

THE STATUS OF URBANIZATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF SUDAN

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Since the Second World War, a new interest has grown among American research scholars concerning the "backward or poor" countries of the world. Consideration of these areas has changed. This re-thinking has been both attitudinal and perceptual rather than material. The "backward" became the "underdeveloped," and the finally the "developing." As colonialism is replaced by "foreign aid" and United Nations Organization help programs, a new vista of momentum is emerging, riding the crest of the concept of "economic development." It has been recognized that rapid economic growth necessarily involves enormous elemental culture change. Thus, great pressure has been exerted to understand the processes of growth and patterns which growth has assumed.

More and more, geographers are becoming involved investigating problems which have "practical" rather than "theoretical" value. In the writer's own regional specialization, Africa, it has long been said that "... behind every market mammy in Africa sits an anthropologist." Now, it would seem, a similar claim may be made for geographers. With increasing frequency, scholars traveling in foreign areas have felt compelled to quip: "you find geographers in the damnedest places."

One of the areas in which geographers can contribute useful insight for economic development is in the field of urban geography. Like plantations and mines, cities are prime vehicles of culture change in a society and in the development of cities a measure of that change. According to William Hance:

"... (cities) tend to expedite the evolution to a modern economy, to loosen the hold of traditional beliefs and values, to print a greater degree of specialization through the acquiring of new skills, to provide incentive for developing more diversified economies, and to develop concentrated markets for domestic produce."¹

Thus, urbanism in previously little urbanized areas is the result, vehicle, and measure of culture change.

In this paper an attempt is made to analyze urbanization in the Republic of Sudan in terms of its distribution, basic characteristics and functions, modes of growth, and implications for economic development. Interpretations and conclusions are tempered by field experience in the Sudan in 1964. The definition of urbanism as used by the 1955-56 census is accepted in full, and the writer claims no part of the "What is Urban?" dialectic.

Situated south of Egypt and lying athwart the Nile River, the Republic of Sudan is the largest country in Africa, and ninth largest in the world, with an area of just under 1,000,000 square miles. It is, however, one of the more sparsely populated countries in the world, with an average density

¹ William A. Hance, *The Geography of Modern Africa*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1964, p. 52.

of approximately 10 person per square mile. This density is less than one-fifth that of the United States, for example. The sparseness of population is aggravated by uneven distribution owing primarily to the river system and to vagaries of climatic conditions. The country encompasses the full transition of physical and cultural complexes associated with the Sudanic Belt of Africa. Ninety-two per cent of the population is engaged in primary production of agriculture, herding, fishing and forestry, while only three per cent is engaged in manufacturing and other secondary activities. Per capita income is approximately \$80.00 per annum.² The country has a long but discontinuous tradition of urbanization based on Islamic commercial and political centers. The Sudan is, however, much less urbanized than other North African and most African countries. According to the 1955-56 census, less than five per cent of the total population lived in centers of 20,000 or more inhabitants.³ This datum contrasts with Egypt, Morocco, and South Africa, all of which have over 25 per cent of their populations in urban forms of greater than 20,000.

It would appear that the relative abundance of land, thus a lack of land hunger, has minimized urban population. In many areas of the world, notably North Africa and India, overcrowding and severe poverty in farming areas have driven peasants to migrate to cities. Urban areas are not burdened so heavily in the Sudan as in other countries with problems concomitant with accommodating a massive influx of unskilled workers seeking refuge from rural poverty and under-employment.⁴

The Sudan is divided into nine administrative provinces of unequal size (Figure 1). The three southern provinces of Upper Nile, Equatoria, and Bahr el Ghazal are the least developed economically and least urbanized. Next in order of development are the three northern provinces of Kordofan, Darfur, and Northern. The remaining three provinces — Khartoum, Blue Nile, and Kassala — are the most developed economically and most urbanized.

In the southern provinces individual towns have an administrative and commercial core occupied by Northerners and built in a British Colonial and northern Sudanese motif. Residential units consist of widely scattered, circular wattle and daub huts with conical, thatched roofs. The towns contain large agricultural elements. The largest town in each province and the only towns of any size are the province capitals of Juba, Wau, and Malakal. Malakal, however, is more typical of middle zone towns in that its residential pattern is much more compact and includes little agriculture. The savanna type of this zone is much more arid than that of the humid South. In contrast, northern cities are made up almost wholly of squat, dried mud, rectangular dwelling with flat roofs. Morphologically, living patterns vary from town to town and province to province throughout the country based on such things as occupation, national origin, tribe, regional source, religious sect, and economic level.

