

Philipps



Universität
Marburg

research network configurations

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

Sponsored by



Bundesministerium
für Bildung
und Forschung

NEWSLETTER

No.3

Spring 2015



CONTENTS

Foreword I. News from the team II. Current & recent visiting researchers
III. Reports on recent activities IV. Notes from the field V. Upcoming activities



Imprint

Editorial Team

Achim Rohde, Nadim Natour

Research Network Re-Configurations

Philipps-Universität Marburg

Deutschhausstraße 3

D-35033 Marburg

Tel.: 49 (0)6421 28 24899

Fax: 49 (0) 6421/28-24829

E-Mail: re-konfigurationen@uni-marburg.de

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

Photo: Drifting Towards Italy © UNHCR/A.D'Amato

Layout: Ali Sonay, Nadim Natour

Proofreading: Hannah McMillen



Foreword

Dear colleagues,

The painful pictures of human suffering and other current developments within an increasing number of MENA countries affect our scholarly work in Re-Configurations on several levels. Some of us cannot visit the countries we are researching out of safety concerns, while others encounter difficulties in conducting their field research as planned due to political constraints. Some of us have become involved in attempts to open the gates of Europe for refugees who flee the war zone that was their home.

The wars in Syria, Iraq and elsewhere in the region, the worsening refugee crisis and the manifold ramifications of these developments within Europe have highlighted the increasing entanglement between Europe and the MENA region. Last December, Re-Configurations had the opportunity to focus on this issue in the framework of a memorable conference conducted in Istanbul in cooperation with the Institut Français d'Études Anatoliennes (IFEA). Thanks to the initiative of our former visiting scholar Natalia Ribas Mateos, we were able to gather a group of scholars from Europe, the MENA region and the US, together with Turkish and Syrian civil society activists, to focus on "Guests and Aliens: Re-Configuring New Mobilities in the Eastern Mediterranean after 2011 – with a special focus on Syrian refugees." In her programmatic and thoughtful contribution to the conference, Saskia Sassen (Columbia University) addressed the issue of global citizenship. The conference proceedings is being published in IFEA's online journal, and a book publication based on the conference is being prepared. We hope to be able to continue to broaden the international outreach of Re-Configurations in the future through further successful joint activities. Meanwhile, we are preparing a host of conferences and workshops to be held in Marburg as part of our network's activities during 2015. For further details, refer to this newsletter and have a look on our website from time to time.

Last but not least, we are proud to announce that our colleague Dr. Laura Ruiz de Elvira has been awarded the Syrian Studies Association's 2014 dissertation prize for her doctoral 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." Congratulations!

With best wishes for all,

Rachid Ouaisa (speaker) and Achim Rohde (scientific coordinator)

I. News from the team

At the end of January 2014, our former colleague **Dr. Jamal Bahmad** left our research network and took up a Postdoctoral Fellow position at the School of Languages, Cultures and Societies at the University of Leeds. Congratulations on the new position! **Ms. Susann Schlesinger**, the team's administrative assistant has also left the network, still she will carry on working at The Interdisciplinary Center for Near and Middle Eastern Studies (CNMS). We would like to thank Jamal and Susann for their efforts and contribution to the network, we wish them all the best in their future endeavors!

We would like to congratulate our colleague **Ali Sonay** on his new position as a post-doctoral research associate at the Al Jazeera Center of Studies Media Research Project at the University of Cambridge. We would also like to cordially thank Ali for his work at "Re-Configurations," which included being on the editorial team of previous issues of this newsletter. Congratulations!

"Re-Configurations" is glad to welcome two new colleagues; **Ms. Hannah McMillen**, a student assistant who supports the team members with English language editing, and **Ms. Stefanie Braun** who has replaced Susann Schlesinger by taking on the administrative assistant position. Welcome to the team!

As part of its efforts to enrich its work, "Re-Configurations" has opened the door for specialists with different expertise. Since June 2014, "Re-Configurations" has had the honor to host four visiting fellows:

- **Dr. Abdelkarim Daoud** (January 2015), Professor at the Department of Geography at University of Sfax-Tunisia.
- **Dr. Jonathan Kriener** (September 2014 - March 2015), group project coordinator at the department for Oriental and Islamic Studies of Ruhr - Universität Bochum.
- **Dr. Souhail Belhadj** (December 2014), "The Graduate Institute in Geneva".
- **Dr. Natalia Ribas-Mateos** (June - December 2014), research associate at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona –CERAO- and at IFEA-Istanbul. During her Marburg residency, Natalia co-coordinated the international conference "Guests and Aliens. Re-configuring mobilities in the East Mediterranean post-2011" which was held in Istanbul, her efforts were essential for the success of the conference! (See p.7-8).

Outstanding doctoral dissertation:

Dr. Laura Ruiz de Elvira Carrascal receives Syrian Studies Association's 2014 Dissertation Prize!

The Syrian Studies Association's 2014 Dissertation Prize was awarded to Dr. Laura Ruiz de Elvira Carrascal for her doctoral 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."

