

THE FUTURE OF AFRICAN CITIES

Muhammad al Najib Brimah

Abstract

Too much time is spent nowadays analyzing the symptoms of urban problems in Africa, without looking at the root causes of those problems. This paper addresses the future of African cities from an African perspective. Urbanization in the context of the west is an aberration because its roots are found in the industrial development of the west. When an African speaks his native tongue, the whole street becomes his neighborhood plaza, playground and the market, even though the western method of planning did not make provision for this. When he speaks the foreign colonial language he only sees the street and not the plaza, the playground, the market or the rest of the neighborhood. From a purely ecological perspective, shanties and their inhabitants are a good example of the new, green urban metabolism. Despite their sanitary and security failings, they often have a social vibrancy and ecological systems that get lost in most planned urban environments.

Keywords:

Africa; traditional culture; urban mannerisms; city development.

Introduction: The Roots of African Urbanism

I would like to comment on academic and creative work on the future of African cities. Rehabilitation and planning proposals are made by many of my colleagues. Although very good papers exist, they are not innovative because their sympathies are along the lines of western models of city planning. I am not sympathetic to the neo-colonialist legacy inherited by Africans, illustrated in the development of cities like Abuja which spins out of control in its development, without cautionary reference to Lagos. The population of Abuja today is the same as London's — 7.5 million people — yet a little over a century ago London was the largest city in the world. In that time, Lagos was described as a golden island by the colonialists, with a population of less than 100,000 people and London had a population of a little over 1 million inhabitants. The academic discussion of such developments include extensive surveys of what others have said about the continent and ideas on what others have said an ideal city should be, with back-up references and footnoted quotations. Yet I find

the intellectuality of it to be based on western ideas and worldview. There are no references from an African point of view.

Reference should be made to Architect Theophilus Okin's book (1968), which was published by UNESCO when he was doing postgraduate work at Columbia University's School of Architecture and Planning, where I also studied. Okin was a good friend. He is from Kwara South. When last I spoke to him his work was focused in the Middle East. I also feel that reference should be made to the late Dr. Lambo's work on how urbanization impacts on the mental state of the African, with reference, in Lambo's case, to the Aro community.

Too much time is spent nowadays analyzing the symptoms of urban problems in Africa, without looking at the root causes of those problems. Urbanization is not natural to the African perspective; what is spoken about are the post-colonial problems of Africa. The seeds of this problem were planted during the colonial era because the structure of African towns can be looked at in two broad aspects. We have traditional African urbanization, not influenced by western styles: for example, if you take old or ancient cities like Timbuktu, Djenne, Mopti, Gao, Agades, Chingetti, Kano, Zaria, Katsina and Ilorin or Mombasa and Zanzibar in east Africa, you will find that they were influenced by a cubist spatial pattern. In terms of gaps between opposite structures, these are for foot traffic. Those for camels are a little wider and tend to lead into atriums, squares and plazas. The layouts of dwellings and economic activities are segregated. Economic activities in these cities are not daily routines but occur on fixed market days. The structures, forms and

organization of these towns are not influenced by western definitions of urbanization.

Major Traditional African Cities: War and Commerce

I have been to most of the major ancient historical Saharan towns and the capital cities of several countries lying between west and north Africa. I visited coastal north African towns and north African Sahel towns from Morocco to Egypt. In the west African Sahel I visited Nouakchott, Attar, Chingetti, Dori, Ouagadougou, Mopti, Timbuktu, Bamako, Severe, Gao, Tillaberry, Zinder, Tchiro, Agades, Niamey so I say all of the above from experience and from my knowledge of the history of this region and of ancient Egypt.

Urbanization in the context of the west is an aberration because its roots are found in the industrial development of the west. There was no urbanization in England, for instance, until the industrial revolution. Until this time people just lived in shires and homesteads. The landlords were the lords and no one had any rights because all that existed was the right of the landlord. With mechanization and the employment of people to operate in large productions, we had the magnet that began drawing people from the shires and homesteads to the centers where the mechanized economic bases were located. Self-interest and greed came in and the owners of these means of production began to draw people from the countryside and outlying shires to the centers of production.

