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The Cities of Sub-Saharan Africa: From Dependency to Marginality

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Of all the major regions in the world today, Africa is one of the least urbanized. With a total land area of some 30 million square kilometres and a population of approximately 743 million people, only 34.7 per cent were living in urban areas in 1995. But even this relatively modest level of urbanization is recent. In 1950, for example, when most of the people of the African continent were living under some kind of colonial rule (the main exceptions at the time were Ethiopia and South Africa), the proportion in towns and cities was only 14.5 per cent. This proportion gradually increased to 18.3 per cent in 1960, 22.9 per cent in 1970 and 27.3 per cent in 1980 (United Nations, 1993: Tables A1 and A2). But by a wide margin, sub-Saharan Africa to the north of South Africa is still predominantly rural. This rural environment is one of the major conditioning factors in a continent whose cities – while often innovative and dynamic – have been shaped over time by significant external forces.

COLONIAL CITIES

Although Africa experienced major historical change and evolution before the establishment of direct European rule, it was the colonial experience – lasting for most parts of Africa from the late nineteenth century until at least the early 1960s – that had the greatest effect on urban form and function. This was the case for four main reasons. In the first place, a great number of cities that became important during the colonial and post-colonial periods, such as Nairobi, Johannesburg and Abidjan simply had not existed before colonialism. All these new towns – and many others, such as Cotonou, Libreville, and Bangui (as capital cities), and large provincial towns such as Bouaké, Tamale, Enugu, Lubumbashi and Mwanza – developed as major centres of commerce and of administrative activity. Because their major purpose was to strengthen the ties between the metropolitan country and the colonial territory, they were often located on or near the coast or a major waterway. A new colonial urban system began to emerge, displacing internal networks of trade and influence which had developed over many centuries.

A second major urban effect of colonialism in Africa was the establishment of powerful currents of rural–urban migration. Although African populations had been moving around the continent for centuries in response to commercial opportunities, variations in environmental conditions, political upheavals and the depredations resulting from the slave trade, colonial regimes and the economic activities which they promoted, raised the level of migratory activity to a much higher level. As a cash economy was introduced, and goods and services could be obtained in exchange for wages, there were incentives for African labourers to migrate to work in mines, on plantations and in urban employment.

Although most colonial migration was rural–rural, perhaps one-quarter of all migrants ended up in the towns. This movement was reinforced in some colonies by harsh administrative practices of forced labour (for example, the *corvée* in parts of Francophone Africa) and the imposition of 'hut' and 'poll' taxes in cash which individual peasants were obliged to pay. For some administrators, the imposition of non-market measures to prod peasant farmers out of their villages into the rural or urban labour markets was necessary since there was a widespread belief in the 'backward-bending supply curve for labour'. That is, it was felt that African labourers had a fixed 'target income' in mind as an objective, so that they would work only up to the point where such a target would be met, after which they would return to their rural homes.

This perspective was paralleled by the equally fallacious – and self-fulfilling – assumption that African migrants to towns were only 'temporary visitors' whose ultimate home was in the rural 'reserves'. Since most African rural–urban migrants were single men who could not afford to bring their families to the towns, this assumption justified paying them urban wages at a scale that could not support their families, who would presumably be earning their subsistence in the rural areas. To the extent that housing and other social facilities were provided to urban African workers, their quality and extent were also limited. 'The obvious convenience of such a conception', wrote Lord Hailey in 1957, 'caused it to be cherished long after it ceased to have any relation to the actual facts of the situation' (Hailey, 1957: 565). By the mid-1950s, the 'winds of change' which nationalist movements brought to the African continent, combined with an increasing concern with African labour efficiency, led to a more positive approach to the African role in towns – at least in the regions of eastern, central and southern Africa, where government control over African urban integration was the most marked (Great Britain, 1955). By and large, the same change in attitude was occurring in both Belgian and French colonial territories at about the same time.

One of the main reasons for increasing administrative and political concern, near the end of the colonial period, for the social conditions of urban Africans was the enormous increase in population which many cities were undergoing. In Kenya, for example, where – as in so many other African countries – Africans flocked to the towns in the post-war years, the population of Nairobi, the largest city, grew from 118,976 in 1948 to 266,794 in 1962, just on the eve of independence. Although Nairobi was (and still is) a multi-racial city, almost two-thirds of this population growth was accounted for by Africans, most of whom were migrants from rural areas. During the same period, Mombasa, the second largest city in Kenya, grew rapidly as well, from 84,746 to 179,575 (Republic of Kenya, 1965: 10). Again, most of Mombasa's growth was accounted for by African in-migration rather than by a natural increase in population. While Nairobi had grown at a compound annual rate of 6.0 per cent during this period, Mombasa had grown at a rate of 5.5 per cent. To the south, Dar es Salaam grew from 69,277 in 1948 to 128,742 in 1957 (a growth rate of 7.1 per cent, and to 272,821 in 1967 (an annual increase of 7.8 per cent) (Tanzania Bureau of Statistics, reported in Kulaba, 1989a: 210). Looking at the growth of Dar es Salaam from the post-war period to the early 1970s, one study observes: 'in Dar es Salaam, after a period of virtual stagnation, the population grew rapidly, quadrupling over the period 1948–71. The annual growth rate of nearly 7 per cent was almost three times that of the rural population and more than double what it had been during the first half of the century. Fully 78 per cent of the total population increase . . . was due to migration' (Sabot, 1979: 44–5). Similarly, across the continent in the Ivory Coast, Abidjan, with a population of 58,000 in 1948, had mushroomed to 198,000 in 1960 – for a sustained rate of growth of 10.8 per cent annually (Attahi, 1992: 37). The growth of the two largest cities in Morocco shows an aspect of this pattern even more clearly. Thus, from 1936 to 1952, over a period of 16 years, Casablanca grew from 247,000 to 682,000 at an average annual rate of 6.6 per cent; Rabat–Salé, the capital, grew during the same period from 115,000 to 203,000, at a rate of 3.6 per cent. But during the eight years (1952–1960) which straddled independence, the two cities grew much more rapidly: Casablanca attained a population of 965,000 in 1960 (for an annual growth rate of 4.4 per cent during the period), while Rabat–Salé grew to 303,000 (for an annual growth rate of 5.1 per cent) (Abu-Lughod, 1980: 248).

In general, these growth rates varied according to local political and economic circumstances. For example, most African cities grew quickly during the 1920s, slowed down during the 1930s, began to grow again during and after the Second World War, and slowed again during what were often political uncertainties during the 1950s. With independence, they began to grow rapidly, a pattern which continued through to the 1980s.

As so many Africans – most of whom were poor – moved to the cities just before Independence, colonial administrators and policy-makers became increasingly concerned about the social and economic conditions under which they lived. Poor living conditions and inadequate urban services, it was suggested, would not only reduce the productivity of African workers, but they would also create the conditions for social and perhaps even political unrest. Partly as a result, all over Africa the 1950s and 1960s (both just before and just after independence in most sub-Saharan African countries) were the decades of major efforts to plan for growing cities, and to provide social and physical infrastructure for rapidly growing populations. Decent wages and good social services, it was cogently argued, would produce a more permanent as well as a 'smaller but satisfied and efficient labour force' that would be both more productive and politically quiescent (Cooper, 1987, quotation at p. 132 from Tom Mboya).

The third major effect of colonial urbanization was the physical structure of the cities that was bequeathed to the African governments that took over the reins of power from the late 1950s (for Ghana, Egypt, Tunisia and Morocco), through the 1960s (for almost all the rest of the Anglophone and Francophone countries in middle Africa), through to the 1980s. Looking at the totality of Francophone cities in 13 West African countries at the end of the 1980s, a major study takes the position that 'today's African cities were, for the most part, established by colonizers who applied urban planning principles appropriate to their country of origin. The most striking aspect of colonial urban planning is the partition of urban space into two zones, the '"European" city and the "indigenous" city' (Poisnot et al., 1989: 11). The extreme attention to the needs of European settlers, who generally received a very high level of planned urban services and infrastructure, with, by contrast, relative indifference to the African majority was a characteristic of urban planning that was rooted in the very fabric of the colonial state.

