Colonial Urban Legacies

An analysis of socio-spatial structures in Accra, Ghana

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1. Introduction

Urbanization and the accompanying demographic challenges are subjects of great importance to contemporary urban development. One of the greatest issues in this field is dealing with the inequality found in large cities. Generally, this inequality is expressed spatially, as well as socially and economically, meaning residential patterns reflect the socioeconomic divide that exist in a city. Understanding patterns of segregation, as well as the reason for their existence, is an important part of understanding how to best improve urban development.

In postcolonial cities, urban structures are in many cases remnants from the colonial policies and physical formation of the city when it was founded. Understanding the objectives behind past urban planning is key to contemporary development in former colonies, since the spatial dynamics that the urban structures produce can play an important part in shaping social dynamics.

It was common practice for colonial authorities to implement segregationist policies in their urban planing, making it of importance to analyze in what ways these structures built up during colonial rule still shape urban development today. A city with structures deliberately meant to divide will inevitably see division as long as the structures are in place.

One example of a colonial city with major issues of inequality and segregation today, which also had colonial urban planning with the intention of segregating, is Accra, the capital of Ghana, found on the coast of West Africa. By studying the socio-spatial structures in Accra over time, the aim of this study is to see if the segregation observed in Accra today can be seen as a result of urban structures built up in the past.

1.1 Research question

How have the socio-spatial structures in Accra, Ghana developed from the city’s colonial formation up until today?

The aim of this paper is to compare the structures that affect the spatial expression of the city’s social divide that existed in colonial Accra with those that exist today to see if structures of segregation prevalent under the city’s colonial rule are still in place today.
2. Theory

2.1 Literature review

Colonial segregation has been studied by a great number of scholars. One of the earliest, most influential writings on the topic is Anthony D. Kings’ work, where he describes the spatial characteristics of colonial urban development and their social and cultural implications in Asia and Africa, but with a particular focus on Delhi, India.¹ In the African context, research on colonial segregation and urban spaces has largely been focused on South Africa and the former French colonies in northern Africa. The high level of attention given to the particular case of South Africa is largely motivated by the presence of long-enduring racially discriminatory legal policies and the clear legacies of division that remain in South African society.

Because of this, a lot of the relevant literature on segregation in colonial African cities focuses on South Africa. An example of this is the important, early contribution to the field of Maynard W. Swanson’s article discussing the colonizers’ perception of the native population as unsanitary, which resulted in colonial policies of racially motivated spatial separation.² Segregation motivated by sanitary policy is a key concept in studying colonial segregation. The discourse of the native being a carrier of diseases resulted in the separation of the European and native population in hundreds of cases of colonial cities.³

More recent research concerning colonial urban development policies of separation, and more importantly the legacies that this generated in post-independence, includes the work of Garth A. Myers and Cathérine Coquéry-Vidrovitch. Myers gives an account of how power influenced the production of space under colonial rule in the cities Nairobi, Lusaka, Zanzibar, and Lilongwe. He describes the justifications used to disguise political motives when implementing segregating structures into urban planning, and the different implications that the colonial legacies had post-independence.⁴

Spatial exclusion went beyond residential segregation and additionally encompassed unequal access to social spaces, employment opportunities, schools, and culture. Coquéry-Vidrovitch explores this in her contribution to the book *Beyond Empire and Nation: Decolonizing Societies in Africa and Asia, 1930s-1970s*. She describes how after independence, in general, the colonial models of urban planning stayed intact. Even though the legal obstacles that had previously existed in certain cases were abolished with independence, this did not cause a massive reorganization of people.⁵

The above mentioned research has been focused on the colonial and immediate post-independence time period, but scholarly attention has also been given to current segregation in former colonial cities, which can be linked back to their colonial past. Once more, much of this research is concentrated to the South African context, although by no means exclusively.⁶ Cristina Udelsmann Rodrigues has written about the “resegregation” of Angolan cities. She describes how a discourse of violence and crime is employed to legitimize social segregation, and how the division upholds itself through an inequality of services and opportunities.⁷

This study will attempt to contribute to the literature on the contemporary effects of colonial segregationist policies, as well as outline the historical process of change of how the implementation of an urban structure intended to separate has developed in a postcolonial context.

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2.2 Path dependence

Path dependence is a theory used predominantly in economics, history, and the social sciences. It involves the study of historical processes to understand different outcomes. Different scholars employ different definitions of what exactly is meant by path dependence. Often this variation in interpretation corresponds with differences in the fields in which the theory is applied.\(^8\)

In his article “Path dependence in historical sociology,” James Mahoney dismisses the understanding of path dependency as the simple idea that “history matters,” which he argues is a way in which some scholars have interpreted path dependency. Mahoney asserts that path dependency theory involves chains of events, which, once they are started, unfold in a somewhat deterministic-like manner.\(^9\) A common metaphor for this is the “domino effect.” Once the first tiles have fallen, this starts a chain reaction causing the rest to follow.

There are several key characteristics of a historical sequence of events that can be deemed path dependent: from the outset there were different ways in which history could have developed; there was some degree of contingency in which of the paths were taken; once a certain direction of development has begun, other options became decreasingly likely; and that there are mechanisms that maintain the process that has been started. Often disagreement regarding the definition of path dependence is related to the varying degrees of emphasis put on these different features.\(^10\)

Unlike theories in the social sciences that argue that the sequence of events are not of great importance, path dependency stresses the order in which things happen. Particular focus is put on events that happen early on since they heavily influence the possible following outcomes, steering history in a particular direction. Things that happen in the beginning of the process limit later options, creating conditions that make the possible different outcomes more or less likely. Because more possibilities exist for different directions of development early on in the process, path dependency places emphasis on studying occurrences that have taken place in the beginning of a sequence.\(^11\)

Mahoney describes two main types of historical sequences that path dependency focuses on – reactive sequences and self-reinforcing sequence. Reactive sequence involves a chain of events,

\(^8\) Andrew Bennett and Colin Elman, "Complex Causal Relations and Case Study Methods: The Example of Path Dependence," *Political Analysis* 14, no. 3 (2006), pp. 251-252.


\(^10\) Bennett and Elman, 2006, pp. 251-252.

