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research network configurations

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

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Imprint

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Photo: Soqotra, Yemen (2008), served as a poster for The International Yemeni Film & Arts Festival
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Foreword

Dear Colleagues,

The research network Re-Configurations has entered its 4th year of funding and the project is currently under review. A decision regarding our proposal submitted to the donor (BMBF) for an extension by another 2 years will be taken soon.

While the individual research projects pursued by members of the team, in particular the doctoral dissertations, are entering their final phase, the network's activities during the past few months have continued apace. They reflect the interdisciplinary character and multi-perspectivity of approaches pursued in the framework of our research network on the ongoing transformations in the MENA region (see p. 7-12). For more details, please consult our website: <http://www.uni-marburg.de/cnms/forschung/re-konfigurationen>.

Results of ongoing research projects and volumes based on conferences conducted as part of the network's activities are increasingly being published or nearing publication (see p. 20-22). Members of the project team are acting as editors for upcoming issues of the open access online journal META (Middle East – Topics & Arguments), published by Philipps University Marburg's Center for Near and Middle East Studies: META No 6 (to be published autumn 2016) is dedicated to the topic of 'culture'; META No 7 (to be published spring 2017) is dedicated to the topic of 'iconography'. For details, see <http://meta-journal.net/>.



A high point in the network's activities during this last year of our first funding period will be the upcoming international summer academy 'Re-Configuring the (Non-)Political. Performing and Narrating Change and Continuity' that takes place in Tunis from 28 August to 4 September, jointly conducted with partners in Germany (the DFG funded research group 'Figures of Thought | Turning Points. Cultural Practices and Social Change in the Arab World', located in Marburg University's Center for Near and Middle East Studies, and the research program 'Europe in the Middle East – The Middle East in Europe', located at the Berlin-based Forum Transregionale Studien) and Tunisia (l'Université de la Manouba and l'Institut de Recherche sur le Maghreb Contemporain, both located in Tunis). This summer academy will assemble a distinguished group of 32 young scholars (doctoral candidates and postdocs), who will advance their individual research projects on aspects of the ongoing transformations in the MENA region by exchanging thoughts and discussing ideas with their peers and senior scholars from the convening institutions acting as tutors. For details, see <http://academies.hypotheses.org/category/reconfiguring-the-non-political>.

With best wishes for all,

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

I. News from the team

In 2016, the Re-Configurations Network has made a few personnel changes. First off, we would like to express our gratitude and appreciation for the tireless work put in by the student assistants Anastasia Stratschka and Anja Schmidt, as well as by the academic assistant Felix Wiedemann, all of whom left the Network during the last few months. Anastasia, Anja and Felix played an integral part in supporting the team in any way they could and we wish them the very best in their future endeavors.

Secondly, we are excited to welcome a new student assistant. Maria Neubert joined the Network in January and she continues to play an active role for the team. And finally, we are happy to announce that Dr. Perrine Lachenal (former visiting researcher) will be staying with the team on a more permanent basis as a research fellow. Her recent work analyzed certain defence practices that have emerged in recent years in Egypt and contributed to a “revolutionary” security market. Her research will continue to be supported by the Network. We thank past team members for their hard work and are excited to continue the Network’s work following staff changes.

II. Current visiting scholars

Dr. Aysa Cavdar

Ayşe Çavdar graduated with a doctoral degree in cultural anthropology from the European University of Viadrina; her dissertation was entitled "the Loss of Modesty: The Adventure of Muslim Family from Neighborhood to Gated Community". She is currently working as a researcher and field reporter for the "Human Security" project run by Citizens Assembly in Turkey and Western Balkans.

In the frame of this project, she participates in field research mainly focusing on two topics: "Violence in white collar working environment" and "Community displacement". She spent two months at the ZMO in Berlin as a visiting fellow in 2015. Her academic interests include urban and religious studies with a particular focus on middle-class living spaces and religiosity. She gave courses at several Turkish universities on journalism, writing, and research methodologies. Prior to her academic career, she worked as a journalist covering political and social issues. She co-edited two books: with Volkan Aytar, *Media and Security Sector Oversight, Limits and*

Possibilities, TESEV, 2009; with Pelin Tan, The State of Exception in an Exceptional City, Sel Yayinlari, 2013.

