The urban market:
Social and Spatial Configurations in the African City

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Abstract: In an era that is luring African cities toward a global constellation of mega-cities, the urbanization of traditional aspects of society, such as the marketplace, provide an identity to local commerce not found in many contemporary urban developments. Often obscure and unnoticed, the architecture that houses large central markets plays an undeniable role in the function and urban organization of today's city.

In the decades following their independence, undergoing rapid urban development, numerous African cities of emerging regional importance constructed central market buildings. The research presented here focuses on such projects in Accra (Ghana), Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso), Lusaka (Zambia) and Dar es Salaam (Tanzania). As part of a larger urban condition, these buildings leave an indelible mark on the social organization of the space within them, at their perimeter, and in the urban context surrounding them. As vessels for the continuation of traditional practices in the context of modern cities, markets such as these produce some of the most vibrant, complex and identifiable spaces in the African city.

In direct contrast to the top-down planning procedures, real estate development, and mega-structures found in many so-called 'highly developed' cities, these areas are shaping their own urban form through the practices of daily life, from the bottom up. They are spaces in which a relatively unstructured economy meets an intense modernity, but one does not hinder the other. Rather, they co-exist, creating a unique form of urbanism that – whatever its faults – is formed and developed largely by its participants. In this regard, they represent a more promising future for the urbanizing world than is often considered: a future which ensures that the city is not beyond control of its inhabitants, that time-honoured social networks need not be trammelled by modernity, and that development acts in support of local culture.

Keywords: Urban markets; African urbanism; market architecture; design agency; modernity.

INTRODUCTION

In an era that is luring cities in the developing world toward a global constellation of mega-cities, the urbanization of traditional aspects of society, such as the marketplace, provide an identity to local commerce in stark contrast to the homogeneity found in many cities in the midst of continued globalization. Often obscure and unnoticed, the architecture that houses large central markets plays an undeniable role in the function and urban organization of the city.

In the decades following their independence and in the context of rapid urban development, numerous African cities of emerging regional importance constructed central market buildings. Whether consciously intended to or not, these buildings condense the strata of society into a single space: vendors of the rural peasantry, urban migrants, the growing middle class; patrons of peri-urban farmers, squatters, and the wealthy urban elite all take part in urban condition at and surrounding the market buildings. As vessels for the continuation of traditional practices in the context of modern cities, markets such as these produce some of the most vibrant, complex, and most locally identifiable spaces experienced in urban Africa. In a way, they act as socio-cultural signifiers: their design is inextricably linked with the social and physical organization already present in the marketplace; at the same time, the presence of the market building leaves an indelible mark on the social organization of the space within it, at its perimeter, and in the urban context surrounding it.

As points of reference, the research reported on here focuses on market buildings in four localities. A city of emerging importance in west Africa, Accra (Ghana) is home to the recently constructed Makola Market, built to house a pre-existing marketplace at the centre of commercial Accra. Similarly, (closed due to damage sustained from a fire in 2003 and reopened in 2009), the Marché Rood Woko in Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso) was constructed by the city government with the intent of utilizing traditional forms of west African markets. Moving to south-central and east Africa, the Zambian capital of Lusaka – an economic engine positioning itself as a regional powerhouse – attempted to formalize City Market, a large informal market positioned at the edge of the central business district and spilling out into previously unbuilt surrounds, by housing it in a modern facility. By contrast, Kariakoo Market, a powerful work designed by Tanzanian architect Beda J. Amuli, was constructed in the years following Tanzanian independence in the already densely urban but predominantly residential Ilala district of Dar es Salaam.

The urban marketplace in these developing cities occupies a peculiar position between tradition and modernity, with one foot coming down on both sides. We do not find such places in most of the 'developed' world, where these traditional aspects of society have been whittled away in deference to the modern juggernaut, yet the markets themselves do not feel as if part of an archaic society disconnected from the city's current state. Their role in the city lies less in their architecture – though that can certainly play a role – than in their social configuration and cultural influence on the surrounding urban fabric.

URBAN ORGANIZATION / TRANSFORMATIONS

The influence of the market upon the city – and its reaction to the context surrounding it - becomes immediately apparent when considering the programmatic organization of the city. As magnets of commercial activity in rapidly growing metropoli, the market buildings themselves become the de-facto centre of larger market districts as their activity spills out into the surrounding streets; or, conversely, as the activity from the surrounding streets makes its way into the organization of the market building.

