

The Making of Urban Towns: A Comparison of the U.S and Nigerian Experiences.

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Abstract

Nigerian cities were classified as slums based on western nations' perspective of the development of their cities. However, the definition of an urban area varies from the perspectives of the different interacting elements that pilot urban development. These elements include geography, sociology, demography, economics, and public administration. For this reason, a single definition, or combination of definitions operative in one country cannot be used as a yardstick for classifying cities in another country. Such combined elements in one country cannot satisfy the interests of similar component elements in another country. The objective of this paper is to examine the historical origins of major urban areas of Nigeria and the United States of America (USA) with a view to identifying similarities and differences. The data for this research were collected through examining historical accounts of the cities, and content analysis was adopted as the method of analysis. The result is that in spite of the similarities in the elements of governance (different written constitutions, practice of same presidential system of government, and same colonial (European) administrators) the Nigerian cities had three different origins; similarly those of the US are also three. Given the primordial origins of Nigerian cities, they do not qualify as slums. The growth of Enugu urban with respect to its development from 1914 - 2007 was emphasized.

Key words:urban, slums, Nigeria, US, primordial, colonial

Introduction

The *Advanced Learners Dictionary* defines urban as *of or in a town*. Professionally speaking, Iwueke (2004) advises that a single definition for urban areas is not tenable. This is because the urban area is continually a system of interacting elements with human organism in the fore. The interacting elements include sociology, demography, economics, public administration and geography. These elements defined "urban" from their disciplines perspective by emphasizing only aspects of urbanization pertinent to their interests. Perspectives are strongly influenced by cultures of different countries as well as the period or time of definition probably due to urban dynamism. Other factors that negative a uniform definition of urban areas include the problem of not having a clear boundary between urban and rural settlement mostly in advanced countries, the available population data needed for urban administration, and the distinct character of urban areas in different parts of the world (Iwueke, 2004).

Cartography sees the urban area in terms of land use subject to exploration, exploitation and visualization. On this note, urban area is defined as a spatial resource with specific segments for communication (route), residential, commercial, industrial, educational, and other purposes for sustained human habitation. A city is like a seed which can germinate, grow and flower and dwindle or die. It can also rejuvenate as a thriving city. This aspect is made possible through urban renewal activities. In the following paragraph, the growth of major cities in the United States of America (USA) and Nigeria are summarily presented. The essence is to compare their historical backgrounds and to appreciate the onerous role of urban planners in keeping our cities lively and habitable. It is convenient to dwell on the U.S. and Nigerian experiences in building of the urban environment by virtue of the fact that the Nigerian and US Constitutions were written and both countries practice presidential system of government. Also, both countries were colonized by Britain. Thus it became necessary to examine the history of the setting (urban environment) in which these elements of governance operate, and to appreciate the onerous role of urban planners in keeping our cities lively and habitable.

It is also important to note that before the so-called discoverers of the “new worlds” set their feet in North America, there were American Indians who had lived there for centuries. These natives lived in their communal villages until they were conquered by the British colonizers who established colonial towns that became the harbingers of the present day cities in the US. It is from this point that this paper takes off to examine the making of these cities.

Method of Analysis

The historical accounts of major cities in Nigeria and USA were collected. The accounts of the Nigerian cities collected started from their primordial (organic) origins as villages that made up the communities, as well as records of colonial towns. On the other hand, the accounts of the US cities collected started with the coming of the colonial administrators, because the old primordial communities of the Aboriginal Indians were destroyed by the colonizers and the European immigrants (new settlers) whose descendants constitute a sizable mix of US population. Using these data as a pedestal for analysis, the contents of the records were analyzed to find similarities and differences.

THE U.S. EXPERIENCE

Planning the territorial settlements.

