Original Article

Provincializing planning: Reflections on spatial ordering and imperial power

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Abstract
This paper takes the development of the British town planning movement as its starting point to explore a series of challenges for the discipline's historiography. The emergence of the professional field involved the circulation of ideas beyond the metropolitan core to colonial territories with spatial interventions that were deemed both physically and morally beneficial. The paper explores the role played by the discipline in developing spatialized forms of ethnic and racial differentiation within colonial territories. I conclude that British planning has largely ignored its own historiography, including the colonial legacy, enabling the discipline to assert its role as a socially progressive profession.

Keywords

Conventional histories of the British planning system situate it separately from the wider field of Empire within which it also operated. The discipline of British planning continues to promote its historical legacy as an exemplar for progressive ideals despite a series of important studies that have illuminated the centrality of planning to colonial modes of governmentality (see, for example, Bhandar, 2018; Home, 2013; Njoh, 2009; Perera, 2008; Rabinow, 1995). The distancing of empire from the history of the discipline helps to strategically locate the British profession as a model for progressive planning ideals. British planning narrates its own colonial history through a prism of neutral expertise or what the planning historian Stephen Ward (2016: 45) describes as 'a progressive notion [that] could be deployed as part of a process of external dominance.' This separation between British based and colonial planning has contributed to a limited engagement with

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postcolonial and decolonial scholarship (Porter, 2010; Watson, 2003). It is striking that British-based planning scholarship, and its associated professional organization, the Royal Town Planning Institute, have both remained largely silent about the discipline's legacy in relation to colonialism. In contrast, closely related fields such as geography are engaged in extensive work exploring and challenging colonial entanglements, including the role of professional institutions (see Esson, 2020; Jazeel, 2017; Noxolo, 2017).

This paper argues that more effort is needed to draw upon decolonial and postcolonial insights to challenge the 'official planning histories' that predominate in Britain, relegating the Empire to a past historical phase from which we have now emerged. As the planning theorist Ananya Roy (2006) states '[E]mpire is not simply an unfortunate backdrop to planning, one that simply can be denied allegiance. Rather empire is planning's "present history"' (p. 8). The continuing distinction between British and postcolonial planning debates limits our understanding of British planning's place within the ongoing impacts of empire (see, for example, Barry and Porter, 2012; Njoh, 2010; Oswin, 2020; Porter, 2006, 2010; Roy, 2009, 2020; Sandercock, 1998, 2003; Spain, 2001). Imperial expansion was justified through ideologies of racial superiority that cast colonialism within a narrative of a civilizing mission towards inferior subjects (Chakrabarty, 2000; Chatterjee, 1993; Gopal, 2019). This Eurocentric representation continues to influence historical claims of the superior expertise of the colonizers (Porter, 2010). An insularity towards the British history of town planning has positioned the profession's imperial endeavours as an exercise of expertise within colonies rather than considering how colonial territories have shaped the discipline as a whole (Home, 1990; Njoh, 2009). British claims that planning's imperial usage represents the deployment of advanced knowledge draw upon a disputed Eurocentric hierarchy that places Europe at the forefront of political modernity with other countries left behind (Bhandar, 2018). Instead, the nascent British planning system was central to the spatial and territorial concerns of Empire with its diffusion into colonial territories supporting the consolidation of the profession's reputation and enabling it to be practiced experimentally in colonial and postcolonial settings. These forms of experimentation were focused on the racial characteristics and perceived inferiority of the colonial population. The degraded living experience of many colonial subjects was mediated through planning's justification of vastly different conditions based upon essentialized racial distinctions (Perera, 2009; Yeoh, 2003).

In this paper I explore how the construction of 'planning expertise' developed in parallel with colonial discourse. I am less interested in the processes and functions of a specific planning system, than in how such interventions reflect a sensibility towards racialized populations as part of attempts to manage and control urban space. Geographically, I focus particularly on Hong Kong, a former British colony, which still engenders a discourse of paternalistic colonialism. The historical sources open up an understanding of the ambivalence of the planning system towards the Hong Kong, offering a powerful counter-narrative to that of benign intervention. My paper draws on archival research conducted between 2018 and 2021 at the National Archives, London; the archives at SOAS (the School of Oriental and African Studies), London; the Wellcome Institute, London; the Thatcher Archives; the British Library oral histories; the Public Records Office, Hong Kong; and the Hong Kong Heritage Project. Only digitally

available records could be consulted during 2020. I looked in particular at files relating to town planning, urban development interests, housing policy, post-war development, enterprise zones, urban development and urban unrest.

I have divided my article into three sections. I begin by reconsidering the framing of British planning historiography. Secondly, I consider the relationship between racial biopolitics and spatial ordering in colonial settings and how the capacity of populations became framed within colonial reporting to develop a narrative of their uneven capacity to benefit from British planning interventions. Thirdly, I consider the importance of a fuller engagement with British and colonial planning as inter-related fields for understanding urban interventions. I argue that the question of racial and ethnic inequalities remains marginalized in British planning discourse, in part due to the narrow framing of colonial planning as a practice applied 'elsewhere' and unrelated to the UK experience.