² Roushdi A. Henin, "Economic Development and Internal Migration in the Sudan," *Sudan Notes and Records*, Vol. 44 (1963), p. 102.

³ United Nations, *Population Growth and Manpower in the Sudan*, Population Study No. 37, 1964, p. 38.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

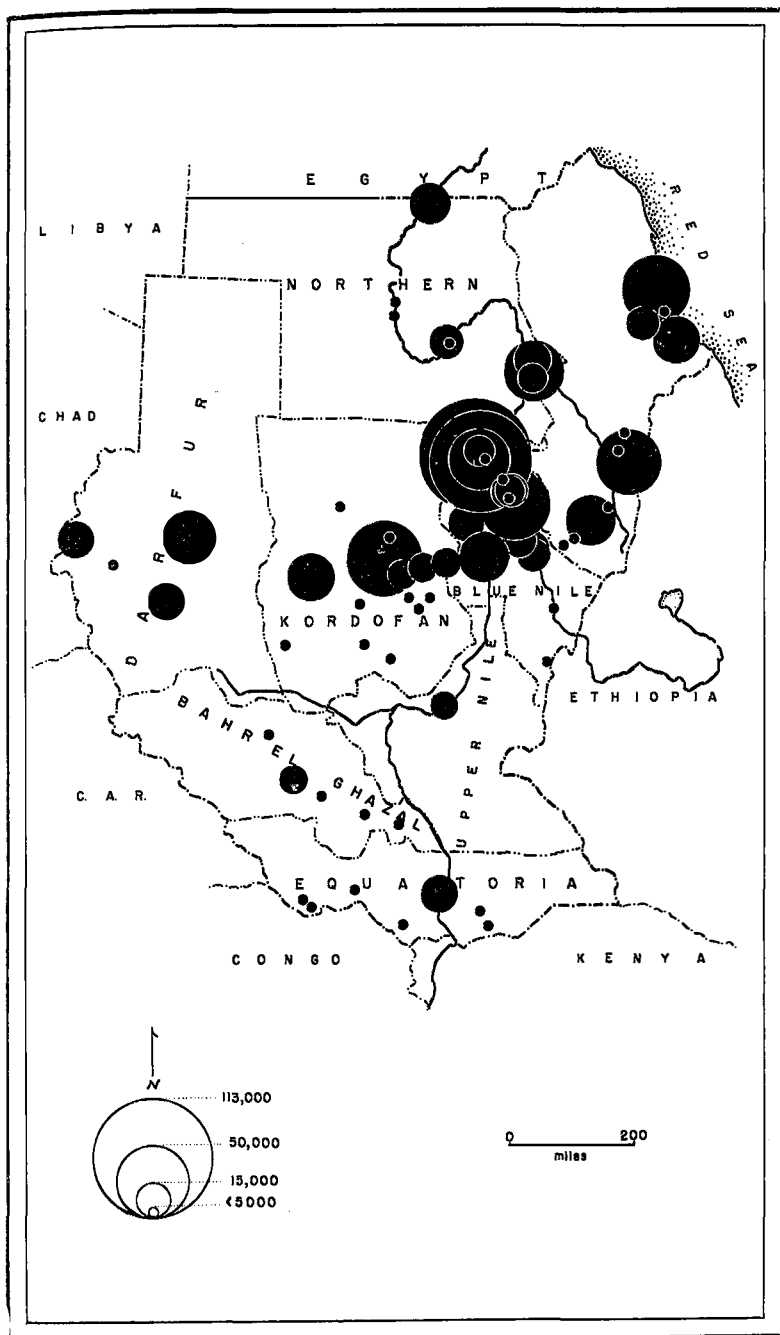


Figure 1. Urban Population in the Republic of Sudan — 1955-56

Historically, urban functions of Sudanese towns have been administrative, with few specialized activities. Today, this lack of functional diversification is breaking down. It is now possible to recognize Atbara as a railroad town, Port Sudan for its port functions, Khartoum North as an industrial city, and Omdurman as a commercial center. However, such specialization is little developed outside of the large urban centers.

