

CHAPTER III

EXISTING CHARACTERISTICS OF NDIA KUU STREET

3.0 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the existing characteristics of Ndia Kuu Street as the study area. These characteristics include historical background of the conservation area where Ndia Kuu is located, the urban design characteristics such as building height, building functions, visual access, material use, vegetation, the paths, the nodes and the landmarks along Ndia Kuu. This chapter therefore identifies the urban design problems along Ndia Kuu .

3.1 Background Information

Ndia Kuu is a Swahili term that means “Main Street”. The street is located on the southern part of the Mombasa Old Town Conservation area. Together with Mbarak Hinawy Street, Ndia Kuu has significant historical attributes that justify the title of the “Main Street”. Ndia Kuu connects Fort Jesus to major parts of the Old Town including the Old Fish Market and Leven House.

The conservation area, covering approximately 31 hectares, is within the old town and roughly corresponds to the old walled town called the Gavana, built by the Portuguese in the late sixteenth century. The Portuguese wall is believed to have been built along Nkrumah and Makadara roads to the south, Samburu road to the west and Wachangamwe street including Kitui road on its north boarder. Wachangamwe street was formerly called the Wall street. Piggot place was added

on the northern side while Treasury square and Fort Jesus were added on the southern side to form the conservation area.

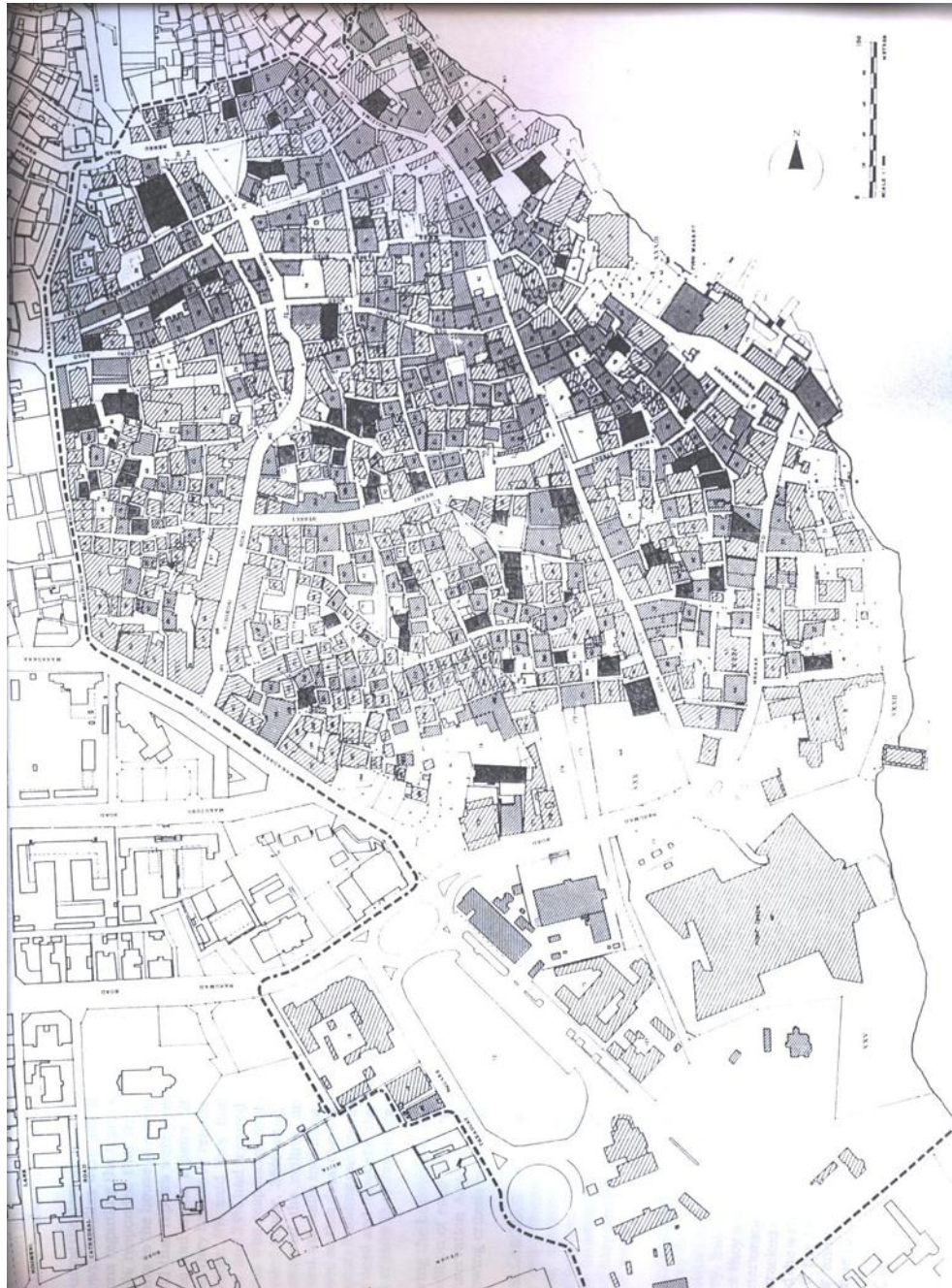


Fig 3.1 Plan of the conservation area within Old Town, Mombasa
Source: King et al, 1987