Provincializing planning

Four broad areas of scholarship have emerged within urban planning's turn to postcolonial and decolonial theory. The first is a body of work that has primarily challenged the canon of Anglo-American urban theory and emphasized the inadequacy of Eurocentric planning and planning concepts within the global South (see Connell, 2014; Robinson, 2006; Roy, 2009; Watson, 2009). A second strand specifically engages with the violence of settler colonialism, examining planning's centrality to processes that dispossessed Indigenous peoples and sought to erase other forms of knowledge (see Barry and Agyeman, 2020; Barry and Porter, 2012; Bhandar, 2018; Porter, 2010). A third strand has sought to critically re-evaluate British colonial history through a series of careful detailed historical and conceptually sophisticated accounts that have examined the racial and imperial construction of spaces and cities through colonialism (see Home, 2013; King, 1977; Legg, 2008; Yeoh, 2003). Finally, interventions have directly engaged with the 'post-colonial careering' of former colonial officials and the problematic discourses around transference of specific planning ideals (Craggs and Neate, 2017; Wood, 2019).

My own perspective is rooted within the former colonial metropole, based at a British planning school. As a British-born scholar of colour with family connections to former British colonies, there are conflicts in being situated within a discipline that remains ambivalent about its imperial past and complacent about its racialized legacy. The planning theorist Tanja Winkler (2018: 591) identifies contradictions whereby despite the limitations and inherent violence of Eurocentric frameworks, we are nonetheless 'conditioned as Western thinkers' deriving our training and knowledge, and our very own expertise from these backgrounds. Critically re-evaluating how to decentre these perspectives is a challenging and complex task. However, further consideration of how the metropole and colonies operate as connected fields from within British planning scholarship encourages us to re-evaluate an existing progressive historiography of the discipline (Barry and Porter, 2012; Njoh, 2010; Perera, 2008; Roy, 2006). Broader critiques have emphasized 'the dark side of planning,' challenging the progressive narrative of the discipline and emphasizing the need for a more nuanced approach (Huxley and Yiftachel, 2000; Yiftachel, 1998). Planning forms a key technical tool of the state aimed to produce

rational order through space. Such ordering distinguishes between those who form part of this spatial rationality and those deemed beyond its rehabilitative capabilities (Kamete, 2018; Wright, 1987). As planning theorist Ambe Njoh (2010) emphasizes, the insufficiently problematized narrative of European colonial planning misrepresents expertise as neutral and obscures its position within an 'encompassing effort to universalize Western culture' (p. 375). Of course colonialism is not a solely European phenomenon but British planning has a unique position given its own positioning as the originator of the modern discipline.

Key British texts such as Peter Hall's (2002 [1988]), *Cities of Tomorrow*, Stephen Ward's (2004) *Planning and Urban Change* and Cullingworth and Nadin's (2003) *Town and Country Planning in the UK* reveal an absence of racial and colonial understandings in the historiography of the discipline. Such gaps reflect a wider ambivalence towards the racial legacies of colonialism in British-based planning scholarship. Spatial interventions have been framed as the outcome of a rational ordering of space rather than contradictory and problematic exercises of power (Brinkley, 2020; Watson, 2003). I am not arguing that British planning debates are little more than univocal apologia for colonial planning. However, the deficiencies of British colonial planning become resituated as limitations of practice within different contexts. Patsy Healey's evaluation of the flows of knowledge within planning is mindful of the colonial context and the problems within a linear myth of modernity and development. Despite Healey's (2013) critique of the development and movement of planning knowledges, their deficiencies are represented as 'inappropriate' usage within 'different cultures and histories'.

> Examples include practices of land-use zoning, with their assumptions of individualized and formally recorded land and property rights, and the notion that spatial plans should be drawn up after undertaking systematic expert surveys, and/or after following careful methods of relating overall goals to analysed options in order to arrive at the content of formal plans which should guide development.

> (p. 1513)

Such a representation of colonial practice falls short of a critical engagement with planning's role within the devaluation of colonial subjects. European planning's actions form part of colonial territorial expansion within a broader imperial project of European epistemic violence (Stoler, 2010). As the critical legal studies scholar Brenna Bhandar (2018: 23) notes 'there is no homogeneous "law of development" that can determine and define what constitutes improvement or indeed progress'. Eurocentric planning schemes and property rights were imposed upon colonies as evidence of such progress but formed a key element of imperial dispossession (Bhandar, 2018; Porter, 2010). When Peter Hall relates that Stanley Adshead, Liverpool's first Lever Professor of Planning, 'bluntly stated the view that "it would be a mistake to treat the Africans as if they are Europeans. . . it would be foolish to offer them those bodily comforts which they have never known"' (Hall, 2002 [1988]: 204), this racist sentiment is presented as an individual foible rather than a central element within the development of town planning. Indeed Hall uncritically outlines the colonial rationale for racial segregation in African cities as a mechanism to

ensure public health protection for Europeans. Yet these narratives are familiar and critiqued strongly within the postcolonial literature for their racist sentiment (see, for example, Chatterjee, 1993). Imperialism represented colonial subjects through a racial lens that conceived of them as outside of European political modernity requiring the educative force of colonizers (Chakrabarty, 2000). The political theorist and historian Partha Chatterjee (1993: 20) similarly notes that 'a whole apparatus of specialized technical services,' that included planning and public health, were called into service to mark out colonized people as holding absolute differences from their colonizers.

