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DISMANTLING COLONIAL MONUMENTS IN AFRICAN CITIES — THE EXAMPLE OF BISSAU.
IS AN EMPTY PLINTH STILL A MONUMENT?

Abstract: This article examines the fate of colonial monuments in Africa during the post-colonial period, especially the monuments that the Portuguese erected in Bissau in West Africa. The discussion is preceded by a detailed analysis of the sources that describe the iconoclasm of colonial monuments in selected African cities and a thorough description of the field studies conducted by the authors in Guinea-Bissau in 2020. As new African states replaced former colonies, the removal of European monuments in their capitals became a widely discussed topic. Some expressly political colonial monuments were removed at the time of formal decolonization, others have fallen down over the years, and yet others still stand. What distinguishes Bissau from every other postcolonial capital in Africa is that, while all its colonial monuments were dismantled after 1973, most of the plinths on which they stood have remained. These empty plinths are a symbol of decolonization – sui generis monuments of dismantled monuments. They speak volumes about the nature of the transformations that have taken place in recent decades. The new way of commemorating people and events in the symbolic and political landscape of Bissau, viz. murals created on the grassroots initiatives of young Bissau-Guineans, is also examined.

Key words: symbolic urban landscape, postcolonialism, decolonisation, monument, Bissau, Guinea-Bissau

INTRODUCTION

Each city is a cultural and political text. This claim is related to the concepts of 'cultural arena', 'performative space', and the more simple 'city-text' put forward by R. Rose-Redwood et al. (2017, p. 2). It describes a complicated palimpsest – a stratified record that continually piles up *pari passu* with the signs left down the ages by passing generations in the settlements they have built and which are known as cities. These signs create a highly elaborate system known as the urban landscape. This landscape

is understood as a cultural production and, as J.S. Duncan (2005) correctly observes, can be used for both reproduction and contestation of political power. Therefore, the relations between political change and evolution of the urban landscape are obvious nowadays. Examination of these relations has been deeply rooted in analysis within the scope of human geography since the critical turn in humanities and social sciences that took place in the early 1970s. The view regarding consolidation of political changes taking place in specific countries within the spaces of their cities was and still is mentioned by many researchers in various urban contexts — urban planning, architecture, urban nomenclature, as well as monumental sculpture (Harvey 1979; Cosgrove 1984; Duncan & Duncan 1988; Azaryahu 1996, 2011; Alderman 2002, 2003; Duncan 2005; Dwyer & Aldeman 2008).

As for the African continent, which was swept by the massive political revolution — decolonisation — in the second half of the 20th century, numerous researchers also present connections between politics and the development and evolution of urban spaces on the continent. This is primarily the case when it comes to the influence of European planning policy on the appearance of colonial cities in Africa. There are numerous studies dedicated to establishment, development and the accompanying politicisation of the space in the European cities in Africa on a pan-continental scale (Myers 2003; Njoh 2007, 2009; King 2012; C. Silva 2015), or divided by cities of individual empires: British (Rakodi 1986; Home 2013), French (Njoh 2004; Bigon 2009, 2012), or Portuguese (Brockey 2008; C.N. Silva 2016). The relationships between political change and urban landscape during the post-colonial period are presented slightly less frequently, although even here, there is no shortage of interesting studies (Myers 2011; Demissie 2013; C.N. Silva 2015, 2016). However, even such extensive literature has its considerable deficiencies. Larger cities, such as Lagos, Dakar, Luanda, Nairobi or the cities in South Africa have been the subject of an extensive number of studies on the relationship between politics and urban space, both during and after the colonisation era. However, smaller hubs, frequently capital cities of smaller countries, seem to lie outside the main scope of the researchers' interests. This is a serious gap since it disrupts the holistic view of the described processes by presenting them exclusively from the perspective of metropolises with a supra-local scope. Meanwhile, smaller cities are the sites of processes equally interesting and important from the point of view of their residents. They are worth taking a look at, if only to verify the universality of the processes described with respect to large African metropolises in the context of less globalised cities.

In order to meet this need, the text presents the recent history of Bissau, the capital city of Guinea-Bissau (during the period following the achievement of independence by this West African country in 1973/74). The lens used to analyse it was the symbolic dimension of urban space, and strictly speaking — one of its elements, i.e. monuments. Among the many elements of urban space, it would be difficult to find one more closely associated with political processes. As K. Verdery (1999) rightfully noted, falling monuments of bygone authority figures frequently accompany political revolutions. As the old regime is replaced by a new one, this change often comes with the removal of monuments erected by the departing regimes and their replacement with a new doctrine. The way the monuments are treated, as S. Marschall (2016, p. 349) points out, depends on the psychological, economic and political factors. The latter factor is extremely important here. The monument itself can no longer be perceived merely as a cultural indicator, but simultaneously, or perhaps first and foremost, as a tool for social engineering held in the hands of the authorities. Using this tool, the authorities certainly manifest their views but also create specific social sentiments, as well as 'manufacture history' to suit their own needs.

The subject matter touched upon here is also extremely important and up-to-date from the social point of view. The past years, including in particular 2020, were marked by the tearing down of monuments — symbols of colonialism and white supremacy all over the world. Contestation of the Confederate Army monuments in the American South and death of George Floyd, an African-American resident of Minneapolis, at the hands of a while police officer in May 2020, which gave rise to protests all over the world and the renaissance of the Black Lives Matter movement, resulted in another wave of vandalism and communal removal of monuments which, for various reasons (not always fully clear to the protesters themselves) started to give rise to social opposition even though

they had been previously tolerated. Thus, numerous Confederate monuments and memorials in USA were removed, along with *inter alia,* the monument of Edward Colston in Bristol or Robert Milligan in London in the UK.

