

re search network configurations

history, remembrance and transformation
processes in the Middle East + North Africa

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Imprint

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Philipps



Universität
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Foreword

Ladies and Gentlemen, dear colleagues,

in April 2013 I had the pleasure of chairing the official opening ceremony of the research network Re-Configurations.

Back then we celebrated the success of Philipps-Universität Marburg in gaining generous funding from the Ministry of Education and Research. These funds will further strengthen its existing research focus on the MENA region.

Since 2006, this focus has embodied in the Centre for Near and Middle East Studies (CNMS). The first few years after its establishment were mainly dedicated to consolidating its infrastructure, designing programmes and teaching staff. In the current phase, the CNMS is working hard to establish itself as a full-fledged and excellent research institution, and I am proud to say that these efforts are bearing fruits! The research network Re-Configurations is an outstanding example of this success. I see a dedicated and gifted international team of researchers working to implement the network's goals in close cooperation with the network's members. These goals are not limited to the realization of individual research projects. Rather, the network serves as a means to move the area studies disciplines, assembled in the CNMS, closer to systematic disciplines in the social sciences and humanities, thereby laying a solid foundation for the development of innovative new research and strengthening the coherence of Marburg University altogether.

It is my pleasure to present the first newsletter issued by the research network Re-Configurations! It bears witness to the progress during the initial phase of its existence. I wish the members of Re-Configurations and its team all the best, and I am looking forward to observing its development in the years to come!

Prof. Dr. Katharina Krause

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Katharina Krause".

President, Phillips-Universität Marburg

I. Introducing “Re-Configurations”

The research network “Re-Configurations. History, Remembrance and Transformation Processes in the Middle East and North Africa” was founded by the Philipps-Universität Marburg in the spring of 2013 with funding from the Federal Ministry for Education and Research (*Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung*, BMBF). Its founding was triggered by the developments in the MENA-region commonly subsumed under the term “Arab Spring”, which highlighted the need for a partial re-assessment of scholarship on MENA countries, for developing new perspectives and deepening our understanding of the events unfolding in the region, their underlying reasons, historic roots, and future perspectives. Our team consists of 10 research fellows who were recruited in fall 2013 and spring 2014, a scientific coordinator, 5 student assistants, a secretary, and an accountant.

The Team

Name	Subject Area
Augustin, Anne-Linda Amira	Middle Eastern Studies
Bahmad, Jamal	Film and Postcolonial Cultural Studies
Ellen Essen (secretary)	
Fischer-Tahir, Andrea,	Social Anthropology, Kurdish Studies
Johannsen, Igor	Islamic Studies, Politics and Modern History
Ouassa, Rachid (speaker)	Politics of the Middle East
Rohde, Achim (coordinator)	History and Culture of the Middle East
Ruiz de Elvira, Laura,	Political Science, Arabic Language and Civilisation
Salehi, Mariam	Political Science
Schwarz, Christoph H.	Sociology
Soudias, Dimitris	Political Science
Strohmaier, Alena	Theatre-, Film- and Media Studies
Visosky, Anne (accountant)	
Weipert-Fenner, Irene	Political Science

“Re-Configurations” provides an institutional framework for an innovative, interdisciplinary, comparative, empirically-founded, and theory-led investigation of the transformation processes in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA region). The research programme consolidates the regional competencies at Philipps-Universität Marburg, in order to conduct interdisciplinary and cross-epochal research to address the current developments and their historical context, thereby enabling new perspectives to be identified and evaluated. For this end, we are developing stronger links between the systematic disciplines represented in the research network (including religious studies, history, political science, sociology, media studies, literary studies, law, peace and conflict research) and those faculties, involved with the region, that are located in the Centre for Near and Middle East Studies (CNMS). The network currently consists of 20 members representing 10 institutions within Philipps-Universität Marburg.

Network Members

Institutions	Subject Areas
Center for Near and Middle Eastern Studies (CNMS)	
Jun. Prof. Dr. Mohammed Farzanegan	Economy of the Middle East
Prof. Dr. Albrecht Fuess	Islamic Studies
Prof. Dr. Rachid Ouaisa (speaker)	Middle Eastern Politics
Prof. Dr. Friederike Pannewick (board member)	Arabic Studies
Prof. Dr. Walter Sommerfeld	Ancient Near Eastern Studies
Dr. Leslie Tramontini	Coordination/Scient. Management CNMS
Prof. Dr. Stefan Weninger	Semitic Studies
Prof. Dr. Christoph Werner	Iranian Studies
Dept. of History	
Prof. Dr. Eckart Conze (board member)	Modern and Contemporary History
Prof. Dr. Benedikt Stuchtey	Modern History
Center for research and Dokumentation of War Crime Trials	
Prof. Dr. Eckart Conze (board member)	Contemporary History
Prof. Dr. Christoph Safferling	Institute of Criminology and Institute of Comparative Law Studies
Institute of Media Studies	
Prof. Dr. Malte Hagener (board member)	Media Studies
Prof. Dr. Angela Krewani	Media Studies
Institute of Contemporary German Literature	
Prof. Dr. Volker Mergenthaler	Contemporary German Literature

