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c/o Department of Geography,
University of Zimbabwe, P.O. Box 167,
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(Tel. 303211-265)

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THE VILLAGE COMPONENT OF AFRICAN CITIES

by
M. Smout

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to explore a few ideas about the evolving morphology of cities in Sub-Saharan Africa. It will attempt to demonstrate, that with the passage of time and the diminishing influence of western colonialism, African cities are becoming increasingly similar to one another and to Third World cities elsewhere.

The suggestion is, that the African city consists of three basic morphological components and that these have developed, or will develop, despite wide variations in the evolutionary history of individual settlements. The three components are:

- (a) the western colonial settlement
- (b) the African village settlement
- (c) the African dormitory settlement.

Two of these components have been the subject of numerous intensive studies, but all too often the African Village component has been ignored - at least by western geographers. This is partly because the economic importance of this component has in the past been slight and partly because of its physical separation from the western colonial settlement with which most westerners associate. It is suggested that the African Village component is growing, not only in terms of physical size and population, but also in terms of its contribution to local economies. In Southern Africa it is the urban component to which we should pay the most attention.

THE NATURE OF THE THREE COMPONENTS

General characteristics of the three components are summarised in Table 1 and are discussed below:

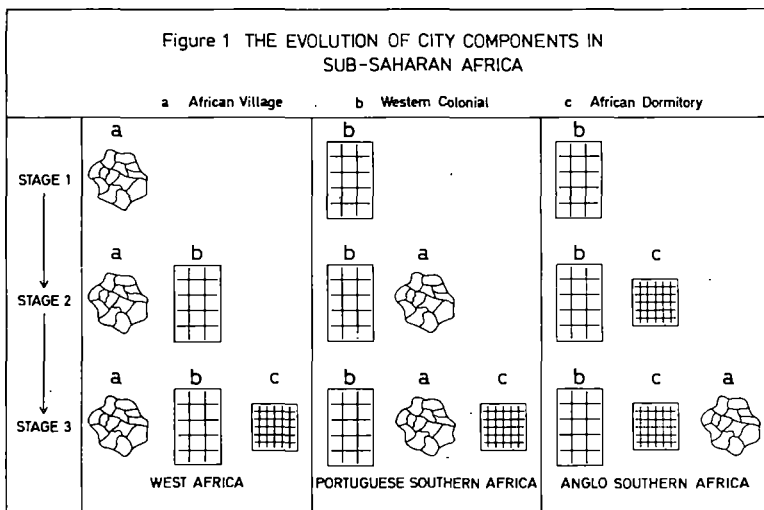
The 'Western Colonial Settlement' is an implant set up for strategic and administrative purposes and as a vehicle for the development of local resources. Its layout is formal - often based on a grid pattern of streets - and development is relatively low density and spacious when compared with European or African settlements. The western colonial settlement usually possesses the full range of urban utilities such as a potable water supply, electric power and waste

TABLE 1 — Components of African Cities

COMPONENTS	RAISON D'ETRE	FORM	ECONOMIC BASE	EMPLOYMENT STRUCTURE	LINKS WITH RURAL ECONOMY	SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND INTERACTION
1 WESTERN COLONIAL SETTLEMENT	Colonial implant for strategic and administrative purposes and development of resources	formal layout - low density and spacious good level of utilities and services (hygienic) land use control and zoning	part of modern western economy - main link with rest of world, exporter of primary products - receiver of foreign aid and capital.	most workers part of formal economy with regular (relatively high) incomes from industry, commerce.	normally weak except when developed nodes provide cash crops or minerals - main economic ties with similar cities elsewhere.	nuclear family units - spatial distribution according to socio-economic factors; greatest interaction with similar centres elsewhere.
2 AFRICAN VILLAGE SETTLEMENT	indigenous centre - residential and social focus - market centre; sometimes seat of tribal authority.	informal irregular layout - cramped - basic urban services rare (often unhygienic); high mix of land uses normally no control.	market and service centre for informal sector; main link between 1 and rural hinterland; wide range of minor tertiary activities.	varying proportion employed in formal sector - regular predictable incomes; significant number in informal sector activities myriad of minor services.	strong two way links - rural produce marketed; supplies simple crafted and manufactured goods.	strong social unity - nuclear and extended family units arranged according to rural affiliations; balanced family structure - strong rural ties.
3 AFRICAN DORMITORY SETTLEMENT	provides subsidised housing and essential services for indigenous work force of 1.	formal layout - higher density than 1 - monotonous, but not cramped; full range of basic utilities to reduced standards.	income derived mainly from sale of labour in 1; internal employment is minimal.	almost all workers in lower paid, lesser-skilled jobs of formal economy.	essentially a one way flow - disbursement of funds and flow of goods into rural areas for their support.	nuclear family and 'single' males; spatial arrangement according to rent paying ability and employer allegiance; weakening ties with rural areas.

