

Housing and development in Freetown, Sierra Leone

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This article surveys housing problems in Freetown and argues that the perpetuation of housing problems in Freetown and the failure to implement housing policies cannot be attributed merely to bureaucratic inadequacies and resource limitations. They can only be fully understood by reference to the way the main agents of housing provision, the private market and the state, operate in the specific social and economic conditions of underdeveloped capitalism.

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This paper analyses the housing problems of Freetown in terms of socialization (urbanization and proletarianization) and capital accumulation (individual and social). Explicitly, it is argued that housing conditions in Freetown are not satisfactorily explained by reference to spatiodemographic factors or bureaucratic mismanagement; rather, explanation has to be sought in the detail of the relationship between housing supply and housing demand which itself reflects the particular nature of the social relations of housing provision prevailing in underdeveloped capitalist societies such as Sierra Leone.

The first section outlines the nature of housing conditions and living environments in Freetown and identifies the various policy documents and planning recommendations that have been produced over recent decades to deal with housing and environmental problems in the city. Two initial observations can be made. First, despite the plethora of documentation it remains very difficult to build up a systematic comprehensive and up-to-date picture of housing and living conditions in Freetown. The 1968 Western Province Household Survey remains the most comprehensive source of information, since then only partial surveys with limited samples have been completed. Second, few of the numerous planning or policy recommendations have ever been implemented; this non-implementation has been cited as a reason for the continuation and indeed exacerbation of housing and environmental problems in the city. Freetown shares both of the above characteristics with most other cities in underdeveloped capitalist societies.

Background to housing and urban planning in Freetown

Freetown was established in 1792 on the peninsular coast of present-day Sierra Leone as the principal of several settlements for freed slaves from Nova Scotia and the West Indies. The settlement has grown from a small fortification with an initial population of around 1000 at the end of the 18th century to today's city of nearly 400000.

Following the abolition of slave trading in 1808, the growth of Freetown was for many years due almost entirely to the settlement of recaptured slaves. By 1833 a total of 43000 liberated Africans had been

resettled in the colony, some 3000 of whom were, according to the 1831 census, resident in Freetown. 'Native' residence (the official term still used for indigenous tribal peoples) in the emerging town was actively discouraged; in 1807 the Temne (the predominant local tribe) were prohibited from settling within 11 miles of Freetown and Native homes in the town were frequently destroyed. However, by 1823 official population returns began to acknowledge the permanence of Native residence and up to 1875 Natives probably comprised between 10% and 20% of the total town population.¹

The population of Freetown increased steadily through the middle of the 19th century, from nearly 10000 in 1848 to around 18000 at the end of the 1860s. The children and descendants of the freed and recaptured slaves gradually overcame their initial divisions to form the basis of a distinctive group, the Creole, who had their own Krio language and adopted European and especially Victorian values and life styles. Initially traders, the Creole population gradually came to predominate in what were regarded as the more prestigious professional occupations – teaching, the law and the civil service – thus performing many roles elsewhere taken by European settlers. To this African settler population was added, especially from the middle of the 1800s, a considerable number of Native residents. Their movement to Freetown was encouraged by the extension of first missionary and then commercial contacts with the interior. With the establishment of the Sierra Leone Protectorate in 1896, Freetown was confirmed as the capital city and major entrepôt of the country, a role encouraged by two world wars when Freetown operated as an important naval base. In 1870 Freetown had a total population of around 20000, this had risen to 33000 in 1914, 55000 in 1933, 65000 in 1948 and 128000 in 1963.

Housing conditions

Settlement in what has been described as 'Freetown's amphitheatre'² has always been crowded; first, by the need to maintain fortifications against both internal attacks from nearby hostile tribal groups, and external attacks from the hostile French, and second, by its restricted site. An area of about two square miles of flat land stretches inland from the seashore to end abruptly at the foot of the Peninsular Mountains which rise precipitously to over 1000 feet. Settlement sites in the early decades were further restricted by areas of swampy land which formed on top an impermeable laterite crust.

The cultural and physical features of Freetown – its large Creole population and its restricted site – inhibited, at least initially, the emergence of a 'dual town' so readily identified elsewhere in colonial Africa; Europeans in Freetown lived for much of the 19th century in housing rented from Creoles in the centre of the city. In the first decade of the 20th century, however, the compact settlement pattern was broken by the declaration of a European reserve on Wilberforce Hill some distance outside the town. The segregation of Europeans was predicated on health grounds and the removal of European settlers from the insanitary and malaria infested central city certainly helped to alleviate the European image of Freetown as the 'white man's graveyard'. Wilberforce has retained its exclusiveness, having emerged in the post-independence period as the focus of residence for diplomats, European managers of local branches of multinational commercial and

¹B.E. Harrell-Bond, *et al*, eds, *Community Leadership and the Transformation of Freetown (1801–1976)*, Mouton Publishers, 1978, Chapter 1.

²H.R. Jarrett, 'The port and town of Freetown', *Geography*, No 40, 1955, pp 108–18.

industrial enterprises as well as for certain sections of the affluent indigenous population.

Despite its generally heterogenous and compact appearance, Freetown, as Harvey has pointed out, has always been characterized by 'tribal microcosms', small but reasonably distinct tribal areas distinguishable in Freetown's residential landscape.³ This residential differentiation reflects the settlement history of the town, with certain tribal and ethnic groups traditionally associated with particular areas – Mandingoes in Bambara town, Foulahs in Foulah town, Mende in Kossoh town and Aku in Fourah Bay.⁴ Several official attempts have been made to direct tribal settlement. In 1816 Kroo town reserve was set aside along the Alligator River for Kroo settlement and again in 1906 the Ginger Hall area was reserved for Mende migrants. Historically, Creole residence focused on the town centre and it was here, especially in the commercial areas, that the Lebanese traders, who began to arrive in numbers towards the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries, also concentrated.

