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# research network configurations

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

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## NEWSLETTER

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## **Imprint**

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**Photo:** A self-defense class in Orman Garden (Cairo, November 2012) © Perrine LACHENAL

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## Foreword



Dear Colleagues,

as the world is being plunged into another reckless and futile round of the 'global war on terror', this time trumpeted by French President Francois Hollande after the despicable and bloody jihadist attacks in Paris, we are watching in increasing desperation the 'bitter harvest' of what started in 2011 as a sparkling ray of light in a region that had long been regarded as somehow immune to any kind of change, let alone ready to introduce inclusive and democratic forms of government. Let's never forget that the Arab uprisings set out with precisely such an agenda, demanding civil liberties, representative and accountable forms of government, and an end to austerity policies implemented in the region under pressure from international donors. But the hopes of 2011 have since been literally drowned in blood, and most countries directly affected by the Arab Spring or similar developments have either seen a counter revolution of the old deep state networks of power (Egypt), have set up or maintained revamped versions of authoritarianism (Turkey, Iran), have imploded into civil war combined with regional war among various domestic factions allied to competing regional players (Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Libya), or are struggling to maintain a peaceful process of transforming the political system against the black riders of the apocalypse that roam the region to prevent precisely what would be the only real threat to their ascend to power, and that is fulfilling the promise of 2011 (Tunisia).

The research network Re-Configurations has been affected by these ongoing developments, as an increasing number of countries we study are about to become off limits for scholars from western academia. But we stay focused on ongoing transformations in the region that are more profound than any change of government, however fragmented and often hidden from the eyes of superficial observers and instant experts they might be. Thus, Re-Configurations has recently held a conference



on “Security Provision in West Asia and North Africa in Times of Social and Political Change”, which focussed on the contraction of states in the MENA region (and beyond) and the resulting rise to prominence of non-state players, which often take up functions considered to fall in the heart of what a state should provide, namely: protection of its citizens from existential harm. These developments have had ambivalent effects and include a wide range of very different and often contradictory players, from militias and organized crime networks to neighbourhood guards and women self-defence groups (see report on p. 12-13).

Re-Configurations has witnessed considerable fluctuation among its team members, as some of our colleagues moved to other countries to continue their career, to be replaced by newly incoming and equally qualified colleagues whom we warmly welcome in Marburg (see p. 5-7)! We are also very happy to be able to welcome visiting scholars in our ranks, our work greatly benefits from their input and comments (see p.7-8)! As Re-Configurations is entering the final round of its first funding period and we’re preparing for the evaluation and proposal for an extension of the project until 2019, we are looking forward to working together in the framework of upcoming network activities in 2016, chiefly but not solely the summer academy “Re-Configuring the (Non-) Political. Performing and Narrating Change and Continuity”, to be held in Tunis in cooperation with German and Tunisian partners next September. Applications can be submitted by 29 February 2016. See call for applications under the following link:

<http://www.uni-marburg.de/cnms/forschung/re-konfigurationen/aktuelles/news/cfp-summeracademy-2016>

With best wishes for all,

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

## I. News from the team

In 2015, the Re-Configurations Network has made a number of personnel changes. We would like to take this opportunity to express our deepest gratitude to the former team members for their meaningful and lasting contributions! *These individuals were integral to the foundation and development of the Network.*

Dr. Irene Weipert-Fenner, a research fellow at the Network since September 2013, left her position at the end of August 2015. She is currently a co-director of the project “Socioeconomic Protests and Political Transformation: Dynamics of Contentious Politics in Egypt and Tunisia against the Background of South American Experiences”. The Pease Research Institute Frankfurt (PRIF) project is funded by the Volkswagen Foundation (in cooperation with the Arab Forum for Alternatives (AFA) in Egypt and the University of Sfax in Tunisia).

Dr. Laura Ruiz de Elvira Carrascal joined the team in September 2013 and contributed to its work for two years. She is currently a postdoctoral researcher at the L'Institut de recherches et d'études sur le monde arabe et musulman (IREMAM - <http://iremam.cnrs.fr/>) working with the ERC / CNRS Project WAFAW (<http://www.wafaw.org/>).

Dr. Irene Weipert-Fenner and Dr. Laura Ruiz de Elvira Carrascal will be retained as associated scholars of the Re-configurations Network, herewith joining Dr. Natalia Ribas-Mateos which held her visiting fellowship from June to December 2014.

We would also like to take this opportunity to welcome our new research fellows, academic and student assistants!

### **Academic assistants:**

- Sihem Hamlaoui - Ph.D. Student, Philipps-Universität Marburg
- Andre Weissenfels - M.A. in “Critical & Creative Analysis”, Goldsmiths College, London University

### **Student assistants:**

- Verena Gartner - M.Sc. Student, Economics of the Middle East, Philipps-Universität Marburg/Lebanese American University
- Jan Gundersen - M.A. Student, Middle Eastern Studies, Philipps-Universität Marburg