Dept. of History of Religions	
Prof. Dr. Bärbel Beinhauer-Köhler	History of Religions
Institute for Comparative Cultural Research - Cultural and Social Anthropology and the Study of Religions	
Prof. Dr. Edith Franke	Study of Religions
Dept. of Political Science	
Prof. Dr. Claudia Derichs (board member)	International Development Studies
Dept. of Sociology	
Prof. Dr. Anika Oettler	Social Development and Comparative Analysis of Social Structures
Center for Conflict Studies (CCS)	
Prof. Dr. Thorsten Bonacker (board member)	Peace and Conflict Studies
Prof. Dr. Susanne Buckley-Zistel	Peace and Conflict Studies

The uprisings against the established order in a number of countries in the MENA region, known as the ‘Arab Spring’, or ‘Arabellion’, or ‘Arab Spring Revolutions’, have exposed tectonic societal changes that had, until now escaped the focus of most scholars and regional experts. In order to adequately assess the scope of these changes and to define an appropriate political response, western area studies would be well-advised to address these developments in a wider historical context (20th century) and to also look at contemporary debates within the MENA region concerning historiographical approaches and the politics of remembrance. These are central aims of the research network Re-Configurations. In order to systematically investigate the current re-configurations in the MENA-region, we identified four research fields: History from below, Re-configurations of cultural memory, Political transformations and transitional justice, Transregional entanglements.

Re-Configurations. History, Remembrance and Transformation Processes in the Middle East and North Africa

<p><u>Research Field 1:</u></p> <p>History from below</p>	<p><u>Research Field 2:</u></p> <p>Re-configuration of cultural memory</p>	<p><u>Research Field 3:</u></p> <p>Political transformation processes and transitional Justice</p>	<p><u>Research Field 4:</u></p> <p>Trans-regional interdependencies</p>
<p><u>Theme</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research of the „leaden years“ during authoritarian rule • Focus on societal phenomena and actors, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - labor conflicts - Subaltern groups - Everyday life resistance - (semi-) autonomous social space 	<p><u>Theme</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Re-Konfigurations of cultural memory after the end of the grand narratives in the MENA-region • Analysis of „cultures of remembrance“ • Study of the „silent“ and the „unspoken“ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The MENA-context has not been analysed yet 	<p><u>Theme</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis of legal reappraisals of dictatorships • The judiciary’s role during democratic transitions. 	<p><u>Theme</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research on external factors and actors contributing to a reshaping of the MENA-region • Research on processes which emanate from the MENA, are transformed in other world regions and influence the MENA-region anew and vice versa




These aspects and dimensions of the present re-configurations in the region are being consolidated through the team members’ individual research projects, as well as in the form of interdisciplinary cooperative research endeavours. The resulting research questions are being explored within a trans-regional comparative framework in cooperation with the CNMS and systematic disciplines at the Philipps-Universität Marburg, thereby strengthening the coherence and research profile of the CNMS and the network’s other various member institutions. A number of theoretical and conceptual questions need to be addressed as part of the re-assessment of scholarship on the MENA region which the research network Re-Configurations aims at. For this purpose, a theory forum has been set up that conducts regular workshops where the whole team and members of the network as well their staff and external guests meet to discuss the issues at hand from various disciplinary perspectives.

For further information, please visit our website:

http://www.uni-marburg.de/cnms/forschung/re-onfigurationen/welcome?set_language=en.

