

Call for Papers - International Conference

Appropriating Space in Colonial and Imperial Contexts

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IREMAM / IMAF

Since their renewal in the 1980s, colonial and imperial studies have often focused on cultural representations and social practices. More recently, scholars have shown increased interest in the spatial dimensions of colonial phenomena, producing thematic atlases and analyzing imperial cartographies.¹ Using the concept of *appropriation*, this call for papers seeks to stimulate further research on concrete connections between human interactions and spatial transformation in colonial and imperial settings. Inspired by geographical and anthropological studies, *appropriation* as an analytical tool avoids the ethnocentric tendencies and meaning limitations carried out by other notions such as *property*² (a very European and law-oriented term). In this sense, *appropriation* relates to any means through which social actors consider a specific space as their own. Conceptions and actions meant to ensure real or symbolic control of space may be mere projection, ongoing processes or incomplete possession. In the plural form, *appropriations* grasps a wide array of situations involving diverging views and experiences, as well as simultaneous or successive states that accommodate or interfere one with another.

¹ R. Louis Gentilcore (ed.), *Historical Atlas of Canada: The Land Transformed, 1800-1891*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1993; James R. Akerman (ed.), *The Imperial Map: Cartography and the Mastery of Empire*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2009; Hélène Blais, Florence Deprest and Pierre Singaravélou, *Territoires impériaux. Une histoire spatiale du fait colonial*, Paris, Publications de la Sorbonne, 2011.

² Alain Testart, « Propriété et non propriété de la terre. L'illusion de la propriété collective archaïque (1^{re} partie) », *Études rurales*, 2003, n° 165-166, p. 209-242; Étienne Le Roy, *La terre de l'autre. Une anthropologie des régimes d'appropriation foncière*, Paris, LGDJ, Lextenso Editions, 2011, p. 13-37.

Complex appropriation dynamics may be most interestingly observed in the worldwide colonial and imperial experiences of the 19th and 20th centuries, including decolonization processes and postcolonial extensions. The control over natural resources, human transformations of urban and rural landscapes, new ways of conceiving and experimenting space are but some obvious manifestations of spatial appropriation. Although these changes were sometimes rationally planned, their implementation more often relied on the improvisation skills and adaptive abilities of men on the spot. From the first half of the 19th century, spatial transformations were facilitated by massive migrations from Europe, Russia or Japan; new techniques born out of the ideological, industrial and scientific revolutions played a pivotal role in allowing forms of spatial appropriation on an unprecedented scale.³ Newly-explored and conquered territories were subjected to mapping and statistics, ecological transformation and material exploitation. The reconfiguration of space through new regulations, town and country planning, land uses and economic needs significantly affected colonized populations and their relation to space.

Yet the nature of such interventions was neither homogeneous nor systematic. It depended on local constraints, effective means of implementation, public debates, diverging interests and contrasted personal experiences among colonizing actors. The latter included publicists, engineers, scholars, political figures, businessmen, military commanders, administrators, missionaries, travellers, and settled migrants. Hence the pace, the intensity and the geography of spatial appropriation considerably evolved from place to place and in the course of time. For instance, land appropriation by the Canadian Pacific Railway in the early 1880s hastened the sedentarization of Siksika, Pikuni and Kainai populations. By opening the plains of Alberta and Saskatchewan to English-speaking migrants, it also undermined concessions that had been previously granted to small numbers of settlers of mixed descent. When those settlers rebelled (1885), the railway was again instrumental, this time to send military troops to quell the uprising.⁴ This call for papers, however, is not limited to external interventions. Studying multiple forms of spatial appropriation requires taking into account precolonial modes and their survival under colonial/imperial regimes of domination, as well as renewed actions by colonized people.⁵ Even where the spatial revolution was seemingly complete, the agency of indigenous actors⁶ is still evident in their ways of fighting, ignoring, circumventing, or benefitting from new territorial constraints. Their own readings and uses of a colonially-produced space point at a human capacity to adjust and invent.⁷ Transcending the “colonial divide”⁸, forms of space coproduction emerged where indigenous individuals acted as guides, translators, economic agents or political authorities. Such was the case in the town of Alexandria in the second half of the 19th century. Involving professional international collaborations, the developing field of property insurance shaped the social construction of space. Insurance practices derived from shared interests among Egyptian and foreign

³ The changing scope and pace of modern land appropriation has been analyzed by John Weaver, *The Great Land Rush and the Making of the Modern World, 1650-1900*, Montreal, McGill University Press, 2003, chap. 3.

⁴ R. Louis Gentilcore (ed.), *Historical Atlas of Canada, op. cit.*, p. 92-93.