## Research fellows:

### Dr. Steffen Wippel

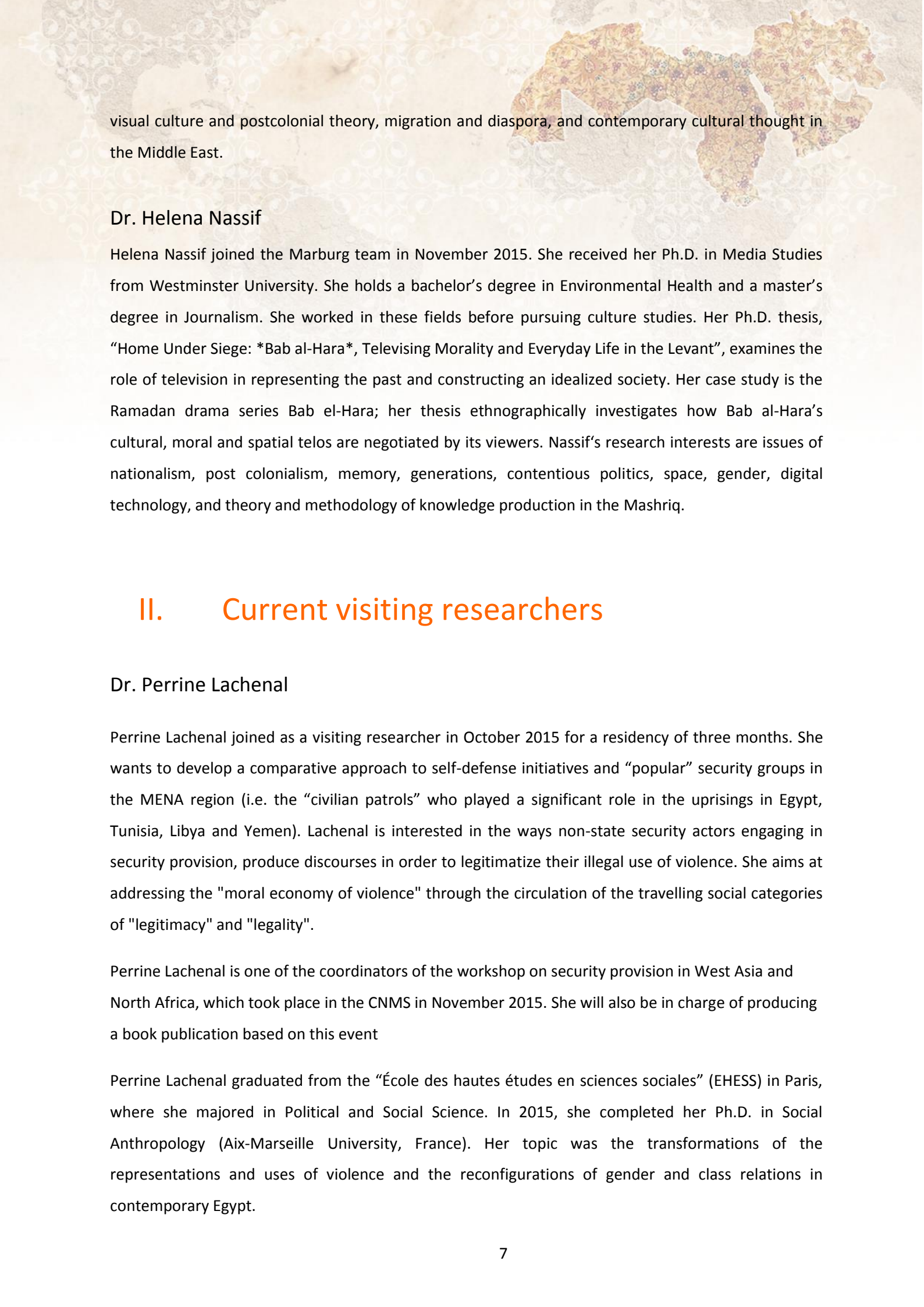
In late September 2015, Steffen Wippel joined the Research Network “Re-Configurations” as a postdoctoral research fellow. Dr. Wippel majored in Economics and Islamic Studies at the University of Freiburg and the University of Aix-en-Provence. He holds a Ph.D. from the Freie Universität Berlin and obtained his Dr. habil. at Erlangen University (where he has been an Associate Professor of Economics since 2010). In 2010, he was also a visiting professor for Economy and Social Geography of the Middle East in the Institute of Oriental Studies at the University of Leipzig. In addition, Dr. Wippel has worked at the Zentrum Moderner Orient (ZMO) in Berlin for more than ten years. In 2014 and 2015, he was at the University of Southern Denmark (Odense), where he taught Middle East Studies in the Centre for Contemporary Middle East Studies. His research interests are (trans-)regional interconnections of urban development in North Africa and the Gulf region. Steffen is a (co-)editor of several publications, a collection of working papers, and a book series on Middle Eastern economics. His recent publications include *Under Construction: Logics of Urbanism in the Gulf Region* (ed., with K. Bromber, C. Steiner and Birgit Krawietz, Ashgate 2014), *Regionalizing Oman: Political, Economic and Social Dynamics* (ed., Springer 2013), and *Wirtschaft, Politik und Raum: Territoriale und regionale Prozesse in der westlichen Sahara* (Hans Schiler 2012).

At the Philipps-Universität Marburg, he will work in the field of trans-regional interdependencies and entanglements: his research project is entitled “Tangier (Morocco) as a hub in transregional interconnections: Economic and urban transformation in entangled spatial perspectives”.

### Dr. Ihab Saloul

Dr. Ihab Saloul joined the Network in November 2015; he is an Assistant Professor of Cultural Studies and the Academic Coordinator of Heritage and Memory Studies at the University of Amsterdam. Furthermore, Dr. Saloul is a NIAS Fellow at the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study (2014/2015) and a Visiting Professor of Culture and Politics at the Freie Universität Berlin. He was a EUME-fellow at the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin and previously taught comparative literature, cultural analysis, and media studies at Maastricht University.

Dr. Saloul is a book series editor of 'Palgrave Studies of Cultural Heritage and Conflict' (Palgrave US) and 'Heritage and Memory Studies' (Amsterdam University Press- AUP). His interests include heritage and memory studies, conflict and identity politics in globalization, literary theory and cultural analysis,



visual culture and postcolonial theory, migration and diaspora, and contemporary cultural thought in the Middle East.

