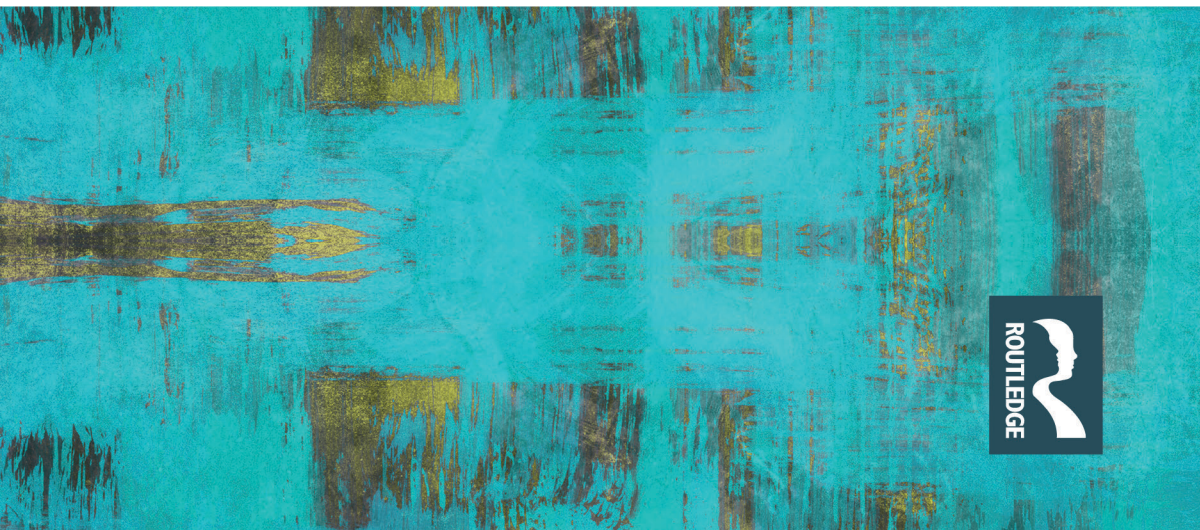
Routledge Studies in the Modern History of Africa

RECONSIDERING COLONIAL HERITAGE IN WEST AFRICAN CITIES

URBAN SPACE IN CAPE VERDE, SENEGAL AND THE GAMBIA

Krzysztof Górny



ROUTLEDGE

Reconsidering Colonial Heritage in West African Cities

The material heritage of the colonial era is built into Africa's cities, from their urban layouts, to their architecture, monuments and street names. This book discusses the varying responses to colonial heritage in West African cities, with a particular focus on the case studies of Praia in Cape Verde, Dakar in Senegal and Banjul in The Gambia.

Europeans tended to focus on cities as centres of administration, and they were often both the starting points for settlement and the locations in which power was formally handed over to new African governments. Colonialism in Praia, Dakar and Banjul was abolished at different times, under different colonial powers (Portuguese, French and British) and amongst vastly different conditions of unrest. Based on extensive original research, this book demonstrates that the contemporary approach to the contentious issue of urban colonial heritage is often determined by metropolis-colony relationship before decolonisation, postcolonial diplomatic relations as well as present-day political decisions.

The book uncovers a rich relationship between politics and urban space, and between new and old. Combining insights from political sciences, history, critical geography, heritage studies and urban planning, this book will be of interest to a wide range of researchers.

Krzysztof Górny is a political and historical geographer specialising in research on cities and countries of Sub-Saharan Africa, where he conducts field research (e.g. in Ghana, Senegal, The Gambia, Rwanda or Guinea-Bissau). He works at the Faculty of Geography and Regional Studies at the University of Warsaw, where he teaches classes on political geography, historical geography, international conflicts, history and geography of Africa as well as urban studies. In 2020, he defended his doctoral dissertation entitled "Colonial heritage in contemporary urban space of West African cities". He publishes articles in renowned international journals, such as *Planning Perspectives*, *Journal of Urban History*, *Journal of Baltic Studies*, *Miscellanea Geographica* or *Land*.