Rachid Ouaisa and Achim Rohde

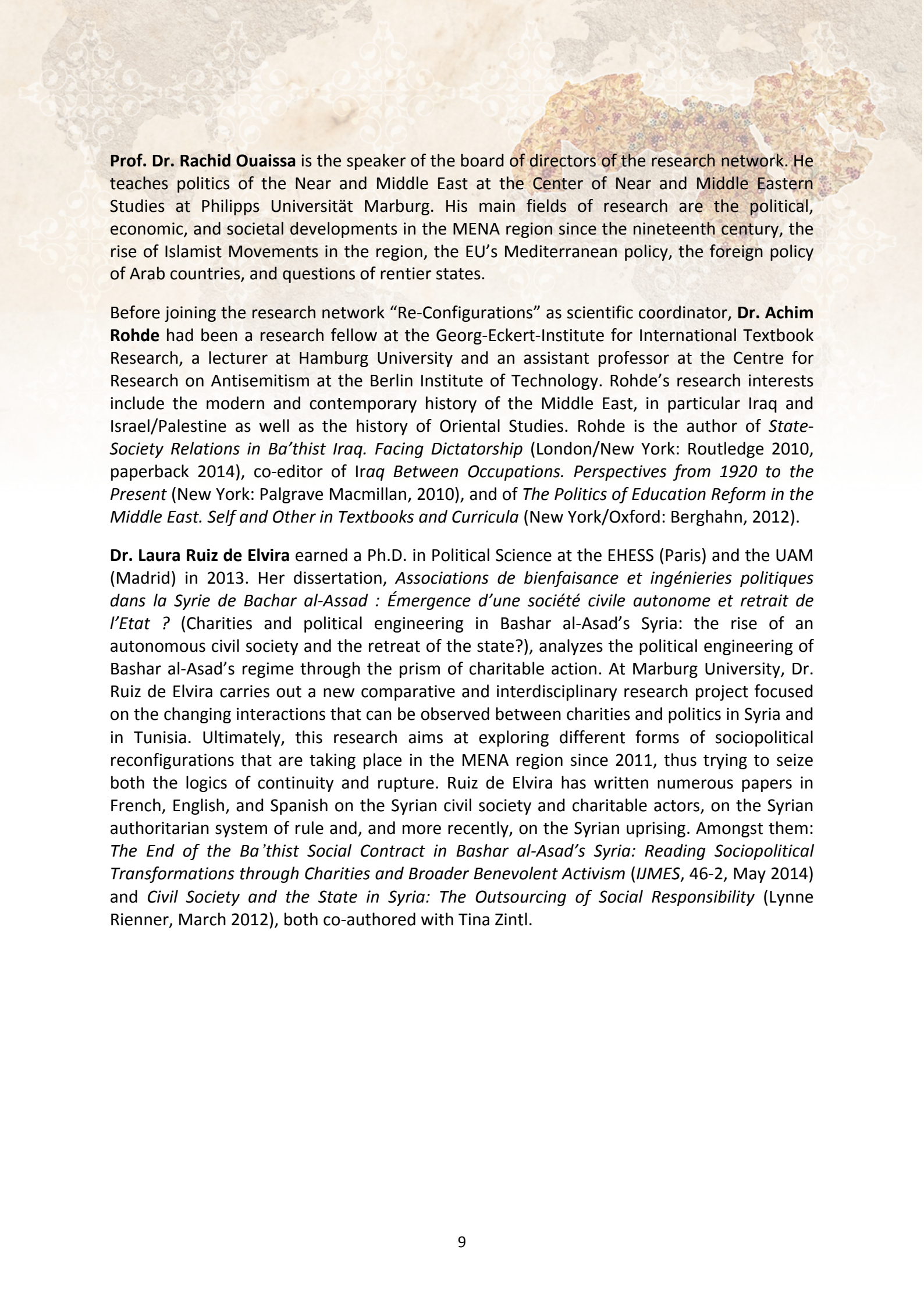


II. Introducing the team members and their research projects

Anne-Linda Amira Augustin is a PhD candidate and research fellow in the research network “Re-Configurations. History, Remembrance and Transformation Processes in the Middle East and North Africa” at Philipps-Universität Marburg. In her dissertation project, entitled *Figurations and interdependencies in South Yemen –Macrosocietal developments and subjectivations in everyday life*, Augustin deals with the question of how young people in Southern Yemen receive ideas, conceptions, and beliefs of the era pre-1990 (pre-unity) era. She argues that active implicit and communicative family memories exist in southern Yemen, which have contributed to the events in Southern Yemen since 2007 (emergence of the Southern Movement) and 2011, when the so-called “Arab Spring” started. Her research aims at showing how youth mobilization in Southern Yemen is mainly connected to cultural, social, and economic transmissions in families.

Dr. Andrea Fischer–Tahir is a social anthropologist with regional focus on Kurdistan. Fischer-Tahir is the author of *‘Wir gaben viele Märtyrer’: Widerstand und kollektive Identitätsbildung in Irakisch Kurdistan* (2003) and *Brave men, pretty women? Gender and symbolic violence in Iraqi Kurdish urban society* (2009), translated into Kurdish language (2011). She is co-editor of *Peripheralization and the social making of spatial dependencies and injustice* (Berlin: Springer VS, 2013). Dr. Fischer-Tahir combines her academic work with commitment to political and social movements in Iraqi Kurdistan, and has supported various grassroots-projects as well as academic exchange with local researchers and activists. From 2004 to 2007, she worked in the field of higher education in Iraqi Kurdistan. From 2007 to 2013 she was a research fellow at the Zentrum Moderner Orient and at the Humboldt University in Berlin. Her research project within the frame of “Re-configurations” turns again to the Kurds in Iraq and to memory in a conflict-ridden society. From the perspectives of memory studies, as well as knowledge production, she will investigate collective and individual performances recollecting the inner-Kurdish militia war between 1994 and 1998.