### Dr. Helena Nassif

Helena Nassif joined the Marburg team in November 2015. She received her Ph.D. in Media Studies from Westminster University. She holds a bachelor's degree in Environmental Health and a master's degree in Journalism. She worked in these fields before pursuing culture studies. Her Ph.D. thesis, "Home Under Siege: \*Bab al-Hara\*, Televising Morality and Everyday Life in the Levant", examines the role of television in representing the past and constructing an idealized society. Her case study is the Ramadan drama series Bab el-Hara; her thesis ethnographically investigates how Bab al-Hara's cultural, moral and spatial telos are negotiated by its viewers. Nassif's research interests are issues of nationalism, post colonialism, memory, generations, contentious politics, space, gender, digital technology, and theory and methodology of knowledge production in the Mashriq.

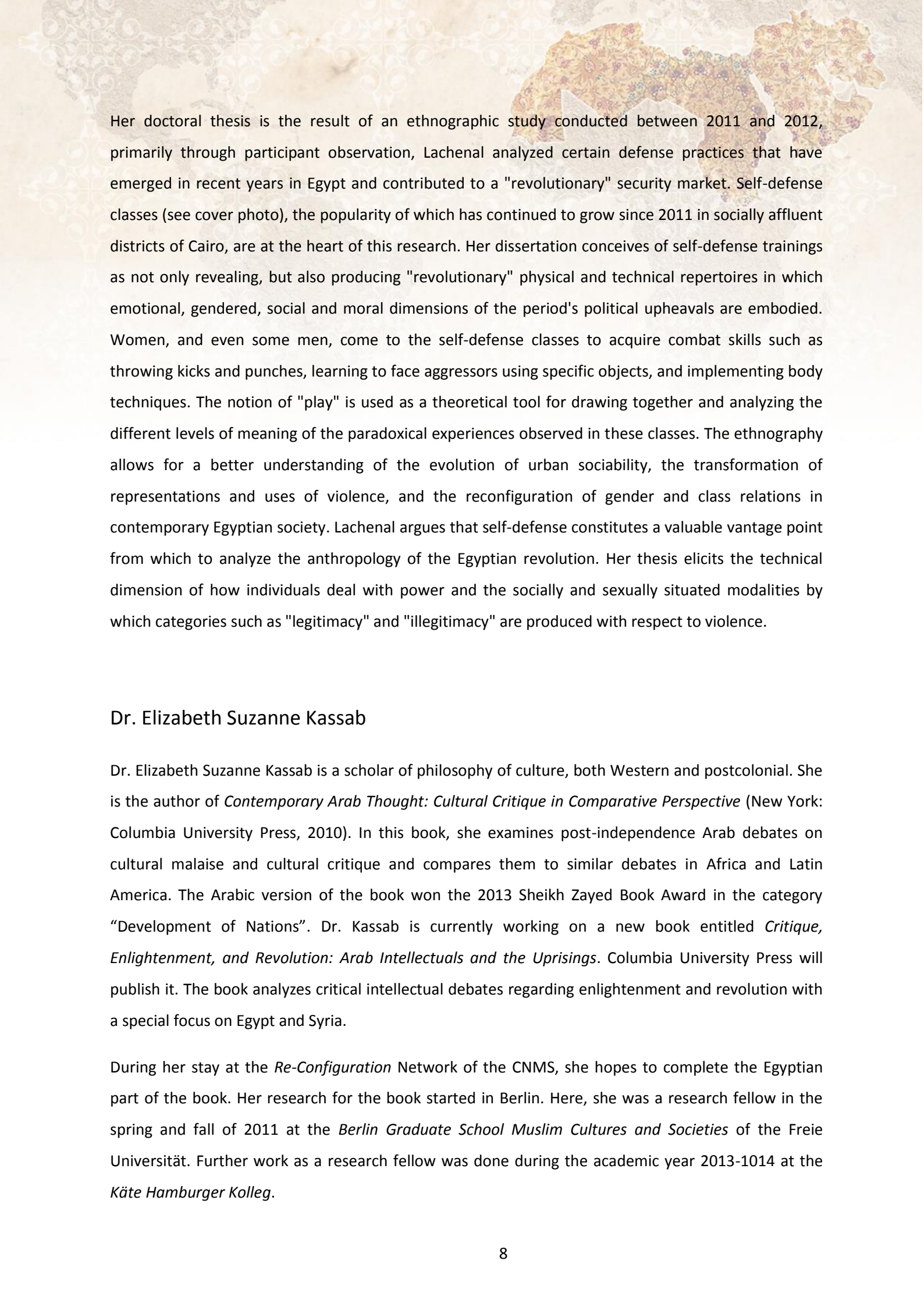
## II. Current visiting researchers

### Dr. Perrine Lachenal

Perrine Lachenal joined as a visiting researcher in October 2015 for a residency of three months. She wants to develop a comparative approach to self-defense initiatives and "popular" security groups in the MENA region (i.e. the "civilian patrols" who played a significant role in the uprisings in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and Yemen). Lachenal is interested in the ways non-state security actors engaging in security provision, produce discourses in order to legitimize their illegal use of violence. She aims at addressing the "moral economy of violence" through the circulation of the travelling social categories of "legitimacy" and "legality".