As a primary example, Lusaka's City Market building, is, at first perception, a rather uninspiring, utilitarian structure of repetitive modular vaults clad in corrugated sheeting (Figure 1). A sprawling structure the size of two city blocks, City Market was built under the pretences of institutionalizing the large informal economy which had previously existed on the site at the fringes of the central business district. The parti is simple and is obviously intended to be egalitarian: a vast expanse of uniformly sized stalls that market participants are free to organize themselves within. Although there is no overarching central control, some groupings of vendors become very apparent. Contrary to western conceptions of economic competition, sellers with identical merchandise group themselves together in order to create an identifiable area within the market, and to reinforce the social cohesion of the group. This form of self-organization would not be possible in a building with more delineated programmatic areas; hence the architecture of the facility itself has allowed the well-established social organization of the market to maintain its presence.

As a physical object, the architecture may leave much to be desired, and the references to the modern megalopolis as opposed to more traditional market housing can be questioned, but the building maintains a seemingly unintentional appropriateness when one considers that the same sort of social and commercial organization going on inside the building is happening at the city scale as well. The commercial program in the retail district fronting the market is fairly rigidly classified; shops selling similar items often occupy the same areas, and pockets of highly specific program develop (Figure 2). A phenomenon found throughout many African cities, the self-organization of entities into distinctive groups contradicts academic economic models by placing direct competitors in the same vicinity. Serving to create distinctive zones, this practice begins to develop social networks that, in the African city, often overpower the raw economic analysis typically found in more developed countries. Rather than seeing similar vendors as competitors, they are approached as collaborators in defining a sector of the city to promote the group collectively. This is a key distinction which propels the urban organization surrounding, and within, the market. In this way, the market building itself becomes representative of a larger urban context; a reference of the city's commercial activity housed in a single structure.