In 2010, her interview with sociologist Nilufer Gole was published as a book by Hayy Kitap. In 2011, she edited the Neo-Islamism issue of Express magazine. During her fellowship with Reconfigurations (June-July 2016), she will work on a research project analyzing how the legal ambiguities related to the built environment reflect on the citizen's relationship with the social and physical landscape of the city.

Dr. Hania Sobhy

Hania completed her PhD in Politics at SOAS, University of London and her BA and MA in Economics and Political Science at McGill University in Montreal. She has taught Middle East Politics, International Relations, International Politics of Economic Relations and Comparative Politics at SOAS, Exeter and McGill. Her research interests include nationalism, citizenship and the governance of social services in the Arab region, especially in relation to the education sector. She has worked on aspects of Islamist and post-Islamist discourses. She has also worked in education and development policy, research and project evaluation since 2004.

During her residency in Marburg, Hania Sobhy will be completing her book manuscript: Schooling the Nation from Mubarak to Sisi. Before moving to Marburg, she held a Postdoctoral Fellowship at the Institut de Recherches et d'études sur le Monde Arabe et Musulman (IREMAM) in Aix-en-Provence. She was previously based at the Orient Institute of the Max Weber Foundation, where she was writing up her updated research on pro-'Revolution' electoral mobilization in Egypt since 2012, initiated during her fellowship with the EUME program and Freie Universität in Berlin.

III. Reports on recent activities

The International Yemeni Film & Arts Festival 2016, April 26-27, 2016

Following last years' success, the second edition of The International Yemeni Film & Arts Festival kicked off with Dr. Gabriele vom Bruck's (SOAS, London) lecture "Genealogies of violence in northern Yemen: Aborted revolution, struggles for dominance, sectarian fault lines". The program included a special exhibition by students of the Peace & Conflict Studies program at Marburg University entitled "Stories from Yemen". Five movies were screened during the festival featuring *The Mulberry House*, Sara Ishaq, 2013, 65 Min running time; *Rise*, Mohamed Samy, 2015, 15 Min running time; *The Color of Injustice*, Abdurahman Hussain, 2015, 3 Min running time; *Shake the Dust*, Adam Sjöberg, 2014, 83 Min running time.


The internationally renowned *I Am Nojoom, Age 10 and Divorced* (2015; 96 Min) was also screened during the festival. The viewing was attended by the film's director, Khadija Al-Salami, who took the time to award us the following interview, conducted by Verena Gantner and Nadim Natour!

How did you become a filmmaker and what inspired you to do movies?

I started presenting children programs on a T.V station at the age of 11 years old, so I saw from that time the power of images. I was supposed to study engineering; I received a scholarship and went to the states but then switched to filmmaking because it was like a tool for me. I grew up in a very traditional society in a very conservative family, where women voice is still a taboo and you cannot express yourself and you cannot talk about your dreams or about your problems. I was a shy girl who couldn't express herself so I thought images would allow me to express myself and let other people express themselves as well, that's how I became a filmmaker.

As a filmmaker, you deal with sensitive social issues like child marriage and human rights. What is your purpose or intention in putting it on the big screen?

My goal is to bring this up because we deny that we have social problems be it women rights, child rights, or even men rights. I want to get people to think about such issues. Whenever we make films like that they would say we shed bad light on Yemen but it's not true because I love that country, it's my own country. When I left Yemen, I said I would never go back because I suffered so much when I was a kid, but then when I was educated and became more mature, I said no, this country needs me,



we have to do something we have to make it change. That's why I got back and started making films. At that time even the intellectual and educated people advised me not to screen my films because people would react violently and that would hurt me personally. I am glad I didn't listen to them.

Were your movies positively received by the Yemeni society?

Some received it positively and some didn't like them, this is how it is when you tackle sensitive issues, you get controversial opinions, but at least you open it up to discussion, you make them see it clearly. When I made my film about early marriage there was a screening in Cairo attended by some Yemeni women. Some of them said early marriage wasn't a common phenomenon in Yemen. Actually, you have to leave the city, go to rural areas where most of the Yemenis live and this is where it is more of a common practice; 52% of the girls get married under the age of 18 and people are not even aware of it, not even educated people. People who are well off don't know what's going on with poor people and those living outside the city, either they don't know or they deny it, but it is actually a fact.


