



The City, the Nation and the World around 1900: Imperial Intersections and Colonial Connections

History Workshop, Berlin June 10-12, 2010

Keynote: Prof. David Gilbert (Royal Holloway, University of London)

Workshop Language will be English.

A snapshot taken in any metropolis in 1900 could be analyzed in terms of the “Age of Empire,” the period of the “Rise of the Nation-State,” or the “Century of Urbanization.” These three seemingly contradictory narratives address three different scales of historical action and historiographical analysis. Although scholars increasingly attend to various intersections of the processes of globalization and the formation of nation-states, this research is still in its beginning phases. In an ongoing interplay of global forces and domestic pressures, new social formations arose, which were simultaneously being re-shaped for example through discourses and practices of imperialism. As one part of this complex, claiming ownership of a colony impacted the colony, the coloniser and the global system. By 1900, the interconnection of places and repercussions of actions were no longer confined to one particular space or even continent – but were situated in an intertwined system that spanned the globe.

Current research, however, often leaves the impression that these developments, and subsequently their analyses, lack a specific locality. This is where this workshop tries to intervene through suggesting the place of the urban – in itself at this very time reconfigured and repositioned – as the central site of intersection of globalizing processes and nationstate formation. Not only did these strands come together in cities around the world in 1900, but they created something distinctly new: the great, central, dominating city which rules more than its own hinterland – whether one calls it imperial, world, global city or metropolis. This specific urban space of high density could simultaneously be claimed by national forces (as the case e.g. for a capital city), be shaped by transnational and global powers (as exemplified e.g. by the big port-city), and be nonetheless ruled by a strong and conscious local elite in power since centuries.

This workshop aims at pinpointing the various intersections and connections of a globalizing and nationalizing world, especially in terms of the imperial and the colonial, within the city. In an attempt to further this discussion of relational power and overlapping scales of analysis in the history of the urban form broadly around 1900, we invite proposals from scholars working in all geographic areas.

Possible questions we would like to address are:

- Is there something specific about the urban broadly around 1900 that determines its centrality as a locality of national and imperial struggles and performances?
- Does the impact of new imperial and global influences alter the city in a qualitative way, or does it simply quantitatively expand existing structures and processes?
- In what ways is the city more than just a “stage” on which imperial and national ambitions and conflicts are played out?
- Who are the main agents in the interconnection of the urban, the national and the global? Are new urban types created through the increasing interweaving of scales?

- How do overlapping socio-spatial arrangements of empire, nation-state, colony and city inform articulations and transformations of race, class and gender?

We plan to conclude with a roundtable-discussion which will broaden the chronological focus of the event and will include the question of the post-colonial city.

For questions of any kind, please contact:

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