponsibly.¹⁰⁷ If Mau Mau was a rejection of modernity, Leakey concluded in the same breath with Carothers, the government must help those "who would like to become fully urban."¹⁰⁸

These views advanced by Drs. Carothers and Leakey went on to reinforce the earlier views which had been raised by the Sunday post that discontent and irresponsible political agitation could easily develop in slum conditions. What emerges from these views is, first, the fact that the Whitehall philosophy of using the carrot and the stick had found a faithful following within Kenya itself. This is borne out of the fact that in the intervening years of the Mau Mau insurrection many Government and civic authorities' officials became increasingly vocal on the question of the establishment of a stable African middle class in urban areas on which civic pride could be cultivated. Secondly, though the psychological and socio-economic aspects of the problem had been looked into,

one glaring thing about both the diagnosis and the remedial measures proposed was the absence of an indepth understanding of the relationship between wages and housing as they affected the African urban populations. It was, therefore, not until mid 1954 that in its influential report the Carpenter Committee¹⁰⁹ produced a definitive analysis of these two aspects of African urbanization. But before delving into the recommendations of this Committee it is important to understand the issues surrounding its appointment by the Government.

The African Wages Committee was appointed by the Governor Sir Evelyn Baring on the 14th April, 1954 and was hurriedly announced in the Official Gazette of the same date. The circumstances surrounding this development were that apart from increased tempo in the Mau Mau activities there was at the beginning of 1953 a resurgence of labour unrest in the colony. For example there were two strikes in Mombasa involving workers of the Kenya Meat Commission and ayahs at the Pandya Memorial Clinic. In February it was reported that about 400 African prisoners who had been detailed for work in a quarry at the Ngong River Prison Camp had gone on strike due the harsh conditions prevailing there. And, still in the same month, there were strikes at the settlers' farms in Molo and Elburgon areas. One Common denominator which ran through these

strikes was the question of the working conditions of the African workers, especially with regard to wages, living conditions and terms of service.

These issues were well articulated in a letter by Mwicigi Karanja, President of the Kenya Federation of Registered Trade Unions, to the Secretary General of I.C.F.T.U. In this letter, inter alia, Karanja pointed out that in the colony of Kenya there were daily difficulties facing African workers as they were regarded as not deserving any human rights such as wages, better living conditions and terms of service and that, as a whole, they did not have representation in the Legislative Council, Wages Advisory Board and the Labour Advisory Board like the Chamber of Commerce.¹¹⁰ These representations were beefed up by Meshack A.C. Ndisi in a speech to the Inter-African, Labour Conference at Bamako, West Africa, in the same month. Ndisi pointed out that "Family allowance for Africans (did) not exist in Kenya" and that what the General Council of K.F.R.T.U. was fighting for was a new system which "would broaden the terms of reference of the existing machinery which (dealt) with the minimum wage -- so that the minimum wage be based on a man, wife and two children regardless of whether he (was) married or not, instead of basing it on a single person..." as was the practice.¹¹¹

Indeed, in this turbulent period both the

K.F.R.T.U. and the African members of the Legislative Council had put on the mantle for spearheading the struggle for the improvement of not only African living conditions in towns but also African wages. While in several of its meetings the K.F.R.T.U. continued to agitate for a living wage for African workers, the African members of the Legislative Council on their part had decided, as a matter of urgency, that a motion on African wages be moved by Mr. (now Sir) Michael Blundell, the member for Rift Valley. Blundell gave notice of the motion on February 7, 1953 in which he said, inter alia,

In view of the necessity of creating an economy which will remove the African from dependence solely on the land and provide a balanced family life, be it resolved that a select committee be appointed to consider and report upon the adequacy of African cash wages and other conditions and benefits of employment. Be it further resolved that the select committee be instructed to give special consideration to the following questions:

- 1) Whether the existing terms and conditions of employment could be so altered as to provide African workers with greater incentives to industry, efficiency and increased output.
- 2) whether the present method of calculating the statutory minimum wage in urban areas is reasonable.
- 3) whether all or any of the findings of the select committee should be extended to areas outside municipalities and towns.

When moving the motion Blundell pointed out that Kenya could not survive for long on what was called a low wage economy and that there was the need to establish a strong correlation between wages and output.¹¹² The motion was approved by 36 votes to 4 and was adopted leading to the appointment of the Carpenter Committee on African wages. The main term of reference of the committee was "to consider and report upon the adequacy of African cash wages and other conditions and benefits of employment" and when it made its findings public in mid 1954 it had dealt with a wide array of questions like the African labour force, African wages, the statutory area minimum wage, methods of labour stabilization as well as African industry, efficiency and output.

Taking off from the postwar official concern with the efficiency and productivity of African labour and its relationship with the stabilization of the African urban family, The Carpenter Committee strenuously tried to establish a link between the persistence of the migrant labour system in the colony and low levels of urban wages. Thus they could argue: "we cannot hope to produce an effective African labour force until we have first removed the African from the enervating and retarding influences of his economic and cultural background."¹¹³ To reverse the migrant labour system and create a stable urban labour force the

Committee recommended that there should be a drastic increase in the statutory minimum wage. They criticized the original intention of the establishment of the minimum wage because, though it was meant to provide a "social safety net" to protect the lowest-paid worker, had had the effect of providing a blueprint for keeping wages low.¹¹⁴ This was borne out of a survey which was done for the Committee and which showed that approximately $\frac{1}{2}$ of urban workers in private industry and $\frac{1}{4}$ of those in public service were receiving wages insufficient to provide for the basic needs of a single man, let alone a man with his wife and children.¹¹⁵ But for a government policy which envisaged a stable African labour force in urban areas to succeed, the Committee pointed out, goal formulation, policy determination and implementation entailed four primary objectives:

- 1) the payment of a wage sufficient to provide for the essential needs of the worker and his family;
- 2) regular employment;
- 3) the provision of family housing and
- 4) the security of the worker in old age.

Indeed, at the time of the appointment the Carpenter Committee, the position with regard to minimum wages was based on a statutory minimum wage which was calculated on the basis of the minimum wage appropriate to some nine urban areas - the Municipalities

of Nairobi, Nakuru, Eldoret, Kitale and Kisumu, Mombasa Island and the townships of Nanyuki, Nyeri and Thika. In calculating the minimum wage the government relied on the advice of the Wages Advisory Board which in turn based its calculations on a formula designed to give a cash assessment of the human needs, as an individual, of the African unskilled labourer living as a single man under urban conditions in housing provided by his employer. The Board also advised on minimum housing allowances, payable in cases where employers did not provide houses. Prior to the publication of the report these allowances were based on the average rent of bachelor accommodation (bedspace) as ascertained by Labour Officers in consultation with Local Authorities. As regards this formula the report stated that

The formula for calculating the minimum wage has remained for all practical purposes unaltered Throughout most of that period, the real value of the worker's wage, as represented by its purchasing power has remained approximately the same.¹¹⁶

On whether existing wages were adequate in relation to work performed by the African labour force, the report said:

...notwithstanding the generally low quality of African labour, a large section of the African labour force receives an inadequate return in wages for work which it performs.... We have been assured by the General Manager

of one large undertaking that his labour force compares in efficiency and output with that of any similar concern in the United Kingdom. Aware, as we are, of the average African limitations as an industrial worker, we hesitate to accept such generalizations. We are left in no doubt, however, that individual Africans do attain standards of efficiency, industry and output equal to those workers of other races and that, notwithstanding this, they continue to receive considerably less wages. As regards skilled and semi-skilled labour generally... their wage levels will be largely affected, if not dictated, by the lowest level of wages, i.e. by that of the unskilled labour force. Wage structures are built from the base upwards. If the base level of African wages is inadequate in relation to the work performed - as we consider it to be in this country - it is reasonably certain that other wage levels... will also be inadequate. 117

All said and done, the Report recommended that the existing formula of the minimum wage under the Wages Regulation Order, 1953, which was sh.52.50 plus a housing allowance of sh.7 was inadequate in the face of the rising cost of living in urban areas. It proposed a minimum wage of sh.69 plus a housing allowance of sh.12 per month. Their calculation was based on the prices prevailing in Nairobi in December 1953. With regard to the family minimum wage the report stated that

moral, social, economic and political considerations alike

suggest the vital necessity of moving, as quickly as possible to a position when even the unskilled labourer can earn a wage sufficient to support himself and his family.¹¹⁸