The European and Creole population of Freetown has generally been associated with better housing and living conditions; but beyond this, tribal and ethnic affiliations seem to have little historical association with housing quality. In terms of housing and environmental conditions, a crude east-west division of the city can be identified; the spacious, more affluent and better serviced housing areas being found predominantly in the west, while the poorer, squalid environments concentrate in the east. This pattern reflects the location of Wilberforce in the south-west of the town and the movement, apparent since the second world war, of Creole and better-off African families from the aging timber-framed houses of the city centre to more modern concrete block, family houses in the west end of the city.⁵ A 1974 survey estimated that in the eastern wards of the town 75–100% of the houses were in poor condition, while in the western wards only 50–75% of houses were so classified.⁶

Within this division there is a considerable variety and mixture of housing quality. Solid concrete structures with electricity, piped water and septic tanks, are juxtaposed next to pan houses (built predominantly of corrugated iron) of unstable construction which have no power, and have only shared pit latrines and public standpipe water supplies. In 1968, Harvey, using the results of the 1967 Western Province Household Survey, estimated that 66% of all houses in Freetown were 'structurally inferior and ephemeral, being highly prone to the devastations of fire and dangerous denizens such as rats, termites and cockroaches'.⁷ Certain areas of the town, however, stand out as particularly notorious. The foreshore areas of Susan Bay and Kroo Bay have long housed shanty developments of mud and wattle and pan houses. The 1948 Report of the Interim Town Planning Committee cites densities of 23 persons per house and 13 persons per house respectively for these two areas. In 1979 it was estimated that the Kroo Bay area had 60 distinguishable structures, housing between 1000 and 1500 people, at an estimated density of 25 persons per house. Shanty type developments are also to be found on infill sites in the central area of the city contributing to the heterogenous quality of city housing. On the outskirts of the town, especially in the east on the mountain foothills, squatter-type developments and unserviced and often unstable concrete 'adjoinings' proliferate.⁸

³M. Harvey, 'Implications of migration to Freetown', *Civilizations*, No 18, 1968, pp 247-69.

⁴R.J. Olu-Wright, 'The physical growth of Freetown', in C. Fyfe and E. Jones, eds, *Freetown: A Symposium*. Sierra Leone University Press, 1968.

⁵M. Banton, *West African City. A Study of Tribal Life in Freetown*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK, 1957; Sierra Leone Government, *National Development Plan 1974/75 – 1978/79*, Central Planning Unit, Freetown, 1974.

⁶C.B. Patel, 'Report on housing policy and programme for Sierra Leone', UNDP Project SIL/74/102, Freetown, 1976.

⁷Sierra Leone Government, *Household Survey of the Western Province*, Central Statistical Office, Freetown, 1967, p 4 and Table 20; Harvey, *op cit*, Ref 3, p 259.

⁸'Adjoinings' are concrete or pan body homes built as a series of adjoining room and parlour units; many are built without planning permission and often fall far short of the basic standards laid down in the 1960 Freetown Improvement Act. The relative absence of squatter settlements on the periphery of some West African towns is discussed in M. Peil, 'African squatter settlements: a comparative study'. *Urban Studies*, Vol 13, 1976, pp 155–166. MLHCP, 'A summary of existing housing conditions in Freetown: a strategy for the future', Ministry of Lands, Housing and Country Planning, Freetown, 1979, pp 29–30.

While a crude association of housing quality and house type can be identified – pan-body structures being of less quality than modern concrete buildings – ‘the quality of the housing environment can be said to depend more on the density and location of development and on the adequacy of the water supply and sanitation than on the material of which a house is constructed’.⁹

Occupancy rates and living densities are difficult to establish with any degree of accuracy. The Ten Year National Plan of 1963, quoting a 1960 survey, claimed that 70% of Freetown’s households occupied only one or two rooms, at an average density of three persons per room.¹⁰ In 1967 the Western Province Household Survey cites 4.3 persons as the average household size in Freetown and an improved density over 1960 of 2.1 persons per room; the average household dwelling unit of two rooms had 550 square feet of living space, about 145 square feet per person.¹¹ Yet, as Patel’s 1974 survey of 1035 households in the George Brook area indicated, average figures disguise considerable variations. Patel established that 89% of the families surveyed lived in one or two rooms, 64% living at densities in excess of two per room with an average living area of only 43 square feet per person.¹² Using Armand Thomas’s 1973 population projections,¹³ the Ministry of Housing has calculated that over a 20-year period from 1974, between 3000 and 4000 new households with an average size of 4.9 persons would be formed annually. The same report calculated that new building construction at the end of the 1970s was running at about 1000 units per year. The most optimistic forecast then suggests that at best the current room densities and occupancy rate of three households per dwelling unit will be maintained over the next decade. However, given that the rate of new household formation is likely to exceed 3000 per year, especially as the alternative magnet for rural migrants, Koidu, begins to lose its attractive power with the declining viability of diamond prospecting, the housing problem in Freetown is likely to increase through the 1980s.¹⁴

In terms of service provision in Freetown, again it is possible to construct only a partial picture as no comprehensive survey has been completed. Indeed, from the information available, little appears to have changed since the late 1960s when 94.6% of Freetown households were estimated to have access only to pit latrines; only 3.6% of households had flush toilets; and around 2% had neither.¹⁵ Sewage disposal in Freetown remains extremely primitive. Three sewage lines serving the embassies, the area of government buildings and the commercial sector deposit untreated waste on the seashore; elsewhere night soil pails and shared pit latrines sited in housing compounds continue to service the overwhelming majority of the population.¹⁶ In these circumstances many people defecate on open and waste land, in water courses and in storm drains. Pollution of surface water is a major problem, especially as water courses and storm drains are often used for washing clothes and for bathing. These problems are exacerbated by the limited and irregular disposal of refuse. Accumulations of waste at street junctions – sites for human, dog, rat and vulture scavaging – are common and again provide an obvious infection hazard. In these circumstances only the supply of clean piped water appears to inhibit the occurrence of major epidemics. Freetown is well supplied with water; rainfall in the Peninsular Mountains averages nearly 200 inches per annum. However, in the dry season pressure is often low and supplies irregular. In 1968, 65% of all households had access to piped water only

⁹*Ibid*, p 15.

¹⁰Sierra Leone Government, *Ten Year Plan of Economic and Social Development for Sierra Leone*, Government Printer, Freetown, 1963, p 63.

¹¹Sierra Leone Government, *op cit*, Ref 7.

¹²Patel, *op cit*, Ref 6, p 8.

¹³A.C. Thomas, ‘Population projections and estimates of housing needs for Sierra Leone’, MA Thesis, University of Ghana, 1973.

¹⁴MLHCP, *op cit*, Ref 8, p 8; Sierra Leone Government, *op cit*, Ref 5.

¹⁵Sierra Leone Government, *op cit*, Ref 7; see also Patel, *op cit*, Ref 6.

¹⁶MLHCP, *op cit*, Ref 8, Part III.

through public standpipes and only 2.8% of households had internal water supplies. Irregularities in flow and in particular limited access to piped water encourages the use of potentially polluted surface water sources. Reflecting this usage, it is estimated that some 25% of all deaths in Freetown are attributable to infectious and parasitic diseases.¹⁷

Housing policy

Government reports of the 1880s and 1890s indicate that overcrowding and poor sanitary conditions have been characteristics of Freetown's living environment since at least the last quarter of the 19th century.¹⁸ The two reports of the Slum Clearance Committee produced between the two world wars, similarly stress these problems and were among the first reports to identify the foreshore as an area of particular slum concentration.¹⁹ The persistence in the nature, and the similarity in the location, of housing problems in Freetown over nearly 100 years are a reflection of the lack of success of housing policies initiated at various times over that period. Four general periods of more or less consistent policy approaches towards housing in Freetown can be identified.

