Urban History Review
Revue d'histoire urbaine

URBAN HISTORY REVIEW
REVUE D'HISTOIRE URBAINE

De Barros, Juanita. *Order and Place: In a Colonial City. Patterns of Struggle and Resistance in Georgetown, British Guiana, 1889–1924*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003. Pp. xii, 252, Illustrations, bibliography, index

Myers, Garth Andrew. *Verandahs of Power: Colonialism and Space in Urban Africa*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2003. Pp. xii, 199. Illustrations, bibliography, index

Richard Harris

Volume 32, Number 1, Fall 2003

Perspectives internationales sur l'histoire urbaine : un aperçu des tendances récentes
International Perspectives on Urban History: A Review of Recent Trends

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1015745ar
DOI: https://doi.org/10.7202/1015745ar

See table of contents

Publisher(s)

Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine

ISSN

0703-0428 (print)
1918-5138 (digital)

Explore this journal

Cite this review

Harris, R. (2003). Review of [De Barros, Juanita. *Order and Place: In a Colonial City. Patterns of Struggle and Resistance in Georgetown, British Guiana, 1889–1924*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003. Pp. xii, 252, Illustrations, bibliography, index / Myers, Garth Andrew. *Verandahs of Power: Colonialism and Space in Urban Africa*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2003. Pp. xii, 199. Illustrations, bibliography, index]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, *32*(1), 65–67. https://doi.org/10.7202/1015745ar

Clark, Peter and Raymond Gillespie, eds. *Two Capitals: London and Dublin, 1500–1840*. Proceedings of the British Academy, volume 107. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2001. Pp. xiii, 311. Black and white illustrations, maps, tables, index. $140.00

This volume, the product in part of a conference held in Dublin in 1998, brings together fourteen eminent historians of London and Dublin and presents us with essays that are both informative and useful. They blend an analysis of the state of scholarship to date with original research and empirical findings. They are well illustrated with plentiful maps and drawings. Each of them is constructed and argued in workmanlike fashion and each is a sound and intelligent piece of work. In addition there is an introduction by the two editors, which sets out the ambitions and gives an overview of the scope of this study.

The essays, bunched in sets, are constructed around seven themes: the urban landscape, the welfare and police of the two cities, their demography and employment patterns, the governance of urban and suburban areas, their cultural institutions, their religious practices, and the nature of their urban identities. But, in fact, many of the essays are not really parallel in structure, in period, or in content. While Joanna Innes's fine piece considers the nature of London's social policies for a hundred and seventy years, Neal Garnham's intriguing analysis looks more narrowly at police and public order in eighteenth-century Dublin. Ian Archer's essay on London's governance covers the period from 1560 to 1700; its companion piece by J. R. Hill, considers Dublin's governance in "the long eighteenth century". Perhaps these sorts of incongruities are inevitable and even interesting; what is of more concern is their lack of mutual engagement. Where parallels are made between the two cities within the volume's pieces, they seem to illustrate the very different natures of these urban structures and to cast doubt on their similarities. While these articles provide much useful and important information, they merely whet the appetite for what the introduction promised. There we are told that the volume will not only shed light on urban convergences and divergences, but will consider the "forms of dialogue, interaction, and emulation." (2) In fact, we get little of this. What would be most useful in some future volume of this sort is to hear the historians involved talking to each other, raising the questions of similarity and difference, addressing the issue of interaction or imitation. In many ways a discussion like this, the conversation of many voices, inconclusive as it may be, would be as useful, and certainly more innovative, than the fine monologues presented here.

There are other structural issues about the volume that are not explained by its editors. Why consider only two of Britain's three capitals, for example? The inclusion of Edinburgh would not only have been a logical, and I think a most fruitful addition. And why this very broad, though unexplained, period for the book's scope? If the editors wished to cover both the early modern and some of the modern period, this might well have been discussed and its merits argued for. There are also curious omissions in the spheres of cultural and intellectual comparison. A discussion of the nature and relation of the two cities' theatrical lives seems one such obvious gap. Another might be a consideration of why Ireland was so important in the intellectual life of the kingdom as a whole in the eighteenth century, why the contributions of Swift and Berkeley, the Sheridans and Burke (to name only those that spring first to mind) could come out of a culture so much more beleaguered and impoverished, at least materially, than her richer and more powerful neighbour. Here again the comparison of Edinburgh might have added an interesting dimension.

