

TITLE: NAIROBI'S INFORMAL MODERNISM

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ABSTRACT: Nairobi was established more than 100 years ago as a transit point for the Uganda Railway. The Uganda railway was built by the British Colonial Administration, to link Mombasa on the Indian Ocean coast with Lake Victoria in the interior of East Africa, in order to extract natural resources. In 1900 commissioner Charles Eliot introduced hut tax, and encouraged European settlement based upon a policy of integrated development. However the advent of the first European settlers swiftly changed this vision, and separate development was established as policy. These were the beginnings of social, economic and spatial exclusions. By the end of the Second World War, most of the land in Nairobi had been privatised, making it almost impossible for any inclusive civic development to take place.

At independence in 1963, the restriction of the movement of Africans was relaxed, creating a large influx of people into the city. These people were excluded from main stream formal operations of the city, and had to survive from their own 'wits'. In recent times, neo-liberal policies have had no meaningful impact on the provision of urban services to the poor. The reduced role of the state has created a haven for privateers to exploit the urban poor. In the process an informal modernism has emerged in Nairobi, where moneyed developers build 8-10 storey rental business cum residential blocks, further marginalising the poor. This paper further argues that for there to be any meaningful progress, the state should provide subsidised rental housing for the poor, as they are unable to get into the home ownership bracket based on market rates.

Key Words: Colonialism, Informal, Urbanisation, Segregation, Modernism

CONTEXT.

Nairobi was established more than 100 years ago as a transit point for the Uganda Railway. The Uganda Railway was built by the British colonial power, in order to link Mombasa on the Indian Ocean coast with Lake Victoria in the interior of East Africa, for purposes of extracting natural resources (Thornton White, L. W. et al. 1948; Hirst, T. and Lamba, D. 1994). Before the coming of the railway, the Masaai people used to graze and water their cattle at what they called "Enkare Nyaribe", meaning a place of cold water (Thornton White, L. W. et al. 1948:10). Some evidence suggests that the site (where Nairobi is located), was used for trading by Kikuyu and Masaai women (Zwanenburg, R. M. A. van and King, A. 1975:263).