1900–39

The policies of the first period were encapsulated in the 1900 City Improvement Act which attempted to give legal sanction to the enforcement of public health standards, physical planning and building code regulations and initiated a system of building licences to be administered by the Public Works Department. The provisions of this act appear to have been largely inoperable and, as several documents dating from the second policy period recognized, the demolition of unfit dwellings or those that violated specified standards did little to cure the overall problem since the families and households involved merely shifted elsewhere, taking the problem with them. An additional factor here was the removal of most European residences to Wilberforce Hill in the first decade of the 20th century; official concern with sanitation problems, which had in part motivated the passing of the 1900 act, was thereby reduced. Ethnic and class perceptions of the nature and immediacy of housing and environmental problems in Freetown were to be a major influence on the degree of implementation of housing policies throughout the succeeding decades. A Colonial Office report of 1941, for example, noted:

The unofficial members of the City Council and of the Legislative Council are for the most part, of necessity drawn from, and elected by, the conservative middle class who do not immediately experience bad housing conditions, have no knowledge of what is done to improve the housing of poorer classes elsewhere, and are, I regret to say, but little concerned for their health and comfort.²⁰

1939–61

The Slum Clearance Reports of 1939 and 1941 initiated the second period of housing policy in Freetown, a period which extended to independence in 1961. The main feature of this policy period was the attempt to link the enforcement of standards in existing housing with the provision of alternative accommodation for those displaced. The Slum Clearance Committee reports in particular advised the linking of the

¹⁷*Ibid*, p 23.

¹⁸See Harrell-Bond, *op cit*, Ref 1, p 159.

¹⁹Slum Clearance Committee, *Report, Sessional Paper*, No 9, 1939; Slum Clearance Committee, 'Interim recommendation regarding the acquisition of land and the creation of town planning areas', *Sessional Paper*, No 4, 1941.

²⁰Cited in Harrell-Bond, *op cit*, Ref 1, p 161.

removal of subtolerable housing with measures to control immigration to Freetown and the initiation of rehousing schemes on empty lots in the inner city and eastern periphery of the town; the Colonial Development Fund was identified as a possible source of finance for these projects. The reports also encouraged the construction of labour lines close to places of employment to alleviate congestion.

The recommendations of the Slum Clearance Committee for a limited degree of positive state involvement in housing provision were taken up and developed, at least in plan form, in succeeding decades. The Fry and Farms Report of 1945 produced the first comprehensive plan for the development of Freetown, albeit stressing the need, in the general context of overall upgrading, to maintain class and racial distinctions in the town's residential structure. The Town and Country Planning Act of 1946 provided the enabling legislation for the initiation of the Fry and Farms plans. Several planning areas were declared and attempts made to define an appropriate land use structure. But, as the Interim Town Plan Report of 1948 indicates, little was achieved, though the 1946 Ten Year Plan for Sierra Leone made £200000 available for planning developments in Freetown.²¹ While Planning Committees were established to oversee planned developments at Ginger Hall, Fourah Bay, Wilkinson Road and Cline Town, it was only at Syke Street in Ginger Hall in 1948 that a pilot scheme for rehousing was actually started. Notices to quit were issued to the inhabitants of the slum properties in Kroo and Susan Bay, but the decrees appear never to have been enforced. With the appointment of a Town Planning Officer in 1950 several drainage and road improvement schemes were completed, but the systematic and comprehensive planning recommended by Fry and Farms was never begun.²² Perhaps the most innovative development of this period, however, was the initiation of the Kissy Low-cost Housing Estate in 1959 – finally completed in 1963, this estate remains today the most tangible manifestation of direct government intervention in housing provision in Freetown. In 1960 the Freetown Improvement Act of 1900 was revised and up-dated and in 1961 the Ministry of Housing and Country Planning was established.

1961–74

The third period of housing policy development follows independence and runs through to the National Plan of 1974. Something of the initial spirit of this period was encapsulated in the 1963 Borys Plan for Freetown, which argued for the comprehensive redevelopment of the town centre, the introduction of central city high-rise dwellings and the creation of neighbourhood units. Borys also enthusiastically envisaged the development of a three-tier, shopping precinct incorporating boutiques, market stalls, supermarkets and department stores as well as office and living accommodation²³ together with a coastal, tourist oriented 'panoramic route',²⁴ all of which are necessary Borys concluded, if Freetown was not to be denied 'the opportunity of becoming a contemporary city, capable of serving future generations'.²⁵ Less grandiosely, the report was also conscious of the need for extensive rehabilitation of existing property and the need to increase the provision of water and power supplies.

The urban planning proposals of the Second Ten Year Plan for Sierra Leone also reflected these grand proposals for extensive redevelopment.

²¹Colony of Sierra Leone, 'Outline of the Ten Year Plan for the development of Sierra Leone', *Sessional Paper*, No 4, 1946.

²²Colony of Sierra Leone, 'Progress Reports on the Development Plan', *Sessional Papers*, Nos 7, 16, 9, 4, 6, 1947–51.

²³Z. Borys, *Preliminary Report: Freetown Comprehensive Redevelopment Plan*, Nickson, Borys and Partners, 1963, p 63.

²⁴*Ibid*, p 58.

²⁵*Ibid*, p 76

Residential areas will be developed on an integrated basis to provide not only housing, but also other facilities like schools, shopping centres, recreational and community centres, parks and gardens.²⁶

However, the Ten Year Plan was notably more cautious when it came to consider issues of implementation and financing. Here the policy of mixed provision of housing characteristic of this period was established. 'Private enterprise should continue', the Plan argued, 'to carry the major part of the burden and every encouragement will be given to private effort to expand its activities through various media, including building and loan societies, mortgage companies and other financial organizations'.²⁷ Government's role was envisaged as continuing the provision of low-cost housing on the Kissy model,²⁸ the extension of its civil service housing loan scheme to other sectors of the population²⁹ and the establishment of a National Property Company which would acquire land for development and direct its future use.³⁰

The recommendations of the Borys Plan and the Ten Year National Plan shared the fate of less ambitious proposals dating from the pre-independence era: they remained essentially paper plans, even the Kissy low-cost scheme ground to a halt, ostensibly from lack of funds. Conscious, perhaps, of the non-implementation of its plans, the Sierra Leone Government commissioned a series of reports from various outside agencies through the 1960s and early 1970s. The IDP Report of 1965 called for a National Urbanization Plan and argued that housing policies were being impeded because land was costly, in individual ownership and difficult to consolidate for development purposes.³¹ These problems were compounded by the inability of the mass of Freetown's population to pay a profitable rent. Donald Hanson's report of 1969 attempted to set out a general housing policy and in particular to outline the dimensions of a World Food Programme housing project; self-help techniques, using unemployed and underemployed labour, the selling of the Kissy houses to raise government funds and the introduction of tax incentives for housing provision and purchase were the main recommendations.³² Fitchett's 1972 report reiterated many of these ideas, additionally advocating the provision of loans for house maintenance and repair, the initiation of site and service schemes and the establishment of a National Housing Finance Company.³³ These reports added little by way of innovation to the 1963 proposals, nor did they provide a detailed programme for housing provision. They failed to trigger any action on the part of the state authorities.