Distancing British planning from the complexities of colonial history creates significant barriers to understanding how race and ethnic difference emerge dialogically within urban space. The valorization of British expertise, and its embodied whiteness, occurred in a context where other racial identities were devalued within structural and institutional hierarchies. Revisiting the nostalgic perspective towards British planning's 'utopian' vision requires us to re-engage with narratives of benevolent concern to uncover how violence is central to the imperial project (see Dorries and Harjo, 2020). As the planning scholar Libby Porter (2010) has argued, 'Producing space in settler colonial colonies was an enactment of the politics of (dis)possession. Dispossessory activities were the work of erasing the lived space of Indigenous peoples' (p. 76). These practices of erasure were coupled with processes of racialization that are integral to the development of planning. Colonial expansion, whereby zones of experimentation were staged within the colonies, provide spaces for the application and evaluation of forms of spatial planning crucial to the development and refinement of planning tools that shape the modern discipline (Perera, 2002; Porter, 2007, 2010).

The claims to progressive forms of planning and infrastructure development are pivotal to the positioning of colonial practices as forms of technical assistance or expertise (Ward, 2016). However, historically situated accounts from postcolonial and decolonial scholars reveal the inadequacies of British planning's efforts in colonial settings. Planning, as a spatial practice, was utilized to impose and maintain racial segregation drawing upon spurious 'scientific' arguments. Colonial cities were often divided between European and Indigenous zones, with much higher living standard apparent in the neighbourhoods of the colonizers. However, colonial cities also became what the architectural historian Gwendolyn Wright (1987, 1991) refers to as laboratories. Colonial cities attracted professionals as they provided opportunities for urban 'experimentation' by planners and architects. Her study of French colonial Morocco, for instance, emphasizes how aesthetics and culture played a political role in colonial authority, noting that 'urban design – sometimes used in radically different ways within the same city - assumed a major role in efforts to make colonialism more popular among Europeans and more tolerable to the colonized peoples' (p. 322). Colonial governance necessitated engagement with local elites who in turn wielded political influence. For example, in British colonial Lagos, Nigerian and European elites were concerned with crime levels and urban infrastructure improvements, making a series of calls to the local administrators for street lighting. In response, the colonial administration introduced new infrastructure in 1898 although principally for European areas (see Olukoju, 2003). Such schemes were important dimensions within narratives of colonial innovation within infrastructure improvements.

In reality European zones received the greatest planning attention. In contrast Indigenous areas often bore the illusion of planning through street layout and other visible modes of improvement that did little to improve the living conditions of colonial subjects (see Bigon, 2005). The planner Nihal Perera's (2008) study of Colombo's city planning sets out how the realities of poverty and overcrowding become a technical problem defined and reinterpreted through the British planning lens. '[T]he city was viewed as a threatening and lacking other that needs some order, discipline, and help. This perception went beyond turning the low-income people into the Other; it marginalized the politics of poverty' (p. 70). The reframing of poverty and overcrowding from a political issue to a technical challenge beyond the capacity of the colonial state absolved unequal forms of governance and investment. In Hong Kong the colonial officials noted 'there remains hardly an inch of space which has not been occupied for one purpose or another' (Wellington, 1929: 7). The implication was that the population was unamenable to interventions obscuring how colonial arrangements forced people into these living conditions. Whilst colonial planners and officials may have believed their interventions held benefits, the imperial realm was not an isolated sphere of activity but circulated racial and racist ideologies between metropole and colony as I will turn to further in the final section (Home, 2013).

Biopolitical benevolence

Planning starts to emerge as a distinct discipline in the late nineteenth century with a focus on spatial arrangements that were deemed both physically and morally beneficial to populations. Public health and urban planning intersected to create different zones within colonial cities that drew upon racial hierarchies and public health concerns that sought to distance Europeans from colonial subjects (Perera, 2002). Biopower offers an important lens through which to view colonial planning interventions. Practices of planning do not solely represent crude forms of power 'over' but varied processes of management and control. The development of interventions into human life through the collection of statistics, which categorized and ordered populations are critical to the development of biopolitical power (see, for example, Rabinow and Rose, 2006). The assumed capacities of populations and their limits became highly racialized. Stephen Legg's detailed examination of Delhi demonstrates that whilst there is clear transference of particular principles of biopolitical governance and state oversight, their articulation differs. 'European biopolitical regulations were radically transfigured when applied in colonial contexts', Legg (2008) notes, '[T]he need for a healthy, and thus productive and content population were still central, although the subjects of this population were deemed to be irreducibly different' (p. 150). These racialized distinctions are inter-related with the extractive nature of colonial economies. Nascent forms of spatial intervention were closely linked to the development of public health.

The aspirations of European cities were deemed no longer appropriate when efforts were made by sanitation engineers and public health officials to transfer them to the colonies. Rather, attempts to implement widespread schemes found themselves met with qualified justifications for inaction based on asserted lack of capacity of colonial subjects. Segregation and differential living conditions was a key facet of colonial

settlement, with colonial subjects often blamed for communicable diseases such as malaria or tuberculosis (Jones, 2003). However, spatial and public health interventions in colonial settings had particular racial understandings that were constructed and contested within the colonial arena distinguishing between European and 'traditional' medicine (Tilley, 2011). The numerous annual sanitary reports provided by the colonial administrations highlight these racial thoughts and this process of delineating uneven racial capacities in relation to public health.