The dotted area on the plan as indicated on figure 2.7, represents the boundary of the conservation area. The conservation area has a lot of historical and architectural significance and it was the center of activities between the late sixteenth and the early twentieth centuries. Due to its proximity to the Fort and the harbour, successive rulers centered themselves within this part of the old town. These rulers included the Portuguese, the Mazrui, the Al-Busaidy and the British.

The conservation area developed along Ndia Kuu, Mbarak Hinawy road and around the old Port. Mbarak Hinawy road was formerly known as Vasco da Gama Road. Most of the old and architecturally significant buildings that remain within the conservation area are found in the section bound by Ndia Kuu, Mbarak Hinawy road and the Sea front. Mud and thatched houses characterized the conservation area until within the last century when these were replaced with stone structures.

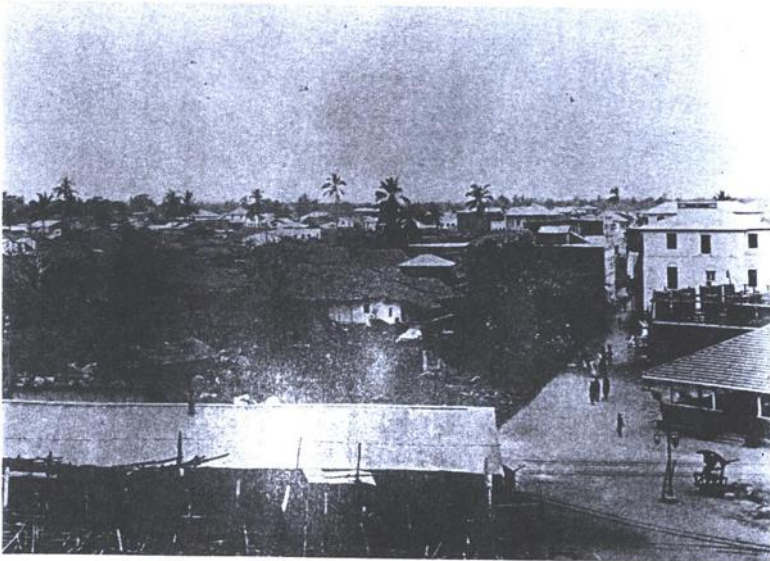
A system of neighborhoods called “mitaa” developed along family or clan lines within the conservation area. This setting is common to all traditional Swahili communities. A ‘mtaa’ (singular), therefore consists of a group of houses whose members extend from the same family and usually depend on one another for their social and economic development. The neighborhoods were separated by pathways, which later developed into a system of streets. These streets roughly run on the north-south axis, which is in the same direction of the shoreline, and on

the east-west axis perpendicular to the water line. None of these streets is purely a straight line and therefore the system created irregularly shaped areas.

The coming of the British saw the formalization of the system of land development. The town was divided into administrative section through the land titles ordinance of 1908. These administrative sections were based on the existing road network and all the plots were numbered under this system, which was adapted and simplified after independence.



Ndia Kuu c. 1890.



Ndia Kuu c. 1898.

Fig 3.2 Historical development of Ndia Kuu
Source: King et al, 1987



Fig 3.3 Historical development of Ndia Kuu
Source: King et al, 1987

Fig.3.2 and Fig. 3.3 show the historical development of Ndia Kuu. The conservation area developed around Ndia Kuu and around the Old Port. Since the Portuguese period, Ndia Kuu linked Fort Jesus with the Swahili town north of the Gavana as a footpath. Ndia Kuu therefore developed into a major business and residential axis within the conservation area.

3.2 Urban Space Characteristics

The Old Town of Mombasa where Ndia Kuu is located consists of old buildings dating back to as early as 16th Century. These buildings form part of the architectural and urban heritage that depicts the historical events that took place within the Island of Mombasa. Highly decorated building elements such as the carved doors, wooden balconies and decorative fascia boards have contributed to the character of Ndia Kuu and the Old Town.



Fig 3.4 Part-Plan of the conservation area within Old Town, Mombasa
Source: King et al, 1987

The conservation area, which includes Ndia Kuu is characterized by narrow streets with building edges arranged haphazardly. This unplanned building arrangement forms the plan of the Old Town and provides unique urban space characteristics as shown in Fig. 3.2.

Neighborhoods are defined by cluster of houses called ‘mita a’ and each ‘mtaa’ has a mosque. The unique architecture and function of the mosque within a ‘mtaa’ helps in creating the overall character of the Old Town. Stone benches in form of ‘barazas’ are also often built along the street to accommodate social activities within the Old Town.