1974–present

The Five Year National Development Plan published in 1974 brought together many of the ideas and recommendations of the preceding decade.³⁴ Less ambitious than the 1963 planning recommendations, the 1974 Five Year Plan nevertheless retained the mixed housing provision policies of the earlier documents. Site and Service Schemes were particularly recommended as an alternative to the provision of completed low-cost houses and, identifying shortage of resources as the major problem facing implementation, the plan gave some consideration to the acquisition of finance from outside agencies. Given current interest rates, it was estimated that only families with a minimum monthly income of between Le 250 and Le 100 would be able to avail themselves of such loans. Thomas's 1972 demographic survey indicated that 92% of Freetown's households have cash incomes of less than Le

²⁶Sierra Leone Government, *op cit*, Ref 10, p 62.

²⁷*Ibid*, p 81.

²⁸*Ibid*, p 72.

²⁹*Ibid*, p 81.

³⁰*Ibid*, pp 83–84.

³¹IDP, *Sierra Leone National Urbanization Plan*, Israel, 1965.

³²D. Hanson, 'Preliminary report on housing in Sierra Leone', UN House Building and Planning Centre, 1969.

³³R.S. Fitchett, 'Survey of existing facilities and further measures to provide for adequate financing of housing programmes', UN Economic Commission for Africa, Addis Ababa, 1972.

³⁴Sierra Leone Government, *op cit*, Ref 5.

100.³⁵ Not surprisingly then the annual reviews of the Five Year Development Plan indicate little or no achievement in improving housing provision; indeed the 1977 report resorted to quoting the construction of 12 experimental UNDP houses at Kissy as 'refreshingly tangible'.³⁶

In August 1983 120 units of housing (of a planned 500) built by the Sierra Leone Brick and Ceramic Company were taken into official management by the recently activated State Housing Corporation. The completion of these houses represents the most substantial achievement of state intervention in direct housing provision since the initiation of the Kissy low-cost scheme in 1959. However, it is unlikely that either the construction of these additional state houses or the formation of the Housing Corporation for housing management purposes will herald a new era of government housing policy. Rather, these achievements should be seen as a throw-back to an earlier period of housing policy which effectively came to an end with the publication of the 1974 Five Year Plan. Three UNDP reports dating from 1976-77 and in particular the Ministry of Lands, Housing and Country Planning report of 1979 more accurately exemplify the nature of the fourth and current period of housing policy in Sierra Leone.

Patel³⁷ – whose survey results were quoted in an earlier section – echoed many of the recommendations contained in the National Plan,³⁸ especially with regard to the training of personnel, the development of traditional and local building materials, the need to obtain outside finance and the desirability of site and service schemes linked with 'self-help' construction methods. However, unlike the National Plan, Patel's report also contained a note of caution with regard to the possibility of such policies even being implemented. This note of caution turned to near pessimism in the UNDP overview report of 1977;³⁹ a degree of pessimism reinforced by Chandra's almost totally negative report on the Kissy scheme which in Chandra's view had 'deteriorated into a slum' as a consequence of severe overcrowding and almost total neglect with regard to building repair and maintenance of basic services.⁴⁰ Reflecting the orientation of these UNDP reports, recognizing the failures of past policies recommending large-scale government intervention and aware of the limitations of government resources, the 1979 Ministry of Housing report attempted to introduce a sense of 'realism' into housing policies for Freetown. The emphasis in this report was on a reduction in the anticipated level of state intervention and a concomitant increase in the role of private market housing provision, in particular by small-scale contractors.⁴¹

The Ministry of Housing report unfortunately lacked a systematic survey: most of its recommendations were based on the 'impressions' gained from an 'unstructured' survey of eight major areas in Freetown.⁴² Two major conclusions emerged. First, decrying the use of inappropriate Western standards and Western planning techniques, the report stresses in the context of 'existing social institutions' the 'acceptable' nature of much housing in Freetown;⁴³ for the Ministry the point at issue was not the type of housing construction but 'the occupancy rate and the level of service provision together with the siting and density of development in the immediate surroundings'.⁴⁴ Second, the report identified what was seen as an underworked small-scale private building sector which had 'little or no capital, achieved very small profit margins and had little formal knowledge of elementary

³⁵Thomas, *op cit*, Ref 13.

³⁶Sierra Leone Government, *Annual Plan*, Government Printer, Freetown, 1977.

³⁷Patel, *op cit*, Ref 6.

³⁸Sierra Leone Government, *op cit*, Ref 5.

³⁹UNDP, *Assistance to the Ministry of Housing and Country Planning: Project Findings and Recommendations*, UNDP Project SIL/73/012/2, 1977.

⁴⁰H. Chandra, 'Report on the management of the low-cost housing estate at Kissy, Freetown', *UNDP Report*, SIL/74/02, 1976.

⁴¹MLHCP, *op cit*, Ref 8; see also C. Liedholm and E. Chuta, 'The economics of rural and urban small-scale industries in Sierra Leone', *African Rural Economy*, Paper No 14, Michigan State University, 1976; and D. Fowler, 'The urban informal sector: some conceptual and policy issues', mimeo, University of Sierra Leone, 1977.

⁴²MLHCP, *op cit*, Ref 8, Appendix II.

⁴³*Ibid*, pp 25-34.

⁴⁴*Ibid*, p 28.

book-keeping and accounting,⁴⁵ yet this same sector, the report argued, was responsible for the construction of the major proportion of housing in Freetown. The recommendations of the report with regard to state intervention were therefore that, on the one hand, the government should be concerned with the provision and maintenance of services – water, power, sanitation and drainage – and on the other with encouraging the operation of the private sector through the organization of credit and loan facilities for both suppliers and consumers, encouraging and developing the use of local building materials and, crucially, in the creation of a land bank to ensure that land, hitherto difficult of access, was made available for building purposes. The report explicitly argued against the recommendations of the 1974 Five Year Plan and for the withdrawal of government involvement in direct housing provision and rejected the notion of master plans as too expensive and too inflexible:

The aim should be rather the development of a long-term strategy for improving the overall situation a little at a time, spreading the benefits over a wider area and to a greater number of people, so that each target is achievable within the existing limited, financial and technical resources and leads naturally to the next.⁴⁶

Implementation failures

Notwithstanding the apparent rejection of Western methods in the Ministry of Housing's 1979 report, housing policies in Sierra Leone have paralleled many of the broad policy changes of Western and especially UK urban planning over the past decades. Understandable in colonial times, the trend has been continued in the post-independence period with the shift in emphasis from rebuilding to rehabilitation, and from ambitious schemes for state involvement to a growing emphasis on the private market.⁴⁷ However, in direct contrast to much Western planning, few of the many housing policies devised for Freetown have been implemented. Awareness of this failure to implement, in the sense of attempting to offer explanations for it, has been apparent only in more recent documents and commentaries.⁴⁸ These explanations have focused, by and large, on two issues: bureaucratic inadequacies and limited government resources.