The people who made the move then began to shed their rustic, down-to-earth and sincere mannerisms for the urbane, yet pretentious

mannerisms associated with this mechanized and unnatural environment. Gone were the humble mannerisms of the country-folk who stand with cap in hand before their employers, men and women who had a natural rhythm with the farms, the rivers and fields in which they had previously worked and who understood the unpredictability of the natural elements that controlled growth, death and the rebirth of plant and animal life. Instead, the people in the growing production centers could work with no inhibitions in front of a machine that asked them nothing, and was quite often predictable in the monotony of its working. There was no need for humility or inhibitions any more, and with this came the gradual development of the urbane manner of the city-folk; a culturedness so-called, which in actual fact was nothing but arrogance.

Urban mannerisms arise with machines because being urbane is a mannerism dialogue between the individual in front of the machine and the machine itself. Urbaneness is the mannerism of urban areas. Moving to such areas in search of work opportunities is urbanization. When this takes place the people crowd themselves into tenement-style living and lose their humble way of life, with closeness to their animals, the birds in the environment, the soil. They lose the free air space between individual dwellings. With no more gardens to separate them, the partition between neighbors becomes a single wall. Decency and shyness are eliminated and indecency creeps in. Overcrowding then breeds immorality and violence. Intuitive ecological awareness dissipates because their ecological footprints and their bio-capacity to absorb the adverse environmental impacts of the conditions under which they live are lost.

This is the root history of urbanization, as it began in the west. There are other urban centers in Africa, such as Ibadan or Kumasi in Ghana. The Yorubas are the most urbanized nation in the sub-region. Their settlements were not influenced by western patterns until the colonial era, even though the morphology of their towns are different than those of say, Kano, Zaria or Katsina. The architectural spatial forms found in the region between Ilorin and Bida are more rectangular, than cubic, and surround a courtyard. Although these two were conquered by the Fulani and Fulani emirates were established, they developed a distinct form, different from places like Kano, because of the environmental factors present in Ilorin and Bida. Their pitch and gable roofs, as opposed to the flat parapetted roofs found in Kano and beyond, are for hydraulic reasons, to shed rainwater.

These old African cities were founded on two reasons. The first is that they were gathering points for war and the second is that they were centers of commerce, not of industry. They were centers for the exchange of goods on specific market days and they became points of human settlement. Their internal zonings were along clan lines and they had no industrial activity zones centered on the use of machines. The communities were linked with artisan work places and schools. However, these were not schools for learning skills geared at specifically earning a living. They were schools of self-knowledge, for knowing the Creator and for learning the adab (the courtesies) of socialization.

The connection between Nupeland and Ilorin is Raba, in Nupeland, and Ilorin being prominent gathering points for war. Raba was the center

of power for Majiya, a Nupe prince engaged in a succession struggle with Jimada, another prince, after the death in 1805 of the Etsu Nupe. Majiya had allied with Mallam Dendo a Fulani scholar to oust his rival, Jimada. However Dendo's increasing popularity was a cause for alarm to Majiya and he expelled the scholar, who sought refuge in Ilorin and rallied forces from Shehu Alimi, the leader of the Ilorin jihad and also sought help from Shehu Usman dan Fodio, the leader of the Sokoto jihad to attack Majiya's forces. Ilorin was the rallying point for the joint forces before the defeat of the Nupe. The Nupe were routed in war by the Fulani in 1810.

