

# Evolution of urban housing strategies and dweller-initiated transformations in Nairobi

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## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 26 May 2011

Received in revised form 16 September 2011

Accepted 4 November 2011

Available online 29 December 2011

### Keywords:

Dweller-initiated transformation

Housing strategies

Kenya

Nairobi

Social inclusion

## ABSTRACT

In her century of existence, Nairobi has served as a laboratory of various housing strategies targeting the indigenous Africans and the poor. Discriminated based on racial segregation during colonisation, the poor have also been the object of post-colonial economic marginalisation. Consequently informal settlements and dweller-initiated transformations of formal housing has become their only mode of urban domicile. The paper looks at the later model and isolates the strategic policy and design choices that have guided the dwellers' drive to transform the provided houses. The investigation uses an historical review of related literature in existing housing estates in city's Eastlands' District. Further, a case study of Kaloleni Rental Estate from the district was undertaken. The resultant dwellings point to informalisation leading to deterioration through use of 'temporary' materials and unplanned space uses in these formal schemes. The strategies based on modernist templates which ignored consultation, local cultural spatial paradigms and basic functional needs are faulted for the proliferation of these undue transformations that compromise the living environments. Further, the continued lack of tenant security in transforming dwellings has aided in the continual physical and social deterioration of neighbourhoods. The recommendations include a phased design guided densification model, socially inclusive through the incorporation of the existing dwellership and their participation.

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## Introduction

Strategies in urban housing in Nairobi, the capital city of Kenya, are rooted in the city's genesis as a colonial segregated city based on race, that later was reiterated by a class-based differentiation. These roots of urban housing strategies are the basic ingredients of the dweller-initiated transformations (DITs) that now dominate the cityscape in residential districts. Indeed, these DITs, founded through informal urbanism (Anyamba, 2011), remain the most pervasive imprint of individual identities in housing estates.

The colonial urban policies were about social exclusion of the African, even if they were substituted by more accommodation through the development of African estates after WW2 (Hake, 1977; Stren, 1978). In fact, this accommodation relied on 'apartheid'-like principle of separate standards for each race. Thus couched in accommodative principle for each racial grouping, the provisions were

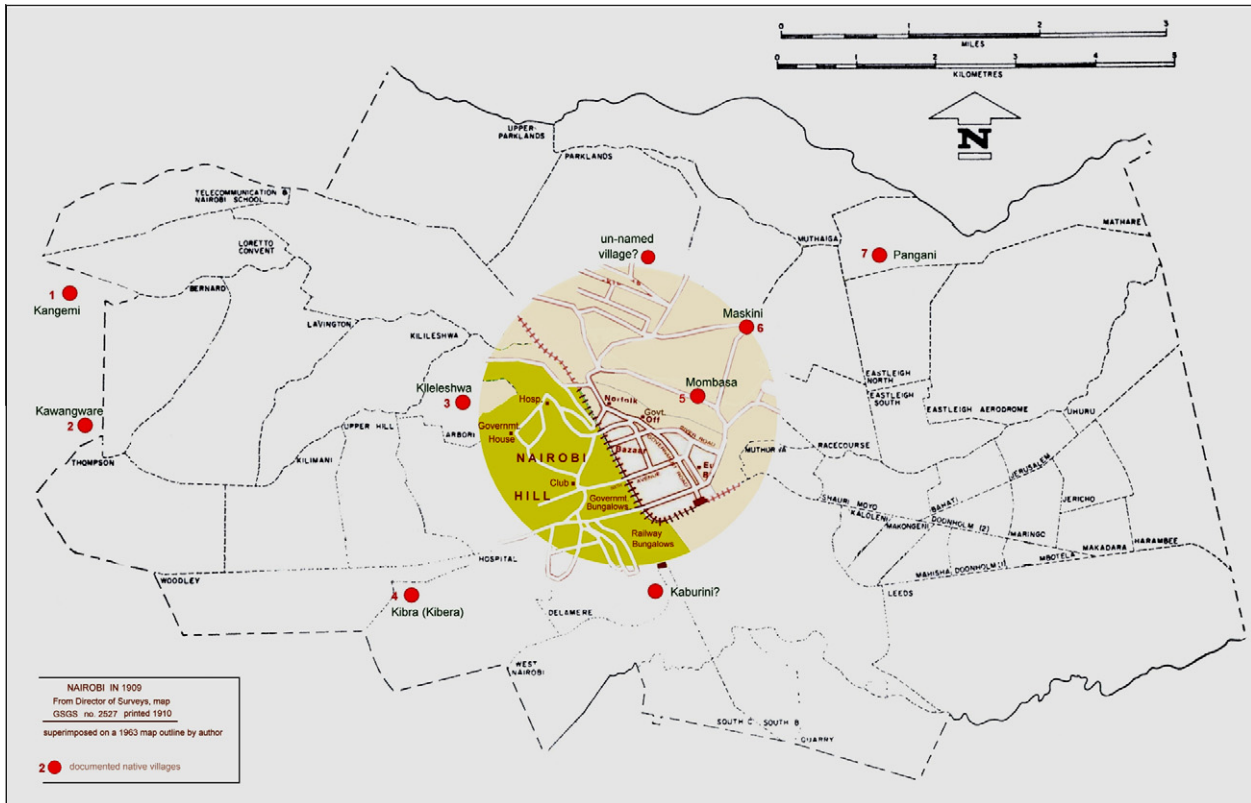
never the same, and only furthered the racially guided urban strategies. Indeed, they were imposed in furtherance of the colonial urban project of domination (Myers, 2003) of the Europeans over the native Africans. These were non-consultative strategies, exclusionist rather than socially inclusive, and not akin to the pre-existing Kenyan human settlement tradition (Andersen, 1977; Anyamba & Adebayo, 1994). The paper takes the position that this was essential in generating the transformations (Makachia, 2010) that later emerged and the added mal-functionality in the urban space of 3rd World cities. The position is that the transformations narrate the dwellers' values, matched with their economic, social and physical objectives, and ill-captured in formal strategies.