The Yemeni film industry is underdeveloped and is financially disadvantaged; the conditions on the ground are not so convenient. What challenges did you face shooting your film in Yemen?

It was really difficult, when I make my own films; I go with my own camera and film by myself but it is not so easy to hide when you are with your crew, everybody asks what is going on and they want to get involved. We also have so many logistic problems, we don't have electricity and the roads are really bad. Once we rented a generator, later on it got stolen, we had to pay the people that stole it more than it originally cost. We went then to the villages and two big trucks broke down because the road was disastrous. By the time we got the generator back, we had no more diesel and we had to get some from the black market, all this took us many days, it was so crazy. We started filming in one of the villages; after three days of shooting the villages forced us to erase everything. We erased all the material and were kicked out of the village. We then had to find another village.

These are serious problems but finding money is the most difficult one. It took me more than 4 years to find funding for my film. All the producers in France said, "who would care about a little Yemeni girl getting married aged 10!" Fortunately, a generous friend of mine proposed to give me the money. I had to also invest some of my savings, in addition to a contribution from my cousin. Otherwise it would have been impossible to make the film!

Did the local authorities in Yemen pose difficulties as well?

I didn't not ask for permission because censorship. We were filming in the old city while Al-Qaida was bombing the area. The political situation, security issues, and what was happening on the ground were at that time more important than me shooting the film. Still, that was a nightmare; we could have



become an easy target for this extremist group. I didn't know if I would be able to finish the film. I was crying every night; I couldn't concentrate on my artistic work. I needed to direct the movie but also solve the problems on my own; I actually managed only 60% of what I intended to do. I'm glad that it had so far received 17 prizes worldwide; I am happy it is well received everywhere even in Arab countries like Palestine for example, where it is being screened for the third time now.

In one of your earlier movies you addressed the role of Yemeni women during the revolution. How do you see the chances of promoting women rights during the revolution?