\(^11\) Mahoney, 2000, pp. 510-511.
where, once the first happens, the following succeed each other in a deterministic fashion. Self-reinforcing sequences involve institutional patterns, which once in place reproduce themselves. It is a cycle that yields “increasing returns,” meaning the structures grow increasingly stronger as time goes by, making it progressively harder to change the systematic structures.\textsuperscript{12}

This paper will employ self-reinforcing sequences as a theory of analysis. A sequence starts off with an initial set of conditions which could develop in different directions. At some point there is a “critical juncture.” This is the point in time where one of the several options that could have happened takes place. After this, the option “selected” continues to reproduce itself.\textsuperscript{13}

Self-reinforcing sequences explain why it can be extremely difficult to change from one system to another. The theory explains how structures are reproduced, not because they are necessarily the preferable or most efficient alternative, but because of their advantage of being established first. Once certain institutions are set in place, they gain momentum. Self-reinforcing mechanisms are activated, keeping the structures in place, even in cases where more suitable alternatives come along. A common example of this phenomenon is the current organization of the keys on a keyboard of a computer or typewriter. Even though the QWERTY-layout (named so after the first six keys on the keyboard) is not the most efficient way of arranging the keys, because of the cost of replacing the current system, it persists.\textsuperscript{14}

When analyzing processes by examining them through the lens of self-reinforcing sequences, two main features of the process need to be especially addressed: the reasons for the structure being put in place and what caused the reproduction of the system.\textsuperscript{15}

There are different explanatory models that offer different accounts for how institutions are reproduced. For economists the question of efficiency is central and utilitarian cost-benefit analyses are employed. In the field of sociology and political science, it is generally more relevant to examine which actors in the structure benefit from its continuation. In this paper, the “power explanation” will be used. This model is applicable when the institution being analyzed unevenly distributes power to the actors in the system. The elites are favored by the system, giving them both the incentive and power to keep the system in place. This structure reproduces and reinforces the

\textsuperscript{12} Mahoney, 2000, pp. 508-509.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., pp. 512-515.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.

power dynamics by increasing the advantage of the more powerful group.\textsuperscript{16} This model draws on ideas by scholars such as Marx and Weber, who argue that different groups in society exist in social conflict with each other.

Path dependency is useful when qualitatively studying historical processes where it is suspected that events early on in the process have had a lasting impact and have shaped the current situation. It is a theory concerned with identifying causal mechanisms that have maintained institutions. Path dependency holds that once a certain path is taken it might be nearly impossible to reverse the process, which can explain links between historical events and contemporary conditions.

\textsuperscript{16} Mahoney, 2000, pp. 521-523.
3. Method and material

This is a qualitative case study using a within-case analysis. Process tracing has been chosen as a method and is a common accompanying method to the theory of path dependency, described in the previous section. Following a description of process tracing comes a discussion of the material used in this study and the reasons for choosing Accra as the subject for this case study.

3.1 Research method

“If statistical work addresses questions of propensities, narratives address questions of process.”

To analyze the historical process of development of socio-spatial dynamics in Accra, from the creation of various neighborhoods during the city’s colonial formation up until today, process tracing is needed. This method is used in within-case studies to examine which conditions and which principles caused a certain chain of events and how events at different points in time shaped the various possible outcomes.

Political scientist Jeffrey T. Checkel argues that analyzing processes is the same thing as analyzing causal mechanisms. Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennet's description of process tracing as “identify[ing] the intervening causal process – the causal chain or causal mechanism – between an independent variable (or variables) and the outcome of the dependent variable” matches this understanding of the method as well. David Collier adds a descriptive use to the applications of process tracing as well, saying that it can be used to describe political and social phenomena.

When identifying causal mechanisms it is possible to make an analysis on both a macro- and a microlevel. This means focusing on the individual agency and choices made by various actors or on larger structural processes. While there are different ways of using process tracing to analyze

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19 George and Bennet, p. 213.


20 George and Bennet, p. 206.

this type of historical narrative, in this study an analytical explanation will be used, which means employing a theory to explain the historical process.\textsuperscript{22} Because the theory being used, self-reinforcing sequence path dependency, places greater emphasis on structural explanations, the analysis will focus more on macrolevel factors.

This study aims to describe the process that caused the levels of segregations seen in Accra today. This is done through studying the colonial urban structures built up when Accra was established as a colonial town and comparing them to the structures today, as well as analyzing the process between these two points in time.

Six Accran neighborhoods have been chosen as the subjects of this study. Three of them (Jamestown, Nima, and Sabon Zongo) were during Accra’s colonial rule the neighborhoods of the Ga people native to the area and African migrants and three of them (West Ridge, East Ridge, and Cantonments) were the neighborhoods of the colonizers. First, an account is given of how each neighborhood was created and any specific purposes behind the creation and situation of it, as well as the level of attention and investment given to it by colonial authorities. Special attention is given to the creation and initial conditions of the different neighborhoods studied because of how the theory of path dependency considers events that take place early on in the process to be of greater importance. Second, there is a discussion on the urban changes that took place in Accra post-independence. Finally, the neighborhoods' current conditions are described. The descriptions of the areas at the two periods of time will center around the neighborhoods’ levels of socioeconomic status of the inhabitants, housing quality, and infrastructure. The infrastructure and services examined can be broken down into different main categories: health and sanitation, e.g. water provision and toilets; communication, e.g. roads and phone lines; convenience e.g. electricity; safety, e.g. street lights and police station; and recreation, e.g. golf courses.

3.2 Material

The process tracing is built on different textual and visual sources. The main part of the narrative account of the history of the different Accran neighborhoods is based on various articles and books, including the works of human geographer Richard Grant, who has done fieldwork in Accra for many years, anthropologist Deborah Pellow, who has published many works about both Accra and

\textsuperscript{22} George and Bennet, p. 211.
urban spaces, and historian John Parker, whose publications include *Making the Town: Ga State and Society in Early Colonial Accra*.

It is worth noting here that none of the authors just highlighted comes from Ghana. While the works of the Ghanaian scholars Samuel Agyei-Mensah, Margaret Essamuah, Ama de-Graft Aikins, George Owusu, Steve Tonah, and Paul William Kojo Yankson have been used in this paper, the fact that the vast majority of the material used comes from outside of Ghana should not be glossed over. Due to deep-rooted global structures, a great amount of research about postcolonial states comes from post-colonizing states rather than the post-colonized states themselves. In fact, in the words of Towson University professor John Murungi “what is African about African studies is not self-evident,” since so much of the production of knowledge about African states comes from outside of Africa intended for non-African readers. Postcolonial structures continue to shape which actors are given the power to produce knowledge and about whom this knowledge is produced. This is a much bigger issue than can be justly covered in this paper and is outside its scope. It is, however, worth noting which structures it is a part of.