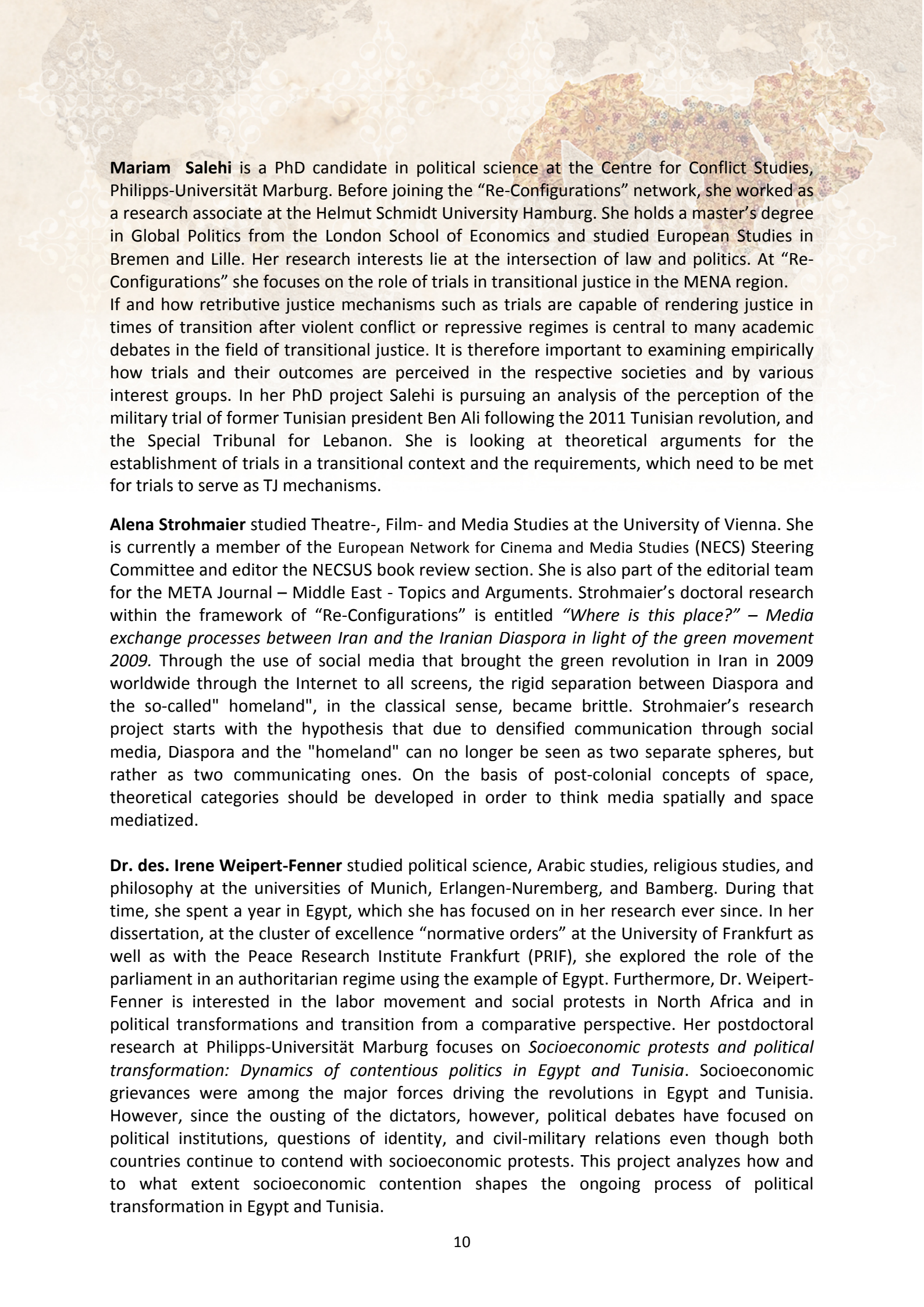
Igor Johannsen studied Islamic sciences, political science and history at the University of Hamburg. His main fields of interest include the history of the Middle East, Islamic philosophy, and Islamism and popular culture. Trying to assess the political, social and religious views of the young and socially as well as politically disadvantaged generation in Egypt, Igor Johannsen in the framework of “Re-Configurations” focuses in his PhD project on specific cultural practices related to a specific historical context. In the wake of the Arab uprisings in 2011, several HipHop-artists in the region dealt with the issues of revolution, rebellion, reform, and the respective societal discourses through their cultural products. Additionally, the Arab HipHop-community gained considerably in visibility, engagement, and creativity. By analyzing the Egyptian HipHop-culture, the aim of the project is to find conclusive answers to questions regarding the social, political, and religious convictions of a part of the new generation in Egypt.