These forms of programmatic self-organization are characteristic of many African cities; a similar phenomenon is found in Accra. Immediately fronting the western edge of the Makola Market area is the almost manically commercial Ussher Town, a roughly gridded patch of moderately-scaled urban fabric and pedestrian streets. In occupying the built forms of Ussher Town, ground-level spaces are insufficient; small-scale market activity makes the climb upwards, making physically apparent the enormity of local commerce at play. It is not
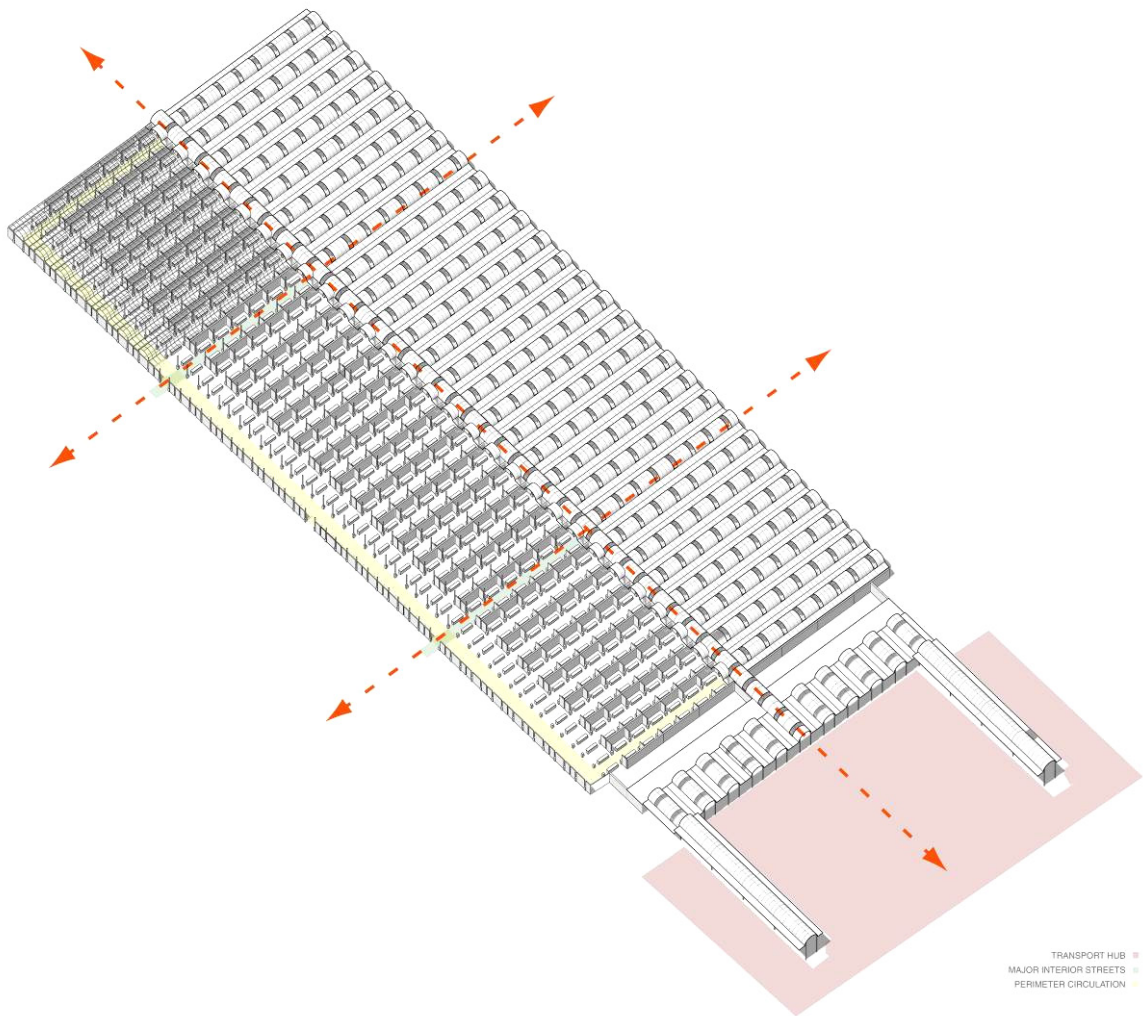
FIGURE 1: Lusaka's City Market. The front entrance acts as a transportation hub, yielding to an expansive, repetitive structure behind. Top: photo of the entry area; bottom: parti diagram showing transportation hub in front and major circulation throughout.
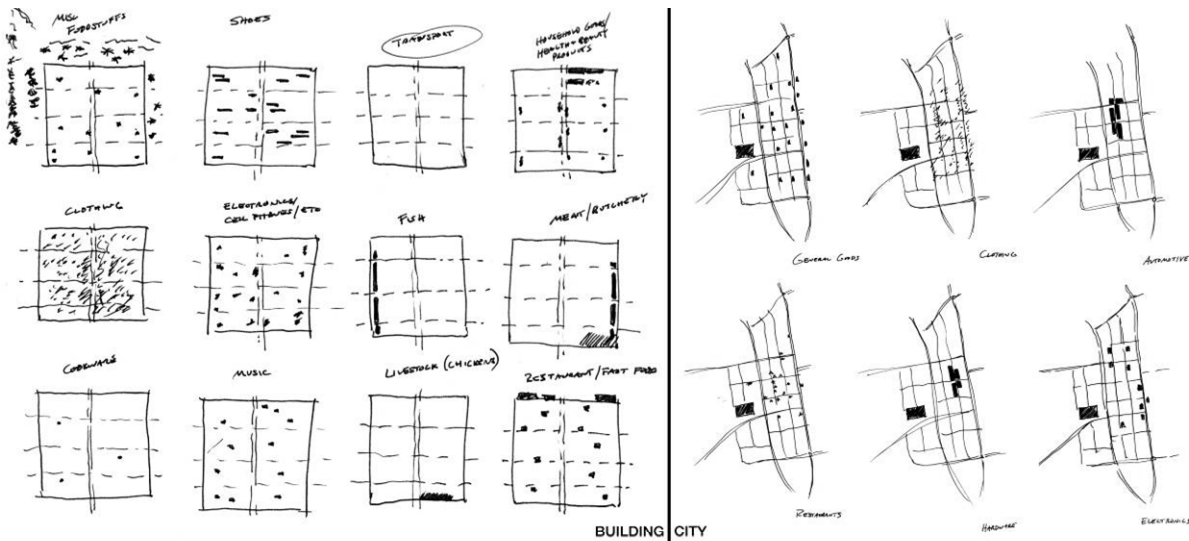
BUILDING | CITY

FIGURE 2: Sketches of program organization within Lusaka's City Market and the surrounding area. Vendors organize programmatic groupings at both scales; the organization of spaces within the building thus reflects the organization of the city, and vice versa.

uncommon to find shops and market stalls up to the fourth floor of buildings in the Makola area; this condition densifies to its utmost intensity around the market, and begins to dissipate as the distance from it increases (Figure 3). In a dense, overpopulated city, this sort of organization is somewhat predictable, but what is of interest here is that the physical organization is not just a result of overpopulation; there is a structure of social networks in place that allow upper-level retail to flourish in spite of the obvious impediment of vertical distance from the street. Upper level shops rarely differ from anything that can be found on the ground level (though the third or fourth floors are sometimes used for wholesale storage), a system which requires a well-established set of social arrangements between buyers and sellers to survive. The western model of location and price as commercial drivers is mostly absent; the majority of the goods sold by vendors in this area are basic items that could be found almost anywhere and are not always purchased by customers with any great frequency, yet there are hundreds, if not thousands of outlets from which to do so.