On behalf of the Prize Committee, Dr. Max Weiss made the following remarks: "This dissertation studies an important aspect of the Syrian regime under Bashar al-Assad, specifically the transformation of the state and its "authoritarian upgrading" along neoliberal patterns. Thereby, Ruiz de Elvira provides crucial insight into the social, economic and political background of the 2011 uprising. The Prize Committee highlighted Ruiz de Elvira's extensive fieldwork research inside Syria - as we sadly realized, this is something that is likely to remain absent from future dissertation prize submissions for a long time." **Congratulations!**

II. Current & recent visiting researchers

Dr. Muhammad Wildan (April-July 2015) is a lecturer at the State Islamic University (UIN) Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta. Having finished his undergraduate at UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta in 1995, he obtained his master degree at Leiden University in the Netherlands in 1999 and then completed his Ph.D. at National University of Malaysia (UKM) in 2009. While completing his PhD, he gained experience as research fellow at the International Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World (ISIM), the Netherlands (2007) and also Asian Research Institut (ARI) at National University of Singapore (2007). His expertise on modern Islam in Indonesia is proven by several works on political and radical Islam, and popular culture. His concern with radical Islamism brought him to be involved in projects on mainstreaming moderate Islam among some conservative and radical pesantrens (religious schools) in Java, Indonesia. Besides teaching at university, he is also involved in Muhammadiyah, one of the biggest NGOs in Indonesia.

Dr. Noga Efrati (March-June 2015) is a historian of the Middle East. Her research focuses on the social, legal, and political history of Iraq. She is the author of *Women in Iraq: Past Meets Present*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2012 - A social and political history of Iraqi women during the periods of British occupation and the British-backed Hashimite monarchy (1917 - 1958). Between 2006 and 2011 she headed the Post-Saddam Iraq Research Group at the Harry S. Truman Research Institute for the Advancement of Peace, The Hebrew

University of Jerusalem. She is now a Senior Lecturer at the Department of History, Philosophy, and Judaic Studies, The Open University of Israel. During her stay at the CNMS, Philipps-Universität Marburg she will research her next work titled "Law and Society in Iraq: Family Law Contested and Reconstructed, 1914-2014"

Dr. Sigall Horovitz (March-July 2015) is a post-doctoral fellow at the Minerva Center for the Rule of Law under Extreme Conditions. Her research areas include transitional justice and international criminal law, with a special focus on Africa and Israel-Palestine. Dr. Horovitz holds a Master of Laws from Columbia University (LL.M.2003, with honors), and a Doctor of Laws from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (LL.D. 2014). Her doctoral dissertation focuses on the impact of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) on national reconciliation in Rwanda. It forms part of the larger ERC-funded research on the Effectiveness of International Courts. Prior to her doctoral studies, Dr. Horovitz worked for the UN as a legal advisor at the ICTR (in Tanzania) and the Special Court for Sierra Leone (in Sierra Leone and The Hague).

Dr. Horovitz directs university projects on transitional justice, and she initiated the transitional justice programs at both Tel Aviv University and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. She also develops and teaches courses on transitional justice and on election and party law. Dr. Horovitz is a recipient of the Arthur Helton Fellowship of the American Society of International Law (2013), the Rabin Scholarship of the Truman Research Institute for the Advancement of Peace at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (2013-2014), and the Vodoz Prize of the Institute of Contemporary Jewry at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (2012). She is a member of the New York and Israeli Bar Associations, and a founding member of ALMA - the Association for the Promotion of International Humanitarian Law.

Dr. Pooya Alaedini (February-April 2015) is an associate professor of social planning at the University of Tehran. His areas of focus include socioeconomic development, urban and regional planning. He has served as a consultant to the World Bank, the UN, the International Labor Organization, and the International Organization for Migration. His publications, including a dozen peer-reviewed articles, two books and several published reports, have focused on high-impact development issues as well as evaluation of major development programs. Dr. Alaedini holds an undergraduate degree in mathematical sciences from Ohio State University and master's degrees in civil/transportation engineering and economics from Ohio State University and University of Delaware. He wrote a noted dissertation on oil-based industrialization in Iran for his Ph.D. in urban planning and policy development at Rutgers University, and conducted research on urban development and industrialization in the Middle East and East Asia at the United Nations University/Institute of Advanced Studies in Tokyo as a post-doctoral fellow.

Dr. des. Nina Salouâ Studer (April-August 2015) wrote her Ph.D. in general history at the University of Zürich on the descriptions of Muslim North African women in the publications of French colonial psychiatrists. Her dissertation will be published by Böhlau Verlag in autumn 2015. She was awarded a two-year SNF (Schweizerischer Nationalfond) scholarship for the Advancement of Scientific Research (Scholarship for Prospective Researchers) in order for her to study for her doctoral degree at St Cross College, Oxford. Her current research is on the medicalization of drinking habits in the colonial Maghreb. She conceptualises the descriptions of drinking habits in medical and psychiatric sources as a new perspective on lived, everyday colonialism, which will allow her to study such diverse topics as assimilation and civilisation, the pathologisation of North African customs, the supposed threat posed by North Africans, as well as questions of gender and class. Her fellowship at the research network Re-Configurations from April to August 2015 allows her to focus on the question of the use of coffee (both practically and metaphorically) in the conquest of Algeria, and will result in an article as well as furthering her research project.