The History of Ilorin and Traditional Culture

I will give a brief description of Ilorin as a point of convergence for Hausa refugees, Muslim Yoruba refugees, Fulani warriors, Kanuris, Kontagoras, Barubas and others. Ilorin was, and is still, divided into four quarters, with each quarter being under a war commander, a balogun, in the Yoruba language, or sarkin yaki, in Hausa. The baloguns are under the command of the emir, who appoints them. The emir himself is also appointed by the baloguns, who are the kingmakers. The baloguns within Ilorin town also have villages in their hinterlands, that they control, run by their respective representatives, who tend to be the next in line for the office of balogun. The emir appoints district heads within the emirates. The walled city is Ilorin proper and anything outside of the city gates is referred to as oko, the hinterland within the emirate. Jebba, for example, falls under the emirate of Ilorin. The settlement patterns of the inhabitants of each of the four balogun districts of Ilorin is an indication of the direction they originally

migrated from. The wall of Ilorin city was totally destroyed in 1892, in a battle between Ilorin and the Baruba (Borgu) who were helped by British troops. So we see that these old cities were war cantonments and this makes their structures different from those of western towns. They were places of refuge, war and later commerce and spiritual education. They were not cities born from the greed and consumerism of the western ethos.

The behavior of dwellers of such towns were based on correctness, meaning modesty and humility and the most humble of such behavior involved the removal of objects on the road that could be a source of injury, as said by the Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him. The primary source of such a human settlement begins with the home, with the focal point being the inner courtyard, which is restricted to the family living in that home. The audience chamber for guests is the entry lobby, or the zaure, in the Hausa language, which leads into the courtyard. Male guests to the house do not go beyond the zaure. The plaza, which is the focus of all the houses that belong to a clan, is the linking or connection point of the whole clan. The main market square is the tertiary plaza linking all the clan settlements in the town.

Market days shift from town to town and because these towns were founded as rallying points for war, they tended to be walled towns and these walls served as the peripheries or the limits of the towns. All of the above refers to walled towns from Ilorin northwards. The wall defines the traveler because the musaffir, the traveler is the one who has gone beyond the limits of the wall. For such a man or woman, the traveler, some of the demands of the Sharia

customs are relaxed, so, for example, prayers are halved.

African cities are the way they are today because of the patterns that colonization took. The peripheral countries of the coast had all their capitals along these coastlines, which developed as port towns, initially linked to the sources of slaves, meaning slaves as commodities, through footpaths. When railway lines were introduced these were linked by railway connection, then also linked by roads with the appearance of the automobile. The rail and road lines, after slavery, came to be linked to the sources of raw materials, meaning minerals and agricultural products. Communication lines were not planned to link town to town within hinterlands, but only to link sources of raw materials to the coastal port towns. It was therefore natural that when these countries gained independence, the people of the hinterland would find themselves with no opportunities, except by the movement to the capital cities where the few industries established by the colonialists existed, to look for work and take on the urbane manners of city folk. This change would come to have a negative impact on the humility and modesty that is the natural disposition of people of the countryside.

Village Depletion and the Growth of Megacities

In my book *Architecture for Afrikans* (Brimah, 1972), I predicted that by the year 2000, the majority of Africans would live in the few urban centers of their countries, in cities with populations of over 2 million people and above. We can see

that all the villages in the environs of Lagos and Badagry have now become a part of Lagos. The same holds for Kano, Kaduna, Enugu, Zaria and so on. The same has happened in Accra. The peripheries of all these towns are nothing but squatter settlements. The appalling state of many of today's African cities is the result of the colonially-induced pattern of rural-urban migration. All the models we use as templates for planning, for the restructuring of our cities, are part of our problem, not the solution.

London is a problem. In reality London is just a conglomeration of hundreds and hundreds of villages brought together by mechanization — the bringing together of the East End and central London and other parts. One of the worst slums in England, up to one hundred and fifty years ago, was the London Bridge area. Families, meaning hundreds of people, lived in the bridge towers and in tenements on the bridge. Conditions were so bad that people openly defecated on the bridge, in the vicinity of the bridge and corpses were everywhere. There were mountains of garbage, worse than what we find in Lagos today. London started as a small village in the Euston area, before the arrival of the Romans, and its chief was said to be a cannibal called London, who is reputed to have eaten some of the invading Romans.