The heavy, uncontrollable foot traffic of the area belies an underlying spatial order developed by vendors at street level. Though not immediately apparent, the ordering of the street life is physically manifested in the multiple layers of commercial program banding between the central traffic flow and the built fabric itself. In some areas, market activity creeps into semi-private alley spaces (Figure 4), while market stalls on main streets are often organized into distinct rows, dividing the street into multiple zones of commerce and circulation. Informal stalls set up in front of building shops, fronting the heavily trafficked pedestrian street and defining an intermediate, secondary circulation zone behind them. A break in the ranks of this wall of informal program operates as a de facto filter point, creating access nodes to the more established shops within the buildings beyond, which themselves are usually spilling out into the street. Thus, thought the street is left entirely un-designed, the market participants begin to create spatial definitions that alter the normal form (and normal function) of the street, developing spaces that respond to their needs as vendors without obstructing the broader functioning of the city (Figure 5). Albeit a simple concept, the level of spatial sophistication demonstrated here is worth noting, even if it lacks the infrastructure or appropriately designed facilities to house it. In an environment where sensitive design may be lacking, the participants simply provide that order themselves, creating a framework to be used in future improvements to the urban fabric.

In all of these cities, the mere presence of the market has a transformative impact in various ways: increased economic activity, creating spaces of social exchange, bringing together diverse populations, and contributing to the organization of the city. Perhaps the best example of the generative urban influence of the marketplace is in Dar es Salaam. Having come of age as a rich tapestry of subcultures, the city of Dar has grown into one of East Africa's largest populations. Shortly after the First World War, the British temporarily established a base for their Carrier Corps just to the west of the city proper; this name was adopted by the Swahili natives as 'Kariakoo' (Kariakoo Market Corporation 1984:3), now a bustling, mixed-use neighbourhood forming the commercial heart of the city. Though colonial authorities conceived of Kariakoo as an exclusively African neighbourhood as part of an overall segregationist policy, it is today one of the city's most diverse neighbourhoods. The relocation of the central market from what is now the central business district (formerly considered the Asian / Arab quarter) to Kariakoo resulted in a substantial influx of Indian traders to Kariakoo as far back as the 1920's (Burton

MAKOLA MARKET ▪
INFORMAL MARKET STALLS ▫
1 FLOOR OF MARKET PROGRAM ▪
2 FLOORS OF MARKET PROGRAM ▪
3+ FLOORS OF MARKET PROGRAM ▪

FIGURE 3: Retail density around Makola Market, Accra. Near the market, market program becomes increasingly vertical, operating on several levels (white: 3 or more levels of program; light grey: 2 levels of program; dark grey: 1 level of program). This density of program begins to dissipate further from the market (shown here in green).

BUILT FABRIC   ALLEY NETWORK   MARKET ENCROACHMENT

FIGURE 4: Market activity encroaching into semi-private alleys in one city block near Makola Market, Accra. Left: built fabric; centre: alley network; right: extent of market activity in semi-private alleys, with informal stalls shown in green.

FIGURE 5:   Ussher Town, Accra. Stalls at the street curb divide the space of the street into primary and secondary circulation zones, with retail fronting each of them. Top left: overall street condition; top right: main circulation zone shown in colour; bottom left: small informal stalls; bottom right: secondary circulation and access to shops.

2002:209). The growth of the neighbourhood was then planned around the market, and by the 1960's formalized stalls had been built to house it. Rapid urbanization post-independence required a more substantial plan, and in the 1970's the decision was made to demolish the existing market and build a new structure.

FIGURE 6: Kariakoo Market. Dar es Salaam: a distinctive landmark at the centre of the neighbourhood.

Tanzanian architect Beda Amuli was commissioned to design the new building, and his powerful work anchors the role of the marketplace as Kariakoo's – and perhaps even Dar es Salaam's – undeniable centre (Figure 6).

Positioning the market at the centre of the neighbourhood has significantly altered the programmatic composition of the area. In the thirty plus years since the current Kariakoo structure was built, it has become the definitive commercial centre of the city and has reinvigorated the former African quarter with socio-economic life. Because the physical structure of the market has proven to be inadequately sized for the ever-expanding metropolis that constitutes the present realities of Dar es Salaam, much of the market activity is now mobile, thus extending the physical manifestation of the market beyond its perimeter walls. The territory around the market's perimeter contains substantially more program – albeit informally – than the market building itself (Figure 7). Hawking outside the market is officially illegal, but in the immediate vicinity it is difficult to enforce; this is an issue we'll return to later.