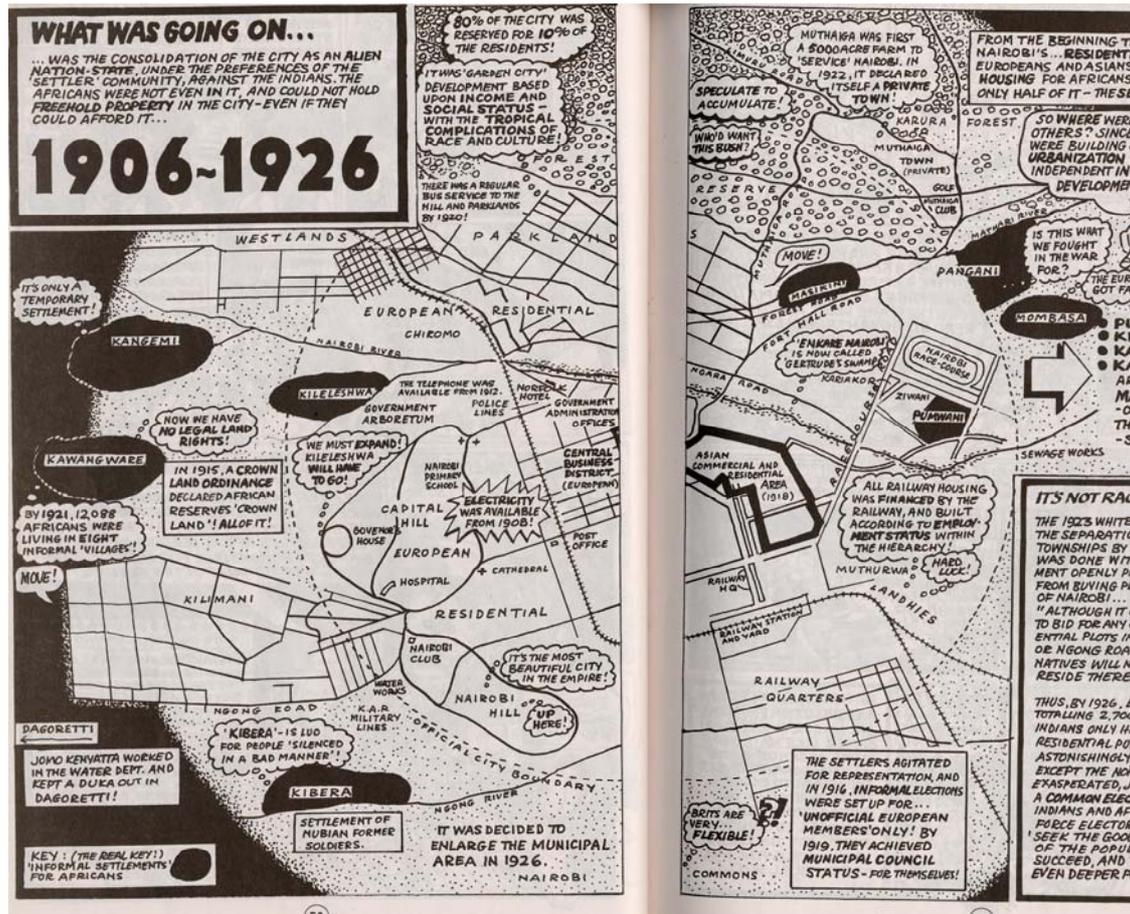
From the beginning, Nairobi's spatial configuration was exclusionary, which led to socio-economic and political exclusion. The plan for a Railway Town of 1899, only took into consideration the European employees of the railway and the European and Asian traders. The plan completely neglected the Asian labourers or coolies and Africans. Nairobi was going to be a railway town for Europeans with a mixed European and Asian trading post (Emig, S. and Ismail, Z. 1980:9). In the colonial consolidation period between 1906 and 1926, Nairobi was being colonised as an alien nation state, based on the interests of the white settler population and by ignoring the interests of Indians. The Africans were not even in it, and could not hold freehold property in the city-even if they could afford it (Hirst, T. and Lamba, D. 1994:50).

Eighty per cent of the city's residential land was reserved for ten per cent of the residents. It was a "garden city" development based upon income and social status – with tropical complications of race and culture (Hirst, T. and Lamba, D. 1994:50). From the very beginning there were two Nairobi's; residential areas for Europeans and Asians and official housing for Africans. But these two Nairobi's were only half of Nairobi – the serviced half. From 1890, all other Africans, who were not in European employment, had been building subsistence urbanisation through independent informal sector development, without the benefit of town planning. Fig.1 illustrates what was happening at this time.

In Kenya, the state preceded the nation. It had the professional institutionalisation of power and the monopoly of force from the start. The common political features of the colonial process included; the use of force/violence, technological advantage, hegemonic ideology, authoritarian statism, bureaucratic elitism, the international political dimension (including labour exploitation) plus in Kenya – imported settler elite

(Myers, G. A. 2003; Home, R. K. 1997; Berman, B. 1990). Because of the above strategies, at the end of the consolidation period in 1926, Europeans owned plots totalling 2,700 acres while Indians had only 300 acres for their residential purposes. The Africans astonishingly, didn't have any except the nominal official housing. Some Africans however owned property; these were single women who were prominent in the development of Pangani village (Burja, J. M. 1975; Burton, A. 2002). They built "Swahili" square houses, where they lived in one room and rented out others. They enjoyed some nominal security of tenure under the English law of USUFRUCT (Hirst, T. and Lamba, D. 1994).