⁵ As does Camille Lefebvre, *Frontières de sable, frontières de papier. Histoire de territoires et de frontières, du Jihad de Sokoto à la colonisation française du Niger, XIX^e-XX^e siècles*, Paris, Publications de la Sorbonne, 2015.

⁶ For a historiographical appraisal of the use of this approach in North American history, see John Munro, “Interwoven Colonial Histories: Indigenous Agency and Academic Historiography in North America”, *Canadian Review of American Studies*, 2014, n° 3, p. 402-425.

⁷ On colonial India see for instance Vanessa Caru : « La fabrique du logement ouvrier à Bombay. Réalisations de l’État colonial et pratiques habitantes (1898-1926) », *Histoire urbaine*, 2007/2, n° 19, p. 55-76.

⁸ In the past decade scholars of empire have devoted growing attention to the porosity of borders of all kinds between colonizers and colonized. See for instance Alison Holland and Barbara Brookes (eds.), *Rethinking the Racial Moment: Essays on the Colonial Encounter*, Newcastle, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011.

businessmen, who together produced a private and regularly updated cartography. In the context of late 19th century booming Alexandria, this kind of maps reveals toponymic choices, the identities and properties of insurance subscribers, a new perception of risk and an ability to intervene in case of fire.⁹ To be sure, other forms of spatial appropriation may have owed little to the colonial/imperial context.

We invite scholarly reflections on locally-inscribed case studies, while keeping in mind the analytical value of articulating various scales.¹⁰ Particular attention will be given to the nature of evidence documenting space-related claim-making processes that have historically coexisted, influenced one another or clashed one another in various times and places.¹¹ Historians, anthropologists, sociologists and geographers may observe spatial appropriations in a limited *environment*, e.g. a mountain range, a forest, a steppe, an agricultural or mineral exploitation, an indigenous village or a new settlement, a neighbourhood or a building, a harbour, a train station, a factory. *Moments* of appropriation may also serve as key entries for innovative research, e.g. the introduction of a new set of regulations, the delimitation of a parcel, the cultivation of a new plant, the disappearance of a natural resource, the planning of a new neighbourhood or the building of a touristic site.

This multidisciplinary collective project will focus on modern (post)colonial and imperial spaces (19th–21st century), including both urban and rural environments. We aim at decrypting complex dynamics of spatial appropriation and their impact upon social relations. How does the radical transformation of a particular space impinge upon resource accessibility and use, local human experience and the construction of social identities?

An international conference on appropriating space in colonial and imperial contexts will be held **at the Maison méditerranéenne des sciences de l'homme (MMSH), Aix-en-Provence, France, on 12-14 June 2017**. The organizers invite paper proposals from a broad spectrum of humanities and social sciences, including history, geography, anthropology, sociology, economics, political science, and literature. Papers should preferably focus on one of the following aspects:

1. **Appropriation Modes:** imaginaries, discourses, technologies, tools
2. **Historical Agents and Social Interactions:** negotiation, conflict, accommodation, past and present social dynamics
3. **The Impact of Appropriation Processes:** environmental, social, economic, political, and cultural effects
4. **Temporalities:** moments, durations, paces of appropriation
5. **Sites and Scales:** touring, territories, borders, articulating scales of social action with analytical scales

⁹ Charlotte Deweerdt, « Développement de l'assurance et du marché foncier à Alexandrie durant la seconde moitié du XIX^e siècle », in Vanessa Guéno and Didier Guignard (ed.), *Les acteurs des transformations foncières autour de la Méditerranée au XIX^e siècle*, Aix-en-Provence, Karthala/MMSH/IREMAM, 2013, p. 195-223.

¹⁰ Arjun Appadurai, "The production of locality", in *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1996, p. 178-199.

¹¹ Chris Hann (ed.), *Property Relations: Renewing the Anthropological Tradition*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Various issues can be tackled within these general themes, such as:

Notions of public/private/sacred space, military conquest, mapping and statistics, land surveying, limits and borders, forms of property acquisition, the elaboration and implementation of new legal norms, land reforms, toponymy and naming policies, spatial orders and social segregation, population movements, transports and communications, the exploitation of natural resources, urban and rural planning, environmental policies, the development of tourism, uses of space, neighborhood and belonging, etc.

Please **submit proposals** in either French or English consisting of a **short CV** (max. 4 pages) and a **paper abstract** (1-2 pages). Send these materials **before September 30, 2016** to the following e-mail address:

colloqueappropriations@gmail.com

A collective publication (an edited volume or a journal special issue) will be considered on the basis of the papers presented and discussed at the conference.

Scientific and Organizing Committee:

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Didier GUIGNARD, CNRS Researcher, IREMAM
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