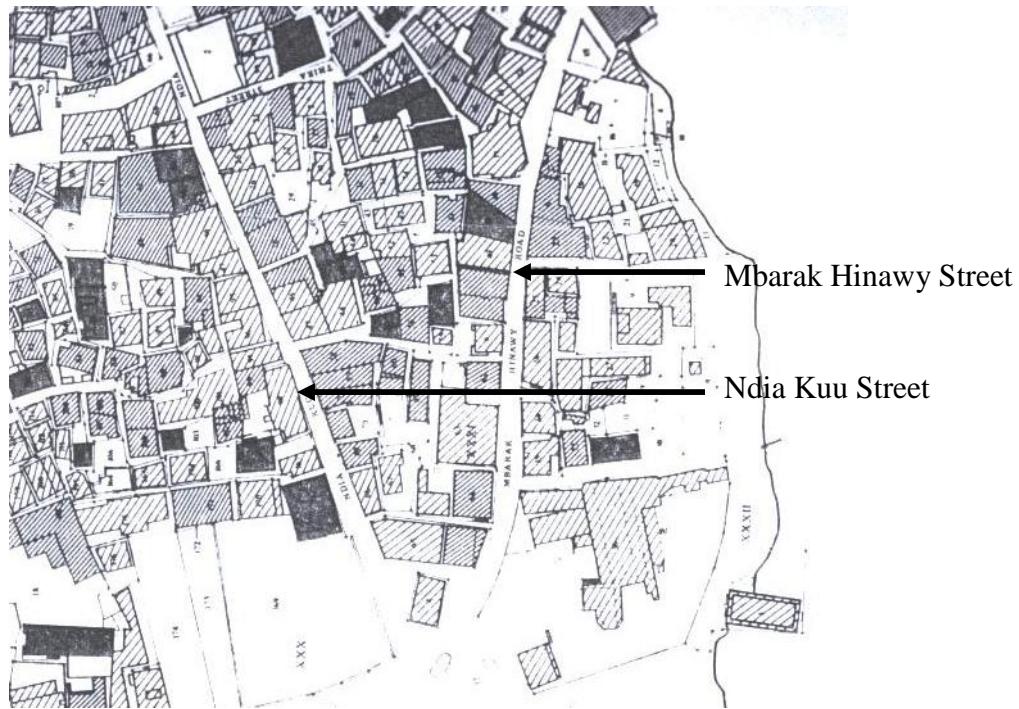


Fig 3.5 Plan of Ndia Kuu
Source: King et al, 1987

The buildings along Ndia Kuu Street as shown on Fig. 3.3 are not well aligned in reference to the street. The width of the street therefore varies as one moves along. Edges of the buildings are often damaged by activities along the street including vehicular movement.

3.2.1 Building Height

Ndia Kuu is characterized by two and three storey buildings with a few exceptions inform of additions that have changed the skyline to four storeys. Fig 3.6 shows an example of these additions that have changed the scale and proportion of the street. More sun shading is created by such additions but the street becomes uncomfortable to the human scale.



Fig 3.6 Buildings along Ndia Kuu
Source: MOTCO, 2007

There is a mixture of single storey buildings and multi-storey structures along Ndia Kuu as shown in Fig. 3.6. This creates interplay of volumes along the street that contributes to the built form of Ndia Kuu.

3.2.2 Building Functions

Ndia Kuu is mostly a commercial street at the pedestrian level with residential uses dominating the upper levels. Retail outlets including small-scale enterprises characterize the street with a few other uses such as a nursery school and a graveyard at the southern part of the street. A few residential units are also found along the street as shown in Fig. 3.7.

