

Khartoum:

A Portrait of an African Colonial City

Dr. Idris Salim ElHassan*

Abstract

Colonialism in its different forms and patterns sought to penetrate all dimensions of the lives of the colonized peoples. The colonial project aimed at usurping their resources through control of the economy, politics, social relationships and culture by obliterating their identity. This colonial legacy is clearly epitomized in the colonial city – as cities are the focus of power and wealth – in Africa and elsewhere. In this article, the case of Khartoum, the capital city of Sudan, exemplifies how the British planning policies of the city reflected the colonial project to suppress, reconstruct and transform the identity of the Sudanese subjects. This is explained in terms of the colonial rule's policies of bureaucratic administration, management of space, control of trade and labour, introduction of western cultural influences and pursuit of racial segregation and social stratification in Khartoum.

Key words: Colonialism, colonial legacy, colonial city, Khartoum, Sudan

مستخلص

هدف الاستعمار الغربي لنهب الموارد البشرية والمادية للمجتمعات الإفريقية – كغيرها من الشعوب الأخرى – وذلك بالسيطرة عليها عسكرياً وسياسياً واقتصادياً

*Associate Professor, Disaster Management and Refugees Studies, International University of Africa.

Email: idreselhassan@yahoo.com

وثقافياً لتحقيق مشروعه الحضاري، ولجعل الحضارة الغربية سائدة على ما عداها من حضارات أخرى. وتعكس المدينة الاستعمارية كل ذلك بجلاء إذا نظرنا إليها من حيث حمايتها وتخطيطها وتركيباتها الاجتماعية ووظائفها وطرق إدارتها ويستعرض المقال هذا الموضوع متخذاً مدينة الخرطوم كمثال للمدينة الإفريقية في ظل الاستعمار

Introduction

Colonialism in its different forms and patterns sought to penetrate all dimensions of the lives of the colonized peoples. The colonial project aimed at usurping their resources through control of the economy, politics, social relationships and culture by obliterating their identity. Colonial legacy is clearly epitomized in the colonial city – as cities are the focus of power and wealth – in Africa and elsewhere. In this article, the case of Khartoum, the capital city of Sudan, exemplifies how the British planning policies of the city reflected the colonial project to suppress, reconstruct and transform the identity of the Sudanese subjects. This is explained in terms of the colonial rule's policies of bureaucratic administration, management of space, control of trade and labour, introduction of western cultural influences and value standards as indicated by their pursuit of racial stratification and social segregation in Khartoum.

Generally, complex historical challenges are not met by cities equally, as each city has its own personality and capacity of efficiency within a specific context. To better understand and analyze the responses to urban challenges, configurations of natural, cultural, and socio-political factors, as well as of the historical past and tradition of each city must be taken into account. In the case of Sudan, the paper posits, the colonial experience could be cited as a major factor, among other internal factors and developments that was responsible for

laying the basis for the weak social integration in the case of Khartoum.

Urbanization and colonialism are the two most important factors which have shaped many African and other societies in the contemporary world (King, 1990). The two elements are closely interlinked (Coquery-Vidrovitch, 2005). Western colonialism sought to dominate and control other non-Western peoples by capturing and subjugating their main urban centers in order force them to conform with the colonial project. The ultimate objective of the colonial powers –other than usurping the natural and human resources-was to turn out submissive colonized subjects who would be imitations of the colonizer’s style of living and culture, yet with an inferior political and social status. The present paper aims to explicate the interrelationship between the two aspects- urbanization and colonialism – by giving a portrait of the colonial Khartoum, capital city of Sudan.

Some scholars consider urban revolution to be as important as the other major revolutions in human history- such as agriculture and industry. Urban settlements have, for centuries and across different continents, contributed tremendously to the shaping of social and cultural institutions. They have been throughout history places for wealth, social intermixing, political stability/instability and cultural creativity (Toynbee, 1973). Cities are the locus of most economic, social, demographic, political and environmental transformations. In our contemporary world cities have mostly been the spearhead for achieving modernity and development (UNFPA, 2006; UN-Habitat, 2006; Cohen, 2004). Nonetheless, recent studies have also shown that the cities today are too often places of exclusion, racism, xenophobia, violence, and social, economic, political and cultural marginalization. This cannot be better demonstrated than by the colonial experience where the root causes for such conditions at present could be traced.

The present article focuses on the colonial history of Khartoum to examine the issue of urban social cohesion in terms of how social structures and institutions relate to the prevalent ideology within a given socio-economic, historical context; viz. the colonial period.