Thus, considering the urban minimum wages the Committee recommended that

a) the introduction of the new minimum wage formula be deferred until January, 1955 and,
b) immediate effect be given to an interim wage structure of a flat increase of sh.10 on all existing minimum wage rates as well as a prescription of new housing allowances based on the average economic rent of a bedspace in local authorities' housing estates. Their recommendations with regard to the "family" minimum wage and the method of its implementation were that

a) the basic "family" minimum wage be assessed at two and a half times the basic "bachelor" minimum and the additional allowances for "family" housing at the average rent of a minimum standard of family accommodation in local authority African housing locations;
b) the transition from the "bachelor" to the "family" minimum wage take place over a period of ten years;
c) in the case of the basic minimum wage, the transition be effected by equal annual percentage additions (15%) to the base (bachelor) minimum, the first addition becoming operative from January 1, 1956;
d) as far as practicable (and subject to consultation

with the local authority concerned), the transition in the housing allowance also be effected by equal annual increases, the first step in the transition again being made with effect from January 1, 1956;

e) the method and rate of transition be reviewed after a period of five years from its inception, and earlier should the economic circumstances of the colony require;

f) the payment of the "family" minimum wage be linked to an age qualification of 21 years and a service qualification of 36 months' continuous employment outside the native land units.

The Committee concluded that

Adoption of these recommendations will mean that, as from January 1956, there will be two statutory minimum wages - the "family" minimum, applying to all male workers who have reached the age of 21 and have been employed for at least three years outside the native land units; and the "bachelor" minimum, applying to all other workers. The "family" minimum wage will be increased at regular intervals, the full "family" minimum being reached on 1 January, 1965.¹¹⁹

The Government used these recommendations to finally draw up a schedule of gradual increments in the urban minimum wage with the object of providing, within five years, an adult minimum wage equal to 1.67 times the minimum "youth" wage.¹²⁰

The improvement in African urban wages was, however, just one aspect of the Committee's recommen-

ndations on how the stabilization of the African urban populations could be carried out. Other aspects included improved educational facilities, provident funds and social amenities. But of great importance was the development of adequate housing because "a coordinated and centrally directed housing programme related to a definite objective" of housing the majority of the working population on a family basis by 1965 was the ideal the government was to constantly strive for.¹²¹ As general guidelines to make this a reality, the Committee recommended first the creation of housing schemes which embodied the concept of the "neighbourhood unit" with provision for schools, health centres, shops, recreational and other amenities as well as security services and, secondly, the working out of an elaborate programme for tenant-purchase and builder-owner schemes.¹²²

The last in this series of recommendations which saw the period 1956-1960 as a period of policy formulation and implementation was the East Africa Royal Commission 1953-1955 Report.¹²³ Made public after two years of extensive research, this report presented probably the most comprehensive treatment so far of the relationship between housing goal formulation, policy determination and implementation and policy impact on the one hand and the state of the East African economies on the other. In its discussion of the conditions for urban development the commission

like Sir Ernest Vasey in 1950, put across a strong case for the removal of the barriers "which prevent Africans from full participation in the life of the towns" which were "the centres of social and intellectual life, of economic enterprise and of political activity."¹²⁴ To have Africans fully participate in the mainstream of "modernization" it recommended that

- 1) there should be both the removal of all trading restrictions for Africans and the lowering of the cost of building materials in urban areas;
- 2) Employer-built as well as African-owned housing for rental be encouraged;
- 3) Encouragement of freehold title to plots;
- 4) there should be more attention in town planning and the encouragement of "organic growth of towns" and,
- 5) there was need for the framing of an overall policy for urban development.

These recommendations sprang from the Commission's conviction that real social development meant that residence and economic interest rather than tribe or race was the basis for association. Thus "the first step in the formation of a healthy urban society is the growth of a settled urban population whose loyalties are directed toward their town rather than their areas of origin."¹²⁵

The Government of Kenya took about six months to study the report, a period which served as an

opportunity for taking an inventory during which goals, policies, and administrative procedures were scrutinized, revised if necessary, and put together into a more consistent pattern. The five recommendations, which in most cases reflected what had been said from Vasey in 1950 to the Carpenter Committee in 1954, were in the end accepted "unreservedly" by the Government. This acceptance was well articulated in a Governors' despatch in 1956 which, inter alia, said,

that East Africa's natural resources are relatively few and poor; that they are nevertheless capable of a vast expansion lies in encouraging by every possible means a change in African agricultural areas from a subsistence economy to a modern, cash exchange system; that in order to bring about this change every necessary restriction and safeguard must be lifted; and the rate of introduction of outside capital and skills must be increased; - and, at the same time, that the best possible use must be made of the internal capabilities and resources of the East African population.¹²⁶

In effect, these proposals reinforced one of the most important policy goals already being pursued by the Kenya Government: "the creation of a stable middle class population."¹²⁷

From the foregoing discussion, we can say that between 1950 and 1955 the elements which were to later form the basis of an urban housing policy were formed. These elements included the need to stabilize the African urban populations, the need to have an

efficient urban labour force and, above all, the need to create a loyalist African urban middle class which could be used as a leverage in stemming radical political agitation as exemplified in the Mau Mau rebellion. The actualization of these needs called for a consistently deliberate move towards increased family housing, neighbourhood unit planning, economic rents, encouragement of African own-built house ownership as well as tenant—purchase schemes, higher wage levels, and residential controls over migrants to urban areas.¹²⁸ These policy goals provided, as it were, a context and an evaluative framework for a variety of different housing schemes in Nairobi. How were these policy goals implemented? What were some of the problems involved?

The period 1956-1960 was a period in which the major preoccupation of the authorities was the provision of proper housing for the African urban populations. Convinced that "...the possession of their own houses has a stabilizing influence on people," the Central Housing Board administered a fund which had been created in 1953 to see to it that the African housing problem had been solved by 1965. This fund had by 1960 reached the following totals:

Free Grant from the Kenya Government	£400,000
Loan from the Colonial Development Corp.	£2,000,000
Loan from the Kenya Development Fund	£787,000
The Emergency Fund	£47,000
Miscellaneous loans prior to 1953	£244,709
	<hr/>
Total	£3,478,709

The contribution of the Kenya Development Fund increased to £1,621,767 by 1963 when the United States Agency for International Development (U.S.A.I.D) began to assist public housing in the country.¹²⁹ Nairobi alone seems to have had the largest share of these funds. This is reflected in the amount of money that had been expended by 1957. As the 1930s came to a close, the Municipal Council had raised loans to the tune of £587,566. This figure had grown to £860,869 by 1945 reaching an all high of £2,634,260 in 1949. Between this year and 1957 this figure had gone up by about four times to £9,021,836.¹³⁰ These monies went into the increasing of the stock of African houses whose capacity by December 1956 was 24,635 in City Council built estates, 18,100 in Kenya Government and East African High Commission estates, 19,050 in African built housing estates and 6,950 in Employers' built housing estates.

In addition to these were 450 in miscellaneous housing estates for schools, community centres, maternity hospital, churches and labour camps staff.* Thus by December 1956 the grand total of Africans legally housed in Nairobi was 69,185. But despite this development the city of Nairobi continued to suffer from lack of accommodation. Indeed, despite the fact that many Kikuyu, Meru and Embu people were removed from the town during the state of emergency, there seems to have been a continuous flood of people from the countryside to towns. For example between 1948 and 1962 the official population figures for Nairobi rose from 118,976 to 266,794 and those for Mombasa from 84,746 to 179,575.¹³² For Nairobi this meant the perpetuation, indeed, the aggravation of the ever present problem of disease outbreaks. In 1964 a United Nations survey team found that 52% of the rooms in Nairobi housed three or more people and 74% had two or more.¹³³ But this did not deter the government and the city authorities from implementing the policy proposals of the period 1950-1955.

Indeed, the years 1956/1957 marked a watershed in the old policy of the provision of accommodation on bachelor basis and the provision of family housing.

*These figures represent those Africans who were housed in Eastlands and do not include those living in European and Asian areas as domestic hands.