The bifurcated nature of colonial urban space was originally conceived to 'protect' Europeans from 'disease' thought to be carried exclusively by indigenous people. In many African towns, the separation of races was promoted by town planning; one of the most important elements of this policy was the establishment of an open, neutral zone (called the *cordon sanitaire* in Francophone towns) to separate Europeans from other groups. While not all colonial cities enforced a strict separation of races – a Mombasa proposal for racial separation was rejected on grounds of cost (Stren, 1978: 116), while different groups lived at least side by side in Dar es Salaam, in Ghana and in Nigeria – the standard of infrastructure in the neighbourhoods inhabited by Europeans was many times higher than in the African areas. If Europeans tended to live in bungalows or *villas* in large plots along clean, shady streets, Africans tended to live in 'huts' or *barraques* (the French word for wooden shacks common in West Africa) in crowded 'townships' along unplanned paths, enjoying few, if any, sanitary services.

This dual system of housing and land use was justified by two major premises: first, Europeans paid both local and national taxes and contributed to the colonial economy in a way that Africans did not (in spite of their numbers); and secondly, Europeans were 'used' to living in cities with European standards of infrastructure, while Africans were essentially 'rural' and would not live permanently in the towns. Both these justifications for the dual provision of space and facilities dissolved by the 1950s as Africans moved massively and much more permanently into the towns and began to constitute an increasingly powerful urban middle class; but the form of the city was moulded by many decades of infrastructural investment and could not quickly change. The large-scale investments by colonial governments during the 1940s and 1950s were considerably enhanced by a more dynamic economy throughout Africa, and by legislative instruments in Great Britain (the Colonial Development and Welfare Act of 1940) and France (FIDES, or the Fund for Economic and Social Development, established in 1946), which supported economic planning, and the construction of significant infrastructural works.

The fourth, and perhaps most profound, impact of colonialism on Africa is the structure of its economy which was left behind. These elements have left indelible traces on urban form and function, in spite of the variation across British, French, Belgian and Portuguese colonial experiences. While it is difficult to generalize, the imposition of the colonial economic framework resulted in an intense, but very divergent spread of capitalist economic activity in mining, primary agricultural production (including plantations), and transportation and communications activities. At the same time, colonial implantation in most areas outside South Africa did not prove sufficiently robust 'to change the essential character of African societies'. Nevertheless, 'foreign capitalism, together with the fiscal demands and economic planning of the colonial state, compelled or persuaded the majority of Africans to become linked with the international economy' (Fieldhouse, 1986: 31). The interests served by this system, as variegated as it was, were very much oriented toward the needs of the metropole rather than to the needs of African society. Looking back on West Africa up to the Second World War, Michael Crowder observes that

> . . . [o]nly the railways remain as a major legacy of the economic policies of the colonial powers of that period, and they were paid for by taxes imposed on the African himself. In both British and French West Africa economic policy on the part of the newly established governments subordinated African interests to those of the needs of the Metropolis. The railways, and later the tarmac roads, tell the tale most clearly: simple feeders linking areas that produced the crops and minerals Europe needed with the ports on the coast. (Crowder, 1968: 173–4)

One of the results of this incomplete transformation that was rife with social inequalities and regional variations is that, according to most measurements, Africa has fared 'worse than almost any other world region over the last twenty or so years, becoming relatively more peripheral and in some respects, absolutely poorer. Nevertheless, small elites and bourgeoisies, overwhelmingly concentrated in major cities, have prospered by virtue of their skills, positions, control over resources and contacts' (Simon, 1992: 34–5). Thus, in spite of small islands of wealth and prosperity (the high income areas) in African cities larger and larger proportions of the population have gradually, but nevertheless dramatically, sunk into poverty and stagnation. From a dependent status, sub-Saharan African cities have become economically marginal in the new global economy.

THE URBAN CHALLENGES OF A MARGINALIZED CONTINENT: PLANNING AND POLICY INITIATIVES AFTER INDEPENDENCE

If we consider Africa to be a relatively marginal region within a more dynamic, globalizing economic system that has been energized by political and economic initiatives originating in Europe and North America (and, more recently, in Japan and Eastern Asia), it is nevertheless the case that there were a great deal of planning and policy responses to urban problems during the immediate decades after independence in the 1960s. But in spite of the fact that most African countries were nominally independent after the late 1950s and early 1960s, their urban planning policies were (a) very similar from place to place and (b) still heavily influenced by metropolitan models. Both the similarities and the local variations can be illustrated by reference to three central fields of activity relating to urban development: master plans and planning legislation; redevelopment, public housing and the regulation of squatting; and anti-poverty policies.

Master Plans and Urban Planning Legislation

After independence, many African countries attempted to respond to rapid urban growth and the contradiction between the status of independent statehood and the increasing evidence of urban poverty by major exercises in 'master planning', and by large-scale government-sponsored construction of residential dwellings. Typically, a major expatriate planning firm would produce a master plan for the future development of the capital city. The plan would contain an analysis of urban form and function, some analysis of likely future growth patterns, a number of technical maps and plans, such as a detailed land use zoning map, plans for infrastructural development and some proposals about procedures, regulations and even institutional reforms necessary to carry out the plan. These plans were the direct descendants of numerous plans produced during the colonial period, although successive documents tended to include more and more data of a sociological and economic nature. The city of Abidjan had six major planning documents from 1928 to 1990; Dar es Salaam had three plans from 1949 to 1977; Nairobi had three from 1948 to the mid-1980s. While these plans often had an important influence on the overall approach to land-use planning in the central areas of the larger African cities, they failed to capture the speed and direction of growth in the peripheral areas, and in any case were almost never supported by the level of capital expenditure necessary to implement their infrastructural projections. In the absence of major capital projects developed within the master plan framework, most urban planning decisions took place within the parameters of building and development regulations that were little more than copies of the existing legislation and bylaws in Britain, France and Portugal.

The metropolitan influence on African urban planning was reinforced by the fact that not only were virtually all urban planners working in Africa Europeans of origin, until at least the mid-1960s, but there were no schools of architecture or urban planning located on African soil (outside of South Africa) until the first decade after independence. Until at least the mid-1960s, virtually all the directors of urban planning in African countries were of European origin.

Urban planning legislation was supplemented by building codes which, in many cases, were also very closely modelled on European regulations. Thus the Kenya Building Code, applied by all local authorities in the country as a condition for legal certification, makes constant reference to a 'British Standard' or a 'British Code of Practice'. Structural steelwork, for example, 'shall be deemed to be sufficient for the purposes of . . . these By-laws, if the steel work is designed and constructed in accordance with the relevant Rules given in British Standard 449 ’. And on building materials in general, '[t]he use of any type of material . . . which conforms with a British Standard shall, except where otherwise required in these By-laws, be deemed to be sufficient compliance with the requirements of this by-law . . . ' (Republic of Kenya, 1970: sections 47, 32).

A new factor during this early post-independence period was the establishment by international development agencies of influence over the strategic agenda for urban development. The early policy initiatives in the areas of shelter, growth-pole development and decentralization were locally designed and some were very successful. However, from 1972, when the World Bank produced its first major urban policy pronouncement (World Bank, 1972), African urban policy-makers began to defer to international development agencies with respect to their agenda for future planning and investment.

Redevelopment, Public Housing Construction and the Regulation of 'Squatting'

Within the terms of reference of the urban planners, but with a dynamic and importance of their own, were policies for the development of residential housing. Two of the hallmarks of the colonial approach to African urban housing in the 1950s were the redevelopment of decaying 'core' areas combined with the removal of 'slums' or squatter areas; and the construction of large rental (sometimes tenant-purchase) public housing estates. Once independence was accomplished, these policies were pursued by the successor governments. In a classic Nigerian study, Peter Marris focused on a large 'slum clearance' scheme covering 70 acres in central Lagos. The pursuit of this scheme illustrated the visible achievement of 'modernity' as a public goal. 'The overriding aim', he writes, 'was to rebuild the most conspicuous neighbourhood of Lagos to the standard Nigerians had set themselves, as a matter of pride' (Marris, 1961: 119). One of the main findings of this study was that the central-city 'slum' residents whose homes were originally redeveloped by the government were, on the whole, not able to take advantage of the newly built housing estate on Lagos mainland – because of either economic or sociological factors.