Since place and time have great impact on the physical planning and social dynamics of urban settings, the article presents a brief outline of Khartoum with particular emphasis on its colonial past. But this will come after making some general statements about the nature of colonialism and its relationship with urbanization especially in Africa.

Colonialism in general refers to when a nation extends its influence and power over other nations, usually through military means, and annexes them as part of its possessed territories. The main goal of colonialism is to exploit the lands and other natural and human resources of the colonized societies for the benefit of the colonizer. The aggregate policies of the colonialist project in the political economic, social and cultural spheres result in depriving the dominated people of their various capacities as well as their history and identity. Hence, the local and indigenous traditions and institutions are relegated to an inferior position and supplanted by ones alien to the local people. In this way, the systems of government, production, values and beliefs, education and cultural practices are controlled and transformed to serve the purposes of the colonial project (Kohn, 2011; and Simon, 1992). Since the colonial state is both coercive and extractive, it- to maximize its benefits- usually runs on very little budgets (the colonial intent was to 'rule on the cheap' (Sharkey 2003).

Moreover, the colonial authorities in order to facilitate their political policies of divide and rule and ease their administrative tasks they require to employ foreign groups to run the economy, and turn out cheap local functionaries for clerical work. All these strategies,

policies and tactics were used in all colonial territories in Africa, Asia and other places. However, this was markedly clear in colonial urban centers where the colonial power and influence concentrated. For, as Yeoh (2001:457), noted "...the centrality of the historical experience of colonialism and the weight of Eurocentric culture is more clearly felt in the cities and ports of colonial societies". In the entry on the 'colonial city' Britannica Online Encyclopedia (2012) has this to say: "The colonial relationship required altering the productivity of the colonial society in that its wealth could be exported to the core nations, and colonial cities centralized this function." It continues, "[t]heir (colonial cities) major role was to house the agencies of this unequal relationship: the colonial political institutions- bureaucracies, police, and the military- by which the core ruled the colony, and the economic structure- banks, merchants , and moneylenders- through which wealth drained from colony to core. " In other words, and, according to Simon (1992:22-23), colonial cities acted as "centres of capital accumulation and political, military, and social control...[with] power, authority and investment capital ...derived from ...and owed to...the distant core."

The above colonial processes have left their marks on the architecture, urban layout and planning of the colonial cities, which, in turn, found expression in the stratification system observed in those cities. It is reported that perhaps the major research area of urban studies in Africa is devoted to the impacts and legacies of colonialism on the continent's cities (Myers, 2011). In Africa selection of capital cities by the colonizers was not always predicated on economic priority; in some cases the political, administrative, or military reasons became overriding. In whatever case African colonial cities mostly exhibited common features, which reflected the political, military, cultural and moral attributes of the colonizer. By contrast, the identity, traditions, social institutions and modes of living of the colonized

were sidelined and treated as not worthy of consideration in formal settings. This unequal relationship of power structure in all of its facets was practically applied through the segregation system separating the colonizers (and those associated with them) from the colonized locals in residential areas, social ranking and communication, and by differential treatment. One of the best depictions of divisions existing in colonial cities was given by Fanon in the following piece: Frantz Fanon, in his oft-cited critique of colonialism in "Les Damnés de la Terre":

"The colonial world is a world divided into compartments of native quarters and European quarters, of schools for natives and schools for Europeans... The colonial world is a world cut in two. The dividing line, the frontiers, are shown by barracks and police stations. In the colonies it is the policeman and the soldier who are the official, instituted go-betweens, the spokesman of the settler and his rule of oppression. The settler's town is a strongly built town, all made of stone and steel. The town belonging to the colonized people, or at least the native town, the Negro village, the medina, the reservation, is a place of ill fame. It is a world without spaciousness, men live on top of each other. The native town is a crouching village, a town on its knees, a town wallowing in the mire.

Quoted by King (2009: 1-2).

The remaining part of the paper will show how the above mentioned colonial urban policies and characteristics of colonial cities in Africa (cf Abu-Lughod, 1980; Wright, 1991; Nevanlinna, 1996; and Çelik, 1997) tally with the picture of colonial Khartoum¹.