III. Reports on recent activities

International Conference - "Guests and Aliens": Re-configuring new mobilities in the eastern Mediterranean after 2011 -with a special focus on Syrian refugees. *By Anja Schmidt*

The international conference "Guests and Aliens: Re-configuring new mobilities in the eastern Mediterranean after 2011" was held in Istanbul from 9-10 December 2014. It was jointly organized by the Research Network Re-Configurations and L'Institut Français d'Études Antoliennes (IFEA), with the support of CERAO (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona) and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM). The conference focused on the altering dynamics and results of immigrant mobilities. Given the background of the Syrian civil war and its ramifications, the conference specifically focused on Syrian refugees. Moreover, several contributions discussed the broader Mediterranean refugee crisis and its handling by the European Union.

Saskia Sassen, upon whose studies the idea for the conference was built, submitted a video presentation¹ in which she stressed that spatial displacement may under certain circumstances enable individuals to empower themselves. This possibility, however, is dampened or even reversed by international regulations and state policies. Sassen concluded with a call for a new understanding of citizenship, *transversal citizenship*, in which nation states become less salient. In the first panel, Achim Rohde (Re-Configurations), Claire Beaugrand (IFPO-OPT), Vincent Geisser (IFPO-Beirut) and Natalia Ribas-Mateos (Re-Configurations) gave a further introduction to

¹ The presentation is available through our website (http://www.uni-marburg.de/cnms/forschung/re-konfigurationen/aktuelles/news/international_conference_guests_and_aliens).



the theoretical approaches to immigrant mobilities. Here, the transformations since 2011 were examined with reference to the treatment of refugees within the EU and at the EU borders and, in the words of Achim Rohde, the European Union was exposed as an anonymous autocracy which is ruled by technocrats.

The huge diversity of the presentations mirrored the complexity of the topic. We examined the situation of Syrians in Turkey, where, among other presenters, Senay Özden from the NGO Hamish gave us insight into the Turkish discourse about Syrian refugees. She posited that they are seen solely as victims and not as individuals with a political identity. We then explored the urban futures of new mobilities. Here, Jean-Francois Pérouse (IFEA) shared with us his observations of the daily life of Syrian refugees in Istanbul, where the ones who are the most vulnerable are in severe danger, many being forced to live in the streets. Fortress Europe was also an important subject of discussion. Giorgios Kosmopoulos from Amnesty International Greece participated in the conference via video stream and contributed his experiences with Frontex and the European policies of deterrence. Further, Mariam Salehi (Re-Configurations) shared with us her research about refugees coming to Germany from Libya, with particular focus on their self-perception. Salehi showed that the situation in which refugees find themselves results in new identities and new levels of individual politicization. She outlined the case of a refugee in Hamburg who claims his flight is the fault of a failed EU military intervention in Libya, and demands that the EU take responsibility and make amends for the injustice it produced.

However, the treatment refugees receive upon arriving in Germany or other EU member states is far from a just and humanitarian approach. In this regard, Christoph H. Schwarz (Re-Configurations) critically examined the role of refugees as “guests” and their concurrent alienation from German society through discriminatory policies such as *Residenzpflicht*. In the last panel the dynamics in border zones were examined. Laura Ruiz de Elvira (Re-Configurations) examined strategies from Syrian civil society and its interaction with both national host countries and international humanitarian actors, while Hélène Michalak (France Expertise Internationale) gave valuable insight into the trans-border flows and informal humanitarian routes. The discussions each panel stimulated were without exception fruitful and inspiring, which was also due to the high level of expertise among the participants.

The Civil Society Programme was held at the Istanbul Addar Center, where we were privileged to watch the (yet not publicized) short film “Boya b\Boya” produced by Karen Boswall (SOAS University), which looks at the reality of the growing population of urban refugees from the perspective of a child who works as a shoe cleaner. The roundtable, which was moderated by Chiara Denaro (University of Rome La Sapienza/UAB), was a perfect closure for the conference, which managed to combine the theoretical approaches with the practical realities of refugees. Having such highly experienced individuals from various NGOs and private initiatives discussing the situation of Syrian refugees in Turkey was inspiring, and gave hope that some improvements might be seen in the near future.

Even though the general situation for refugees is currently very severe, this new empowerment and politicization of both refugees and of those who take action for their benefit, shows that there still seems to be some space for future change. Academics and civil societies in receiving countries should unite around this prospect, working together to change structures and policies in order to respond to the new mobilities in a more humane way.

