

## Neighborliness in Global Perspective

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„Neighbourliness“ is a concept that refers to the most contingent and yet least evitable phenomenon of all social relationships: neighbourly relations. As space of enforced closeness the neighbourhood can be considered a microcosm epitomising all sorts of dynamics, processes and structures emerging in human interactions. Neighbourliness is thus a lens to pierce the ambivalences, intricacies and specifics of social life. Neighbourliness is also one of the topics which the Orient-Institut Beirut (OIB) – one of ten research institutes of the Max Weber Foundation abroad – investigates in the framework of its broader research profile „relations“. To explore it more, the OIB chose „Neighbourliness“ as the overall theme for the annual conference (Stiftungskonferenz) of the foundation. The participants from many countries discussed through different academic disciplines (History, Religious Studies, Literary Studies, Anthropology, Political Science etc.) the characteristics of neighbourliness as a spatial form of relationship with specific dispositions and practices. In eleven panels and based on selected core issues, such as for example friendship and enmity, theology and philosophy, gender, statehood, international relations and cultural practice, the directors of the institutes of the Max Weber Foundation and a number of their research associates, as well as many other international scholars, worked through the subject of neighbourly relations across space and time. They asked about how neighbourliness was/is imagined, performed, instrumentalised, regulated and regulating, gendered and raced in various world regions and epochs. This conference report will provide a glimpse of selected themes and arguments without giving a comprehensive summary of all the contributions.

For Max Weber, neighbourliness was a rational, pragmatic action and an economically

inspired brotherliness, the neighbour the typical „helper in need“. Thus, neighbourliness invites us to reflect on the human capacity of establishing relationships and co-existence in the context of mutual dependency. In pre-modern German societies of the Late Middle Ages for example – as REGINA SCHÄFER (Mainz) showed us – neighbourliness was of high importance, since it contributed crucially to strategies of negotiating living together in the absence of state organisation. It encompassed all the three categories of neighbours/friends/relatives, and showed the increasing significance of the notion of kinship in jurisdiction and a stricter regulation of social relations.

Being the most contingent phenomenon within the triangle of neighbourship, friendship and kinship, relations with neighbours differ from relations with friends or family and make boundaries especially sensitive. JAKUB ZBRZEZNY (Aberdeen) elaborated in how in cities with mixed Jewish-Christian populations in the Byzantium of the 4th and 5th century, similar, yet different liturgical rituals – the cults of Jesus' passion and death of Lent and the carnival-like festival of Purim with its cross-like effigy of Haman, the villain of the Book of Esther in the Tanakh – blended into a misleading mixture of the two figures and prompted Christians to perceive their Jewish neighbours as mocking Christian faith.

Precisely because neighbourliness is based on a form of non-voluntary closeness, the concept provides fertile ground to explore aspects of interaction in shared space ranging from affection to aggression, features that might inhabit the same relationship in equivocal ways. KATARINA RISTIC (Leipzig) demonstrated how in contemporary post conflict-memories of countries previously known as Yugoslavia, perpetrators and victims of all ethnic groups draw on the same idealisation of pre-war neighbourly relationships. Idealising cross-ethnic neighbourliness and simultaneously remembering ethnic mobilisation as top-down process led by politicians, media and intellectuals play an important role in dealing with the past and in distancing oneself from the outbreak of ethnic animosities and violence.

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Regarding the latent violence inherent in neighbourly relations, it is not without reason that neighbourliness becomes a crucial ethical concept regulating social interaction in world religions. HANS-PETER MATHYS (Basel) looked at neighbourliness as norms disciplining relationships between foreigners. Since Palestine as a transit country was always inhabited by many foreigners, already in the biblical texts the entire spectrum of human codes of conduct and rules of behaviour – ranging from utterly xenophobic to highly inclusive and from everyday neighbourly assistance (Nachbarschaftshilfe) to the commandment of neighbourly love (Nächstenliebe) – is revealed.

In Islam, neighbourliness towards the other and God transgresses the spatial realm and becomes even something existential: an ontological commitment of hospitality and constantly conscious human responsibility to distinguish between good and evil. CHAFIKA OUAIL (Beirut) introduced its significance as one of the highest virtues of conduct a noble being may possess in all the three essential Islamic spheres – jurisprudence, theology and spirituality.

