

Call for Papers:

Uneasy Neighbours: Coexistence, Conflict and Control in the Colonial City, c. 1870–1940

Conference, University of Bremen, July 2022

This workshop seeks to capture the conflicting tendencies of the colonial city by exploring neighbour relations and urban proximity. Urbanisation in the nineteenth century is commonly described as a process of growing social and spatial fragmentation. In African, Asian and Mediterranean cities, colonial rule established or exacerbated such divisions. The multi-ethnic populations of the colonial city increasingly saw themselves segregated along racial, religious, and economic lines. While such argument explains the emergence of socio-economic inequalities, it sheds little light on everyday relations and political exchanges amongst city dwellers. Whilst colonial rule sought to establish ethnically isolated enclaves, mutual relationships and fragile coexistence between urban residents persisted. These conflicting tendencies resulted not in ‘compartmentalised’ cities, to use Fanon’s terminology, but in patchwork neighbourhoods that defied strict boundaries and maintained a significant level of encounter, engendering shared identities in some cases, violent conflicts in others. As a dense and complex site of social interaction, the neighbourhood offers a promising vantage point from which to re-examine patterns of cohabitation, conflict, and control in the colonial city.

By adopting this prism, we seek to challenge prevalent dichotomies that still shape much of the historiography of the colonial city: fragmentation vs. encounter, coexistence vs. conflict, agency vs. coercion. While historians of the British and French Empires such as Carl Nightingale and Benjamin White explore the various means of colonial segregation, other scholars, particularly those working on the Ottoman Empire such as Michelle Campos, Nora Lafi, or Ussama Makdisi, emphasise the resilience of coexistence well into the high imperial age. Studies of German colonial urbanism by James Brennan, Patrick C. Hege, and Cathérine Coquéry-Vidrovitch address different levels of social integration. By moving beyond the cohabitation/segmentation binary, this workshop seeks to capture the *ambivalence* of being neighbours in the colonial city: a fragile, at times tense, at times amicable *modus vivendi*. How did different communities living in immediate proximity and being subjected to the ethnic-religious categories of colonial rule interact with one another? How were urban conflicts produced and negotiated in distinct neighbourhoods and to what extent did the social and racial tensions inherent in global empires affect communal living in colonial cities? In which ways were urban conflicts shaped by colonial control and policing? Which impact did racial and/or religious segregation have on socio-economic inequality and how were different communities able to maintain and rework neighbourly relations? These are the main questions to be addressed by the workshop.

The two-day workshop at the University of Bremen seeks to bring together early career and senior scholars with an interest in colonial cities in order to discuss emerging research at the intersection of global, urban, and colonial history. Our aim is to establish the figure of the neighbour and the social geography of the neighbourhood as a locus of examination in global urban history, allowing to study power relations, forces of urban development, and dynamics of spatial inequalities. We particularly welcome contributions dealing with multi-ethnic and multi-religious cities in Africa, Asia and the Mediterranean during the era of ‘high imperialism’ (c. 1870–1930). In order to approach the colonial city through proximity and everyday contacts, we invite papers dealing with (but not limited to):

- theoretical and conceptual reflections on neighbour relations and neighbourhoods
- segregation and interaction in multi-ethnic cities
- comparative and connected histories of cohabitation
- histories of (labour) migration and the (re)making of neighbourhoods
- neighbourhood-based associations and business networks
- religious tensions and sectarian violence in shared urban spaces
- colonial control of urban neighbourhoods and practices of policing
- planning histories of urban neighbourhoods.

Paper proposals (max. 250 words) and short CVs should be sent to Norman Aselmeyer at norman.aselmeyer@uni-bremen.de or Avner Ofrath at avner.ofrath@uni-bremen.de by 15 October 2020. Participants will be asked to pre-circulate written papers (1500–3000 words) one month before the workshop. We particularly encourage contributions from researchers in African and Asian institutions. While we aim to secure funding to cover transport and accommodation costs, we will also be able to facilitate presentations by video link. We are currently in the process of locating the most suitable international journal for the purpose of publishing a selection of revised papers and will inform the participants prior to the workshop.

Contact:

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