The main goal of the article is to present the political change that was the decolonisation of Portuguese Guinea and the founding of Guinea-Bissau in the light of the traces left by this process within the space of the key city and the capital of the region — Bissau. The chosen indicators of these transformations were monuments, whose presence in the urban landscape was and is obvious, both during the period of Portugal's domination and upon the establishment of the new African political regime with its ever-evolving political scene. Removal of the colonial monuments and their replacement with new ones, frequently anti-colonial, is a common phenomenon in Bissau and beyond.

The text is divided into three parts. The first one presents a broader geographic context associated with tearing down colonial monuments along with withdrawal of Europeans from their African colonies. The second part discusses monuments erected by the Portuguese in the colonial Bissau and their fate after decolonisation. The final part is dedicated to new monuments, placed in the urban space by the Guinean authorities, which transformed the political and symbolic urban landscape by endowing it with an 'African' and 'revolutionary, anti-colonial' character. This part also includes a description of a new phenomenon in Bissau, viz. the commemoration of the figures associated with the independence movement in a series of murals decorating several buildings in the city centre.

FALLING MONUMENTS IN POSTCOLONIAL AFRICA

Gradual decolonisation of the African continent, which began before World War II and continued practically up until the 1990s, was a political change that resulted in countless acts of removal or destruction of monuments associated with the period of European domination. Iconoclasm of monuments presenting European themes took place in nearly all former colonies, even those which parted with their metropolises by way of peaceful and gradual political transformation (e.g. Senegal). Some of the monuments were removed simultaneously with formal achievement of independence (e.g. the statue of King George VI in Nairobi in 1964), sometimes preceded by a violent war of independence (e.g. the statue of Mouzinho de Albuquerque in Maputo in 1975), others were moved many years later (e.g. the statue of Queen Victoria in Nairobi in 2015), while some remain on their spots to this day (e.g. the statue of Governador Albuquerque in Praia). This phenomenon, with respect to different colonial cities, was presented in many publications dedicated to removal of colonial symbols from the urban landscape of African towns and cities. It is worth mentioning and collectively discussing some of them here.

Removal of colonial monuments in African countries began immediately after formal declaration of independence, and in some cases — even immediately prior to it. This was the case, for instance, for the statues of Lord Delamere and King George VI in Nairobi, Kenya, removed in November 1963 and May 1964, respectively (Larsen 2012). In the former case, the iconoclasm took place one month before the formal declaration of independence by British Kenya on 12 December 1963. Similar fate awaited the monuments of General Gordon and Lord Kitchener in Sudan, removed from Khartoum in 1958 along with the implementation of the policy of Arabisation by the president of Sudan, Gen. Ibrahim Abboud, who came into power earlier that year (Larsen 2012). In Bamako, soon after Mali became independent from France on 22 September1960, the monument to General Gustave Borgnis-Desbordes, who established the first French post in the city, was removed (Mann 2005). The statue of Colonel Louis Archinard met a similar fate — it was removed in 1967 from the space of another city in Mali — Ségou. Archinard was the French military official who had led the conquest of Ségou and the surrounding region in 1890 (De Joiro 2006). After the French withdrew from Dakar, Senegal, the monument of governor Louis Faidherbe was removed and transferred to the capital's museum, while in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, the monument of Cecil Rhodes was torn down in 1980. In 1995 in Mauritania, 80 km north from Nouakchott, a monument commemorating colonial soldiers killed

during the Battle of Um Tounsi in 1932 was destroyed (Baba, Freire 2020). Even in Namibia, where the heritage of German colonialism is still omnipresent in urban spaces, the year 2009 saw the removal of the German statue of *'Reiterdenkmal'* (the soldier's monument) commemorating German military and civilian causalities who died in the colonial wars against Ovaherero and Nama (Elago 2015).

In Kinshasa, the capital city of the Democratic Republic of Congo, which became independent from Belgium in 1960, monuments of King Leopold II (unveiled in 1928), his successor Albert I and the Welsh founder of the city, Henry Morton Stanley, stood until 1967. After president Mobutu Sese Seko came into power in 1965 and policy of authenticity was implemented, Belgian monuments commemorating figures which were viewed in an extremely negative light in the context of their actions in Central Africa (mainly Leopold II and Stanley) had to go. This was not the end of their story, however. Stashed away in the city's warehouses, forgotten for several decades, they returned in 2010 to Ngaliema Park, next to the presidential palace in Kinshasa (Tounsi 2020), where they remain to this day (early 2021). This happened despite the fact that as a result of the global "Black Lives Matter" movement, other monuments of Leopold II, even in Belgian cities, were removed (in Antwerp) or devastated (in Brussels) in June 2020. The decision to return King Leopold II to the centre of Kinshasa was explained by Jose Batekele, director of collection at the national museum in the presidential park, who said: "For us, the statue of Leopold II, it reflects a history, a memory. It is a reference for our children" (Tounsi 2020).

DR Congo is not the only example of a place where colonial statues were returned to the places chosen for them years ago by the European administration. A similar situation took place in one of the former Portuguese colonies in Africa — Cape Verde. In 1975, when the colony gained independence, its new African government formed by the PAIGC, aiming at cooperation with the Eastern Bloc, decided to rid the landscape of Praia, the country's capital, of the monument to the Portuguese explorer Diogo Gomes, erected in 1956. The monument was returned to its place when a number of democratic reforms took place in the country in early 1990s and foreign policy took a turn towards Portugal once again upon the collapse of the USSR (Górny, Górna 2019). This example is important from the perspective of the monument stories coming from Guinea-Bissau, another former Portuguese colony described in this text.