When the so called discoverers of the “new worlds” set their feet in North America particularly the US, there were American Indians who had lived in the continent for centuries. These natives lived in organic communal villages until they were conquered by the European colonizers and the new settlers who established colonial towns that began the present day cities in the US. Arnold, and Frank (1979) state that the seventeenth century might have witnessed the beginnings of city planning in the US colonies, where villages (fortress) were hemmed in by land cultivated on a communal ownership. This paved the way for the introduction of preplanned small grid plan towns, initially at port towns where the European immigrants first settled as tenement residents in mid nineteenth century. The new grid town planning scheme was introduced further inland as more and more settlers moved inwards. It was later followed by the rectangular survey system, etc. The contributions of other professionals in the development of the cities are not discussed here.

The country, USA, was carved out of the coterminous North American continent as a result of the adventurous exploits of the European explorers, with very strong British influence. Initially, USA was smaller than what it is today but over the years she grew in size by a gradual incorporation of other areas (States) into her territory.

Foundations of urban towns

During the colonial era, the European settlers founded and planned the Urban towns in the US. But in the 19th century after the death of colonial town planning, the word “planning” disappeared from American civic dictionary. City lots were then a speculative business, not a matter of community policy. The lots were free for all especially surveyors who surveyed and produced layout maps of towns with plots to be sold at cheap prices. Apart from building regulations designed to prevent fire out-breaks in the densely settled area of the city, governments had almost no inclination or capacity to regulate the uses of land, or to take steps to correct these abuses Goodman (1968). For the most part, people accepted uncritically the way in which American cities were developing because little did they know that an urban society was in the making.

Goodman (Ibid, 16) continues this analysis and reported that the rapid urbanization was fast ahead. Technology was forging the instruments through which an urban society would become viable. For instance, the increase in railroad mileage, the introduction of telephony, the invention of the passenger elevator, the development of the first practical typewriter. Others included use of the first Bessemer converter, the centralized business service and the first practical applications of the electric arc lamps. The 1880’s were boom times in building as skyscraper frame construction was introduced.

The cumulative impact of these technological innovations was to centralize population. By 1880 there were 77 cities with inhabitants of over 25000, and 20 cities of over 100,000. Some Americans, mainly religious groups, rejected the new urban industrial life and preferred the early ‘socialists’ doctrines and relocated to the small utopian communities. Many other Americans, on the other hand especially industrial commercial concerns, enjoyed the economic and social success. Be that as it may, the uncritical appraisal of the cities did not continue, as some crusaders for improvement and a change of heart emerged.

Thus, the US town planning history can be generally classified into three stages namely the organic villages, the colonial town planning and the rectangular surveys that heralded the modern layout plans. The last two actually formed the basic foundation for the US cities as many of the organic villages are virtually extinct.

Harbingers of Urban Renewal Policy.

Two small groups made efforts to meet the city on its own terms, not to escape from its demands: the housing reformers and the park planners were the precursors. These two groups paved the way for a rebirth of planning at the end of the 19th century Goodman (1968)

For **housing reformers**, urban housing first became an issue through the concern with sanitation. Serious epidemics of typhoid, cholera, and yellow fever periodically swept sections of the country, and they were most severe in the cities. New York City paid attention to the problem at an early date: in 1834 and 1845. Reports on sanitation blamed bad housing as a major cause of diseases. A state legislative committee surveyed slum area of New York and Brooklyn in 1957, and its report dealt both with the relationship between disease and poor housing and with the process by which urban housing became blighted.

After 1865, the large cities of the country became increasingly congested. New York, Boston, Chicago and Cleveland were more densely populated than almost any cities in the world. These conditions finally gave rise to a legislative action and attempts were made to improve low-cost housing design. Other major cities later established similar codes. For instance, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, Chicago, Boston, Cleveland and San Francisco adopted effective municipal ordinances. After fifty years of work, the housing reformers finally persuaded the public to assume some community responsibility for the conditions under which they lived.

The Park Planners performed a similar function. Their ability to convince a number of cities after 1860, that parks and boulevards were desirable and could not be provided without planning and land controls finally paid off. This was important in altering the laissez-faire attitude toward urban growth. In both ‘the park planners’ and ‘housing reformers’ policy issues began to be reasserted, Goodman (1968)

There were other professionals that contributed to the growth of cities in the US at that time, but all of them would not be included here. Thus only the contributions of the 'housing reformers' and the 'park planners' seem to be most appropriate here.