Perrine Lachenal is one of the coordinators of the workshop on security provision in West Asia and North Africa, which took place in the CNMS in November 2015. She will also be in charge of producing a book publication based on this event

Perrine Lachenal graduated from the "École des hautes études en sciences sociales" (EHESS) in Paris, where she majored in Political and Social Science. In 2015, she completed her Ph.D. in Social Anthropology (Aix-Marseille University, France). Her topic was the transformations of the representations and uses of violence and the reconfigurations of gender and class relations in contemporary Egypt.



Her doctoral thesis is the result of an ethnographic study conducted between 2011 and 2012, primarily through participant observation, Lachenal analyzed certain defense practices that have emerged in recent years in Egypt and contributed to a "revolutionary" security market. Self-defense classes (see cover photo), the popularity of which has continued to grow since 2011 in socially affluent districts of Cairo, are at the heart of this research. Her dissertation conceives of self-defense trainings as not only revealing, but also producing "revolutionary" physical and technical repertoires in which emotional, gendered, social and moral dimensions of the period's political upheavals are embodied. Women, and even some men, come to the self-defense classes to acquire combat skills such as throwing kicks and punches, learning to face aggressors using specific objects, and implementing body techniques. The notion of "play" is used as a theoretical tool for drawing together and analyzing the different levels of meaning of the paradoxical experiences observed in these classes. The ethnography allows for a better understanding of the evolution of urban sociability, the transformation of representations and uses of violence, and the reconfiguration of gender and class relations in contemporary Egyptian society. Lachenal argues that self-defense constitutes a valuable vantage point from which to analyze the anthropology of the Egyptian revolution. Her thesis elicits the technical dimension of how individuals deal with power and the socially and sexually situated modalities by which categories such as "legitimacy" and "illegitimacy" are produced with respect to violence.

## Dr. Elizabeth Suzanne Kassab

Dr. Elizabeth Suzanne Kassab is a scholar of philosophy of culture, both Western and postcolonial. She is the author of *Contemporary Arab Thought: Cultural Critique in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010). In this book, she examines post-independence Arab debates on cultural malaise and cultural critique and compares them to similar debates in Africa and Latin America. The Arabic version of the book won the 2013 Sheikh Zayed Book Award in the category "Development of Nations". Dr. Kassab is currently working on a new book entitled *Critique, Enlightenment, and Revolution: Arab Intellectuals and the Uprisings*. Columbia University Press will publish it. The book analyzes critical intellectual debates regarding enlightenment and revolution with a special focus on Egypt and Syria.

During her stay at the *Re-Configuration* Network of the CNMS, she hopes to complete the Egyptian part of the book. Her research for the book started in Berlin. Here, she was a research fellow in the spring and fall of 2011 at the *Berlin Graduate School Muslim Cultures and Societies* of the Freie Universität. Further work as a research fellow was done during the academic year 2013-1014 at the *Käte Hamburger Kolleg*.



### III. Reports on recent activities

#### **"Islamists in the Regional Transformation Process: Dialogue and Documentation" - work progress in 2015: launch of a website and "MENA direkt"**

The team of the transformation partnership project III: "Islamists in the Regional Transformation Process: Dialogue and Documentation" is delighted to inform you about its current work progress, especially regarding the new publication series "MENA direkt" and the launch of the project's associated website.



**Prof. Dr. Rachid Ouaisa**

The project is conducted by Prof. Dr. Rachid Ouaisa, the Head of the Department of Politics of Near and Middle Eastern Studies at the Center for Near and Middle Eastern Studies (CNMS) Marburg at the Philipps-Universität Marburg, and by the team of researchers, which consists of Julius Dihstelhoff, Ivesa Lübben and Heidi Reichinnek.

Since 2012, this research group has been working on a science-based dialogue between decision makers of moderate Islamist parties from the MENA-Region and potential German partners (parliamentarians, experts and business representatives) in a funded cooperation with the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The aim of the project is to conduct transformation research using the example of selected actors of



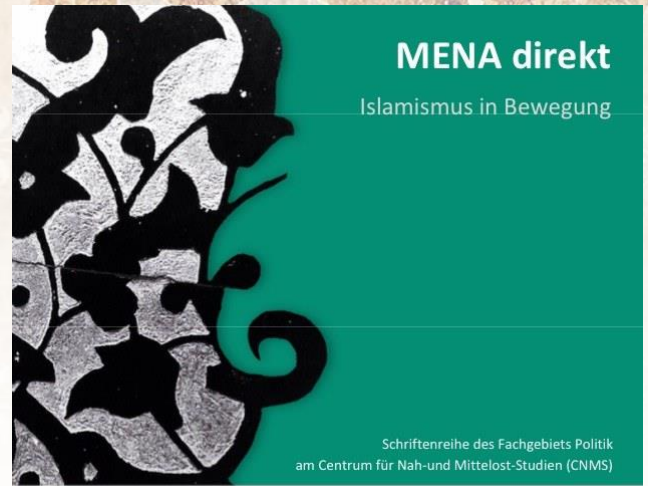
**Julius Dihstelhoff, Heidi Reichinnek, Ivesa Lübben**

Islamism in systemic transformation processes based on the determinants of politics, economy and social affairs. Further achievements are dialogue-forums including deputies of several Islamist parties in Berlin, deputy discussions in the German Bundestag,

expert gatherings at the Foreign Office,

as well as a national conference on Tunisia with representatives of the Islamist En-Nahda Party. Against this background, a relationship of trust between the team from Marburg and Islamists has been established, which has provided deep insights into the structures and ideologies of Islamist parties in the Middle East and North Africa.