Fig.1 Nairobi's Spatial Configuration c 1906-1926



The 1927 plan for a settler capital, continued the exclusionary practices of the previous years, using the cynical racial simplification of an alien "class system" through a zoning policy that ensured a pattern of segregation and social stratification, which laid the foundation for massive structural maldevelopment that perpetuated informal urbanisation (Hirst, T. and Lamba, D. 1994:86). At that time, it was necessary to enlarge the municipal boundary to cover an area of 84km². Fig.2 illustrates how the city has grown in size and population over the last 100 years or so. The 1948 Master Plan for a colonial capital and the 1973 Metropolitan Growth Strategy (MGS) adapted segregationist principles. They were not used as tools of inquiry with a view of creating some level of equity among the population, but rather they were used to maintain the status quo. Political decisions preceded plans, rather than the other way round. This type of planning within a system of monopolistic power serves to reinforce hegemony rather than operate as regulatory framework (Castillo, J. M. 2000:21).

Fig.2: Nairobi's Area and Population in 100 year period

Year	Area in (Sq Km)	Population
1900	18	
1906		11,512
1919	25	
1926	84	29,864
1936		49,600
1944		108,900
1948	91	118,900
1962		266,795
1963	684	342,764
1969		509,286
1979		827,775
1989	693	1,324,570
1999	696	2,143,254

Source: Halliman and Morgan, 1967; Kenya Population Census, 1962, 1969, 1979, 1989, 1999.

At independence in 1963, the restriction of the movement of Africans was relaxed, creating a large influx of people into Nairobi. In this postcolonial period, the new African ruling elite opted for the continuity of colonial governance structures rather than change. The inherited British ideology of impartial officials guided by notions of technical rationality, advising elected politicians who viewed the exercise of power as a moral non-political activity- was inappropriate in a post-independence situation (Rakodi, C. 1997). In addition the inherited colonial logic of urban development was meant to contain and control settlement rather than managing growth and change. This system proved to be ineffective in the post colonial period and propagated the mismatch between supply and demand for urban services (Burton, A. 2002; Rakodi, C. 1997).

The rapid population growth in the last 30 years or so meant that traditional planning strategies could not supply adequate services, leading to the proliferation of informality. To understand the resilience of informal urbanisation in Nairobi, we should not underestimate the limited role that urban planning has played (Hake, A. 1977; Emig, S. and Ismail, Z. 1980; Obudho, R. A. and Aduwo, G. O. 1992). Plans, programmes, strategies and decisions taken from the perspective of planning, have historically been tools to reinforce the process of political and social exclusion. Planners oftentimes have just been pawns in the broader agendas of politicians. Friedman, D. 1988, in "Florentine New Towns" makes the above assertion quite clear, by demonstrating how politics dictated urban design in the late Middle Ages. In many developing countries, plans have often been posterior documents for foreign credit or political consensus building, as was the case with the Metropolitan Growth Strategy, regarding the 1974 World Bank loan for the construction of Dandora site and service scheme.

Globalisation has also acerbated the exclusionary tendencies of many developmental programmes. The development paradigms advocated by the international community have in general impacted negatively on the urban poor and further marginalised them. In the 1960s, the dominant development theory was modernisation through raising levels of public investment and savings. Urban growth was to be controlled through strong regulatory intervention bias in which slums were to be eradicated. Evidence from many developing countries, shows that, this orientation failed due to lack of adequate resources (Syagga, P. M. 2002). In the 1970s, the basic needs approach was in vogue, where urban development was geared towards facilitation and was project based. In this context, attempts to expand delivery and management of urban services had to meet three basic criteria of; affordability, cost recovery and replicability.

There was a general failure of these development paradigms, which generated the push to the neo-liberal theory with its emphasis on markets since the 1980s. Neo-liberalism grew stronger in the 1990s as the cold war ended; emphasis was on democratisation modelled on the Western World. This was

underpinned by concepts of enablement and good governance. Urban management was geared towards enablement of private sector, civil society and community groups. Restrictive building and land-use standards increasingly became phased out. New ideas are now emerging about development in the 21st century. Many development agencies are revising their strategies and placing greater emphasis on the elimination of poverty through the concept of sustainable livelihoods (Syagga, P. M. 2002). Fig.3 shows the dominant global development paradigms and their corresponding urban development strategies. All these paradigms and strategies have propagated exclusion as they have not been adequately funded, leading to enhanced informality.