THE NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE

Planning the territorial settlements.

The country, Nigeria, came to be as a result of the Berlin Conference in 1884 when African Continent was partitioned into colonies and shared amongst European countries. This started what was called the Scramble for Africa, and the intention was to exploit all African resources (human and material) and possibly settle there permanently. Britain got Nigeria as one of her colonies in Africa, and started mapping for administrative convenience, and demarcation of her colonial boundaries.

Actually there was nothing for the colonizers to plan with respect to settlement because many organic towns and kingdoms were already in existence before the colonizers arrived. Given the selfish nature of British colonial administration where colonies were developed based on availability of natural resources, towns were founded only where there were such resources. Thus, colonial towns started as small labour camps for workers in the coal, tin, or gold mines, or other resources.

Foundations of urban towns

The antecedents of Nigerian cities were obviously different from those of the US save for similarities of colonial origins and their written constitutions. While the US organic communities were destroyed, those of Nigeria endured. The formation and degradation of our cities hinged on different backgrounds. Iwueke (2004) has four typologies of Nigerian urban areas.

- i. The traditional pre-colonial types are those cities that existed before the colonialists entered the country. Cities like Kano, Ibadan, Sokoto and Benin are in this category. Modern facilities like motorable roads, electricity, water supply, etc, were superimposed on them.
- ii. The colonial non-traditional types came to be as a result of colonial activities. The layout, building types and facilities were far better than the traditional cities. Within this category are Kano (Sabomgari areas), Enugu (Coal Camp and Asata) Lagos (Ebute-metta), Jos, etc.
- iii. The colonial GRA were established during and after the colonial era. These areas have the best building layouts and Housing estates, infrastructure, facilities. These are found in every city in Nigeria.
- iv. The modern type came into being in the last 50 years where town planning activities were established. Unfortunately, they are called 'the shame of town planners' because their growth flourished as each man proceeded to develop his land as he deemed fit without regard for order, safety, and beauty (Iwueke, 2004, quoting Mabogunje, 1978).

Actually, three types of cities can be identified above: the pre-colonial types, the colonial non-traditional types and the modern types. The colonial Government Reserved Areas (GRAs) were not cities per se. They were residential areas reserved for the colonial administrators and/or managers who preferred to live in serene low density areas removed from the high density residential areas occupied by the Nigerian workers. Thus, the proliferation of these reserved areas in most cities in Nigeria especially in the colonial non-traditional types. Delving on historical perspective of urban development in Nigeria, Okeke (2002) postulated that in Africa, before the European incursion, there was a type of life classified as urban living amongst the native population found in the enclave that is now called Nigeria. Around the 17th century, the traditional urbanism was mostly agrarian settlement of high population concentration which prevailed before the industrial capitalist orders. There was also a strong socio-political organization with strong central powers. This traditional urbanism led to the growth of such towns as Ile-

Ife, and Ibadan in Yoruba land, and Kano, Katsina and Sokoto in the Hausa-Fulani axis of Nigeria. This view was also expressed by Ayeni (1980) when he states two developed urban systems of the Hausa-Fulani and Kanuri which covered Sokoto, Kano and Katsina empires in the North; and that of the Kingdoms of Yoruba to the South-west that included the states of Lagos, Ondo, Oyo and Ogun.

Okeke (2002) opines that the other ethnic groups were generally assumed that their predominant segmentary political system and subsistence level of economy slowed down urban development. Then, Ayeni (1980) exemplified urban development in the Eastern part of Nigeria as a feature of colonial period with the exception of a few cases like the middle Delta and Calabar.

Analysis of the foundations of the Nigerian cities.