Lecture Series / winter semester 2014/15

During winter semester 2014/2015, “Re-Configurations” has hosted a biweekly lecture series. The network’s PhD students and visiting scholars presented their research agendas. A total of 8 lectures were held:

- Dr. Jonathan Kriener: A Silent Arab Spring? Connectivities among Arab Social Scientists
- Alena Strohmaier: New Visual Media Strategies of the Iranian Diaspora
- Dr. Natalia Ribas-Mateos: Memory, Mobilities and Mobilisation: The case of Istanbul’s Balat neighborhood
- Mariam Salehi: Transitional Justice in Tunisia
- Anne-Linda Amira Augustin: ‘Jil al-Wahda’ Remembers: Collective Memories and Social Space Production in Southern Yemen
- Igor Johannsen: Arab Rap Representin’: Rhymes, Rhythms and Resistance
- Dr. Christoph Schwarz: The Moral Economy of Political Activism and Intergenerational Relations: Historical and Family Narratives of Young Protesters in Morocco, Tunisia, and Spain
- Dimitris Soudias: Contextualizing Participant Experiences in the 2011 Occupations of Tahrir and Syntagma Squares: Impressions from the Field

Network panel on “Spaces of Authority”

Dr. Irene Weipert-Fenner

A conference organized by the department of Peace and Conflict Studies at Marburg University at the “Zentrumstage 2014, Authorities in Conflict” from 29 to 31 October 2014



The last bi-annual conference of the Center for Conflict Studies (“Zentrumstage”) dealt with “authorities in conflict.” One major question was how authorities can be challenged in conflicts, for instance in anti-regime wars, but also in mass demonstrations against governments or non-governmental organizations. This directly relates to one of the major points of interest of the Re-Configurations Network as the Middle East and North Africa is one of the most prominent areas of contested authority. We therefore organized a panel that explored the MENA region as a space of authority in conflict from an interdisciplinary perspective: Andrea Fischer-Tahir presented from an anthropological perspective how the contestation of authority in Iraqi Kurdistan is embedded

in ongoing processes of knowledge production and remembrance including of the militia war of the 1990s. Achim Rohde de-constructed the idea of a quasi-totalitarian Iraq under Saddam Hussein by highlighting discourses relating to the concept of democracy that left some space for expressing discontent, similar to other authoritarian regimes in the MENA region. Laura Ruiz de Elvira asked why Syria in the years 2000 did not witness the same scale of increase of social protests like other countries in the region with similar structural grievances. Building on the differentiation between "authority"— understood as the modality of power to influence, based on a status, competences or charisma – and "legitimacy" – conceptualized as the social acceptance based on common beliefs - she explained this phenomenon on the one hand by specific ruling tactics such as using confessionalism to divide and rule society. On the other hand, social actors did not practice resistance directly, but by “acting as if,” i.e. pretending to cooperate and yet trying to make use of rules for one’s own interests. Jamal Bahmad, using the example of Morocco, brought in the perspective of media studies and showed how movies can transport the subaltern memory and at the same time criticize the absence of these voices from the public discourse. Though dealing with a wide range of topics and countries, the concept of authority found in the different case studies showed features which were discussed during the whole conference: authority as the uncontested power protected by discursive “red lines” one cannot cross. This stands in contrast to rule, ruling elites or the ruling government, which can in fact be criticized in autocracies. It was furthermore discussed whether the fact that the authority itself remains symbolically unchallenged constitutes a factor that accounts for the longevity of a given authoritarian regime.

Re-configuration: Film Series

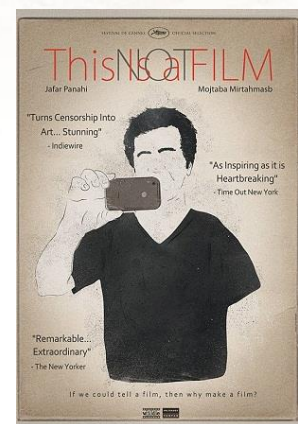
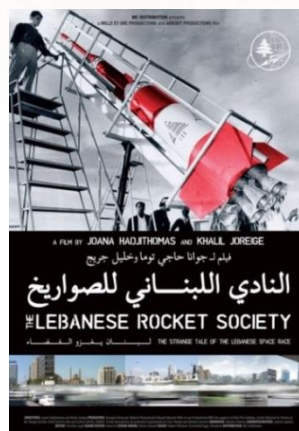
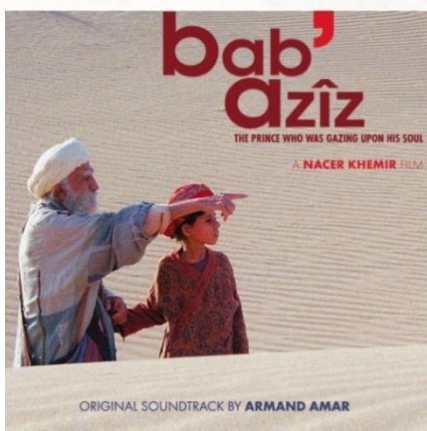
[Alena Strohmaier](#)



In spite of its remarkable role in documenting the historical and social transformations of the Middle East and North Africa for over a century, cinema remains a neglected area of teaching and research in the academic study of this part of the world. It is both an understudied and untapped source for understanding the region through the eyes of its cultural producers. Cinema has existed in the MENA region since the birth of the medium in the late 19th century and closely chronicled the deep reconfigurations of the region’s societies and culture to the present day. Filmmakers have screened their societies through sophisticated and heterogeneous perspectives that are rarely evident in the disciplinary modes of knowledge production in western and local academia. A decade into the 21st century and particularly after the historic uprisings and emergent reconfigurations across North Africa and the Middle East in recent years, this is a timely moment to redress the imperfections and lacks in the study of the region by bringing new paradigms and lenses to the forefront of academic and public debate.