removal facilities and the environment is essentially an hygienic one. Frequently the use of land is formally controlled and distinct land use zones or functional regions may be distinguished within the settlement. The economy is an integral part of the modern western system and this settlement is the main link between the modern world and a particular national economy. Links with the local rural economy are often weak except where developed rural nodes supply cash crops or minerals. The western settlement exports mainly primary products or those which have undergone only basic processing. It is an importer of sophisticated manufactured goods, of skills, foreign capital and foreign aid. Most workers in the western component form part of its formal economy and earn regular, relatively high wages and salaries in industry and commerce. The social structure of the western component is based on the nuclear family and their spatial distribution reflects in essence their socio-economic status. Social interaction is greatest between this group and other similar groups in other cities; often international social links are stronger than those with other parts of the same territory.

The 'African Village Settlement' is an indigenous centre; a social and residential focus which may also be an important market centre. Its layout and organisation is informal and irregular and contrasts with that of the western colonial component. Urban utilities are either totally absent or inadequate and to western eyes an unhygienic, cramped environment is often the result. There is little or no control over the use of space in the African settlement and a high mix of land uses results, many plots being multifunctional. Its economic base is not always easily understood. Firstly, it is the market and service centre of the informal sector of the local economy and further, it gains income from being the main link between the western component and the rural hinterland. The wide range of minor tertiary services and almost infinite division of labour provides many people with a livelihood - albeit a minimal one sometimes described as 'subsistence urbanism' (Breese, 1966). A significant proportion of the residents of the African village component may be employed in the formal economy of the western component and their regular, predictable incomes filter down to support those engaged in the myriad of minor services in the village settlement. Unlike the western settlement, the African village component has strong two-way links with the local rural economy. Apart from the constant flow of people who possess both rural and urban affiliations, the village component is the chief market for rural produce. The African village component possesses strong internal social unity based on both nuclear and extended family groups which are often arranged according to rural (tribal) affiliation. Family structure is normally balanced (when compared to rural counterpart regions) and there are strong social ties with rural areas.



of early 19th century travellers suggest that several of the major centres such as Kumasi, possessed resident populations of 10 000 to 15 000 (Hull, 1976) with perhaps 100 000 people involved in the economic life of the settlement. During the day the city population swelled several fold as people moved from surrounding agricultural areas into the markets to sell goods. The arrival of the European colonists in West Africa from the late 19th century saw the establishment of numerous western settlements and most of these were sited at existing nodes. Hull (1976) refers to these as 'satellite towns of European administration' and notes that for reasons of health and security they were usually constructed just beyond the walls or boundaries of the traditional city. In consequence 'the pro-colonial city remained remarkably intact in both layout and architecture', while 'the satellite towns on the other hand were often microcosms of the typical English town' (Hull, 1976).

In these early stages the social and economic distance between the colonists and the indigenous population was reflected in their physical separation, but with the passage of time and the gaining of political independence, this division has blurred and has been replaced by another. The western colonial settlement now houses the urban elite comprised mainly of expatriate skilled workers and those indigenous Africans in possession of political or economic influence. Unskilled labourers who predominate in the labour market, have to some extent been drawn from the African Village settlement but efforts by government authorities to provide cheap housing have resulted in the development of the third component postulated - the African dormitory settlement (Grove, 1973).

In Southern Africa, urban morphology has evolved along different lines, partly because there were no indigenous pre-colonial settlements of the size and complexity found in west Africa and partly because of the more widespread colonial influence. With the notable exception of Bulawayo, few of the southern African cities are located at pre-colonial settlement nodes and the initial city component was the western settlement which closely mirrored the urban morphology and traditions of its colonial founders.

In Anglo southern Africa, the African dormitory settlement quickly followed, for the colonial components soon attracted an indigenous workforce. British administrators were against any form of indigenous African settlement being allowed to develop close to the colonial settlement. In Salisbury for example, an African encampment sprung up within days of the arrival of the first white settlers only 2 km south-west of the original fort. The British South Africa Company had very quickly to lay out an African township in order to organize development and gain control of what it perceived to be health and security hazards (Kay and Smout, 1977).