The statements made above need to be examined critically. It is difficult to find any strong base upon which the above assertions relied given the fact that the many interacting elements that contribute to the growth of a city give rise to myriad of definitions of an urban area. Thus one element alone cannot serve as a yardstick for defining an urban area. The traditional urbanism that nurtured the growth of Kano, Katsina, Oyo, Ondo, etc, also nurtured the growth of Onitsha, Awka, Aba, Owerri in Igbo axis of Nigeria, etc. Or is there a presumption that these eastern traditional cities never existed before colonialism? The answer is emphatically no. The two developed urban systems comprising the Hausa-Fulani-Kanuri and the Yoruba Kingdoms were not the only kingdoms that existed in Nigeria before colonialism struck. In the East (Anadi, 1967), there were the Eri-Nri Kingdom (with headquarters at Ora-Eri and Agukwu-Nri), the Ada-Abam-Abiriba-Ohafia Kingdom (centered at Abiriba), and the Aro Kingdom. While the Eri-Nri was in charge of religious affairs and proselytized Igbo communities, the Abiriba was a warring community from which were hired mercenaries that fought battles for any oppressed Igbo community that paid the price demanded by the mercenaries. These two kingdoms were famous for their contributions to the communities, and were sought for religious and military matters, respectively. Many other communities were famous for other very important reasons and were also sought after.

The British colonialists built narrow roads for evacuation of resources looted from Nigeria. The effect of this was that many of those famous traditional towns through which the roads did not pass automatically lost their fame, while some towns initially in the doldrums but were opportuned to have the roads pass through them became famous. All these towns could not be said to have colonial origin. Also, the two kingdoms (Eri-Nri and Abiriba) in Igbo land lost their fame because their *raison d'être* was replaced with colonial alternatives. For instance, while the traditional religion and culture (the concern of Eri-Nri kingdom) were replaced with Christianity, the Abiriba mercenaries were replaced with the military (British, and later Nigerian army). The issue of segmentary political system impeding urban growth in the eastern Nigeria was not quite correct. Rather, it strengthened the concentration of population in each of the communities thus making them potential urban areas. The effect was that huge taxes were collected from each community, especially in Igbo speaking areas. This situation did not exist in northern Nigeria where taxes were collected through the Emirates.

Then, the assertion that eastern Nigeria was a feature of colonial period is a case of overt misinformation. What this statement is saying is that there were no pre-colonial urban towns in the then eastern Nigeria. This is not true. Suffice it to say that apart from Enugu, all other towns in the east existed before British colonialism, and thus could not have been of colonial origin. Really, primary colonial urban areas in Nigeria came into existence as centers of administration from where British colonial government exploited the mineral, human and other resources of the country. Cities like Enugu was set up for coal mining, Jos for tin mining, Zungeru for gold, etc. Other spin-off cities (nodes or secondary centers) which accelerated the mining and transportation of the minerals were Makurdi, Port-Harcourt, Zaria, etc, with rail-lines for evacuation of the British loots in Nigeria. Other resources that powered the

growth of other cities around the country were groundnuts (from the north) cocoa and rubber latex (from the west) palm oil (from the east), etc. There was also human resource which energized the great interest of the colonialist for those areas with large concentration of people. Tax collection was the sole aim for pitching camps in such areas as Sokoto (the seat of the caliphate), and other Emirates in the North, Ibadan in the West Onitsha and Awka, many communities in the east.

The Living Conditions of Urban Towns in Nigeria and Slum Formation:

The physical structure of homes and the facilities available in the traditional residential areas in Nigeria have reacted to the various socio-economic influences which restructured the traditional houses. The houses were designed in form of compounds to take care of extended families, provide shelters from rain, excessive heat or cold and ward-off intruders (Adedibu, 1980). But the colonial era has changed these perspectives. Based on these conditions, the following are points upon which the quality of urban environment depends: (1) the extent of planning and control of the city development, (2) the quality of buildings, (3) the infrastructural development and (4) the standard of public health services and facilities (Adedibu, 1980)

Urban Growth: this is very high in Nigeria leading to overcrowding, high densities, high occupancy ratio and proliferation of informal settlements.

The Urban Economy: it is characterized by low and marginal productivity and high rate of both unemployment and under-employment. The industrial sector is operating at low capacity utilization. Thus urban poverty is widespread, and has engendered the growth of the urban informal sector.

Urban Management: this is riddled with poor co-ordinations ad hoc planning and programming, precarious financing, subjective project implementation, low maintenance culture. The results are inadequate facilities for the teeming population.