The absence of organizational and administrative abilities among some government personnel and departments has recently been highlighted as one of the major obstacles to the effective implementation of housing plans in many underdeveloped countries. The promulgation of housing policies is fruitless, declares Drakakis-Smith unless 'logistic and technical requirements can be met at the same time'.⁴⁹ In the specific context of Sierra Leone, Decker comments in a similar vein:

to a large extent the inability of professionals to solve the problems of urban growth has been due to the lack of a political and administrative framework capable of permitting the professional to perform his functions efficiently.⁵⁰

Sierra Leone's first town planner was not appointed until 1950, four years after the intention to make such an appointment was voiced in the country's first Ten Year Plan;⁵¹ the establishment of a ministry with overall responsibility for urban planning did not take place until 1961. For the following two decades the separation of housing responsibilities between the Ministry of Lands (responsible for issuing building permits)

⁴⁵*Ibid*, p 33.

⁴⁶*Ibid*, p 39.

⁴⁷For the UK parallels, see S. Merrett, *State Housing in Britain*, RKP, 1979; J. Short, *Housing in Britain: The Post-War Experience*, Methuen, London, 1982.

⁴⁸Sierra Leone Government, *op cit*, Ref 5; Patel, *op cit*, Ref 6; UNDP, *op cit*, Ref 39; C. Decker, 'Problems of spatial development in Sierra Leone', mimeo, University College, London, 1978; D. Wright, 'Land use planning and practice in Freetown: an appraisal of the problems, prospects and policies in developing Sierra Leone', MA Thesis, University of Queensland, Australia, 1978; MLHCP, *op cit*, Ref 8.

⁴⁹D. Drakakis-Smith, *Urbanization, Housing and the Development Process*, Croom Helm, 1981, p 39. See also R.C. Stren, 'Underdevelopment, urban squatting and the state bureaucracy: a case study of Tanzania', *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, Vol 16, No 1, 1982, pp 67–81.

⁵⁰Decker, *op cit*, Ref 48.

⁵¹Colony of Sierra Leone, *op cit*, Ref 21.

and the Ministry of Housing and Country Planning (responsible for overseeing zoning regulations and land use compatibility) and the absence of coordination between these two ministries created major problems for the effective planning of urban development in Freetown. The amalgamation of the Lands and Housing Ministries in the late 1970s to form the Ministry of Lands, Housing and Country Planning together with the establishment of a state Housing Corporation ostensibly removed the basis for earlier problems, but may merely have created a new set of future coordination problems. The new ministry's own report certainly expressed early doubts:

unless clearly defined roles are established, to the mutual satisfaction of both organizations, during the formative stage, then friction and conflict is likely to make itself felt.⁵²

The history of previous attempts at collaboration do not augur well for the future. Wright, for example, recounts the fiasco of the Greater Freetown Area Planning Committee established in 1969 with participating members culled from the Ministry of Housing, Public Works, Surveys and Lands, Chamber of Commerce and the Freetown City Council.⁵³ The committee was ineffectual because the representatives were unable to transcend either the habits of thought imposed by experience of working within hitherto tight administrative boundaries or their own vested interests. A January 1977 report from the Ministry of Housing and Country Planning – 'Factors responsible for the unplanned development of the Greater Freetown Planning Area' – anticipated Wright's assessment by citing, as examples of these factors, the activities of other departments and in particular the absence of effective liaison with ministries responsible for electricity, water and the provision of other services.

The second factor commonly cited as an explanation for the failure to implement housing policies is limited government resources. Since the Hanson Report in 1969,⁵⁴ considerable emphasis has been placed on policies for mobilizing housing finance both through outside agencies and through the development of loan and mortgage facilities for suppliers and consumers.⁵⁵ Indeed, the emphasis which the MLHCP 1979 report placed on the role of the private sector was in part motivated by the realization that state funds for direct intervention in housing provision were not to be found: 'It is, however, accepted that finance is scarce and as a result emphasis must be placed upon other resources of land and on human resources'.⁵⁶ The ministry accepted this point without argument, removing from the scope of its assessment any consideration of the level of state financial involvement, except to make a general plea for 'increased expenditure in the sphere of urban housing';⁵⁹ the remainder of the report was concerned with ways to minimize that expenditure.

Financial limitations clearly impose restrictions on the state's involvement in urban housing. But it needs to be recognized that such restrictions have operated in times of comparative national affluence as well as in periods of severe recession. The question of limited resources cannot be divorced from the issue of priorities in expenditure; even in recent times when Sierra Leone has been beset with enormous balance of payment and debt problems⁵⁸ resources have been found to finance the development of an Olympic standard sports stadium, although the country has few, if any, international competitors; for the installation of

⁵²MLHCP, *op cit*, Ref 8, p 35.

⁵³Wright, *op cit*, Ref 48.

⁵⁴D. Hanson, *op cit*, Ref 32.

⁵⁵See Fitchett, *op cit*, Ref 33; Freetown Government, *op cit*, Ref 5; Patel, *op cit*, Ref 6; UNDP, *op cit*, Ref 39; MLHCP, *op cit*, Ref 8.

⁵⁶MLHCP, *op cit*, Ref 8, p ii.

⁵⁷*Ibid*, p ii.

⁵⁸See *West Africa*, June 1982.

a colour television network when 90% of the country's inhabitants do not have television sets; and for the provision of luxurious accommodation for the hosting of the 1980 Organization of African Unity conference when the majority of Sierra Leoneans remain ill-housed.

