

ميكام  
مركز ميريان  
للدراسات المتقدمة  
في المنطقة المغاربية



MECAM

Merian Centre  
For Advanced Studies  
In The Maghreb

# CALL FOR APPLICATIONS

Deadline 23 July 2021; 24.00h CET.

The Merian Centre for Advanced Studies in the Maghreb (MECAM) has recently been established at the Université de Tunis/Tunisia to strengthen cooperation in the Humanities and Social Sciences in and across the Maghreb, the Middle East, and Europe. The overall theme “Imagining Futures: Dealing with Disparity” guides MECAM’s research agenda on questions of Aesthetics & Cultural Practice, Inequality & Mobility, Memory & Justice, Resources & Sustainability, and Identities & Beliefs. These constitute the core issues of MECAM’s five thematic research clusters and Interdisciplinary Fellow Groups (IFG). For its third Interdisciplinary Fellow Group (IFG) “**Identities & Beliefs**”, MECAM invites applications for **five short-term fellowships for researchers at different career stages** for the period from 1 March 2022 to 30 June 2022, on site in Tunis. This call for applications is open to researchers from all countries including Tunisia.



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## CALL FOR APPLICATIONS

### MECAM-Fellowships for the IFG "Identities & Beliefs"

The Merian Centre for Advanced Studies in the Maghreb (MECAM), based in Tunis, is a new institutional framework for interdisciplinary, transregional, and intergenerational research. It focuses on complex social and political processes and issues of common interest that divide and connect the Maghreb, the Middle East and Europe historically and in our time – e.g. beliefs, distribution of resources, migration, rule of law, socio-economic conflicts, and (transitional) justice. MECAM aims to construct and strengthen scholarly networks between Tunis and Germany, and across the Maghreb, the Middle East, Europe and beyond. From a vantage point in the Maghreb, MECAM's guiding theme "Imagining Futures - Dealing with Disparity" addresses the complex processes of (re-)negotiating societal experiences into ideas for the future ('imagining futures') within the context of different forms and scales of disparity and unequal conditions ('disparity'). It explores the connection between multidimensional disparity and the possibilities of building and negotiating future-oriented ideas and models through five thematic clusters, which represent important issues of common concern in the Maghreb, the Middle East, and Europe. The clusters correspond with the respective Interdisciplinary Fellow Groups (IFG): "Aesthetics & Cultural Practice", "Inequality & Mobility", "Memory & Justice", "Resources & Sustainability", and "Identities & Beliefs". The analysis proceeds from both a historical and geographically comparative perspective.

In its fifth call for short-term fellowships, MECAM invites applications for five fellowships for researchers in the context of its Interdisciplinary Fellow Group (IFG) "**Identities & Beliefs**" for the period from 1 March 2022 to 30 June 2022. The call is open to researchers from all countries including Tunisia. The members of the group will be required to participate regularly in the activities of the IFG programme and MECAM, to present their research projects and to submit a report on the progress of their research project at the end of the fellowship. In addition, a joint working paper will be prepared and published by the IFG.

The thematic focus of the IFG "**Identities & Beliefs**" is on the diversity of identities and beliefs in Tunisia, the Maghreb and beyond. More specifically and in line with MECAM's overarching theme, the IFG is interested in the ways in which identity-based and belief-related disparities shape the (re-)negotiation of imaginaries, visions and models of the future: Which identity-based disparities and diverse beliefs are available and dominant in specific contexts? What are their similarities and differences across different social and political settings? How have the disparities around identities and beliefs evolved in recent history and up until the present, and which visions for the future emanate from them?

Addressing these guiding questions, the IFG draws on an open understanding of the concept of "identities", encompassing aspects of ideology, ethnicity and religion. The concept of "beliefs" refers to individual's or social group's more concrete convictions and positionings in relation to specific issues. The IFG is particularly interested in different **political** aspects of "identities" and "beliefs", which are claimed by a diversity of societal and/or formal political actors in Tunisia, the Maghreb and beyond. For instance, it refers to multi-layered identities and beliefs around spatial perspectives or forms of territorial belonging (local, subnational, national, regional, transnational; intra-state and cross-border); different forms of language uses and linguistic expressions; and the recent historical trajectories that have contributed to forging the current – and possible future – national (e.g. Tunisian, Algerian, Mauritanian, Libyan or Moroccan) and transnational (e.g. Amazigh, Maghrebi, Arab, Mediterranean or Islamic) narratives. Relatedly, the linkages between religion and secularism, official and so-called marginal narratives, and majority and minority beliefs are relevant to capture central dynamics of identities and beliefs. All these forms of identities and

beliefs as well as the related societal and/or political practices are also closely connected with diverse visions of the future that different actors are claiming and/or imagining.