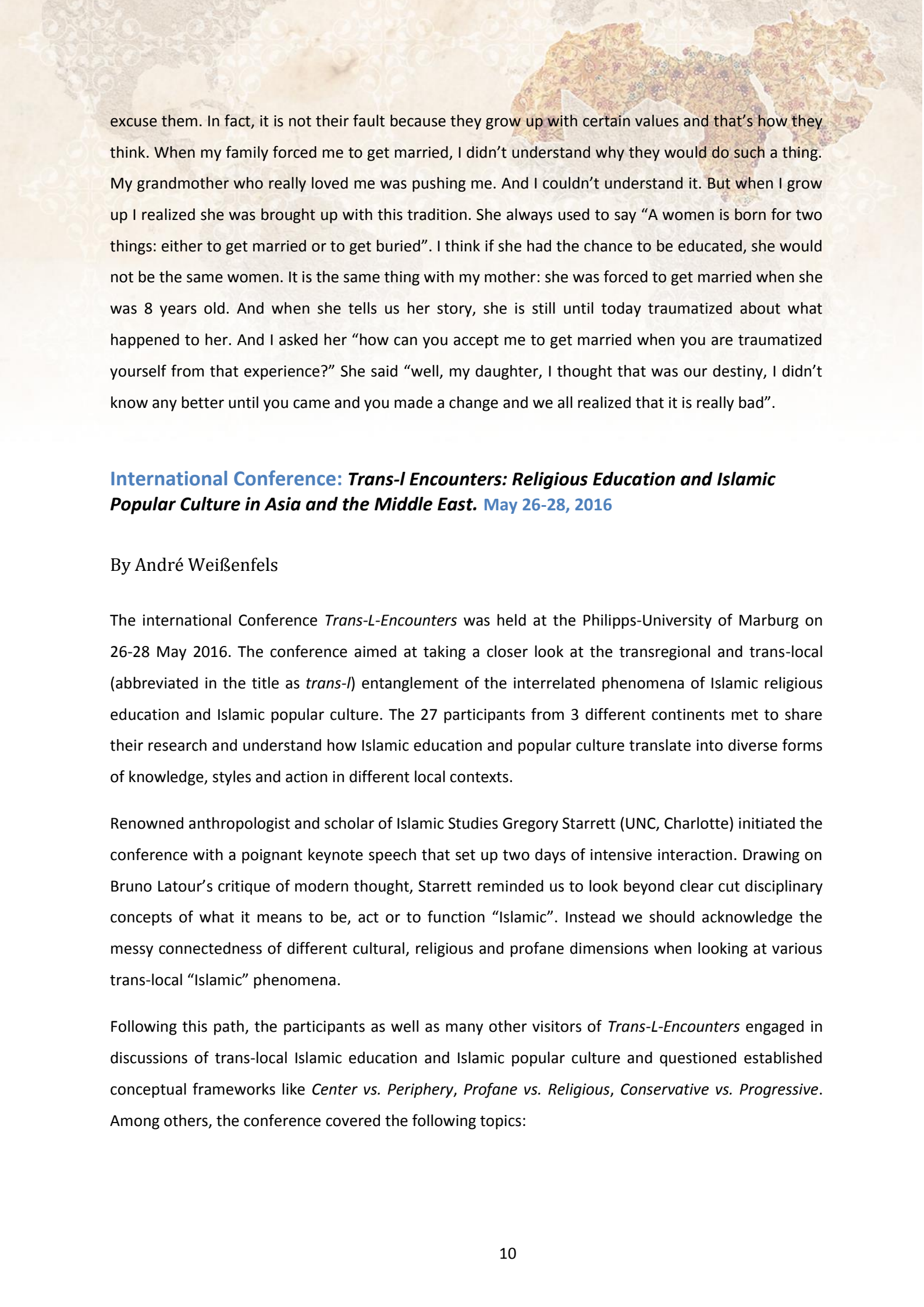
I would say, with a broken heart, it is now no longer a priority to fight for women and children rights. Women are trying to find shelter from the bombs that are falling every day and also to find food and water in order to survive. So this war, unfortunately, brings women's rights back to zero, but I am glad that there are some women that are still fighting, but for how long can they going to keep fighting? When I made that film about women during the revolution I thought to myself: Women screaming out in the streets are strong not just because they are against the regime; they are against every man around them because for centuries they have had no rights. The uprising was just like an opening for them to scream their anger out, their oppression by the whole society.

We need a revolution of thinking, a revolution of education. What is happening now is not only because of the regime, but because everybody is like the regime. I have realized during the uprising that there is not going to be a really great change. You need years and years to educate the people and make a change in the way of thinking. Men who are asking for change and freedom of expression and democracy exclude women. They even said women should demonstrate alone and not next to men.

You have been living abroad for many years. Do you see your own country differently? Do you notice that in your work as a filmmaker?

Yes, definitely. I discovered the beauty of my country and its people through the French people. I didn't know much about it because we don't have this culture to travel and discover. When you watch the movie [My name is Nojoom, Age 10, divorced], I discovered these regions through books and pictures made by French people. I said, "Oh my god, this is in my country?" When I went to the villages and took the actors with me, they asked "Why did you bring us here, to this backward place?" They were so mad at me; there were no hotels and no this and that. I was so impressed by the landscape and the people, the mix of culture and the diversity of the land.

Sometimes you don't understand why Yemenis do certain things. When I was a kid, I thought: why do they not think? But then, when you go abroad and you see how they are brought up and educated you



excuse them. In fact, it is not their fault because they grow up with certain values and that's how they think. When my family forced me to get married, I didn't understand why they would do such a thing. My grandmother who really loved me was pushing me. And I couldn't understand it. But when I grow up I realized she was brought up with this tradition. She always used to say "A woman is born for two things: either to get married or to get buried". I think if she had the chance to be educated, she would not be the same woman. It is the same thing with my mother: she was forced to get married when she was 8 years old. And when she tells us her story, she is still until today traumatized about what happened to her. And I asked her "how can you accept me to get married when you are traumatized yourself from that experience?" She said "well, my daughter, I thought that was our destiny, I didn't know any better until you came and you made a change and we all realized that it is really bad".