But rather than carp on these opportunities not taken and rather than give a recipe for my ideal comparative British urban history, I should like to end by commending all the authors who contributed to this volume, and the editors for arranging it, and bringing them together.

Donna T. Andrew
Department of History
University of Guelph

De Barros, Juanita. *Order and Place: In a Colonial City. Patterns of Struggle and Resistance in Georgetown, British Guiana, 1889–1924*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003. Pp. xii, 252, Illustrations, bibliography, index.

Myers, Garth Andrew. *Verandahs of Power: Colonialism and Space in Urban Africa*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2003. Pp. xii, 199. Illustrations, bibliography, index.

The form of any city is the result of the designs of many people. It expresses power, most obviously of those who control land but also, more generally, of the dominant classes who make space in their own image. Grand boulevards and squares were made by absolute states; high-rise offices and modern planned subdivisions speak of a blander collaboration of planners with corporate developers; the squatter shantytowns, disorderly to outside eyes, express a popular democracy in which real power lies elsewhere.

Colonial cities of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were created by autocratic, at best paternal societies. Colonizers made cities to serve their own ends, and aimed to teach the lessons of civilization, modernity, and cultural superiority. In recent years some writers have explored how European powers shaped the settlements through which they exercised colonial rule. Timothy Mitchell, one of the more influential of these, has identified a strategy of "enframing," which imposed visible order, segregated peoples and functions, and established points of surveillance.[1] But as, for example, Brenda Yeoh has shown, the power that colonizers exercised over city residents was never absolute; the strategy of enframing was always incomplete and compromised.[2]

Two recent books exemplify and extend our understanding of how colonial power over cities was negotiated, and with what consequences. In *Order and Place in a Colonial City*, the historian Juanita De Barros examines the dialogue of control

and resistance in Georgetown, the capital of British Guiana, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Using colonial records in London and Georgetown, she traces a series of battles over sanitation, milk supply, and the varied use of public space for markets, demonstrations, and the expression of personal and collective identity. Sanitation and health had become a particular obsession of the British, a major locus and pretext for the exercise of control. In Georgetown it brought them into particular conflict with the Indo-Guianese, in their capacity as scavengers or as suppliers of milk. Scavengers, mostly Madrasi, were frequently condemned for corruption and inefficiency, although they resisted and evaded regulation. Much of Georgetown's milk was provided from the city's environs, which were heavily settled by East Indians, many of whom had only recently migrated from rural areas. Other issues brought the British into conflict with the Afro-Guianese majority. There were battles over the fees imposed on hucksters, many of whom were women; over marriage and festival processions; over the activities of centipede (Santapee) gangs; and most obviously over the recurrent riots and demonstrations, which drew on carnival and, increasingly, on labour traditions. Although she does not refer to Timothy Mitchell's work, De Barros suggests how the British tried to draw a line between inside and outside, the respectability of private space and the promiscuity of the streets, populated in large numbers by women, "turbulent Amazons" who joined men in using public space to build personal reputation through display, and deployment of a pungent creole. In short, De Barros shows us a plausible city, filled with the tensions and negotiations of everyday life.

More significantly, De Barros links the specific struggles to a larger argument about the role of colonial cities in the West Indies. The region was still, of course, overwhelmingly rural; in British Guiana, as on most of the islands, plantations remained the main source of wealth. But, De Barros argues, cities played a key role as centres of political power, of colonial administration, and of the society that colonizers made for themselves. They were the most vulnerable and important targets for mass demonstrations. In cities, too, ethnic groups were arguably less segregated than in the country; cities encouraged mixing, miscegenation, and the growth of a creole culture as evident in the street carnival. De Barros tries hard to locate evidence for cooperation between Afro- and Indo-Guianese, for example, by teasing out indications that members of both communities were active in the same centipede gangs. If her efforts are suggestive rather than conclusive, that is largely because of the limitations of the available records.