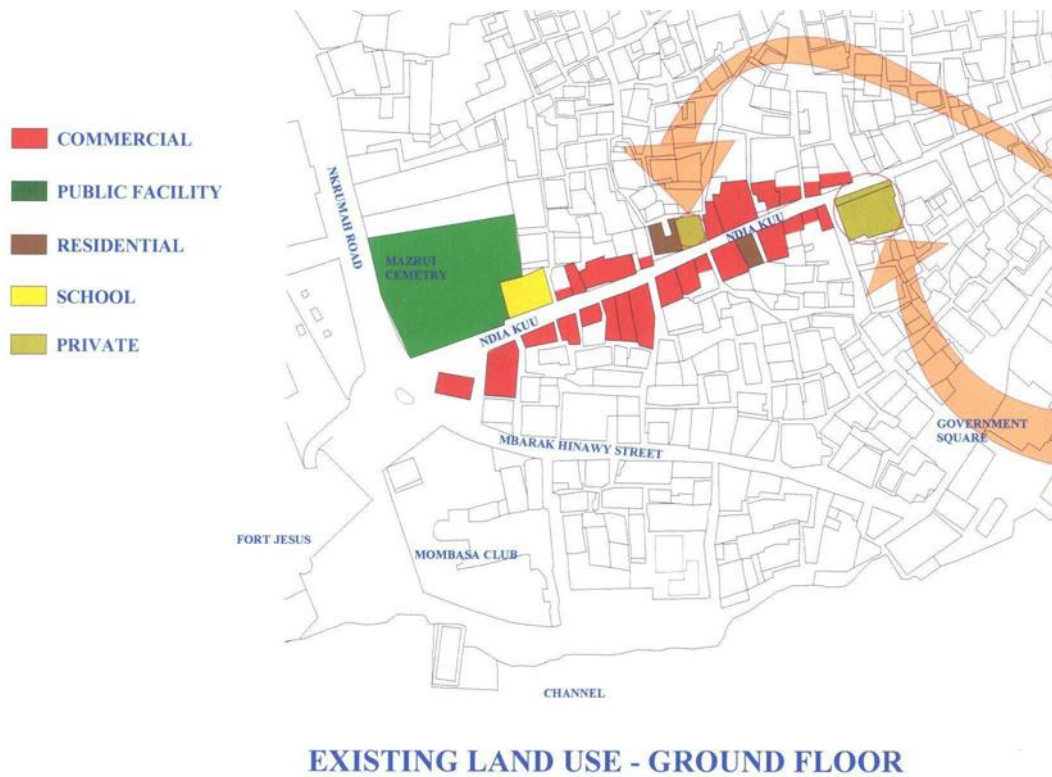


Fig 3.7 Land use along Ndia Kuu
 Source: Field Survey, 2007

The sites indicated as private in Fig 3.7 are currently undeveloped after demolitions of previously existing buildings. These two sites once had buildings of architectural and historical significance. Fig. 3.22 shows the image of the building before demolition while Fig. 3.14 shows the site after demolitions. These two sites have broken the continuity of the edges along the street and the resultant spaces are currently under utilized. Urban design measures are required to ensure that such demolitions do not occur again in other parts of the Old Town and also to create usable spaces that conform to urban conservation principles.

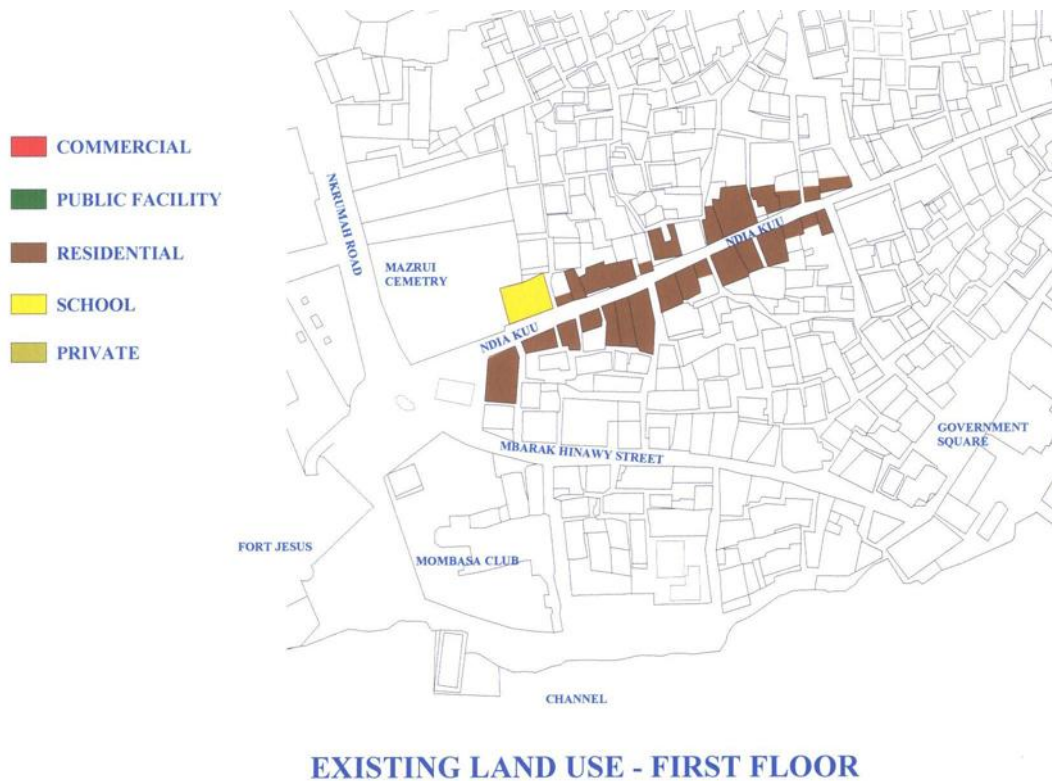


Fig 3.8 Land use along Ndia Kuu
Source: Field Survey, 2007

Residential units are the predominant land uses at upper levels along Ndia Kuu as shown in Fig. 3.8. From the historical background of the Old Town, it is noted that these residential units consist of clusters of houses called ‘mitaa’, which are made up family relations, typical of closely-knit societies. Urban design strategies and proposals are required to enhance this social cohesion among the Swahili communities. This includes urban design policy frameworks and design intervention to ensure the sustainability of this unique urban heritage.