The launch of our new publication series indicates a process-related documentation of single analyses linked to the transformation process in the MENA-Region. The corresponding publication series "Islamismus in Bewegung" can be seen as an output of the cooperation with the Foreign Office, referred to above, through fieldwork and scientific conferences. We cordially invite the wide public to familiarize themselves with the collected data via the project on our homepage. Furthermore, our website



serves as a platform for web links concerning Islamist movements and their parties, a list of links of more research institutes, think tanks, and political foundations, as well as more resources to assist you with your own future research. Moreover, the website offers a vast variety of political programmes from Islamist parties in the MENA-Region. Ten publications have been released in irregular intervals so far (status as of November 2015).


Access available through: <http://www.uni-marburg.de/cnms-islamismus>

We wish you a pleasant and informative reading and look forward to suggestions, praise or criticism.

**“Focus sur Tanger: Là où l’Afrique et l’Europe se rencontrent”,**  
Tangier (Morocco), 1-4 October 2015. A Conference Report by **Steffen Wippel**



Steffen Wippel started his new position as a senior research fellow in the “Re-Configurations” Network by organising the international conference “Focus sur Tanger: Là où l’Afrique et l’Europe se rencontrent”, which took place in Tangier from October 1 to 4, 2015. Co-organisers were Dieter Haller, professor for social anthropology at the Ruhr-Universität Bochum, and Helmut Reifeld and his team from the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, Rabat office. Thanks to the foundation’s generous funding, the event took place at the recently renovated Grand Hôtel Villa de France, which offered magnificent views of the highly symbolic medina crowned by its diverse houses of prayer and across the Strait of Gibraltar to its Spanish/European opposite shore.




Yet, in contrast to most research done, the conference did not want to rehash a glorious past and old mythology of bygone cosmopolitanism. Instead, it endeavoured to take a close and critical look at the considerable urban, socioeconomic and infrastructural transformations the city and its immediate hinterland are experiencing recently and the economic, social, cultural and political implications and consequences of these transformations. At the same time, the presentations took into consideration Tangier's historical and contemporary role as a passage, bridge and interface between different geographical, economic and cultural spaces. As such, Tangier was understood as a focus and arena for current changes, evolutions and problems affecting, and sometimes shaking, Morocco and the Mediterranean and Muslim worlds.

A main intention of the conference was to attract international attention to Tangier – especially in Germany, where many media and decision makers slept through the agglomeration's recent boom despite close historical links (in contrast to other nations' growing economic engagement with Tangier and the region) According to the multidirectional links and multiscalar embeddedness of the city, the conference was organised in four panels highlighting “Le Maroc à Tanger” and “Tanger au Maroc” respectively “Le monde à Tanger” and “Tanger dans le monde”, considering both contemporary economic and infrastructural engagement and cultural and historical perspectives. Presenters were mainly from Morocco, but about sixteen papers presented by Germans and French. An excursion and a projection by a prominent filmmaker completed the paper presentations.

Whereas the director of the urban planning agency presented current visions for developing Tangier into a Mediterranean metropolis, a local historian and engaged citizen defended Tangier's multiculturalism as an asset for the city's future. Having recent developments in mind, a geographer from Rabat asked whether Tangier could still be considered as the “island” unique from the rest of Morocco. Another engaged researcher critically presented the high-speed railway project that soon will link Tangier to Casablanca and the political protests it provoked. Based on the various new infrastructures, recently established or planned for the near future, a further paper analysed Tangier's role as a re-emerging hub in transnational and transregional transport and trade networks. In contrast, two other presentations turned to the backside of the current economic boom and showed how Tangier is affected and reconfigured by more or less formal flows (i.e. transcontinental migration between Africa and Europe, local and translocal networks of traditional trafficking, the cannabis economy and offshore activities).

Papers on Tangier as a spiritual space, which considered the continuous role of *ḡnūn* in social life, and on endeavours to bring modern arts performances into the city added stronger cultural perspectives to the conference. This was complemented by papers on Tangier's internal and external images and how they are mirrored, for instance, in German films and literature. A policy-oriented paper attacked





the purposeful production of images for urban marketing. Bringing up links with Germany again, two other presentations reconsidered its long historical presence up to WW II and its involvement in anti-French resistance in Northern Morocco during WW I.

With that, the conference has been rather successful in bringing together researchers from different disciplines and with complementing perspectives on various facets of Tangier's long-term and current developments and positions. Sufficient time for personal encounters offered the opportunity to discuss some topics in more detail as well as possibilities for future cooperation. The Konrad Adenauer Foundation will publish the conference papers whereas the two academic organisers will reflect on a more focused publication in the medium term.

### **International Conference - Reconfiguring Security Provision in West Asia and North Africa in times of Social and Political Change. 26-27 November 2015**

Amongst the various demands of the thousands of people who took to the streets in West Asia and North Africa since late 2010, one common theme has been an end of arbitrary police violence and corruption. Throughout the uprisings and in an attempt to contain the growing insecurity, people started policing in the absence of police. Prominent examples are the *liḡān ša'biya*, the popular committees, in Egypt and in a different shape and outreach in Yemen. Though considerably more militarized, popular committees in Syria – consisting of local residents in neighborhoods – have played a similar role before being coopted by the Assad regime. Yet even before the uprisings, non-state actors have policed territory in spaces of limited statehood, such as Hizballah in Lebanon, or the People's Protection Units in Syrian Kurdistan.

To this regard, the findings in a recent survey on popular security perception in Yemen (Soudias & Transfeld 2014)<sup>1</sup> are all the more curious. Although people in most of the country's governorates consider police work to be either ineffective or entirely absent, they seem to generally call for more police presence despite their often-bad experiences.

