



SUMMER ACADEMY

CALL FOR APPLICATIONS

The research units “Re-Configurations. History, Remembrance and Transformation Processes in the Middle East and North Africa” and “Figures of Thought | Turning Points. Cultural Practices and Social Change in the Arab World”, based at Philipps University Marburg’s Center for Near and Middle East Studies, in cooperation with Université de la Manouba (UMA), l’Institut de Recherche sur le Maghreb Contemporain (IRMC), both based in Tunis, and Europe in the Middle East – The Middle East in Europe (EUME), a research program at the Berlin-based Forum Transregionale Studien, invite scholars from the fields of **sociology, human geography, history, cultural studies, literature, media and art, social anthropology, economics, political science, and educational studies** to apply for an international **Summer Academy** that will be convened from **28 August to 04 September 2016** in Tunis on the theme

RECONFIGURING THE (NON-)POLITICAL. PERFORMING AND NARRATING CHANGE AND CONTINUITY

The Summer Academy

Reconfiguring the (Non-)Political. Performing and Narrating Change and Continuity

is chaired by a group of scholars that includes **Michael Allan** (University of Oregon), **Laura Ruiz de Elvira** (ERC WAWAW/IREMAM), **Andrea Fischer-Tahir**, **Malte Hagener**, **Felix Lang**, **Rachid Ouaisa**, **Friederike Pannewick**, **Achim Rohde**, **Christoph Schwarz**, **Steffen Wippel** (all from Philipps-Universität Marburg), **Karima Darèche**, **Imed Melitti** (IRMC, Tunis), **Habib Kazdaghli**, **Mouna Tekaya** (UMA, Tunis), and **Georges Khalil** (Forum Transregionale Studien / EUME, Berlin).

24 doctoral and postdoctoral scholars from different countries and academic backgrounds will be given the opportunity to present and discuss their current research in an international and multi-disciplinary context. The Summer Academy is designed to support scholarly networks and contribute to closer ties between research activities in and outside Europe, the Middle East and North Africa. In order to promote intensive debate and encourage new perspectives, the Summer Academy is structured around four main elements: presentations of individual research projects in small groups, working group sessions for the participants, general lectures, and panel discussions open to a wider public.

The Summer Academy focuses on changing notions of **'the political'** (in the broad sense of the French term 'le politique'), seeing it as part of transformative processes and power struggles in the MENA region in recent years. Political and social struggles involving various players defined through their ideological, regional, generational, ethnic and/or confessional background do not necessarily lead to comprehensive transformations of the political system or state institutions. However, such processes may even descend into civil war, as we are witnessing in an increasing number of MENA countries since 2011. Just the same, it is important to note that previously excluded political actors are now entering the stage, coming up with and practicing new forms of activism, developing new forms of agency, proposing alternative political projects, finding new ways of narrating experience, and envisioning different prospects for their lives.

As one of the defining features of recent developments it has been noted that issues previously attributed to the private realm, to the cultural or social sphere (e.g. personal lifestyles, communal identities), are being politicized and thus become the focus of public controversy. At the same time, local and transnational ruling elites tend to transfer formerly highly politicized issues (e.g. economic and financial policies) increasingly to the realm of technocrats, masquerading them as objective realities akin to the laws of nature. Mirroring a disillusion with the established mechanics of political institutions and governmental practice, as well as signaling a general decline in the credibility of political grand narratives, the very term 'politics' has acquired a negative connotation among broad sections of the population, even if precisely these sections might simultaneously be engaged in activities which, from an outsider's perspective, would be considered anything but unpolitical. Refusing to have one's own actions, thinking, or articulations labelled 'political' may be seen as a defensive technique in authoritarian conditions, a means to evade persecution. Last but not least, to disapprove the label

'political' sometimes echoes transnational discourses, for instance concerning the 'neutrality' of humanitarian aid.

This Summer Academy focuses on **contemporary and historical discourses and practices**. In adopting a more fluid and encompassing understanding of politics that goes beyond formal structures and traditional forms of political participation, we take a fresh look at how the '(non-)political' in **society, media** and the **arts** was and is performed, narrated, and represented. Starting with reflections on the post-2011 situation(s) in the MENA region, the Summer Academy aims to understand what 'new' components can be detected in contemporary developments that are not discernible in Middle Eastern societies and cultures since the early post-colonial period. We thereby aim to move beyond a binary understanding of current developments in the MENA region as either rupture or continuity by conceptualizing them as re-configurations of the political field, which take place in a contradictory and fragmented, yet profound manner.