Clearly the two issues of bureaucratic incompetence and resource limitation are linked, although this is a connection that is rarely made in the literature. What appears as bureaucratic mismanagement from an urban housing point of view may be the consequence of entirely rational, or at least conscious, decisions by another tier of government with regard to the priorities for resource use. The established explanations for the failure to implement housing policies in Sierra Leone raise further and more fundamental questions in their own right, in particular about the political nature of decisions with regard to the use of national resources. The inability or reluctance of commentators on housing in Sierra Leone to go beyond the relatively superficial is a characteristic shared with many observers of urban problems in other underdeveloped countries; a characteristic described by Slater as a myopic concern with the 'spatio-demographic level of analysis' which treats urban problems in isolation from an explicit consideration of their embracing political and social context.⁵⁹ Housing research in Sierra Leone has been overly concerned, albeit in a partial and very incomplete manner, with the necessary but analytically limited task of establishing the statistical basis of Freetown's housing problems and, apparently blinkered by the boundaries of the nation state, lacks any reference to that wider body of empirical and theoretical literature on housing and urban problems in other underdeveloped capitalist countries. Thus, virtually all the commentaries on Sierra Leone's urban housing, notwithstanding numerous differences with regard to policy emphasis, share unrealistic assumptions about the potential housing contribution of the private market and erroneous notions about the role of the capitalist state, particularly that of the post-colonial capitalist state, in housing provision.

It is the contention of the second part of this paper that the perpetuation of housing problems in Freetown and the failure to implement housing policies cannot be attributed merely to bureaucratic inadequacies and absolute resource limitations, but should be related to the way the main agents of housing provision, the private market and the state, operate in the specific social and economic conditions of underdeveloped capitalism.

The elaboration of this perspective draws heavily on parallels with the experiences of the advanced capitalist countries. It is now a commonplace in the development literature to note that underdeveloped countries are not following the same path to economic development as that taken by these developed capitalist countries. As a comment on jejune notions of Rostovian growth stages this is an important corrective. Indeed, the very variety of historical circumstances which characterized capitalist growth in Western Europe, North America and elsewhere should itself be sufficient to dispel notions of a unilinear development trajectory.⁶⁰ Yet such observations should not obscure the manner in which an understanding of these variable experiences can enhance our analysis of present and future events in underdeveloped capitalist societies. The need is, of course, to amalgamate the lessons derived from the experiences of advanced capitalism with the specific historical circumstances of underdevelopment.⁶¹ The arguments of the

⁵⁹D. Slater, 'Towards a political economy of urbanization in peripheral capitalist societies', *National Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, Vol 2, No 1, 1978, pp 26-52.

⁶⁰T. Kemp, *Industrialization in Nineteenth Century Europe*, Longman, Harlow, UK, 1969; T. Kemp, *Historical Patterns of Industrialization*, Longman, Harlow, 1978; T. Kemp, *Industrialization in the Non-Western World*, Longman, Harlow, UK, 1983.

⁶¹B. Magubane, 'The city in Africa: some theoretical issues' in R.A. Obudbo and S. El Shakh, eds, in *Development of Urban Systems in Africa*, Praeger, New York, 1979; Slater, *op cit*, Ref 59.

following sections are developed exclusively with reference to the post-independence period in Sierra Leone, with much of the illustrative evidence being drawn from the past 10 to 15 years; to extend the debate into the pre-independence period would require taking into account the specific historical conditions of colonialism.

Housing, capitalism and underdevelopment

The experiences of the developed capitalist countries indicate the nature of the conditions under which the private market and the state combine in capitalist societies, sometimes antagonistically but often in a complementary manner, to expand the supply of housing. These conditions can be identified in a general way as the coincidence of periods of capital accumulation (as measured by national economic growth and growing personal wealth) with a sustained process of socialization (urbanization and proletarianization). The absence of these conditions in countries such as Sierra Leone in large measure accounts for the persistence of inadequate housing.

The housing market

For the private sector (builders, contactors, property speculators and landlords) housing is a commodity; realization of the exchange value of that commodity is enormously facilitated in periods of economic growth which ensure a high rate of profit and growing demand from increasingly affluent sectors of the population. Through the 1970s Sierra Leone's GDP grew on average by 1.4% per annum. The country is perennially beset by balance of payment and debt crises and by soaring inflation – in 1978, for instance, the balance of payment deficit was Le 50 million, the July 1983 revenue deficit was Le 191 million and between 1968 and 1974 Freetown's cost of living index increased by 38%, rents alone increasing by 400% between 1957 and 1976.⁶²

Income levels for the majority of Freetown's population remain low. In 1972 it was established that over 90% of the city's population had incomes of less than Le 100 per month and 73% had incomes of less than Le 50 per month.⁶³ In 1979 some 65% of the country's urban population had monthly incomes below Le 57, the poverty line for a family of five (ie the wage required to purchase a minimum calorie diet); on this basis some 25% of Freetown's families are malnourished.⁶⁴ All sectors of Freetown's population⁶⁵ have experienced a decline in real incomes during the past decade; this decline has been especially marked among those involved in the economy of the informal sector. Unemployment in Freetown is about 15% and rising among all groups; unemployment among secondary school and university graduates, for instance, has recently led to demands for the early retirement of government employees.⁶⁶

In conditions of economic stagnation and declining real incomes the private market is manifestly incapable of providing for mass housing needs. Yet there is limited evidence which suggests a potential for expansion. In 1976 Beresford-Cole, a local businessman, using the income returns of the Demographic Unit's 1972 survey⁶⁷ identified a potential market for 'middle class' housing. A 500 acre site, seven miles south-west of Freetown city centre, a site owned by Beresford-Cole and now called Marjay Town, was cleared, divided into serviced plots and offered for sale. Loans, to help with the construction of houses which

⁶²F. Wheen, ed, *World View. An Economic and Geopolitical Year book*, Pluto Press, Lodon, 1982; *New African Development*, April 1978; *West Africa*, February 1979; *West Africa*, July 1983; *The Times*, 2 June 1983; MLCHP, *op cit*, Ref 8.

⁶³Thomas, *op cit*, Ref 13.

⁶⁴MLHCP, *op cit*, Ref 8, pp 9–10.

⁶⁵*Ibid*, part II.

⁶⁶With the possible exception of sections of the civil service who received three pay rises during the 1970s and have recently been awarded a further 20% increase (*West Africa*, July 1983).

⁶⁷MLHCP, *op cit*, Ref 8, part II.

⁶⁸Thomas, *op cit*, Ref 13.

had to conform to one of ten approved designs, were made available through the newly created Marjay Building Society – repayable over 20 years at prevailing bank interest rates.⁶⁸ The scheme has been slow to attract investors and settlers, but may have been adversely affected by the death of Beresford-Cole in 1979.

Additional evidence suggesting an untapped housing demand comes from Patel's 1974 survey of the George Brook area⁶⁹ and the Ministry of Housing's wider but less systematic survey of 1978.⁷⁰ Both surveys reported that some respondents among their middle-income samples were willing to pay more for improved housing, if it were available. The extension of additional credit and saving facilities for housing purposes as suggested by several of the policy documents reviewed previously may help to tap this demand, but such facilities have yet to materialize on a city-wide basis.