Essential to the identity of a central market is the influx of individual participants; the economic concentration of small-scale vendors would not be possible without a steady stream of transportation to and from the hubs that often form around the market. Goods coming from the hinterlands often arrive on public transport – in Dar es Salaam, an organized system of individually owned *dala dalas* (minibuses, vans, or other vehicles running regular routes, carrying passengers and small cargo). The *dala dala* stations, including one just outside the perimeter fence at the front of Kariakoo market, become activated by individuals continually on the move. As a response to this high volume but temporally brief presence of potential customers, the scale of shops and market stalls drastically diminishes near the station (and near other transport stops as well). With no time to linger, transport passengers act as market consumers only when looking for quick access to basic necessities. Hence, the scale of retail enterprises breaks down into ever smaller units, increasing in number as they decrease in size (Figure 8).

Akin to Dar es Salaam's *dala dalas*, an extensive system of privately-owned yet carefully coordinated minibuses converge on three stations in the city centre of Lusaka, one at the front of City Market. This brings a substantial number of ordinary, often impoverished Lusakans to the central business district, the population of which tends to be comprised more of well-salaried employees. Thus, the strata of society all converge upon the marketplace, reinforcing its presence as an active social and commercial centre for the city.
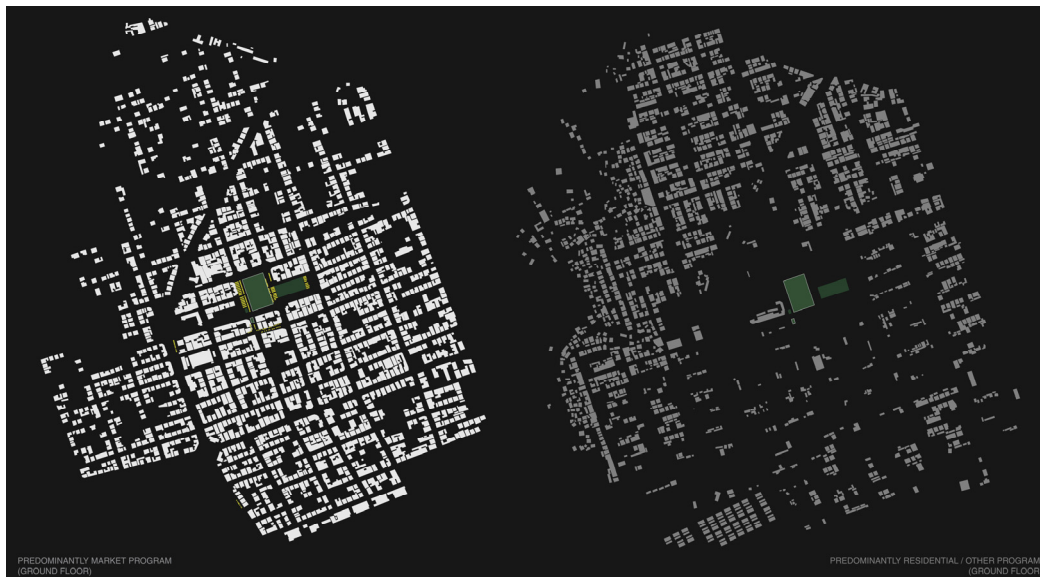
PREDOMINANTLY MARKET PROGRAM
(GROUND FLOOR)

PREDOMINANTLY RESIDENTIAL / OTHER PROGRAM
(GROUND FLOOR)

FIGURE 7: Market/retail density around Kariakoo Market, Dar es Salaam. The market is shown in green. Left: buildings with primarily market/retail program at ground level; right: buildings with other program at ground level. The increased retail density near the market becomes very apparent.

MAJOR TRANSPORT STATIONS
MICRO-SCALE RETAIL / MARKET
SMALL-SCALE RETAIL / MARKET
LARGER SCALE RETAIL
MAJOR TRANSPORT LINES

FIGURE 8: Transportation nodes and scale of market program, Dar es Salaam. Nearest Kariakoo Market (shown in green), the shops begin to reduce in scale as a response to the more transient customer base utilizing the various transportation outlets. Informal stalls are shown in yellow.

THE MAKING OF PLACE / DESIGNING WITH AGENCY

In the markets explored here, the ineffable sense of 'place' that defines great urban experiences remains strong – something increasingly anomalous in the context of a globalized, urbanizing world. Still connected to the land, still a part of the lives of the city's residents, and still filled with individual or small-scale vendors, the market anchors the local culture and creates an irreproducible locality.