Fig.3: Global Development Paradigms and their Characteristics

Time Period	Dominant Orthodoxy	Geopolitical Trends	Strategy for Urbanisation
1960s	Modernisation Theory with a strong Western bias	Emergence of newly independent countries and the cold war	Import substitution strategy for industrialisation. Slum eradication
1970s	Growth and Redistribution Theory. Basic Needs Theory.	Cold war, Oil shock and the Emergence of Debt crisis	Focus on site and service schemes, self-help projects, core housing etc. Projects to satisfy: Affordability-Cost Recovery and Replicability
1980s	Emergence of the Neo-liberal Theory	Debt crisis Full - blown. Severe economic decline of developing countries	Problems of affordability came to fore. Tacit acceptance of informal settlements. Relaxation of laws.
1990s	Neo-liberal Theory the driving orthodoxy. Emphasis on Enablement and Good governance	End of cold war. Increased emphasis on democratisation based on Western models.	Cities increasingly seen as engines of economic growth. Restrictive building and land-use standards increasingly being phased out.

2000s	Sustainable Livelihoods Theory. Focus on poverty eradication	USA as the dominant super power. Increasing urban poverty.	Privatisation. Focus on private/public sector partnerships
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Source: Authors Reconstruction from Syagga, 2002

INFORMAL URBANISATION

Informality has been the dominant mode of city making in many third world cities (Nairobi included). This phenomenon which occurs by default is a result of; bureaucracy and corruption in formal processes, weak political/legal structure, lack of affordable serviced land etc. (Chabal, P. and Daloz, J-P. 1999; Hansen, K. T. and Vaa, M. 2004; Simone, A. M. 2002). As discussed earlier the formal planning strategies adapted from the colonial period had failed in the post colonial period.

The failure of these strategies, which were designed to contain settlement rather than allow for growth and change, created the conditions for informal urban processes to proliferate in order to fill the void left by these formal planning procedures. The emergent informal processes ranged from those undertaken by the poor on the one end to those undertaken by affluent on the other, with the survivalist being the most purely informal and the affluent being the least informal (Fig.4.shows Nairobi's Urbanisation Study Model). These informal processes are in principal extralegal practises, which are undertaken because of the failures of the formal process to provide the necessary commercial and residential needs of the population. They manipulate and take advantage of the weaknesses of the legal framework, and from entirely illegal on the one end to those that in small ways add on to or redesign legal/formal practices on the other.