In 1957 the Ofafa* stage one housing scheme was completed and it was to mark the last of the stone and tile, Public-Works, Department-style, single room, single-storeyed housing to be built in the fashion of the 1940s and the early 1950s. In this year policy swung towards the provision of family accommodation in line with the new thinking as propounded in the Ernest Vasey, Carpenter and the East Africa Royal Commission Reports of 1950, 1954 and 1953-1955 respectively. Thus, apart from the Makadara Estate which was developed from 1953 onwards as an area where individuals, landlords or employers could build at their expense along prescribed lines, and the plots in Bahati on which the emergent African middle class could build their own houses, efforts were concentrated on the new Ofafa developments which were later named by the residents as Maringo (meaning posh), Jerusalem (the heavenly city) and Jericho (not far from Jerusalem).

These schemes were meant to be a new layer of more expensive housing for the emergent African middle class. In other words, the module for most buildings up to 1955 --the provision of bachelor bedspaces -- began to give way to this new module. This new policy went hand in hand with new wage policies. Unlike the

*Ofafa Kunguni along Jogoo Road just above Ofafa Maringo

Table 6.11: Progressive Increase in African Wages
in Nairobi, 1956-1962.

Year	Male Employees over 21 yrs				Other Employees			
	Basic Minimum		Minimum Housing		Basic Mini.		Mini. Housing	
	sh.	cts.	shs,	cts.	shs.	cts.	shs.	cts.
1st Jan. 1956	82	50	17	50	75	00	13	00
" 1957	85	00	20	00	75	00	13	00
" 1958	85	00	22	50	75	00	13	00
1st Dec. 1958	90	00	22	50	75	00	13	00
1st Jan. 1960	95	00	24	50	73	00	13	00
Dec. 1960	102	00	26	00	74	00	13	00
Dec. 1961	107	00	26	00	74	00	13	00
Dec. 1962	115	00	26	00	79	00	13	00

Source: Labour Department, Annual Reports 1956-62, quoted in Clayton and Savage, op.cit., P.410

pre-1955 period when wages were so meagre as to make it impossible for African workers to support a wife and children in the town, from 1955 this changed with the implementation of the Carpenter Committee recommendations on African wages. Thus the Nairobi wage increases between 1955 and 1963 went as shown in the below Table 6.11:

These increases represented a percentage increase ✓ in total wage packet of 14%. The average engagement rate in Nairobi showed a considerably higher increase:; this rose by 103% between 1954 and 1961. A wage earners' index of consumer prizes, though kept from October-December 1958, showed an increase of 8% between that time and December 1962. From 1954 to 1962 total employment of Africans rose only from 492,551 to 525,351 (after a peak year in 1960) and that of adult males from 390,949 to 430,793.¹³⁴ When these statistics are viewed within the framework of a rapidly increasing population, it becomes clear that the policy of creating a stable labour force was becoming more and more successful.

Be that as it may, available data show that as the 1950s came to a close the programme of housing for Africans slowed down. In 1958 the City Council completed 136 flats at Ngara and began building the new style Ofafa Maringo Estate which it completed in 1959 with 1,400 flats letting at sh.100 per month. In the same year (1959) it completed Embakasi Village, having built a similar settlement at Kariobangi in the previous year. In 1960 500 family flats were built in Jerusalem and construction began in Jericho which was to provide 2,386 flats and houses in 1962 and 616 in 1963. In 1962/63 244 flats were built at Mariakani in Nairobi South (present day Nairobi South "8") and plans were under way to build a similar

number at Kariokor to be completed in 1963/64 when the old houses were demolished and the inhabitants removed to Ofafa Kunguni built in 1957.

Comparatively, this was a great leap forward in housing provision in Nairobi but it was at a very superficial level because a number of factors. First, there was a tremendous increase in the town's population. It jumped by 45,000 between 1957 and 1962 most of the increase certainly taking place in 1960 when something like 50,000 people were believed to have come into the whole of Nairobi Extra-Provincial District. In a report submitted to the City Council in March, 1960, it was estimated that some additional 25,000 people had crowded into the Eastlands area of the city alone.¹³⁵ The 1959 Annual Report for the Nairobi Extra-Provincial District foresaw this when it warned:

over the last few years a very considerable advance has been made by the city in moving away from the conception of the "bedspace" towards family housing. This is of the greatest importance as it is on the basis of family life that an African middle class can be built up and this middle class must form the basis of the future state of Kenya The completion of the Ofafa (Maringo) scheme should take the city further in this direction, but it would be idle to suggest that progress will be made in 1960--in fact the reverse is likely to be true. The reason for this is that the K.E.M. (Kikuyu, Embu, Meru) movement regulations unquestionably affected a check on the growth

of the African population of the city and it is only this essential check which has permitted that improvement in the housing situation, which has been achieved since 1952. There was gross overcrowding in those days of the city. With the removal of the emergency regulations it is likely that Kikuyu will flock into the city in large numbers and the result will be overcrowding which may well be of the 1952 magnitude136

The second factor which affected the situation of housing provision was that the increase in the population of the city took place against the backdrop of a slump in the country postwar economic prosperity. This affected the upward trend of the absorption of this increased population in meaningful employment. According to a survey carried out on reported employment and earnings in Kenya in 1962, the number of registered African wage-earning men in Nairobi dropped by 9,000 between 1957 and 1960. This figure dropped by a further 9,000 to a low total of 59,300 in 1962 when a daily average of 500 men was recorded at the Nairobi Employment Exchange.¹³⁷ This murky aboutturn in the town's economic fortunes hit hard at private development. The following table shows the decline in the number and value of plans for private housing development in Nairobi from 1957 onwards.

Table 6.12: Decline in Number and Value of Plans for Private Housing Development in Nairobi, 1957-1963

Year	Number of plans	Estimated cost K£
1957	1,604	8,557,016
1958	1,818	7,337,314
1959	2,116	6,459,258
1960	1,529	5,324,324
1961	690	1,998,000
1962	699	1,516,960
1963	685	1,845,567

Source: L.M. Bloomberg and C. Abrams, United Nations Mission to Kenya on Housing, U.N. Commission for technical Assistance, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 1965.

This turn of events definitely hampered the full implementation of the 1950-1955 housing policy proposals. But these factors - population increase and economic downswing - were not uncommon in the historical development of Nairobi; they had been there since the founding of Nairobi.¹³⁸ If this is the case then reasons for the slow implementation of policy proposals between 1956 and 1960 have to be sought in the conceptualization and nature of African urbanization since the founding of the town.

From the very start Africans were officially regarded as mere temporary residents in towns, doing unskilled work for short periods, leaving their families in the rural areas to which they would periodically return and eventually retire in old age. This perception had led to the idea that extensive public housing elaborate enough for the African family life would encourage an excessive influx into the town resulting not only into additional crime and disease but also in an undesirable economic burden on the city. Writing on this view in 1955 A.T.G. Thomas, the Nairobi Senior Medical Officer of Health said

The fundamental policy regarding African housing adopted until recent years was that its main purpose in Nairobi was to provide accommodation for labour on a bachelor basis. It was considered that, owing to the migratory habits of labour, cost of family housing, and for other reasons, it was not desirable to encourage permanent African family settlement. 139

This early perception of African urbanization had, by 1955, resulted not only into a backlog in the provision of accommodation but also into a conspicuously highly stratified and differentiated Nairobi. This became compounded in the era of policy implementation by the scarcity of funds, technical personnel and adequate information on the extent and nature of the problem of African housing. Thus when it came to the period 1956-1960 the Government found itself in the middle of a basic contradiction. While on the one hand it

accepted "the creation of a stable middle class African population" as a policy goal¹⁴⁰ on the other it wanted to retain control over land tenure and to restrict mortgages in the name of "the protection of the African's interests".¹⁴¹ In addition to this, it was felt in some government circles that in the event of policy implementation plots were not to be large enough or privately owned because of the cost of land in urban areas where alternative demand by wealthier communities would keep up prices. This raised a fundamental question: if building standards were to be lower in African lower-class rental areas than in middle class estates, would this not reinforce the existing racial lines of stratification by new economic criteria?