Environmental pollution (water, air, or noise) is a threat to both aquatic and terrestrial life, and has created waves of anxiety, worry and concern for environmentally-friendly individuals and society (Uchegbu, 2002). Drawing from these observations, every type of town described above except the traditional pre-colonial type was infected with vestiges of degradation either from inception or due to influx of people later (rural-urban migration). This is in partial agreement with Okeke (2002) who postulates that there is no gainsaying that Nigerian cities, prior to contact with Western civilization and more so now, are potential slums.

The Growth of Enugu Urban

Enugu is not an indigenous creation. It emerged as a result of European expedition (Okeke, 2002). Enugu was not in existence before 1900. It was founded in 1909 by an itinerant team of geologists prospecting for silver but suddenly struck coal instead. Enugu is a coal city built on land acquired by the British through agreements with the chiefs of Eke, Ngwo, Abor, Nsude, Akagbe-Ugwu and Nike Communities (Okpala, 1980; Anibueze, 2005). The first labour camps in 1914 were located at Hilltop (Ngwo) and later at the slopes to the south, Alfred Camp or Ugwu Alfred. After completing the construction of the Milliken Hill Road in 1915, another labour camp known as Udi Siding, (Figure1), down the plains was set up for coal miners. In 1916, the site for White quarters was surveyed and demarcated. This gave rise to the establishment of the European Quarters, called Ekulu GRA (Ejiofor, 2009). This is the nucleus of present GRA.

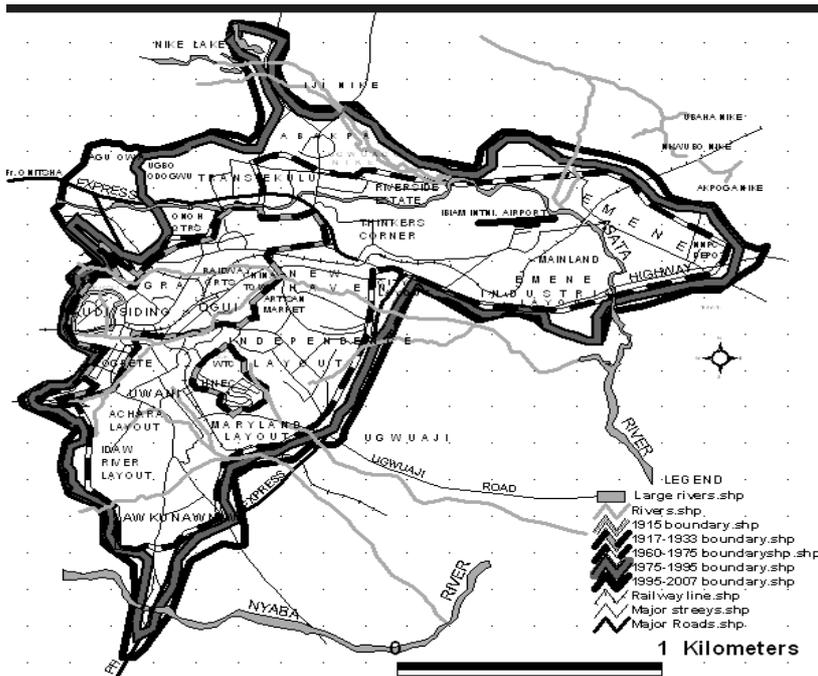


Figure1: Growth of Enugu urban from 1914 – 2007.

Source: Survey Division (1975), Okpala-Okaka (1995), Anibueze (2005), Image NASA (2008)

Those who could not be employed in the coal mines started trading near Udi Siding, and Ogbete Main Market started (Anibueze, 2005). In 1917, Ogbete was acquired and Coal Camp was built. Same year the city was graded a second-class township. It was called Enugwu-Ngwo and was).Made the headquarters of southern province of Nigeria in 1927. But because of rapid expansion towards areas owned by other indigenous communities rather towards Enugwu-Ngwo it was renamed Enugu in 1928, (Okeke 2002, Anibueze, 2005).