3.2.3 Visual Access

Buildings along Ndia Kuu are inconsistently arranged which is typical of unplanned cities that have developed through natural growth. This has created visual qualities similar to Gordon Cullen's description of Serial Vision. Each building along Ndia Kuu meets the street with its unique angle thereby creating combinations of concave and convex urban spaces along the same street. This allows the pedestrian to experience unique and varying urban space characteristics of the street. Fig.3.9 demonstrates the changing angles of vision as one moves along Ndia Kuu thereby enhancing visual perception of the urban space and its qualities.

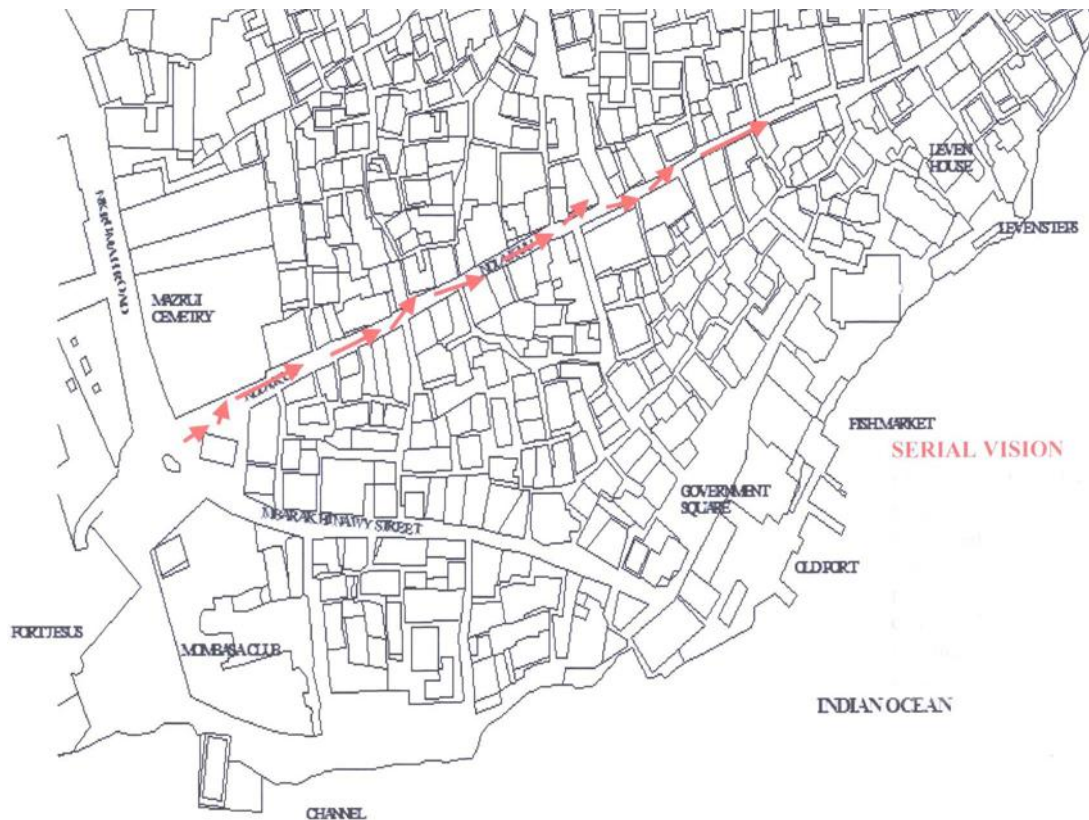


Fig 3.9 Visual access along Ndia Kuu
Source: Field Survey, 2007

3.2.4 Material Use

The main materials used along Ndia Kuu include whitewash plaster on coral stone walls, decorative hard wood for doors, windows and balconies including ornamental hard wood brackets supporting wooden balconies, decorative fascia boards and other elements. Concrete paving blocks recently laid on the street form the main surface finish for most parts of the conservation area.



Fig 3.10 Building materials used
Source: MOTCO, 2007

Mazera stone has been used on one building along Ndia Kuu and this is an example of non-conforming finishes within the conservation area as demonstrated in Fig. 3.10. Such finishes have altered the character of Ndia Kuu and the conservation area.

3.2.5 Vegetation

There is very little vegetation cover along Ndia Kuu as shown in Fig. 3.11 where one building frontage is designed with plant materials. Almost the entire street is paved with concrete blocks leaving no space for vegetation as part of landscaping. The hard surfaces on the street are environmentally unfriendly and also aesthetically displeasing. The design of this street needs to incorporate landscaping elements to include vegetation. Landscaping elements provide functional efficiency of urban spaces while at the same time enhancing aesthetic qualities of such spaces thereby enhancing human activities.