For the purpose of the 1955-56 population census urban areas included any settlement previously selected by a district commissioner as an administrative center, and those settlements which the Department of Statistics felt had 5,000 or more inhabitants.⁵ Sixty-eight settlements, ranging in population from 699 to 113,000, were included (see Table 1). Of these,

Table 1
TOWNS ARRANGED IN POPULATION-SIZE ORDER

Rank	Town	Total De Jure Population	Rank	Town	Total De Jure Population
1	Omdurman	113,551*	35	Sinkat	5,175
2	Khartoum**	93,103*	36	Bara	4,884
3	El Obeid**	52,372*	37	Kadugli	4,716
4	Wad Medani**	47,677*	38	Wagar	4,676
5	Port Sudan	47,562*	39	El Kamlin	4,341
6	Kassala**	40,612	40	Suakin	4,228
7	Khartoum North	39,081*	41	Abu Kershola	4,154
8	Atbara	36,298*	42	Er Roseires	3,927
9	El Fasher**	26,161	43	El Hawata	3,921
10	Kosti	22,688	44	Yambio	3,890
11	Gedaref	17,537	45	Muglad	3,735
12	Tokar	16,802	46	Aroma	3,451
13	En Nahud	16,498	47	Dongola	3,350
14	Ed Dueim	12,319	48	Zalingei	3,314
15	Nyala	12,278	49	El Mesellemiya	3,131
16	Geneina	11,817	50	Quala'en Nahl	3,083
17	Shendi	11,031	51	Nzara	2,971
18	Wadi Halfa	11,006	52	Rumbek	2,944
19	Berber	10,977	53	El Abbasiya	2,846
20	Juba**	10,660	54	Talodi	2,736
21	Malakal**	9,680	55	Aweil	2,438
22	Singa	9,436	56	Torit	2,353
23	Rufa'a	9,137	57	Argo	2,329
24	Sennar	8,093	58	Showak	2,171
25	Wau**	8,009	59	Tanj	2,071
26	Umm Ruwaba	7,805	60	Burri el Lamab	2,016
27	Tendelti	7,555	61	Yirol	1,895
28	Es Suki	7,388	62	Sodiri	1,804
29	Er Rahad	6,706	63	Rashad	1,683
30	Shambat	6,611	64	Kurmuk	1,647
31	El Hasaheisa	6,600	65	Merowe	1,620
32	Karima	5,989	66	Maridi	893
33	Dilling	5,596	67	Yei	739
34	Ed Damer**	5,458	68	Katire	699

Source: First Population Census of Sudan 1955/56, Town Planners' Supplement, I, 1960, p. 206.

* Urban large

** Province capital

⁵ Henin, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

seven were classified as "urban large" in that they had populations of 20,000 or more and had dominantly urban functions. Three towns having more than 20,000 inhabitants were not included as they were deemed not sufficiently urban-like. These latter units plus the remaining fifty-eight towns having less than 20,000 population were classified as "urban small." Thirty-three towns had less than 5,000 population.

High population primacy is concentrated in a single urbanized area — the Three Towns, which is made up of Khartoum, the capital of Sudan, Omdurman, and Khartoum North. Considering Linsky's generalizations concerning "primate cities," this primacy is not surprising in that population density in the Sudan and per capita income are very low, and that there is a dependence for national income mainly on one or two agricultural export commodities with a high percentage of the population employed in primary activities.⁶ Located at the juncture of the Blue and the White Niles, the Three Towns conurbation has nearly 30 per cent of the urban population in the Republic of Sudan (see Table 2). All cities

Table 2
MODE OF LIVING AND PROVINCE
(000)

Province 1	Total 2	Urban		Rural	
		Large 3	Small 4	Sedentary 5	Nomadic 6
SUDAN	10,263	430	424	8,023	1,386
Bahr el Ghazal	991	—	17	974	—
Blue Nile	2,070	48	96	1,781	145
Darfur	1,329	—	54	1,010	265
Equatoria	903	—	22	881	—
Kassala	941	48	101	290	502
Khartoum	505	246	9	197	35
Kordofan	1,762	52	63	1,293	354
Northern	873	36	52	718	67
Upper Nile	889	—	10	879	—

Krotki, Karol Jozef, 21 *Facts About the Sudanese, First Population Census of Sudan 1955/56* (1958), Table 12. la, p. 35.

(Percentage)

Province 1	Total 2	Urban		Rural	
		Large 3	Small 4	Sedentary 5	Nomadic 6
SUDAN	100	4	4	78	14
Bahr el Ghazal	100	—	2	98	—
Blue Nile	100	2	5	86	7
Darfur	100	—	4	76	20
Equatoria	100	—	2	98	—
Kassala	100	5	11	31	53
Khartoum	100	49	2	39	10
Kordofan	100	3	4	73	20
Northern	100	4	6	82	8
Upper Nile	100	—	1	99	—

Ibid., Table 12. lb, p. 35.