Overall, however, the evidence for a sizeable expansion of the housing market even among the better-off and middle-income groups is weak. Moreover, any expansion of this type is likely to increase the inequalities in housing provision, for any suggestion that the private market might provide for the housing needs of the urban poor is noticeably absent. The faith which policy advisers in Sierra Leone have in the private market as an agency for housing provision is further undermined by the observation that even when the appropriate stimulus of a healthy national economy is present, large sections of the urban workforce are inadequately catered for. The notorious slums which long scarred the landscapes of the burgeoning industrial cities of 19th and 20th century Europe and North America bear vivid testimony to the fact that economic growth alone does not create the conditions for the provision of mass housing. That most developed capitalist countries have to a degree tackled, but in no way eliminated, the problems of urban slums is attributable to two additional and related factors: on the one hand the growth of labour organizations which successfully campaigned for better working conditions and more secure wages and on the other to state intervention in the housing market. The effect of the first was to allow some sections of the working class access to improved housing in the private market, the effect of the second (itself in part attributable to the rise of powerful labour organizations – see below) was to provide improved but variable quality housing for low-income households.

The absence of campaigning labour organizations in Freetown is a reflection of the incomplete socialization process which characterizes Sierra Leone and many other underdeveloped countries. Freetown grew by 4.8% per annum in the intercensal period 1963–74 and has probably maintained at least that rate of growth to the present;⁷¹ a rate of growth which falls short of the average rate of urbanization in Africa of around 6%,⁷² but is nevertheless substantial. However, given a stagnant labour market, the inability of many to find permanent employment and, in the same circumstances, the lack of commitment by others to urban life (as demonstrated by the continuation of circular migration) means that the prevailing urbanization and proletarianization processes tend to be partial. Consequently, there is an absence in Freetown of those conditions which are likely to lead to the growth of class consciousness and the creation of strong labour organizations able to campaign effectively for improved wages. As elsewhere in the economy, the activities of the private market in the provision of housing are

⁶⁸See Marjay Development Co Ltd, *Project – Own a House: Procurement of Finance*, Freetown, 1976; Wright, *op cit*, Ref 48.

⁶⁹Patel, *op cit*, Ref 6.

⁷⁰MLHCP, *op cit*, Ref 8.

⁷¹B. Gleave, 'Urban growth, urbanization and development in Sierra Leone, 1963–74', *Malaysian Journal of Tropical Geography*, No 3, 1981, pp 7–17; MLHCP, *op cit*, Ref 8.

⁷²A. O'Connor, *The African City*, Hutchinson, London, 1983, p 47.

determined by profit and competition; low incomes yield little or no profit. The urban poor in Freetown compensate for their inability to pay for decent housing principally by overcrowding and increasingly by the development of squatter settlements.

The state and housing

It has been the universal experience of the developed capitalist countries that a marked improvement in the provision of mass housing had to await state intervention,⁷³ although the timing and intensity of that intervention has varied enormously.⁷⁴ The level of involvement by the Sierra Leonean state in the provision of housing falls far short of that experienced elsewhere, even among other underdeveloped countries.⁷⁵ In Freetown the Kissy scheme (begun in colonial times), its recent additions and the dozen or so UNDP experimental houses remain the sole examples of direct state housing provision for low-income groups. State activity in Freetown housing is largely taken up with ineffectual attempts to enforce building by-laws and land use zoning regulations and with the maintenance of sanitation and water services. This low level of state involvement in urban housing in Sierra Leone can be explained by reference to the nature of state's role in the maintenance and regulation of the conditions for capital accumulation.⁷⁶ Two issues are of particular significance – the role of the capitalist state in ensuring the social reproduction of labour power and its role in maintaining social order.

In the context of an underdeveloped and stagnant economy, the demands made by capital on the state for ensuring the social reproduction of labour power are minimal. The labour needs of capital are readily accommodated by a growing surplus population which ensures a large reserve of labour which is cheaply available and easily replaced. A burgeoning surplus population has long been a characteristic of Freetown, particularly in the post-independence period. The productive efficiency of the employed and of the labour reserve is adequately maintained in these circumstances by the support of kin and ethnic organizations together with minimal state provision of basic common services. The pressures which built up in the now developed capitalist countries, and are to an extent present in some of the 'newly industrializing countries', for intensive state involvement in welfare provision – education, health and housing – are largely absent in Sierra Leone. These pressures relate to the shift by capital, in the context of economic development, from the appropriation of absolute surplus value to that of relative surplus value as manifested in an increasing concern with improvements in productivity through ensuring the efficiency of individual labourers rather than with merely extending the length of the working day or increasing the total number of workers.⁷⁷ Indeed, in some respects it is possible to go further and argue that in the context of Freetown the provision of sanitation and water services has as much to do with the prevention of contagious diseases – which do not respect class boundaries, and hence threaten the health of the ruling classes – as with the state's role in maintaining the social relations of the reproduction of labour power.

Notably absent from Sierra Leone, where the process of socialization is incomplete, are sustained demands for better living conditions on the part of organized labour. Social order among the urban poor in Freetown is basically ensured by a network of family, religious and

⁷³While housing conditions have improved over the past 60–80 years, considerable inequalities and inadequacies still characterize housing provision in developed capitalist countries. The limitations in capitalist housing become particularly prominent during periods of economic recession when increases in basic indices such as homelessness, the number of subtolerable properties and levels of overcrowding are invariably recorded (A. Friend and A. Metcalf, *Slump City*, Pluto, London, 1981).

⁷⁴L.S. Burns and L. Grebler, *The Housing of Nations*, Macmillan, London, 1977; A.J. Scott, *The Urban Land Nexus and the State*, Pion, London, 1980.

⁷⁵D. Drakakis-Smith, *op cit*, Ref 49; D.J. Dwyer, *People and Housing in the Third World*, Longman, Harlow, Essex, 1979.

⁷⁶R. Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society*, Weidenfeld, and Nicholson, London, 1969; N. Poulantzas, 'The capitalist state: a reply to Miliband and Laclau', *New Left Review*, No 95, 1976; J. Holloway and S. Picciotto, eds, *State and Capital*, Edward Arnold, London, 1977; B. Jessop, *The Capitalist State*, Martin Robertson, 1982.

⁷⁷H. Braverman, *Labour and Monopoly Capital, The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century*, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1974.

tribal organization to which the state gives official and unofficial support; the reinstatement in 1975 of the 'headman' position being the most recent and significant example of such support.⁷⁸ Social control is also maintained by the exercise of covert and overt means of repression such as government direction of the news media and the use of the police and the paramilitary, both of which were extensively used during the disturbances of 1955 and 1981.⁷⁹ But such expressions of militancy on the part of the urban poor are rare, reflecting a lack of developed class consciousness in conditions of partial socialization. Divided by a plethora of ethnic, religious and demographic characteristics, the urban poor in Freetown today, as in earlier decades, lack political clout in dealing with the capitalist state.

