

Making Space in the Maghrib
American Institute for Maghrib Studies (AIMS) annual conference
8-9 July 2017
Tunisia

Summary

The American Institute for Maghrib Studies invites scholars to submit papers for an interactive conference to be held in Tunisia on the theme of “Making Space in the Maghrib.” The aim of this conference is to develop an interdisciplinary suite of papers examining processes of space-making into, out of, and within northern Africa (broadly defined) at various levels of analysis, throughout all historical periods, and through multiple theoretical frameworks across the humanities and social sciences.

Rationale

The mass uprisings of 2011 brought newfound attention to North Africa as a distinct space, one that is autonomous from regions under which it is too often subsumed, whether the Middle East, Africa, the Mediterranean, or *d'outre-mer*. At the same time, the “givenness” of the Maghrib as a region — that is, the conditions of its *regionality* — are both multiple and contradictory. The multiplicity and conflictuality of these conditions are not unlike those cited in Edward Said’s account of the emergence of the Orient as an imaginative geography, one produced within the accumulation and exercise of the North Atlantic’s cultural, political, and economic hegemony, from the Renaissance to the postcolonial period. Space-making, however, is not simply a differential operation of power that occurs within the macrological forces of geopolitics. As Mbembe argues in his critique of Foucault’s notion of biopower, any account of the emergence of modern sovereignty must contend with the perfection of its micrological potency as, for example, in such intimate colonial spaces as the plantation. Moreover, the elements that define these spaces cannot be abstracted from their larger environmental relations. Assemblages of forces — climatic, vegetal, and animal as much as human — are thickly implicated in the emergence of spatial regimes. Building upon world-ecology scholarship investigating historical articulations of the nature/culture divide, this conference seeks to account for the ways in which space has been (un)naturalized in the Maghrib.

Accounting for the variegated processes of spatial reification necessitates the employment of a multidisciplinary framework. While geographers have developed exceptional theoretical and methodological tools for the analysis of spatial formations, other disciplinary approaches are finding equally inventive and insightful ways of unpacking and accounting for space as well. Across the humanities and social sciences, concepts and practices of space have drawn increased scrutiny in recent years. At the same time, the particular and characteristic logics and processes of space-making, unmaking, and remaking in northern Africa have yet to be subjected to this same kind of sustained inquiry and critique.

Let us begin with the very insistence that the *maghrib* constitutes a region in the first place; we thus invite scholars from all disciplinary backgrounds to submit proposals which introduce new understandings of space across North Africa. It is our hope that an auspicious convergence of insights can yield both a fundamental rethinking of the *maghrib*, as well as a preliminary set of mappings of the spatial practices that both constitute and reconstitute it.

Possible themes and topics include, but are not limited to:

- Boundaries of communal identities
- Citizenship and territoriality
- Gendered politics of space
- Health, wealth, class and the state
- Imperial/national subjectivities
- Internal frontiers/borders
- Natural and unnatural disasters
- Spaces of flow / spaces of place
- States of exception
- Territorialization and environment
- The urban in the rural (and vice versa)
- Value, appropriation, and ecology
- War, peace, and territory

Requirements

Scholars interested in participating in this conference are asked to submit a paper proposal by 1 February 2017 to maghribspaces@gmail.com. Proposals should contain: a paper title and abstract (300-500 words), author's name, professional affiliation, and a brief professional biography (200-300 words). Participants should expect to be notified 1 March 2017. All participants will submit papers and will be asked to act as discussant on another participant's paper. In order to facilitate an informed and intensive discussion at the conference, complete draft papers will be due no later than 1 June 2017. Invitations will be withdrawn for participants who fail to submit draft papers.

Publication

The conference organizers aim to submit suitable conference papers for a special journal issue or an edited volume in English. In addition to the assigned discussants' comments, the organizers plan to provide each participant with substantive feedback. Revised papers will be due 1 September 2017 in order to facilitate rapid publication of the collection. Translations of French and Arabic papers into English will be provided.

Practicalities

For all selected participants, organizers provide local transportation, accommodations (3-4 nights in the conference hotel), meals, and other reasonable per diem expenditures. The conference will cover international travel costs for Maghribi participants coming from Morocco, Algeria, and Libya. Other invited participants will need to cover their own travel costs to and from Tunisia.

Conference Committee

Elizabeth Bishop (Texas State University)
Brock Cutler (Radford University)
Jacob Mundy (Colgate University)