Finally, the IFG aims to examine the respective identities and beliefs in a **comparative perspective**, by analysing them inside Tunisia (intra-state), between (parts of) Tunisia and other Maghrebi contexts (intra-regional) and beyond, for instance in the Middle East or Europe (cross-regional). In terms of methodology, the IFG values a diversity of scholarly methods from the Humanities and Social Sciences, including the interweaving of macro-, meso- and micro-perspectives as well as qualitative and quantitative methods.

## ELIGIBILITY & MOTIVATION

Applications are welcome from researchers at all stages of their academic career:

advanced PhD OR postdoc OR advanced researchers in any discipline of the humanities or social sciences such as anthropology, history or political science.

- You are interested in discussing your own research in the framework of MECAM's main theme "Imagining futures – Dealing with disparity" with colleagues from the Maghreb, the Middle East and Europe.
- You are eager to do collaborative work, engage in collegial debate and exchange within an interdisciplinary group of fellows on questions of "Identities & Beliefs".
- You are interested in revisiting your own research questions from a different vantage point.
- You want to become part of a (new) network of interdisciplinary, intergenerational, and transregional exchange and debate on disparities and the competing models for the future that co-exist in the societies of the contemporary Maghreb, Europe, and other parts of the world.

## OUR OFFER

### MOBILITY

MECAM's resident fellowships are awarded to individuals for four months from 1 March to 30 June 2022 on the basis of innovative and high-quality research projects that correspond to the IFG's thematic focus. In exceptional cases due to the pandemic, the fellowships can be arranged in hybrid and/or sur-place ways, where the individual fellow remains at her/his place of actual residence for part of or for the whole fellowship period. Successful applicants will become 'MECAM fellows' with all relevant rights and obligations for their fellowship period. The stipend/salary costs of the fellows will be covered by MECAM according to the principle 'no gain, no loss' on an individual basis: The financial agreement aims to enable the invited fellows to stay at MECAM without reducing their net-income (i.e. the sum of all verifiable salaries). In addition, all fellows will be reimbursed for relocation costs to Tunis and accommodation costs in Tunis. However, the maximum monthly accommodation costs are 600 dinars (approx. 190 EUR). Furthermore, it is also possible that proven research costs can be reimbursed up to an amount of 500 EUR.

### NETWORK

MECAM Fellows will become part of a network, which will be built up by subsequent groups of fellows over the next years, and by the scholars of the institutions that are involved in the institutional framework. In the initial phase, the IFGs include doctoral students, postdocs, as well as advanced researchers from Germany, Tunisia, the Maghreb, the Middle East, Europe, and other regions and countries. There are also networking opportunities via the specific networks of IFG representatives from MECAM's partner institutions, as well as with scholars that may be invited within the IFG as guests.

### EXCHANGE AND DEBATE

The primary aim of all fellowships is to create a high-quality and flexible setting for a peer-to-peer exchange and debate between researchers from different countries, disciplines, and in different phases of their academic career: The IFG combines virtual and in-person forms of exchange and debate, and facilitates collaboration and engagement with scholars at MECAM partner institutions, students, and the wider public. An IFG coordinator will support the fellows during their stay at MECAM and will organise the on-site scientific programme; comprising colloquia with lectures on individual projects, collective writing processes and, if appropriate, organizing an initial and/or concluding workshop.

### INDEPENDENCE

MECAM offers the freedom to pursue individual projects on a topic of personal choice, such as an academic article, an essay, a policy paper, a book, a report, etc.

### SUPPORT

MECAM provides its fellows with office workspaces equipped with digital infrastructure as well as publication facilities for open-access and peer-reviewed formats of publication through the infrastructures of its partners. It offers assistance in finding accommodation and other organisational aspects. Moreover, the exchange between fellows is supported by a secure digital workspace (TrafoHub) and other digital tools.

## YOUR APPLICATION

MECAM assigns its partner institution, Forum Transregionale Studien in Berlin, with the processing of personal application data. Therefore, we kindly ask you to submit your application via the secure online application platform of the Forum Transregionale Studien by **23 July 2021, 24.00h CET**: [application.trafo-berlin.de](https://application.trafo-berlin.de)

Applications by email will not be considered. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact MECAM's coordination team: [mecam-office@uni-marburg.de](mailto:mecam-office@uni-marburg.de)

As part of your application, you will be asked to prepare and upload:

- **Curriculum vitae including publications** (2-3 pages),
- **Research proposal:** Short abstract of your project (max. 1000 words),
- **Names and contact details of two referees** (university faculty members or practitioners in a field relevant to the applicant's project) who can serve as referees (no letters of recommendation required),
- One recent **writing sample**: journal article (published or forthcoming), book or thesis chapter.

