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History

Abstract:
My research project, currently entitled Pestilence and Planning: The Plague, Public Health and Colonial Urbanism in Lagos, Nigeria stands at the intersection of urban and medical history to examine how colonial conceptions about disease, Africans and urban space led to attempts to remake and reshape life in and the landscape of Lagos. I will argue colonial urban planning in the 1920’s, 30’s, 40’s, and 50’s might be best described as coercive urbanism. Colonial planners attempted to remake Lagos in a way that kept the colonial state secure. Initially, these British officials often used coercion and violence to impose their policies, which were predicated on the social construction of Africans and their cities as unhygienic, primitive and diseased. Although British officials later adopted more technical, developmentalist and less directly coercive methods, their ideas throughout the period were always informed by their own perceptions about the deficiencies of Africans and African urban life. These deficiencies were directly contrasted in the minds of the British by the modern and universalistic planning and public health policies of the colonial state. Thus, colonial planning marginalized Africans and ignored their roles in both imagining and shaping Lagos in the twentieth century. This project will contribute to our knowledge about cities in the Global South, comparative urban planning and the history of health and disease in Africa and beyond.