With the “Re-configuration: Film Series,” Jamal Bahmad and Alena Strohmaier, organized an event together with the Marburger Filmkunsttheater incorporating cinema into the academic discourse. The aim was to screen landmark films from and on the region. The organizers selected films on the basis of each film’s artistic quality. Each screening began with a short introduction by one of the organizers or a special guest, and was followed by a discussion after the screening. This forum was a great success and helped to expand and to foster thematic diversity and contributed to new perspectives on society, politics and culture of the MENA region.

- 3. November 2014: Bab Aziz, Nacer Khemir (TUN, IR 2005), 98Min. OV. Introduced by: Jamal Bahmad
- 15. December 2014: The Lebanese Rocket Society, Joana Hadjithomas & Khalil Joreige (LIB, FR, QA 2012), 93Min. OV. Introduced by: Malte Hagener
- 26. January 2015: This Is Not A Film, Jafar Panahi (IR 2011), 75Min. OV. Introduced by: Alena Strohmaier



Transformation Partnership Project III: "Islamists in the regional transformation process: dialogue and documentation"

This project is funded by the German Foreign Ministry and directed by Prof. Dr. Rachid Ouassa, aims at exploring the role of moderate Islamist actors in current Middle Eastern transformation processes, and their policies towards Europe and Germany in particular.

The project team consisting of Julius Dihstelhoff, Ivesa Lübben and Heidi Reichinnek provides monthly policy papers directed at German decision-makers. In order to ensure the highest quality of these papers, the project team is committed to



ongoing field research (most recently in Tunisia and Qatar). In the near future these papers, along with other material generated during the project, will be made available through a project homepage. By creating this website, the visibility of the project will increase significantly.

From the 2nd to the 5th of March a conference on the topic “The Role of Ennahda in the Transformation Process: Experiences and Perspectives” was held at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Berlin. It was attended by members of Ennahda and representatives of the civil society close to Ennahda as well as German experts and scientists. To deepen the research on Ennahda, a survey using empirical questionnaires was conducted among all Ennahda members of the “Assemblée constituante tunisienne.” This study will be evaluated over the coming months, and further field research in Tunisia is planned. Over the course of the next few months the research will expand to focus on Egypt and the recent developments in the country.

In 2016, a book will be published presenting the results of the research, embedding them within a broader theoretical framework. To announce the research project, a press article as well as a project description was released. For further information refer to these links:

- <http://www.uni-marburg.de/cnms/politik/forschung/forschungsproj/TP3>

- <http://www.uni-marburg.de/cnms/aktuelles/news/alias.2014-09-11.1383731322>

IV. Notes from the field:

Syrian relief associations working in exile: Beyond humanitarian aid Dr. Laura Ruiz de Elvira Carrascal



The Syrian war has forced more than 3.8 million Syrians to flee their motherland and seek refuge in neighboring countries and beyond. Once merchants, workers, civil servants, peasants, students, most of these persons have found themselves in a radically new configuration in which they are forced to struggle to get a job, feed their children, and, whenever necessary, pay the rent of precarious housing. Against this background, charitable giving – which was already on the rise in the years 2000 due to liberalization policies undertaken by the state – and humanitarian aid have become more vital than ever for Syrians. It is in this context that the flourishing of Syrian associations working on relief activities in (and from) Turkey and Lebanon – where more than 1.6 million and 1.1 million refugees are officially to be found respectively – should be interpreted.

Last spring I spent one day with one of these associations: ‘Uyun Suria. This small humanitarian network is composed of a handful of young Syrian activists who dedicate part of their time and energy to supporting their poorest compatriots living in Lebanon. Since 2013, ‘Uyun Suria has organized several campaigns to improve the living conditions of those who are settled in the numerous informal camps, has undertaken regular activities for Syrian refugee children, and has designed developmental projects such as the construction of a bread oven. Through these activities, the aim is not only to provide humanitarian aid, but also to 1) develop the capacities of Syrian refugees, so they can become self-sufficient instead of beggars, 2) provide psychological support, 3) raise

awareness among vulnerable communities (e.g. women and children), 4) disseminate certain ideas and values (e.g. tolerance, citizenship, freedom, and gender equality), and 5) build a new generation. “We want Syrians to be ready for “tomorrow’s Syria,” “We want them to have experience so the reconstruction will be possible.” For these activists, who were already active before leaving Syria, their current work is not only humanitarian, developmental, and charitable, but also a patriotic duty, a human impulse, and a moral obligation. So, in a certain way, their current activity is a continuation of their previous militant activism inside Syria. For them, as for many others working elsewhere, the relief sector has become even more important than politics in the present context.