Order and Place is well-written, clearly organized, and nicely illustrated with a number of contemporary photographs, which help to give the reader a sense of a place with which few will be familiar. I have a couple of niggling complaints. The index is short (and arguably too reliant on key terms); Table 5.3 shows numbers not, as claimed, percentages; there appear to be minor errors in some of the "city" (column) percentages in Tables 2.6 to 2.9. Indeed, it is a pity that De Barros did not make fuller use of the census data that she reports in these tables, which pertain to the distribution of ethnic groups by city ward for each census year from 1891 to 1931. Such data can be used to calculate indexes that show the changing level of segregation between groups. On the assumption that spatial distance reflects social distance, these in turn may be used to infer trends in social relations between the major ethnic communities. Using the statistic that was developed by Otis and Beverly Duncan, the most generally used measure of segregation, I calculated index values using the data that de Barros reports.[3] They show several significant trends. In 1891, the Afro- and Indo-Guianese communities were somewhat segregated. The calculated index was 43, indicating that this proportion of either group would have had to move in order to eliminate their segregation.[4] This is roughly comparable with the level of segregation of many immigrant communities in North American cities today, and lower than the usual level of segregation of African-Canadians and -Americans. More significant than the level was the trend. By 1931, the segregation of Georgetown's Afro- and Indo-Guianese communities had fallen to an index value of 35. Here is systematic, if circumstantial, evidence that in the intervening decades these two communities had been growing together.

The evidence on segregation throws light more strikingly on relations between Europeans (mostly British) and the two main, subordinate ethnic groups. In 1891 the Europeans were much less segregated from the Afro-Guianese (IS = 20) than from the Indo-Guianese (IS = 50). It is tempting to try to explain this difference in terms of the relative degree of social distance between Europeans and the two respective subordinate groups; the truth, however, may be that the Indo-Guianese community consisted of more recent arrivals in the city, and were more segregated from Europeans simply because they had been compelled to settle disproportionately on cheap land at the urban fringe. After 1891, the segregation of Europeans from both groups, and especially the Afro-Guianese, grew steadily. By 1931 the index values for the segregation of Europeans from Afro- and Indo-Guianese were quite substantial, being 48 and 59, respectively. In part, the growing segregation of the colonizers from the colonized was surely a tribute to the sorts of struggles, both chronic and acute, that De Barros has documented. In conjunction with the slow integration of the two subordinate groups, it speaks to the slow emergence in Georgetown of a creole, anti-colonial culture.

Order and Place is a careful case study that hints at regional connections and parallels. De Barros looks for (and finds) echoes of the Trinidadian carnival, for example, and makes plausible claims about the emergence of a creole culture that has resonance across the colonial Caribbean. By comparison *Verandahs of Power* is bolder, less conventional in structure and more ambitious in its theoretical claims. In it Garth Myers, a cultural-historical geographer, uses a linked series of biographical and geographical case studies to build and illustrate an argument about the making of urban space in colonial settings. In geographical terms the five case studies, of colonial

Nairobi (1920s), Lusaka (1930s), and Zanzibar (1940s–1950s), and of postcolonial Zanzibar (1960s to 1970s) and Lilongwe (1960s to 1970s) are confined to East-Central Africa. They are linked through the persons of Eric Dutton, a career colonial administrator, who framed plans for each of the three colonial cities, and Ajit Singh, a Punjabi-born architect, who worked for Dutton in Zanzibar and who went on to help plan Lilongwe, Malawi's post-independence capital. Myers uses Dutton and Singh not only to link his case studies but also to illuminate the ways in which the social hierarchy of rule operated in the late colonial period, a hierarchy in which Dutton ended near the top, while Singh occupied a contradictory middle rung. To illuminate and illustrate the bottom, and largest rung, Myers uses Juma Kombo, who for a short time worked on the project that Myers and Singh helped frame in Zanzibar. To generalize Bwana Juma's experience, Myers uses Ng'ambo, the 'other side' of Zanzibar, where both Juma and Singh lived, as the type of a community that was occupied, and largely built, by Africans, and that had parallels in the neighbourhoods of Pumwani (Nairobi), George (Lusaka), and Chinsapo (Lilongwe). Myers, then, employs a complex research design that allows him to address issues of power and space within a comparative frame of reference.