New York, Paris, Hamburg and other western cities also tasted the kind of humble beginnings of a city like London. They all had their little core villages that grew as they became centers of manufacturing, and had their fair share of overcrowding, poverty, slum dwellings, dirt and disease. From the time Ford came up with his Model T automobile in Detroit, USA and inaugurated the manufacturing process that

turned out these everyman's cars, the automobile had a negative impact on the structure of American cities and their growth. This was in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries. Towns were now planned for cars and not human beings, and the towns lost their focal points as people spread out from the center. This impacted on services such as roads, electricity, water supply, drainage. The western towns we now emulate are actually the decadent result of their growth. They are not ideals of human settlement. They are breeding grounds for immorality, crime, high finance and its attendant decadence. It extricates interpersonal relationships and upholds individualism and sets down criteria for nuclear family type human settlements, by breaking down extended family structures.

Researchers into African urbanism become too engrossed with the Dajjalian western viewpoint. The ideal pre-colonial African settlement tends to be ignored, and the usual frame of reference is completely different from the African mental framework. Western towns, as they are being developed and structured today, serve the western way of life, the western socio-economic and immoral system. Globalization has now linked all the colonial territories of the old imperial powers, as part of this western system. Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, said the Dajjal has the letters K F R, written on his forehead. The Dajjal has one eye and this one eye means globalization, a single system that everybody is made to follow. This, in other words, is a single socio-economic system, a single moral system and a single pattern of human settlement. He, peace be upon him, also said at the end of time we will see a woman giving birth to her own mistress, the bare-footed, the wretched and shepherds exalting themselves

and competing in the erection of very high buildings, sky scrapers, and this is when we will see the naked, the deaf and the dumb being rulers of the earth. In this time he said living under the earth would be better than living on its surface. He also said when the time comes that we see two people fighting over a space that is no bigger than the size of a brick, that we should leave such a town. The latter is a prediction of the kind of overcrowding that we have in today's megacities like Tokyo, Mexico City or Lagos.

If we look at skyscrapers today we very clearly see the statement made above relating to vertical megastructures. For example, one recent skyscraper in the Islamic world has a 5 million square meter space (45 million square foot), is one hundred and sixty nine storeys tall, being built by 20,000 workers, to contain about 30,000 units of dwellings, meaning serviced residential spaces, also with shopping, business, hotel and leisure facilities. The facilities simply refer to the various communities in the skyscraper. A single studio residential space in this building will rent for US\$100,000 per annum. The building is a series of rectangular tubes of different heights, tied together, to serve as a single cantilever tube. As their heights increase the numbers of tubes reduce and elevators will have to be changed several times before reaching the top of the building. Each level is a different community. From the lobby at ground level to the topmost floor the tower is three-quarters of a kilometer high. Those who live and work in the building will be able to live for one year within it, without having to go anywhere because it is a town in itself, a settlement of homes. There is nothing that one wants to do that cannot be done there, whether this be going shopping or going

to the theatre. Anything that one can do in the borough of Manhattan, New York City can be done in this towering city. I have coined this term "towering cities" to describe these tube-like human settlements.

The amount of electrical energy and water to be consumed by inhabitants of this and similar skyscrapers will be more than what all of the over-20 million inhabitants of Lagos, one of the world's twenty megacities, presently consume. Lagos, Nigeria and Cairo, Egypt made the list of the twenty megacities of the world. These twenty megacities occupy only 2% of the earth's surface yet consume three-quarters of the earth's resources every year. The cities of the future, of the rich economies will be towering cities, or eco-tower towns, namely small-sized cities of about 40-50,000 families, like today's tallest skyscraper cities.

From the Kitab al Irshad of Allama Majlis, comes the hadith of Abu Jaafar al Baqi, a sixth generation grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him:

"When the Qayim, peace be upon him, rises, he will go to Kufa. There he will destroy four mosques. There will not remain a mosque on the face of the earth, which has a verandah except he will destroy it and make it flat. He will fix the main street and every (building) which juts out along the road will be destroyed. He will destroy the latrines and waste pipes (which jut out) onto the roads..."