The second level of this contradiction was even more conspicuous given the way it so graphically brought out the pre-1950 debate on who was to be responsible for the provision of African housing now that Africans had been accepted as permanent members of the Nairobi urban edifice. While in the period 1956-1960 the government was committed to giving the more advanced urban local authorities more responsibility for local development there was in the same period the problem of how it was going to ensure that the local ratepayers would agree to subsidize a large, permanent African population which at first would make

little contribution to the cost of many of the services required. The question of who was to meet the cost of the provision of African accommodation in towns had been a thorny one since the 1940s and in the period 1956-1960 it was bound to play a leading role in the solution to the problem of housing. The fact that Mayor Udall (member of the Nairobi Municipal/City Council from 1920 to 1960) raised this issue in 1943 quite significant gives us a glimpse into how it came to haunt this latter period. In a speech to the Nairobi Municipal Council in this year, and notwithstanding his recognition of the need to improve both Indian and African housing conditions in Nairobi, Mayor Udall said that

if it is the opinion of (the) Government that accommodation must be found for all Africans and Asians who wish to live here, I consider that it is the duty of (the) Government to provide the funds for an undertaking of such magnitude in the shape of housing, and if the housing is to be on a subeconomic basis, Government should bear any loss that might be incurred....To ask ratepayers to bear the loss of such an enterprise as the housing of all the poorer immigrant classes is asking too much, considering (the) Council's present economic problems. 142

Of course Mayor Udall had conveniently decided to forget the fact that though Africans were not directly rate-payers they had nonetheless been made to contribute to their upkeep through their beer and

trust funds¹⁴³ This practice which the whites refused to acknowledge led the Commissioner for Local Government, Lands and Settlements to protest in 1935:

There is great scope for work among the African population. There is a tendency to neglect the claims on the Councils' revenues of African welfare and health work, and to regard the Native Trust Fund as the proper source of expenditure for these purposes. The remark is not infrequently made that the Africans are not ratepayers and so have no claim on the rate revenues. There is, of course, a very large number of European and Asian residents in Nairobi who are not ratepayers, but from the public health standpoint the interests of each community are clearly interwoven and neglect of health revenues amongst the Africans will undoubtedly be detrimental to the general health of the community. The Native Trust Fund can properly be used to supplement and accelerate improvement of health services amongst the Africans, but it cannot rightly be regarded as a milk cow on which the initiation of much needed services is to depend.¹⁴⁴

This protest however did not prevent the town's Treasurer from continuing to segregate the Africans from taxation purposes and of requiring them to pay separately from the other races for the services they received.¹⁴⁵

This is the kind of attitude with which the Europeans in the Post-Mau Mau period continued to look at the question of African accommodation even in the era of policy implementation. This attitude posed two very important questions which the

government was to grapple with between 1955 and 1960. First, if the government was, in the meanwhile, to accept the view that Africans were only now being integrated into the Nairobi urban setup and that they were not ratepayers, could not this acceptance mean a new trend where the giving of special treatment to them (Africans) could by extension mean the perpetuation of the racial compartmentalization the Ernest Vasey and the East Africa Royal Commission Reports had strongly argued against? Secondly, how was the government going to plan for future accommodation needs if it was going to remain bogged down in the pre-1950 politics of who was responsible for the provision of African accommodation?

This meant that while the postwar period to 1955 was a period in which the identification of the African housing needs and policy formulation were done, the period 1956-1960 when implementation was to be carried out met with the insurmountable problem of doing away with a racial inheritance which threatened to destroy all efforts to solve one of the most intractable problems in the colonial history of Nairobi- the problem of housing. The contradictions we have mentioned above, in a word, inhibited any meaningful move towards policy implementation and it was left to independent Kenya to grapple with the problem.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 For example, The Historical Survey of the Origins and Growth of Mau Mau (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1960), an official account of the movement, portrays Mau Mau as backward-looking and tribal; Carl Rosberg and Karl Nottingham, The Myth of Mau Mau (1966) portrays the movement as forward-looking and Kenya-nationalist rather than Kikuyu sub-nationalist in orientation; Professor B.A. Ogot, "Politics, Culture and Music in Central Province: A study of Mau Mau Hymns 1951-1956", a Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Historical Association of Kenya in 1976, portrays the movement as both forward-looking insofar as it fought for political freedom and end to colonial rule, and sub-nationalist inasmuch as it evidenced a strong sense of Kikuyu nationalism as opposed to Kenya African Nationalism and Donald Bannet, Mau Mau From Within (1966) saw the movement as a peasant revolt. Other writers who have written on the movement and have come up with equally divergent views are D.H. Rawcliff, The Struggle for Kenya (1954), Martin Kilson, "Land and the Kikuyu", Journal of Negro History, 40, 2, April 1955, PP.103-153, Annette Rosenstiel, "An Anthropological Approach to the Mau Mau", Political Science Quarterly, LXVIII, September, 1953, PP.419-432, L.S.B. Leakey, Mau Mau and the Kikuyu (1952) and Defeating Mau Mau (1954), Kenya Historical Review, 5, 1, 1977 and Robert Buijtenhuijs, Mau Mau Twenty Years After: The Myth and the Survivors (1973)
- 2 Edmond J. Keller, Jr. "A Twentieth Century Model: The Mau Mau Transformation from Social Banditry to Social Rebellion", Kenya Historical Review, 2,2,1973, P.199.
- 3 Ibid., P. 200.
- 4 Sir Andrew Cohen, British Policy in Changing Africa (London, 1959), P.105.
- 5 Richard E. Stren, "The Evolution of Housing policy in Kenya" in John Hutton (Ed.), Urban Challenge in East Africa (Nairobi: E.A.P.H., 1972), PP.57-96 and Housing the Urban Poor in Africa: Policy, Politics and Bureaucracy in Mombasa, Research series No.34, Institute of International Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 1978, PP.205-211.
- 6 Richard E. Stren, "The Evolution of Housing policy..." P.72
- 7 T. Zeleza, "Decolonization: The Kenya Case", quoted in

- William Ochieng', "Mau Mau and Decolonization in Kenya", Staff Seminar Paper, Department of History, Kenyatta University College, November 7, 1984, P.2.
- 8 East African Standard, 3.5.48
- 9 Labour Department, Bulletin, LV, 1, 1950, P.2
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 See Ernest A. Vasey, Report on African Housing in Townships and Trading Centres (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1950), Appendix A.
- 12 Anthony Clayton and Donald C. Savage, Government and Labour in Kenya 1895-1963 (London: Frank Cass, 1974) P.338
- 13 Ernest A. Vasey, op.cit.
- 14 Ibid., Appendices B and C.
- 15 Anthony Clayton and Donald C. Savage, op.cit., PP.291-292
- 16 A.T. Steele, quoted in Ibid., P. 292.
- 17 East African Standard, 2.12.48.
- 18 J.M. Lee, Colonial Government and Good Government (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), P.41
- 19 Nicola Swainson, The Development of Corporate Capitalism in Kenya 1918-1977 (London: H.E.B., 1980), P. 103.
- 20 Quoted in William Ochieng', op.cit., P.6
- 21 Nicola Swainson, op.cit., P.99
- 22 Ibid., PP.100-101
- 23 Ibid.; P.105
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 Ibid., P.106
- 26 Clayton and Savage, op.cit., P.297
- 27 Ibid. African Housing Colonial Development and Welfare Scheme was Scheme No.324 for Nairobi under which the sum of £83,000 was provided as a free grant for the purpose of building additional quarters for Africans employed in the town.

This housing project was initiated in 1943, the sum of £25,000 being spent in that year from colony funds. Approximately £50,000 of the Colonial Development and Welfare grant was spent by 1946. The Colonial Development and Welfare also provided a £600,000 Housing Fund for financing sub-economic housing schemes for Africans employed in urban areas.

In this period Municipal Schemes in Nairobi were Ziwani and the Pumwani Extension Schemes. These were completely municipal projects which were completed in 1946 at a cost of £110,000. Makongeni project which was to start in this year and expected to cost a total of £220,000 had gone 2/3 by January 1947. This project was financed from the £600,000 C.D. & W. Housing Fund, one half of the cost being met by a free grant and the other half by a loan from the Government. It was designed and started by a joint committee of the Municipal Council, the Government and the Chamber of Commerce nominees but in September 1945 it was handed over to the Municipal Council for completion. See KNA: LAB.9/348, Major Orde Browne Report. For further information on postwar housing development in Nairobi also see E.R. Bridger, City Engineer, "What Nairobi is Doing to House Africans: City Engineer States Facts", East African Standard, 22-23.5.53.