Myers's account draws heavily on Mitchell's ideas about enframing although he, like de Barros but unlike Mitchell, also pays close attention to the manner in which Africans resisted and evaded the colonizers' plans. Each chapter is designed to illustrate the dialogue between enframing and resistance. This is accomplished most effectively in the paired case studies of Zanzibar, for which Myers is able to draw upon a wide range of materials, including oral histories and personal experience. The temporal range of the case studies enables Myers to show the continuities between the methods of colonial and postcolonial rule, whether the latter was nominally socialist (Zanzibar) or, in the Malawi of Hastings Banda, conservative and dictatorial. Indeed, he shows that in many ways the planning and housing schemes of early post-independence states were less sensitive to local traditions than those of the late colonial period. To a limited extent the use of biographical material, including personal records, links the case studies; to a greater extent, and perhaps more importantly, it helps to bring them alive.

There is much to appreciate about *Verandahs of Power*. It strikes a nice balance between theory and evidence; by comparison with some other studies of colonial urbanism and design, a disproportionate number of which have (for no obvious reason) concerned themselves with the French colonies, it sets up a fruitful, balanced dialogue between power and space; the linked case studies help the author to build a more general argument. I have minor concerns. In asking why colonial (and postcolonial) administrators failed to accomplish their goals, Myers could usefully have placed more emphasis on the financial constraints. None of the societies that he studies were rich, even by colonial standards, and Britain was in no position to offer much more than token financial assistance. Indeed, even in the most affluent nations, bold urban plans have routinely failed to accomplish their goals, or have produced serious, undesired consequences. I also found the system of referencing to be awkward, though here the responsibility lies with the publisher not the author.

Both books, but most obviously that of Myers, offer observations about post-colonial regimes and raise the question of what was specifically colonial about the experience of colonial cities. Not, surely, the linked goals of maintaining control while soliciting consent. Nor, certainly, the failure of governing regimes to accomplish those goals. Even the specific methods of colonial governments have many close parallels in North American cities. The use of sanitation to regulate the urban poor, efforts to control the disorderly use of public space, the segmentation of land use and other paraphernalia of enframing, are all very much part of the history of planning and urban governance in Canadian cities. If there is anything uniquely colonial in the places and struggles that are described by De Barros and Myers, it is in the degree to which they were racialized, coupled with the way in which this racialization was formalized in the mechanisms of rule.

But there is a more difficult question. "Colonial city" implies that the places in question were largely shaped by the forces of colonialism. In new capitals like Nairobi and Lusaka this was indeed the case, at least for a time. Even here, however, many urban residents soon followed lives that were only indirectly influenced by the colonial power. By labeling these places colonial we may lead ourselves to forget that colonized peoples not only resisted colonial rule, they often ignored it. In the barrack yards of Georgetown, as in the streets of Ng'ambo, people lived in ways that escaped the notice and the influence of colonial officials. As memories fade, how can we recapture that fact?

Richard Harris
School of Geography and Geology
McMaster University

---

1. Timothy Mitchell, *Colonizing Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).
2. Brenda Yeoh, *Contesting Space. Power Relations and the Urban Built Environment in Singapore* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).
3. Otis and Beverly Duncan, "Residential Distribution and Occupational Stratification," *American Journal of Sociology* 50 (1955): 493–503. I made a slight adjustment to the reported data for 1931, which appear to exclude the ward of Wortmanville.
4. The Duncans' index can take on values between 0 and 100, where the latter indicates complete segregation. Strictly speaking, "index of segregation" refers to situations where the residential distribution of one group is compared with the rest of the population; "index of dissimilarity" refers to comparisons between two, specific ethnic groups. They are calculated in the same way. For simplicity, only the former term is employed here. Index values vary with the scale of analysis. Because the population of Georgetown's wards was similar to that of modern-day census tracts, index values for Georgetown are comparable with those widely reported for modern Canadian and US cities.