For example, a public health report written more than 30 years after the British had assumed control of Hong Kong criticized the lack of racial segregation in the city as the reason for the public health crisis:

> The city has been built devoid of arrangement and few steps have been taken to separate the European from the Chinese inhabitants. The dirty habits of the latter should have led the founders to have provided against the mixed dwelling of the two races. . .The emanations from the Chinese may prove to be prejudicial to the health of the Europeans inhaling them.
>
> (Black, 1869: 47)

There was little interest in the degrading living conditions of the Chinese other than their potential impacts on European health. The claim that the Chinese populace had vastly different living standards by cultural or racial custom became an enduring trope throughout Hong Kong's colonial governance. However, there were always distinctions made between Chinese elites, who were co-opted into the running of the colony, including many major landlords, and the majority working population (see Carroll, 2005). Chinese elites (Carroll, 2005). There was strong resistance to improving the living conditions of the Chinese labouring population by both Chinese and European landlords. A letter from Chinese landowners to the Governor in 1878 used intersecting racial and class-based arguments to argue that racial uncleanliness of their tenants provided a justification for increasing housing densities and lowering sanitary standards. Consider, for example, a response to a plan to increase ventilation between dwellings:

> Now these habits . . . are condemned by the more recent rules of Western science are, as a matter of fact, the outcome of a lengthened experience among the Chinese of living in large and crowed cities, and are as deep rooted as most of their social customs, so that it is quite certain that the tenants for whom these houses are intended as they would not understand the reason.
>
> (Landowners and Residents of Hong Kong, 1878)

Deference to so-called Chinese custom, focused on increasing housing density as much as possible and resisting alleyways or other communal spaces. In contrast, Osbert Chadwick produced a report on the manners and habits of the poorer Chinese population, which argued for a greater level of public health intervention. Chadwick's detailed examination involved early forms of public participation via key organizations in Hong Kong, which produced some 200 written responses. Throughout the report, Chadwick expresses scepticism towards claims that the living conditions of the Chinese labouring population

were in any way desired by them or beneficial to them, pointing to the simple fact that Hong Kong's housing densities were higher than those of other settlements in mainland China. In so doing, he challenged a racialized narrative that intervention to improve the impoverished housing conditions of Hong Kong's Chinese population was culturally insensitive. 'It will therefore be well to examine the evidence [that] . . . . the Chinese are so healthy a race that it would be presumptuous for Western to interfere with their time-honoured stinks' (1882, p. 21). Interestingly, the Colonial Surgeon's reports of 1874 and 1875 differ from the earlier racial explanations, and support Chadwick. He describes housing conditions so dire that he was forced onto the street to vomit many times given the levels of overcrowding and dirt within the buildings (see also Chu, 2012). For Ayres (1874) the housing conditions are created by European and Chinese landlords 'who squeeze those who have no power to make their complaints known without scruple'. But as the urban historian Cecilia Chu (2012) has argued the 'colonial government's heavy reliance on generating revenue from private property in a leasehold system supported a lucrative housing market' (p. 3). The Crown leasehold system underpinned Hong Kong's rising densities and limited infrastructure provision, with significant water rationing until the mid-1960s (Chau, 1993; Chen, 2001).

Racial biopolitics framed ideas of colonized populations as lacking the capacity to benefit from interventions. Instead, the discourse of other racial groups as 'inferior' to Europeans justified uneven and discriminatory rules, regulations and dispersal of funding under the aegis of rational forms of planning (see Chang, 2012 in relation to Singapore). Hong Kong's medical and sanitary reports, for example, offer precise details on numerous dimensions of the European and Chinese population. British colonial officials considered the greatest challenge to be '[t]he traditional beliefs of the uneducated Chinese as to the cause of diseases, the means and spread and the factors which affect its course are so at variance with modern teaching'. Furthermore, little could be done to tackle diseases 'until they can be brought to understand the true nature of the problems' (Wellington, 1928: 6). However, the lack of sanitation and severe overcrowding were significant contributory factors to the spread of diseases (see Owens, 1940). Those interventions that did emerge were mapped onto the assumed capacities of populations to receive or benefit from scientific interventions (see Jones, 2003).

Racial distinctions between colonized populations and Europeans brought together scientific discourses with racist ideologies. Emerging forms of spatial intervention were closely linked to the development of public health as a discipline. For the geographer Matthew Gandy (2006) 'the body developed into an increasingly politicized terrain around which the defining aspects of modernity could derive a sense of symbolic unity' (p. 499). He emphasizes the inter-relationships with colonial forms of government acting to divide citizens from subjects. This division is not an anomaly but stems from 'an integral dimension to modernity itself, in the sense that the "exception" or the state of exception is actually fundamental to the operation of the system as a whole' (p. 502). Spatial management was intertwined with racial thinking that placed racial groups in differing temporalities often used to justify urban segregation or differential spatial provisions. Stephen Frenkel and John Western (1988) show in the case of Sierra Leone that public health justifications were given for the separation of Europeans where 'the medical language seems often to have served as an expedient, with a meaning more social than

scientific' (1988: 227). The juxtaposition of nascent epidemiological studies took 'facts' about mosquitos along with racist assumptions. Together they weave together a narrative to support differential development which denied colonial subjects the same levels of protection from disease (Bowie, 2018).