MECAM kindly requests that applications are submitted in English or French. MECAM's working languages are English, French and Arabic. Applicants should be able to communicate in at least two of these languages.

The applications are evaluated by renowned international academics who are members of MECAM's International Advisory Board. All applicants will be informed of the outcome of the selection process in November 2021. The main selection criteria are academic merit and the quality of the project proposal, as well as the relation of the project to the thematic frame of the respective IFG. The experience and ability of the applicant to conduct the research project will also be taken into account.

Interregionalism, interdisciplinarity, and intergenerationality will be reflected in the fellowships: We therefore welcome academic cooperation between researchers from Germany, Tunisia, from the wider North African and Middle Eastern region, and the international academic community. We also want to promote diversity through interdisciplinary perspectives from various social science and humanities disciplines and contribute to strengthening academic cooperation between leading academics and young researchers. The latter is intended to help younger academics to integrate into research structures and thus build up sustainable interregional networks.

MECAM is monitoring the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the safety and mobility of people closely, but for now MECAM is hoping to go ahead with the fellowships as announced in this Call for Applications.

## INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK – WHAT IS MECAM?

The “Merian Centre for Advanced Studies in the Maghreb” (MECAM) was founded in April 2020 as an international centre for interdisciplinary research and academic exchange. It is located at the Université de Tunis/Tunisia with branches that shall be developed in Casablanca/Morocco and Beirut/Lebanon. MECAM is a joint endeavour of a consortium of renowned Tunisian and German research institutions: It is coordinated by the Philipps-Universität Marburg and the Université de Tunis and supported by the Universität Leipzig, the German Institute for Global and Area Studies (GIGA) in Hamburg/Germany, the Forum Transregionale Studien in Berlin/Germany, the Institut Tunisien des Études Stratégiques (ITES) in Tunis/Tunisia, and the University of Sfax/Tunisia. During a three-year preliminary phase (2020-2023), this consortium is entrusted with the institutional development of MECAM and the preparation of the project’s main phase (2023-2032).

MECAM's partner institutions:

- **Philipps-Universität Marburg, Marburg:** The Philipps-Universität Marburg, with its 25,000 students, has a research focus on the Area Studies, which is reflected for instance in the Center for Near and Middle Eastern Studies (CNMS). The CNMS is involved in MECAM, alongside other interdisciplinary institutions and departments, including the Centre for Conflict Studies, the Department of History and Cultural Studies, the Institutes of Media Studies and Romance Philology, and the Department of Mathematics and Computer Science.
- **Université de Tunis, Tunis:** The Université de Tunis was founded in 1960 and is today, with some 20,000 students, one of the largest universities in Tunisia, boasting a wide-ranging research and teaching portfolio with an outstanding reputation for research excellence across the region.
- **Universität Leipzig, Leipzig:** The Universität Leipzig is a German university with around 30.000 students. Within the MECAM institutional structure the University is represented by the Institute of Geography, the Institute for Oriental Studies, and the Small Enterprise Training Program (SEPT). The Institute of Geography’s regional focus is the Mediterranean region.
- **German Institute for Global and Area Studies (GIGA), Hamburg:** GIGA is an independent research institute based in Hamburg, Germany, which conducts research on politics, economics, and society in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East as well as on global issues. Within MECAM, the GIGA Institute for Middle East Studies (IMES) is particularly involved.
- **Forum Transregionale Studien, Berlin:** The Berlin-based Forum Transregionale Studien promotes the internationalization of the humanities and social sciences. It provides scope for research, exchange, debate and communication across national, regional or cultural borderlines. In cooperation with universities and research institutes in and outside of Berlin, the Forum appoints Fellows from all over the world, develops formats of transregional communication, and engages in research programmes and initiatives such as EUME, Prisma Ukraina, or re:constitution.
- **Institut Tunisien des Études Stratégiques (ITES), Tunis:** ITES is a think tank based in Tunis. ITES prepares studies and analyses in the field of applied policy research, strategy development and policy advice on various current issues in Tunisia, the Maghreb and other MENA countries.
- **Université de Sfax, Sfax:** The Université de Sfax is located in Tunisia's second largest city and important economic centre in the south of the country. It is attended by 35,000 students.

The Federal Ministry of Education and Research of Germany sponsors the establishment of the international centre for research in the Humanities and Social Sciences with 1.7 million Euro in the first three years. The Université de Tunis offers complementary resources.

For further information on MECAM, please visit: [www.uni-marburg.de/en/cnms/mecam](http://www.uni-marburg.de/en/cnms/mecam)