A number of other African countries pursued 'slum clearance' policies in their major cities during the 1960s and 1970s. Nairobi, for example, undertook a 'clean-up' campaign lasting for several months in 1970, as a result of which 10,000 squatter dwellings were demolished and 50,000 people left homeless (Stren, 1979: 186). The Tanzanian government 'redeveloped' some so-called 'slum' areas of downtown Dar es Salaam, replacing those houses destroyed with newly built units. But most of the low-income families who lost their houses could not afford to pay the rents (or tenant-purchase instalments) on the new units; others were given rights to more remote and still unserviced plots which they found difficult to develop (Kulaba, 1989a: 226–7). In Dakar, an estimated 90,000 people were displaced through the eradication of central-city *bidonvilles* between 1972 and 1976 (White, 1985: 512). In Lomé, government 'clearances' removed local population from major areas of land in 1968 (275 hectares were cleared for the new university), in 1974–5, in 1977 (clearing of the old *zongo* area near the central market), in 1979 (clearing of a marginal housing area), and in 1982 and 1983 (clearing of the population from the port and industrial area), leading to a major movement of lower income residents to the peripheral areas of the city (Adjavou et al., 1987: 20–1). And in Abidjan, between 1969 and 1973 the government displaced over 100,000 people (some 20 per cent of the total population) from low-income housing in the central areas of the city (Joshi et al., 1976: 66). '[I]n the name of "modernization" and the battle against "unsanitary conditions",' writes Alain Bonassieux, 'the authorities organized the destruction of "illegally occupied" and "unaesthetic" areas of the city' (1987: 42). While some African countries were able to build new housing for at least a proportion of those whose houses were destroyed, most of the displaced could not find alternative housing nearby to the areas where they had previously lived.

The second – and more substantial – pillar of the colonial approach to African residential development was the construction of large-scale housing estates. During the colonial period, large estate housing projects were undertaken in such countries as Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), Kenya, Senegal and the Ivory Coast, where the government (and parastatal agencies such as the railways and port authorities) needed to house their employees. After independence, this state-centred approach to housing developed more widely, with many countries establishing national housing agencies with an important mandate to improve housing for Africans. Behind this drive was the feeling of many urban Africans that their housing conditions should be upgraded in line with their changed political status. As a Lusaka city councillor put it:

> Under colonial rule, only white people lived in town, whereas Africans lived in their huts in the native quarters outside the city limits. Africans were separated from their families who remained in the villages. Jobless Africans were not allowed in the city. We are independent now. We should live in good houses with our families. (quoted in Laquian, 1983: 12)

In West Africa, large public housing projects, accompanied by systematic eradication of 'slums' and the maintenance of high standards of physical development, characterized both Senegal and Ivory Coast (Stren, 1990: 37–9). In Senegal, the *Société Immobilière du Cap-Vert* (SICAP) was formed as early as 1949, as a mainly public company to develop lodging in the capital. Ten years later, a fully public corporation, *l'Office des Habitations à Loyer Modéré* (OHLM), was formed for lower-cost housing. Both corporations depended largely on state subsidies. By 1968, the two agencies had produced close to 12,000 housing units, almost all of them in Dakar. Their production declined drastically in the 1970s, largely due to lack of resources.

But it was Ivory Coast which built the most. In a massive construction programme unparalleled in black Africa, SICOGI (*Société Ivoirienne de Construction et de Gestion Immobilière*) – formed out of two existing parastatals in 1965 – produced

21,897 'low cost' housing units during the next decade. At this pace it was only slightly ahead of SOGEFIHA (*Société de Gestion Financière de l'Habitat*, created in 1963), which built 17,912 units during the same period. Meanwhile, a land development agency, the SETU (*Société d'Equipement du Terrain Urbain*, established at the end of 1971) had by September 1979 prepared 1,779 hectares of land in Abidjan, of which the company itself estimated 444 hectares were for 'low-cost housing', accommodating as many as 350,000 persons (including housing provided to the public housing agencies themselves).

Leaving this massive accomplishment of the SETU aside, the two major housing parastatals produced over three times as much housing as did their Kenyan counterparts, the National Housing Corporation – the most active public housing agency in Anglophone Africa. This record is all the more remarkable given the fact that the population of Ivory Coast is less than half of that of Kenya. Like Kenya and virtually all other sub-Saharan African countries (outside South Africa) however, the role of public agencies in supplying urban housing in the Ivory Coast was drastically curtailed in the 1980s. State investment funds were at a premium, and many of the projects had strayed from their original purpose of assisting lower income groups. Thus, from 1963, when 23 per cent of Abidjan's population lived in informal, or spontaneous housing without proper services, to 1984, when 16 per cent of the population lived in spontaneous housing, the state system did its work well. After the mid-1980s, however, when the public housing and land development agencies were virtually disbanded, the proportion of people living in informal housing areas began to rise again. While the figures are not comparable with earlier estimations, it was claimed in the early 1990s that 70 per cent of the population of Abidjan lived either in 'evolving' housing (consisting of low-quality housing with limited services) or spontaneous and village housing (consisting of poor-quality housing with no services) (Attahi, 1992: 74).

The case of Abidjan is instructive, since almost all other large cities in sub-Saharan Africa had more difficulty meeting the gap between the supply of, and demand for good housing. One consequence of this difficulty – at least, outside Anglophone West Africa – is the increasing prevalence in 'informal' or 'spontaneous' housing in African cities. While there are many definitions of this type of housing, and many local variations around the main tendency, the central defining elements are usually twofold: (1) the housing in question is either illegally built (that is, without formal permission from the authorities) or (and in many cases in addition) it sits on land which has not been properly purchased through the formal system and zoned for residential development; and (2) few, if any, services – such as water, roads, sewerage and stormwater drainage, electricity, telephones, and community facilities (such as clinics and schools) – are built in the immediate neighbourhood.

The increasing informalization of urban housing in African cities may be related to the failure of the formal sector to provide enough serviced plots and low-cost houses in the face of large-scale population growth; and it may be related to the degree to which the African state is willing to tolerate so-called 'illegal' occupation of urban land. Philip Amis has argued that, over the late 1970s and the 1980s, there was an increasing tendency among African countries to accept – at least at some level of security – the presence of informal urban housing. The underlying logic behind such an 'acceptance policy', he suggests,

> must be sought at the political level. In essence, the importance of political stability within the urban areas of the Third World seems important. In this context the acceptance of unauthorized settlements is a relatively painless, and potentially profitable, way to appease the urban poor in the Third World. The increasing mobility and ability of international capital to change locations at short notice are likely to make these political considerations more rather than less important. (Amis, 1990: 19)

Added to this argument – which is a hypothesis rather than a demonstrated relationship – is an economic one: rates of return for urban housing and land have, by all evidence, been lucrative in comparison with alternative foci for investment. To the extent that there is relative peace in the informal housing market, commercialization or 'commodification' of low-income housing is likely to grow apace. Since political elites and their business colleagues are among the most ubiquitous actors in this urban real estate market, the balance between informal housing and state regulation is likely to remain supportive of a burgeoning informal sector (Amis, 1984: 87–96). But even when large-scale commercialization has not been a major factor, informal housing has grown enormously, as is illustrated by the case of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, where from two-thirds to three-quarters (conservatively estimated) of the demand for new housing was met by informal means by the 1990s. In spite of this growth in informal housing, however, Tanzania has never strictly enforced building regulations with regular police raids and demolitions, with the result that so-called 'squatters' feel relatively secure. Most squatter houses are constructed with at least semi-permanent materials, such as wood, cement and iron sheets; and many are built by middle- and high-income earners. Where enforcement is stricter – such as in Harare, Nairobi, or Abidjan – the quality of the informal structures (at least in central areas) is generally lower. Informal housing areas that are removed from central business districts and from high-profile main arteries such as airport highways tend to be treated more tolerantly by the authorities.

In Anglophone West Africa, the distinction between 'slums' and 'squatter' or informal housing is more important than in other parts of the continent, where the two forms of housing tend to overlap. As Margaret Peil (1976: 155–66) and Kwadwo Konadu-Agyemang (1991) have pointed out, 'squatter' settlements as such do not exist in this part of Africa, due to the fact that the owners of low-income houses 'almost invariably hold their titles from the land owners and/or their agents, or at least have permission to build, although they may not have obtained permits from the Council or Town Planning Department, and therefore may appear "illegal" in the official jargon of the authorities' (Konadu-Agyemang, 1991: 141). In spite of the fact that ownership of the land is not problematic, however, there has undoubtedly been a deterioration of housing and urban infrastructural conditions in Anglophone West African cities. Citing a large-scale housing survey of all states in Nigeria in the mid-1980s, a leading professor of planning noted that 'inadequate accommodation appears to be one of the most serious problems arising from the high rate of urbanization. A substantial proportion of urban houses . . . are either dilapidated or are in need of major repair. Overcrowding is pervasive and high rents are a major indicator of urban housing problems' (Onibokun, 1989: 78).