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

By André Weißenfels

The international Conference *Trans-L-Encounters* was held at the Philipps-University of Marburg on 26-28 May 2016. The conference aimed at taking a closer look at the transregional and trans-local (abbreviated in the title as *trans-I*) entanglement of the interrelated phenomena of Islamic religious education and Islamic popular culture. The 27 participants from 3 different continents met to share their research and understand how Islamic education and popular culture translate into diverse forms of knowledge, styles and action in different local contexts.

Renowned anthropologist and scholar of Islamic Studies Gregory Starrett (UNC, Charlotte) initiated the conference with a poignant keynote speech that set up two days of intensive interaction. Drawing on Bruno Latour's critique of modern thought, Starrett reminded us to look beyond clear cut disciplinary concepts of what it means to be, act or to function "Islamic". Instead we should acknowledge the messy connectedness of different cultural, religious and profane dimensions when looking at various trans-local "Islamic" phenomena.

Following this path, the participants as well as many other visitors of *Trans-L-Encounters* engaged in discussions of trans-local Islamic education and Islamic popular culture and questioned established conceptual frameworks like *Center vs. Periphery*, *Profane vs. Religious*, *Conservative vs. Progressive*. Among others, the conference covered the following topics:

- Joud Alkorani (University of Toronto, Canada) explained how the satellite television *Fatwa*-show *Yastaftunak* (“They Ask you for Legal Opinions”) commodifies *Fatwas* and uses the aesthetics of commodity to appeal to a worldwide audience. For Alkorani, these commodified *Fatwas* are embodied by a form of consumption that, similar to Marx’s commodity fetishism, feeds from the mythical material existence of the *Fatwa* and overlooks the power relations which are driving its production. Thus, the audience of *Yastaftunak* engages in a “dead”, one-directional relationship with the *Fatwa*; lacking actual agency, the viewers are constituted as religious subjects by a knowledge that is produced by hidden relations of power and property.
- Isa Babur (FU, Berlin) demonstrated how the state attempts to change the curriculum of the faculties of theology in Turkey. He explained that, while the number of higher learning institutes dedicated to Islamic theology increased dramatically in recent years, the content of the curricula is being limited and streamlined. The curriculum is less critical and less philosophical as half of the *kalam* (Islamic Scholastic Theology) classes are cut. One of Babur’s interview partners from a university administration justified these steps by saying: “Students come here to find answers. But the *kalam* classes only multiply their questions”. This impoverishment of Islamic theology education at the hands of the Turkish government turns Islamic knowledge into a clear cut set of rules and recipes applicable in daily life, and this is a far cry from the more amorphous and flexible understanding of Islam in traditional theology. Islam is thus turned into a commodified identity reflecting the social engineering agenda of the AKP.
- Manja Stephan-Emmrich (HU, Berlin) examined how *Dubai Style* clothing became fashionable in urban Tajikistan, as many young Tajiks decide to study and work in the Emirates. Combining the aspirations for an internationalized livelihood and economic success with the aim of moral perfection, this *Dubai Style* became the contested marker for economic, cultural and social capital of urban Tajiks. It also helps to distinguish a new urban Tajik middle class identity that is presented as progressive and modern, in contrast to the backward rural identity.

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In his wrap up comments (closing remarks) after two days of intense and productive work, Gregory Starrett summarized the main questions, topics and conclusions from the event. He emphasized notions of *ambiguity* and *performance/performativity* as crucial for understanding a multitude of phenomena of Islamic religious education and Islamic popular culture. Furthermore, he stressed that many of the examples presented during the conference were connected to *crisis*, be it in a spiritual, cultural or economic sense. Hinting at the crisis of the “core” of Islamic identity, performance, economy and locality, Starrett provocatively posed the question: “What if they actually rebuilt the *Ka’bah* in Indonesia?”