Fig 3.11 Vegetation along Ndia Kuu
Source: MOTCO, 2007



Fig 3.12 Vegetation along Ndia Kuu
Source: MOTCO, 2007

Some vegetation cover along Ndia Kuu is in form of outgrowth due to lack of regular maintenance of buildings along the street. Fig. 3.12 shows bougainvillea outgrowth in between two buildings along Ndia Kuu. Another form of vegetation that is noted in Fig. 3.12 along Ndia Kuu is that of mature trees inside the Mazrui Graveyard. This form of vegetation is also uncontrolled and undersigned.

3.2.6 Nodes

Ndia Kuu has three street intersections which act as nodes along the street. The first node is the junction between Nkrumah street and N dia Kuu street and it is marked A on Fig. 3.13. This is the starting point of Ndia Kuu, which forms a place for commercial and social activities. The node marked B on Fig. 3.13 is formed by intersections along Ndia Kuu by narrow alleys into other parts of the Old Town. The intersection of Ndia Kuu by Thika Street and Nyeri Street forms another major node marked C on Fig. 3.13. A number of social and commercial activities take place within this node. These three nodes with their distinctive characteristics have contributed to the character of Ndia Kuu.

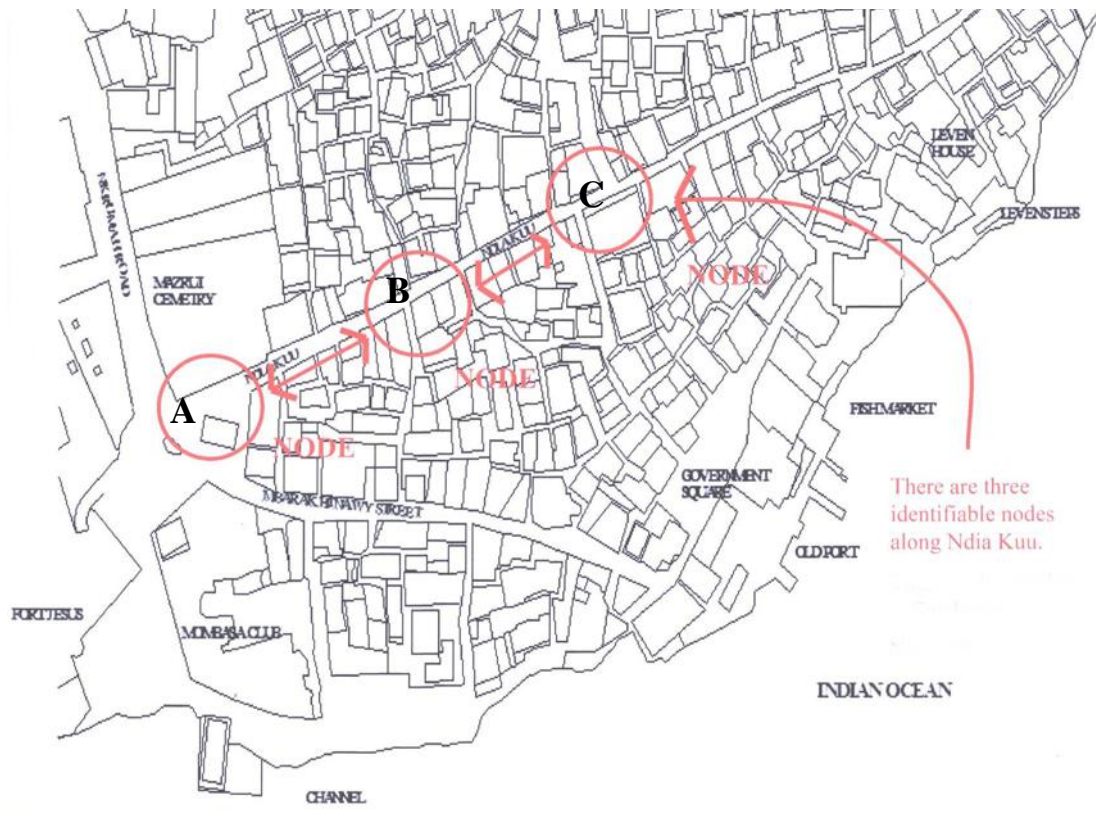


Fig 3.13 Nodes along Ndia Kuu
Source: Field Survey, 2007



Fig 3.14 Junction of Ndia Kuu and Nyeri Street
Source: MOTCO, 2007

Fig. 3.14 shows the site of a demolished building which is located on the node marked C on Fig. 3.13. The site is currently unutilized pending legal injunctions and proceedings arising from unauthorized demolition of architecturally and historically significant building within the conservation area. This is an example of developments that, if allowed to proceed, would contradict conservation principles and regulations for the Old Town of Mombasa. Fig. 3.22 shows the image of the building on this site before demolition. The arched arcade on the

façade of the building strongly influenced the character of Ndia Kuu. The node has therefore lost its character after the demolition of such landmark buildings.