Examples of removal of the colonial monuments that were postponed in relation to the actual formal decolonisation of the country can be found *inter alia* in South Africa, where symbolic decolonisation of public spaces still remains a live process, accompanied by numerous social conflicts. The most spectacular (in media terms) and globally known African act of iconoclasm of a colonially-themed monument was the "Rhodes must fall" campaign, initiated in March 2015. As a result, in the following month, a monument commemorating Cecil Rhodes, a British mining magnate, white supremacist and prime minister of Cape Colony from 1890 to 1896, was removed from the courtyard of the University of Cape Town. This campaign amounted to more than the decolonisation of the public space of Cape Town. It reached much deeper, by referring to decolonisation of the university as a whole, while touching upon the issues of racial inequality at the university as well as throughout the South African society, extensively described in literature (Chaudhuri 2016; Murris 2016; Newsinger 2016; Nyamnjoh 2017; Kwoba et al. 2018). Following protests sparked by the *#RhodesMustFall* movements, the monuments to Queen Victoria in Port Elizabeth and to Paul Kruger in Pretoria were devastated, among others. However, the case of Rhodes' statue in Cape Town is not the only example of a colonial monument in South Africa to capture a lot of attention in academic literature. An extensive debate has been going on for many decades regarding the Voortrekker Monument built in Pretoria in 1949 to commemorate the Great Trek into the interior of the country. The monument, a symptom of Afrikaner nationalism and mythology (Autry 2012), has been the subject of discussions regarding its meaning and possibilities of contemporary use for years (Delmont 1993; Crampton 2001; Moreeng, Twala 2014).

As shown by the aforementioned examples, the stories of colonial monuments in African countries are met with great interest among researchers representing a very broad spectrum of social sciences. The following considerations supplement this research with the case of Bissau, the capital of Guinea-Bissau. So far, the fate of colonial monuments in this city has not been discussed despite the

fact that they represent an extremely interesting study of the symbolic urban landscape's reactivity to political changes taking place in the country. They also serve as a lens for broader changes affecting colonial monuments in former Portuguese colonies in Africa and beyond.

BRIEF HISTORY OF BISSAU

Bissau is the youngest city among all capitals of Lusophone African countries. The settlement only gained its city status in 1863 and became the actual capital of the colony on 9 December 1941, when the function of the capital city was moved here from Bolama. However, the actual beginnings of the Portuguese settlements in this region date back to 1687, when the first trading outpost was established to strengthen the position of the Portuguese Crown in the transatlantic slave trade (da Silva 2011). In later years, it was abandoned and re-established multiple times until eventually, only in the second half of the 18th century, *Fortaleza de São José da Amura* was built. It exists until this day and is the oldest site of material colonial heritage in the city. Slave trade itself went on in the region from the 16th to the 19th century (Cá 2000) and initially served as the main driving force for development of the city, which only spread outside the walls of the fortress in 1844 (Mendy 2006). Until 1879, Guinea-Bissau was managed administratively from Cabo Verde and did not become a separate colony until the end of the 19th century. The Portuguese gained total power over this territory through armed conquest, partially supported by certain local leaders collaborating with Europeans, e.g. Abdul Njai (Bowman 1986), quenching the last bastions of African resistance in 1936. That was also when the first planned phase of urbanisation of Bissau began (Cali 2012) and 5 years later, the city became the colony's capital.

The way that the Europeans were designing African cities was meant to reflect imperial values in their spatial structure (C.N. Silva 2015). It was supposed to legitimise white supremacy, organise and delineate the colonised — coloniser relationship and, first and foremost, maintain European control over the African soil and its native inhabitants. This was also the case in the cities founded by the Portuguese, as pointed out by many researchers (Bicalho 2001; Castelau-L'Estoile 2008; Domingos 2015; Milheiro 2015; Tostões & Bonito 2015). It should also be stressed that, unlike the Portuguese cities in India, settlements on African coasts (especially the Atlantic coast) were established by Iberians from scratch since no structured urban organisms from the pre-colonial era had existed here. Bissau was no different in this regard. The first serious urban development plan was drafted during the times of the First Republic (1910–1926) by the engineer José Guedes Quinhones in 1919 by delineating a network of wide streets with orthogonal layout around the fort and the small settlement by its walls. The main artery, running through the centre of the city (currently *Avenida Amílcar Cabral*) connected the port on the south-eastern end with the large roundabout and the governor's palace in the north-west, while the 'ring' avenue around the city marked the border between Bissau and its suburbs (*subúrbios*) (Milheiro 2015). Another city development plan was not created until after World War II in the Colonial Planning Office in Lisbon. Those were already the times of Estado Novo (1933–1974), when, as A.V. Milheiro (2015, p. 38) points out, public spaces in Portuguese cities were given a particular 'political rhetoric in line with the ideological discourse'. That was when colonial monuments were erected in Bissau. Their presence in the urban landscape was supposed to reinforce Portuguese domination over the colony and maintain the city's European *genius loci*.

PORTUGUESE MONUMENTS IN COLONIAL BISSAU

In colonial Bissau, the Portuguese erected a number of monuments that were meant to reinforce their supremacy over the indigenous population in the urban landscape. In one of the central points of the urban fabric, at the beginning of the colonial Bissau's main artery, *Avenida da Republica*, connecting the port with the governor's palace, the statue of Nuno Tristão was placed to commemorate the 15th century sailor, explorer and one of the precursors of slave trade. In colonial times, he was erroneously considered the