Over the years both the western and African dormitory settlements have grown larger and more complex but the interaction between them has remained minimal, for the economic dualism and plural nature of society has been reinforced by law. Attempts by the indigenous population to establish informal settlements have been largely unsuccessful. The law not only empowers urban authorities to physically remove unplanned dwellings but also acts as a regulator of rural migrants into urban areas (1). It is only in recent years that informal African settlements have started to develop in Anglo-southern Africa.

In Angola and Mozambique the colonial administrators brought with them a different set of ideas and values to those of their British counterparts. As a result, cities such as Beira and Maputo evolved along different lines to centres in South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Zambia. At no stage did the Portugese enforce a legal separation of the races, although economic dualism gave rise to a high degree of racial segregation in terms of place of residence. Further, there was little sympathy with the concept of providing subsidized housing for the indigenous workforce and no objections to the establishment of African settlements within and adjacent to the boundaries of colonial settlements. The rural African was known to construct his own dwellings and the urban African in the Portugese territories was expected to do the same according to his means. As a result of this policy, the informal African village component houses the bulk of the African population of cities like Luanda, Maputo and Beira, and the African dormitory component is yet to become a significant part of such cities.

THE EFFECTS OF CHANGING POLITICAL ATTITUDES IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

Changing political circumstances, coupled with economic necessity, are already affecting urban morphology in southern Africa. In Mozambique, the Marxist-socialist government is now embarking on a programme to provide subsidised housing to certain categories of urban workers and the African dormitory settlement, a ubiquitous feature elsewhere in southern Africa, is currently evolving in Maputo (2).

In Zambia, Zimbabwe, and South Africa the lack of any African Village type of settlement within or adjacent to the cities was for a long time the result of controls on the flow of rural migrants to urban areas - the removal of political constraints, can result in very rapid change. Zambia, on gaining political independence in 1964 wrote 'the right freedom of movement' into its constitution. One of the results of this decree was a massive influx of people to Lusaka and the Copperbelt towns; many of these people are accommodated in informal settlements such as 'Zambia City' on the Copperbelt, which are rapidly taking on the social and economic characteristics of African village settlements.

A similar situation occurred in Zimbabwe in 1976. In August of that year an informal settlement sprung up adjacent to the south western boundary of Salisbury and within six weeks it possessed a population estimated at 10 000 people (Seager 1977). At that time rural urban migration was being accelerated by war conditions in much of rural Zimbabwe and authorities were becoming increasingly lax in their enforcement of laws normally used to control the influx of rural migrants. The net result was the rapid development of the Derbyshire squatter settlement. Bitter complaints from nearby farmers resulted in the removal of its residents to a site and service scheme at Zengeza south-east of Salisbury. However, during its short (three month) life the Derbyshire settlement acquired a remarkable socio-economic complexity and approximated very closely to the postulated African Village settlement.

At Zengeza 4 where authorities hurriedly pegged out plots of 10 x 10 m and built communal water points and ablutions, the population grew equally rapidly and within a year was estimated at 15 000 people in some 3 000 dwellings (Adams, 1979). At that time the settlement was officially described as a 'temporary camp' and security of tenure was nil, but an understanding existed that the population will not be disturbed for a minimum of five years thus giving occupants relative security. The residents of Zengeza 4 were hopeful that a Black government in Zimbabwe might give them permanent security of tenure and from personal experience the mood in the settlement was one of

cheerful optimism. Studies now being carried out on this settlement (3) will provide statistical information on its employment structure and degree of internal social and economic complexity. It is already clear to the careful observer that Zengeza is no dormitory for urban workers. It appears to possess a balanced demographic structure and significant numbers are employed in a wide range of activities within the settlement.

While it is hard to postulate policy changes that might occur following political independence in Zimbabwe, it is likely that people will possess a greater freedom of movement than in the past thus accelerating rural-urban movements. This in turn will necessitate a greater freedom for people to develop communities according to their own needs and along traditional lines, so that the African village component can be expected to form an increasingly important part of cities in Zimbabwe.