The first parts of the paper illustrate through literature explorations of historical cases of native African-focussed housing strategies in the city of Nairobi. It shows how housing strategies remained about accommodating the group and the poor. The deliberate strategy of Neighbourhood Unit Concept (NUC) and its examples are given further focus as it shaped contemporary housing strategies. The Eastlands district (Figs. 1 and 2) was the site for most

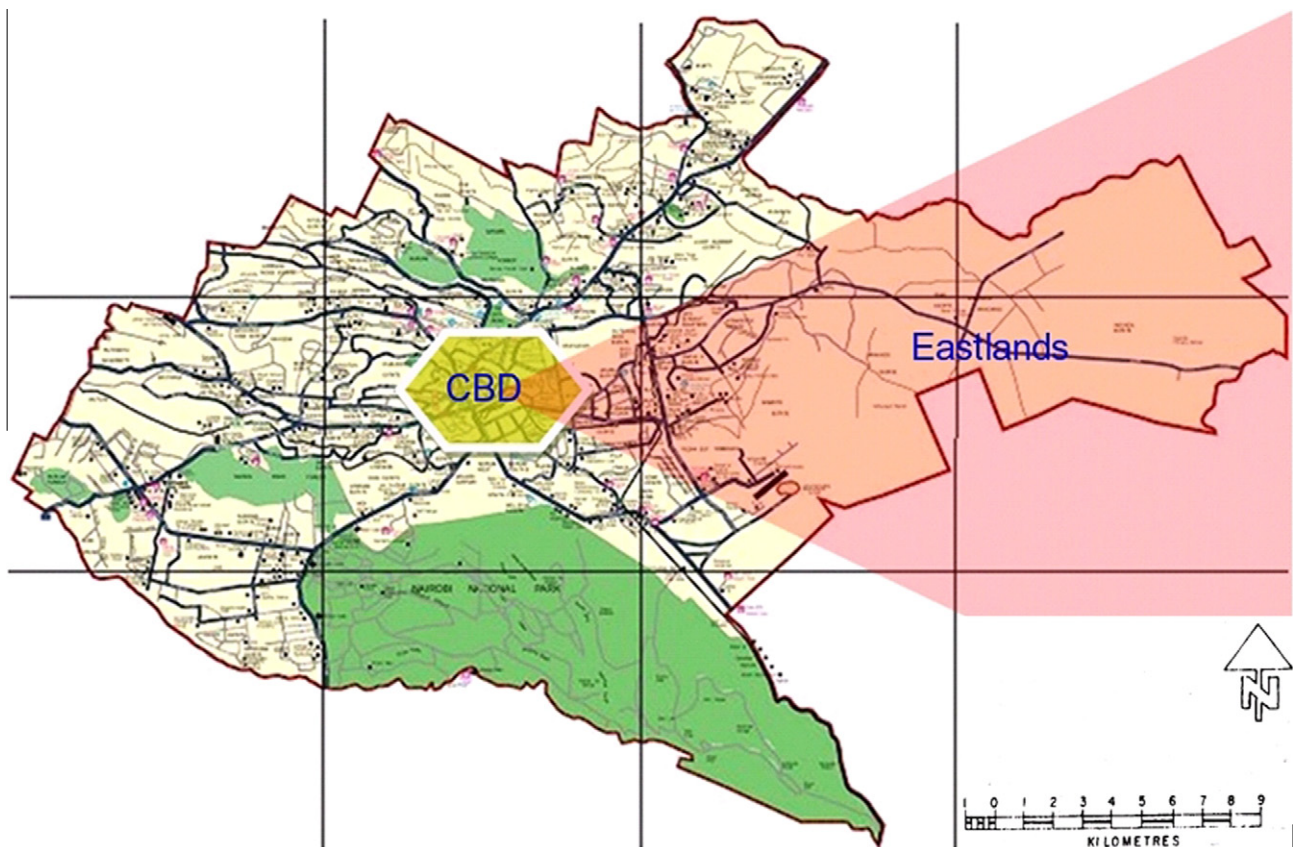
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**Fig. 1.** 1963 map of Nairobi showing location of early informal villages. Highlighted circle shows original centre controlled by the British colonial administration in 1901. The higher altitude 'hill' area (green/darker) was reserved for Europeans (based on Survey of Kenya 1910 map).



**Fig. 2.** Current map of Nairobi showing Eastlands and CBD (constructed by author).

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