As the literary scholar Kyra Schuller (2018) describes, in relation to the nineteenth century development of race, '[I]t helped produce hierarchies of somatic capacity, the biological phenomenon of the population, and the corresponding central goal of power to measure and manage the uneven distribution of vital potential throughout national territory, including overseas colonies' (p. 12). Urban planning, along with other modes of state intervention, has historically sought to regulate, segregate and control urban populations through the control of physical space. However, colonial planning can no longer be understood as generalized forms of progressive practices, but rather re-evaluated within the narratives of imperialism as locally situated and contingent solutions (see Gandy, 2014). As the geographer Margo Huxley (2006) has argued attention to the 'truths' underpinning spatial ordering open up governing rationalities and ambitions to 'generate positive effects in bodies, behaviours and moral temperaments' (p. 784) and encompassed ideas of enhancing 'evolutionary potential'. Modes of colonial classification of populations as objects of study and sites for critical intervention were highly racially stereotyped. Racial ideologies underpinned schemes of categorizing people and groups facilitating greater intervention into everyday life through the development of statistical data.

Colonial hauntings

Forms of racial control, segregation and devaluation shaped the intellectual space for urban planning within the colonial arena. As Libby Porter (2007: 469) has elucidated in her study of forests in Australia, settler colonial planning has embedded understandings of space 'derived from colonially rooted perceptions of place,' influencing historical and contemporary though. British and colonial planning practices do not represent alternate and opposed frame of thinking. The rationalities of British urban planning move between metropole and colony as a mechanism to control and order populations and space (Watson, 2003).

The literary scholar Avery Gordon (2008) explores hauntings to explore 'an animated state in which a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known' (p. xvi). Thus (post)colonial practices do not move from a historical reality into an archive of the past but resonate throughout contemporary societies. Considering the way the modern-day discipline was honed during this colonial period opens up how spatial and racial ideologies moved between empire and colony. 'Indirect rule provided opportunities for experimentation with progressive ideas such as municipal improvement and town planning,' writes Home (2013), alongside the promotion of 'White supremacist ideas applied to colonial urban landscapes through racial segregation policies' (p. 52). The development and transferability of British town planning practice became associated with progressive European models of modernity as implicated within the framework of racist ideologies. An emphasis on a body of knowledge that could be applied with the overt

aspirations of improving the spatial form of colonial cities was critical to an imperial model of modernity.

The development of the colonial civil service helped to construct white expertise. A reconsideration of the specific circumstances through which planners received opportunities to advise and practice overseas enables us to further problematize the connections between British and colonial planning. British university planning departments and the overseas civil service were critical to the professionalization of knowledge production within wider networks of colonialism. Civic Design at the University of Liverpool was established in 1909 as the first British department of Town Planning, followed by the University of Birmingham (1912), and then the Bartlett at University College London (1914).

Liverpool's Civic Design Department was strategically embedded within colonial networks: not only were academic staff involved in numerous overseas commissions, but the student body was highly international (Crinson, 2003). Peter Batey, the seventh Lever professor at Liverpool, is one of the eight white men[1] who have held the chair from its founding until the present day (1912–2021). He describes Lord Lever as soap manufacturer and benefactor who donated the proceeds of a libel suit enabling the establishment of the department, the eponymous chair, and the journal, *Town Planning Review* (Batey, undated). This gift chimes with Lever's depiction in British planning history as a benevolent philanthropist concerned with urban planning reform exemplified within his model village of Port Sunlight in the Liverpool region. Whilst there are critiques of these forms of paternalist spatial intervention, rather less attention is paid to how Lever benefited directly from his colonial interests in the Belgian Congo, attempting to 'transfer' the model village to a colonial setting.[2] Crinson (2003) notes that 'By 1930 the Colonial Office had recognized the key role played by Liverpool, as well as the newer department at University College London, in supplying planners for the colonies' (p. 36). The British profession gained from imperial expansion as their reservoir of expertise grew with university departments links to colonial connections, thereby bolstering the discipline.

As the geographers, Ruth Craggs and Hannah Neate (2017) note the 'constellation of people, ideas and practices involved in urban policy between 1945 and 1990 were significantly shaped through the unique set of mobilities brought about by the end of European empires' (p. 45). Abercrombie (1944), himself a former Lever Chair at Liverpool, is perhaps best known for his work in Britain, in particular the *Greater London Plan*. Abercrombie (1948) was involved in many British planning schemes and also advised numerous governments overseas, producing plans for Dublin (1922), Cyprus (1947) and Addis Ababa (1956), as well as Hong Kong. His colonial work throws new light onto his domestic plans: for example, the foreword to the 1944 *Greater London Plan* describes the life and sophistication of London not only as a European city, but as the 'Capital of Empire' (1944: 20).