first European to have reached the area of today's Guinea-Bissau. In 1441–1446, at the dawn of the great geographic discoveries era, Tristão took several journeys along the coast of North and West Africa at the request of Prince Henry the Navigator. The first expedition in 1441 resulted in the first African slaves captured by captain Antão Gonçalves, serving under Tristão, being brought to Portugal (Iliffe 2017). During the third journey, he reached *Langue de Barberi* at the mouth of the Senegal river, where he established contacts with the West African ethnic group of Wolof. Thus, he became the first European to reach land to the south of the Sahara by sea. During his last journey in 1446, he most likely reached the estuary of Gambia, where he was killed, without ever arriving in what today is Guinea-Bissau. His monument in Bissau, however, was one of the best-displayed in the city (fig. 1a). It was raised on a 4-metre plinth, where it remained until the country's decolonisation. After the Portuguese Guinea became independent, it was moved to Cacheu — a settlement in the northern part of the country, where the river of the same name flows into the Atlantic, and where one of the oldest (1588) early colonial forts in Africa is located. Today, this small fortification serves as a warehouse of colonial monuments brought there after 1974 (it could not be determined when exactly) from all over the country (fig. 1b). Between 2007 and 2008, the monument was slightly damaged by unknown perpetrators who broke into the fortress. Today, instead of Nuno Tristão's monument, in the centre of Bissau, there is a bust of the "father of independence" of Guinea-Bissau — Amílcar Lopes da Costa Cabral (fig 1c), known as one of the main leaders in the fight against Portuguese imperialism in Africa, killed by the Portuguese intelligence in 1973, several months prior to declaration of independence by Guinea-Bissau. He was commemorated on monuments in numerous cities in Guinea-Bissau (e.g. Bissau, Bafata) and Cape Verde (e.g. Praia, Sal, Assomada).

Fig. **1a**. Monument to Nuno Tristão in colonial Bissau
Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org (access 05.07.2021)
Fig. **1b**. Fort in Cacheu, where the monument to Nuno Tristão is currently located
Source: photograph by the author, Cacheu, February 2020
Fig. **1c**. Monument to Amílcar Cabral in contemporary Bissau, in place of Nuno Tristão's monument
Source: photograph by the author, Bissau, February 2020

Replacing the figure of the precursor of Portuguese imperialism in Guinea with a bust of a leader of the anti-colonial movement is a clear sign of symbolic decolonisation of Bissau.

Another monument erected during colonial times in Bissau is a statue depicting Honório Pereira Barreto (1813–1859). He was a descendant of a Cape Verdean and a Guinean, educated in Lisbon and born in Portuguese Guinea. During his short life, he was the governor of Cacheu three times (1834–35, 1846–48 and 1852), while in 1837–1859, he held power in Bissau four times. He died there at the age of 46. From the perspective of the imperial Portugal's interests, Barreto was one of the key figures in the history of Iberian conquest of Guinea. He considerably strengthened the Crown's position in the region while making an effort to weaken the position of the British, who at the time had taken Bolama (the heart of the colony) and the Bissagos Islands by force[1]. Today, Barreto is seen as a model of a man successfully subjected to colonial assimilation, who was simultaneously presented as an example of an African acting in service of the monarchy. The indigenous people of Guinea saw him primarily as somebody who participated in trading slaves with the newly established independent Brazil. On the other hand, however, territorial reach and consolidation of contemporary Portuguese-speaking Guinea-Bissau is, to a large extent, the work of Barreto, who was commemorated numerous times already during the Portuguese era. In 1959, on the 100th anniversary of his death, a commemorative postal stamp was issued, a corvette named after him served in the Portuguese fleet, and in Bissau, apart from having a monument in front of the Portuguese Hotel (fig. 2a), he also became a patron of a high school in the capital, which today is named after Kwame Nkrumah. The monument, like many similar ones, was moved to the Cacheu fortress after decolonisation (fig. 2b). However, in this case, the plinth on which the metal figure once stood remained. Today, it serves two purposes. First of all, it was used as a mast for the high voltage line running above the square (fig. 2c). Secondly, it acquired a new symbolic meaning — it was used to hang a small relief of Ernesto *Che* Guewara (1928–1967), a Latin American communist fighter, the symbol of the Cuban revolution. This action is understandable from the perspective of the political orientation of the PAIGC, which came into power in Guinea-Bissau upon withdrawal of the Portuguese. The socialist government of Luís Cabral (1931–2009), stepbrother of the murdered Amílcar, was established in September 1973. It was characterised by socialist internal policy and close relations with the Eastern Bloc in foreign policy. The revolutionary character of the fight for independence of the Portuguese colonies in Africa was likened to the guerilla warfare led by *Che* in Cuba, Congo and Bolivia. Therefore, this iconic character had to be reflected in the symbolic landscape of Bissau in the form of a monument in the middle of a square named after him. However, the manner in which it took place is perplexing. The plinth on which *Che's* image can be seen today, right above his head, still bears a clearly visible writing: 'HONÓRIO BARRETO'. From today's perspective, it is hard to determine whether it was a deliberate choice aimed at confronting the past with the revolutionary present (Cabral's government was overthrown in 1980) or simply a way to save resources. The empty-looking plinth without a statue is a part of a larger set of empty plinths to be found everywhere throughout Bissau.

Another such example is the plinth on the nameless square in front of *Palácio Colinas de Boé*, which today houses the headquarters of the National People's Assembly (Port. *Assembleia Nacional Popular*). The plinth used to feature a statue of João Teixeira da Rocha Pinto (1876–1917), a Portuguese officer of the colonial army, who was born in Angola and died in Mozambique (fig. 3a). Pinto's moniker was 'The Devil Chief' (Port. *Capitão Diablo*), given to him in connection with the pacification of the Oio region, carried out in 1912–1915, in which he took active part. His monument, which is also located in Cacheu today (fig. 3b), was unveiled in May 1955 during the visit of the Portuguese president, Marshall

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[1] Eventually, this territorial dispute between Portugal and Great Britain was resolved in 1870 through arbitration of the American president Ulysses Grant, who convinced the British to withdraw from the region. Out of gratitude, the Portuguese erected in Bolama a monument to the 18th president of the United States. This bronze monument survived after 1974, although many similar monuments erected in Guinea-Bissau during the colonial times were destroyed. The statue was stolen in 2007, cut into pieces and sold as a valuable raw material (Quist-Arcton 2007). Interestingly, in recent years (most likely in 2018), a monument to Grant was unveiled once again (Ferreira 2018). The statue was created by the Guinean artist Zinho Ká.