¹ There are a number of works which discuss the historical foundation of Khartoum and the different planning stages it has seen; see, for example, McLeam, (1910); Abbadi, (1974); Edwards, (1922); Abu

The most important historical event that has shaped the modern Sudan as a whole and Khartoum in particular is the colonial experience, which had restructured the country's social, economic and political bases. The British colonization of the Sudan (1898- 1965), like all other imperial powers at the time, rested on satisfying the empire's needs for raw materials for their industries and opening up of new markets. In the organization of the governing system neither the political, economic or social colonial system was like the Turkish rule (1821-1885) that preceded it. The British colonial government was filled with graduates from Oxford, Cambridge, LSE, and Edinburgh, many of whom were decorated with academic and athletics honors. The rationality of the administrative system of provincial governors, district commissioners, inspectors and native administration was based on implementing the two guiding colonial principles of "law and order" and "civilizing mission", at minimal human and financial costs. Accordingly , the introduced setups in the economy (Gezira scheme for cotton), education (to turn out functional administrators), transport (railways for military purposes and transport of raw materials) and new urban centers (Atbara, the railways HQs, and Port Sudan, the main sea port for exports and imports) were primarily geared to meet the needs of the colonial system. The highly centralized British rule was epitomized in the capital city, Khartoum, where the Governor General and his three secretaries (Judicial, Financial and Administrative), in addition to a small military force, some non-British foreign nationalities, and local junior functionaries were located.

The geographical and historical rationale for selecting Khartoum as Sudan's capital by the colonialists and their colonial policies, which followed, had considerable bearing on its demography, forms of social

sin and Davies (1991); al-Agraa (1985); Doxides (1959); Mefit (1974); Ahmed, (2000); Arkel, (1949); Walkby,(1936); Sulieman, (1966); and Shuqair, (1967).

interaction, urbanization dynamics, and modes of living and general development. Originally, as Daly and Hogan (2005:104) remarked, "Whether primarily for its symbolism, its hallowed status as the place for Gordon's 'martyrdom', there was no doubt that it would be rebuilt and that it would be the seat of power." Days after the defeat of the Mahdist army in Karari in 1898, memorials and flag-raising were held in the ruins of Khartoum. Weeks after plans were laid for its reconstruction (Daly and Hogan, *ibid*). Daly and Hogan described the building of Khartoum as a superb example of what role a colonial city was designed to play. This, among other things, is well illustrated by the interlinkages between its physical planning, architecture, social organization and modes of interaction between its residents. It was a planned city with roads, intersections, vistas, and a cornice. More importantly, it was decorated with monumental buildings as exemplified, for example, by the Venetian-inspired Governor-General's palace. These were followed by barracks, government buildings and officials' residences and. It was filled with foreigners of all sorts and only few Sudanese were allowed to stay to serve the colonial categories. The number of the Sudanese increased later when slums and industrial areas came into being. As such, the city was strikingly foreign and resembled a colonial city that was in but hardly of the Sudan (*ibid*).

The colonial system used different tactics to achieve its basic goals. For optimum exploitation of the resources in the colonized countries, it needed to attain full control through military, civil and administrative means. In the case of Khartoum, being their stronghold center of power, security came first.

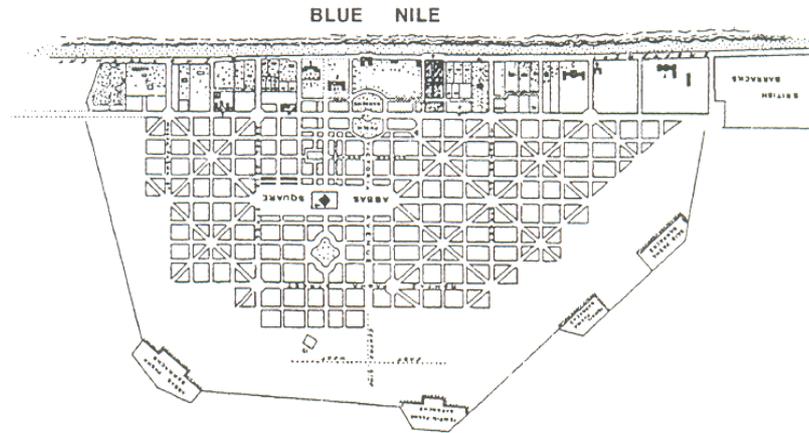
Priority of security concern in Khartoum was reflected in the layout of the city, which was made under the personal direction of Kitchener, "and this layout was primarily designed to satisfy military requirements". One of the most striking features was Khartoum's long

diagonal streets, which divided the town up into a series of Union Jacks. "These diagonal streets provided at their intersections road points from which machine guns could command large areas, and afforded easy access from one part of the town to another" (Sarsfield-Hall, 1933:8; Sandes, 1937:482) For extra security, Khartoum was semi-circled by a string of army forces' barracks to rebel any attacks from the southern parts (see fig.1).