The promotion of the expert 'town planner' able to advise on widely varying cities and situations of which they had little personal knowledge was critical to the development of the discipline. The Colonial Office advised on the selection of experts and leading planners were given the opportunity to visit colonies for a short time to devise a planning vision. However, less experienced planners also had opportunities if they were willing to relocate for an extended period. Planning provided a terrain for colonialism to

be promoted as technical assistance rather than imperial imposition. The Colonial Office wrote to Hong Kong in late 1946 to recommend their approach to Borneo as both colonies had suffered significant war damage. British Borneo's Governor commented 'With the almost complete destruction that has occurred, we have an opportunity to reconstruct the urban centres of North Borneo on model lines. My proposal is to engage a town planner of high reputation. . .' (Colonial Office, 1946).

Internal correspondence between Hong Kong officials notes that war damage provided 'an opportunity to demonstrate a model progressive community in the Far East. . . the appointment of an expert of standing would be of great assistance in expediting the preparation of a radical plan *of improvement*' (Colonial Office, 1947a) The Colonial Office corresponded with a number of names: 'Clifford Holliday, who has acted in similar capacities in Haifa, Ceylon and Gibralter . . . Max Lock is also a possibility. He is relatively young and unmarried and might like to do a tour for two or three years. . .' (Colonial Office, 1947b). However, Sir Mark Young, the Governor of Hong Kong between 1941 and 1947,[3] was insistent that one of the leading lights of the profession must be recruited to prepare a planning vision, sending a telegram to the Secretary of State for the Colonies seeking to secure 'a Town Planning Expert of high repute' in developing the comprehensive plan. The Governor was concerned that the right planner is found to lead any efforts to improve the Colony and Abercrombie is only one of two leading figures considered suitable:

> I imagine it will be unlikely that Sir Patrick Abercrombie would be willing to undertake this task, but it would be an advantage if an expert of comparable status could be selected, as his proposals would be less likely to meet with opposition from the various interests affected than would recommendations by a comparatively unknown Town Planner.
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> (Young, 1946: 1)

The framing of expertise reaffirms the problematic notion that it is embodied within Eurocentric knowledge. Expertise was held by individuals due to their own standing and knowledge. However, expertise was also situated within networks of imperial power and connections meaning that no prior knowledge of Hong Kong was necessary. The British town planning movement's success, in part, has been achieved through the opportunities given to planners through the Colonial Office seeking to manage their territories (King, 1977). Examining how individuals became enmeshed in colonial projects, is to unpack assumptions of generalizable expertise and to situate them within imperial networks rather than problematic assumptions of individual 'genius' (see Hall, 2002 [1988]). Whilst individual planners may have believed in the importance of the discipline, they were also aware of the contradictions of being sought as experts and the limitations of their own capabilities, in ways that historiographies of planning can obscure through focusing primarily on ideas and individuals. As the former architect-planner Percy Johnson-Marshall notes during the post-war period 'I was invited to prepare a plan for colonial Burma (now Myanmar), *but of course it was ridiculous to think any of us could do this* but at least we could show people how to go about the task' (cited in Crinson, 1990, emphasis added).

Hong Kong is often superficially discussed as an example of successful British planning and is proposed to lack resistance to colonialism that marked many other countries. However, the Colony lacked formal town planning until interventions were sought following the Second World War. British colonialism continued to expound a technocratic framing of knowledge to help to bolster their role and renewed efforts were made to engage in planning and other public health activities. The British were also keen to reassert the idea of their favourable leadership following Japanese occupation (see Carroll, 2005). At the same time, however, the colonial population were depicted as lacking an inherent capacity to benefit from British colonial planning. A 1951 memo on town planning sent by Hong Kong's Director of Public Works expresses concerns regarding any change:

> The population of Hongkong lives largely under highly congested conditions and is concentrated in relatively small areas due to the nature of the terrain and the outlook of the people. These factors limit very considerably the amount of replanning that can be done and make it essential that such planning is undertaken by persons acquainted both with the peculiar requirements and outlook of the populace. . .I am convinced this is no way to approach town planning in this colony
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> (Bowring, 1951)

Planning models differed depending on the socio-political context and the power of colonial governments in situ. They took specific directions dependent on the assumed priorities. Yet these attempts varied depending on the location of town planning interventions. Hong Kong's officials suggested little change could be implemented due to the cultural norms of the population and purported lack of space. Colonial officials in Hong Kong continued to emphasize that there was not enough money for town planning. However, their future concerns were that any attempt was sure to be met with failure due to the 'peculiar requirements' and 'outlook' of the largely Chinese population. Little attention was given to how the inflated and unaffordable land market was directly the result of Crown control (Chu, 2012). There were few protections for workers with the minimum wage introduced 14 years after the end of British rule in 2011 (Wong, 2014). Nonetheless, the problem is primarily formulated as a psychological or racial one justifying the limited intervention of the British to date. Abercrombie's plan for the colony contains elements that he notes would be strongly opposed in Britain due to high densities proposed for housing (see Abercrombie, 1948). These differentiations were justified on the basis of offering denizens a better living standard than their asserted pre-existing conditions. The Hong Kong University professor W. G. Gregory went so far as to state in 1963 that 'the Chinese are an adaptable and hardy race, bred in a long history of continuous deprivation. . .' (p.32). Colonial planning provides a manifestation of expertise embedded within a racially derogatory logic (see also Acey, 2012 in relation to Nigeria).