Prof. Dr. Rachid Ouassa is the speaker of the board of directors of the research network. He teaches politics of the Near and Middle East at the Center of Near and Middle Eastern Studies at Philipps Universität Marburg. His main fields of research are the political, economic, and societal developments in the MENA region since the nineteenth century, the rise of Islamist Movements in the region, the EU's Mediterranean policy, the foreign policy of Arab countries, and questions of rentier states.

Before joining the research network “Re-Configurations” as scientific coordinator, **Dr. Achim Rohde** had been a research fellow at the Georg-Eckert-Institute for International Textbook Research, a lecturer at Hamburg University and an assistant professor at the Centre for Research on Antisemitism at the Berlin Institute of Technology. Rohde's research interests include the modern and contemporary history of the Middle East, in particular Iraq and Israel/Palestine as well as the history of Oriental Studies. Rohde is the author of *State-Society Relations in Ba’thist Iraq. Facing Dictatorship* (London/New York: Routledge 2010, paperback 2014), co-editor of *Iraq Between Occupations. Perspectives from 1920 to the Present* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), and of *The Politics of Education Reform in the Middle East. Self and Other in Textbooks and Curricula* (New York/Oxford: Berghahn, 2012).

Dr. Laura Ruiz de Elvira earned a Ph.D. in Political Science at the EHESS (Paris) and the UAM (Madrid) in 2013. Her dissertation, *Associations de bienfaisance et ingénieries politiques dans la Syrie de Bachar al-Assad : Émergence d’une société civile autonome et retrait de l’Etat ?* (Charities and political engineering in Bashar al-Assad's Syria: the rise of an autonomous civil society and the retreat of the state?), analyzes the political engineering of Bashar al-Assad's regime through the prism of charitable action. At Marburg University, Dr. Ruiz de Elvira carries out a new comparative and interdisciplinary research project focused on the changing interactions that can be observed between charities and politics in Syria and in Tunisia. Ultimately, this research aims at exploring different forms of sociopolitical reconfigurations that are taking place in the MENA region since 2011, thus trying to seize both the logics of continuity and rupture. Ruiz de Elvira has written numerous papers in French, English, and Spanish on the Syrian civil society and charitable actors, on the Syrian authoritarian system of rule and, and more recently, on the Syrian uprising. Amongst them: *The End of the Ba’thist Social Contract in Bashar al-Assad’s Syria: Reading Sociopolitical Transformations through Charities and Broader Benevolent Activism* (*IJMES*, 46-2, May 2014) and *Civil Society and the State in Syria: The Outsourcing of Social Responsibility* (Lynne Rienner, March 2012), both co-authored with Tina Zintl.



Mariam Salehi is a PhD candidate in political science at the Centre for Conflict Studies, Philipps-Universität Marburg. Before joining the “Re-Configurations” network, she worked as a research associate at the Helmut Schmidt University Hamburg. She holds a master’s degree in Global Politics from the London School of Economics and studied European Studies in Bremen and Lille. Her research interests lie at the intersection of law and politics. At “Re-Configurations” she focuses on the role of trials in transitional justice in the MENA region. If and how retributive justice mechanisms such as trials are capable of rendering justice in times of transition after violent conflict or repressive regimes is central to many academic debates in the field of transitional justice. It is therefore important to examining empirically how trials and their outcomes are perceived in the respective societies and by various interest groups. In her PhD project Salehi is pursuing an analysis of the perception of the military trial of former Tunisian president Ben Ali following the 2011 Tunisian revolution, and the Special Tribunal for Lebanon. She is looking at theoretical arguments for the establishment of trials in a transitional context and the requirements, which need to be met for trials to serve as TJ mechanisms.

Alena Strohmaier studied Theatre-, Film- and Media Studies at the University of Vienna. She is currently a member of the European Network for Cinema and Media Studies (NECS) Steering Committee and editor the NECSUS book review section. She is also part of the editorial team for the META Journal – Middle East - Topics and Arguments. Strohmaier’s doctoral research within the framework of “Re-Configurations” is entitled *“Where is this place?” – Media exchange processes between Iran and the Iranian Diaspora in light of the green movement 2009*. Through the use of social media that brought the green revolution in Iran in 2009 worldwide through the Internet to all screens, the rigid separation between Diaspora and the so-called “homeland”, in the classical sense, became brittle. Strohmaier’s research project starts with the hypothesis that due to densified communication through social media, Diaspora and the “homeland” can no longer be seen as two separate spheres, but rather as two communicating ones. On the basis of post-colonial concepts of space, theoretical categories should be developed in order to think media spatially and space mediatized.