The connection of the central market to the hinterland remains culturally relevant in that many of its vendors and participants are urban migrants whom have spent a good deal of their lives in villages or small towns. This is likely to remain relevant as long as large populations continue to migrate to urban areas and emerging cities. Unlike in heavily industrialized countries, where most goods are mass-produced and widely distributed, a good portion of the food and trades that are offered here are produced locally or performed individually. Often, the vendors themselves originally hail from the rural areas which produce the local food supply, having been lured to the city in search of employment and needing to find some way of making a tolerable living. During the years of most rapid urbanization in Lusaka, for instance, only about 3% of market vendors in the city were Lusaka natives, (Todd 1979:15), a share that has likely increased over the ensuing decades but is still likely to be a substantial minority. This is a common trait amongst these spaces, and it merely emphasizes the role of the market as a diverse urban centrepiece that drives the city. But more importantly, the market represents a space that – however drastic the differences – contains some familiarity to the vendors' homeland: a traditionally structured market, similar in function (though not scale) to what may be found in more rural areas or townships. This familiarity in an otherwise unfamiliar environment builds an important connection to the physical confines of the market, contributing to the overall order.

So ingrained in the culture is the social configuration of the market that previous attempts to alter it, whether inadvertent or intentional, have been met with furious resistance. In Ouagadougou, riots erupted over rumours that the market, having been shut down after a fire ripped through a section of the market in 2003, would be sold to foreign investors pursuing a more profitable redevelopment of the land (Dicko 2007). Residents preferred to see the structure sit unused as a memory of its former role in the city than have it razed for new construction (The momentum gathered behind these initial protests eventually led to a decision to rehabilitate the market, which reopened in 2009). Protests of similar vehemence occurred in Accra. The old Makola market structure, dating from the 1920's, was gutted by a devastating fire in 1993; its demise was used as a pretence for a comprehensive restructuring of the commercial activity. Citing the imbalance of food vendors to residences in the area, those selling foodstuffs were to be relocated to satellite markets being built up in more residential areas – partially a (somewhat simplistic) effort to keep the food vendors near the estuaries of consumption, but more broadly an attempt to alleviate traffic congestion around Makola. In spite of the renewal plans, or perhaps because of them, the market vendors held fast to their territory. Most resistors eventually capitulated, save for five individual vendors, dubbed the 'famous five', who refused to move their foodstuff operations to a satellite market and delayed the new market project for quite some time. This inspired the rest of the market vendors to retain their stalls and operate as they had been within the site of Makola market. As the groundbreaking for the new building approached, vendors continued to resist their slated relocation. Before construction was to begin, the Accra Municipal Authority (AMA) brought in the bulldozers to be used to raze the site well ahead of schedule, intended to scare the vendors into submission and facilitate their removal. Officials returned the next day to find vendors selling goods from atop the machinery (Dadey 2007).

Over time, more powerful authorities prevailed, and the building was constructed. Today, the site of the destroyed market has become a modern structure, described by the architect as having a "more orderly form" (Dadey 2007). In the likeness of many buildings around Ussher Town, it was designed with four floors of retail, adding a more modern facility with amenities intended to improve the quality of the market: shops with proper doors and windows, air conditioning, and fluorescent lighting. However, the modern amenities are isolating in the context of the contiguousness of the greater system of Makola market buildings; the air conditioning requires doors to remain closed, typically signifying in the local context that a shop is closed; individual rooms with windows reduce the surface area of market stalls immediately accessible to circulation, and walls between shops decrease the social cohesion between vendors carefully built up over time. As a result, many of the traders removed from the site have returned to the streets of the area, choosing to make their operations mobile rather than set themselves up in the new structure.

If defeated by the comprehensive re-organization and new construction at Makola, the force of the collective market vendors re-established itself towards the northern end of the area, which as part of the redevelopment was slated to become a major transport hub. The area provided for busses and a car park was quickly taken over by market vendors dislocated from their previous confines where the new construction was beginning

FIGURE 9:   Market vendors overtaking the planned transport hub in Accra, near Makola Market.

(Nazir 2007). While the site of the planned transportation hub does currently operate as a port of call for minibuses, its primary programmatic function is as an extension of the marketplace (Figure 9).

Unlike in Lusaka, where anti-hawking laws are rigorously enforced, the streets surrounding Makola Market in Accra and Kariakoo Market in Dar es Salaam are heavily commercialized, infusing the city with socio-economic life and, at times, causing severe congestion. Much of the chaos is caused by the ubiquity of hawkers. Due to unanticipated growth and insufficient design planning, the physical confines of the market buildings are inadequate to house such a volume of commercial activity. This, combined with the potentially more lucrative possibilities of selling at various points over time, forces many of the market participants to go mobile. The street activity generated by the hawkers defines the social and experiential characteristics of the area, creating a zone of frenetic flow and occasional stagnation which forms the unintentional heart of the city. In short, the activity it generates is the identity of the market and its surrounds. It is also illegal; every basket of transportable goods, every street-side stall, and every mat laid down on the sidewalk is in flagrant violation of city policy. While logistics of cracking down would simply overwhelm the police, it is worth examining the unintended results of such policies, were they to be implemented.