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Urban Space in Cape Verde, Senegal and The Gambia

Krzysztof Górny

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1 Introduction to colonial heritage in West African cities

This book tackles the subject of colonial heritage within the space of African cities, with particular emphasis on cities located in the western part of the continent. Urban space, in particular in prominent administrative hubs, should be treated as a source of information on the condition of their residents, the dominant political trends – past and present, as well as each location's history and *genius loci*. Every space "speaks" to its users/audience. It gives an account of its past, the people who created it as well as its current creators, custodians and users. This message is not only aesthetic, but also political. The specific language which space uses to communicate with us is sometimes difficult to decipher, in particular if the "interlocutor" has a different cultural background. Still, analysing this language, concealed in material and non-material elements of urban space, may yield interesting results. This book endeavours to help readers understand the contemporary political language of selected African cities and reconstruct the political narrative recorded within their space and its evolution.

It is divided into five parts. The first one presents the main objective and detailed objectives of the work and serves as an introduction to the subject. It also formulates the research questions and hypotheses. This chapter contains a brief overview of literature that tackles the issue of colonialism and heritage itself. The subsequent section of the introduction describes the differences between individual types of African colonialism, arising from different policies pursued by European colonial empires in relation to the conquered territories. Finally, this part contains a brief presentation of the process of decolonisation of Africa from the geopolitical perspective. The pan-African view of decolonisation of African urban spaces serves as an introduction to the later detailed, up-close analyses of three capital cities located in West Africa – Praia, the capital of Cabo Verde, Dakar in Senegal and Banjul in The Gambia. They are described in the three subsequent parts of the book (Chapters 2, 3 and 4), presenting a local, strictly urban perspective on the contemporary[1] status of preservation of colonial heritage in selected African cities. Chapter 5 – the last chapter – contains a summary of and conclusions drawn from the conducted research. It evaluates the soundness of the adopted

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hypotheses and presents directions for potential further research into colonial heritage of African cities.

General outline of the subject

Contemporary cities of Sub-Saharan Africa are the most dynamically developing urban hubs in the world. Demographic boom, agrarian overpopulation, changes in the natural environment, industrialisation and development of the services sector are only some of the factors conducive to development of urbanised areas in African countries. Inner city demographic development and migration from the countryside to the city, resulting from the aforementioned factors, gave rise to both horizontal and vertical growth of African metropolises. Urban sprawl has led to the creation of vast informal districts in the outskirts of many cities on the continent; at the same time, the density of their centres is continuously increasing, which is accompanied by vertical expansion.

The scale and pace of those transformations are undoubtedly leaving a mark on the landscape of African cities. On one hand, these cities are becoming progressively larger, more modern and globalised; on the other hand, the costs of this evolution can also be observed in the overpopulated informal suburbs and disappearing historical architecture in the centres. Since the majority of the existing Sub-Saharan African cities were founded during the colonial era, it is assumed that their historical spaces are primarily the districts established and shaped by the Europeans. It should be noted, however, that arrival of Europeans in Sub-Saharan Africa should not be equated *a priori* with the appearance of the idea of a city in that region. Cities had existed there much earlier, with many of them being robust centres of power and commerce. Major ones include Great Zimbabwe on the south of the continent, Mbanza Kongo in Central Africa, the cities of the Yoruba people and the capital of Benin on the Gulf of Guinea, as well as the cities of Central Sudan, i.e. Kano, Katsina and Zaria and West Sudan, e.g. Kumbi Saleh, Awdaghost, Niani, Walata, Timbuktu and Djenné (Tymowski 1999). The arrival of Europeans led to complete downfall or considerable transformation of many of the aforementioned pre-colonial hubs, as well as to establishment of numerous new urban centres, in particular on the Atlantic coast.