Dr. des. Irene Weipert-Fenner studied political science, Arabic studies, religious studies, and philosophy at the universities of Munich, Erlangen-Nuremberg, and Bamberg. During that time, she spent a year in Egypt, which she has focused on in her research ever since. In her dissertation, at the cluster of excellence “normative orders” at the University of Frankfurt as well as with the Peace Research Institute Frankfurt (PRIF), she explored the role of the parliament in an authoritarian regime using the example of Egypt. Furthermore, Dr. Weipert-Fenner is interested in the labor movement and social protests in North Africa and in political transformations and transition from a comparative perspective. Her postdoctoral research at Philipps-Universität Marburg focuses on *Socioeconomic protests and political transformation: Dynamics of contentious politics in Egypt and Tunisia*. Socioeconomic grievances were among the major forces driving the revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia. However, since the ousting of the dictators, however, political debates have focused on political institutions, questions of identity, and civil-military relations even though both countries continue to contend with socioeconomic protests. This project analyzes how and to what extent socioeconomic contention shapes the ongoing process of political transformation in Egypt and Tunisia.

Associated Members

Abdellatif Aghsain received his Masters degree in 2003 in Arabic, and Islamic Studies, and French Linguistics at Mohamed Ben Abdellah University in Fes with a thesis about Moroccan writer Mohamed Choukri's two autobiographic novels *For Bread alone* and *A Time of Mistakes*. In 2005 he received a Masters degree in German Literature and Arabic Studies at Albert-Ludwigs University, Freiburg. In his interdisciplinary Masters thesis entitled *The Discourse of the „Other“ in Enlightenment. Lessing and Islam*, he examined the European philosophical, anthropological, and literary discourse on the Orient during the epoch of Enlightenment in a comparative literature study on works of Al-Ma'arri, Ibn Tufail and Lessing. Aghsain currently works as a Researcher and PhD student at the Centre for Near and Middle Eastern Studies in Marburg. His PhD research on the short story of Syrian writer Zakaria Tamer he focuses on the topics Power, Individual and the Intellectual. His research interests include Modern Arabic Literature after 1967, Anthropological Literature, and Intellectual History of the Arab World.

Ali Sonay, holds a MA in Political Science, Islamic Studies, and Economics from the University of Erlangen-Nuremberg. His Master thesis was on the regionalization of the Kurdish issue since the establishment of the Kurdish Regional Government in Iraqi Kurdistan in 1991 and its entailing political, economic, and cultural effects on the Kurds in Turkey, Syria, and Iran. Since July 2011, he is a junior researcher at the Department of Arabic Studies and doctoral student at the Department of Middle Eastern Politics at the Center for Near and Middle Eastern Studies at Philipps-Universität Marburg. In his doctoral thesis, he examines the ideational and performative embeddedness of the April 6 Youth Movement – which was one of the main organizers of the Egyptian mass protests in January 2011 - in a global context of political activism. His object thereby is to detect meaning and manifestation of contemporary contentious politics. His field of study comprises Social Movements, Urban Space and Politics, and Youth and Political Thought in the Middle East, particularly in Egypt, Turkey, and Syria.

Sonay is a member of the editorial team for the online journal META – Middle East – Topics and Arguments (<http://www.meta-journal.net/>) and the editor of the Re-Configurations' Newsletter

Hafid Zghouli studied German as a Foreign Language, Arabic, and French Literature at the University of Fez. Between 2003 and 2010 he studied German Literary Studies and Oriental Studies at the University of Freiburg, where he graduated in July 2010 with a Master thesis on Heinrich Heine's poetical representation of orient and occident: *Spiegelverhältnisse zwischen Orient und Okzident bei Heinrich Heine*. In 2011/12 he was assistant and lecturer at the Centre for Near and Middle Eastern Studies (CNMS) at the Philipps-Universität Marburg. Since October 2012, he has been a research fellow at the CNMS, where he is currently writing a doctoral dissertation on the fictional representation of history in the contemporary Arab novel. The project is specifically concerned with the historical novels of the Moroccan writer Bensalem Himmich. It will examine the different strategies Himmich applies in dealing with and reflecting on history in his novels, but also about the function of the fictionalised history in its connection with the socio-political context in which the concerned works were created.

Student Assistants

Mohammed Al-Hayek

Palwascha Haqmal

Alexander Lohse

Schluwa Sama

Jamison Howell White

III. Recent Activities

The network's central questions are discussed regularly and interdisciplinarily at predefined activities such as lecture series and theory workshops. The first months after the network's inception were dedicated to laying the infrastructural groundwork and recruiting the team. Since the fall of 2013, a number of network activities have taken place.