- 28 See KNA: LAB. 9/348, Major Orde Brown Report.
- 29 Municipal Council of Nairobi, 14th Annual Report of the Senior Medical Officer of Health, 1943, P.43.
- 30 Municipal Council of Nairobi, 18th Annual Report of the Senior Medical Officer of Health, 1947, P.6.
- 31 East Africa and Rhodesia, 29.12.38
- 32 City Council of Nairobi, "Report on African Housing", 1950, in KNA: LAB.9/1752, African Housing General File.
- 33 Ibid., P.3
- 34 Ibid., P.3
- 35 East African Standard, 14.1.47.
- 36 Report of the Committee of Inquiry into Labour Unrest in Mombasa (The Phillips Report), (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1945), PP.53, 57.
- 37 Municipal Council of Nairobi, Annual Report of the Municipal Native Affairs Officer, 1941, N.P.
- 38 Ibid., N.P.

- 39 Sharon Stichter, "The Formation of a Working Class in Kenya" in Richard Sandbrook and Robin Cohen, (Eds.), The Development of an African Working Class: Studies in Class Formation and Action (London: Longmans, 1975), P.36. For a full exposition of the hierarchy in the form of differential remuneration among the various races see various issues. Colony and Protectorate of Kenya, Notes on Commerce and Industry in Kenya Since 1950 which are available at The Kenya National Archives.
- 40 Ibid.
- 41 East African Standard, 18.1.47. The letter was signed by Chege Kibachia, the President of the newly formed A.W.F.
- 42 Makhan Singh, History of Kenya's Trade Union Movement to 1952 (Nairobi: E.A.P.H., 1969), P.142.
- 43 Sharon Stichter, "Trade Unionism in Kenya, 1947-1952: The Militant Phase" in Peter C.W. Gutkind, Robin Cohen and Jean Copans, (Eds.), African Labour History (London: Sage publications Ltd., 1978), PP.155-174.
- 44 The term casual worker was being used to denote employees on a monthly or ticket basis as compared to those on a written contract of service or on a resident labourer's contract. For details see Colony and Protectorate of Kenya, Annual Report, 1946, PP.24-25.
- 45 Ibid.
- 46 Ibid.
- 47 Colony and Protectorate of Kenya, Notes on Commerce and Industry in Kenya (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1950), PP.12-13
- 48 Colony and Protectorate of Kenya, Notes on Commerce and Industry in Kenya (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1952), P.18
- 49 Colony and Protectorate of Kenya, Annual Report, 1946, p,26.
- 50 Ibid.
- 51 Colony and Protectorate of Kenya, Annual Report, 1946, P.26.
- 52 East Africa High Commission, The Pattern of Income

Expenditure and Consumption of African Labourers
in Nairobi, October - November, 1950.

- 53 The cost of living for Africans as measured by the Mombasa African Retail Price Index (R.P.I.) rose by some 60% between 1947 and 1952 while the minimum wage in Nairobi rose by only some 50%. See the East Africa High Commission, East African Economic and Statistical Bulletin, No.1, September, 1948, Table F.4.
- 54 As the Carpenter Committee found out in 1954, the minimum wage provided only the barest minimum for a single man, and it was virtually impossible for a married man to support a family on such a wage. See the Carpenter Committee Report, footnote 109.
- 55 Municipal Council of Nairobi, 20th Annual Report of the Senior Medical Officer of Health, 1949, P.1.
- 56 Ibid., P.25
- 57 Ibid., P. 23
- 58 Municipal Council of Nairobi, 18th Annual Report of the Senior Medical Officer of Health, 1947, P.7.
- 59 Ibid.
- 60 Ibid., P.8
- 61 See the various Annual Reports of the Senior Medical Officer of Health for years 1945-1952.
- 62 Statistical data pertaining to the socio-economic and geographical incidence of mental illness is not available to support any hypothesis of differential susceptibility between town and countryside. All one can say with any degree of assurance is that the rapid socio-economic change and the insecurity characteristic of urban life do spawn neuroses that are uncommon in the rural areas. For urban life in general see D.M. Wilner and R.P. Walkley, "Effects of Housing on Health and Performance" in Leonard J. Duhl (Ed.), The Urban Condition (New York: Basic Books, 1963), PP.215-228; F. Golladay and C.Koch-Weser, Health and the Urban Poor, Urban Poverty Task Force, World Bank, December, 1974; and C.C. Hughes and J.M. Hunter, "Urbanization and Disease in Africa," African Urban Notes, IV, 2 (1969), PP.20-36. For mental sickness see C.C. Hughes and J.M. Hunter, "Urbanization and Disease in Africa", African

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- 74 Ibid.
- 75 East African Standard, 2.7.59.
- 76 Ibid.
- 77 East African Standard, 11.1.55.
- 78 East African Standard, 13.1.55
- 79 Dr. A.T.G. Thomas, "Some of the Practical Problems About African Housing" in East African Standard, 24-25.1.55
- 80 Mrs. E.M. Rayner, "The Pyramid of African Housing Problems" in East African Standard, 7.2.55
- 81 East African Standard, 19.8.52
- 82 See East African Standard, 24.4.53.
- 83 East African Standard, 7.5.53

- 84 Ibid.
- 85 Ibid.
- 86 Ibid.
- 87 Oral interviews with Wanjau Gichuki, Makadara, 27.4.85; Isaac Awouri, Shauri Moyo, 3.2.85; Omari Suleiman, Pumwani, 11.4.85, Israel Mutoka Makomere Amboko, Shauri Moyo, 3.2.85 and Luanda Isundwa, Shauri Moyo, 3.2.85. All these informants called the colonial move a "divide and rule" method.
- 88 Quoted in the East African Standard, 7.5.53.
- 89 Oral Interview, Cucu Esther Ngima, Dandora Phase III, 4.5.85. She notes that it was only Meru and Embu which carried out their own trials in their own Districts without necessarily consulting the Headquarters at Mathare in Nairobi.
- 90 Oral Interview, Musa Musasia, Makongeni, 29.9.85.
- 91 Ibid.
- 92 D.E.B. Hughes, Memorandum on Nyeri District, 1949-1952, P.9.
- 93 Colony and Protectorate of Kenya, African Affairs Department Annual Report: Nairobi Extra-Provincial District Annual Report, 1954 (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1956), P.176.
- 94 Ibid.
- 95 District Commissioner, Nairobi, Annual Report, 1954, P.1.
- 96 Colony and Protectorate of Kenya, African Affairs Department Annual Report....op.cit., P.177.
- 97 Ibid., PP.179-180
- 98 Frank Furedi, "The African Crowd in Nairobi: Popular Movements and Elite Politics", Journal of African History, XIV, 2(1973), PP.275-290 and David Throupe, "Moderates, Militants and Mau Mau :Politics in Kenya, 1944-1952", Ad Hoc Annual Conference of the Historical Association of Kenya, Nairobi, January 3-5, 1986.
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- 100 See Alderman George A.Tyson, The African Housing

Problem, A memorandum submitted to the Nairobi Chamber of Commerce, February, 1953.

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- 104 J.C. Carothers, The Psychology of Mau Mau, P.23
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- 106 L.S.B. Leakey, Mau Mau and the Kikuyu (London: Methuen, 1952)
- 107 This was the Government's Position which was stated by the Member for Health, Lands and Local Government in the Debate on the Second Reading of the Housing Bill, Legislative Council Debates, LV, May 6, 1953, Cols. 46-47
- 108 L.S.B. Leakey, op.cit., P.108.
- 109 Report of the Committee on African Wages
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- 110 Mwicigi Karanja to the Secretary General, ICFTU, 19.1.53, quoted in Makhan Singh, 1952-1956: Crucial Years of Kenya Trade Unions (Nairobi: Uzima Press Ltd., 1980), PP.14-15.
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- 112 Legislative Council, Hansard, 19.2.53, Cols.185-189
- 113 The Carpenter Committee Report, op.cit., p.11
- 114 Ibid., P.55
- 115 Ibid., P.22
- 116 Ibid., P.22
- 117 Ibid., P.33
- 118 Ibid., P.71
- 119 Ibid., PP.142-143

- 120 See the East African Standard, 10.12.54.
- 121 The Carpenter Committee Report, op.cit., P.145
- 122 Ibid., P.146
- 123 The East Africa Royal Commission 1953-1955 Report, op.cit.
- 124 Ibid., P.250
- 125 Ibid., P.214.
- 126 Quoted in Recharad E. Stren, Housing the Urban Poor in Africa, op.cit., P.211.
- 127 Ibid., P. 212
- 128 Though the importance of passes were, by 1950, found to be insufficient in the control of Africans in Nairobi in the absence of extensive improvement in African housing, the colonial administration was still considering the introduction of what it called a "Universal passbook control of Africans" in the city as an aspect in a general move towards a new approach to the administration of Africans in the town. This was in line with "The policy of the Government with regard to the stabilization of African urban workers as set out in the Carpenter Report" but it needed delicate handling. See KNA: LAB. 9/280, General Administration of Africans in Nairobi - Policy, R.G. Turnbull (Secretariat) to the Honourable W.B. Havelock, Minister for Local Government, Health and Housing, 12.4.55.
- 129 Clayton and Savage, op.cit., P.409. Also see the Central Housing Board, Annual Reports, 1958-1960 and KNA: LAB.9/1780, The Central Housing Board 1957-1962.
- 130 Andrew Hake, African Metropolis: Nairobi's Self-Help City (London: Sussex University Press, 1977), P.58.
- 131 City Council of Nairobi, Annual Report of the African Affairs Department, 1956, P.10
- 132 Clayton and Savage, op.cit., P.409
- 133 See L.M. Bloomberg and C. Abrams, United Nations Mission to Kenya on Housing, U.N. Commission for Technical Assistance, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (1964), 1965.