Fig. **2a**. Monument to Honório Pereira Barreto in colonial Bissau
Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org (access 05.07.2021)
Fig. **2b**. Fort in Cacheu, where a fragment of the monument to Honório Barreto is currently located
Source: photograph by the author, Cacheu, February 2020
Fig. **2c**. Plinth with the image of *Che* in contemporary Bissau
Source: photograph by the author, Bissau, February 2020

Francisco Craveiro Lopes (1894–1964) to Bissau (A.E.D. Silva 2006). It was not the first monument to Pinto since previously, in 1929, his bust had been unveiled in the city centre near *Avenida da Republica*. However, the first monument was removed and transferred to Cacheu. Currently, the empty plinth located in one of the city's main arteries, connecting the centre with the international airport, is a prominent witness to the changes that have taken place in Guinea some 50 years ago (fig. 3c).

Another empty plinth, located near the main Guinean port terminal, close to *Fortaleza de São José da Amura*, provides a similar testimony. Before decolonisation, it was embellished with the figure of Diogo Gomes (1420–1500), a Portuguese soldier, explorer and writer, who explored the Atlantic coast of West Africa upon orders of Prince Henry the Navigator, reaching Senegambia and discovering Cabo Verde. During his travels, he sailed to the estuary of the Geba, where the river flows into the Atlantic, which at the time was the furthest and most significant excursion by the Europeans to the south, along the African coast. For obvious reasons, his monument was located on one of the squares by the Geba (fig. 4a), where it remained until decolonisation, after which it was moved to Cacheu (fig. 4b) despite the fact that he is said to have had a peaceful approach to the populations inhabiting the explored territories. Today, the plinth where the monument once stood is in the middle of the parking lot for lorries servicing the container terminal of the nearby port (fig. 4c).

In contemporary Bissau, there are a few more empty plinths which the Portuguese had once used to display themes meant to strengthen their symbolic and factual domination over the city (fig. 5). One of them is located in the middle of the main square of *Fortaleza de São José da Amura*, which

Fig. **3a**. Monument to João Teixeira da Rocha Pinto in colonial Bissau
Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org (access 05.07.2021)
Fig. **3b**. Fort in Cacheu, where a fragment of the monument to Teixeira Pinto is currently located
Source: photograph by the author, Cacheu, February 2020
Fig. **3c**. Empty monument plinth in contemporary Bissau
Source: photograph by the author, Bissau, February 2020

today houses the military barracks. Another one is several dozen metres away from the fortress's main gateway. Both plinths are today deprived of any inscriptions; however, it is known that the former was erected in 1946, on the 500th anniversary of the arrival of the Portuguese to Guinea (1446–1946), while the latter used to commemorate António Pereira Mouzinho de Albuquerque Cota Falcão (1829–1858), the governor of Portuguese Guinea, who died in the fortress while in office. The monument inside the fortress was stripped of the inscription since the following writing under the sculpture seemed unacceptable: "V centenary of Guinea 1446–1496 to the heroes of the occupation and pacification" (Port. *V centenário da Guiné 1446–1496 aos heróis da ocupação e pacifição*). In the past, the fortress was occupied by the colonial army and the inscription was addressed to its soldiers; however, nowadays, when the Guinean army is stationed here, the decision to take down the writing seems obvious.

There are some colonial monuments that are now gone without a trace. Apart from the previously referenced first bust of Teixeira Pinto, the monument to sailors, erected on the 500th anniversary of death of Prince Henry the Navigator (1460–1960) is also worth mentioning. The statue stood on the coastal boulevard and disappeared when the capital city's port was expanded. Interestingly, similar monuments, were built at the same time in several other cities owned back then by the Portuguese empire in order to commemorate the Prince, who was a central figure in creating their overseas power. And so, the same statues appeared in Dili (East Timor), Áqua Grande (São Tomé and Príncipe), Lourenço Marques (since 1976 Maputo, Mozambique), Praia (Cape Verde) and in Bissau, Farina and Cacheu in Guinea-Bissau, as well as in Portugal itself, in Torres Verdas.

Fig. **4a**. Monument to Diogo Gomes in colonial Bissau
Source: postcard from the authors' private collections
Fig. **4b**. Fort in Cacheu, where a fragment of the monument to Diogo Gomes is currently located
Source: photograph by the author, Cacheu, February 2020
Fig. **4c**. Empty monument plinth in contemporary Bissau
Source: photograph by the author, Bissau, February 2020

Colonial and new monuments in postcolonial Bissau

During the post-colonial period, all monuments from the Portuguese domination era were removed from the urban space of Bissau and other places (Milheiro 2012). Today, it is difficult to determine when exactly they were dismantled, but it probably took place already in the first years of the existence of the independent republic. Their fate in the last quarter of the 20th century also remains veiled in mystery. However, it is known that already at the beginning of the 21st century, some of them, in varying technical condition, were displayed in an open-air museum of colonial monuments in the renewed Cacheu fort. However, only four monuments from the capital (those of Nuno Tristão, Honório Pereira Barreto, João Teixeira da Rocha Pinto and Diogo Gomes) ended up in that small town in the northern part of Guinea-Bissau. Others, if they had been made of metal, were probably scrapped. That was certainly the case with two monuments from other cities: the first one, a monument to the U.S. president Ulysses Grant in Bolama was stolen in 2007 and cut into pieces; the other one was a figure of João Augusto de Oliveira Muzanty (1872–1937), governor of Guinea in 1906–1909, erected in Bafatá. Already in the 1990s, the remains of the torn-down metal figure could be found in the park where the monument had previously stood[2]. Today, there is no more than another empty plinth remaining of the governor. It is standing in the river port in the centre of the historical part of Bafatá.

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[2] Photographs of this monument, as well as many of the previous ones, described above, can be seen in a short film depicting the fate of colonial monuments in Guinea-Bissau, available on YouTube at: https://www.you-tube.com/watch?v=XnY5gydqXpY&t=2s (access 09.02.2021).