Rather than re-conceiving the space of the street to accommodate them, the hawkers are criminalized, putting the livelihood of an entire segment of the city's population in jeopardy. Though the primary motivation is to eradicate the informal economy (whose participants avoid paying taxes) and force the development of a more controllable system, efforts to reduce the congestion and perceived chaos characteristic of these spaces also

influences the decision-making. In the attempt to deal with this, authorities all too often prefer to destroy a crucial segment of the local economy – along with the way of life that comes with it – rather than undertaking the more difficult task of overhauling the physical environment to accommodate the practice of everyday life.

The inclination to turn towards legislative rather than design solutions assumes two things (albeit unintentionally): first, that whatever systems are currently in place are wholly undesirable and ought to be changed; and second, that the design of the physical environment has no bearing on the well-being of the city. Even if we accept the former (which itself is highly suspect), it does not necessarily produce the latter. The first of the assumptions is often tied to goal of (for lack of a better word) 'modernization', which in turn takes steps in moving African cities closer to their more globalized counterparts in much of the western world. However nebulous its exact definition, it can generally be agreed that 'modernity' came upon most western cities linearly, progressing through an extended period of time from what may be classified as a developing society to the post-industrial urban landscapes present in the contemporary city. In many African cities the same transformation, however, has been more sporadic; less of a continual movement through time from past to present than a simultaneous existence and fusion of the two. Today, with the urban market a telling description of it, the African city occupies a less easily classifiable position which, in some ways, is beginning to gravitate towards the urban and economic form of the west. For the residents, this is not universally positive; along with the welcome economic growth, it has the potential to usher in unfamiliar forms perceived as better simply because they are newer, but without producing any real social value.

The transformation to western models is exacerbated by the conception – held in many African cities – that current forms based on the traditional socio-cultural organization are inadequate, disorderly, even unsanitary – and that the way forward is 'modernization', which, in the realm of urban design policy, has frequently meant local participants have had to relinquish control and cede it to private developers or authorities. The underlying thesis behind this, misguided as it is, is that the culture of these places inherently breeds the challenges we now find in the developing urban world. Of course this is ridiculous, but it is an attitude that can shape very real perceptions of the city, particularly in under-infrastructured areas. Far too often, the development of infrastructure – which is a necessary undertaking to the improvement of any city – is symbiotically related to the entrenchment of authority – which can have varying results but in its most capricious form is simply a euphemism for removing design agency from the affected people and placing it in the hands of external authorities, whom themselves are often convinced that regulatory solutions would work marvellously if only they could be implemented with an authoritative exactitude. But, of course, regulating activity without addressing the source of the issues will only transplant the problem to somewhere else. In valuable urban centres, the continuing practices of market participants are pushed aside in favour of more controlled, programmatically isolated, and supposedly 'modern' developments. This sort of mindset reinforces the dichotomy between what is perceived as old and what is promoted as new, rather than accepting that neither can exist wholly on its own, or that the benefit of new built forms for the sake of being new is not always so clear, particularly when they are entirely incompatible with existing social structures.

With such a divisive approach, it ought to be little wonder that urban residents begin feeling the strains of a lost personal connection to the city; their cultural roots having been dismissed and their physical space transformed. Characteristic of a globalized form that many urban policy-makers aspire to, (often unwittingly), the physical space of the city becomes more of an imposition upon, instead of a contribution to, the social functioning of its inhabitants. As Hilton Judin states: "We are sad today because our personal past is no longer with us in any but a massively altered form. It is not perceptible to us in the city that shifts and changes with the enormous social movements currently underway. We long for this past in direct proportion to its disappearance. Our yearning for lost and unspoiled places is especially strong, as we perceive ourselves in a present over which we have little control" (Judin 2008:129-130).

As the physical environment is recreated in ways ordinary citizens have no influence over, the spaces they occupy begin to lose their personal meaning. In the globalized city, residents have essentially become passengers in the movement of social and economic changes taking place (and the physical environments they produce) rather than the conductors of it. As a similitude of built form creeps into to increasingly globalized localities, the distinct identity of place once taken for granted risks being reduced to an artificial nostalgia for what used to be a very real urban condition formed throughout time, connected to its past, a part of the lives of those within it. Globally, particularly in more developed nations, those connections are being severed, producing spaces with no particular attachment to place, to people, or to everyday life. Paradoxically then, we increasingly find familiarity in anonymity and alienation (Augé 1995:106), having lost any obvious connection to our own physical environment. To a large extent, the markets of urban Africa offer a counterpoint to this more general trend, having preserved their function while the physical space is transformed, but the potential to move entirely

towards that model is ever present.