As planners we must be dialectical. By that, I mean we must make ijtehad (deductions) and find reference points in our own source of knowledge and our own source-history, making that the template or the matrix when planning our human settlements. We must look at the

way our families are structured in planning our dwellings — the limits that are set between men, women and guests and the limits that are set even within the individual family, between parents and children, during periods of siesta. We have to look at the distances between the doors of our homes and our main activity areas, such as work places, places of worship and neighborhood recreational meeting points and neighborhood commercial activity areas. Parameters for restricting automobiles from the pedestrian corridors of the communities must also be established. Private courtyards and neighborhood plazas linking clusters of houses should be design elements in town planning proposals. Building heights must meet human scales, with none being taller than the minarets and church-bell towers of the respective neighborhoods. All these should form part of the criteria and design guidelines for planning human settlements in Africa.

Planning Education for Africa

When urbanists writing on Africa make reference to Frederick Engels, we must remember that Engels was from the elite of 19th Century Britain, those who owned the means of production that attracted rural folk to what became urban centers; places like Manchester, where his father had his factory. This is despite the fact that Engels was sympathetic to the cause of Karl Marx. Let me mention the work sponsored by the Club of Rome on the Limits to Growth, led by Dennis Meadows, the then-young Harvard computer wizard. The Limits to Growth painted a bleak picture of this planet earth if the greed for the exploitation of natural resources continued unsatiated. In 1972, I was an enthusiast of this book and bought one of

its first copies, when it was published. This book led me to become an advocate of bionic design and it led me to work on a handbook for the design of sanitary facilities for developing countries. The book involved text and graphics on how to construct Clivus compost toilets and rainwater harvesting for small towns and rural areas, for the World Health Organization, under the supervision of Architect Professor Sweeney, at the Architecture Research Center of Texas A & M University, College Station, Texas.

Planning education that basically perpetuates western town-planning principles is all that schools of architecture and planning teach all over the world. I am not saying that planning for drainage, water supply or electricity, or the calculation of the bending moment of a simply supported beam or the introduction of shear walls in a multi-storey building, for transmitting diaphragm loads should follow an African or European solution. These are universal scientific principles, which must be learned by all students and applied while planning and designing. However, spatial organization within an African setting must be guided by the culture and socio-economic patterns of Africans. As far as planning education is concerned, calling a town planning course urban planning is a misnomer because town planning is a freshly ground activity concerning the creating of a new human settlement, whereas urban planning is not the same.

We cannot plan a state of chaos, all we do is ameliorate chaos. What I mean is that urbanization is chaos because it represents a decadent stage of human settlement, where all rules governing sane human living have broken down and the collective patterns of extended

family networking have been taken over by the singularity of the nuclear family. This is the massing of different cultures and social behaviors into a denseness similar to black holes, in which all the laws of nature break down and light, meaning discrimination, the rules that govern correct behavior, is extinguished. The mannerisms of the urbane are pretentious. Survival is by the fittest and compassion is at a low ebb. For third world countries, what this means is that the infrastructural services that support the urban centers break down and human habitation becomes substandard. For this reason, there cannot be urban planning. There can only be urban restoration and preservation. The preservation aspect has to do with sustainable development. Thus urban planning, as a course, should fall under the purview of departments of architectural and historical restoration and planning. Urban centers can only be restored and rehabilitated. They cannot be planned. The only plan that can be done is the planning of the organization of its restoration. So changes have to be made in planning education so that urban planning becomes urban rehabilitation.

When an African is within his community and he speaks to another African, in his native tongue, the way he perceives his community, the rhythm between the people on the streets, petty traders, children playing and the buildings that define the shape of the neighborhood, is different from when the same person speaks a European language with his fellow countryman. When he speaks his native tongue, he does not see the rigidity of the arrogant western forms that invaded his community with the advent of colonialism. What he sees is the humility associated with the traditional forms and their rhythms of collective responsibility, which say:

We are all family in an extended framework as opposed to European individualistic or nuclear family structures, whose architectural statements manifest as the elimination of family compounds and neighborhood plazas. When he speaks his native tongue, the whole street becomes his neighborhood plaza, playground and the market, even though the western method of planning did not make provision for this. When he speaks the foreign colonial language he only sees the street and not the plaza, the playground, the market or the rest of the neighborhood. Everyone hurries into his house in a shroud of suspicions about the next person.