In addition to using written work, maps have been used as well. A digitally accessed map of colonial Accra (1927) was used to obtain information about the city and its structure and buildings. For contemporary Accra, various maps visually representing statistics of children per woman, child mortality, food insecurity, and housing quality were used to compare the different neighborhoods.

### 3.3 Case selection

The phenomenon of colonial spatial structures affecting current social development is present in an abundant number of postcolonial cities, meaning that there are hundreds of cases that could have been potential candidates for this type of study. The advantage of examining an African former colony rather than an Asian one is that many of the major African cities that exist today grew into existence as a result of colonialism. This means that the colonial authorities had a larger influence over the city’s structure than if they had had to deal with a pre-existing urban system. In for example different Indian cases, the colonial city became an amalgamation of prior structures and those built by colonial workers. This brings another layer of complexity to the phenomenon, which can make it harder to isolate the initial conditions.

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Many of the large cities in Africa share many characteristics: demographic features, including rapid urbanization and great problems of inequality; geographical features, such as being situated along the coast; economic features, like having a history of playing an important role in the country’s export-driven economy; historical features, most prominently being a colonial city; and spatial features, for example having a history of urban planning used to intentionally segregate, having had zoning used in the city’s urban planning, and having zones of administrative and political buildings and a business district located centrally. In these ways Accra is representative of many other African metropolises.

Because Accra is a case where the phenomenon being studied can be clearly observed and because the case of Accra is similar to many other postcolonial cities, especially African, although not exclusively, the process observed in Accra can be expected to be found in other cities as well.

This is a case study using the method process tracing, which puts a lot of specific focus on the case at hand, meaning that a lot of the empirical findings will only be relevant for the particular case of Accra. However, since a lot of attention will be on institutional processes and a lot of the other cases of African postcolonial cities have similar histories and similar urban challenges today, it is reasonable to believe that the systemic processes over time will have resembled each other. This means that the findings for Accra might be generalizable to other cases as well.
4. Background

This section of the paper covers the background of three different areas that this paper attempts to contribute to. First, the contemporary African urban context is discussed with focus on segregation and inequality. The second part deals with the contents of the pre-existing literature on colonial urban planning, including the reasons behind colonial policies of segregation, how these policies were legitimized, and how segregated colonial urban spaces were structured. Lastly, a historical background of Accra is given.

4.1 African urban challenges

More than half of the global population lives in urban areas and the world’s total urban population is continuing to grow. Africa and Asia still have larger rural populations than urban but also stand for the most rapid urbanization processes. In 2014, the proportion of the urban population in contrast to the rural was measured to increase by 1.5 percent in Asia and 1.1 in Africa annually. Some of the increase in the number of people living in cities is accounted for by migration, but a larger factor is simply the population growing through new births.

While urbanization on the one hand is commonly associated with economic development, modernization, and improvement in health standards, including lower fertility and mortality rates, it also often comes with numerous social problems for the urban population. Rapid and unplanned expansion of cities is typically hard to manage and brings with it problems regarding how to provide basic services for the growing population. In many cases, the difficulties in managing these challenges result in insufficient housing, overcrowded living conditions, and inadequate access to safe, affordable water and sanitation and hygiene services.

These problems are indicators of the poverty and great inequality that are frequently manifested in urban areas. Mike Savage et al. describe segregation as the spatial manifestation of inequality. Social inequality and division cause social exclusion. The divide between socioeconomic groups and the exclusion of the poor take on many forms, one of them being spatial

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division. As many studies have shown, among them Elizabeth Oltmans Ananat’s work on the link between racial segregation, poverty and inequality in the American urban context, segregation preserves social inequalities. The list of ways in which socio-spatial inequalities reproduce themselves could be expanded on nearly endlessly. Access to quality education, employment opportunities, political participation, health services, and transportation are ways in which the unequal distribution of opportunities are expressed.

Besides these differences in opportunities, the concentration of socioeconomic groups generates a perception of low chance of social mobility in the poorer groups, which can in itself be a barrier to further opportunities. At the other end of the spectrum, the wealthiest portion of the population separates itself from the rest of the city through gated communities to escape the grime and commotion. Private investments in clean environments, a wealth of recreational activities, and public services reserved for the wealthiest portion of the population further exacerbates the existing inequalities.

The fragmentation of the city is often, on top of social barriers, enhanced by urban planning and management. In many cases in former colonies, the foundation of the city’s structure and urban planning, and as a result socio-spatial inequalities, are colonial legacies, which have morphed and been reshaped since colonial policies were abandoned.

4.2 Colonial urban planning

The shaping of urban spaces was an instrument of power utilized by European colonizers to exercise control and domination in the African colonies. While sometimes incorrectly considered a merely physical and inanimate project, the design of urban spaces plays a part in shaping the human


relations that take place within its structures. The ability to control the spatial dynamics that the
European colonizers and the colonial subjects acted in was an important strategic tool of control.

The colonizers saw the indigenous people as different and subordinate. This outlook in
practice translated into separation and control. Colonial cities were structured in such a way that
different areas were meant for different people and purposes.

The colonizers and the colonized occupied different spaces. This was desirable for the
colonial administration for many reasons. One of these was comfort. The colonial urban settlements
resembled upper- and middle-class European residential areas. The inhabitants of these settlements
lived spaciously and had access to water, sewerage, and, later into the colonial rule, electricity and
telephones, among other amenities. On top of this, the colonizing population had recreational
facilities such as golf courses, race tracks, and swimming pools.32

Furthermore, in addition to the comfort that accompanied the European colonial lifestyle,
another objective of living separate from the native population was to avoid the diseases that the
Europeans believed the natives to be carrying.33 The African native was described by Europeans as
being unclean and diseased, in contrast to the healthy colonizers. A 1914 Kenyan public health
ordinance describes the “African race” as “inherently unhygienic.”34 This construction was one of
the many ways in which Europeans used the Oriental or African Other as a contrast to themselves,
as to strengthen their self-image as the superior people.35

The image of the indigenous population as diseased was used to legitimize the exclusionary
structure of the colonial city. The medical beliefs of the time, stemming from changes in society
with regard to urbanization and industrialization, held that bacterial infections were spread through
the air, making physical proximity to Africans potentially dangerous. As a consequence of this,
colonial administrators in the African colonies became more adamant about separating the
indigenous people from the Europeans.36 This was especially prevalent when health crises struck,

32 King, 1976, p. 33.


33 Godwin R. Murunga, “Inherently Unhygienic Races': Plague and the Origins of Settler Dominance in
Nairobi, 1899-1907,” in Steven J. Salm and Toyin Falola (eds.), African Urban Spaces in Historical


35 John M. Hobson, The Eastern Origins of Western Civilization (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,
2004), pp. 7-10.