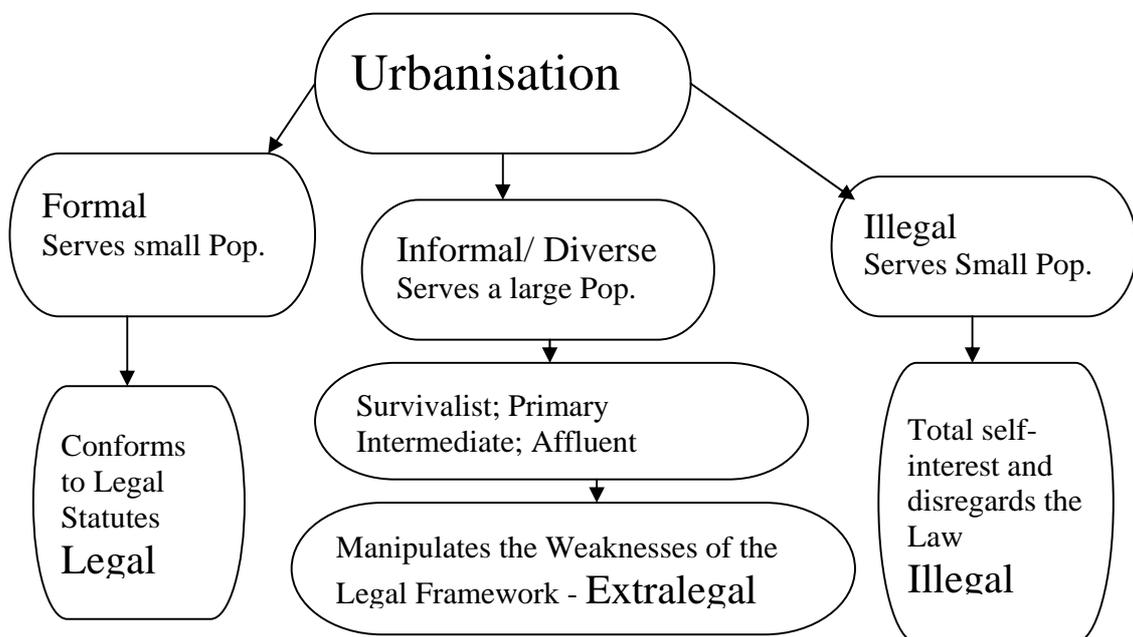


Fig.4: Nairobi's Urbanisation Study Model. It is based on the assumption that society adopts a capitalist mode of production and that society is not egalitarian.

Source: Author

These practices are not homogeneous as generally discussed in most literature on informality; they are heterogeneous and are also not the preserve of the urban poor. Evidence in Nairobi has shown that informal practices which I refer to as “Diverse Informalities” are practiced by all socio-economic groups of the Nairobi population. The very low income groups adopt survivalist strategies, while the low and some middle income people engage in primary informal practices. The middle class on the other hand practice intermediate informalities as the high income group engages in affluent practices. The separation of these informalities provides a more nuanced and accurate description of the informal urban processes in Nairobi. The categorisation is not absolute as the boundaries are seamless, with certain characteristics shared by all the forms of informality and others unique to one or the other form of informal practice. The different informalities, impact differently on the urban fabric and infrastructure, with both the survivalist and affluent having the least impact, whereas the primary and intermediate categories have the most impact. The categorisation is basically a study tool in reconceptualising informal urbanisation. At their core, what I have called “Diverse Informalities” shared a number of characteristics as itemised below.

Common Traits in these Informalities

- Diverse informalities have their basis on individual effort, which results in sole proprietorship. These practices are therefore not subject to lengthy bureaucratic decision making processes, which mean that failure and success are borne individually.
- Diverse informalities are small enterprises; depending on circumstances, the sole proprietor may hire additional hands in order to achieve her/his goals. This additional assistance rarely exceeds 4-5 people, meaning that the operations remain small scale (small enterprises).
- Diverse informalities fill the void left by the failure of formal urbanisation processes, in other words they are a default urbanisation strategy.
- Diverse informalities operate in a symbiotic relationship with formal processes, in other words; there can be no informality without formality.
- Diverse informalities produce products of extremely varied standard and high use value i.e. they are flexible and utilitarian.
- Diverse informalities grow progressively through accretion or addition, as opposed to complete packages.

Fig.5 below highlights the salient attributes of each category of informality.

Fig.5: Categories and Salient attributes of Diverse Informalities.

Category	Survivalist	Primary	Intermediate	Affluent
Type of Tenure	No tenure since it is not place based	Letter of Allocation, or Temporal Occupation License (TOL)	Secure Tenure Normally Leasehold For 99 Years	Secure Tenure Absolute or Leasehold for 99 Years
Characteristics	Transient in nature with a bias to commerce Dominated by the urban poor. May operate with or Without License.	Place based and Complex. Dominated by Low and Middle Income Groups Require License from council to operate Engage in Residential and commercial Activities	Settlement based, focusing on residential and few commercial activities. Dominated by Middle Income and a few High Income Players Settlements can be new or Extensions/ Modifications	Settlement based, biased to residential Developments. Dominated by high income groups. Commercial activities not undertaken.