In this context, it is important for those shaping urban form – architects, planners, designers, participants – to provide specific, appropriate solutions to the challenges facing the developing city. Perhaps the primary failure in the endeavour to design the developing city has been the unwillingness to make holistic considerations that go beyond infrastructure (on the functional end), or beyond individualistic expression (on the artistic end). If the architecture and urban form of the city is seen merely as unnecessary 'dressing up' rather than a substantive contributor to urban improvement, then of course it will quickly fall to the lowest of priorities. The relegation of design to luxury status is logical given this preconception, but it is also indicative of the utter disregard the design profession has shown towards its potential role in society, shrugging off the opportunity to generate better, more appropriate designs in the developing city. It is clear to most of us that design considerations in the developing city are often being ignored, or misconstrued as cultural rather than design problems; but what is not so clear, perhaps to any of us, is the extent to which architects and urban planners have been complicit in this misfortune. By privileging spaces of luxury over spaces of necessity, and by limiting its scope, the discipline of architecture has consistently missed its opportunity to participate in the sort of holistic design solutions that may actually bring about a design's maximum value. As soon as it is realized that regulatory solutions and policy are impotent without the necessary infrastructure; and infrastructure cannot be used to its fullest potential if the design of the spaces it supports is inadequate, it will be up to architects and planners to harness this tremendous amount of design agency and produce that value. Without restoring the discipline of design to a significant role, without empowering the participants of urban activity in the physical form of the city, design will remain a secondary consideration in an increasingly important challenge.

CONCLUSIONS

Though continuing traditional practices and maintaining spaces of local control, the markets of urban Africa continue to welcome the modernity that has, on occasion, begotten the loss of participants' control elsewhere. They occupy a unique position of self-supporting conflicts: traditional yet modern; collective but individualized; a bastion of anthropological place operating within the context of modernity without succumbing entirely to it. As cities move towards economic and urban systems already in place in much of the world, there is the danger of losing that status of place - something that is impossible to measure with any precision but plays a key role in the identity of the contemporary city. Again turning to Judin, the task in confronting this loss is "not simply to realize or uncover the real, but to encourage already shared cultural figures as elements on the way to even more fantastic forms, and thus to recognize them not as less or lacking, but as elements which another context is required to welcome" (Judin 2008:132).

The idea, then, is to pursue an urbanism which does not pit modernity against tradition, power against participation, or improvement against continuation, but rather one that fuses these qualities together, producing one without losing the other.

It is an urbanism that – whatever its faults – remains primarily controlled by its participants, not by external authorities. While there may be an inherent chaos attached to that, it is a system that allows the city the sort of rapid, improvised change that is characteristic of modern societies, yet does not disenfranchise those lower-income participants by excluding them from its gains. Thus, despite their challenges, African cities remain not a hellish existence of underdevelopment, but a beacon of hope that a more equal, participatory city may emerge from any perceived disorder. In this regard, they represent a more promising future for the urbanizing world than is often considered: a future which ensures that the city is not beyond control of its inhabitants, that time-honoured social networks need not be trammelled by modernity, and that development acts in support of local culture. The enduring presence of local economies, of self-managing entrepreneurs, of flexibility and responsibility, is a condition that is all but lost in urban America, for instance, where urban activity is largely dependent upon highly formalized cities built from an extraordinary wealth that few people or institutions could ever achieve. By contrast, these markets – arguably the heart of the African city – are still influenced from the bottom up; allowing (for better and worse) a dizzying number of merchants to make a meagre living through social structures that overpower the absolute authority of more globally-oriented models. And if we are to avoid the disappointments of the western city, this is a trajectory well worth studying. In this form of urbanism, the present will never be lost upon the population; changes in the shape of the participants' world will be made willingly by themselves rather than being forced upon them by external players.

In an increasingly connected world, much discussion has taken place on the status – or perhaps, the loss – of the distinctive 'place.' Functioning through hardship, the African cities encountered here maintain a distinct

identity, made apparent in the social and spatial configurations of their central markets. These are not places of anonymity or monotony. Even as many urban societies progress towards a concept of global modernity, these are places of unique and particular locality. If the modern city begets voices of solitude "made all the more baffling by the fact that [they] echo millions of others," (Augé 1995:103), these urban markets preserve the traditional, the local, and the real; the voices of participants sound not of placeless solitude but of cultural rigidity. As the modern market activity forms physical space, it comes across longstanding social and cultural traditions deeply rooted in each of these African societies, and the encounters within them sing of an experience largely lost to most of the western world. As soon as one recognizes it, the loss is palpable; there are few urban conditions with which to compare.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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