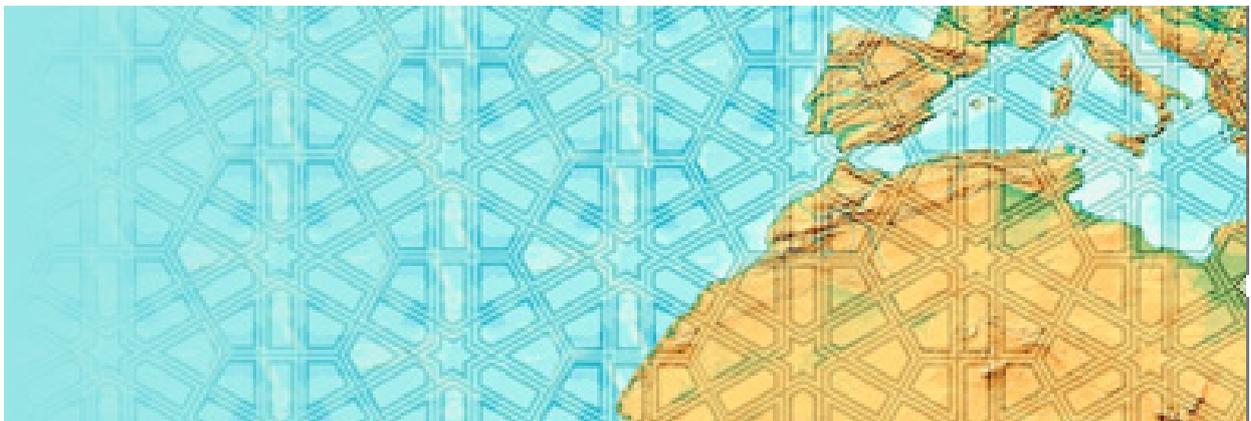


“Re-Centering a Region: the Maghreb in Motion”

Marburg, 15-17 February 2018

- Conference Concept -



The so-called “Arab Spring” injected considerable dynamism into the Arab world, triggering a wave of transformational processes. It is no coincidence that the impulse for these transformations came from Tunisia, a country in the Maghreb. Indeed, the Maghreb was a region in motion long before 2010/2011, with revolutionary tendencies and anticolonial insurgencies having shaped North Africa since the colonisation of Algeria in the 19th century. The Algerian struggle for independence in the 1950s and 1960s, which was extensively analysed and theorised in the writings of Frantz Fanon, helped to shape the exceptional role of the Maghreb in the development of revolutionary thinking. This legacy is still recognizable in the “Arab Spring”, and it connects the Maghreb with neighbouring regions.

Being ‘in Motion’ – this notion to a large extent characterizes the cultural region of the Maghreb. Multiple entanglements, transfers, and mobilities are exemplary not only of the region’s internal structure, but also of its relationships with Europe, Africa and the Arab world. As a centre of geopolitical connectivity, cradle of many great empires, as a place of cultural and religious hybridity, the Maghreb is often perceived as a double periphery to both the Middle East and Europe. In fact, however, the Maghreb occupies a fairly central position between Europe and Africa, operating as an important cultural and geopolitical hinge.

This results in a dialectic that is highly characteristic for the region: an enduring tension between periphery and centre, between the reception and production of ideas, between change and continuity. This dialectic forms the basis for our epistemological interest in the Maghreb and for the conference concept outlined in this document. A further motivating factor is the lack of a thorough scientific engagement with the Maghreb in the Islamic and Arabic Studies departments at most German universities – indeed, these departments often go by the telling name “Near East Studies”. In the colonial and early post-colonial period, Maghrebi writing was frequently of a francophone character. Consequently, in German academia, North Africa has for decades remained within the domain of Romance Studies, while German Oriental Studies have quite literally dealt with the ‘Orient’, the Mashreq or ‘Arabic East,’ as well as with the Gulf. German social sciences have furthermore touched on the Maghreb only marginally and usually in the form of selective and isolated individual studies.

In the German political and public spheres, the ‘Occident’ to this ‘Orient’ – that is, the Maghreb or ‘West’ of the Islamic world – has hardly played a role. It has enjoyed only minimal prominence as a security concern (e.g. in the debate about (EU-)border regimes and so-called “safe countries of origin”, as part of the fight against terrorism, in terms of mobility partnerships, or in the context of sexual assaults committed in Germany by immigrants).

German academics have struggled to offer adequate approaches to these important issues as well as other concerns that pertain to the Maghreb because the scholarly engagement with the region – an area of considerable cultural, linguistic, social and ethnic plurality – remains in its infancy. And yet, though any engagement with this immensely varied and complex region presents a methodological and disciplinary challenge, it can also offer ground-breaking insights to those whose scholarly interests focus on the MENA region, area studies and transregional research.

The principal aim of the proposed conference is thus twofold: first, to bring together existing research on the Maghreb and, second, to initiate a more thoroughgoing scholarly engagement with the region in the fields of political science as well as literary and cultural studies, which has so far been conspicuous by its absence in Germany. Internationality as well as interdisciplinarity are central here. By closely collaborating with scholarly institutions and researchers from the Maghreb, other European countries, North America and beyond, the conference aims to provide a platform not only for existing approaches to the Maghreb, but also for a consideration of how new international and interdisciplinary perspectives might prove productive in the future.

The questions the individual panels deal with purposefully address both politico-economic and socio-political as well as cultural questions. These will be discussed across the disciplines and with an eye on the possibility for exchanges and transfers within the Maghreb, with other Arabic-speaking countries, across the Mediterranean and with the rest of Africa.

The panels are provisionally called:

- Panel I** *Historical Entanglements*
- Panel II** *Mobility and Change*
- Panel III** *Agents of Change (Roundtable)*
- Panel IV** *Media of Change*
- Panel V** *Considering Current and Future Research on the Maghreb (Roundtable)*



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