June 1st 2014: We leave Beirut, where the headquarters of this small organization are situated, and head to the Syrian border, namely to the al-Marj camp in the Bekaa valley, where more than 900 families live nowadays. In the van I meet four young volunteers who live in Lebanon, along with two from the United States. Conversations are charged with both nostalgia and dynamism. One hour later we arrive at Al-Marj camp, which is composed of precarious tents made of wood and plastic. In summer the atmosphere is suffocating but winter’s snow is even more hated by Syrian refugees. Very quickly, children of all ages start gathering in a big and empty structure that is being used as a playground, a meeting space, and a distribution hub. Two groups are formed: while the first one does gymnastics and sings traditional songs, the second enjoys a crafts activity. For a few hours, these children leave their family tent and forget their misery. Boys and girls whose families are both pro-regime and pro-opposition get together. Still their smiles do not hide their trauma: many of them have lost at least one relative and violent fights amongst boys are usual. “We teach children to become children again [... while, at the same time, we spread ideas of] justice, citizenship, equality and non-sectarianism.”

Behind the immediate relief actions, there is a social and a political project: sow the seeds of a new Syria. The discourse displayed by these activists is significantly elaborate and the level of consciousness is also high. By working with refugee children, what ‘Uyun Suria and other similar organizations are actually promoting an alternative narrative to that of sectarianism and violence emerging from inside Syria.



is

Photo: Laura Ruiz de Elvira Carrascal, "A day for fun: children from the al-Marj camp, in the Bekaa valley (Lebanon), enjoy the activities organized by the ‘Uyun Suria team".

Syntagma, Tahrir, and the transformative power of participation

Dimitris Soudias

The 2011 occupations of Tahrir and Syntagma squares have left their traces on participants; their scars and magical memories. Looking into narrative accounts of transformative impacts of both occupation experiences from a comparative angle, we can find some striking similarities.

In a conversation in Athens, 31 year old Elena explained as follows: *"The truth is that if you'd ask me what the most important thing is that came out of Syntagma, it's that it has changed me a lot as a human. I mean, before Syntagma Square, I rarely went to protests, I wasn't part of the movements before. [...] I'd say I was apolitical."*

Her experience of Syntagma square led her to participate in various protests and sit-ins ever since, and supporting the 'time bank' that has been founded in Syntagma Square in 2011. Time Banks, which have become popular in many parts of Greece, are a service network where one offers an hour of Spanish lessons in exchange for one hour of babysitting – bypassing the use of money. In times where many parts of the Greek populace had few expectations on ruling elites, they took issues into their own hands. Quite a few participants remained or became active after Syntagma: in street politics, refugee work, neighborhood politics, free clinics, and other fields.

Similarly, 28 year old Mahmoud in Cairo underwent changes in the ways he viewed and dealt with politics after his participation in Tahrir in 2011: "You're talking to somebody who's had no political interest at the time", until police violence on January 25 changed his views drastically. Mahmoud took to the streets every day until the fall of Mubarak. And after that, he joined a group of activists who inspected police stations in greater Cairo, making sure detainees are provided with food, legal representation, and access to their families. However, in summer 2013, with the massacre in Raba'a, Mahmoud and his colleagues' work came under massive threat and some arrests by police, forcing them to lay down their work. And although today's Egypt doesn't leave Mahmoud with high spirits, he acknowledges he has become a lot more critical.

"Now I am aware. I think I have an incomplete project. [...]. It makes me think of what works and what doesn't. It harasses me sometimes. But now I reflect on everything."

Elena's and Mahmoud's experiences alike draw near social movement research on immediate and long-term effects of collective action participation, underscoring the transformative power of participation experience and close relations between movement experience and sustained commitment to activism. These first field impressions indicate that despite of changing structural conditions in polity and politics, participant's experiences and how they impact their activism, remain. Because even in Egypt, with mad police repression under Sisi, do people still take to the streets.

V. Upcoming activities

International Conference - Gender in Iraqi studies: Trans_ local actors and knowledge flows in comparative perspective. 06.05.2015 - 08.05.2015

This conference contributes to contemporary research on gender-relations and gendered configurations of change in Iraq. Scholarship focusing on gender issues concerning Iraq has developed as part of a feminist agenda of writing the marginalized stories of women into the historiography of Iraq, and of highlighting women's perspectives and their agency in contemporary developments even under conditions of occupation and violent conflict. Applying a gender studies perspective is twofold; apart from being a normative choice of scholars indebted to feminist, queer and subaltern studies, it is the result of pragmatic considerations regarding an effective research strategy that will render visible the ruptures as well as the continuities of modern and contemporary Iraqi history in various interconnected fields.

In order to adequately assess the changes of social relations and governmentalities triggered by the ruptures the country experienced since the early 20th century, our scholarship needs to move beyond more or less normative and teleological assumptions emphasizing either 'deterioration' or 'improvement'. Therefore, the conference is designed along the following lines:

- Taking into account the historicity of social relations, we seek to trace patterns of continuity and change since the 1920s and to discuss competing gender discourses and gendered practices in Iraqi society over time.
- Aware of the complexity of transformative processes as well as of gender-based injustice and violence, the conference focuses on the political, economic, legal as well as cultural dimensions of gender configurations in Iraqi society, on the multiple and transregional flows of knowledge and the moves of relevant translocal actors.
- Informed by practice theory we claim that an understanding of reconfigurations and their academic representation requires a strong focus on ways of perception, thought and action, as well as on self-reflexivity regarding our own academic practice of knowledge production and circulation.

