EXETER CONFERENCE AND ITS CHRONOTOPES

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Between 14 and 17 September, 2002 the University of Exeter was the site of the 2nd conference on Britain and the Maghreb held under the auspices of the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies and the Centre for Mediterranean Studies of the University of Exeter, Fondation Temimi pour la recherche scientifique et l'information from Tunisia and with support by the British Councils in Tunisia and Morocco. The range of papers, the atmosphere and the location of the conference are perhaps best described in terms of chronotopes or the "primary means for materializing time in space", as Michael Bakhtin suggests. In a novel, these would be the "organizing centers for the fundamental narrative events." Most papers may be grouped in chronotopes. Two of those identified by Bakhtin serve my purposes here. The third is invented.

The Idyllic chronotope, which is linked to the pastoral novel, describes the setting of the conference as much as it does a number of the papers given. Exeter is located in the South West of England, a lush farm area, which can be seen from the windows of the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies, the venue of conference. To the north and West, stretches the idyllic Dartmoor National Park, where a number of delegates where transported to a 6th Century BC religious site and on to the old village of Chagford, guided by Donna Landry and Gerald Maclean. To use the touristic/Orientalist cliché, time stood still or, at least for a change, Maghrebi visitors moved backwards in time in Britain. John Potvin illustrates this move in his study of representations of the male body in the *London Illustrated News*. He contends that the representation of the male Oriental body relegates it to a past time in congruence with the Western chronological time. The Blunts, whose Algerian trip is studied by Donna Landry, describe Algeria as a time-space of "innocent" happiness, their romance rekindled by the "archaic East." Mohamed Laamiri notes in his overview of British travel literature on the Maghreb that one of the images which emerge is that of the Maghrebi city as myth or legend, a place without reality or substance. Najet Mchala shows how, through a combination of classical sources and tales of the fantastic, Shakespeare blurs the line between history and memory in the proximity of a Tunis, which has become Carthage in his play. The island in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* is a site of magic in Prospero's terms and a space where an ephemeral, largely "bookish" East finds its expression. Enacting a past or fantastic time in the Maghrebi space was not limited to the British. Costanza Ferrini

shows how the Italian writer Emilio Salgari, for instance, sets one of his popular adventure stories in Algiers. De Amicis' description of Morocco reveals a similar outlook despite the fact that it serves different purposes and is written in a "scientific" genre. Patricia Almarcegui explores the apparent paradox of Spanish representations of the East. Having an 'East within,' Andalusia, and proximity to Morocco did not prevent Badia and his compatriots from locating Morocco in a vague "Oriental" time.

The Rabelasian chronotope :

Although Domestic Services did their best to cater for the needs of a crowd with a multitude of dietary requirements and restrictions, food in Exeter was not a match for the Couscous and fresh oranges, which were readily available in Zaghouan at the first conference on Britain and the Maghreb: the State of Research and Cultural Contacts held in March, 2001. Entertainment was, however, spontaneous and abundant. The poet Fathi Kacemi provided the whole range: Rabelaisian satire on snoring, peace poetry, romantic verse, and even a poem about Exeter, or "exetera". The course of the early encounters between Britain and the Maghreb is, however, rather the other way around. One of the key themes of the conference was European communities in the Maghreb, their lives, how they related to one another and their relationship to their environment. Gerald Maclean portrays, from various published and unpublished accounts, English communities whose lives were built on excess. The environment and their own behavior, most notably, heavy alcohol abuse, changed their manners, corrupted their "Englishness" and affected their very bodies. Ali Tablit describes the English settlement in the Mustapha Superieur district of Algiers as an enclave where the English formed a small community. Glimpses of this community can be gleaned from the memoirs of Elizabeth Broughton, *Six Years Residence in Algiers*, 1806-1812, analyzed by Zakiya Zahra. A view of the lives of English captives in Algiers in the 1630s is exposed by Aicha Ghattas, whose focus is on the uses of captivity narrative in historiography. Anne Williams' research focuses on the Knights of Malta, a group who were more Quixotian than Rabelaisian, and who armed themselves and attempted in vain to hold on to fortified presidios along the North African coast and particularly Tripoly from 1530 to 1551.