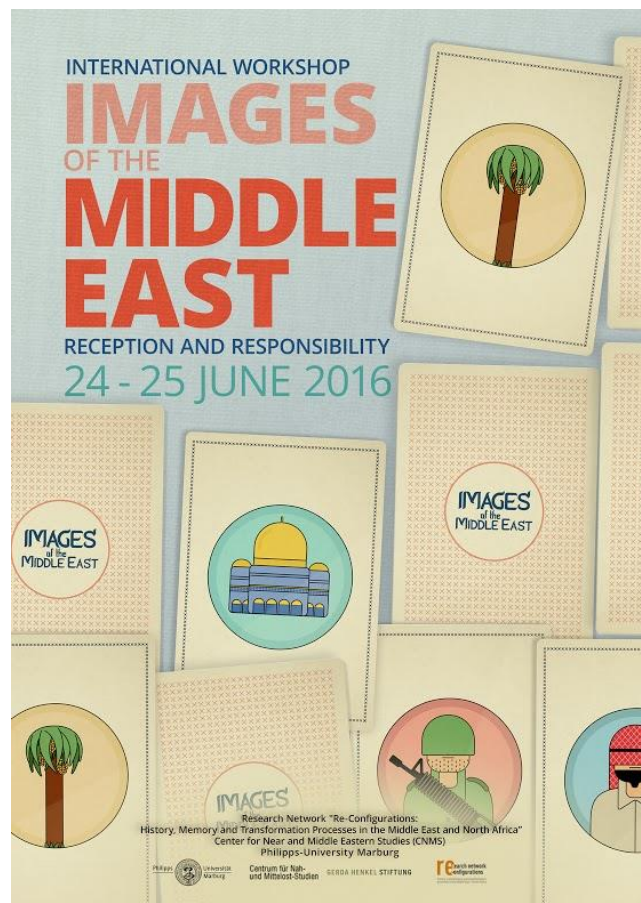
In summary, a vast amount of fascinating empirical material was presented by the participants during the conference. However, conceptual frameworks still need to be developed further in order to properly connect the many examples of Islamic religious education and Islamic popular culture we encountered. While the trans-local aspects of the presentations were clearly elaborated, the links between education and popular culture – between knowledge production and aesthetics – still need to be conceptualized more thoroughly. The conference has shown that, despite all efforts towards interdisciplinary approaches, it is still hard to escape the reign of immovable, closed up categories with their respective, distinct objects of knowledge, inextricably linked to modernity. Thus, “Trans-L-Encounters” has opened up the field of Islamic religious education and Islamic popular culture to further research, contributing to what will hopefully soon be a science of proper connectivity between structures, people and things in the sense of Latour’s social-technical networks.


IV. Upcoming activities

International Workshop: *Images of the "Middle East" – Reception and Responsibility.* 24-25 June 2016. In cooperation with Gerda Henkel Stiftung.

Images continue to determine the news and public perception of the "Middle East" in Europe and elsewhere. The current crisis related to terror and refugees demands another critical look at media production, reception and responsibility in the Middle East.

The workshop attempts to approach these issues from multidisciplinary angles, bringing together experts from film and media studies, politics, and Islamic studies, as well as practicing filmmakers and journalists. The main discussion will revolve around examining possibilities, alternatives and limitations of visual media production and perception in / about the Middle East.





Key questions include: What are the images that shape media production and reception today? How are those images transmitted and circulated? And to what extent do *Othering* and *Stereotyping* influence public reception? In short: what do we see when we see the Middle East?

The workshop aims to examine responsibilities and limitations of media coverage and analyze future research priorities and alternative forms of media production such as blogging and Vlogging, social media, embedded and citizen and peace journalism. The discussion is open to various topics and case studies including, but not limited to, the fight against ISIS in Iraq and Syria, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the Arab spring, and migration and terrorism in Europe.