An additional motivation for state involvement with housing provision is associated with strategies which have been implemented in some developed capitalist countries to stimulate economic growth by investment in the built environment. The first Sierra Leone Five Year Plan recognized this potential, among other roles, for housing:

The role of housing in the social sector as an investment in human beings is now recognised all over the world. In addition to the social purposes housing is an important economic development tool.⁸⁰

However, the links between economic growth and investment in the built environment are complex⁸¹ and are not necessarily present in underdeveloped countries such as Sierra Leone. Harvey, for instance, has argued that construction activity acts as a spur to economic growth only in those conditions where surplus capital, unable to find profitable outlets in the productive sector (the primary circuit of capital), looks to investment in fixed capital, which includes the built environment (the secondary sector) in anticipation of a new wave of primary circuit activity.⁸² Surplus capital of this type and on an appropriate scale is not available in the underdeveloped economy of Sierra Leone; such surplus capital as there is having been repatriated by multinationals or otherwise lodged in foreign banks and portfolios.⁸³

If the conditions for state involvement in housing provision have been largely absent from Sierra Leone, the construction of state housing at Kissy would appear to be anomalous. However, the original Kissy project (of nearly 300 dwellings) was begun in colonial times (1959) and the activities of the colonial state in this respect need to be seen in the context of the aftermath of the 1955 riots⁸⁴ and the build-up to independence. The recent additions at Kissy⁸⁵ need also to be related to recent disturbances in Freetown; the 1981 riots were principally concerned with food prices but also reflected the general miserable living conditions in the city.⁸⁶ The Kissy additions in this sense can be seen as an attempt to shore up the legitimacy of the present government, in the interests of maintaining social control among sections of the urban masses. This is achieved directly through the exercise of patron-client housing relations and, rather more indirectly, by providing a palliative: a material demonstration of a very limited kind, of the state's apparent commitment to improving living conditions. The stress laid by Jusu-Sheriff, the finance minister, in a recent budget speech, on housing needs is indicative of the growing appreciation of the importance of this issue among the ruling class,⁸⁷ an appreciation which is reinforced by the concern of the Sierra Leonean state with establishing its international legitimacy as a stable govern-

⁷⁸Harrell-Bond, *op cit*, Ref 1, p 286.

⁷⁹Fashole-Luke, 'Class formation in Sierra Leone: the dockers of the port of Freetown', paper presented at the First Sierra Leone Studies Symposium, University of Birmingham, 1979.

⁸⁰Sierra Leone Government, *op cit*, Ref 5, p 280.

⁸¹P. Deane and W.A. Cole, *British Economic Growth, 1688-1959: Trends and Structure*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, 1967; S. Pollard, 'Fixed capital in the Industrial Revolution in Britain', *Journal of Economic History*, Vol 24, No 3, 1964; F. Crouzet, *Capital Formation in the Industrial Revolution*, Methuen, London, 1972.

⁸²D. Harvey, *The Limits to Capital*, Blackwells, Oxford, UK, 1983.

⁸³A. Hoogvelt and A. Tinker, 'The Sierra Leone Development Company: a case study in imperialism', University of Sheffield, mimeo, 1978.

⁸⁴Harrell-Bond, *op cit*, Ref 1.

⁸⁵*West Africa*, July 1983.

⁸⁶*West Africa*, December 1981.

⁸⁷*West Africa*, July 1983.

ment in its attempts to attract foreign capital and overseas aid. 'Symbolic' housing schemes such as that at Kissy (significantly, the original 'low-cost' label has now been dropped from official references) are a common occurrence in many other underdeveloped countries and serve a similar purpose.⁸⁸

Conclusions

A characteristic shared by all the proposed and government approved housing policies in Sierra Leone is that they derive 'solutions' exclusively from a partial and misleading interpretation of 'Western' capitalist experience; partial and misleading in that they attribute an unwarranted potential to the role of the private market and harbour mistaken notions about the nature and role of state activity. Only fragmentary references are to be found to what, in other situations, have been labelled 'non-capitalist' solutions. The most prominent among these is the policy of 'self-help' as first proposed by John Turner⁸⁹ in his espousal of the concept of 'autonomous housing' and subsequently championed, often with considerable modification, by researchers, national governments and international agencies.⁹⁰ The avoidance of this issue in the Sierra Leone housing documents, whether by default or design, presents in terms of the arguments of this paper, the most 'realistic' aspect of what are otherwise a set of profoundly unrealistic policy recommendations; for as Burgess⁹¹ among others has demonstrated, as self-help housing merely transfers housing supply to the petty-commodity sector it transcends few of the limitations of capitalist relations of production and exchange.⁹²

Within the prevailing economic conditions of underdeveloped capitalism the limitations of the private market in housing provision can only be alleviated, in part, by state intervention. This is a conclusion supported not only by the experiences of developed capitalism but increasingly by the experiences of some of the more advanced underdeveloped countries.⁹³ In Sierra Leone where the needs of capital for the reproduction of labour power are adequately catered for by a growing population (particularly in Freetown) and by the operation of traditional social support systems through familial, ethnic and religious ties – and where these same support systems, backed by the use of repression, maintain social order – state provision of welfare artefacts such as housing remains nominal. In the experience of underdeveloped countries it is only where economic growth combines with the unusual and exceptional geographical circumstance of absolute lack of space, as in Hong Kong and Singapore, or where the urban poor have, on occasion, acquired a degree of social cohesion and political power, as in parts of Latin America, that state intervention has gone much beyond the symbolic.

For the foreseeable future, in the conditions of a stagnating national economy and without a fundamental shift in the balance of class forces, Freetown's housing problems will be handled, as in the past, by a combination of paper plans and symbolic schemes.

⁸⁸I. F. Rothenberg, 'Symbolic schemes and housing policy for the poor: lessons from Colombia, Mexico, Chile and Hong Kong', *Comparative Urban Research*, Vol VIII, No 2, 1981, pp 48–75.

⁸⁹J. Turner, *Housing by People*, Marion Boyars, London, 1976.

⁹⁰See P. Ward, *Self-Help Housing: A Critique*, Mansell Publishing, London, 1982.

⁹¹R. Burgess, 'Petty-commodity housing or dweller control', *World Development*, Vol 6, No 9/10, 1978, pp 1105–33.

⁹²See also S. Brett, 'Low-income urban settlements in Latin America: the Turner model' in E. de Kadt and G. Williams, eds, *Sociology and Development*, Tavistock, 1974; and D. Conway, 'Self-help housing, the commodity nature of housing and amelioration of the housing deficit: continuing the Turner-Burgess debate', *Antipode*, Vol 14, No 1, 1982, pp 40–46.

⁹³Drakakis-Smith, *op cit*, Ref 49, Chapter 5.