Not only religions used neighbourliness as a regulating force, but also the state. Drawing on the example of surveillance practices in apartment buildings under Soviet rule, BOTAKOZ KASSYMBEKOVA (Liverpool) argued that the state housing policies in the Soviet Union were considered and implemented as tools for establishing a just and equal society.

IRMGARD PINN (Tehran) presented digital neighbourhoods and local internet communities with hundreds of thousands of users and carved out the importance given to social media and network platforms in organising social spaces of cohabitation despite the high price to pay for this social asset: the subjection to a nation-wide monitoring system violating their citizen rights.

FALKO SCHNICKE (London) demonstrated how neighbourliness as a social construct is being realised and comes into being through iteratively performed actions. He showed how the special relationship between France and the United Kingdom was constantly staged as political alliance

throughout the twentieth century through carefully orchestrated theatrical displays of mutual state visits.

Two lecturers looked at neighbourliness as a raced/racing and gendered/gendering category. JANE FREELAND (London) claimed that gendered concepts of neighbourliness cross cut ideological and political systems by comparing the similarities in the struggle for gender equality in divided Germany. She concentrated on feminist activism and state campaigning for exclusively female neighbourhood networks in the struggle against domestic violence, in both East and West Berlin.

BALTHAZAR BECKETT (Cairo) critically evaluated President Franklin D. Roosevelt's usually praised New Deal policy and its impact on racial segregation in the American urban space in the wake of the Great Depression. He argued that real estate policies and housing laws from 1930 to 1960 resulted in state-sanctioned divestment from urban neighbourhoods at the expense of African Americans. Representing non-white people as detrimental to a neighbourhood's health and future prospects a newly created pan-European whiteness was propagated.

Besides the possibilities of neighbourliness in regard to its adaptability as an analytical concept to the realms of micro- and meso-level (i.e. interpersonal, inter-group relations), also its adaptability to the realm of the macro-level of international relations in political science were explored. Focusing on the politicisation of relations between neighbouring states in the Middle East, AURORA SOTTIMANO (Saint Andrews) tested the applicability of the notion of neighbourliness for analysing the seemingly volatile, yet calculable interplay of inter-state relationships in the Middle East, which are often exercised according to the binary frame of an either antagonistic or brotherly attitude, coinciding with the politicisation of national identities.

NORIKO KAWAMURA (Washington) inspected international relations with Japan's neighbours China, Korea, Russia/the Soviet Union, as well as the United States across the Pacific in the light of its adaption of the Western imperialist concept of territorial proximity to assert its hegemonial interests in the bordering areas until the end of World War II.

In the final panel, MINA IBRAHIM (Gießen) and GAËTAN DU ROY (Brussels) examined a neighbourhood in Cairo, Shubra. In Egyptian popular discourse, Shubra is celebrated as a symbol of interreligious conviviality, a representation often invoked in novels, films and TV series. Anthropological insider and outsider perspectives on Shubra yielded intimate insights into everyday practices of neighbourliness in urban Cairo and the vulnerability of the relationships between Muslims and Christians in an increasingly Islamised public space.

The conference concluded with a screening of the touching documentary „We Are All Neighbours“. The film records the anthropologist Tone Bringa's research on the effects of war on neighbourly relationships in a village outside Sarajevo in Bosnia.

In conclusion it can be claimed that the key finding of the conference undoubtedly was that there is great value in neighbourliness as a previously rather neglected analytical concept. Its potential lies in featuring as a prism through which to look at the constantly established, renegotiated, and reformulated boundaries of proximity and distance – dimensions inherent to spaces of human interaction and power – and its affective, historical, political, ethical and religious manifestations. This was reflected in the thought-provoking discussions and questions the topic was able to stir. The conference showed that this is only the beginning of a new field of research that can be approached from and be made fruitful for a wide variety of perspectives, themes and disciplines. The inspiring presentations have stimulated many innovative impulses which can lead to exciting studies in this field in the future. The conference sparked such a great interest that a sequel conference was set up and held in Erfurt (Germany) from 12 to 14 February 2020.