36 King, 1976, p. 37.
such as the outbreak of the bubonic plague in West Africa at the beginning of the 20th century. This phenomenon of motivating the exclusion of Africans from white areas for the health benefits of the colonizers has become known as the “sanitation syndrome,” a phrase coined by Maynard W. Swanson in 1977. Swanson’s research focused on understanding how South African apartheid could be seen as a consequence of white anxieties of the infectious natives. However, this phenomenon was not exclusive to South Africa but was pervasive throughout African and Asian colonies.

Besides the perceived protection against disease and the privileged lifestyle and, a third objective of segregation was that it was a method of social control. In many cases, the colonial administrators situated their buildings on elevated parts of the city. As well as having the advantage of clearly separating the European population from the African one, it additionally created a position of control. The fact that the elevated position placed the colonizers physically above the colonial subjects signaled domination. On top of this, the height provided the administrators with a favorable position for surveillance, adding another element of control over the movement of the native population.

Segregation was not always explicit. The degree to which it was directly declared varied between colonies and time periods. However, even in the cases where segregation was not legalized, in effect segregation still existed, actualized through different cultural attributes of the areas and economic barriers. Often the land and houses in predominantly white areas were too expensive for the vast majority of the indigenous population, effectively making certain parts of the city unavailable.

The segregation of the white and the native population created pockets of privilege in the colonial towns. The administrators report their undertakings in the colonies as lacking both in personnel and economic resources. The European population was prioritized, resulting in investment in the neighborhoods of the colonizer, while the indigenous residential areas access to infrastructure and amenities was low. Moreover, the privilege gap included more than residential

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37 Swanson, 1977.
structures. All aspects of living, including access to public spaces, culture, education, and employment, differed greatly between the different populations.\textsuperscript{41}

4.3 Historical background of Accra

Even though the area around Accra was inhabited before Europeans set foot on the West African coast, for the purpose of studying the structure of the city, it is only once the region developed from rural settlements into an urban area with strategic planning that it becomes relevant for this study. For this reason earlier historical background will be kept very brief.

For centuries, the coastal regions around Accra has been a region of trade between different African populations and eventually with Europeans as well. The Accra area was inhabited from the 15th century forward by the Ga people, where a number of fishing villages were established. During

\textsuperscript{41} Coquéry-Vidrovitch, 2012, p. 267.

the 17th century, the Dutch, Swedes, Danes, and British set up forts in Accra. Before the 1850s the European colonial project did not concern itself with major territorial control in Africa. Rather, only smaller territories were occupied to establish ports and forts along coastal areas, mainly for trade purposes.

When the Gold Coast was declared a colony of the British empire in 1874 and in the following decades, Accra transformed from an area primarily controlled by the Ga community to a colonial town under British administrative rule. In 1877, Accra replaced Cape Coast as the colonial administrative headquarters of the Gold Coast colony. On top of its importance in colonial governance, through its role in the colony’s export, Accra generated significant economic activity. By the end of the century, Accra had turned into the busiest port in the colony. The city was not, however, so much involved with production as a focal point for trade.

During the decades surrounding the transition from the 19th to the 20th century, the city saw a lot of devastation, including a famine, a greatly damaging fire, an earthquake, the bubonic plague, and an influenza epidemic. The Gold Coast gained self-government in 1952, and in 1957 it was the first sub-Saharan African colony to declare their independence from colonial rule, and the name of the state changed from the Gold Coast to Ghana. With independence and the liberalization policies that followed came increased investments in infrastructure in the city, an increase in foreign companies setting up offices in Accra, and a physical expansion of the city.

Today, Accra has developed into a highly populated city, with a population over 2 million.

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46 Grant and Yankson, 2003, p. 67.

47 Robertson, 1984, p. 32.

48 Ibid., p. 35.

49 Grant and Yankson, 2003, p. 69.

5. Research

To study in what ways socio-spatial structures in Accra have changed, from being a colonial city up until today, this section describes the urban structures in place in Accra at different points in time. First, Accra as a colonial city is described. This includes the spatial implications of being colonized – both the results of the colonial authority’s desire to segregate the native and the British populations and the spatial effects of Accra’s role in the British colonial project. Second, the six chosen neighborhoods are described, with a focus on their formation and the level of investment directed at each area by colonial authorities. Following this comes a section about the changes that took place in Accra after independence affecting the movement of people, such as the shortage in housing and the type urban investments made by the Ghanian government. Next, the six neighborhoods are returned to in their contemporary context. Here, their situation today is discussed regarding the inhabitants socioeconomic status, as well as the level of infrastructure and services. Finally, the six neighborhoods are compared to each other by using different indicators of health and economic and social status.

5.1 Urban structure in colonial Accra

The transformation of Accra into a genuine colonial city came when the city was made the capital of the Gold Coast in 1877. The reasons for choosing Accra were many, but one of them was the health-related advantages that came with the opportunities of building exclusive European areas that Accra presented. Colonial urban planning was deeply influenced by the racist health theories of the time. The belief was that separating Europeans from the diseased native people would significantly decrease the risk of infection.\(^{51}\)

While early on in the colonial project in Accra, the African and European population had lived in proximity to each other, with the increase in the European population that accompanied the growth of the city, segregation became a more common spatial feature of the Accran urban landscape, especially once the wives of the European traders and administrative workers moved to Accra as well.\(^{52}\)

Policies with the objective of improving public, but especially European, health had a great effect on the colonial urban structure of Accra, not least after the bubonic plague in 1908, after

\(^{51}\) Grant and Yankson, 2003, p. 66.

which a three-year program of town planning was commenced.\textsuperscript{53} Although, this was by no means the first case of implemented segregating policies legitimized by medical theories.