Growth Poles and Anti-Poverty Programmes: Statist Policies of the 1960s and 1970s

The second decade of independence was a very important phase for urban development in the post-independence period. For the first time the specificity of the 'urban question' was addressed in a coherent manner within the process of policy formulation as well as in development planning and management. The need for change was prompted by the negative externalities of urban primacy, by the failure of the modernization approach of the first decade and by the realization that a centralized state structure could not execute a development-orientated programme.

In strategic terms, this entailed devising mechanisms for containing the rapid growth of cities and balancing urban systems. The promotion of rural development and the enforcement of municipal regulations was expected to arrest rural–urban migration and haphazard settlement in urban areas. Similarly, the deconcentration of primate cities and the re-direction of urban investments to less developed areas was expected to redress the distributional imbalance of urban centres. Another strategic measure adopted was to mitigate urban poverty through the Basic Needs development strategy, which was prominently encouraged by international development agencies.

These three initiatives reflected an attempt during this period to shift the emphasis of development away from sustaining towns as mere service centres or as the loci of collective consumption into nuclei for a real economic development. The initiatives signified an attempt to create an urban system that was 'generative' and which was organically integrated with the domestic economy. The distinction between cities that were 'generative' and those that were 'parasitic' had been made originally by Bert Hoselitz in 1955 (Hoselitz, 1955), then applied by Akin Mabogunje to Nigerian cities in the 1960s (Mabogunje, 1968). While the concepts were rarely used explicitly, they continued to be important in the thinking of many African economic planners throughout the 1970s and even the 1980s. Indeed, the idea that cities in Africa were often 'parasitic' rather than 'generative' was powerfully – though indirectly – expressed in the notion of 'urban bias', a notion that still holds sway today among many planners and development agency officials. According to this notion, popularized by Michael Lipton in his book *Why Poor People Stay Poor: Urban Bias in World Development* (1977), urban groups are able to organize themselves politically to attract disproportionate investments, and other benefits, to the detriment of the more impoverished rural groups, who should be the beneficiaries of development. While this idea had considerable merit in the 1960s and 1970s, the effect of structural adjustment on African cities since the 1980s has had the consequence of significantly cutting urban real wages, while raising agricultural producer prices and abolishing the currency and price controls which, in the past, supported organized urban interests (Becker, et al., 1994).

A striking feature of the poverty alleviation programmes of the 1970s was the expansion of the public (bureaucratic) sector in the process of service delivery. State corporations were established to execute and manage the new programmes and the delivery process was supply-driven through public sector agencies. Excessive subsidies, broad standardization, and administrative rationality dominated programme management at this stage. The dependent nature of import substitution industries favoured traditional primate cities that had the advantages of not only agglomeration and economies of scale but also large markets and convenient communication for raw material imports. By the end of the 1970s, the skewed profile of urban systems was even more reinforced and the process of deconcentration had not materialized.

In the mid-1970s, there was a new wave of administrative reorganization throughout the continent. In an attempt at transforming the inherited colonial bureaucracy, particularly through the promotion of popular participation, several countries embarked on a major process of administrative decentralization. This involved the transfer of power and authority from the headquarters to the field units. For a number of countries, these reforms were limited only to deconcentrating authority in a horizontal manner to field agencies of the central government. In this respect, the decentralization exercise did not effectively devolve power so as to promote popular participation (Fisette et al., 1995; Jaglin and Dubresson, 1993; Mawhood, 1983; Wunsch and Olowu, 1990).

Despite its political shortcomings, this decentralization process led to the establishment of new administrative headquarters in smaller urban and rural settlements. But most of these administrative centres were essentially consumption driven, with little contribution to productivity change in the immediate hinterland.

While the growth pole strategy failed in its manifest aspects, the initiative in itself demonstrated an attempt to redefine the role and structure of the African city in the process of economic development. Since that time, this issue has remained part of the urban development agenda in the region. As for the Basic Needs programmes of the late 1970s, there is no question but that they opened up a flow of investment resources in the social sectors, also contributing to a change in management culture whereby the urban poor and the informal sector were acknowledged as part of mainstream urban activities. Similarly, while the decentralization exercise of the 1970s did not lead to meaningful devolution of power and authority, it introduced into the development agenda the relationship between various levels of government.

All these institutional and policy re-alignments coupled with the demographic growth of cities transformed African urban centres from mere railway stations, ports and provincial administrative headquarters into social entities which have a diversified range of socio-economic activities. None of these activities, however, created a basis for sustainable and internally driven development.

AN URBAN CRISIS?

The 1980s: Policy Shift

The global recession of the 1980s hit African countries very severely. Changes in the terms of trade and the subsequent technological restructuring completely dislocated African economies from the global trading system. The shift in the pattern of industrial accumulation (technological flexibility, computerization and prominence of the 'symbol' economy) de-valorized primary inputs and rendered superfluous much of the predominantly unskilled urban labour force. Urban centres in Africa, whose underlying function and structure had been the servicing of an import/export economy, lost their basis for sustainability. As they entered the third decade of independence, African cities were caught up in a profound crisis.

In the new economy of the 1980s and 1990s, Africa's factor advantages – cheap unskilled labour and primary inputs for industrial production – were no longer a tenable basis for economic competitiveness under emerging global conditions. In fact, industrial nations were trading much more among themselves than with the least developed countries. African urban centres did not have the requisite infrastructural and institutional endowments for attracting private investments that could promote engagement in global transactions. By the mid-1980s, African urban centres were completely marginalized. For example, from 1983 to 1991, total foreign direct investment in sub-Saharan Africa increased only marginally, seemingly stuck at a level of about 6 per cent of all direct investment in developing countries; at the same time, the region's percentage of world exports fell from 2.4 per cent in 1980 to 1.0 per cent in 1992 (Halfani, 1996: 93–4). This stagnation reflected a pattern wherein emerging technical and commercial structures of global networking completely excluded the sub-Saharan African region.

The most prominent institutional casualty of the crisis situation was the state and its agencies. The extended responsibilities it had assumed under the Basic Needs programmes of the 1970s had enlarged its own institutional size as well as its scope of operations (Sandbrook, 1982). By the early 1980s, central governments were unable to provide for even the recurrent expenditure for the provision of social services and the maintenance of law and order. In fact, even its capacity for mobilizing domestic fiscal and monetary resources was highly curtailed. At a local level, this was reflected in the form of a major municipal crisis. Deprived of central government subventions urban authorities could neither provide basic services (Stren and White, 1989), nor enforce law and order. The urban system found itself in a profound organic crisis. Its structural basis had disintegrated and the legitimacy of its superstructural agencies was impaired.

It was out of such an organic crisis that the informal sector and civil institutions found the space for a powerful resurgence. Initially evolving as survival strategies, informal activities were consolidated by the evolution of community associations and transactional procedures based on traditional norms and values. By the mid-1980s, the African city was driven predominantly through informalism (ILO, 1991; Touré, 1985). The management of land use, transportation, shelter, employment, and some of the social services took place outside state management and regulation (Bubba and Lamba, 1991; Lee-Smith and Stren, 1991).

On the one hand, the growth of informalism created a basis for a more organic and indigenous form of urbanism, once the inherent distortions are rectified. On the other hand, the spatial effect of this process was increasing sprawl, environmental damage and deepening localization. The situation was compounded by increasing rural–urban migration, amplified by the severity of the rural crisis (Baker and Aina, 1995). Some urban centres were doubling every seven years. The ensuing population growth compounded the shelter, employment and environmental crisis.

When the crisis became evident, the first reaction of both national governments and international development agencies was to suspend the social and economic investments of the 1970s that were designed for poverty alleviation. This entailed suspending shelter programmes such as sites and services (Mayo and Gross, 1985), squatter upgrading, low interest housing credit and even subsidized basic commodities. Poverty eradication ceased to be a primary priority for urban development.

In the second half of the 1980s a new programme of structural adjustment was adopted by the World Bank to deal with Africa's debt and other structural economic problems (Duruflé, 1988; Sandbrook, 1993: ch. 1). As the main accent of the new programme was to improve the balance of payment situation, primary attention was given to improving the conditions for the production of tradable goods (World Bank, 1989a). In most cases these were agricultural primary commodities. Since few urban centres had significant enterprises that produced tradable goods for export, most cities did not gain from the export drive promotion. Indeed, the wide gap between high urban incomes and low rural incomes which was such a feature of African development in the late colonial and early post-colonial years began noticeably to close (Becker et al., 1994). Meanwhile, the retrenchment of public services and reduction in government expenditures (particularly for social programmes) increased urban unemployment and accentuated urban poverty. Only the few urban elites who managed to link themselves with the export economy and had access to investment credit managed to maintain high incomes. The African city resumed its dualist morphology of the 1960s. While a very small part portrays affluence and splendour, its large bulk epitomizes abject poverty.

