Morphological Transformation of Kileleshwa, Nairobi

Collins Sasakah Makunda* and Tom J. C. Anyamba

Abstract

In this paper, we investigate the physical manifestation of ongoing urban habitat transformation in the context of a residential neighbourhood, Kileleshwa, which is located in the western suburbs of Nairobi. This is done through an analysis of the emergent morphology of the urban habitat by delving into various levels of urban resolution: the street network, the plots, and the buildings, while tracing the roots of the neighbourhood in the colonial era and its rapid change in the current millennium. In so doing, the aim was to understand the degree to which these dimensions had undergone change as a consequence of the urban transformation. The findings of the paper are that at the different levels – the street, plot, and building – a variation in transformation has occurred, with a resultant increase in the density of the urban habitat. This variation is explored in detail at these different levels of the neighbourhood's urban tissue. In shedding light on this ongoing transformation, the paper contributes to a deeper understanding of how an urban habitat has actually transformed, as manifested in its physical outcomes, which have in turn set the stage for the social transformation of the urban context.

Keywords: *Apartment block, Building typology, Density, Kileleshwa, Morphology, Nairobi, Plot, Street layout, Transformation, Urban habitat.*

INTRODUCTION

Morphological transformation is a feature of urban areas all over the world. However, in cities in the global South, the nature of morphological transformation is profoundly influenced by the rapid population growth and high urbanization rates currently being experienced (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), 2014; UN DESA, 2015).

A case in point is a city such as Nairobi, which is at the epicentre of a demographic boom. While Kenya´s population in 2019 was 47.56 million persons, Nairobi's share of this population was about 10% with a population of 4.4 million persons (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS), 2019). This represents a 40% increase or a growth by 1.26 million persons in a decade. The city also makes up one-third of Kenya's urban population (KNBS, 2019). In addition, in 2019, it accounted for 12% of the country's households with a total of 1.5 million households (KNBS, 2019).

In recent years, neighbourhoods in the capital city have manifested signs of pressure from the expanding population. One such neighbourhood is Kileleshwa, located 4 km from the Central Business District (CBD) (Hass Consult, 2016a). Historically, this was a low-density residential neighbourhood. It is part of Nairobi's suburban upmarket neighbourhoods referred to as the 'leafy green' suburbs with roots in colonial era Kenya (White, Silberman & Anderson, 1948). These are the old suburbs in the upper, western area of the city (Halliman & Morgan, 1967). They are typically known for their single-family detached dwelling units set in plots that are a quarter of an acre or more with a preponderance of mature trees. Their planning, in the colonial era, was inspired by garden city principles and the concept of the neighbourhood unit (Freund, 2007; White, Silberman & Anderson, 1948; Huchzermeyer, 2011).

From its establishment and over the intervening years up until the turn of the millennium, Kileleshwa remained fairly stable as a low-density

*Corresponding author:
Collins Sasakah Makunda, The Oslo School of Architecture and Design, Oslo, Norway.
Email: collins.makunda@aho.no