Impact on Built Fabric	Minimal or no Impact on Built Fabric	Most Prominent physically and impacts heavily on The built fabric by way of Kiosks and Settlements. Uses all sorts of materials, s/hand and Recycled.	Has large variety of building types. Uses standard approved materials. Built on labour contract at different times and locations.	Generates all types of architectural styles-eclectic. Little overall impact on built fabric as they are in low density Zones.
Impact on Infrastructure	Prey on Water, Electricity and Sanitation Systems	Make legal or illegal connections to Services. Puts additional pressure on carrying capacity of services	Puts additional pressure on services. Builds services on self-help basis. Doubtful quality of design and constr.	Takes advantage of well serviced land.
Costs	Requires small sums of money to start up. Pays minimal license fee to the council	Requires tens/ hundreds of thousands. Pays minimal fee to Council. Pays protection fee to youths/police.	Requires millions of shillings to operate. Pays statutory fees.	Requires large sums of money. Pays statutory fees.
Other	Remains statutorily Illegal	Subject to demolitions with or without notice	Development plans may be illegal	Lacks social amenities, and travels long distances to access them.

Source: Author

The above informalities have greatly impacted the urban fabric of Nairobi, and have influenced the transportation, housing and commercial facilities. The matatu mode of public transport thrives because of the collapse of the formal transport system, not only in Nairobi but in Kenya as a whole. This mode of transportation does not operate in the interests of the travelling public, but rather operates on the commercial interests of the matatu owners, and thereby further marginalising the urban poor.

Public infrastructure including roads was poorly maintained with some roads in the city becoming impassable in 1998. Matatu operators raised fares and staged strikes in protest, with passengers refusing to pay the high fares. There have also been complains by matatu operators about police harassment and extortion, while at the same time engaging in battles over who controls public transport in the city. Apart from battles over the profitable motorised public transport, the large numbers of pedestrians who walk many kilometres a day due to low incomes still lack footpaths, not to mention bicycle paths. This state of affairs demonstrates that Nairobi city council has not emerged from the heritage of colonial planning (Lee-Smith, D. and Lamba, D. 1998). The study carried out by Lee-Smith in 1989, showed that 24% of all trips were on foot because of the high cost of motorised transport.

The inadequacy of formal housing has also led to the proliferation of informal settlements, where the provincial administration has been instrumental in structuring Nairobi's informal settlements and in administering them outside the legal framework. Thus chiefs and district officers allocate plots for housing and informal sector businesses outside the framework of any plan. These plots are on public land including

road reserves. People from any income group, can obtain these plots in return for payments which the officials appropriate (Lee-Smith, D. and Lamba, D. 1998; NISCC, 1997).

This commercialisation of informal settlements has meant that the majority of the residents are tenants and many structure owners are absentee landlords (Mwangi, I. K. 1997; NISCC, 1997; Syagga, P. M. 2002b; Lee-Smith, D. and Lamba, D. 1998). The lack of commercial outlets/opportunities has led many urban poor to adopt hawking as a survival strategy. This practise of hawking is not place based, but rather transient in nature with many operators, operating with or without licences. The well to do normally engage in place based informal practices which include both residential and commercial activities. These activities are the subject which I next discuss.

INFORMAL MODERNISM

The informal urbanisation process earlier discussed showed that low and middle income people engage in primary informalities, while middle and high income people undertake intermediate informalities. It was also shown that boundaries between these informalities are not clear cut, and that there are large grey areas between these categories. Many moneyed middle and high income people are increasingly building residential cum commercial buildings, which fall in the grey area between primary and intermediate informalities. These buildings which are beginning to dot the skyline of Nairobi's eastlands area are generating a new "Informal Modernism".

Market liberalisation, globalisation and the reduced role of the state, has enhanced informal practices including informal modernism. In informal modernism, moneyed privateers are filling the gap left by the state, by providing residential and commercial outlets for the low income group. Studies carried out in Nairobi, show that most residents in informal settlements are renters and that the construction of informal buildings is indeed a lucrative business (Amis, P. 1983; Lee-Smith, D. 1990; Lee-Smith, D. and Lamba, D. 1998; Syagga, P. M. 2002b; Mwangi, I. S. 1997). The profitability of informal developments is the reason why many people are building these new commercial cum residential outlets. Their interests are to make maximum profits from their investments, the comfort and physical environment of the tenants plays a secondary role, further marginalising the tenants.