- 134 Labour Department, Annual Reports 1956-1962,
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- 135 City Council of Nairobi, Annual Report of the
Social Services and Housing Department, 1960,
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- 137 See Reported Employment and Earnings in Kenya,
1962, Economics and Statistics Division,
Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, Nairobi,
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- 138 Perhaps the best source on this point is Andrew
Hake, see footnote 130 above.
- 139 East African Standard, 24-25.1.55
- 140 See footnote 134 above
- 141 Ibid.
- 142 Quoted in East African Standard, 28.7.43
- 143 Mary Parker, "Political and Social Aspects of
the Development of Municipal Government in Kenya",
(London: Ph.D.Thesis, 1949), P.76.
- 144 Quoted in Clayton and Savage, op.cit., P.43
- 145 Cf. W.Bestwick and A.E.Brazier, Report on the
Control and Management of the Nairobi City
Council's African Housing Rental Estates
(Nairobi: City Hall, April 1, 1958), P.102.

This study has been an attempt to analyse the structural roots of the problem of African housing in Nairobi between c.1900 and 1960. In its broadest perspective, the study has examined the problem of African housing, African urban living conditions and related colonial policies during colonialism.

In chapters three to six the study has tried to demonstrate that first, before the out-break of the Second World War, both the central government and the Nairobi urban authorities showed negligible interest in the problem of African accommodation. In this period Africans were not considered to be part and parcel of the Nairobi urban set up; they were allowed in the town by virtue of their function as migrant labourers who had their place already carved up for them in the "native reserves". The reasons for denying Africans permanent residence in Nairobi in this period were not because colonialism wanted to preserve the African socio-cultural fabric, as Lord Lugard envisaged in his Dual Mandate, that bible of colonial expansion and preservation, modernization and tradition.¹ Born out of the need to organize society to ensure that whites did not lose control over the African race, this denial was an articulation of a cheap labour provision mechanism: it guaranteed access to cheap African labour for pax-colonia whereby the white elite in the town relieved itself of the

burden of having to pay for the heavy social costs of urbanization.

This arrangement, it is argued in the study, was later to be rationalized in terms of diseases and epidemiology. From the very earliest years of the founding of Nairobi, epidemiology and sanitation came to be used by the town's policy-makers as motives and rationalizations for the policy of control and segregation. It is, therefore, the contention of the study that this development was not wholly inspired by a colonial racist desire to see the colonial community divided at every level along racial boundaries. The use of epidemiology and sanitation to shape the institutions of control and segregation was a superimposition on Nairobi of similar trends in England in the 1850s when London became a focal point for the deepening fears and anxieties of the Victorian elite about the endemic poverty and potential violence of the casual worker. Just like in London, it is further contended, these twin phenomena were in Nairobi before 1939 viewed in the image of contagion as a threat to the white elite's expectations of progress and social order. That is why throughout this period the authorities continued to raise the classic complaints about diseases, theft, drunkenness and crime and the association of these evils with African residential areas.

But whether the question of epidemiology and sanitation was real or imagined, it has been suggested, it was important in the formulation of control and segregationist policies. It was important not because epidemics created abnormal situations but rather because they sharpened existing behavioural patterns which, to paraphrase Roderick E. McGrew's views in his study of cholera in Russia,² betrayed deeply rooted and continuing contradictions in the Kenyan colonial economy. Just like in Russia where cholera attacked most dramatically the poorest and weakest, the masses and slums, so did tuberculosis or pneumonia attack the Africans in the shanty dwellings of Nairobi. That Europeans also contracted these diseases and died from them seemed only to underline the danger of either allowing a large influx of Africans into the town or living near those who had already arrived and settled.

This view was pushed further to embrace the question of cheap labour provision. That diseases existed cannot be denied. But, this study contends, as the interwar period came to an end the problem of diseases had tremendously been reduced. As to why authorities continued to invoke it in this period has been located in the question of cheap labour provision and the need to avoid the heavy social costs of urbanization. Thus it is argued that

diseases and epidemiology as motives and rationalizations transcended Nairobi urban boundaries to embrace both town and country. The two came to be used to deny Africa permanent residence in Nairobi so that labour for pax-colonia could be reproduced in the reserves: it was worked into a policy which ensured access to African labour without the whites having to pay for this labour's accommodation. So long as this labour could be reproduced in the "native reserves" where the network of kinship relations provided for both subsistence and welfare functions, the Nairobi urban authorities were content with basing primitive accumulation of capital not on the separation of labour from the means of production (land) but on the maintenance and transformation of the pre-capitalist relations of production.

The two concepts - maintenance and transformation - have been examined in the study to relate the history of the urbanization of Nairobi to the history of the wider community: Kenya and the wider world. Thus we have argued that the movement of Africans to Nairobi and their subsequent marginalization was inevitable. It was inevitable in the sense that first, the process of capitalist rural transformation in Kenya created conditions in the countryside whose dialectic was the ejection of surplus population into towns and the "white" Highlands. Secondly, the denial of African permanent residence in Nairobi through the

refusal to provide them with adequate accommodation was not a solution to the forces capitalism had unleashed: Africans had gone to the town in search of better means of livelihood and lack of accommodation meant not their departure but their settlement in insanitary shanty dwellings. Thus settled in the town, the problem of their urbanization became essentially a problem of control. Worked out into a policy, control came to be characterized by, first, a desire on the part of the authorities to keep wages low and, secondly, a desire to segregate African residences from European residential areas. However, because the historical context in which African ^{Cityward} Cityward migration - the penetration of both the means of production and consumption into the countryside - was irreversable, Africans kept on pouring into the town. The accommodation schemes which were implemented in this period - Kariokor, Starehe and Shauri Moyo - for what came to be described as "legitimate" Africans could not cope with the influx. This led to the rise of scattered shanty dwellings which acted as septic fringes for the Africans. And in these dwellings Africans - men and women, young and old - lived in socially and economically revolting conditions.

These shanty dwellings were a whirlpool of moral ruin in which most Africans sank daily, losing

daily more and more of their power to resist the demoralizing influence of want, of filth, and of insanitary surroundings. These were lurking places of the bitterest poverty with all considerations of health, morals, and even the most ordinary decency were neglected. It is in these conditions, it has been shown in the study, that high incidence of diseases, wretchedness and demoralization occurred. These were the lowest nooks of Pangani, Pumwani (Majengo), Mombasa, Maskini and Kileleshwa. These places had yet another dark side to them: colonial brutality when it came to their destruction. This brutality is well brought out in a vivid description of the destruction of some 50 huts in Pangani by The East African Standard. On the 12th February, 1955, City Council ordered the destruction of the huts as their owners, who had been given one day's notice,

watched impassively...white firemen burned down their ramshackle dwellings after staving in the walls with axes... Heaps of rubbish, soaked in petrol, were piled in the centre of each hut. More petrol was splashed on walls and roofs. Then the cluster of huts was set on fire. Within a few minutes the task was complete. Flames leaped 50 feet high, a thick pale of black smoke reached up for 200 feet. So intense was the blaze that workmen and firemen retreated 50 yards to escape the fierce heat.³

But given the reluctance of the authorities to spend public funds on African welfare, policies adopted to segregate or control Africans in Nairobi involved contradictions. While on the one hand the Nairobi policy-makers needed cheap African labour, on the other they wanted a town free from a large African "floating" population which was so erroneously associated with a lack of "law and order." By the end of the interwar period town and country had become so irrevocably linked that diminishing means of subsistence in the latter came to place demands on the former. This generated conflicts which came to be centred on those principles on which primitive accumulation of capital was based: the questions of cheap labour and the policy of control. This brings us to the second point of this chapter.