With regards to the physical layout, the British colonial administrators divided the city into clearly-marked residential zones: a) one "for occupation by Europeans or by persons occupying houses of a European pattern and living in accordance with Europeans standards"; b) " for residential houses of a second class quality"; c) " native Lodging Areas –cantonments - somewhat outside the town...for native laboring classes"; d) an area outside the town for " occupation by persons engaged in Noxious Trades [original]" (Sarsfield-Hall,1933:9). The four areas were designated, following the practice of the British colonial administration in Africa, as classes of residential land which determined "the type of housing that can be constructed in different areas (e.g. plot size, lease terms, land fees and taxes and the quality and permanence of building materials), and service provision" (Njoh 2003); and Paltuniano,et al , 2011)

The criterion used for the zoning was based on the economic status of an area's inhabitants. Class 1 corresponded to affluent areas with large plots, Class 2 to a middle-class group using permanent and modern materials and Class 3 to low-income groups using sub-standard materials; and Class for the remaining categories using unspecified materials. The system was meant as a segregation policy that kept the poorest on the outskirts of the city.

Figure 1 Map of Old Khartoum surrounded by army barracks



The composition of Khartoum's population exhibited, like any cosmopolitan place, heterogeneity; i.e. its groups' formation and interrelationships were not based on tribal, ethnic or geographical affiliation². Khartoum has been a stratified society with marked variations in the ranking of its populace. At the top come the British and other Europeans (mainly Greeks, Italians, Armenians, and Jews) as rulers, professionals, representatives of international companies and trade, missionaries and owners of key businesses. In the second category comes the *Shuwwam* (those mainly of Lebanese and Syrian origin), then the Egyptians, engaging in supporting functions in the state bureaucracy and running important services facilities such as the railways, communications and banks; they also worked as skilled laborers. Generally, all non-British performed matters that were necessary to run the colonial system. The third category comprises

² A good description of colonial Khartoum and composition of its inhabitants could be found, for example, in Sarsfield-Hall (1933); Abu Salim (1991); Hamdalla (1949); Sandes (1937); and Saad (2006).

Sudanese dignitaries (religious, community and tribal leaders), big merchants specializing in local commerce, government officials (*affendiyya*), working classes in public and private sectors, and petty traders and casual laborers. At the end were non-Arab Sudanese (e.g. Nuba) who came from parts other than Northern Sudan, and non – Sudanese of African origin (e.g. Fellata from West Africa and Ethiopians). All of these engaged in menial and undesirable jobs (such as domestic servants, toilet cleaning and prostitution). The government then applied strict regulations to control the mobility of the latter groups so as not come to Khartoum without official approval to do so through enforcement of acts like Closed Districts Ordinance (Hamid, 1996: 22).

The above – mentioned groups lived and interacted in somewhat exclusively demarcated spaces with varying residential arrangements and working conditions congruent with their political and socio – economic positions. The British worked and lived in areas adjacent to the Blue Nile in spacious places with gardens and wide streets on the eastern side of the city. In the words of Sarsfield-Hall (1933:26) for this part of the city “Khartoum might be described as a Garden City as nearly all the better class residences are surrounded by pleasing gardens which contain grass spaces, tennis lawns, flowering shrubs, flowers and small plantations of citrus trees.” They were provided with best amenities and services. Among the British themselves, there was marked social differentiation according to the political/administrative ranks and social background. For example, ordinary Britons (e.g. junior staff or military personnel) were not allowed to enter the Sudan Club which is an exclusive place for high-ranking officials and their families. Other Europeans also lived in big houses and worked in places nearby the British; they as well had gardens and own space for their social activities, but of lesser grade than that of the British. Organizations, community schools, churches,

clubs and other entertainment facilities. Important persons of the European community could intermix with the British socially up to a limit. In all cases the actual political and administrative powers were in the hands of the latter. The two European categories were separated from other non-European communities by the broadest road in the city- Victoria (presently, the Palace Street)- which divided Khartoum into two areas, east and west. West of Victoria lay the central market and workshops. Socially and physically separated from the British and Europeans, but adjacent to the market, resided the *Shuwwam* followed by the Egyptians (mainly Copts) who also had big houses, but comparatively smaller than those of the governing elite, in a second class area. Sudanese dignitaries, big merchants and government officials lived in the south – western part of the town in good houses but whose standards were far below that of the first and second class areas, and had no gardens or good amenities . Their social communication with the former categories was limited to formal settings only. Their sociability was confined within the group of their own countrymen with its sub – divisions.