Health motives were not the only forces driving the segregating organization of Accra. The colonial administrators wanted to modernize Accra. Part of the image of modernity was connected to health, but a lot was associated with lifestyle. There was a desire to get rid of, or at least isolate, customs and practices deemed too “backwards” to be part of a modernizing colonial city.\textsuperscript{54}

The British administration employed zoning to organize the city. The native residential and commercial area was separated from the colonial ones. A large patch of vegetation was one spatial feature used to physically separate different parts of the city. Another way in which this was done was that certain European residential areas were located on higher ground, again creating a physical separation.\textsuperscript{55}

The center of a city is often reserved for activities given priority. In Accra this included the administrative and military centers and spaces needed for economic activity. The fact that Accra was a trade city affected the way in which it was spatially organized. The objectives of transporting goods for trade to Accra, storing them, and then shipping them out to the global market meant that Accra had its railway stations, warehouses, and harbor situated in the heart of the city.\textsuperscript{56}

Besides the commercial and administrative core, Accra had a number of residential areas. Neighboring the central business district was the European residential area the Ridge. Another European residential area was Cantonments, which was located on higher ground. The suburbs reserved for the colonizing population was primarily to the east of the center of the city. The non-European quarters lay primarily to the west of the exclusive European spaces. These spaces included Nima and the centrally located Jamestown, which both had a high concentration of Ga inhabitants, and Sabon Zongo, which was the “strangers’ quarters” in which many immigrants resided. The neighborhoods of the colonizers and the colonised differed greatly in the level of attention and investment they were given. This resulted in the neighborhoods of the colonial workers being highly planned, in comparison to the neighborhoods of the natives and migrants where housing structures developed without administrative oversight. This had the effect of the unplanned neighborhoods becoming high-density while the planned ones were low-density,

\begin{footnotes}
\item\textsuperscript{53} Pellow, 2001, p. 62.
\item\textsuperscript{54} Parker, 2000, p. 100.
\item\textsuperscript{55} Grant and Yankson, 2003, p. 67.
\item\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.
\end{footnotes}
meaning there was a difference in the number of people per unit of land and household. There was also a major inequality in housing quality and the infrastructure and public services available to the inhabitants of each neighborhood.

5.2 Six neighborhoods of colonial Accra

Figure 3. The neighborhoods of Accra

* This map is of contemporary Accra, not colonial, but the marked out neighborhoods are in the same place

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Jamestown

Jamestown was one of the first established parts of Accra. It grew out of the British James Fort set up by the British in 1673, one of the three ports established along the Accra coast. Jamestown, together with Ussher Town and Osu, was the nucleus of the colonial settlement. Because of the economic objectives behind the colony, Accra’s center was organized to support export, and the investments made in the area reflected these ambitions. In 1909, a railway connecting the docks located in Jamestown to the inland production of cocoa was built. However, investments into the area intended to develop infrastructure and public services for the people living in the area were limited. Despite the central location of Jamestown, the residential area was a low-income, high-density neighborhood subject to very limited urban planning.

Previous to the establishments built after the of arrival of colonizers, Ga people had settlements on the land that later became Jamestown. This high concentration of Ga inhabitants in this particular part of the city continued following colonization as well.

Sabon Zongo

A common feature of colonial cities, was the “strangers’ quarters.” This was a part of the city that was not inhabited by European colonizers nor the people native to the colonized land, but by migrants. Accra had several of these areas, as West Africa had for centuries been a region of much movement between different parts. The Ga people were the people ethnic to the Accra region and consequently the allocators of the land, many other ethnic groups resided there as well, including Hausa, Yoruba, Mossi, Frafra, Grusi, Kuiasasi, Nupe, Fulani, and Wangara. Even though these people were considered “strangers,” the Ga people had an amiable attitude towards strangers coming to the region.

At the end of the 19th century a strangers’ quarters known as a Zongo (Hausa) was established in the native part of the town. However, after the bubonic plague of 1908 the people living in the zongo were evicted as part of sanitation policies and the three-year program of urban reorganization. The people living in the zongo were relocated to a new area. This place was named Sabon Zongo, meaning “new zongo.” Sabon Zongo was largely neglected regarding organizational structures and facilities.

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59 Ibid., pp. 44-47.
Sabon Zongo was at this time not attached to the Accra center, but was located a couple of miles outside of Accra. This was a deliberate choice made by the British administrators to keep the African groups physically and socially separate. Despite this, there was a lot of movement between Sabon Zongo and the Accra city center due to labor, family, and social ties.\textsuperscript{60} As Accra grew towards the end of the colonial rule in Accra and post-independence, the urban limits expanded so that Sabon Zongo was included.

### Nima

Nima was not settled before the 1930s, when it was used by cattle traders.\textsuperscript{61} Because of the availability of affordable land, the area continued to grow, attracting former soldiers after the end of World War II and migrants coming to Accra in search of jobs due to the economic activity of the city.\textsuperscript{62} Like Sabon Zongo, Nima was the home of a range of ethnic groups.

Nima grew in an unplanned manner with less durable housing and very low levels of infrastructure. It was not until the 1950s that a certain level of infrastructure was implemented. However, proper roads and sanitation facilities, such as water provision, public toilets, and waste disposal, were still lacking.\textsuperscript{63}

Like Sabon Zongo, it was also physically separate from the original colonial settlement, but as the city grew, it became included within the urban limits.

\textsuperscript{60} Pellow, 2002, pp. 49-50, 67.


\textsuperscript{62} Pellow, 2002, p. 37.

\textsuperscript{63} Essamuah and Tonah, 2004, p. 87.
The Ridge (West Ridge and East Ridge)
The arguably clearest feature of segregated colonial cities were residential areas available only to Europeans. The architecture and luxurious facilities provided for the residents in these neighborhoods was a way of attempting to bring the English lifestyle to the colonies. In colonial cities in other countries, such as Dakar, Abidjan, and Brazzaville, this took the shape of le plateau, and the equivalent in Lusaka and Accra was “the ridge.” The ridge and le plateau were both areas of the colonial cities that strategically used differences in altitude in the city to separate the European and the native population.64

The ridge in Accra was created to be an exclusive European residential area. Consequently, it was a economically prioritized, highly planned, and low-density area. Through the property prices and policies regulating the minimum sizes of building and plots of land in the European neighborhoods, the areas were kept exclusive.