In 1986, with the formal establishment of the Urban Management Programme within the World Bank and the UNCHS, attention was directed to the sphere of urban management where distortions in techniques, procedures and organization of land use, financial resource mobilization and deployment, planning and programming were deemed to impinge on the efficient functioning of urban systems. Suggestions for reforms were made through the development of improved systems, training and accountability mechanisms. A global programme, financed by a consortium of donors with the UNCHS and the World Bank as the caretakers, was established (Stren, 1993). To a large extent, the management focus of this programme, with the emphasis on technical and institutional reforms as well as efficiency maximization, corresponded with the monetarist, market-orientated policies of macro-economic reforms of the structural adjustment programme.

The organizational framework for the market-driven system of urban management was underpinned by the notion of 'partnership'. It was recognized that a functional association between the public, private and civic actors was critical for the efficacy of the market urban system. A major role of government was to create an 'enabling environment' for the efficient functioning of the other two actors (UNCHS, 1987). By the late 1980s and early 1990s, these concepts were further extended through the notion of *governance* in the area of urban policy. While one approach to this concept stresses the effective role of government (Landell-Mills and Serageldin, 1991), another approach, elaborated by academics and research activists, recognizes the multiplicity of managerial regimes and promotes a more organic linkage between civil society and state (McCarney et al., 1995; Wilson and Cramer, 1996).

Anatomy of Decline: African Cities Today

During the 1980s, the increase in the level of spontaneous, or informal housing in and around African cities reflected their almost total inability to provide adequate serviced land and infrastructure to their growing populations. The 1980s and 1990s thus became, in common parlance, a period of 'urban crisis' across the continent – at least to the north of South Africa. The crisis – which itself was a reflection of declining or stagnating economies in the face of continuous rural–urban migration, had three major components: a decline in levels of formal employment, and a corresponding rapid increase in 'informal sector' activities in many key areas of the urban economy; a deterioration in both the quality and distribution of basic services; and a decline in the quality of the urban environment, both built and natural. All these changes adversely affected the quality of urban life for everyone, but particularly the poor.

An employment crisis

In the years immediately following independence in most African countries, Africanization of the public service and an expansion of parastatal agencies led to a high rate of new employment creation in urban areas, particularly in the capital cities and large regional centres. By the 1970s, these increases were paralleled by increases in both the quantity of manufacturing jobs available (most of them in the largest towns), and in average manufacturing wages. At the same time, agricultural wage employment fell, or stagnated in many countries, thus increasing the attractiveness of the larger towns to rural migrants who could not gain sufficient incomes by working in subsistence agriculture.

By the late 1960s and early 1970s, it became clear that the rate of rural–urban migration was greatly exceeding the rate of formal employment creation in Africa's cities. Total numbers of jobs created in the formal sectors (including government, the parastatal sector, manufacturing and the large-scale service sectors such as banking and tourism) were not keeping pace with the increase in the urban population, whether this was caused by rural–urban migration or by natural increase.

Figures on manufacturing employment in medium- and large-size establishments show that most countries experienced rapid growth in the 1970–75 period, followed by slower growth in formal manufacturing employment during 1975–80. While the period from 1980 to 1985 (which included the second oil shock) saw renewed or accelerated manufacturing employment growth in some countries, others – particularly those with large manufacturing sectors such as Ivory Coast, Ghana and Nigeria – reported negative employment growth rates, while such countries as Kenya, Senegal and Zambia had annual increases during this period of only 4, 3 and 1 per cent, respectively (Becker et al., 1994: ch. 5).

African countries cannot afford to maintain publicly funded social security systems such as the social assistance or unemployment insurance programmes that operate in most countries of Europe and North America. For most Africans seeking urban employment (except those who have the resources to wait), remaining in 'open unemployment' is not a realistic option. As formal urban employment opportunities declined, the alternative of engaging in small-scale, less remunerative activities – now known collectively as the 'informal sector' – became more and more common. While there are differences of opinion over the use of this term at all,

> the African informal sector can be fairly carefully defined. In the last twenty years, urban small-scale, artisanal, residual/casual, and home production have expanded considerably in African nations. Their relative importance varies considerably across countries, in accordance with economic structure and public policy. Nonetheless, the main informal activities include carpentry and furniture production, tailoring, trade, vehicle and other repairs, metal goods' fabrication, restaurants, construction, transport, textiles and apparel manufacturing, footwear, and miscellaneous services. (Becker et al., 1994: 159–60)

Typically, enterprises with 10 or more workers tend to function within the formal sector, while smaller enterprises (down to a single person) tend to function more informally. In any case, beginning in the 1970s, and gaining strength during the economic downturn of the 1980s and early 1990s, the urban informal sector has become a powerful force for employment creation in virtually all African cities.

Although good statistics are not available for the 1980s and 1990s, the proportion of the urban labour force in informal activities has almost certainly risen. A leading Ivoirian sociologist estimated that, over the period from 1976 to 1985, the number of people 'working on the street' in a variety of informal activities had risen from 25,000 to 53,850 in Abidjan alone. During the same period, the central government complement in Abidjan rose from 31,840 to 56,940. 'Given the negligible difference between the two,' he argues, 'one could conclude that the street offers as much employment and provides a living to as many people as the public service!' (Touré, 1985: 18). One of the trends of the 1980s and 1990s has been the supplementation by informal activities on the part of a large proportion of public sector employees.

The growth in the informal economy both in terms of absolute numbers of people involved, and in terms of economic importance, has given more opportunities to certain (often previously marginal) groups in a restructured, more services-oriented economy. In particular, poor women have been prominent in food selling and food preparation trades in almost all parts of the continent. By the early 1990s, women's role in many other informal economic activities was an important focus of the research literature. As one commentator noted, 'women's activities existed in the towns well before the 1970s and 1980s. But during the aggravated crisis of recent years they have proliferated and become virtually ubiquitous' (Bonnardel, 1991: 247). Characterizing 'informal feminine enterprises', the same writer argues that they share many elements with men's informal activities, but in addition they are on average smaller than men's enterprises, they never (or rarely) employ salaried workers, the majority of them transform local primary materials (such as grains, cassava, groundnuts and local dyes), and they hardly ever use recycled material from the modern sector (Bonnardel, 1991: 264–5). The importance of women's participation in the urban informal economy is illustrated with particular force in a study of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania during the 1980s and 1990s. Based on an impressive range of personal interviews with both political actors and ordinary people working in the informal sector, Aili Mari Tripp argues that the widespread resort – especially by poor women – to 'income generating activities' (as people's personal 'projects' are often called) obliged the Tanzanian government in 1991 to revise its longstanding policy that had restricted 'leaders' and 'public servants' from engaging in economic activities outside their formal occupations (Tripp, 1997).

A crisis in urban services

As African cities continued to increase in size during the 1980s and 1990s, their declining economic situation led to a precipitous decline in the supply of basic infrastructure and urban services. In many African cities, most refuse is uncollected and piles of decaying waste are allowed to rot in streets and vacant lots; schools are becoming so overcrowded that many students have only minimal contact with their teachers; a declining proportion of urban roads are tarmacked and drained, and many that are not turn into virtual quagmires during the rainy season; common drugs – once given out freely – have disappeared from public clinics and professional medical care is extremely difficult to obtain, except for the rich; public transport systems are seriously overburdened; and more and more people are obliged to live in unserviced plots in 'informal' housing, where clean drinking water must be directly purchased from water sellers at a prohibitive cost, and where telephones and electrical connections are scarcely available. For Nigeria, research by the World Bank demonstrates 'that unreliable infrastructure services impose heavy costs on manufacturing enterprises' which, in turn, diminish their competitive advantage and raise the cost of doing business (World Bank, 1991: 38).