The developments in "Block 10" in the eastlands area of Nairobi are a good example of the production of informal modernism. Basically well connected people have been allocated plots in this block, where they quickly build 8-10 storey single roomed apartment blocks. These blocks are built with slab and column as its structural basis, akin to Le Corbusier's modernist techniques propagated internationally after the Second World War. The major difference between these blocks and the modernists' block is that they have minimal use of glass; in fact many rooms have poor natural lighting. The ground floor is normally used for commercial purposes i.e. shops, saloons, pubs, butcheries etc., while the upper floors are used as dwellings. The plot sizes for these blocks ranges between 40-50 feet by 60-100 feet, with the typical layout being as shown in Fig.6. Each floor can have approximately 20 rooms all sharing two or three bathrooms and a similar number of toilets. Considering the fact that each room may house a household of more than two people, there is a possibility of accommodating sixty people per floor. In terms of sanitary provision, this gives a ratio of twenty people per toilet, which is well above the recommended 5-6 people per toilet (NACHU, 1990 in Syagga, P: M: 2002:52).

The poor design of the blocks also makes it necessary for tenants to carry out the laundering on the balconies and along the circulation corridors. Fig.7 illustrates how this laundering activity compromises the use of balconies and corridors.

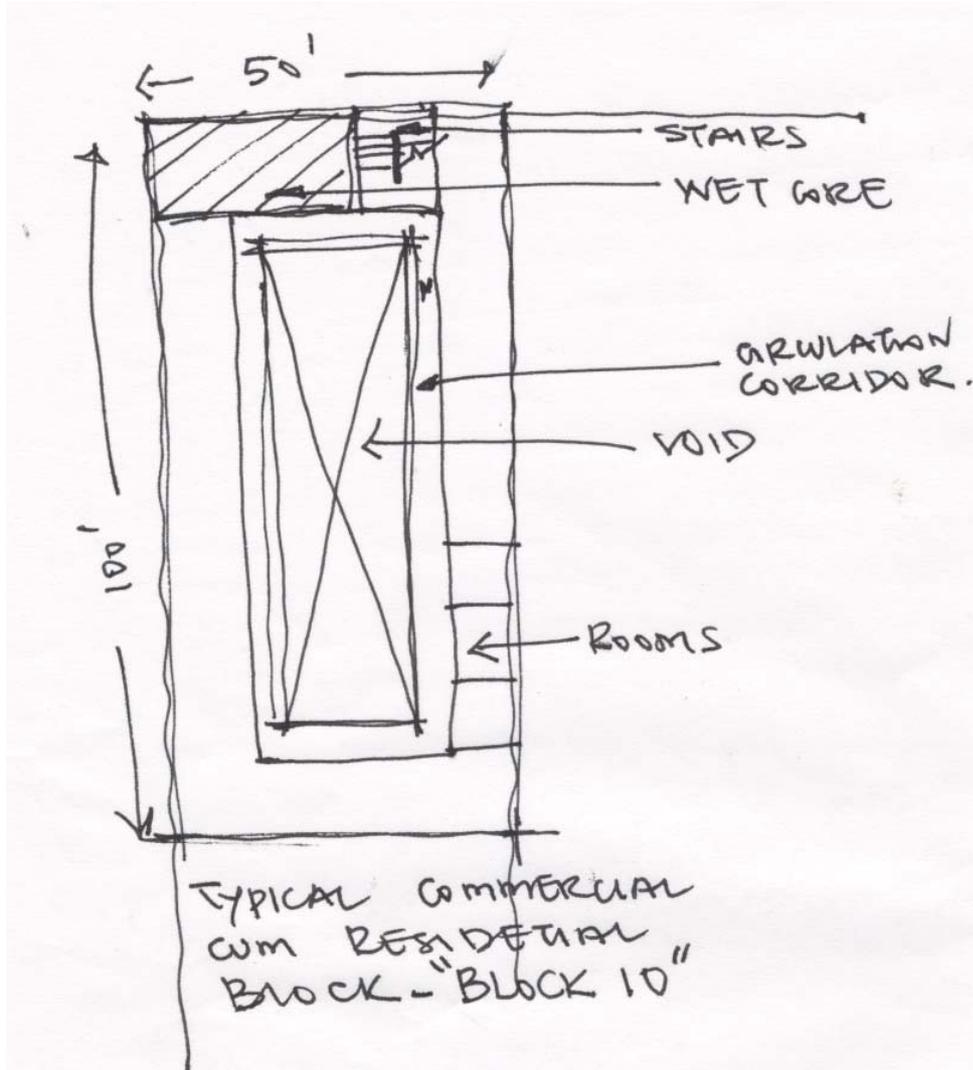


Fig.6 Typical Residential cum Commercial Block - Layout
 Source: Author



Fig.7: Informal Modern Block - Block 10. Laundering compromising the use of balconies.

Source: Author

Another problem tenants face is the danger posed by rickety stairs which are difficult to maneuver in the 8-10 floor blocks. Most landlords do not install lifts in these blocks and the council is unable to enforce the rule that requires lifts to be installed in buildings of more than five floors. The effect is that tenants suffer the burden of having to physically climb the 8-10 storeys, and at the same time giving landlords quick returns as they avoid investment in expensive lifts.

Mathare north is another area that is experiencing a proliferation of informal modern blocks. This area was in the late 1980s zoned by the city council for double storey developments. However the flawed allocation process of the plots ensured that the low income target group was not achieved and many plots were allocated to the well to do. These people quickly built multi storey single roomed apartment blocks for renting to low income households. The resultant blocks Fig.8 are similar to those in “Block 10”. In both Mathare north and Block 10, there is no provision of infrastructural facilities, most roads are earthen and become impassable during the rainy period. The result of this is that in addition to the tenants being financially poor, they also suffer environmental poverty.