At this point, it should be noted that colonialism, considered as an era of conquest and domination of Europeans over the inhabitants of other continents, commenced in the 15th century, at the beginning of the era of great geographical discoveries, and ended in the second half of the 20th century with the downfall of European colonial empires. This work will discuss examples of cities established both during the first stage of European penetration of West African coasts in the 15th century and hubs founded only after the introduction of the ban on trans-Atlantic slave trade in the 19th century.

Full-scale decolonisation of Africa and Asia started at the end of World War II, when economically ruined European colonial empires were looking

for savings, among others by cutting spendings on colonial administration. Simultaneously, grassroots African movements were becoming increasingly vocal in the colonies, postulating their significant autonomy or complete liberation. Global political and economic shifts resulting from World War II and western societies' growing awareness of the abuses of the European administration in the colonies forced the authorities in London, Paris, Brussels and Madrid, and much later also in Lisbon, to formally part with their Asian and African possessions. Indonesia became independent from the Netherlands already on 17 August 1945 (Benda 1965). In turn, Sudan – a vast British colony in Africa – gained independence in 1956, among others due to the fact that the costs of maintaining colonial administration on such a large territory significantly exceeded economic and political benefits of preserving British rule. The pace of those processes was rapid, culminating in 1960, when the right of self-determination was obtained by 17 new African countries, jointing the group of merely ten already independent ones. As cities were abandoned by European administrations – gradually or in a rush – they were overtaken by Africans, who had always inhabited them and in most cases dominated them in terms of sheer numbers, but had been unable to influence their development. The situation changed in terms of the last aspect and from that point onwards, it was the new, local (i.e. African) authorities that were responsible for creating urban reality.

From the very beginning, African authorities at all levels encountered many obstacles. The major ones include the struggle for political independence as well as issues related to underdevelopment. One of the numerous other problems was the approach to the heritage of the bygone colonial era. It was a multifaceted issue that concerned practically every aspect of how the new countries and their societies operated. On a national level, it was necessary to consider revision of post-colonial borders (which was ultimately abandoned), leaving or changing the official language, determining the economic and diplomatic relations with the former coloniser as well as the new, also independent neighbours. Another considerable issue was establishing a new regime and legal order.

On a local level, i.e. in the cities discussed in this work, facing the colonial heritage present within their space was inevitable. European heritage was omnipresent on both material (the urban layout, buildings, monuments) and non-material level (urban nomenclature, spatial racial segregation, etc.). Africans could tackle the subject of how to approach colonial heritage right away or postpone it and take care of more urgent matters. They could weaponise it in a symbolic struggle against the former coloniser or preserve it to make diplomatic relations more amicable. Three possible scenarios of approaching the heritage of the recent colonial era emerged at the time of decolonisation. The first one involved annihilation of colonial heritage as the European administration withdrew. The second solution was to leave the existing sites and protect them; these sites were gradually becoming relics, and thus colonial monuments. The third option was not to take any steps

and leave this issue to be resolved at a later date. Decolonisation of toponyms commenced by President Mobutu Sese Seko in Zaire led to changes in the name of the country, its capital city and other cities as well as all post-colonial street names (option 1). It was dictated by an ideology called "African authenticity policy", "authenticity ideology" or simply "Mobutism" (Young and Turner 1985). On the opposite extreme, leaving colonial monuments in Senegalese cities was associated with conciliatory foreign policy towards France (option 3).

The fate of colonial heritage within the space of selected West African cities during the post-colonial period is the subject of this book. It is a study in political geography, whose main premise is analysing and explaining the relations between political processes and geographical space (Short 2002; Flint and Taylor 2007). Therefore, this subject is one of the core interests of political geography, while this work as a whole, with urban space being the subject of its research, combines political and historical geography. It also falls within the scope of broader urban studies, frequently tackled not only by geographers and regionalists, but also by anthropologists or architects.