During this workshop, the participants discussed non-state security provision in West Asia and North Africa since 2011 in comparative perspective. The invited scholars (discussants) are ones who have observed similar occurrences in other regions. Through this, the workshop brought together scholarship in a transregional perspective in order to not only transfer knowledge, but to generate new and deepen existing conceptual tools for analyzing the phenomena in question. As a broad frame

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<sup>1</sup> Soudias, D., & Transfeld, M. (2014). Mapping Popular Perceptions: Local Security, Insecurity, and Police Work in Yemen Policy Report (Vol. 3). Sana'a: Yemen Polling Center.

of reference around which the workshop was structured, two theoretical notions which offer striking analytical insights.

Firstly, Hansen & Stepputat's (2001) notion of the "paradox of the state" explores how while people are demanding more rights, entitlements and institutions from the state, the state's authority is constantly questioned and functionally undermined.<sup>2</sup> They further argue this has to do with the persistence of the imagination of the state as an embodiment of sovereignty and legitimacy, as the sole source of order and stability. This myth persists in the face of everyday experiences of the often profoundly violent and ineffective practices of police or outright collapse of state institutions.

Secondly, within the nexus of legitimacy and legality of violence and security provision, the concept of 'securitization' (Balzacq 2005; Buzan et al 1998) offers valuable insights.<sup>3</sup> It is interesting to note that securitization moves and discourses are not only being practiced by state authorities, but also from below. Non-state security actors, in their effort to take up the roles of security provision, produce discourses of securitization in order to legitimate their policing efforts and use of violence despite their illegality. Simultaneously, practices of corruption, violent crime, and police abuse contribute to a situation in which local police forces undergo a process of delegitimization (Müller 2014).<sup>4</sup>



Photo: Anja Schmidt. Participants in the workshop

Organized by: Dimitris Soudias, Perrine Lachenal, Andrea Fischer-Tahir, Anne-Linda Amira Augustin, Thorsten Bonacker, Nadim Natour, Anja Schmidt, Mohammed Al Hayek, Hanna AlTaher

<sup>2</sup> Hansen, T. B., & Stepputat, F. (Eds.). (2001). *States of Imagination. Ethnographic Explorations of the Postcolonial State*. Durham: Duke University Press.

<sup>3</sup> Balzacq, H. (2005). The Three Facets of Securitization: Political Agency, Audience and Context. *European Journal of International Relations*, 11(2), 171-201; Buzan, B. Waeber, O., & de Wilde, J. (1998). *Security. A New Framework For Analysis*. London: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

<sup>4</sup> Müller, M.-M. (2012). Addressing an Ambivalent Relationship: Policing and the Urban Poor in Mexico City. *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 44(2), 319-345.



## IV. Upcoming activities

**Summer academy, *Reconfiguring the (non-) political. Performing and narrating change and continuity.* 28.08.2016 – 04.09.2016 in Tunis**

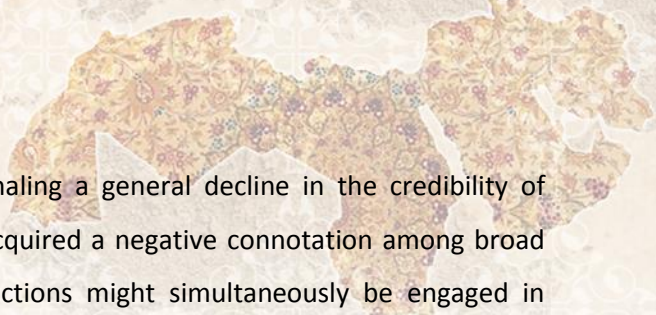
The Summer Academy is chaired by a group of scholars that includes *Michael Allan (University of Oregon), Laura Ruiz de Elvira (ERC AFAW/IREMAM), Andrea Fischer-Tahir, Malte Hagener, Felix Lang, Rachid Ouaisa, Friederike Pannewick, Achim Rohde, Christoph Schwarz, Steffen Wippel (all from Philipps-Universität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

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

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

As one of the defining features of recent developments, it has been noted that issues previously attributed to the private realm or to the cultural or social sphere (e.g. personal lifestyles, communal identities) are being politicized and thus become the focus of public controversy. At the same time, local and transnational ruling elites tend to transfer formerly highly politicized issues (e.g. economic and financial policies) increasingly to the realm of technocrats, masquerading them as objective realities akin to the laws of nature. Mirroring a disillusion with the established mechanics of political





institutions and governmental practice, as well as signaling a general decline in the credibility of political grand narratives, the very term 'politics' has acquired a negative connotation among broad sections of the population, even if precisely these sections might simultaneously be engaged in activities which, from an outsider's perspective, would be considered anything but unpolitical. Refusing to have one's own actions, thinking, or articulations labelled 'political' may be seen as a defensive technique in authoritarian conditions, a means to evade persecution. Last but not least, to disapprove of the label 'political' sometimes echoes transnational discourses, for instance concerning the 'neutrality' of humanitarian aid. This Summer Academy focuses on contemporary and historical discourses and practices. In adopting a more fluid and encompassing understanding of politics that goes beyond formal structures and traditional forms of political participation, we take a fresh look at how the '(non-) political' in society, media and the arts was and is performed, narrated, and represented. Starting with reflections on the post-2011 situation(s) in the MENA region, the Summer Academy aims to understand what 'new' components can be detected in contemporary developments that were not discernible in Middle Eastern societies and cultures since the early post-colonial period. We thereby aim to move beyond a binary understanding of current developments in the MENA region as either rupture or continuity by conceptualizing them as re-configurations of the political field, which take place in a contradictory and fragmented, yet profound manner.