Following the colonial era's urban planning policies aimed at keeping the poor out of the city " to live their own lives in accordance with native standards" (Sarsfield-Hall,1933). Therefore, the working classes (in fact casual laborers) resided in far away *deims* (cantonments) in houses with only one or two rooms (as the workers were mostly bachelors). The cantonments were not well planned or provided with adequate water and sewage systems or any other public services. The last category, being socially stigmatized, was excluded residentially and socially and had no interaction with any of the other groups except for casual encounters during the process of carrying out their jobs. They were given small plots in faraway squatter areas with no adequate services or amenities (Fawzi, 1954).

Nearby suburbs, e.g. Burri (Barclay, 1964) and Tuti (Lobban, 1983) were envisaged to be accessible to the town and were meant to be occupied by "better class natives" (Sarsfield-Hall, 1933). A number of far-away villages at the outskirts of Khartoum – e.g. Kalakla, Jabra, al-Salama, Jeraif etc.- were not part of its stratification system because they lived their own traditional life, and the only thing that connected them to Khartoum was- as farmers and agro- pastoralists- selling their vegetables produce, milk and animals to the locals and buying cash commodities and necessities from its markets (Fawzi, 1954)

Khartoum society, on the other hand, as explained, was stratified on the basis of socio-economic differentiation set forth by the British colonial system under the term 'classes'. Kinship was not basic to neighborhood relations, except for villages surrounding old Khartoum. The extended families among the Sudanese residents were mostly not localized and did not stay together for generations in the same house. The majority of Khartoum inhabitants did not have their own homes, so they moved between rented houses from one area to another. However, wealthy persons like wad *al-Mashliyyah* or wad Ahmed were renowned for owning more than one hundred houses each; something that is unimaginable in the case of old Omdurman (national city across the Blue Nile from Khartoum). Sudanese Khartoumites joined each other as extended families only on certain occasions as their small houses could not accommodate large numbers of people. Neighborhoods were constituted of temporary groups of multi-tribal and multi-ethnic origins unified by their economic position and profession more than by anything else (Fawzi, 1954). Football clubs, for instance, and unlike Omdurman, were established along the basis of profession or community belonging; e.g. Neel football club was known as the *atrak's* (of Turkish origin) team.

The parts north of the railways were where foreign communities, wealthy and middle rank Sudanese officials resided and led a different style of life from that of the poorer sections of their Sudanese countrymen (Hamdalla, 1949; Abu Selim, 1991). In the areas north of the railway line where Europeans, other nationalities and better-off Sudanese dwelled one that the kind of shops, merchandise, clubs and entertainment places of a kind not available in the other sections of the city or neighboring Omdurman city. For example, there were bars named Lord Byron and GB (Great Britain), two important night clubs (St. James and Gordon Music Hall), Sudan Bookshop, animal zoo, Grand Hotel, Sweet Rosanna café, Papa Costa bakery, Morris Goldenberg for optics, Vanian variety shop, Blue Nile cinema... etc. In the mid thirties of the last century an application was even filed to open a skating rink! (NRO, 6/1/1 , 1930-1935). All former places were frequented by the members of the foreign communities and *affendiyya* and educated Sudanese, i.e. the different strata of the middle class, or the middle class in the making in the case of the Sudanese elites. An official red area (Abu Saleeb) was demarcated in the middle of the city to cater for the needs of the numerous unmarried foreigners and migrant workers and soldiers. International dance bands, fairs and circuses used to visit the city quite frequently. All these places and events were closed or exclusively designated for Europeans and non-Sudanese of high social status. Khartoum Sudanese families could only window shop in the "European" section of the market place (*souq afranji*) and go on evening walks enjoying the scenes of the beautiful gardens and parks. However foreign communities – as mentioned - had their own private social and sports clubs (e.g. Sudan Club, the Greek, Italian, Armenian, Syrian and Egyptian clubs) to which only occasionally some high-ranking Sudanese were invited.