Nigerian cities were not alone in experiencing a serious decline in infrastructure and public services during the 1980s. For Togo, a study of urban investment levels in the four five-year plans spanning the period from 1966 to 1985 shows a steady reduction from 17.9 per cent of total investment in the first plan, to 16.7 per cent in the second plan, to 10.6 per cent in the third plan and 6 per cent in the fourth plan (Dulucq and Goerg, 1989: 149). This pattern, which appears to reflect a similar tendency in other French-speaking countries, may be connected to a decline in French overseas aid funds, both in absolute and relative magnitudes during the same period (Dulucq and Goerg, 1989). For Dar es Salaam, a Tanzanian researcher has shown an overall decline of 8.5 per cent over the period from 1978/79 to 1986/7, in terms of expenditures on services and infrastructure, measured in constant currency units (Kulaba, 1989b: 118). If the population growth of Dar es Salaam is further taken into account, the per capita decline in expenditures comes to 11 per cent per year over the period studied. While the Tanzanian economy as a whole was stagnating during much of this period, the decline of urban infrastructural fabric was occurring at a much more rapid rate. To the north, Nairobi's services were also in dramatic decline. From 1981 to 1987, another study showed the capital expenditures of the Nairobi City Commission for water and sewerage to have fallen at an annual compound rate of approximately 28 per cent. Similar calculations for expenditures on public works over the same period show an annual decrease of 19.5 per cent, compounded; and for social services an annual decrease of 20 per cent compounded (DHS and Mazingira Institute, 1988).

Two of the major urban services that have become increasingly overburdened in almost all African countries are waste management and public transport. Indeed, if housing shortages were the major urban issue of the 1970s, waste management became the major issue of the 1980s, and along with the scourge of HIV/AIDS, one of the major unresolved problems of the 1990s. In 1985, a widely circulated weekly magazine in Kenya described the situation in Nairobi in the following terms:

> It has always been proudly referred to as the Green City in the Sun. But today, Nairobi presents a picture of a city rotting from the inside. Over the past 18 months, the main city news in the local press has been about mounting piles of stinking refuse, dry water taps, gaping pot-holes and unlit streets. (*Weekly Review*, 25 January 1985: 3)

Nairobi's problems, like those of many other rapidly growing African cities, were essentially related to resources. As the city grew both in population and spatially at a rate close to 5 per cent per year, the resources available to the municipal government in order to maintain its existing fleet of refuse removal vehicles – let alone to permit it to purchase additional vehicles – were severely limited. Thus, as the city expanded, the amount of refuse collected fell from a high of 202,229 tonnes in 1977, to 159,974 tonnes in 1983, a decline of 21 per cent over six years. This meant that, over the late 1970s and early 1980s, the city was collecting, on average, almost 10 per cent less refuse per capita every year. In spite of a major internal reorganization of the Nairobi City Commission, the refuse situation was still deteriorating in August 1989, when, although officials felt 100 refuse collection trucks were needed effectively to serve the city of over a million people, only 10 trucks were functioning on a daily basis out of a total fleet of 40 vehicles (Stren, 1989: 47; 1992: 10–11). In Dar es Salaam, the situation was even more challenging, since the local government agency (the Dar es Salaam municipal council) was much less endowed with resources than its neighbour to the north. A Tanzanian study of the city's garbage collection vehicles showed that in 1985, some 20 functioning trucks (of which only six were considered to be 'in good condition') were able to collect only about 22 per cent of the estimated 1,200 tonnes of garbage produced every day. Refuse removal, as a Tanzanian researcher comments, 'is a complex financial, technical and managerial issue', but it cannot be separated from other problems of providing services in a city in which the revenue generated during the late 1980s was only $5.60 per person (Kulaba, 1989b: 133–41). While we do not have comparable figures for the 1990s, there was unlikely to have been an improvement in municipal expenditure per capita; and in any case by the mid- to late 1990s only about 10 per cent of the solid waste generated in Dar es Salaam was being collected and disposed of (Kironde, 1999: 153). Partly because of its poor record in waste management, Dar es Salaam decided in 1994 to privatize the collection of refuse in the central parts of the city (the City Council continued to collect for the outlying areas). The effort seems to have had some effect only in 10 central wards, although the private company operates under severe constraints of poor equipment and limited revenue (Kironde, 1999: 160–3). While the level of collection varies across the continent, it remains a severe problem in almost all countries.

Just as the urban poor, who tend increasingly to live in peripheral, unplanned settlements are only sporadically served by such services as water supply, refuse removal and electricity supply, their marginal location and low disposable incomes makes them more vulnerable to difficulties in public transport supply. The situation in most African cities in the 1960s and 1970s was one of monopoly supply, whereby a public (or publicly contracted) bus company organized the mass transport system throughout the whole of the municipality. Some of these companies were very large: for example, the SOTRA in Abidjan (a 'mixed' private company with both French and Ivorian shareholders) had a fleet of 1,179 vehicles, and a staff of 6,153 in 1989: the SOTRAC in Dakar (also a 'mixed' company) had a fleet of 461 vehicles and a staff of 2,871 in 1989; the KBS in Nairobi (a 'mixed' company in which the City Council held a 25 per cent share with a private British company) had 275 vehicles and a staff of 2,304 in 1989; and Harare's ZUPCO (a privatized company taken over by the government) had 666 vehicles and a staff of 2,135 in 1988 (Godard and Teurnier, 1992: 52). By the 1980s, this system was breaking down, as many city administrations could not afford to replace, let alone properly maintain their ageing bus fleets at the same time as the population was growing; and even the private companies (operating in many Francophone countries) were having difficulties maintaining an efficient service in the face of declining revenues.

As the large public companies began to falter, private transport became more and more important, especially for the poor. Often the service was more direct, faster and certainly more accessible, particularly to and from outlying areas where roads were bad and the large buses could not easily function. These smaller, privately owned vehicles had a variety of local names, derived according to a number of different principles, according to the location: for example, the Nairobi *matatus*, the Dar es Salaam *dala dalas*, the Bamako *duru-duruni* and the Brazzaville *cent-cent* are based on the coins, or fares that were charged for the service when it was first initiated; the speed of the vehicle is reflected in the *cars rapides* of Dakar, the *kimalu-malus* of Kinshasa, or the *zemidjan* of Cotonou; and the age and lack of comfort and security is indicated in the *alakabon* of Conakry, the *congelés* of Douala and Yaoundé, the *gbakas* of Abidjan, and the *mammy-wagons* of Lagos. Typically, they are reconstituted pick-up trucks, small minibuses, or minivans, holding up to 36 passengers in various degrees of overcrowding depending on the route and the time of the day. In most cities, they have been able to carve out well over half the market for public transport. While many are concerned with their apparent recklessness (often caused by the tight financial regime under which they operate, which discounts speed and maintenance), these vehicles have widened access to many urban locations – particularly the peripheral, often informal areas.

Environmental crisis?

The decline in the built environment was sharply in evidence throughout most of urban Africa.

Thus, as more of the urban population was forced into unplanned settlements on the outskirts of large cities, or into more crowded living space in an already deteriorating housing stock in the more established 'high density' areas, as a lower proportion of the population had direct access to clean, piped water, regular garbage disposal and good health services, the quality of life for the vast majority of the population deteriorated during the 1980s and 1990s. This trend seems to have been accentuated by the effects of structural adjustment in many countries, according to which urban workers lost more than rural smallholders. Some demographers have even suggested that the decline in urban mortality rates that was clearly evident during the 1960s and 1970s may have slowed down in the 1980s (Antoine and Ba, 1993: 140).

In the 1990s, however, both traditional health problems and environmental concerns were overwhelmed by the scourge of HIV/AIDS across the continent. Of approximately 34.3 million adults and children in the world estimated to be living with HIV/AIDS at the end of the 1990s, some 24.5 million (or fully 71 per cent) live in sub-Saharan Africa (MAP Network, 2000: 3). Spread unevenly throughout Africa in a 'belt' stretching from Côte d'Ivoire in the West through to East Africa, and becoming increasingly more virulent in Southeast and Southern Africa, the pandemic affects from 12 to 25 per cent of the population in the most affected countries, hitting urban dwellers much more, proportionately, than rural dwellers. As John Caldwell has put it,

> [t]his is a disease which in a number of countries will be the cause of death of half the population. It will lower Zimbabwe's life expectancy by 2000 by 20 years to the level of half a century ago, and . . . by 2010 to 35 years. It has increased the mortality level of adults in their prime, 20–40 years, to pre-modern levels. At any one time one-third of the people one meets in cities like Harare or Blantyre are infected and have at the most only a few years to live. The situation in the cities approximates that of European cities during the Black Death or Plague. (Caldwell, 1997: 180)

While Africans are making alarming adjustments to the disease, and even winning some battles in the area of prevention, the social and economic effects of this affliction will almost certainly be reflected in low levels of development for generations to come (Fredland, 1998).