Fig. **5**. Map depicting the spatial layout of symbolic elements (monuments, commemorative plaques and murals) in the urban landscape of Bissau in 2021
Source: own study on the basis of field research conducted in February 2020

When the colonial government was replaced by the African one (this process took place between September 1973 and September 1974), the new authorities, apart from disassembling the symbols of the previous regime, gradually began to introduce into the Bissau landscape some new elements, charged with political messages, that are now omnipresent in the contemporary urban space. Two of them were installed on the plinths of the colonial monuments. One was the aforementioned monument to *Che* Guevara; the other is the largest monument in Bissau, which serves as the central point of the square in front of the presidential palace (previously the governor's palace), the key location in the entire city. In 1941, after several years of construction, a stone and reinforced concrete monument to the Effort of the Race (Port. *Monumento ao Esforço da Raça*) was unveiled in this location (called *Praça do Império* at the time). It had been designed in 1934 by the Portuguese architect Ponce de Castro and made from granite imported from Porto. This monument was modelled on the monument to Portuguese Colonial Effort (*Monumento ao Esforço Colonizador Português*) in the Foz do Douro district of Porto. During colonial times, the monument in Bissau also referred to the "effort" made by the Portuguese in the colonies. In 1973, when the PAIGC liberation army took control over Bissau, the monument was rebranded as a monument to the Heroes of the Independence (*Monumento aos Heróis da Independência*). The Portuguese crest was removed from it and a five-pointed star was added — the same star appears nowadays on the national flag of Guinea-Bissau. Today, the date of the unveiling of the original statue — 1941 — still remains on the square, which has also been renamed from the Imperial to that of the National Heroes. It is an interesting and one-of-a-kind example in Guinea-Bissau, of the adaptation, and a kind of rebranding, of a colonial pedestal to suit contemporary needs, combined with the resignation from the revolutionary act of iconoclasm.

Apart from the above examples, in contemporary Bissau, there are several monuments erected from beginning to the end in an independent country (fig. 5). The first one is 'Hand of Timba' (Port. *Mão de Timba*, also known as *Mom di Tima* or *Sunku Dedus*). It is a monument depicting a clenched black fist, located near the city's main port. The monument was created during the presidency of Luís Cabral (1973–1980) and commemorates the people killed in the Pidjiguiti massacre, whose names (approx. 60) are engraved on the monument. The events later referred to as the Pidjiguiti massacre took place on 3 August 1959. They began with a strike of the Guinean port workers and sailors employed in *Casa Gouveia*, who were demanding fairer wages. However, the strike was violently suppressed by the summoned Portuguese colonial police. This event should be treated as the beginning of the war called the War of Independence by the Guineans and the Colonial War by the Portuguese (Amado 2005), as well as of the founding myth of the PAIGC. The exact number of fatalities of the massacre is not known today (A.E.D. Silva 2006). First of all — it is because that when it took place, political censorship of Salazar's government did not make such information public. On the other hand, there is the version disseminated by the PAIGC activists, among others by the first president of Guinea-Bissau, Luís Cabral, which mentions more than 50 people having been killed. One of the Portuguese soldiers stationed in Bissau at the time — Mário Dias — described these events many years later, claiming that 16 people had died on that day and that using the word massacre is an exaggeration.[3] Those events are commemorated by one more monument, standing closer to the entrance to the port, right next to the main gate where the city's main communication artery — *Av. Amílcar Cabral* — begins. The monument bears the following inscription: "To the martyrs of 3 August 1959, a tribute from the citizens of Guinea and Cabo Verde". Apart from these two monuments commemorating 3 August, this date was also proclaimed a national holiday in the country.

During the post-colonial era, only two people were commemorated in Bissau with monuments depicting specific individuals. The first one is the previously mentioned Amílcar Cabral, whose bust was erected in the city's main avenue connecting the port with the presidential palace. However, it is not the only monument depicting the key hero of the fights for independence of the contemporary Guinea-Bissau. His much larger monument, presenting the entire figure, is located on the city's largest roundabout, in front of the Osvaldo Vieira International Airport. The monument was unveiled on 25 May 2009, on the Africa Day. The figure itself was already brought to Bissau in 1986 from Cuba, where it had been made one year earlier. In 1986–2009, the monument was kept in *Fortaleza de São José da Amura* in the centre of the city. The unveiling of this 2-tonne bronze figure was attended by the Cuban ambassador to Guinea-Bissau (the monument was a gift from Fidel Castro's government), the daughter of Amílcar, Iva Cabral, and Raimundo Pereira, back then the acting president of the country. The monument's unveiling was also accompanied by the renaming of the avenue connecting the airport to the strict city centre. It had previously been called *Av. 14 de Novembro*. This date commemorated the 1980 coup, as a result of which Luis Cabral was removed from power by another prominent PAIGC politician — João Bernardo ("Nino") Vieira. Nino ruled the country twice. For the first time — as a result of the coup, from 1980 to 1999, and for the second time — already as a democratically elected president in 2005–2009. However, on 2 March 2009, he was assassinated during another coup, aimed this time against him. Already three months after his death, the name of one of the main streets in the city was changed from the date commemorating Nino coming into power to *Avenida dos Combatentes da Liberdade da Pátria* (Avenue of the Fighters for Freedom of the Homeland). Interestingly, since the monument is located near an airport whose patron is Osvaldo Vieira, A. Cabral's monument is frequently mistaken for that of Vieira. This error was also reproduced on Wikipedia[4] and Openstreetmap[5].

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[3] His report on these events can be read on the following blog: https://blogueforanadaevaotres.blogspot.com/search?q=Pidjiguiti (access 09.02.2021).

[4] https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Osvaldo_Vieira (access 10.02.2021).

[5] https://www.openstreetmap.org/#map=17/11.88674/-15.65050 (access 10.02.2021).