The movement of planning ideas from metropole to colony forms a complex field of action that is loaded with racial narratives. Linking colonial and metropolitan fields of planning assists us in illuminating how these discourses travelled. Enterprise zones and their amalgamation of planning and economic ideas have often been studied from the

perspective of their policy movement from the UK to the USA (see, for example, Jones, 2006; Wetherell, 2016). Less attention has been paid to how they represent the distillation of a set of assumptions about Hong Kong and its colonial governance. Policies are intertwined with the racial logics that historically underpinned British colonialism. Their take-up is arguably based partially on the ability of a simplistic story of enlightened colonial success based on racial tropes about the Chinese population.

In the UK, the Conservative party in opposition during the 1970s favoured forms of deregulation and entrepreneurship in the development of urban policy. The policy idea of Simplified Economic Zones was enthusiastically embraced by Geoffrey Howe, who went on to become Chancellor in the incoming Thatcher administration of 1979, and emblematic of the Thatcher government's urban regeneration ideology. Howe gave a speech in June 1978 where he proposed their urban policy would 'aim to recreate the Hong Kong of the 1950s inside Inner Liverpool or Inner Glasgow'. Howe ultimately rejected the idea of a 'Crown Colony' within the UK where most state protections and taxes could be removed. The new Conservative government were uncertain as to how far deregulation could go but a memorandum from the Cabinet Secretary to Thatcher argued that 'the consultation document should mention – without commitment – all the ideas for derestriction mentioned in the official's report. These include relaxation of health and safety standards and employment protection requirements . . . .' (Hunt, 1979) Thatcher's influential adviser Keith Joseph, who also served as a government minister, supported a task force focused on Merseyside that should include 'someone with direct personal experience of Hong Kong' (Joseph, 1978). Simplified Economic Development Zones were proposed to 'implant "Hong Kong" capitalism in urban areas perceived to be "underachieving"' (O'Dowd and Rolston, 1985: 218). The Conservative perspective was that urban areas such as Liverpool were 'poisoned by socialism' under the Labour Government (Joseph, 1978).

Debates within the Conservative party about regeneration strategies reveal a set of assumptions about Hong Kong embedded within the colonial gaze. The representation of Hong Kong vastly simplified the political turmoil experienced during the 1950s as large numbers of refugees fled unrest in mainland China. It erased the dire living conditions, instead focusing on 'success' as an innate racial characteristic of Hong Kong Chinese people. Some disquiet was expressed about the idea of reducing regulation, particularly in relation to health and safety and employment protections, positing the idea that it would lead to second class citizens living in the UK (Hoskyns, 1979). Yet no such concern was expressed about the existing lack of regulatory protections in Hong Kong. Claims that British colonialism simply facilitated Hong Kong's successes were unproblematized but draw on racial tropes of the paternalistic colonizer leading colonial subjects to realize their own potential (see Chakrabarty, 2000). The Hong Kong account is depoliticized obscuring the of dissent over living and housing conditions that dated to the commencement of British rule as well as wider political unrest (Chadwick, 1882; Chu, 2012; Pryor, 1972; Smart, 2006).

The Conservative enterprise zone policy provides one example of how perceived 'neutral' planning tools travel from colonial contexts (Wood, 2019). Within political discourse, there are implicit ideas of how an urban area's population will be 'corrected' through the implementation of planning ideas. Any approach looking to colonial settings

to find solutions to urban poverty is rooted within a history of imperial oppression. British planning raises questions about the processes through which an active unknowing of race centres whiteness. The history of British planning continues to promote a narrative of the exercise of expertise that obscures the spatial dynamics of racial power. The racial ordering of planning historically distinguished between European and colonial subjects. Thus the movement of planners and the development of their ideas within colonial settings cannot travel free of racial ideologies.

Race was tied to spatially ordering with initial reports on settlement under the aegis of the Secretary of State for the Colonies in the post-war period in the UK. There were considerable concerns about migrants arriving in the metropole from the New Commonwealth. Colonies remained perceived as vastly different places unconnected to Europe. Insufficient attention has been given to how the extension of urban planning as emerging from colonial tools of management was inflected with racial and racist ideas (Rex and Moore, 1967). Black and ethnic minority groups often found themselves within some of the poorest regions of the country but much political rhetoric placed them as the cause of the degraded living conditions. 'This problem [bad housing]. . .is much aggravated in the case of coloured people [sic] who may at home have been accustomed to standards of accommodation which would not have been considered adequate in this country. . .' (Cabinet Office, 1955). These assumptions about the housing conditions in imperial settings replicate ideas of differential modes of civilization that justified differential provisions between the British and British colonial subjects. The spatial ordering of immigrants connecting them as the cause of substandard housing is infused with colonial distinctions transposed to the metropole. Contestations over urban space were integral to the politicization of racial difference in the UK (see Layton-Henry and Rich, 1986).