#### **Conference overview:**

Birgit Schäßler (Orient-Institut Beirut): Welcome and Introduction

*Panel 1: Neighborliness and Friendship: The Neighbor as Friend*

Chair: Birgit Schäßler (Orient-Institut Beirut)

Ajay Skaria (University of Minnesota): Political

Friendship: Gandhi and the Remaking of the Neighbor

Regina Schäfer (Universität Mainz): Neighbours and Freunde – Negotiating the Conditions of Living Together in the Late Middle Ages

Patrick Rummel (Universität Marburg): Neighbors, Kinsfolk, Brothers? The United States, British North America and Victorian Empire Federalists

*Panel 2: Neighborliness and Enmity: The Neighbor as Enemy*

Chair: Milos Reznik (German Historical Institute Warsaw)

Katarina Ristić (Universität Leipzig): Neighbors as Brothers: Neighbors as Enemies – Memories of Neighborliness in (former) Yugoslavia

Aurora Sottimano (University of St Andrews): My Neighbour, my Brother, my Enemy: the Politics of (De)Mobilisation and Securitisation in the Middle East

*Panel 3: Regulating Neighborliness: The Neighbor between State and Neighborhood*

Chair: Franz Waldenberger (German Institute for Japanese Studies Tokyo)

Botakoz Kassymbekova (University Liverpool): Neighborhood under Dictatorship: Surveillance and Co-Existence in a Soviet Apartment House

Betül Basaran (St. Mary's College of Maryland): Residents and Neighborhood Dynamics in Ottoman Istanbul, 17-19th centuries

*Panel 4: Gendering Neighborliness: The Neighbor as a Woman*

Chair: Mara Albrecht (Orient-Institut Beirut)

Betul Argit (Marmara University): Neighborly Relations between Manumitted Former Ladies of the Harem and their New Neighbors

Jane Freeland (German Historical Institute London): „If you hear a woman screaming, don't leave her alone!“ The Role of Neighbors in Addressing Domestic Violence in Divided Berlin

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*Panel 5: Neighborliness and Religion: The Neighbor as a Theological Challenge*

Chair: Thomas Maissen (German Historical Institute Paris)

Chafika Ouail (Orient-Institut Beirut): Revisiting Jiwār in Islam: Towards an Ontology of Co-Existence

Hans-Peter Mathys (Universität Basel): Love thy Neighbor as Thyself (Lev 19, 18) and the Concept of Neighborliness

*Panel 6: Globalizing Neighborliness: The Neighbor at a Distance*

Chair: Sandra Dahlke (German Historical Institute Moscow)

Irmgard Pinn (University of Tehran): My Digital Neighborhood. Local Internet Communities in a Globalizing World

*Panel 7: Neighborliness across Borders: The Neighbor as a Political Problem*

Chair: Fatih Ermis (Orient-Institut Beirut)

Roula Abi Habib Khoury (Saint-Joseph University Beirut): Cross-Border Neighborliness between Lebanon and Syria: a Sociological Perspective

Noriko Kawamura (Washington State University): A Historical Inquiry into Neighborliness and the Shifting Boundaries Surrounding Japan

*Panel 8: Neighborliness as a Challenge to the Self*

Chair: Simone Lässig (German Historical Institute Washington)

Jakub Zbrzezny (University of Aberdeen): The Clash of Liturgical Calendars, the Clash of Neighborhoods – the Case of a Jewish Carnival in Christian Lent

Balthazar Beckett (American University Cairo): „Something Vulgar in a Holy Place“: African Americans as „Anti-Neighbors“ in 1930s & 40s United States

*Panel 9: Exhibiting and Performing Neighborliness*

Chair: Sarah El Bulbeisi (Orient-Institut Beirut)

Megan MacDonald (American University Cairo): Out of the Neighborhood and Into the Museum: Archival Space and the North African Neighbor in Contemporary French Exhibitions

Falko Schnicke (German Historical Institute London): Performances of Proximity. Using the English Channel to Stage Twentieth-Century British-Franco Relations

*Panel 10: Neighborliness as a Concept between Philosophy and Society*

Chair: Martin Baumeister (German Historical Institute Rom)

Hans van Ess (Max Weber Foundation): Neighborliness in Chinese Thought

*Panel 11: Shubra – A Neighborhood in Cairo*

Chair: Pascale Ghazaleh (American University in Cairo)

Mina Ibrahim (Universität Gießen) and Gaétan du Roy (Université Saint-Louis Bruxelles): Everyday Practices of Neighborliness in Urban Cairo

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