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CHAPTER 5THE GROWTH OF KIBERA: FROM NUBIAN ENCLAVE TO SQUATTERREAL ESTATE

'To continue with the supplementary question, Mr. Speaker, I think the people who erected these temporary structures at Kisumu Dogo, Line Saba and Siranga in Kibera area had special authority from the City Council of Nairobi. Would the Minister see to it that he does not grant special authority to people to construct such houses leading to deliberate slums?'

Parliamentary Question 1st Aug. 1980
by Dr. Mango

5.1 Kibera: Introduction and Overview

The next five chapters are concerned with one specific unauthorized settlement within Nairobi called Kibera. Here we shall draw almost exclusively upon our own fieldwork carried out at intervals between April 1980 and December 1981. The precise details of the organisation of the fieldwork and the methodology may be found in the Appendix.

In this chapter we shall give an outline of the history of the Kibera settlement before examining its social organisation and housing market in more detail in the subsequent chapters. This will of necessity involve us in a consideration of the Nubian community,¹ since historically Kibera has almost been their ethnic enclave. Hence this chapter is partly a story about the destruction of their 'community'.

The main focus of this chapter is the transformation of Kibera from an area controlled informally by the Nubian community to one controlled by a Kikuyu dominated administration. This involves two processes: firstly, a change in the ethnic composition of those who control the settlement, i.e. from Nubian to Kikuyu, and, secondly, a

change in the method of land control, i.e. from informal to formal.

Whereas previously there was a free-for-all in which allocation of building land seems to have been informally restricted to the Nubians, the local administration has now established a de facto land control and allocation. Thus the local administration has been able to establish control over who builds what where.

We shall argue that it is this local administrative control over land that has greatly encouraged the commercialisation of low income housing by providing some security for capital investment in house building. This will also show the way members of the local administration use their political position to further their own economic interests and as a source of patronage.

This chapter illustrates two general points we are concerned with involved in the rise of Kenyan capitalism. Firstly we shall see it has a tendency towards the destruction of self-contained ethnic enclaves and 'traditional' communities. Secondly we shall show the way kinship and tribalism become used in instrumental ways to further economic ends. More specifically the client-patron networks deriving from the involvement of the local administration will become apparent.

This chapter is structured chronologically, the first section concerns itself with Kibera until the 1960s during which time it could be characterised as a Nubian enclave. The remaining sections show how after the late 1960s a Kikuyu controlled administration has gained control of the area's land use. Finally we shall examine the future prospects for the settlement.