The specificities of the Iraqi case and the interaction of these factors can best be understood by looking at the *longue durée* of modern Iraqi history in a (trans-) regional comparative framework, thus we seek to situate the study of Iraq within the broader context of comparative (trans-)area studies.

Organising Committee: Dr. Andrea Fischer-Tahir, Dr. Achim Rohde, Hanna AlTaher, Nadim Natour



International Conference - “Spectres of Justice: The Aesthetics of Dealing with Violent Pasts”. 28.05.2015 - 30.05.2015

In the ever broadening field of transitional justice studies, the arts have received scant attention. Yet, it is frequently artists, authors and intellectuals who are to be found at the forefront of civil society efforts to come to terms with a troubled past. Be it in Serbia, Lebanon, Cambodia, Argentina or South Africa, literature, film, theatre, visual arts, music and popular culture are deeply marked by the violent conflicts of the past and the present. While individual pieces of work have been the subject of academic inquiry in a number of disciplines, the relations of cultural production to processes of transitional justice have hardly been explored.

On the one hand, artists, authors and filmmakers intervene in political debates on the past by creating spaces of potentiality and ambiguity which contrast with the judicial and documentary aspects of transitional justice and their focus on establishing consensual truths. On the other hand, narrative conventions and aesthetic forms shape the discourse of transitional justice and human rights as well as the implementation of specific instruments such as truth commissions or tribunals. By examining transitional justice as a cultural form and enquiring into the role of art and literature in phases of socio-political transition, this conference seeks to elucidate the interconnections and exchanges between these two spheres.

The conference aims to investigate specific cultural products and situate them in their respective social and historical context. It will consider how notions of truth, justice, reconciliation and memory are constructed in works of art and literature, by the authors and artists, and in the reception of these works and artists in the media. Finally it will explore how this wider discourse on and practice of transitional justice is in turn shaped by cultural production.

Organising Committee: Dr. Jamal Bahmad, Prof. Dr. Thorsten Bonacker (Sociology), Prof. Dr. Susanne Buckley-Zistel (Peace and Conflict Studies), Prof. Dr. Malte Hagener (Film and Media Studies), Felix Lang, Prof. Dr. Anika Oettler, Prof. Dr. Rachid Ouaisa (Politics), Prof. Dr. Friederike Pannewick (Arabic Literature and Culture), Dr. des. Dominik Pfeiffer, Dr. Achim Rohde, Mariam Salehi, Alena Strohmaier.

International Yemen Film & Arts Festival in Germany – 02.06.2015

The *Yemeni Spring* in 2011 provoked an enormous artistic and intellectual power. Revolutionary film productions brought pictures of the Yemeni protests to a broader public. The International Yemeni Film & Arts Festival is the cornerstone of the Yemen Peace Project's Artistic Outreach program. The inaugural Festival was held in 2014, with events in seven cities (Sana'a, Aden, Los Angeles, New York, Washington, Berkeley and London). These included screenings of films, exhibitions of photographs, and discussions with featured artists and filmmakers. The Festival is now in Germany!

The YPP uses art to further the mission of increasing understanding of Yemen in the wider world and wants to bring the work of Yemeni artists to the US and other countries to provide people around the world a window into Yemeni society and culture. Since March 2015, Yemen is at war. That is why we give the audience the possibility to discuss the up-to-date situation in Yemen in a panel discussion with German Yemen researchers and Yemenis after the last film screening.

We would be pleased about donations for the up-coming International Yemeni Film & Arts Festival in 2016.

The festival will be held on 02 June 2015 at the Capitol Marburg, Biegenstraße 8, 35037 Marburg.

Contact person: Anne-Linda Amira Augustin a.augustin@uni-marburg.de

The full program of the festival is available at the website of the German-Yemeni Society:

<http://www.djg-ev.de/de/aktuelles/djg-news/international-yemeni-film-arts-festival.html>