Socially speaking, Khartoum was very liberal; and it accepted forms of behavior that were not tolerated in other proper

Sudanese milieus or even urban places like Omdurman. Moreover, the city centre was outward- looking, with clear western features. The nationals (officials and merchants) occupied the third class rank and their destiny very much depended on the British colonialists and the groups attached to them. With no ideology, religious or otherwise, to unite them, the early elites of the nationalist movements tapped different literary, historical and political Egyptian, Indian, Islamic, and Arab sources to forge a new resistance path. Despite this, a number of forums such as the social clubs, tea parties, and literary societies, played an important role for the exchange of ideas between the Sudanese elites and the British rulers which helped to water down the tensions between the two sides. The best example for this was *dar al thaqafa'h* (Sudan Cultural Centre)³ where lectures and discussion forums were held to debate issues from a cultural perspective. The educational system was another venue for close interaction between the British colonialists and the educated Sudanese. Gordon Memorial College was established in 1902 to, on one hand, commemorate the death of Gordon, the last governor of Sudan during the Turkish rule of Sudan, and, on the other, to produce a category of educated Sudanese capable of carrying out petty clerical tasks. Here, the early batches of educated Sudanese were exposed to western modes of thought, ideologies and ways of behavior; i.e. to become westernized in thinking without real western privileges.

For the ordinary Sudanese, Khartoum society was not built on one solid religious ideological foundation like that of *Mahdiyya* in Omdurman. Official Islam of the governing Egyptians dominated the scene, and the lay people confined themselves to simple *sufi* religious practices, so that one could hardly note any religiously- based resistance movement against the British rule in Khartoum. The 1924 rebellion was primarily led by some junior Sudanese military officers

³ Samples of the lectures and debates which were held then could be found in Hawley 2001.

and *affendiyya* The British allowed many customs and traditions to continue provided that they did not conflict with or challenged their rule.

In the *deims* – third and fourth class residential areas- where the working classes and casual laborers lived- strong mutual solidarity existed between people of one or couple of streets. The houses opened all day long and women and children in particular moved, played and ate freely in each others' houses without inhibitions. However, there existed no systems of leaning or places for regular meetings other than some social clubs and street corners for the male youth and some elderly men. Even though, these groups were not constant, for the continuous shuffling of the residents (Saad, 2006).

In Khartoum, in contrast to Omdurman, and due to the relative absence of strong religiously motivated social pressures, modern innovations found easier channels of acceptance. Football was first established in Burri (a suburb of Khartoum) adjacent to the British military barracks in which a number of Burri people used to work. "Jazz" bands, elitist singers (e.g. Hassan Attiyya), polo contests, tennis courts, in addition to the night clubs, restaurants, and cafes we mentioned earlier were all to be found in Khartoum, with no parallels in national urban centers. To escape the tight social controls of Omdurman, its youthful government officials came to Khartoum to let go before returning to Omdurman. Old Khartoum had, nevertheless, its traditional *qahawi* (coffee-shops), *indayat* (local liquor houses) and other similar places reserved for the "natives"(Saad, 2006).

The *affendiyya* (officials/ bureaucrats) had a style of living different from the ordinary citizens concerning their social links, eating habits, dressing, talk, spending of leisure time by virtue of their relative higher incomes and social status. In spite of the difference in life orientation between the two groups, the *affendiyya* were not completely cut off from their rural or poor family backgrounds. They

shared with them the social occasions of weddings, mourning and other family ceremonies. The Khartoumite educated maintained closer and somewhat more continuous social relations with their original homelands. This could be explained by the fact that they were mostly single or had left their spouses and young children at their home villages.

Consequently, colonial Khartoum, as could be deduced from above, had a split character and a dual personality, one foreign and one local. On the other hand, the indigenous were not an integrated social group due to the conditions mentioned above.

Conclusion

The failure of Khartoum in providing a convincing and viable model for social integration could be traced to its historical colonial experience. In this manner, Khartoum is not dissimilar from other African colonial cities with regards to colonial legacies of how the colonialists' imported modes of visions, morals and ways of living and behavior had influenced, and was reflected in, their urban spatial and social policies. In turn, those ideologies laid four bases for urban colonial policy concerns

- (1) Emphasizing the supremacy of the colonial rule and all its political and cultural concomitants and its hierarchy;
 - (2) Indicating who was to be allowed to be in the city or not;
 - (3) Maintaining a strict rule of segregation;
 - (4) Ensuring 'law and order' and smooth running of the system for maximum appropriation of resources (Myers, 2011).
- The portrait of Khartoum as a colonial city is thus akin to and resembles other African experiences with regards to application of the British urban colonial policies (cf Celik 1997; Myers 2003; Wright 1991; Coquery-Vidrovitch 2005). As stated by Young (1994), 'while the pattern varied, it possible to discern certain common features across the colonial world'.

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