The second person who has been commemorated with a monument in Bissau is Titina Silla. She was a member of the PAIGC and one of the most popular figures of the independence movement. Titina Silla was killed on 30 January 1973 by the Portuguese on her way to Amílcar Cabral's funeral. To this day, the date of her death is the National Women's Day in Guinea-Bissau. The monument was unveiled by president José Mário Vaz on 30 January 2015, on the 42nd anniversary of Silla's death. The figure was made by a local artist based on one of the few preserved photographs of the fighter, holding a small child in her arms. The monument was placed in the middle of a square named after her, in front of the Kwame Nkrumah High School.

Importantly, in contemporary Bissau, the figures commemorated with monuments and street names are fighters for independence who belonged to the PAIGC, but only those killed in battle during the war with Portugal: Amílcar Cabral (1924–1973), Titina Silla (1943–1973), Domingos Ramos (1935–1966), Osvaldo Vieira (1938–1974), Pansau Na Isna (1938–1970), Rui Djassi (1938–1964), or Francisco Mendes (the first prime minister, who died in an accident in 1978). However, the symbolic urban landscape does not include elements commemorating the first two leaders of independent Guinea-Bissau — Luís Cabral (1931–2009) and João Bernardo Vieira (1939–2009), who held power in the country on behalf of the PAIGC for a total of three decades in 1973–1999 and in 2005–2009. Both of them were removed from their positions as a result of coups, after years of disillusionment with the way they ran the country. Today, they are erased from the collective consciousness of Guineans, which is also reflected by the symbolic space of the capital city, deprived of any relevant markers. It is also worth noting that Luís Cabral, in spite of his party pedigree and unquestionable merits during the fight for independence, was not buried in the Pantheon of Revolutionaries located in *Fortaleza de São José da Amura*, where all of the aforementioned fighters killed in combat were buried, along with Nino and two other leaders of the country, Malam Bacai Sanhá (leader in 1999–2000 and 2009–2012) and Kumba Ialá (president in 2000–2003).

The last monument in Bissau is located — similarly to Amílcar Cabral's bust — in *Avenida Amílcar Cabral*. This monument depicts the logo of Rotary International, an organisation founded in Chicago in 1905. Its goal is to support the pro-peace measures worldwide and provide humanitarian aid. The motto of the organisation is written on the monument, and it reads: "Service Above Self".

Symbolic postcolonial landscape in Bissau — not only monuments

It is worth noting that apart from a small number of monuments and a much larger group of empty plinths present in today's landscape of Bissau, its symbolic layer is completed by two more types of elements. The first one are commemorative plaques, and the other one — politically themed murals, which have been popular in recent years.

In the strict city centre (borders visible on the map — fig. 5), there are currently 9 plaques commemorating various events and people. The oldest one is located in *Avenida da Unidade Africana* and commemorates the visit of Liberian president William Tolbert to Bissau in 1975.[6] Subsequent plaques commemorate the people associated with the life of the post-colonial city. On 24 September 1976, a plaque dedicated to Dr. Severino Gomes de Pina, a Guinean lawyer (1903–1973), was unveiled. The nearby street was also named after him. The plaque was signed "Tribute from the Bissau City Council". Another one commemorates Mário Pinto de Andrade — an Angolan poet and politician born in 1928, whose works were strictly anti-colonial. Andrade was one of the MPLA founders, and its first chairman. He died in exile in Bissau in 1990 and the plaque containing this information is next to the house where he had lived. The remaining plaques do not refer to people but to specific events: [1] inauguration of the Internet in the city (plaque unveiled by the prime minister of Guinea-Bissau Faustino F. Imbali on 17 April 2001); [2] naming of a street after Moura, Bissau's Portuguese partner city (unveiled on 27 January 2010 by the mayors of both partner cities); [3] opening of the Maritime

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[6] William Tolbert Jr. (1913–1980) — president of Liberia in 1971–1980, murdered as a result of the coup carried out by the army led by Samuel K. Doe. The last Liberian president from the True Whig Party — the party of the descendants of the former slaves brought to Liberia by Americans.

Institute — Port. *Instituto Marítimo-Portuário da Guiné-Bissau* (unveiled on 30 October 2013); [4] ceremonial opening of the restored Martines de Pindjiguite Square (unveiled by the prime minister Domingos Simões Pereira on 3 August 2015); [5] opening of Parque de Bambú — recreational space dedicated to young Guineans in front of the national assembly building (the park was ceremonially opened on 22 December 2019 by the prime minister Aristides Gomes).