Fig 3.15 Junction of Ndia Kuu and Nyeri Street
Source: MOTCO, 2007

The junction between Ndia Kuu and Nyeri Street as shown in Fig. 3.15 is a node that is poorly maintained. Unique buildings form part of this node and the spaces that make up the node are poorly defined. Activities take place on this node but some re-organization is required to improve efficiency and aesthetics.

Most of the activities are therefore concentrated on these three nodes along Ndia Kuu, which implies that, urban design intervention is required to enhance the spatial definition and qualities of these urban spaces.

3.2.7 Paths

Vehicular and pedestrian paths along Ndia Kuu are poorly defined. Fig. 3.16 shows the street being used as a pedestrian walkway, vehicular circulation and also other activities such as seating. This is a clear conflict in definition of circulation paths along Ndia Kuu.



Fig 3.16 Pedestrian and vehicular circulation along Ndia Kuu
Source: MOTCO, 2007

Fig. 3.16 shows a failure in existing circulation patterns that encourage conflicting space usage, which often results into problems such as road accidents. Buildings also undergo accelerated deterioration, which ruins the character of the street, thereby hindering human activities and destroying the urban experience within the Old Town.

3.2.8 Edges

There is a rich interplay of solids and voids within the edges of Ndia Kuu as shown in Fig. 3.17 and Fig.3.18. The street elevations along Ndia Kuu show a mixture of building heights from single storey to two and three storey buildings.



Fig 3.17 Part-Elevation of Ndia Kuu

Source: King et al, 1987



Fig 3.18 Part-Elevation of Ndia Kuu

Source: King et al, 1987

The street edges are harmonious and balanced; therefore urban design guidelines need to be put in place to ensure that the character of these edges are maintained. Such guidelines must be used in conjunction with the existing conservation regulations and guidelines. This will ensure the conservation of the character of these edges as part of the urban spaces within the Old Town.

3.2.9 Landmarks

Important landmarks along Ndia Kuu include the Mazrui Graveyard, but others within the vicinity of the conservation area include the Fort Jesus, the Government Square, the Old Port, the Fish Market, the Leven House and the Leven Steps among others. The area marked C on Fig. 3.19 shows the site of the demolished building which has remained undeveloped for close to two decades. This was a landmark building along Ndia Kuu that needs to be re-built in its original form in order to retain the character of the street.