Conclusions

The legacy of British post-war planning obscures how colonial and British planning are intimately co-constructed. Planning remains largely silent in the British context on its own role in the construction of ethnic and racial inequalities at home (see Gale and Thomas, 2020 for a notable exception). It is clear that only through a separation of British identity from the history of empire could conceptions of Britishness be framed as fundamentally white (see Bhambra, 2016). The distinction between Britain and Empire enables an erasure of racial questions from the repertoire and legacy of the discipline. Instead, racialized minorities in the UK continue to be viewed through the lens of immigrant settlers that require planning processes to 'integrate' them into some form of a spatial polity (see, for example, Harris, 2017). Critiques of the inadequacy of planning and housing to meet the needs of the post-war period have been left to historians generally writing outside the mainstream planning discipline. A desire to preserve the legacy of the social worth of post-war planning has contributed to a neglect of the limitations of the planning system and the persistent inability to meet housing demand contributed to the anti- immigrant hostility. British and colonial urban spaces are sites of difference, where the various histories of migration, racism and the forming of new communities developed under the ghosts of colonialism (Gilroy, 2000).

The imperial legacy of racial hierarchies has been of little concern to mainstream planning histories which tend to treat colonialism as a backdrop to planning rather than integral to the formation of British planning expertise. British planning's professional legacy is reliant on distinguishing it as separate from colonial practices. Furthermore, representations of colonial planning as largely benevolent can only be given through distancing itself from the ideologies of Empire. The division of British planning between empire and colony has created a false dichotomy. British planning remains considered as a largely progressive discipline, albeit with significant critiques. British colonial planning is represented as a practice that is distanced from imperial history and from planning practice more generally. The attention of decolonial and postcolonial scholars to the epistemological violence of planning under Empire remain at a distance to the British field. Through situating British planning's progressive account as emerging in dialogue with imperial expansion, new ways of understanding and exploring inherent assumptions about its progressive values can be opened up.

A series of recent interventions have again sought to situate the British planning tradition as world leading through their singular focus on planning as a progressive discipline (see, for example, Bowie, 2018; Lock and Ellis, 2020). Engaging with imperial histories requires us to engage with understandings of how British town planning's reputation has been built through forms of colonial governmentality. The continuing veneration of particular individuals who forged their careers within the British empire requires us to ignore colonial dispossession and racial discrimination (Porter, 2010). What might this mean for the increasingly international body of students who come to learn about town planning in Britain, with its claims to authority in planning based within a problematic and partial historical memory? In contrast to the predominantly white male planning professoriate, only around 3% of the British profession's practising planners are from black and ethnic minority groups (Royal Town Planning Institute, 2019). Perhaps this is not surprising given the prevalence of different forms of racial discrimination in British society.

The historian Dipesh Chakrabarty has highlighted the intellectual conceit expressed within the idea of Europe and its own rationality. Chakrabarty exposes a particular Western historiography that places European people and their practices as superior to colonized people and argues that there is a necessity to provincialize, or decentre, Europe. British planning's history and its relationship to visible racial and ethnic minorities in the contemporary period require further situating within the colonial project. An implicit assumption is that the racist imperial ideology dissipated at the end of Empire rather than becoming embedded in planning tools created in the exchange between metropole and colony as a growing form of spatial control and intervention. The creation of forms of expertise as intimately linked to white professionalism marked the post-war diffusion of planning and development fields (Ward et al., 2011). Insidiously, they have enabled problematic, stereotypical and racist narratives to emerge within post-war planning and development discourses. Placing racial imperial ideologies at the centre of planning discourse offers an opportunity with which to acquaint ourselves with alternative readings and silences within the dominant histories (Huxley, 2000). These contrasting accounts can aid in provincializing planning and professional discourses revealing the narratives

that mediate the actions of the diverse groups and professions required for the task of colonial administration (see Chakrabarty, 2000).

As a mode of governance, planning occupies an uneasy space between technical expertise and contested notions of the public interest. Attentiveness to postcolonial and decolonial perspectives offers possibilities to re-examine the entanglements between the development of modern town planning in the UK and within colonial territories as a connected field. In so doing we must revisit histories of planning which elevate early town planning as a set of progressive ideas. If forms of governance rely upon the stories created through key actors then wider engagement with alternative postcolonial insights into British and European planning history is long overdue. Resituating British planning as a colonial practice, operating between the metropole and its colonies, asks us to think again about who and what is served through a continuance of this laudatory legacy.

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Notes

1. The presentation includes 105 pictures of people with a focus on key roles in the department and journal's history. Whilst there are numerous duplications, there are images of women four times and men 101 times.
2. Lever's colonial experimentations included the transplanting of the Port Sunlight model to Leverville. However, there were significant problems in their transference as they were embedded within Eurocentric and racial hierarchies 'Instead of giving the majority of his workers access to education and in turn blue and white collar work, his bargain was couched in terms of the exchange of labour for civilization as defined in his Euro-centric and austere way' (Loffman and Henriet, 2020: 73). Insufficient palm oil production did not lead to increased wages given the challenges of the work, but coercive and violent mechanisms to control the workforce on the ground (see Marchal, 2017).
3. He was held as a prisoner of war. The Japanese occupied Hong Kong from 25 December 1941 until 15 August 1945 and British control resumed on 30 August 1945).

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