As public health conditions become less favourable, intra-urban differences should become more marked. While there is little data over time, it is clear, for example, that there is an increase in the number of deaths either directly or indirectly related to malaria. The peri-urban areas – where the poor have been increasingly relocating under conditions of inadequate sanitary infrastructure,

> concentrate all the most ideal conditions for the reproduction of malaria vectors and the transmission of the disease: a more dispersed settlement pattern, permanent buildings which use construction materials that are virtual refuges for anopheles mosquitoes, the existence of numerous vegetable farms and finally the proximity, in some cities at least, of swampy areas, and stagnant extensions of rivers. (Antoine and Ba, 1993: 140)

Under these conditions it may not be surprising to learn that in the central districts of Brazzaville less than one infectious mosquito bite per person was recorded every three years; by contrast, the rate was more than 100 times higher in the new informal settlement areas with low population density. In Bobo-Dioulasso, the second largest city in Burkina Faso, the rate of malaria occurrence measured in a peripheral neighbourhood was almost twice as high as that measured in a central section of the town (Antoine and Ba, 1993: 140).

One practice that some health officials have related to the increased incidence of malaria vectors is urban agriculture. Apart from a possible public health risk (which is disputable) of the increased planting of such crops as maize and sugar cane in the vicinity of cities, there is a considerable nutritional benefit, particularly to low-income families who cannot otherwise afford certain foods. A major study of six towns in Kenya showed that 29 per cent of all households grew food within the urban area where they lived, and 17 per cent kept livestock. Most of the urban crop and livestock production was consumed as subsistence by the households themselves (Lee-Smith et al., 1987). Reflecting similar findings to the Kenyan study, a survey of research on urban farming in Zambia found that most urban farmers were poor women, growing food because of the failure of incomes to keep up with prices (Rakodi, 1988). A later study of Nairobi based on a different sampling strategy (the sample was chosen from those working on the land rather than randomly from urban households in the city) found that 64 per cent of the respondents were female (very similar to the earlier Mazingira survey); that they tended to have only primary education, or no education at all; that most were born outside the city, in neighbouring districts; and that very few actually sold their crops (Freeman, 1991).

The pattern of poor women practising urban agriculture in order to provide food for themselves and their families was also a major finding of a study of 150 urban farming households in Kampala, Uganda. This study argued that urban farming as a major activity developed in Kampala 'in response to the declining economic situation' (Maxwell and Zziwa, 1992: 29).

Across the continent in Lomé, a study of the agricultural aspects of urban farming – while not comparable to work in East Africa – observed that most of the market gardeners were men, and that very large sections of public land reserves on the periphery of the city were under cultivation, with the tacit approval of the authorities. While market gardening increased in Lomé as a direct response to the economic difficulties beginning in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the study noted that the produce was sold commercially rather than consumed by the cultivators (Schilter, 1991).

One of the effects of increasing urban agriculture in Africa is that the economic and cultural differences between city and rural areas have become blurred. This is particularly the case in peripheral, unplanned areas where formal infrastructure is scarce, and many households live in relatively large plots of land in a semi-rural environment. Where once the central business district, with its clean, wide streets and high-quality shops and offices, was the focus of urban life – in both the large capital cities and in secondary cities as well – the centre of gravity has shifted. More and more of the population is moving to the periphery of the larger cities, where land is cheaper and much more easily obtained, where shelter can be constructed economically using locally available materials, and where harassment from the police and restrictions of the formal planning system are rarely felt. In these peripheral areas, families can more easily keep farm animals such as chickens, goats, pigs and even cattle; they can cultivate subsistence crops and pursue a style of life that differs from life in nearby rural villages only in degree.

A crisis in governance

By the 1990s, as African cities continued to grow at a pace that considerably exceeded the average for most other parts of the world, it was clear that they were experiencing a crisis in governance. By 'governance' we mean both the effective functioning of the institutional structure (in this case, the structure of local government), as well as the relationship between this structure and civil society as a whole (McCarney et al., 1995). Seen in this fashion, the crisis which African cities are traversing consists of two elements: their inability to manage and coordinate a wide range of urban services at a level adequate to the needs of a poor, and growing population; and their limited ability to engage with emerging sectors of local society in finding acceptable local solutions to, and resources for, increasingly complex challenges.

Africa's historical institutional legacy is a major factor in virtually all accounts of recent problems of local governance (Jaglin and Dubresson, 1993; McCarney, 1996; World Bank, 1989b). Britain and France, as the major colonial powers on the continent from the late nineteenth century to the 1960s, provided the basic framework for two, largely parallel approaches to local government. These two approaches overlapped to some degree by the 1990s, but their essential elements could still be distinguished. The pattern most common in Francophone countries can be called the communal structure, while the pattern in Anglophone countries may be called the representative council structure. The differences between the two are largely explained by history and the accretion of many decades of legal and administrative precedent.

Decentralization in Francophone countries
Most of the Francophone countries in Africa (with the major exception of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and Burundi, which were Belgian colonies) are former French colonies. Since the early part of the twentieth century, urban government has been structured according to the French law dating back to 1884, which provides for communes with mayors, municipal councils and specific revenue and expenditure powers and procedures. The level of a responsibility over finances and local decisions typically depends on the size and wealth of a 'commune', although the local authority has generally been considered to be an organizational modality internal to the unitary state. In any case, by the end of the colonial period in the late 1950s, the evolution of municipal institutions was such that the municipal councils (the administrative organs of the communes) in the larger cities had become responsible for a relatively important range of local services, and were presided over by elected mayors. For example, Abidjan, the capital of Ivory Coast, was declared a 'full exercise commune' (the highest legal category) in 1955, electing a full council by universal suffrage in 1956. Its first elected mayor was Félix Houphouët-Boigny, who was also at the time Prime Minister of the government. After independence in 1960, however, and in spite of a decentralization law passed in 1961, the Ivoirian government found it necessary to suspend many of the powers and political responsibilities which the departing colonial government had extended to Abidjan. While a relatively wide range of functions was discharged by the communes and the larger 'City of Abidjan' (consisting of the central area of Abidjan and some adjoining communes), decisions on their implementation were taken by central government officials. This structure remained in place until 1980 (Attahi, 1992).

A somewhat similar situation, with much deeper historical roots, obtained in Dakar, the capital of Senegal – then the largest French-speaking city in West Africa. From 1887, when Dakar (which had earlier been designated, along with three other towns, as a 'full exercise commune' under French law) was given French-style institutions. The city had an elected council, an elected mayor and considerable influence over finance, services and the hiring of personnel. With the creation of a new administrative entity in 1924 called 'The region of Dakar and its surrounding areas' (*Circonscription de Dakar et dépendances*), however, the central government began to exert much more direct control over municipal affairs. The tendency to circumscribe the power over municipal decision-making became even more prominent in 1964 (four years after independence), when the Dakar region was put under the authority of the government-appointed governor of the region, assisted by nominated advisers. The next year, the management of the water and electricity services, previously under the aegis of the municipality, was transferred to the central government (Diop and Diouf, 1993). Discussing Dakar in the early 1980s, one knowledgeable observer concluded that the administration of the commune of Dakar was 'exclusively carried out by centrally appointed officials, which has led, as a consequence, to the setting aside of any direct participation by elected elements' (Lapeyre, 1986: 339).

By the 1980s, the balance between central and local government began to change in the former French colonies. Two of the major contextual (and external) factors explaining this shift were (1) the increasing interest of donor agencies in decentralization and democratization (World Bank, 1989b); and (2) the decentralization reforms in France, which began in 1982, and continued throughout the 1980s and early 1990s (Centre de Valorisation de la Recherche, 1989; Gilbert and Delcamp, 1993; Institut de la décentralisation, 1996; Terrazzoni, 1987). Not only was there more attention placed on the development of metropolitan government structures, but a more democratic and decentralized framework began to take shape. An exceptional case, analysed in a classic study by Sylvy Jaglin, was the decentralization of Ouagadougou's urban administration through local participation headed by a revolutionary '*Comité de défense de la Révolution*' under Thomas Sankara (until his death in a *coup d'état* in 1987) (Jaglin, 1995). While this particular initiative in Burkina Faso came to an end as a result of a larger political dynamic, the idea of decentralization did not die with the new (and current) regime (Attahi, 1996a). In any case, by the end of the 1980s, many of the major Francophone countries (such as Senegal, Ivory Coast and Bénin) were organizing regular, even multi-party elections both at the local and national level, and a number of other countries were clearly moving towards multi-party democracy. Thus, Senegal, which began multi-party elections in the late 1970s, established in 1983 the Urban Community of Dakar (CUD), which created a working arrangement to incorporate the three newly created communes of Dakar, Pikine and Rufisque-Bargny. From 1983 to the 1990s, the Mayor of the CUD was the mayor of the commune of Dakar, a high-profile politician with previous central government ministerial experience. Indeed, the Mayor of Dakar has become, argue Momar Diop and Mamadou Diouf, 'one of the main players in the politics of national integration' (Diop and Diouf, 1993: 114).