Spatial and temporal scope of the analysis

The main part of this work describes the results of research carried out in three West African capital cities. Chapters 2, 3 and 4 present colonial heritage in Praia, the capital of Cabo Verde (Chapter 2), Dakar, the capital of Senegal (Chapter 3) and Banjul, the capital of The Gambia (Chapter 4). Detailed field research was carried out in all cities: in February 2017 in Praia, in June 2018 in Dakar and in March 2019 in Banjul.

In this book, West Africa is understood as a region which includes the following modern-day countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo, Cabo Verde and Côte d'Ivoire. The borders of the region were taken from the most commonly applied division into global regions, adopted by the United Nations for statistical purposes.[2]

The applied city selection key is also crucial. It was not accidental and there are at least three reasons for choosing Praia, Dakar and Banjul as the subjects of in-depth studies. Firstly, in 2015–2016, I visited Gambia, Senegal and Cabo Verde during several trips. These earlier study visits enabled later careful and detailed planning and preparation of the field research. Secondly, the three countries and their capital cities selected for the analysis are situated in the same region (West Africa), which translates to similar historical and economic conditions for their development. The third reason is the political and historical aspect. In the past, the cities selected for the analysis were prominent centres of colonial administration in three different European empires. Praia was the capital city of the Portuguese colony of Cabo Verde, and after the archipelago gained independence in 1975, it became the most important city (the capital) of the new country. On the other hand, Dakar

was one of the most prominent French cities in Africa. In 1902–1960, it was the capital of the largest French colony in the world – French West Africa (AOF). It comprised the modern-day territories of countries such as Senegal, Mauritania, Guinea, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Benin. When Senegal became an independent state in 1960, the city became its capital. Banjul, on the other hand, was the main administrative centre of the British colony of The Gambia until 1965. It was known as Bathurst at the time and when the colony gained independence, it took over the function of the capital city. The different colonial pasts (Portuguese, French and British) still affect the political relations between the former colonies and their metropolises. The form and evolution of bilateral relations, on the other hand, resulted in extremely varied approaches to the heritage of the colonial era, which resulted in the current differences in the status of its preservation. Inspecting the three selected urban centres with such different colonial pasts is meant to demonstrate the complexity and diversity of political processes taking place in post-colonial Africa and their extremely varied impact on the space of the continent's cities.

Determining the temporal scope of this analysis is a much more challenging task. The starting point is in early 15th century, at the beginning of the era of great geographical discoveries and the accompanying first attempts at penetrating Africa's Atlantic coast, made by "the Portuguese, who were the *spiritus movens* of those discoveries" (Brooke-Hitching 2018). Prince Henry the Navigator, who wished to find the sea route to India, sent subsequent expeditions farther and farther south from Ceuta, which was occupied by the Portuguese in 1415. This period can be divided into three phases (Baker 1931). The first one, in the years 1415–1434, resulted in reaching Cape Bojador in modern-day Western Sahara. During the second phase, which lasted until 1462, another section of the coast was explored, all the way to the Gulf of Guinea. It was then that Europeans discovered the estuary of the Senegal River, the Cape Verde Peninsula as well as the estuary of the Gambia River. The uninhabited archipelago of Cabo Verde Islands was discovered in 1460. Two years later, it was there that the Portuguese founded their first settlement to the south of the Tropic of Cancer. The last phase saw further southward exploration along the coast. Finally, in 1488, Bartolomeu Dias reached the Cape of Good Hope and merely a decade later, in 1498, Vasco da Gama arrived in the Deccan Peninsula. Thus, the areas where the cities selected for this analysis were founded were already subjected to conquest and colonisation in the second decade of the 15th century. The French and the British appeared in West Africa much later. The former founded their pioneer settlement of Saint-Louis in 1659 at the mouth of the Senegal River on the Atlantic coast, while Dakar itself was only established in the second half of the 19th century. The British, on the other hand, founded their port at the mouth of the Gambia River in 1816, after introduction of the ban on slave trade in 1807 (Lloyd 2006). In 1807, a prohibition for British people to participate in slave trade and import was adopted; subsequently, in 1833,