A new form of reinforcing the political dimension of Bissau's social landscape is creation of murals within its space. This form of street art has now become a major part of visual space in many cities (Irvine 2012) and is frequently a bottom-up reaction of the society to political changes in the country (Marschall 2000). In early 2020, there were 5 murals in the historical centre of Bissau, commemorating: Nelson Mandela (on the wall of the property owned by the South African embassy), John Boyd Orr, the first Director-General of FAO and laureate of the 1949 Nobel Peace Prize (on the wall of the property owned by FAO), Agostinho Neto (on the wall of the High School named after him), as well as two murals commemorating Amílcar Lopes Cabral. Particular note should be taken of the last of them, unveiled in 2019, whose author is the Brazilian artist Cazé. The mural sparked the grassroots initiative of the local young artists inspired by Cazé's work. In September 2020, eleven people from two youth art groups — Galeria Jovem, and later also Pantera Negra — decided to create a series of similar murals commemorating other important figures from the period of fights for independence. A communal fundraiser was held to finance the following murals, created on large walls of buildings in the centre of Bissau and unveiled by the end of 2020: a mural of Titina Silla (24 September, on the 47th anniversary of proclamation of independence), Pansau Na Isna (on 3 October), Domingos Ramos (on 17 October), Francisco Mendes (on 31 October, painted over in June 2021) — the first prime minister of Guinea-Bissau, as well as a poet and musician José Carlos Schwarz (in December 2020). The murals commemorate three people who died during the fights for independence (Silla, Na Isna, Ramos), as well as one of the creators of Guinea-Bissau's statehood (Mendes) and the "father" of contemporary Guinean music (Schwarz). The goal of the group was to remind young Guineans about their most recent history, associated with the formation of the country, as well as to give rise to patriotic sentiments. "Young" Nuno Ala Tambá, an artist born in 1991, who presided over the works on the murals, concluded that they are meant to "help young Guineans learn about the image and heritage left by the national heroes"[7]. Young Nuno pointed out that what persuaded him to take part in the initiative was his work with Cazé on Cabral's mural, as well as the support of the Guinean sociologist and social activist Miguel de Barros, who deals with the relationships between art (including street art) and political movements in Luso-Africa (Barros 2012; Barros, Lima 2013; Barros, Lima & Martins 2015). This form of artistic expression, vividly outlined in the public space, has several functions and roles. First of all, it expresses political views of some of the Guinean artists from the younger generation as well as the will to transform the degraded visual space of Bissau. It is also supposed to promote national unity and to educate people basing on the founding myths associated with the war of independence. Apart from being the source of street nomenclature and subjects depicted in monuments, the struggle for independence has once again become a source of themes injected into the symbolic landscape of the Guinean capital city's public space.

CONCLUSION

Removal of *ancien régime* monuments and erection of the new ones is a process as old as the very idea of monuments, which dates back to ancient times. Dismantlement of African colonial monuments and installation of the anti-colonial ones, on the other hand, are acts accompanying political changes caused by formal decolonisation (independence), continuing to this day in the post-colonial reality.

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[7] https://www.asemana.publ.cv/?BISSAU-Titina-Sila-homenageada-com-mural-gigante&ak=1 (access 06.07.2021); https://www.dw.com/pt-002/guineenses-pintam-murais-para-resgatar-mem%C3%B3ria-e-promover-unidade/a-55469602?maca=por-gk-volltext-newsstand-noticias-pt-26357-xml-googlenews (access 06.07.2021).

Therefore, the changes described above, taking place in the symbolic landscape of Bissau, are nothing new from the pan-continental perspective. With one exception, viz. in no other capital city in Africa did the decision-makers behind these changes decide to leave almost all empty plinths on which colonial figures had stood. This raises the question of why such a decision was taken. Today, it would be nearly impossible to ask about it the aforementioned decision-makers (the majority of the authors of political reforms and changes in the landscape of Guinea-Bissau's cities from the 1970s are dead). As a result, we can only hypothesise. Perhaps economic aspects were the decisive factor. After all, taking down a metal figure is quick, while rearranging frequently entire squares with a plinth in the central point can consume financial resources that young African countries almost never had. This thesis seems to be contradicted by the passage of time. After all, almost a half-century has passed since decolonisation of Guinea-Bissau, so both the time and the means have been available. A thesis which appears to be much more interesting concerns political matters, which are typically key in the monument-related issues. Perhaps leaving empty plinths, with sticking out wires to which the "icons" of the empire had been attached, was (and still is!) supposed to reinforce the message about the form in which the Guinean revolution took place; about the rapid break-up with Portugal and its symbols and about the sharp socialist political turn that took place at the time (*Che* Guevara on Barreto's plinth).

A few other monument-related themes should also be noted. The new monuments commemorate exclusively the most recent history, in particular rebellions and fights for freedom ('Hand of Timba') and heroes of these fights (Cabral, Silla). On the one hand, this demonstrates that a successful anti-colonial uprising was treated as a founding myth of Guinea-Bissau and as a nation-forming force for its society. On the other hand, the complete lack of references to the pre-colonial period in Bissau's landscape is striking. They are absent from monuments and toponymy, which differentiates Guinea-Bissau, for example, from the neighbouring Senegal (there are monuments of this type in Dakar) or Gambia (the name of the capital itself — Banjul — is of the pre-colonial origin). This is most likely due to the lack of knowledge of the more remote history, both among the society and the decision-makers. The attachment to the myth of the revolution is still visible, for example, in the themes of the murals, which, after all, are created as part of the grassroots initiatives of the young generation.

The PAIGC, which still rules the country (it has the majority of seats in the parliament, and the president Umaro Sissoco Embaló also has his roots in the PAIGC, even though he ran for office as a member of the Madem-G15), deliberately maintains the liberation myths since all the heroes of those fights are associated with that party. However, political nuances seem to play a significant role even here, and are also visible in public space. Amílcar Cabral, who died as a great anti-colonial hero of trans-national renown, is nowadays reproduced throughout Bissau's landscape (street, monuments, murals). On the other hand, his step-brother — Luís, also a hero of the liberation fights, who took on the responsibility for the first years of the independent country (as the Chairman of the Council of State) — since he failed in his mission and was overthrown, is nowadays omitted in the urban landscape, just like his authoritarian and nowadays unpopular successor, João Bernardo Vieira. Moreover, apart from A. Cabral and T. Silla, no one has monuments dedicated to them (e.g. Ramos, Na Isna, Mendes), although many heroes have been paid homage with street names and recently also murals.

When it comes to the fate of the colonial monuments, in short, not all of them have been completely annihilated (e.g. by being scrapped or blown up). Some of them ended up in the museum in Cacheu, where they seem to be playing a marginal educational and propaganda role. On the one hand, they serve as reminders of the colonial past of Portuguese Guinea, and on the other hand — of the fact that they have been removed. However, they have been put to use, which is the best evidence of the purposeful nature of the monument-related actions in the post-colonial Guinea-Bissau. This supports the thesis that every monument-related act, i.e. erection, dismantling, transfer, replacement or purposefully leaving an empty plinth expresses an attitude towards what a given monument represents, and this attitude is nearly always political in nature.

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