South of the Limpopo, the African Village component is still in its infancy, for official policy has not favoured informal housing and settlements. However, despite political policies and a recent decision to budget R750 million for a concerted attack on the country's housing shortage, (Natal Daily News, 8 May, 1979), 'The question arises whether our resources, together with our current economic growth, are sufficient to be able to commit this amount of money to low income housing every five years' (3). Finlayson (1978) continues 'the system of subsidisation constitutes a financial burden on the South African economy, a burden that we are no longer able to carry'.

In all likelihood economic reality will overrule political policies in respect of housing and informal urban development. The official estimate of the population housed informally in the Durban-Pietermaritzburg region in mid-1979 was 600 000 (Natal Daily News, 25 September, 1973), and for the country's main urban regions a figure of 1,1 million was suggested (Mbasorpp, 1978).

The implications for urban morphology in South Africa and its Black States are clear: an increasingly large number of people will live in informal settlements so changing the nature of the cities. Although this process has already begun, the resulting settlements are in most cases illegal and their residents labelled as squatters. They lack security of tenure and this hinders efforts to establish a home and community. Given security of tenure, settlements are capable of upgrading themselves in terms of both the physical and social environment (Adams, 1979).

Two examples of what the future may hold for the South African city are Ngangaliswe and Malakazi. Ngangaliswe is an unplanned African settlement 2 km

from Umtata in the Transkei. Finlayson (1978) describes it as 'a reception area for newcomers to the urban area' and notes that it houses some 17 000 people who constitute over 60% of the urban population of Umtata. Ngangeliswe has a strong sense of community and neighbourhood identity. While the majority of its workers are employed in Umtata, there is significant employment within the settlement itself and it clearly possesses the characteristics of the African Village component.

The 600 000 people housed informally in the Durban-Pietermaritzburg region occupy a variety of house and settlement types ranging from haphazard houses on the hills of Clermont, to the 'shack farms' of the Natal north coast and to large settlements such as Malakazi, which accommodates some 15 000 people. Some 30% of the adult males and 60% of adult females in Malakazi are employed; most in the formal sector of the region's economy, but informal sector employment within Malakazi includes a wide range of occupations and accounts for approximately 2 000 workers (Stopforth, 1973). Stopforth notes that 55% of Malakazi's population were either born there or in the Durban metro region and many are already part of the urban process. By virtue of their urban experience, educational histories, and job opportunities they can build not only their own shelter but also their own communities. He continues 'if their activities are fostered by planning authorities such communities can progressively improve their living conditions and become incorporated as part of the urban complex.'

CONCLUSION

Informal settlements of the African Village type have become an established part of Third World cities. McGee (1967) describes the 'rural like villages' within the South East Asian city, while Breese (1966) talks of both the 'bustees' and the 'village enclaves' of Delhi and similar elements exist in the major South American cities. Clearly the urban processes affecting these cities are similar. The informal settlements like the African Village component are an expression of what Breese calls 'overurbanization', describing it as a situation in which larger proportions of a countries population live in urban places than their degree of economic development justifies.

Most sub-Saharan countries still possess low levels of urbanisation and the region's population as a whole is only 13% urban. However, if Africa is to follow the rest of the Third World, massive increases in urban populations can be expected in the next few decades.

It is unlikely that economic expansion will keep pace with such urban population growth and an increasing proportion of the population in Sub-

Saharan cities is likely to be employed within the informal sector of the economy and housed within informal or village components of the cities.

In South Africa the authorities are either unable or unwilling to conceive of the Village Settlement as a natural and integral part of urban development. Canute-like, they attempt to stem the tide of rural migrants and expend vast sums of money on subsidised housing. However, it is questionable whether massive expenditure on low cost housing is in the best interests of the country. Perhaps the provision of employment opportunities should carry a higher priority, for there is little value to providing houses for those who cannot afford even subsidised rents. In time, economic necessity may bring about the policy changes needed to permit a regulated development of informal elements in South African cities and at this point, the African Village component will become an established part of cities throughout sub-Saharan Africa.

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NOTES

1. Examples of such legislation in Rhodesia would be the Land Tenure Act, the Vagrancy Act, and the African (Urban Areas Accommodation and Registration Act). For discussion of the effects of this legislation on rural to urban migration in Rhodesia see Smout, M.A. Zambezia 4 (ii) pp 79 - 91.
2. Personal communication with African academic colleagues who have recently discussed this issue with Mozambique authorities in Maputo.
3. Research being conducted by the Department of Sociology and the Regional and Urban Planning Centre of the University of Zimbabwe.



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