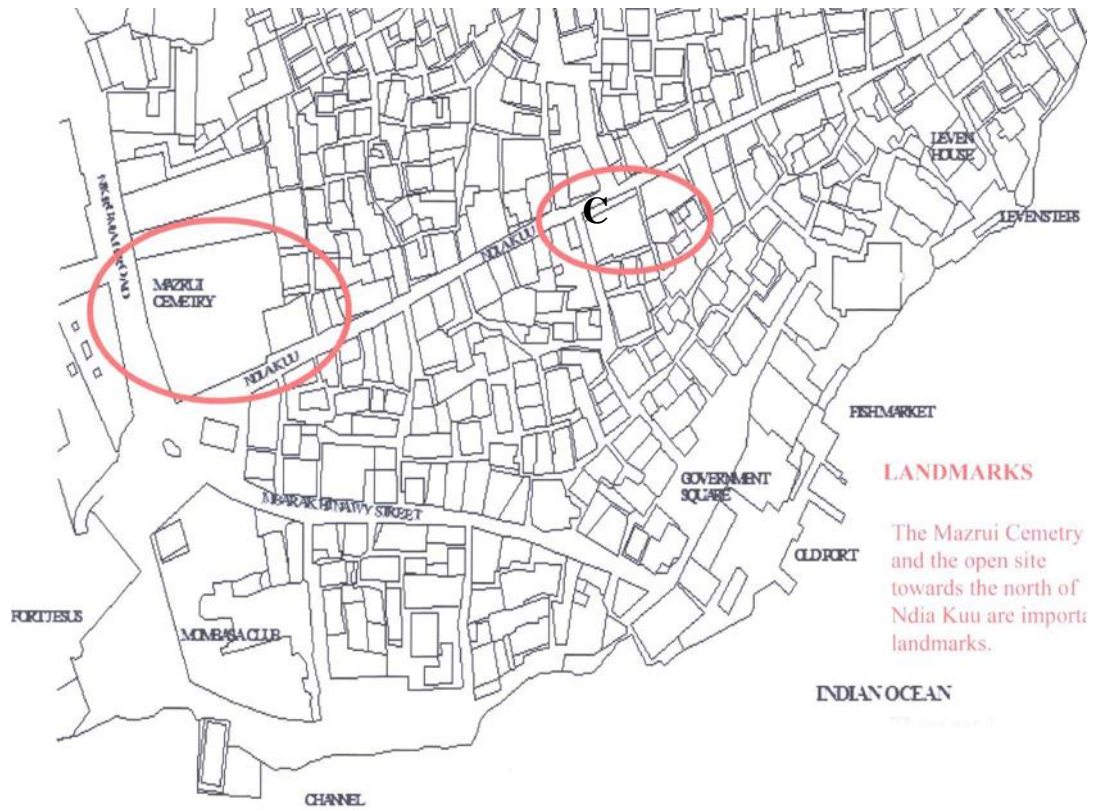


Fig 3.19 Landmarks along Ndia Kuu
 Source: Field Survey, 2007



Fig 3.20 The Mazrui Graveyard
Source: MOTCO, 2007

The Mazrui Graveyard is an important landmark at the beginning of Ndia Kuu due to its historical significance and its prominent location near the Fort Jesus. However, this landmark is poorly defined as public facility within the historical Old Town. Aldo Rossi, an Italian architect, presents his design of the Modena Cemetery as a house, a city and a public building. Rossi refers to the cemetery as a house for the dead, which needs to be designed with special attention to the elements that create dignified resting places for the dead. Appropriate design of the cemetery must therefore be incorporated to restore this dignity for a landmark

such as the Mazrui Graveyard without compromising religious values and requirements for Islamic graveyards.



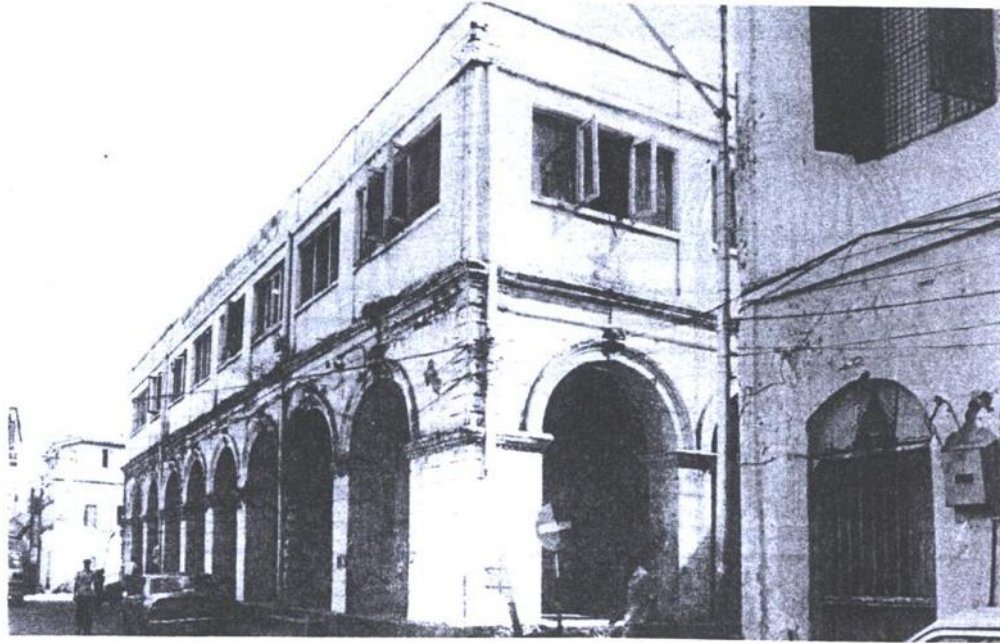
Fig 3.21 The Mazrui Graveyard
Source: MOTCO, 2007

Fig. 3.21 shows the attempts to create urban street furniture and Landscaping elements along the wall of the Mazrui graveyard. This attracts activities along the wall especially in the evening as a social meeting place. This landmark is prominently located and it is also attached with historic significance, due to the fact that the Mazrui once ruled the Old Town of Mombasa.

Another important landmark building that once existed along Ndia Kuu is shown in Fig. 3.23 and the site has since remained undeveloped and unutilized. The site therefore encourages undesired activities such as dumping of garbage as shown in Fig. 3.22.



Fig 3.22 Site of demolished building along Ndia Kuu
Source: MOTCO, 2007



Hansing and Company: Demolished in 1989.

Fig 3.23 The building along Ndia Kuu before demolition
Source: King et al, 1987

3.3 Conclusion

The study established a number of both positive and negative aspects about Ndia Kuu as an urban street within the conservation area of the Old Town. These aspects contribute to the character of Ndia Kuu. The negative aspects are established as problems of the street, which include poor circulation paths, poor definition of the nodes, lack of elements that enhance human activities, poor definition of landmarks and physical decay of the built fabric. Part I of this study established that the width of the street, number of columns per meter, average height of windows and number of doors influence human activities within urban spaces of the Old Town. These elements were found to be lacking along Ndia Kuu Street. However, there are some positive aspects about Ndia Kuu, which create a unique character that needs to be enhanced and well articulated. These include the rich historical context of Ndia Kuu, the unique architectural typology

including the built elements, the social and cultural context of the people of Old Town, the geographical location of the Old Town, the landmarks associated with the historical context and the general urban layout of the Old Town.