



## **World Making and the City**

**RHS Symposium  
13-15 May, 2020  
University of Warwick**

### **Keynote:**

**Prof. Michael Goebel, The Graduate Institute, Geneva**

The rise of global history is having a significant impact on how we write histories of the city. Global historians have attempted to anchor the global in the social space of the local, in which the city often comes to the fore. For their part, urban historians have tried to bring cities or parts of cities into dialogue with global processes and projects (see the upcoming Global Urban History Project/Centre for Urban History conference ‘*The Pursuit of Global Urban History*’). Both strands of enquiry position the local as a social space, and yet, the importance of the city scale in analyses persists. How can we account for this? In what ways can the urban landscape function not as a pre-defined container but as a helpful canvas for rendering global processes and/or projects visible? In what ways has it contributed to new descriptions of the world, classifications of its workings, and/or plans to reshape it? In short, what role has it played in world making?<sup>1</sup>

Foundational to any reflections on world making and the city is the notion of the urban as a site of contact. Chains of trade and consumption have been at the heart of urban exchange, around which liberal and neoliberal world orderings have been imagined. Demographic diversity has been instrumental to the development of ideas about cosmopolitan worlds or multiculturalism. Closely tied to this are linguistic and sectarian alterities. In areas of governance and law, the city has been instrumental to globalist world-making projects. Likewise, a number of cities have come to the fore in making worlds of global-political solidarity. For example, migrants from colonial territories encountered one another in interwar Paris and London, where they forged ideas about the struggle against imperialism and the shape of a world after empire. After the Second World War, cities such as Algeria, Dar es Salaam, and Havana became sites where exiled liberation movements, radical intellectuals, and post-independence leaders developed notions of Third World solidarities against neocolonial threats.

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<sup>1</sup> For an extended discussion on world making see Duncan Bell, ‘Making and Taking Worlds’, in *Global Intellectual History*, ed. by Samuel Moyn and Andrew Sartori (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), pp. 254-80.

Such world making is, of course, extremely complex. Despite claims to universality, there is no one vocabulary for this kind of activity and the activity itself is riddled with divisive politics. This is something the city scale appears to illuminate. Indeed, we might ask: How did local constellations of power in the city enable certain collective worlds to come to prominence, while relegating others to the background? How did these plural worlds coalesce and stabilise into more concrete formations through processes of urban interaction?

This conference looks to push forward such lines of research by focusing on how the city facilitated new ways of thinking about global processes and ultimately, world-making activities. It asks:

- How and why did new visions of world order emerge in particular cities?
- What role did individuals, associations, and states play in facilitating or shutting down urban spaces with globalist inflections?
- Why do we see some such projects succeed and others fail?
- How do the pluralised origins of such activities bring into question potentially teleological narratives?

We welcome papers addressing any aspect of world making in the urban environment. They should be 20-30 min in length and based on original material. All travel and accommodation costs will be covered. Please send a 250-word abstract and paper title, plus a one page CV to [worldmaking2020@gmail.com](mailto:worldmaking2020@gmail.com) by 1 September 2019.



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