But of all the decentralization exercises to have been initiated in Francophone Africa, the most thoroughgoing, and by many measures, effective has been that of the Ivory Coast. The initiative began in late December 1977, when a law was passed in the National Assembly confirming the establishment of the two existing 'full exercise' communes (Abidjan and Bouaké). Then, following the 7th Congress in October 1980 of the country's governing party – the PDCI – three major laws, dealing with powers and regulations, were passed. These laws still form the basis of the country's municipal legal framework. According to most observers, the decentralization exercise in the Ivory Coast has on balance been a positive experience. The role of the communes through such functions as maintaining the civil registry, public security, building and maintaining schools, maintaining urban roads, building and maintaining markets, removing household waste, and regulating abattoirs and public water taps, is clearly visible. In addition, their elected mayors have often become very proactive, using 'their networks of personal friends and supporters, as well as the bureaucracy and the party in power to mobilize support. They also attempt to obtain additional resources for their new responsibilities from foreign embassies and international NGOs' (Attahi, 1996b: 121–2).

Decentralization in Anglophone countries In English-speaking African countries, the centralist legacy of the colonial period was more ambiguous. Historically, the United Kingdom has placed more emphasis than has France on democratically elected local councils for the administration and finance of a very wide range of local services. Towards the end of the colonial period, there was a strong thrust to introduce an 'efficient and democratic system of local government' all over English-speaking Africa. But this legacy was profoundly ambivalent entering the post-independence years in the 1960s, since colonial officials often supported local councils and their locally elected leaders as a counterforce to the more broadly based nationalist, anti-colonial movements. Such support at the point of independence endowed local governments in many countries with an anti-nationalist association, an association that did not conduce to good relations with the new, centralist-oriented African governments. In any case, all over English-speaking Africa during the 1960s, local councils proved unable to cope with burgeoning demands for improved education, health, and other local services. These shortcomings were particularly acute in the large, rapidly growing cities. And their inability to raise financing, in conjunction with central government restrictions on transfers, meant that their performance fell far short of their responsibilities. Partly as a result of both political and financial factors, in most English-speaking countries the political autonomy and fiscal resource base of municipal governments was progressively restricted during the 1960s and 1970s. Important exceptions were Nigeria, where for complex political reasons, military governments were favourable to local governments; and Zimbabwe, which (after independence in 1980) opted to support local government as a major element in its development strategy.

If the decentralization reforms of the 1970s were initiated by highly centralized governments, with little involvement of local communities and other groups in civil society, the reforms of the 1980s and 1990s have involved more give and take between government and other forces in the wider society. That this relationship has involved a struggle is evident in the case of Nairobi, the capital of Kenya. With a population of 1,346,000 in 1989, Nairobi is by far the largest, and most economically important centre in the country. From the 1920s on the city was governed by an elected municipal council and mayor. In 1983, citing 'gross mismanagement of council funds and poor services to the residents', the Minister for Local Government suspended all elected officials and placed Nairobi's 17,000 municipal employees and all buildings and services under the direct control of a commission, which he himself appointed. Although the original intention of the commission had been to 'clean up' the council and re-establish elected local government, the central government passed various motions through the National Assembly extending the life of the commission until both national and local elections were held in December 1992.

Kenya's first multi-party elections ushered in a new chapter in the turbulent history of Nairobi – and of urban local governance in Kenya. One of the major new parties specifically called, in its election manifesto, for the granting of increased autonomy to local government. As has always been the case in Kenya, local and national elections were held at the same time. But whereas the governing party, KANU, had always captured both levels of seats in the urban wards and constituencies in the past, in this election the opposition parties won most of the parliamentary seats in the major urban areas, and took control of 23 of the 26 municipal councils, including Nairobi. With the end of the city commission, the new Mayor of Nairobi (elected by the sitting councillors) was himself not a member of the governing party of the country. Political differences between the central government and the newly elected municipal councils soon came to the surface, with the Minister of Local Government issuing a series of directives that curtailed the powers of the mayors. For the government, these councils were a political force to be reckoned with; but for the emerging middle class, the councils were a vehicle by which to achieve a greater measure of local autonomy (Stren et al., 1994). The elections of 1997 were another platform for conflict between a more vocal urban civil society and a government which attempted to keep the urban councils under its control. In the run-up to these elections, there was significant violence in Mombasa between indigenous coastal Africans and so-called 'up-country' Africans; the latter, nearly 100,000 of whom were displaced by riots and intimidation, might have been expected to vote for opposition parties in both national and local elections. In effect, the dislocation of many of these people probably increased the chances of the governing party of eventually winning the Coast Province elections, and the majority of seats in the Municipal Council as well. But in most other major towns of the country, as in 1992, opposition parties won a majority of local council seats. In the late 1990s a number of urban NGOs and civil rights organizations continued to press for constitutional reform, although by the end of the decade little had been formally accomplished (Lee-Smith and Lamba, 2000).

The re-emergence of South Africa During the 1990s, the emergence of South Africa as a democracy had a major impact on both research directions and policy discussions throughout Africa. The new South African Constitution, which was formally adopted in 1996, devotes a whole chapter to local government (Chapter 7, containing 14 separate articles). *Inter alia*, this chapter of the Constitution states that the objects of local government (including municipal government) are

> (a) to provide democratic and accountable government for local communities; (b) to ensure the provision of services to communities in a sustainable manner; (c) to promote social and economic development; (d) to promote a safe and healthy environment; and (e) to encourage the involvement of communities and community organizations in the matters of local government. (Section 152)

In managing its administration and planning processes, municipalities are *required* by the Constitution 'to give priority to the basic needs of the community, and to promote the social and economic development of the community' (Section 153). To strengthen the direction already taken by the Constitution and the discussions leading up to its promulgation, the South African government phased the reorganization of local government institutions from a 'pre-interim phase' (during which there were widespread discussions as to the new structure and functions of local governments), through an 'interim phase' (from municipal elections in 1995/6 through to the next elections in 1999), culminating in a 'final stage' in 1999, when a new system was finally established (White Paper on Local Government, 1998). Two subsequent pieces of legislation, the Municipal Structures Act (1998) and the Municipal Systems Bill (1999) make detailed provisions to enshrine the practical mechanisms needed to support participatory and developmental municipal governance. In addition, the government has decided that, following the municipal elections of November 2000, six major urban areas – including Cape Town, Durban and Johannesburg – will have their multiple jurisdictions amalgamated into 'unicities', rather than the existing two-tier structure. This whole process of institutional change, which began in the 1970s with the powerful movement to eradicate apartheid – in which organized workers, students, youth, women and urban residents were mobilized against both national and local state structures – led to 'local negotiating forums' in the 1990s which brought organized civil society in direct contract with government representatives. This remarkable 'bottom-up transformation of local government according to non-racial and democratic principles' (Swilling, 1996: 129) has been extremely influential in new thinking about urban governance throughout the continent.

CONCLUSIONS

The struggle of African cities to survive during the fading years of the twentieth century continues into the new millennium and has been conditioned as much by their colonial history as it has by the new global economy with which they are faced. While the history of this large and complex continent is extremely varied, both global and local dynamics require that new alternatives be found to the present situation. Clearly, attempts at structural transformation during the 1970s did not sustain real growth. In the decade that followed African cities were plunged into severe crisis – a crisis from which they have not emerged. At the global level, sub-Saharan African cities (outside South Africa) have now been relegated from dependency to marginality; locally they are forced into attempts at institutional reform while simultaneously coping with demographic pressure, economic stagnation and social deterioration.

While their immediate economic future may not be very bright, there are some glimmers of hope for African urban centres. The example of a democratic and re-energized South Africa, the economic powerhouse of the continent, suggests new possibilities for a more effective and inclusive approach to municipal policy-making. With international assistance, decentralized urban management arrangements are being put in place that may be able more directly to respond to the needs of the low-income majority. But at a more general level, African cities are transforming both their own physical landscape and their social and political structures into new forms that better reflect their unique cultural and historical conditions. Paradoxically, any eventual integration of African cities into the world economy may first require a recognition of their real differences as a basis for institutional regeneration.

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