By the end of the interwar period it was becoming clear that these contradictions could be, at least, partially resolved by the development of public housing for Africans. Thus during and after the Second World War as a result of the development of import-substitution industrialization, coupled with the difficulty of running the "Kipande" system without proper housing, the colonial authorities cautiously moved towards the acceptance of Africans as a necessary evil in Nairobi. The major reason for this

development was the need to stabilize the African urban population to meet the needs of for increased industrial labour efficiency and productivity. Housing became a very important function of labour. It is argued in this study that this was a period in which the relationship between capital (finance and industrial) and African labour became transformed to take cognizance of postwar developments both globally and in Kenya. This was because, it is further contended, the major contradiction in the Kenya social formation had shifted from the relationship between two modes - capitalist and pre-capitalist - to that between capital and labour in one mode - capitalist. And in this shift the questions of labour stability, labour efficiency and labour output became key factors in the urbanization of the African population. To have a stabilized African labour force which could cater for the post war industrialization in Nairobi revolved around two important factors - the increase or improvement in wage levels and decent and adequate housing.

Thirdly, developments in the postwar period, both globally and locally, changed the colonial perception of Africans in urban areas. Internationally, there was the rise of United States of America as a global political, economic and military power and this came to challenge the British hitherto

unmitigated hold on her colonies. From a position of looking at these colonies basically as sources of raw materials she moved towards a policy which started recognizing the importance of industrialization and social welfare in the colonies. Locally, there was a series of labour unrest and the Mau Mau uprising which, it has been suggested in the study, had their material basis in the worsening urban living conditions in Nairobi in particular and Mombasa in general. These developments saw to the creation of housing estates, the encouragement of African property ownership as well as urban real estate for direct occupation or rental. Indeed, from 1956 when a new housing policy was being implemented in Nairobi, the Africans (middle class), at the encouragement of the colonial authorities, were brought into the mainstream of urban property ownership with urban real estate as a legal source for African capital accumulation. This was meant, the study concludes, for the creation encouragement and strengthening of a loyalist African middle class.

The period 1956-1960 thus forms a watershed for a new trend, a new factor in the political economy of Nairobi: the rapid establishment and expansion of African property relations whose manifestations have become so glaringly apparent in the low-cost housing provision in the post-colonial period.

Nairobi in 1956 embarked on a path which finally moved it from the pre-1940 social (i.e. racial) to economic (i.e. class) categorization.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 F.D. Lugard, The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa (Edinburgh and London: Blackwood, 1922).
- 2 Roderick E. McGrew, Russia and Cholera, 1823-1832 (Madison and Milwaukee, 1965), chapter I, passim and P. 156.
- 3 East African Standard, 12.2.55.

EPILOGUE

In chapter one of this study it was asserted that the problem of housing and poor living conditions for Africans in Nairobi today have their roots in the colonial period. Writing in the 1980s and bearing in mind this contention, it might be useful to look at, albeit briefly, the question as to whether there have been any marked changes in policies since independence.

Since the attainment of political independence in Kenya in 1963, a number of factors have influenced the formulation of urban housing policies. Among these factors are, first, inherited colonial planning laws and building standards coupled with the colonial attempts to control urbanism. Secondly, there is the concept of individual ownership of land together with the mechanisms of a willing-buyer willing-seller policy upon which the independence settlement was based. Thirdly, there are the developmental trends of independent Kenya as a peripheral capitalist economy. These factors, with all their social, political and economic underpinnings, have since 1963 thrown to the fore various key policy issues as regards urban housing. Among these are the questions of urban squatters, slum clearance or improvement and the provision and/or affordability of decent urban housing. Central to these issues has been the question of the provision of low-cost housing in Kenyan towns.

Herein lies the commercialization of the provision of housing, the transformation of unauthorized settlements which is characterized by the operations of a capitalist housing market and, finally, the dissipation of squatting due to the mode of the provision of shelter, control by local administration and landlord-tenant relationships. Before we can look at some of these issues critically, let us first examine the developmental trends which have brought them about.

The year 1960 marked the end of any official attempt at control of population movement as Emergency Regulations were removed. This act in itself saw to the rapid immigration of people, especially the Kikuyu, Embu and Meru who had hitherto been banned from staying in Nairobi, into the city. This led the town's population to jump from 343,500 people in 1962 to 827,800 in 1979. This represented an annual growth rate of 5.8% between 1962-1969 and 5% in 1969-1979.¹

In an outline of a scheme for aided self-help housing projects prepared by the City Council for submission by the Government of Kenya to the World Bank in 1969, these figures were commented upon and the city's population in the year 2,000 was projected at 3,000,000.² This was a disturbing reflection on the existing housing situation as

had been projected for 1976 for the different income groups living in the town.

It was observed in this document that some 12,000 housing units were needed to be added to the existing stock annually "merely to take care of the increase in the number of households within the next few years." But between 1967 and 1970 the actual completion of new conventional housing units averaged only 1,500 per annum and the projected construction for 1972-1976 was estimated at just under 3,000 units per annum. Moreover, the number of units required to house additional families did not take into consideration the fact that many of the existing units were sub-standard and overcrowded or that the existing housing stock fell short of the needs of the families already living in Nairobi.³ Studies conducted by the Nairobi Urban Study Group indicated that the existing shortfall of conventional housing units was 60,000 in 1972. Before 1963 one unit of council housing was provided for every 21 inhabitants but by 1970 this ratio had declined to one unit per 58 people.⁴ This murky reflection made Bo Vagnby and Otto Kaszner of the Nairobi University Urban and Regional Planning Department and the Housing Research and Development Unit respectively to declare in a research report for Joe Magazine that "The problem is of tremendous magnitude which is reflected by the

fact that Nairobi needs one new housing unit every fifty minutes in order to accommodate her increased population alone and by the early 1980's the required rate will increase to one unit every thirty minutes."⁵

This situation was particularly acute in the lower income groups i.e. those who were earning under £200 per annum. This group was estimated to need at least 10,000 units per annum in the period 1972-1976. According to the City Council document already referred to, it was not surprising that it was in housing occupied by this group where over-crowding was most acute. Compared with the average size of households at 4.5 persons, the average occupancy rate per room in the areas of poor standard of unapproved housing was 5.5 persons.⁶

This situation of the imbalance between the supply and demand of accommodation in Nairobi generated a heated debate between the government and academicians for most of the 1960s and early 1970s. The issues which surrounded this debate were, first, as to whether the solution of the contradiction between population increase and lack of adequate and decent housing in towns like Nairobi should or should not adopt slum clearance and/or squatter improvement as a settled policy. Secondly, there was the question of what type of housing was most ideal for the Kenyan low-income earners.

Not unlike the colonial period, the government's approach to the first question was one of slum clearance while at the same time advocating for the promotion of low-income urban housing. This approach was well brought out in a policy statement which was later articulated in Sessional Paper No.5 of 1966 on Housing Policy which, inter alia, said that

If towns are not to develop into slums and centres of ill-health and of evil-social conditions, low-income urban housing and slum clearance must continue to form the major part of the nation's housing programme.....⁷

On the second question the government's approach was unequivocal. To its urban policy-makers every Kenyan living in town deserved decent housing.⁸ This policy objective was contained in the country's policy of "Decent Housing" which was promulgated in the 1969-1974 Development Plan in which we read:

The prime objective of Government policy on housing is to move towards a situation where every family in Kenya will live in a decent home, whether privately built or state sponsored, which provide at least the basic standards of health, privacy and security....⁹

Needless to say, these two approaches to the question of urban housing in Nairobi were a reflection of colonial policies which emphasized slum clearance and building in permanent materials.