Means of dissemination and **communication** obviously form a crucial component of these ongoing transformations. The Arab uprisings redefined media production and reception within the MENA region and the way activists on the ground made use of new technologies like smartphones and 'social networks' for mobilization, discussion, documenting evidence, and bearing direct witness of events. At the same time, these *dispositifs* often facilitated the tracing and tracking down of activists. Infrastructure, technology, protocols and hybrid ensembles of actors and objects fundamentally transform our conception of the public and the political.

Various **cultural and artistic practices**, from Hip Hop to literature or dance helped shape the Arab uprisings. Cultural production and the arts have long been used by ruling elites in the region as transmitters of a certain political ideology. But the field of cultural production has always been more complex, alternating between normative discourses prescribed by ruling elites on the one hand, and the subjectivity of human agency on the other. Along with poststructuralist, postcolonial and post-Marxist theory, we understand cultural practices not simply as functions of the existing order or as mere reflections of social change, but as integral components in the process of constructing our reality.

The dynamics of the current processes of change pose a challenge to established concepts and **research paradigms**. Whereas the Arab uprisings challenge established patterns of analyzing state-society relations, technological revolution and the emergence of post-national spaces have radically altered modes of human action. Therefore, the Summer Academy encourages conceptual debates and seeks to discuss the structuring and re-structuring of **knowledge production** on a local, regional, and global scale.

Conditions of Application and Procedure

The Summer Academy addresses **doctoral and postdoctoral researchers** from the **social sciences** and the humanities, who wish to present their ongoing projects in a comparative perspective in relation to the questions raised above. Participants receive a stipend covering travel and accommodation.

Favoring a strong focus on agency, close reading of texts, and empirical research, the Summer Academy aims at a fruitful theoretical reflection on notions of 'the political'/'the non-political'. The program pursues an interdisciplinary approach that includes perspectives informed by sociology, human geography, history, cultural studies, literature, media and art, social anthropology, economics, political science, and educational studies. The researchers' work should be clearly relevant to the themes of the Summer Academy. While it will focus on the MENA region, transregional comparative approaches are especially encouraged. The working language is English; selected panels may be conducted in French and Arabic.

Applications should be submitted in **English** and consist of

- a curriculum vitae
- a three- to five-page outline of the project the applicant is currently working on, with a brief summary thereof,
- the names of two university faculty members who can serve as referees (no letters of recommendation required).

SEND BY **EMAIL** as **ONE PDF FILE** or in **ONE WORD DOCUMENT**.

The application should be received by **29 February 2016**, addressed to:

reconfig@staff.uni-marburg.de

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Organizational Committee:

Andrea Fischer-Tahir; Felix Lang; Rachid Ouaisa; Friederike Pannewick; Achim Rohde;
Laura Ruiz de Elvira; Christoph Schwarz, Steffen Wippel

The Summer Academy is conducted within the framework of the research network “Re-Configurations. History, Remembrance and Transformation Processes in the Middle East and North Africa”, supported by the German Federal Ministry for Education and Research and “Figures of Thought | Turning Points. Cultural Practices and Social Change in the Arab World”, a research unit funded through a Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Award of the German Research Foundation. Both are located at the Center for Near and Middle East Studies of Philipps-Universität Marburg, Germany. The Summer Academy builds upon the model established by the research program Europe in the Middle East – The Middle East in Europe (EUME) and the Forum Transregionale Studien, Berlin.

For further information on the research units at Philipps Universität Marburg and partners, please see:

www.uni-marburg.de/cnms/research/turning-points/index_html?set_language=en

www.uni-marburg.de/cnms/forschung/re-konfigurationen/welcome?set_language=en

www.uni-marburg.de/cnms

<http://trafo.hypotheses.org/869>

www.eume-berlin.de

<http://www.irmcmaghreb.org/>

<http://www.uma.rnu.tn/index.php?code=5>

For more information on the format and the proceedings of academies, please see:

<http://academies.hypotheses.org/>

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