The Ridge had comfortable and expensive homes for its residents, as well as functioning public infrastructure and facilities, including a European hospital (built in 1916) and a police station, facilities providing the inhabitants with health and safety services. Additionally, the Ridge had plenty of recreational facilities, including a race course, a golf course, and facilities for polo, cricket, and tennis.65

Cantonments
Cantonments was, like the Ridge, a residential area intended exclusively for Europeans. When it was created, at the end of the 19th century, it lay north of the city center.66 It was located on higher grounds to achieve the goal of separating itself from the rest of the city, but primarily the perceived grime and disease of the native population. The housing in Cantonments was provided by the state and intended for civil and public servants.67 In the same manner as the Ridge, Cantonments was prioritized economically in providing infrastructure and services.

65 Grant and Yankson, 2003, p. 67.
66 The Gold Coast - Accra [map], Survey H.Q. Accra, 1927.
5.3 Urban development post-independence

After Accra’s independence, the city continued to grow, including the industrial and administrative center and the residential areas. Statistics on Accra’s physical expansion between the years 1986 and 1997 show that the city grew over 170 square miles, increasing its total area by close to 200 percent. In general, the expansion was unplanned residential growth along the outer edges of the city.⁶⁸

A lot of people arrived in Accra in search of employment opportunities, causing an increase in population and consequently housing shortages. Migrant workers generally found lodging in the “strangers’ quarters” of the city – including Nima and Sabon Zongo.⁶⁹

Even though the Ghanaian government made promises to invest in housing for all of Accra’s inhabitants following Ghana’s independence, in practice the houses built were often reserved for people with political connections or they were too expensive for the majority of the population. Another tactic used in the name of solving the housing situation was slum clearances, which did not help those most vulnerable and in need of improved housing.⁷⁰ As a result, these promised investments did not end up solving the housing crisis.

Urban planning has since independence been centered around attracting foreign business and as a result the improvement of living standards in the low-income parts of Accra has been given low priority.⁷¹ For example, Nima saw meagre attempts at improvement in sanitation services the 1950s and has since faced major neglect regarding infrastructural and housing planning, despite its continued growth in population.⁷²

During the 1980s Ghana, like many developing countries, was subjected to the International Monetary Fund and World Bank’s structural adjustment programs, involving major liberalizing and privatizing changes in the country’s society and economy. Among many other effects this had on Ghanaian society, this raised the prices on the housing market. There were clear division between

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⁷¹ Grant and Yankson, 2003, p. 73.

the rich and the poor. The low-income parts of the city were overcrowded, housing conditions were of low quality and sanitation services were lacking.  

5.4 Six neighborhoods of contemporary Accra

Jamestown
Jamestown, together with Ussher Town located directly to the northeast, makes up Central Accra, situated adjacent to the Central Business District. Central Accra is inhabited by low-income families. Even now this area is the part of Accra that has the highest concentration of Ga people.

Jamestown is densely populated and overcrowded, with room occupancy reaching as high as 7 or 8 people per room. A lack of urban plans to develop the area has resulted in its dilapidation. It has old and rundown family houses built during Accra’s colonial era with low levels of amenities, such as water pipes and toilets.

The area’s communication infrastructure is of low quality, including roads being unpaved. Additionally, sanitation services are poor, including and systems of waste disposal, water delivery, and drainage. For example, only 35 percent of people living in Jamestown have water pipes to the insides of their houses, 11 percent have water closet toilets, and 7 percent have sewerage liquid waste disposal systems. The state of Accra’s physical structures and facilities result in living conditions of low standard.  

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73 Arku, 2009, p. 263.
76 Agyei-Mensah and Owusu, 2010, p. 504.
77 Pellow, 2001, p. 73.
Sabon Zongo

Sabon Zongo has a mix of different cultural influences, particularly Hausa, Muslim, and Ga. The people who live there generally have low income, birth rates are higher than the city average, and illiteracy is high.

The neglect that Sabon Zongo has faced from public authority is clearly revealed when examining public services and infrastructure. Firstly, communication is obstructed by the quality of the roads. They are generally unpaved and have problems with drainage. The roads are often muddy and rutted, which can at times cause vehicles to get stuck, and also means that further instalment of communication infrastructure, for example phone lines, is difficult. Furthermore, the lack of investment in street lights along the roads affects the area’s safety.

Another serious issue is the area’s sanitation services, including toilets and provision of water. Less than half of people living in Sabon Zongo have running water in their houses. Because public sewage lines were never installed in Sabon Zongo, those that want private toilets need their own septic tank. Less than ten percent of the inhabitants have flushable toilets at home. Instead, they rely on public latrines, which are few and people are charged a fee to use them. Because of this, the latrines are only used for defecation, while urination takes place in shower rooms or gutters.

The poor levels of infrastructure combined with other factors, such as goats and poultry roaming the streets, the people living there knowing who each other are, motor vehicles being few, and children playing in the streets, give the neighborhood of Sabon Zongo a rural, village-like feeling.

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78 Pellow, 2001, p.63.
80 Pellow, 2001, pp. 67-68.
81 Ibid., p. 68
Nima

Like Sabon Zongo, Nima, with its background of migrants coming to reside in the area, has a mix of ethnic groups and languages spoken. The people living there generally have very low income and illiteracy rates are as high as 25%.<sup>83</sup>

Nima is a high-density, unplanned area, described as the biggest slum in Ghana.<sup>84</sup> The houses in Nima are not of a durable nature, generally built out of mud with old corrugated iron sheets as roofs.<sup>85</sup>

Like the two areas previously discussed, Nima is an extremely deprived area lacking a lot of the basic infrastructure and facilities needed, such as sanitation services including systems of delivering water, toilets, and systems for disposing waste. Less than a third of households have running water in their homes and only 6 percent of the inhabitants have flushable toilets.<sup>86</sup> On top of sanitation services, Nima is in need of further communication infrastructure, like proper roads.

The low levels of public infrastructure and services observed in Nima are, as is the case in Jamestown and Sabon Zongo as well, the result of large neglect from the urban planners in Accra.