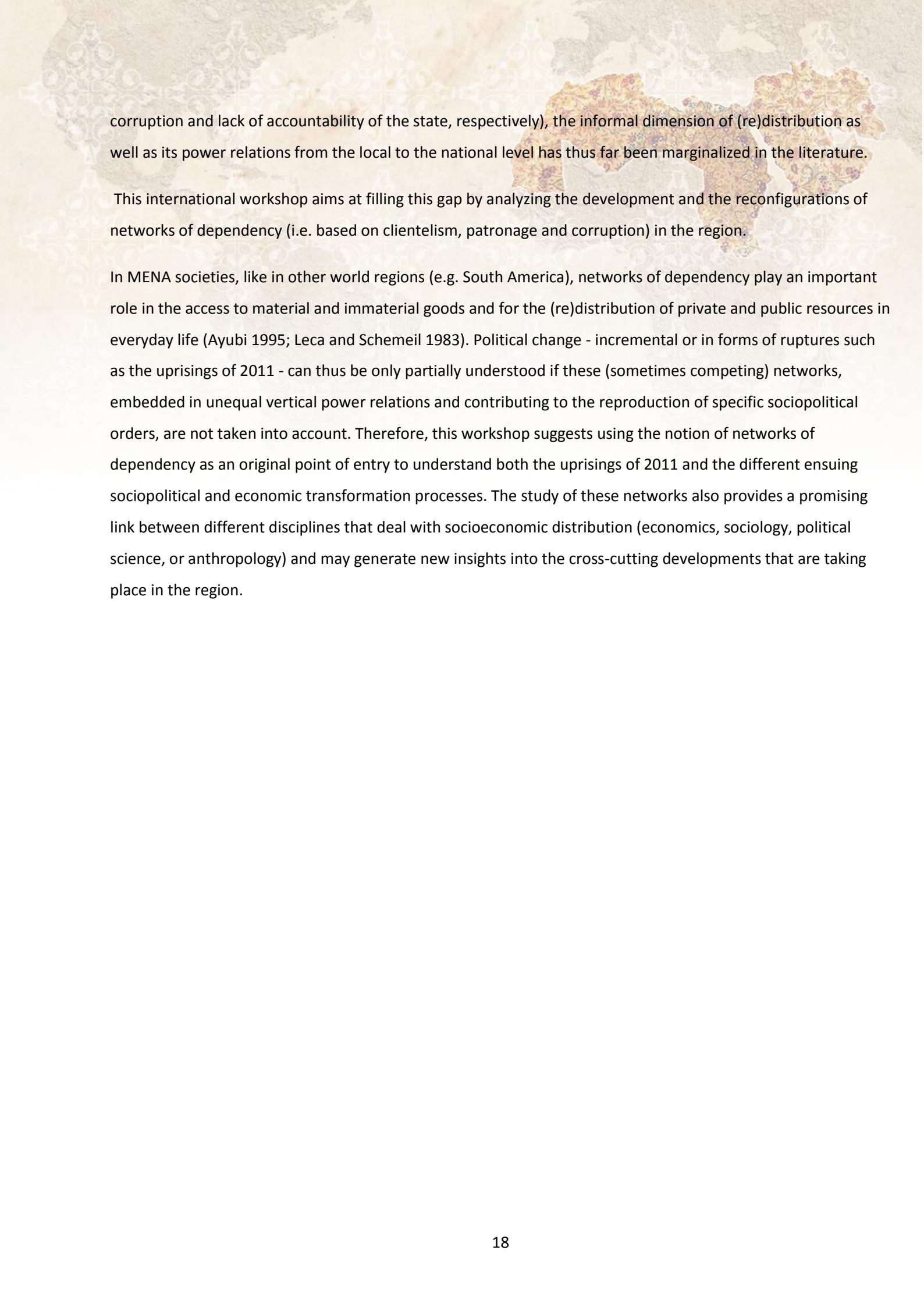
See also: <http://www.fuk-fachschaft.de/>

International Workshop - Networks of Dependency - "Re-configurations of clientelism, patronage, and corruption in the Middle East and North Africa".

21.07.2015 - 22.07.2015

Organized by Mohammad Reza Farzanegan, Laura Ruiz de Elvira, Christoph Schwarz and Irene Weipert-Fenner

In all the uprisings that took place in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region in 2011, one common demand was the call for freedom, dignity, and social justice. Citizens saw in the actions of the rulers an explicit violation of tacit political and socioeconomic norms, and thereby of the old social pacts that had been concluded in the 1950s and 1960s (Harders 2003; Hibou 2001; Zorob 2013). Yet we know little about the specific norms and social orders that people in the streets actually called for in 2011. Whereas most of the attention has previously been attributed to formal institutions and their procedural norms (and to their violations: widespread



corruption and lack of accountability of the state, respectively), the informal dimension of (re)distribution as well as its power relations from the local to the national level has thus far been marginalized in the literature.

This international workshop aims at filling this gap by analyzing the development and the reconfigurations of networks of dependency (i.e. based on clientelism, patronage and corruption) in the region.

In MENA societies, like in other world regions (e.g. South America), networks of dependency play an important role in the access to material and immaterial goods and for the (re)distribution of private and public resources in everyday life (Ayubi 1995; Leca and Schemel 1983). Political change - incremental or in forms of ruptures such as the uprisings of 2011 - can thus be only partially understood if these (sometimes competing) networks, embedded in unequal vertical power relations and contributing to the reproduction of specific sociopolitical orders, are not taken into account. Therefore, this workshop suggests using the notion of networks of dependency as an original point of entry to understand both the uprisings of 2011 and the different ensuing sociopolitical and economic transformation processes. The study of these networks also provides a promising link between different disciplines that deal with socioeconomic distribution (economics, sociology, political science, or anthropology) and may generate new insights into the cross-cutting developments that are taking place in the region.