City Density and Shantytowns

Cities come and go but earth remains with its blue skies, its rivers, fauna and its green cover, no matter how pessimistic the western viewpoint is, as to earth's future. Earth will remain until the last day. Express flights are being planned to Saturn. Ways are being looked for on how to live in black holes and serious efforts are being made to produce antimatter. With this, construction methods are being planned on how to construct a universe, in the search for the Higgs boson, the elusive particle that physicists believe is responsible for the mass of the universe. No matter how many tunnels are built under the earth, for the smashing of matter with anti-matter and no matter how many ascents are made from the earth into their towering cities, when living on the earth has become a burden for humankind, they will still have to descend from those towers and come down to earth, going back to the basics, which is the fundamental way of living; living with humility.

The excerpt below from the New Scientist magazine of the 17th June 2006, titled ECOPOLIS NOW describes the dilemma of western planners (Pearce, 2006). It shows that the tools for the planning and design of cities in the hands of western planners have failed them. The failure of western cities is the failure of the western socio-economic system and its decadent culture. Culture is the behavior of people, the way they live — meaning the clothes they wear, the food they eat, the way they worship and how they organize their dwellings. Socialization is how they interact with each other and this stems from the culture they have. Their economic system is the result of their culture because an economic system is the exchange of goods and services. The goods are what they wear, what they eat. What they use are the things they buy and sell and these are things that stem from their culture. The services are the delivery elements in their social transaction.

When people abandon their culture and their socio-economic transactions, they lose their community structures and spatial patterns, things fall apart and immorality becomes the norm of a society that has lost its culture. This is what has happened to western people. The economic system adopted when they left their rural settings and were overtaken by the self-interest and individualistic greed associated with the urbanization they created, with its technology, that breaks down families and promotes immorality and the freedom to do as one wishes means that they have now reached the end of the city and cannot go beyond the towering eco-cities.

They now look for solutions in the poor zones. Unfortunately, the shanties in the cities of the third

world being referred to below are the decadent outcome of human settlements in the third world. They are not ideals. The shanties are only the manifestation of the disease called rural-urban migration resulting from the lack of economic opportunities for country-folk because economic activities are centered in the cities and these become magnets for drawing people from the rural areas. The future of African cities lies in the return to their own traditional settlements and drawing inspiration from their spatial forms and organizations, using them as templates, along with our planning and architectural skills, in the provision of infrastructural services with its sound structural, mechanical and electrical engineering supports, using materials that are native to us, in a current manner of usage, knowing its proper strengths and wear and tear specifications. We do not have any choice but to go back to our own socio-cultural basis of spatial neighborhood design because it is the neighborhood that makes human settlement.

Below is the New Scientist excerpt (Pearce, 2006):

"Dense cities heat the air around them. Stone, concrete and asphalt absorb more solar energy, and reflect less, than natural surfaces such as grass, water and trees, so they pump up the temperature at night. Vehicles, air conditioning and electrical appliances also give off heat, while tall buildings cut down winds that can disperse the heat. So cities are usually about 1 °C warmer than the surrounding countryside during the day, and can be up to 6 °C warmer at night."

"The denser the city, the worse the effect. In hot climates, where many of the world's super-dense megacities are found, air conditioning is used to keep the indoor temperature bearable. On a hot day in many of these cities, air conditioning can consume more energy than any other single activity."