Lecture Series

The network's first lecture series in the winter semester 2013/14 welcomed members of the research team and guest speakers to share their current research agenda among the Marburg academic community and an interested general public: **Irene Weipert-Fenner** highlighted in her lecture *Lost in Transition? Social Justice in Egypt: Between Public Protests and Political Struggles*, how political debates during the last years of the Mubarak regime that dealt with the growing socioeconomic discontent. Secondly, some examples of current conflicts over economic and social policies were analyzed to show how continuing challenges are trying to be solved under new, yet still fluid, circumstances. Among those are the choice of the economic system and the role of the state here within (12 November 2013). **Peter Wien**, Professor of history at the University of Maryland, presented a part of his ongoing book project on the culture of Arab nationalism, focusing on *Al-Andalus as space of remembrance in Arab nationalism* (28 November 2013). **Laura Ruiz de Elvira** elaborated in her lecture on *Charity and Politics from a Comparative Perspective (Syria, Egypt, and Tunisia)* how particular religiously oriented charity organizations can become entrenched in politics and how this phenomenon was largely overlooked by scholars (10 December 2013). **Andrea Fischer-Tahir's** presentation on *The Militia War in Iraqi Kurdistan (1994-1998): An Uneasy History* illuminated the infighting between two parties which also led to the administrative separation between both sides. Fischer-Tahir highlighted the significance of the memory of this war despite its official neglect (14 January 2014). **Reinhard Schulze**, Professor of Islamic Studies at the University of Bern presented a study focusing on *The Transition from political normative order to a lifeworldly system of values: Insights from the Arab Spring* highlighting a transformation and reconfiguration of ideological orientations agreed upon by large segments of society (21 January 2014). **Refqa Abu Remaileh's** lecture on *Tradition Fusion: Contemporary Palestinian Literature and the Arab Literary Heritage* highlighted how Palestinian literature is captured between the search for authenticity on the one side and resistance on the other (11 February 2014).



Workshop 1: Area Studies 14/15. November 2013

The first theory workshop of the research network focused on *Area Studies* in the social sciences and was held at the CNMS on November 14th and 15th, 2013. Area studies has been an influential paradigm since the beginning of the Cold War, particularly in Anglo-Saxon academia, in order to understand various world regions from an interdisciplinary perspective. For the last decade or so Area Studies has also become mainstream at German universities, specifically pertaining to the official scientific reorientation of forming clusters and centers of excellence. The workshop discussed questions related to the notion of Area Studies; the networks inception is very much connected to the mentioned scientific reorientation in Germany. In the workshop's first section, the self-positioning of our community as researchers in this context was discussed. What became apparent was that all participants shared the narrowing character of ascribing oneself to one subject only, but emphasized interdisciplinarity, which the reorientation accounts for. The workshop's second section consisted of a close reading session of specific texts on how to position the Middle East and North Africa as an *Area* and in how far the newly established Area Studies centers could function as promoters of critical thinking.

Workshop 2: Revolutions or What?

Conceptualizing the 'Arab Spring' 28. February 2014

The network's second theory workshop dealt with the question how to understand the nature of revolutions in an interdisciplinary perspective in order to classify the dynamics associated with the so-called Arab Spring more comprehensively. The workshop was subdivided into four sessions. The first discussed the debate on agency vs. structure in the social sciences, based on the first chapter of Karl Marx's 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, hinting at the importance of cross class alliances for successful revolutionary processes. The second session addressed the function and role of film and media studies perspectives on the upheavals in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA-region), thereby focusing on the global trend of how new media provide individuals with instruments to be the director, actor, and receiver in one. The next session discussed the perspectives of literature studies on the Arab Spring highlighting the contemporary role of intellectuals in increasingly individualizing societies and the entailing critique of vanguards. The concluding session comprised a flashlight round, whereby each participant shared his/her insights of the day, which was followed by a summarizing final discussion, emphasizing the importance of transregional comparisons for further understanding as many of the dynamics visible in the MENA-region are embedded in global processes. The follow-up workshop will have an approach in this way.



Ali Sonay

IV. Notes from the field: “We need to keep Kurdistan a save place”

Sulaimaniya, Kurdistan Region of Iraq, 3 February 2014. Journalist Shwan Mihemmed smiles when he says: ‘I wished we would get a completely new government. So that the people see, things can change. And of course, that they see the opposition is not better as the hitherto government’. It is his concluding statement to comments on the never-ending negotiations of the leading parties to form a new government after the elections in September 2013. In these elections to the Kurdistan Parliament (the parliament was established first in 1992), the Kurdistan Democratic Party (est. 1946) gained most voices, followed by the Change Movement (est. 2009), the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (est. 1975), the Islamic Union (est. 1994) and the Islamic Movement in Kurdistan-Iraq (est.1988) – both Islamic parties originating in the Kurdish Muslim Brotherhood. From 1992 to 2013, KDP and PUK formed together the government together or – as a result of their militia war (1994-1998) – separate administrations. Now, the Change Movement as more or less a PUK’s split-off, claims to want to form a new government with the KDP, but neither is the movement that is led by the former PUK’s vice secretary-general a promising partner for the oldest among the Kurdish parties, nor the other parties accept such claims. In the meantime there is a propaganda war going on, watched and commented by the citizen mainly through the TV channels which are all owned by the political parties.