The Ridge (West Ridge and East Ridge)

The Ridge is still a very exclusive, high-income area. Housing structures are planned and low-density. It is both residential, as well as a commercial, political, and leisure area. The residential areas contain luxury apartments and gated communities, while some of the public buildings found in the Ridge include embassies, the parliament, the Ghana Stock Exchange, and the National Theater.<sup>87</sup>

In the 2012 article “Connecting the Dots Between Health, Poverty and Place in Accra, Ghana,” by John R. Weeks et al. the neighborhoods of Accra were classified according to housing quality, which included “type of floor, whether or not the house has electricity, the source of water, type of toilet, type of bathing facility, methods of waste disposal, cooking fuel, kitchen facility, and

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<sup>83</sup> Agyei-Mensah and Owusu, 2010, p. 505.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p. 509.

<sup>85</sup> Essamuah and Tonah, 2004, p. 87.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 504.

<sup>87</sup> Agyei-Mensah and Aikins, 2010, p. 889.
number of persons per sleeping room." In this ranking, East Ridge was considered to have the highest housing quality in Accra.

**Cantonments**

Cantonments continues to be a highly planned, low-density, high-income residential area. Because the land and property in Cantonments is still very expensive, only those who are very wealthy can afford to live there. Residents of areas like Cantonments include people such as business executives, top politicians, and high-status public and civil servants. People of Ga origin are found far below the city average in Cantonments.

Literacy is high in the district. Only 6 percent lack the ability to read or write, compared to Accra’s average of 15 percent, and the low-literacy areas, where illiteracy can be as high as 29 percent.

Because of the high-status nature of an area like Cantonments, public investments in infrastructure and public services – health and sanitation services, communication, convenience, safety, and recreation – are a priority, and additionally the people who live in Cantonments can afford private investments into their homes. This higher level of amenities can be observed in, for example, the fact that the majority of households have piped water and flushable toilets inside of their houses.

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89 Agyei-Mensah and Owusu, 2010, p. 505.

90 Ibid.

91 Ibid., p. 504.
5.5 Comparing indicators of development in the neighborhoods

The table found on the following page compiles different statistics of the six chosen neighborhoods. Four indicators are chosen to give a picture of the area’s development, socioeconomic nature, and facilities: children per woman, child mortality, food insecurity, and housing quality.

Children per woman is an indicator commonly used when discussing levels of development because of its close links to economic and health conditions, which can be difficult to measure directly. Often, low fertility rates indicate health standards that are high enough that the children being born to a great extent survive. Additionally, higher birth rates are commonly linked to lower incomes. These factors make this indicator interesting to study for this study, since it can potentially reflect the standards of health and sanitation services in each neighbourhood, as well as economic levels.

Similarly to children per woman, child mortality rates are indicators of health levels and the public services that cause them.

Food insecurity is a measure of the access to sufficient amounts of affordable and nutritious food. There are different factors affecting a household’s access to food, including the physical availability. One important aspect of it is a household’s income and financial stability. Because of this, it is used to study the economic levels of each neighborhood.

Housing quality is the term given to describe the “type of floor, whether or not the house has electricity, the source of water, type of toilet, type of bathing facility, methods of waste disposal, cooking fuel, kitchen facility, and number of persons per sleeping room.” This is an interesting measurement to compare since it is arguably the indicator that most directly measures the physical structures in the different neighborhoods.

The table presents the compiled statistics, with the indicators on the left side and the six different neighborhoods along the top. First listed are the former neighborhoods of the colonized and following are the former neighborhoods of the colonizers. Each indicator is given a ranking for each neighborhood – higher, middle, or lower. These are relative to the different parts of the city, and not compared global standards.

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The values of the variables of relative to other parts of the city, not global standards.

* No data available for West Ridge

In general, all indicators point to a connection between the former colonizers' residential areas and higher levels of health, economic, and housing development, and on the other hand lower levels of development and the former native and migrant quarters. If a combined value were to be given to each indicator for the former neighborhoods of the colonized (Jamestown, Nima, and Sabon Zongo) and the colonizers (East Ridge, West Ridge, and Cantonments), the colonizers’ neighborhoods would show results indicating higher levels of development on all four indicators.

However, the patterns are not always straightforward. For example, West Ridge has a higher level of children per woman than Nima. In addition, while Jamestown and Nima belong to the two clusters of areas with the highest rates of child mortality in Accra, rates of child mortality in Sabon Zongo are the same as in East Ridge and West Ridge. As a last example from the table, Nima has the same levels of food insecurity as East Ridge and Cantonments.

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93 Children per woman: John R. Weeks et al., 2013, p. 164.


Worth noting, however, is that Cantonments belonged to the lowest category in children per woman, child mortality, and food insecurity and in the highest for housing quality. Respectively, Jamestown belongs to the neighborhoods with the highest rates of children per woman and child mortality and the lowest of housing quality. While Jamestown is in the middle-category for food insecurity, none of the other neighborhoods studied in this paper belonged to the lowest category.

The clearest trend that can be deduced from the table, however, is the connection between the formerly native and migrant neighborhoods and low housing quality. East Ridge, West Ridge, and Cantonments all had the highest out of five categories ranking housing quality, while all Jamestown, Nima, and Sabon Zongo all had the lowest.

Figure 5. Housing quality\textsuperscript{94}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{housing_quality.png}
\caption{Housing quality index by quintile.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{94} John R. Weeks, 2012, p. 934.
6. Analysis

The research findings suggest that colonial legacies continue to have great impact on postcolonial societies. Socio-spatial structures created in colonial Accra appear to have been reproduced over time. When comparing the six different neighborhoods at their formation and in their early stages with their contemporary state, it is clear that those neighborhoods deliberately separated and administratively neglected in colonial times still deal with these issues today.

Jamestown, Sabon Zongo, and Nima resemble each other in their demographics, typically low-income and low-literacy populations, and their residential structures, high-density and administratively unplanned areas. In addition, these three neighborhoods share a lack of infrastructure. All three neighbourhoods had poor quality roads. They were unpaved, and in the case of Sabon Zongo problems with drainage damaged the roads further. Besides the low-quality communication infrastructure, other lacking amenities included sanitation services, such as systems handling water and waste, drainage, and toilets.

The difference between the levels of investment directed at Jamestown, Sabon Zongo, and Nima and West Ridge, East Ridge, and Cantonments can also be seen in the safety facilities provided. While the Ridge had a police station stationed in it, presumably providing the inhabitants with a sense of protection, an area like Sabon Zongo does not even have lights lining the streets.