⁶ Arnold S. Linsky, "Some Generalizations Concerning Primate Cities," *Annals, Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 40, No. 3 (September, 1965), pp. 507-508.

in the country with a population of 30,000 or more, with the exception of Port Sudan, the country's major sea port, are located within 430 miles of this complex. As urban development is inextricably linked with industrialization, it is interesting to note the large portion of the country's present potential for industrialization which is concentrated in such a small area. Of the 240 industries in the Sudan in 1961, more than 100 were in Khartoum Province, though the province contained less than five per cent of the total population.⁷ An industrial location in or near the Three Towns now offers the best prospects for success. Existing routes of transportation, complementary industries, power supply, and facilities for communication and marketing are established there. Part of the local population has some experience in non-primary occupations, and the resident population, as the most affluent in the Sudan, offers a considerable market.

This concentration of advantages for economic development in one location is not good for the country as a whole. The absence of any "urban large" center in the three southern provinces and in Darfur is a major handicap, not just for economic development, but also for the establishment of better health and educational facilities. It is difficult and costly to extend such services into areas far removed from urban centers of any size. The problem is especially difficult where rural population densities are low and settlement widely dispersed. Thus, progress in economic development, health, and education would be furthered by greater urban development outside of the Three Towns, preferably in the least developed southern and northern provinces.

As things stand now, most money for economic development is being invested in agriculture and transportation. Irrigation projects such as Khashm el Girba, Kanana, the Manquil Extension of the Gezira, and many smaller pump schemes along the Niles, in addition to experiments with intensification techniques, are receiving primary attention. Large sums of money are also being expended on rail transport improvement, bridge construction, and road building. Interest and investment in these two areas are vital for laying an economic base for industrial growth. For, while agriculture remains dismally underdeveloped and the vast majority of the population operates at the subsistence level, efforts toward large scale industrialization are untenable.

Industry is not a panacea for economic development, for the latter, reflected in terms of high per capita income, usually includes high-level production in all sectors of the economy, including agriculture. The agricultural revolution is just as essential as the industrial revolution. In fact, agricultural development must precede and finance industrial development, for industrialization is the result of and major outlet for capital accumulated in commercial agriculture.

The rate of growth of the large urban centers, which is approximately four per cent per annum, is not great. Of this figure, approximately one per cent per annum is due to migration,⁸ the remainder being attributable

⁷ United Nations, *op. cit.*, p.40.

⁸ R. A. Henin, "The Future Population Size of Khartoum, Khartoum North, Omurman and Port Sudan," *Sudan Notes and Record*, Vol. 42 (1961), p. 87.

to births over deaths. An analysis of data on place of birth versus place of residence (see Table 3) reveals a number of interesting factors relating to trends in settlement patterns in the Sudan for approximately the last thirty-five years. Far and away the greatest movement has been from rural nomadic to rural sedentary. In fact, the growth in rural sedentary was eight times that of urban large. The tendency for settlement of nomads in sedentary agriculture is to be expected as it is a world-wide trend and, to this point, government policy, but it is also significant for the degree of "pull" exhibited by agriculture. Therefore, the large government investments in agriculture seem justified. Another factor of great significance is the relative loss of population by small urban centers primarily to agriculture and secondarily to large urban centers, for the rate of growth of small urban centers has been less than births over deaths. Large urban areas have gained slowly in population, drawing mainly from urban small and rural sedentary.

In the more developed provinces of Kassala, Khartoum and Blue Nile both large and small urban areas are growing. The less developed provinces of the North and South, on the other hand, are characterized by growth in large urban areas, where they exist, but declining small urban centers.

In summary, urbanization in the Republic of Sudan has reached a very modest level. Much of this urbanism is highly concentrated in a few large urban centers. Some of the smaller urban areas have urban features only to a limited extent, and extensive areas of the country are yet remote from any urban area of real importance. The Sudan still lacks dispersion and functional diversification of city and town that would help in an effective development of resources and would contribute to progress in education and health.

As long as economic development continues to be agricultural rather than industrial, sedentary ruralization rather than urbanization will continue to be the dominant trend. Small urban centers will continue their relative decline and large urban centers will grow at a moderate rate as industrial and commercial sectors increase and transportation is improved.

Table 3
ANALYSIS OF GAINS (+) AND LOSSES (—)
(OOO)

Mode of living	Net Gains + Losses —	Urban		Rural	
		Large	Small	Sedentary	Nomadic
Urban large	+123	—	+48	+68	+7
Urban small	—125	—48	—	—74	—3
Rural sedentary	+950	—68	+74	—	+944
Rural nomadic	—948	—7	+3	—944	—

Source: First Population Census, Final Report, 1962, Table 7.5, p. 361.