CONCLUSION

The urban poor in Nairobi will continue to be marginalized and excluded from urban processes, unless the city council makes an integrated approach to urban development. The collective consumption goods of; roads, sewage, water and power supply can only be effectively installed through state/municipal initiatives (Castells, M. 1983). Exclusionary forces at work at macro levels, makes it imperative that, policies for urban inclusion be thoroughly articulated at the micro levels by the local authority. In this regard, it has been shown that most Nairobians are tenants, and are not necessarily prioritizing individual home ownership. Why then propagate individual home ownership as the main urban development paradigm?



Fig.8: Informal Modern Block in Mathare North.

Attempts to promote urban inclusion through regularization have not been wholly supported by the ruling elite for political reasons. If urban residents are to become independent of political manipulations, and thereby freeing themselves from the “Big Man” patronage system, the politicians will lose their control. In order to maintain their control, it is therefore necessary for the ruling class to maintain the status quo (Chabal, P. and Daloz, J-P. 1999).

De Soto, 2001 proposed urban inclusion through the regularization of property markets, an approach which may theoretically be a novel idea, but there is no guarantee that legal frameworks will improve the physical character of informal settlements. Evidence in Dandora (Nairobi) shows that many poor people on acquiring individual title deeds, sold their properties to the well off. It is therefore necessary to look at alternative methods of tenure as opposed to individual titles. In Voi town for example, there has been an experiment with Community Land Trust as an alternative tenure system. The sectional properties act currently in use in many middle income high rise developments is another example which has not been tried for low income households. Affordability and cost recovery has been the major handicap in developing appropriate housing for the low income group at their current income levels. Therefore as at now, subsidized rental housing seems to be the best option for housing Nairobi’s urban poor. This can be justified by laying emphasis on the fact that access to decent housing is a fundamental human right.

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