The areas acquired between 1915 and 1917 (Figure 1) included Coal Camp (Ogbete), Iva-Valley, the Secretariat, Railway Quarters, part of UNEC, Clerk Quarters, Artisan Quarters (China town) in 1923, Asata, Ogui township, and in 1933, Abakpa Military Cantonement (Anibueze, 2005). After the Nigerian Independence (1960), further acquisitions were added: Independence Layout, Uwani, P and T Quarters, Bridge-Head Layout, Emene Industrial Layout, Housing Estate (Abakpa), Trans Ekulu Layout. Other layouts approved by government were Ogui Layout, New Haven, Awkunawnaw, Achara Layout, Maryland, Idaw River Layout, Thinkers Corner, Oji River Layout, Republic Layout, etc, ((Anibueze, 2005). This list is not exhaustive of the layouts in the city.

All this notwithstanding, Enugu did not have a general urban development plan. Its development was rather organic in response to urban migration demands in which layouts were carved out to accommodate the growing population as the need arose, (Ejiofor, 2009). Thus, the city expanded continually in pocket-type development as discussed above.

Over the years, the city grew in population starting from less than 100 in 1900, 10,000 in 1921; 15,000 in 1939; 35,000 in 1945; 50,000 in 1953, 138,497 in 1963, and by 1991 census it was 465,000. Most of the populations are migrants who were predominantly civil servants (Okpala, 1980; Okeke, 2002). Figure 1 shows clearly that the city had been expanding north, east, south and rarely westward where Enugwu-Ngwo is located. This justifies the change of its name from Enugwu-Ngwo to Enugu. The range of hills that studded the western flank of the city has actually impeded development towards that

side. In the other sides, the greatest growth took place between 1960 and 1975, after which there has been slow development possibly because of filling in of the gaps created in the existing layouts.

Conclusion

Colonialism played a very important role in planning and renewal of cities in both the U. S. and Nigeria. However, while the cities in Nigeria were traditional, pre-colonial and post-colonial in nature, those of the U.S had very strong colonial origin. Degradation has been part of Nigerian cities right from onset especially in the colonial and post colonial cities. The post colonial approach was that of upgrading and redevelopment or modernization of existing residential areas, as well as building new cities. Enugu came into being as a result of colonial expedition on coal exploration. The city was founded in 1909 for exploitation of coal deposit and grew in population from mere less than 100 in 1900 to 465,000 in 1991. The city is still growing.

Having discussed the U.S. and Nigerian experiences in the formation of cities historically, it is obvious that the two countries had different origins regarding their cities. While the U. S. inherited colonial towns following the destruction of American Indian primordial communities, Nigeria started first with traditional and later colonial towns. Both countries suffered city degradation from migrants and administrative inefficiencies. But one thing that is unique with Nigerian towns is that all of them are adjudged potential slums based on foreign standards. This should not be the case because the orientation for the making of the traditional Nigerian towns took into consideration the extended family system, the existing traditional technology and climatic factors; all this worked perfectly for Nigeria at that time. There were no slums at that time by our traditional standards. Evidence of degradation started rearing its head when rural-urban migration started impacting negatively on urban facilities of the colonial, post colonial and modern cities.

Slum areas in the US are those neighbourhoods formerly occupied, wasted, and abandoned by White people, only to be reoccupied later by the Blacks. Such a situation does not exist in Nigeria, except the GRAs which are now occupied by rich Nigerians. These GRAs still maintain the serene environment that existed when they were initially occupied by the Europeans. Therefore, this author strongly asserts that there are no slums in Nigeria. There are degraded urban areas, and urban jungles (informal settlements occupied by poor people), but these are by no means slums, judging from the historical antecedents of the term.

It is recommended that more cities like Abuja should be built to decongest the older urban areas, particularly in the Southeast of Nigeria. Such cities are adapted from colonial cities though the design and materials used in the construction are indigenous. Southeast of Enugu should be explored for future development to balance the uneven development that has been going on in the north, south and the east of the city. Currently, a new layout is in the making in the southeast of the city. This is a welcome development.

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