This chapter addresses an issue that has barely been studied in a comparative perspective, that of urban residential segregation – the policies and practices of urban residential zoning during colonialism, and their continuation after independence.\(^1\) The question is whether and how decolonization and the change of power affected urban policies of residential zoning. Of course, the situation differed for every city. Colonial residential segregation was instituted in many ways, sometimes imposed by the government (as in East and South Africa), at other times indirect (in the case of both anglophone and francophone West Africa). Moreover, segregation went much further than simple residential segregation: it could involve the separation not only of housing but of practically every substantial element of daily life: public spaces, laws, schools, livelihood, and culture. Colonial life was often organized along lines of inclusion or exclusion of specific groups, and residential zoning was only part of this general pattern of segregation. Yet, the built environment was an essential and conspicuous expression of the compartmentalizing spirit of colonialism. As Anthony King (1984:99) noted, ‘How people think governs how people build. And how people build [...] also affects how people think.’

The manifestations of residential zoning in colonial times were very diverse. Self-evidently, in many ways colonial urban policies have left an imprint on the postcolonial developments of the African city. However, formal residential zoning did not have such a strong impact in either period. In this chapter, I argue that the residential laws and rules played a relatively minor role during both colonial and postcolonial times. The colonial period can be divided in two phases: first, up to the 1930s, when urban planning was given little attention and residential policies barely existed; second, between the early 1930s and the 1960s, when residential policies and planning began to be more seriously planned. This colonial town planning continued without great changes in the early decades of independence.

\(^1\) A first draft of this argumentation was tried at the conference ‘African urban spaces; history and culture’ in Austin, Texas, March 2003. The author and editors thank Elsbeth Locher-Scholten for her expert help in editing this chapter.
The change of power at independence did not bring an enormous shift in the structure of the African city. Indeed, independence created a pattern that before had only existed in West Africa: segregation as a political ideology became unlawful everywhere. As a consequence of the transfer of sovereignty, a sudden mobility was put in motion: an African bourgeoisie rushed to occupy the former white settlers’ districts, while people at the bottom of society moved to downtown districts to extend their ‘informal’ trade activities to the quarters where they had been forbidden in the past. Nevertheless, the change of power little affected residential habits; at most, racial zoning was substituted by social zoning. Therefore, just prior to or after the transfer of sovereignty, it even appears that decolonization strengthened rather than weakened previous trends. In Johannesburg racial (and social) zoning increased rather than decreased; Soweto, the southwestern township of Johannesburg, became larger than ever before. So did Pikine in Senegal, which came into existence in the late 1950s as a result of the forced removal of urban shantytowns to the fringes of the city. Residential evolution after independence was more or less similar everywhere (post-apartheid South Africa included). Since then, urban growth has been so intensive, partly due to globalization, that the development of sprawling African megacities of later years differs little from urban growth elsewhere in the world.

This article does not deal with the desegregation of the middle classes at independence, which in a sense is self-explanatory: the national bourgeoisie benefited from the new political situation. Independence made many African political expatriates return to their countries in tropical Africa and occupied the houses and quarters of the former colonizers. In settlement colonies, former settlers emigrated in sufficiently large numbers to leave behind comfortable and luxurious villas and buildings in the residential quarters that until then had been reserved for whites. In the case of Maputo, for instance, about one million settlers departed at Mozambique’s independence, leaving behind their empty houses.

More interesting is the situation of the common people. How and in what rhythm did they take over former colonial cities? In what way and how did the state intervene to attempt to regulate their migration process and housing problems? What were government visions at the time? Although detailed case studies for the postcolonial period are scarce, existing studies conclude in general that social zoning replaced racial zoning soon after independence. Except for South Africa, white settlers remained a minority, and class differentiations did not have racial consequences. For instance, Lebanese traders in West Africa, or Indian traders in East Africa, as well as ‘coloured’ people in South Africa, had during colonial times (and under apartheid) been used as go-betweens between the ‘natives’ and the whites. They were accustomed to trade and therefore to live side by side with