What might be called a postcolonial chronotope can be illustrated by the presence of Maghrebis in Europe, a theme treated in six contributions. Boualem Belkacemi charts the flux of Algerian students to Britain form 1977 to 1990, showing the relationship between oil revenues and Algeria's relations with France, on one side, and the number of students heading to British universities on the other. Nina Sutherland taps into a horn's nest in her research on the Harkis. She contends that they make a community of refugees, rejected by both France and Algeria. Lucy MacKeith closed the proceedings by a

presentation on an art project, exhibited in the Institute specifically for the conference, which brought together Muslim and Arab children from Exeter in order to express their sense of who they feel they are in Britain today. The movement of stories was explicitly addressed by Inam Mrabet and Monia Hejaiej and, in a different way by Sabiha al Khemir. Mrabet stresses the impact of translation on cultural understanding and exposes the commercial and cultural biases underlying translation of Arabic literature into English. Hejaiej, whose paper points out that there is a methodological bias which denied the links between Western and Arab literatures for far too long, shows how stories traveled across cultures, from oral narratives in the Arab Mediterranean to Chaucer. Sabiha al Khemir brings both worlds together in her novelistic world. In her first novel, *Waiting in the Future for the Past to Come*, personal time and communal space diverge, pushing the main character to exile in Britain. In the second book, *The Blue Manuscript*, a Maghrebi women living Britain discovers her ties to Islamic art from the past. This movement between the two regions and the ensuing mixed allegiances are treated in a number of historical papers.

The range of activities and web of contacts of Robert Cole, whose portrait is compiled by Colin Heywood through letters and official records, reveal the complexity of British-Algerian relations on the ground at the turn of the seventeenth century. In the nineteenth century, the stakes and the state of Maghrebi geo-politics were very different but British policy remained complex and far from transparent. The case of Boubker El-Gahanjaoui, studied by Khalid Ben Srhir, mirrors Cole in many respects. El-Gahanjaoui was a Moroccan who collaborated with the British with the consent of the Sultan. Through him we sense opposition to British policies raised by "humanist" voices. The portrait of the British consul in Tunisia, Richard Wood presented by Fathi Kacemi reflects such a tendency. Wood draws on reformist thought in 19th century Tunisia to urge his government to change its views of Islam and policies towards the Ottomans. Abdellatif Hannachi's paper on the image of Britain among Tunisian elites during the first part of the 20th century reveals a hazy and changing view, linked to local as well as Middle East politics and loyalties.

Debate on Maghrebi-British academic cooperation was opened by Abdeljalil Temimi in a paper, which laid out the past and the future of the interchange. He shows that the present project, which has many short-lived precedents, has witnessed a solid restart in Zaghouan in March 2001. Most notable in his view is the wealth of information and archival sources, which remain largely unused. The wider implications of the interchange are likely to open up these archives and vary the sources for the study of both the Maghreb and Britain. The study of the encounter reveals much about the internal dynamic of each area and, in some cases, helps shed light on issues which go beyond the Maghreb and

Britain. Ken Parker, who keynoted the conference, identifies early modern British policy in the Maghreb as training ground for Britain's colonial policy in the East later on. A case study of this point is provided by Mohamed Razouk, whose research on British policy towards the Moriscos of Morocco in the early part of the 17th century shows their policy of divide and rule, managing all three sides: the Moroccan authorities, the Morisco community and Spanish ambitions. Parker also emphasizes two ideas, which kept returning throughout the conference. His work on constructions of "barbary" in early modern England, identifies misreading and amnesia as two key features of these constructions. While misreading and amnesia may have determined how Britain viewed the "Barabary", it is the task of conferences such as this one, to contribute to a much-needed corrective reading and to help restore the memory of a long and complex interchange between Britain and the Maghreb.

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