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

**Various cultural and artistic practices**, from Hip Hop to literature or dance, helped shape the Arab uprisings. Cultural production and the arts have long been instrumentalized by ruling elites in the region for the purpose of transmitting a certain political ideology. However, the field of cultural production has always been more complex: normative discourses prescribed by ruling elites and the subjectivity of human agency. Along with poststructuralist, postcolonial and post-Marxist theory, we understand cultural practices not simply as functions of the existing order or as mere reflections of social change, but as integral components in the process of constructing our reality. The dynamics of the current processes of change pose a challenge to established concepts and research paradigms. Whereas the Arab uprisings challenge established patterns of analyzing state-society relations, technological revolution and the emergence of post-national spaces have radically altered modes of

human action. Therefore, the Summer Academy encourages conceptual debates and seeks to discuss the structuring and re-structuring of knowledge production on a local, regional, and global scale

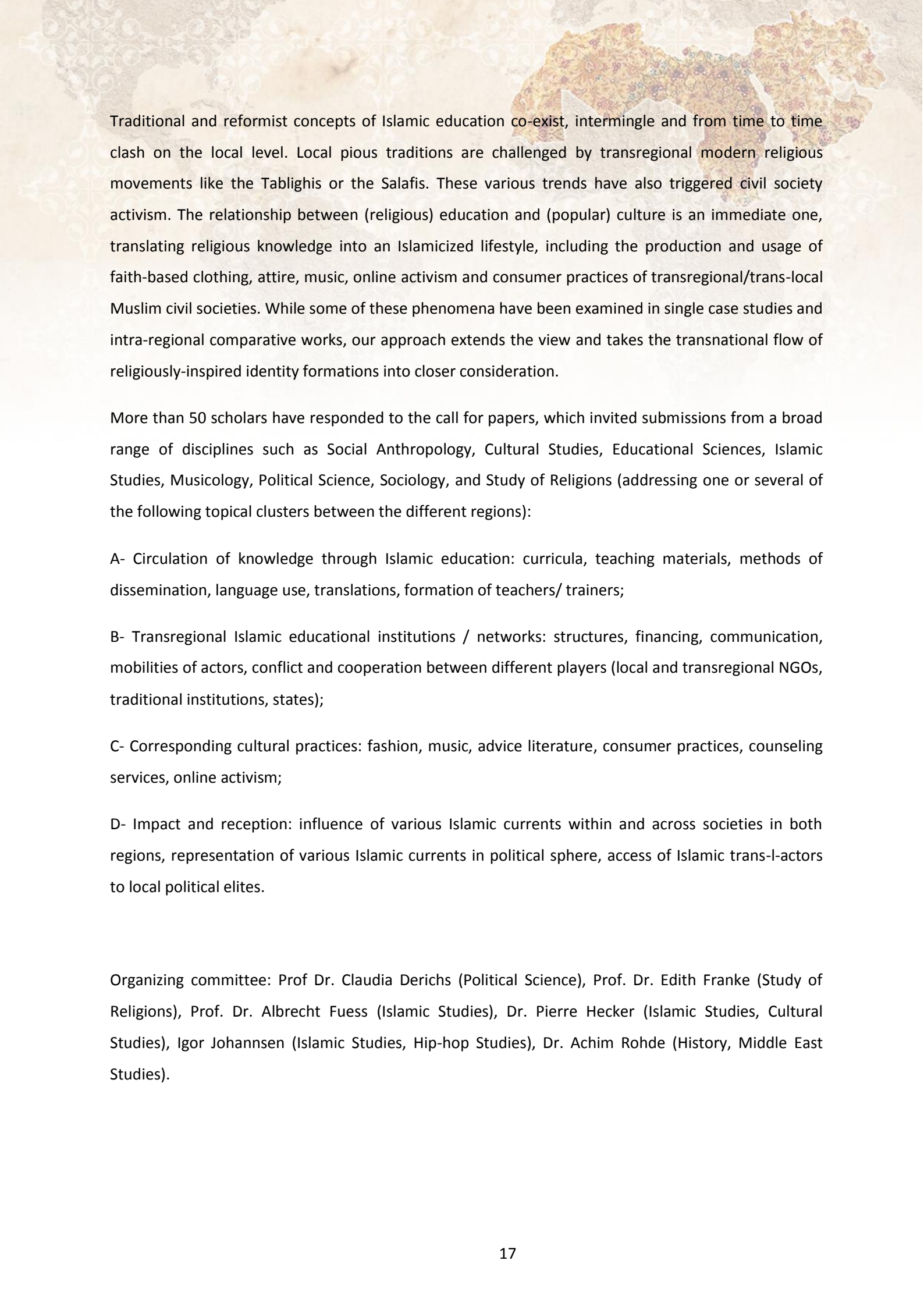
The Summer Academy is organized by: *The research units “Re-Configuration” and “Figures of Thought / Turning Points. Cultural Practices and Social Change in the Arab World”*, both based at Philipps-Universität Marburg’s *Center for Near and Middle East Studies*, in cooperation with Université de la Manouba (UMA) and l’Institut de Recherche sur le Maghreb Contemporain (IRMC), both based in Tunis, and Europe in the Middle East – The Middle East in Europe (EUME), a research program at the Berlin-based Forum Transregionale Studien.