In the table included in the final part of the research section, the clearest connection between the type of former colonial districts and the indicators was the relationship between higher housing quality and former European residential areas and lower housing quality and the former native and migrant quarters. Since factors such as population density, sanitation services, and amenities like electricity, water, and waste disposal were included in the calculation of this indicator, it is to be expected that the measurement with the closest connection to historical and contemporary urban policy of each district would demonstrate the strongest relationship between colonial and contemporary conditions. An explanation for this is that this indicator in a way measures the direct effects of spatial legacies, whereas issues of for example health and income, measured in children per woman, child mortality, and food insecurity, are often a further effect of these conditions.

However, the table suggests that health and income are indeed affected as well. This indicates that the physical structures set up, for example access to services and the varying opportunities that exist for people in different parts of the city, have an effect on levels of sanitation and socioeconomic status.
The research findings show that various characteristics of the different neighborhoods have been sustained over time. The theory of path dependency predicts this type of preservation of structures. Once a system is set in place, it tends to reproduce itself, growing stronger over time.

The beginning of a path dependent sequence is an initial set of conditions that might develop into different scenarios. In certain ways, it can be argued that this does not apply to the case of Accra, since the pre-existing power structures of colonialism shaped the urban development of Accra. The formation of Accra was not a tabula rasa that could have developed in any direction, but rather it took place within a larger global system of power. However, the physical areas of Accra that were designated for either the colonial subjects to the colonial administrators can be considered contingent.

The second step in a path dependent sequence is a formative moment where a structure is put in place. In the case of Accra’s city design, this was the point in time after Accra was declared a colonial city, more colonial workers and their families moved to Accra, and urban planning was deliberately used to separate the foreign and the native populations.

Following this, self-reinforcing sequences are put in motion. When certain parts of the city were largely neglected by state authorities, this both attracted the poor to the areas, since they could afford to live there, as well as kept the area poor since no investments were made in infrastructure or services. This further affects other aspects of the society, such as the health and the economic, educational, and political opportunities of the people residing in the area.

As was described in the case of Sabon Zongo, because the neighborhood was, and still is, made up of native and migrant residents, this started a practice of subjecting the area to considerable neglect from authorities. Public facilities are, when they exist, of low quality. For example, the roads in Sabon Zongo are in bad condition. Because of the difficulties that bad communication infrastructure pose, further investment in public infrastructure is complicated, exacerbating the effects of the substandard infrastructure.

Once a society starts going down a certain path and builds up institutions, for example urban structures, the system reinforces itself, reproducing and strengthening the structures that exist, making them increasingly difficult to change. In the case of segregation, its relationship to inequality is reinforcing.

Segregation leads to inequality (in amenities, education and employment opportunities, access to sanitation services etc.). Once there exists people and parts of the city that are worse off, this increases the desire among the privileged for separation. This, in its turn, further increases inequality, which further increases segregation, and so on. Essentially, the causal mechanisms
causing the continuity of segregation and inequality, are in part the reinforcing nature of segregation and inequality themselves.

The occurrence of gated communities in cities like Accra, for example in East Ridge, is a clear example of ways in which the rich seek to separate themselves from the rest of the city, and reserve certain privileges of health, education, contacts, and employment. A fear of crime and disease is used to legitimize the comfortable, exclusive lifestyle within the gated communities as a sanitation and crime prevention strategy. At the same time, the inequality that the gated community is a result of and continues to uphold is an important component in creating the crime and unequal levels of health that the communities themselves are trying to separate themselves from. These structures that grow stronger over time are known as “increasing returns.” Self-reinforcing sequences create structural webs that once they exist are very difficult to untangle.

Even though the structures observed in Accra have been reproduced over time, it is a mistake to consider the urban situation today a simple continuation of colonial practices. The structures are legacies which have been morphed and adapted with the changes that came with independence and the following decades. For example, the structural adjustment programs implemented in the 1980s exacerbated the inequalities in Accra, since they caused reduced public investment into the society, for example in the form of public services, and further encouraged an economic focus on engaging with the global market and foreign investors. Since this systematically favored those groups that were already wealthy and disadvantaged the poor, unequal structures were further reinforced. Changes like these have meant that the structures keeping the different neighborhoods of Accra on different paths of development have changed from being upheld by administrative choice to being maintained by an economic system that disadvantages lower socioeconomic groups.

The type of reinforcing sequences discussed uses the “power explanation” to explain how the structures are reinforced, whereby institutions are sustained through a system that unevenly allocates power, keeping unequal systems alive. Under the current system, the people with the political and economic power to change the system, are the ones that are currently benefiting from it. This makes change extremely difficult to bring about.
7. Summary and conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to analyze in what ways socio-spatial structures found in Accra, Ghana have developed from the foundation of the city was under colonial rule and up until today. Accra is a city with a lot of socio-spatial inequality, manifested through the differences in development of different neighborhoods.

By studying earlier work describing six different neighborhoods in Accra, as well as maps of past and present-day Accra to compare levels of infrastructure, housing quality, and socioeconomic status in different neighborhoods, the aim was to see if the socio-spatial differences found during colonial times resemble those in existence today.

The research showed that the neighborhoods segregated spatially and socially during the city’s colonial rule still are overcrowded, have inadequate infrastructure and public services, low housing quality, and low ratings on indicators relating to health, income, and literacy, whereas the neighborhoods of the wealthy European colonizers have remained low-density, wealthy, and well provided for regarding infrastructure and services.

The segregation and inequality that existed as a result of colonial policy is an important part of explaining how and where it takes place today. The structures built up where privilege, opportunity, and power is unevenly distributed helps spatially explain why these differences have been able to be sustained over time. Accra is another example added to the literature on how segregation works in cyclical, self-reinforcing patterns, since it both causes and is caused by inequality.

This paper also further adds on to the discussion on the difficulties in changing inequality because of the structural components that preserve it. Inequality manifests itself in many different ways, including physical structures, which can be physically difficult to change.

Studying the reasons cities like Accra are structured the way they – as in this case where part of the explanation can be found in the objectives behind the physical structures and spatial features in place, as well as the self-enforcing nature of inequality and segregation – adds to the literature available to those dealing with contemporary urban challenges. As urban populations and physical cities themselves continue to grow, continued research in the field of urban development remains important, with significant implications for practitioners of urban planning.
Bibliography