Journalist Shwan Mihemmed, as one of the few independent political analysts, knows best how the politicians of any faction think and tend to act. But, also his background as a former member and Peshmerga (guerilla fighter) of the Iraqi Communist Party /Kurdistan section, and as editor-in-chief of the private weekly *Hawlatî* (Citizen) and its split-away the weekly *Awêne* (Mirror) has made him a little bit frustrated and cynical when it comes to the leading parties and their games for power. The 50year old journalist thinks that the function of the Kurdistan Parliament is predominantly to represent plurality and to mediate constantly between political actors who have a long history of violent competition, and so is the function of the cabinet. Decisions are made instead by the leaders and political bureaus of the parties. They are also those controlling the courts in Kurdistan; at least judges tend to make decisions according to the interests of those in power. There is no judicial independence, and no protection for critical journalists. Recently, for example, the court of the district of Kalar (southwest of Sulaimaniya) discharged a prominent PUK member and former Peshmerga commander accused of being involved in the murder of a journalist in Kalar who had been covering on corruption and maladministration. The case of that journalist, who is considered now a ‘martyr of the pen’ (*şehîd-î qelem*) has been engrossed by Change in the service of the propaganda against its rival, the PUK, in order to cover up that the leader and main figures of Change themselves have produced the political situation and climate of suspicion and aggression that they are criticizing so fiercely. ‘Important is’, says Shwan Mihemmed, ‘that they continue talk. Otherwise they start war as they did in the 1990s. And we really need to keep the Kurdistan Region a save place, especially since the security situation in the rest of Iraq is worsened again, and in West-Kurdistan (Syria) and North-Kurdistan (Turkey) there is still war.’

Andrea Fischer-Tahir

The author is a resarch fellow at "Re-Configurations" and visited Kurdistan-Iraq in January/February 2014 as part of a field research for her ongoing Postdoc-project.

V. Outlook

Team

Our former colleague Dr. Refqa Abu Remaileh has gained a post-doctoral scholarship by the Humboldt-Foundation. We congratulate her for this achievement! Unfortunately, she therefore has left the Reconfigurations-team in March. Still, she will remain affiliated to the University of Marburg as her host institution during the time of her scholarship. Dr. Abu Remaileh will be replaced in the team by Dr. Jamal Bahmad, whom we are pleased to welcome as a new colleague by May.

The two remaining vacant positions as research fellows in the team are filled by Dr. Christoph H. Schwarz and Dimitris Soudias. We are happy to welcome them in Marburg in April.

Summer Academy Rabat 2014

International Summer Academy for Doctoral and Postdoctoral Researchers in Rabat, 25th August – 5th September 2014 In the framework of the research program Europe in the Middle East – the Middle East in Europe (EUME) the Berlin-based Forum Transregionale Studien, the Max Weber Stiftung – German Humanities Institutes Abroad, and the École de Gouvernance et d'Économie in Rabat invite scholars from the fields of Comparative Literature, Cultural Anthropology, Middle East Studies, Political Science, History, Geography, Urban Studies and Sociology to apply for an international Summer Academy that will be convened from **25.08. – 05.09.2014** at the **École de Gouvernance et d'Économie (EGE) in Rabat** on the theme

Conflict and Mobility in the City: Urban Space, Youth and Social Transformations

The Summer Academy is chaired by a group of scholars that includes **Fadma Ait Mous** (EGE, Rabat), **Michael Allan** (University of Oregon), **Baudoin Dupret** and **Zakaria Rhani** (both Centre Jacques Berque, Rabat), **Hakan Ergül** (Hacettepe Üniversitesi, Ankara), **Ulrike Freitag** and **Nora Lafi** (both Zentrum Moderner Orient/ZMO, Berlin), **Rachid Ouassa** and **Friederike Pannewick** (both from the Center for Near and Middle Eastern Studies/CNMS, Philipps-Universität Marburg). It is held in cooperation with the **Centre Jacques Berque** in Rabat, the **Université Mohammed VI Polytechnique** in Benguerir, the **CNMS**, the research network “Re-Configurations: History, Memory and Transformation Processes” of Philipps University Marburg.

Twenty-four 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.

For further information see:

<http://www.eume-berlin.de/call-for-application-ausschreibung.html#c1223>