### **International Conference: *Trans-I Encounters: Religious Education and Islamic Popular Culture in Asia and the Middle East.* May 26-28, 2016**

Contact between Asia and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), mostly through merchants and missionaries, dates back to the early days of Islam. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, connectivity based on shared religious beliefs between Southeast Asia, Central Asia, and the MENA intensified. Participation in the annual pilgrimage to Mecca from Asian countries has soared and tourism is growing along historical south-south routes. In Southeast Asia, transregional economic ties (e.g. in the field of Islamic banking, the insurance sector and pilgrimage logistics) have grown stronger. In Central Asia, religious educational networks have been established by graduates of universities in MENA countries. Informal educational practices like Islamic counselling services and advice literature are spreading across both regions, partly through trans-I-networks. Unlike relations between Asia and Europe, these ties are not burdened by a legacy of colonialism.

This conference therefore aims to take a closer look at the transregional and trans-local –abbreviated here as ‘trans-I’ –developments in Asia and the MENA, specifically focusing on the interrelated phenomena of religious education and Islamic popular culture. Interaction in both sectors is growing due to technological progress, which facilitates mobility and communication. Partly reflecting the appeal of the epistemological project of an Islamization of knowledge, attendance of institutions of religious education (including higher education) in Asia has greatly increased in recent years.



Traditional and reformist concepts of Islamic education co-exist, intermingle and from time to time clash on the local level. Local pious traditions are challenged by transregional modern religious movements like the Tablighis or the Salafis. These various trends have also triggered civil society activism. The relationship between (religious) education and (popular) culture is an immediate one, translating religious knowledge into an Islamicized lifestyle, including the production and usage of faith-based clothing, attire, music, online activism and consumer practices of transregional/trans-local Muslim civil societies. While some of these phenomena have been examined in single case studies and intra-regional comparative works, our approach extends the view and takes the transnational flow of religiously-inspired identity formations into closer consideration.

More than 50 scholars have responded to the call for papers, which invited submissions from a broad range of disciplines such as Social Anthropology, Cultural Studies, Educational Sciences, Islamic Studies, Musicology, Political Science, Sociology, and Study of Religions (addressing one or several of the following topical clusters between the different regions):

A- Circulation of knowledge through Islamic education: curricula, teaching materials, methods of dissemination, language use, translations, formation of teachers/ trainers;

B- Transregional Islamic educational institutions / networks: structures, financing, communication, mobilities of actors, conflict and cooperation between different players (local and transregional NGOs, traditional institutions, states);

C- Corresponding cultural practices: fashion, music, advice literature, consumer practices, counseling services, online activism;

D- Impact and reception: influence of various Islamic currents within and across societies in both regions, representation of various Islamic currents in political sphere, access of Islamic trans-l-actors to local political elites.

Organizing committee: Prof Dr. Claudia Derichs (Political Science), Prof. Dr. Edith Franke (Study of Religions), Prof. Dr. Albrecht Fuess (Islamic Studies), Dr. Pierre Hecker (Islamic Studies, Cultural Studies), Igor Johannsen (Islamic Studies, Hip-hop Studies), Dr. Achim Rohde (History, Middle East Studies).



## V. META Releases

### Middle East –Topics / Arguments (META)

The peer-reviewed online journal “Middle East – Topics & Arguments” (META) has released its fourth and fifth issue. The fourth issue focusing on **Area Studies**, issued in spring 2015, was edited by Achim Rohde and Ines Braune. The fifth issue of the journal was edited by Andrea Fischer-Tahir and Dimitris Soudias, focuses on **Periphery**, with case studies from Iraqi Kurdistan, Tunisia, Algeria, Jordan, and Southern Yemen.

META's sixth issue focusing on **The Rebel** will appear in Spring 2016.



**Middle East – Topics & Arguments**

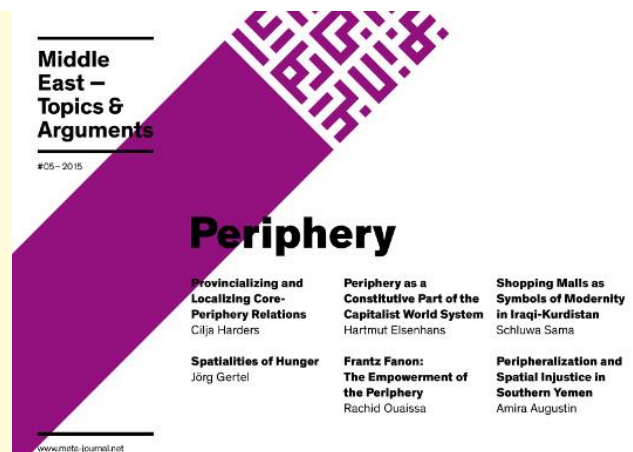
**Release #4  
AREA STUDIES**

Di, 26. Mai 2015, 18.15 – 19.45 Uhr  
Centrum für Nah- und Mittelost-Studien  
Hörsaal, Deutschhausstr. 12

**Podiumsdiskussion:**  
„Liquid Disciplinarity? Nah- und Mitteloststudien in Zeiten der Globalisierung“

**Mit:**  
Birgit Schäbler (Uni Erfurt), Hans-Georg Ebert (Uni Leipzig),  
Anna-Katharina Hornidge (Uni Bremen)

Philipp Universität Marburg  
www.meta-journal.net



**Middle East – Topics & Arguments**

#05 – 2015

**Periphery**

**Provincializing and Localizing Core-Periphery Relations**  
Cilja Harders

**Spatialities of Hunger**  
Jörg Gertel

**Periphery as a Constitutive Part of the Capitalist World System**  
Hartmut Eisenhans

**Frantz Fanon: The Empowerment of the Periphery**  
Rachid Ouassia

**Shopping Malls as Symbols of Modernity in Iraqi-Kurdistan**  
Schluwa Sama

**Peripheralization and Spatial Injustice in Southern Yemen**  
Amira Augustin

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