But what were the genesis of these approaches? In chapter six of this study it was pointed out that the period 1958-1965 witnessed a drastic drop in the national housing production and it was this development which in 1965 led the government to request United Nations' assistance to analyse the situation. The United Nations Study revealed that first, the problem of housing in Kenya was similar to that one prevailing in other countries where lack of capital and problems of management were quite glaring. Secondly, it was pointed out that whether in Kenya or any other developing country there was no shortage of publicly owned land, that a number of central and local government institutions had been capable of providing a considerable number of housing units. The United Nations Mission recommended that the bulk of government funds be directed to the provision of low-cost housing maximum attention be directed to the development of site and service schemes; part of government funds be devoted to the improvement of existing housing stock; there should be the promotion of the concept of self-help housing; there should be the initiation of research activities in low-cost housing and the development of adequate training programmes and, finally, there should be the promotion of the national building industry. Out of studies that were carried out after these recommendations, a number of things emerged, the most important being an

amendment to the Building code which in 1968 was gazetted as Grade II By-laws. This amendment made provision for local authorities to adopt lower standards like the provision of non-waterborne sanitation and wider application of local building technology. Most of the latter part of the 1960s and the 1970s saw the development of site and service schemes which were financed and planned by the Ministry of Housing through its executive arm, the National Housing Corporation. Nairobi City Council on its part implemented several rental and purchase housing schemes such as Uhuru and Outer Ring Road Estates.

But while these developments were taking place the question that was being asked was as to whether housing types defined as of minimum standards were in reach of the majority of the Kenyan urban populations. That the government's objective of providing "decent housing" to every Kenyan urbanite was well meant is borne out of the fact that the allocation of its fund for housing in the 1965-1969 Development Plan period increased by 230% making a total of £34 million. This move was meant to increase the stock of housing four times more than what had been estimated in the previous plan. The estimated requirements were calculated at 110,000 units to cater for the population increase only, excluding a shortfall of 50,000 units.

75% of the 110,000 units were planned to cost less than £750 each. Of the £750, £250-300 was to be spent on infrastructural services, £250 on the construction of a combined kitchen and toilet block, £40-50 on professional fees, land rents, etc. leaving £200-250 for the construction of two habitable rooms to be erected on a self-help basis.¹⁰

Be that as it may, the question as to whether the majority of Kenyan urbanites could afford this type of house remained unanswered. A £1200 unit, which was the upper limit according to the National Housing Corporation programme, was in the late 1960s and early 1970s not affordable by more than 12% of the African urban population let alone the low-income group and £1200 could hardly cover construction costs for a conventional two-roomed unit with kitchen and modern sanitation. Indeed, when the 1965-1969 plan period was coming to a close the glaring fact was that out of the 50,000 units required for the Second Plan period, only 25,000 units had been built¹¹. When housing experts came to question the wisdom of the government in this set minima in housing standards, they were reacting not only to this anomaly; they were also concerned with the fact that the government, in setting up its minimum quality on urban housing, had failed to realise that with the average cost of an NHC house in the early 1970s being between

Ksh.20,000- Ksh.24,000 the private sector built houses at an average cost of Ksh.100,000. Thus D.Haldane¹² could conclude in 1971 that such housing was ⁱⁿmacce-ssible to the poor.

After all had been said the question became that one of what was to be done. Starting from the point of the basic needs approach researchers like Dharam Ghai¹³ put across a case for housing subsidizes arguing that housing was a basic need just like nutrition, health, education and water. It was out of this that the government finally came to accept the United Nations Mission's recommendation on the promotion of site and service schemes. This was meant, according to the World Bank, to stimulate self-help and make it possible for the poor to house themselves with a minimum of public expenditure.

From the foregoing, we can conclude that when Kenya attained her political independence the obtaining situation with regard to urban housing was that one of "lack of capital with which to build houses and disparities between what the average family (could) pay for its shelter and cost of producing it".¹⁴ The problem was not one of land as Nairobi could without any problems absorb at least five times of its population¹⁵ at that time. The Mission's recommendations were later to form the basis on which independent Kenya was to develop an urban housing policy.

Its emphasis on capital and research led to the establishment of certain agencies which, hand in hand with local and central government authorities, were to oversee housing provision in the country. These agencies were the Housing Finance Company of Kenya (HFCK) which was set up in collaboration with the Commonwealth Development Corporation (CDC), the National Housing Corporation (NHC) which emerged from a reorganized Central Housing Authority (CHA) and, in conjunction with the University of Nairobi, the Housing Research and Development Unit (HRDU). While HFCK was to act as the agency for provision of private mortgages, the NHC was to play the role of the executive arm of the government in the coordination and channelling of funds to other institutions which were engaged in low-cost housing programmes. The HRDU on its part was to play the role of the government's think-tank on the problem of housing and how it could be solved. These developments which were formulated into policy had one glaring defect. While the HRDU and other independent researchers continually focussed on the housing problem of low-income urbanites, the HFCK and the NHC continued to direct their efforts exclusively on the provision of housing for Nairobi's middle class. This was brought out by the fact that it took the Kenya government a long time to implement the U.N. Mission's recommendation on the need to promote site and service schemes.

In an apparent reference to this, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) pointed out in 1979 that

Although there was a growing awareness among some professionals of the need to change the emphasis of prevailing policies, there is no doubt that the magnitude and conditions of the AID and IBRD/IDA projects did influence the speed at which these changes occurred.¹⁶

The government's emphasis through the HFCK and NHC on housing provision for the middle class was a colonial carry-over from the 1956-1960 period when the encouragement of the creation of a middle class, through decent housing provision was emphasized. Secondly, its acceptance of the concept of one-room units as exemplified in the site and service schemes as a housing policy was not unique to independent Kenya. In most part what the colonial authorities built in Nairobi under the "bedspace" policy were one-room units. Indeed, by 1961 about 72% of all houses built by the Nairobi City Council were one-room units.¹⁷ Thirdly, the government's approach to the problem of squatters and squatter settlements in Nairobi has been a continuation of that of the colonial authorities - the application of the bulldozer to the solution of basically social problems. Finally, the encouragement of African ownership of real estate and the commercialization of low-cost housing has its roots in the 1956-1960 colonial period when Nairobi

moved from social (i.e. racial) to economic (i.e. class) categorization. As Marc Howard Ross says,

Africans have moved into positions formally held by Europeans and Asians in the city, and in contrast to the stratified racial system which dominated Nairobi ... the barriers to African mobility are gone. The elite now includes a significant number of African businessmen, politicians, and highly trained professionals, many of whom have made their fortunes in a few short years.... Each neighbourhood (is now) scored in terms of being a lower, middle or upper class area....¹⁸

FOOTNOTES

- 1 See Economic Survey (Nairobi, 1981).
- 2 Nairobi City Council, Outline of a Scheme for Aided Self-Help Housing Project prepared by Nairobi City Council for submission by the Government of Kenya to the World Bank (Nairobi: City Hall, 1969), P.1
- 3 Ibid., P.2
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Bo Vagnby and Otto Kaszner, "Housing: An Offspring of Development" in Joe Magazine, June, 1976, P.11
- 6 City Council of Nairobi, "Outline of a Scheme...." op.cit., P.2
- 7 For a full exposition of this approach See Republic of Kenya, Sessional Paper No.5 of 1966/1967: Housing Policy for Nairobi (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1966).
- 8 By decent housing was meant a house with at least two rooms, a toilet, a shower and a kitchen. For details see footnote 9.
- 9 For elaboration see Republic of Kenya, Development Plan 1969-1974 (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1969).
- 10 Bo Vagnby and Otto Kaszner, op.cit., P.10
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 D. Haldane, "Those without", Urban Africa, 30 and 31 (Nairobi: National Christian Council of Kenya, 1971).
- 13 Dharam Ghai, et al, Planning for Basic Needs in Kenya (Geneva: ILO., 1979)
- 14 L.N. Bloomberg and C. Abrams, United Nations Mission to Kenya on Housing, (U.N. Commission for Technical Assistance, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 1965), P.1
- 15 Ibid., P.2
- 16 United States Agency for International Development, Kenya Shelter Sector Study and AID'S Experience (Nairobi: RHUDD, USAID, 1979), P.34.
- 17 J.M. Ichoya, "Towards a Housing Policy for Nairobi" (M.A. Thesis, University of Nairobi, 1974).

- 18 Marc Howard Ross, "Class and Ethnic Bases of Political Mobilization in African Cities," Paper prepared for delivery at the 1972 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Washington Hilton Hotel, Washington D.C., September 5-9, 1972, PP. 18 and 20.

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