"To cut this huge use of energy, many cities are taking steps to counter the heat-island effect by redesigning buildings to reduce direct sunlight through windows, increase ventilation, cool the air with water fountains and cut energy absorption by painting external walls white. Planting trees along the streets can help reduce the air temperature too. Up to 400 liters of water can evaporate from a single tree every day, cooling the surrounding air. In Miami, researchers found that summer electricity bills were around 10 per cent lower in neighborhoods with more than 20 per cent tree cover than in neighborhoods with none."

"While planners look at how to cut back the energy consumption of big cities, at the other end of the scale are shantytowns — organically evolved and self-built by millions of people in the developing world without a planner in sight. These shanties meet many of the ideals of eco-city designers. They are high-density but low-rise; their lanes and alleys are largely pedestrianized; and many of their inhabitants recycle waste materials from the wider city."

"From a purely ecological perspective, shanties and their inhabitants are a good example of the new, green urban metabolism. Despite their sanitary and security failings, they often have a social vibrancy and ecological systems that get lost in most planned urban environments."

"So perhaps something can be taken from the chaos and decentralized spontaneity embodied in shanties, and combined with the planned infrastructure of a designed eco-city. Cities built without extensive high-rise can still be dense enough to make life without a car profitable, and they can retain the economies of scale needed for the new metabolism built around efficient recycling of everything from sewage to sandwich wrappers. At the same time, they need to remain flexible enough for people to adapt them to the way they want to live. The key is to put people and ecology joint first."

Conclusion

Western countries speak from only one side of their mouths when they talk about sustainable development. The wealthiest nation, the United States, imposes sustainable development guidelines on some others, especially those it donates so-called development grants and funds to, yet refuses to ratify the Kyoto Treaty on the environment. Ensuring sustainability of the environment is not simply a matter of latching on environmental impact assessment guidelines on every project while the engine of greed that drives the present world still grinds. Sustainability is to leave things as you find them and maintain them in order for others to find them in the state that you met them. There is the case of a hundred-year old man whom Sayyidina Umar, the second caliph, found sweating and working in the fields, planting wheat. He asked him why he was going through all the trouble and the old man replied that he found wheat when he came to the world and had to continue planting in order for those coming after him to also find wheat. The sustainable city is where the psyche of the inhabitant is not under siege, his mental state is balanced and his socio-economic and cultural state, health conditions, his spirituality, his ecological footprints and the bio-capacity index of his environment are all balanced. These are the parameters by which sustainable human settlement can be defined and not by taking a cue from the prevailing conditions of the shanties of the third world, which are simply symptoms of bad planning.

Editorial Note

This unpublished manuscript by the late architect and urbanist Muhammad al Najib P. Brimah was received by the Editors from his widow, Mrs. Halima P. Brimah in February of 2008, shortly after her husband's decease. We have decided to publish it with only minor revisions, so that its message will not be lost to world urbanism. There are many references to topical African architecture that may be confusing to Western and other non-African readers. We have decided not to cut any of this material, however, hoping instead that African readers will profit from reading the situations and case examples the author was referring to. Najib Brimah often writes in anger and says controversial things, in response to what he sees as a totally wrongheaded approach to his continent's severe urban problems. We decided to let the author have his final say, in his own words.

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Najib P. Brimah

Najib P. Brimah, or Muhammad al Najib Peregrino-Brimah (1947-2007) was born of Nigerian parents in Accra, Ghana, where he spent the first seventeen years of his life. He studied architecture at Texas A & M University, College Station, Texas and Columbia University, New York, obtaining a master's degree in health facilities design in 1974. After working with Max O. Urbahn and Associates, a New York-based architectural firm, he established a practice in Lagos, Nigeria. Among his designs is that of the Nigerian national mosque in Abuja, Nigeria's capital. He greatly admired the work of Egyptian architect Hassan Fathy, and dedicated the last fifteen years of his life in a sometimes uphill battle promoting earthen architecture as an avenue to delivering quality housing to the urban poor, and affordable housing to the not-so-poor. His deepest passion though, was the quest to understand the structure of the universe. He engaged in conversation with a number of physicists, including the late David Bohm. Najib P. Brimah was very much in sympathy with Prince Charles's ideas.