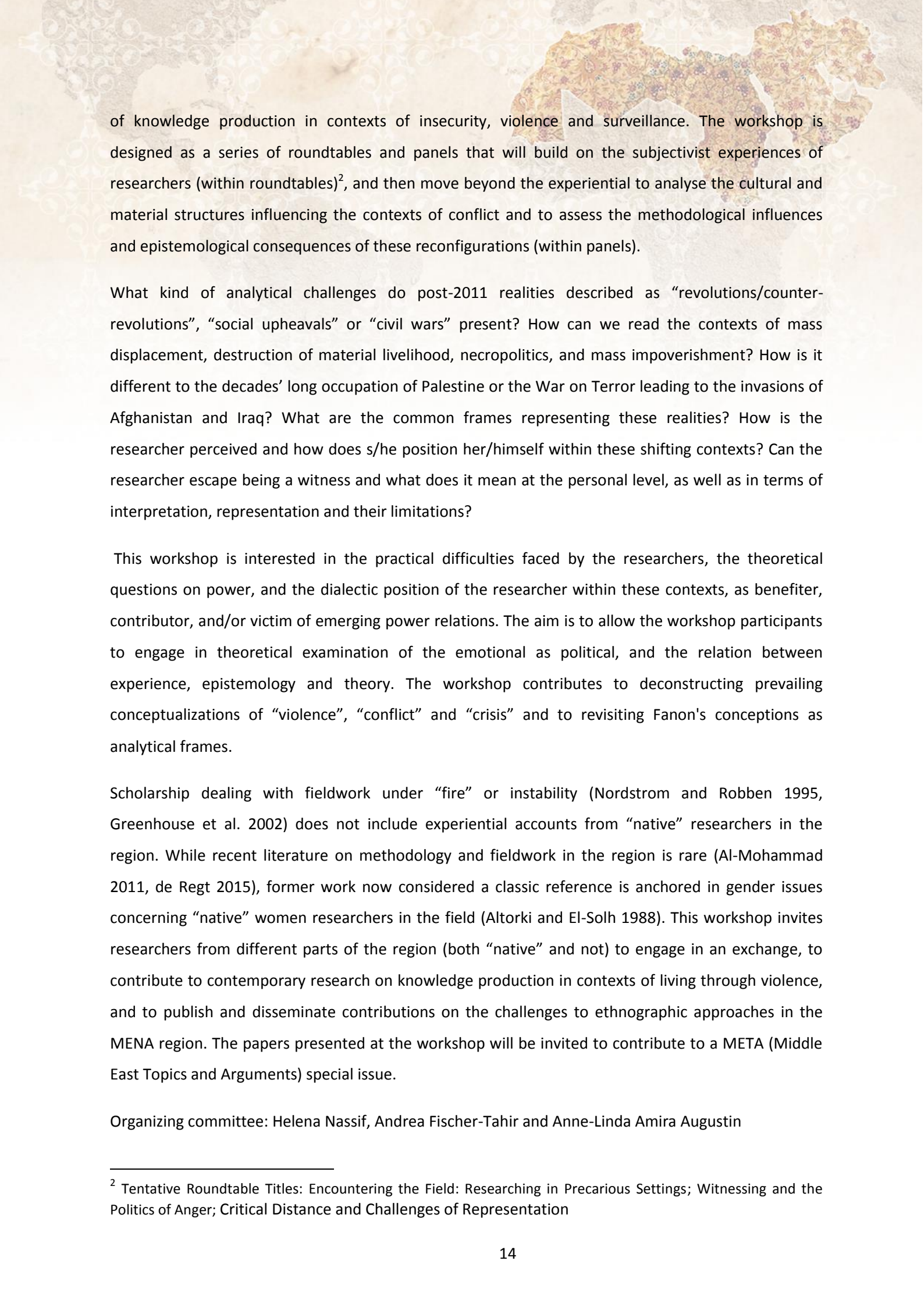
Organizing committee: Prof. Abrecht Fuess, Prof. Malte Hagener, Dr. Ihab Saloul, Philipp Rückriem

International Workshop: *Theorizing Methodology in the MENA: Questions on Fieldwork and Knowledge Production in Contexts of Violence, Surveillance and Fear.* 6-7 October 2016

Researchers conducting fieldwork within the MENA region since the upheavals post-December 2010 are voicing a myriad of challenges they are encountering in their research. Field research interruptions, access problems, threats to personal safety or interlocutors, loss of interlocutors or of their families, ethnographic failures, and epistemological and theoretical conundrums are just a few challenges.¹ They are also initiating new conversations around knowledge production and fieldwork in the specific contexts of the region. Debates and conversations in seminars and conferences have centred on the type of knowledge produced in the region, its relation to power structures, as well as the new forms of fieldwork experiences and ethnographies that are emerging. Doing research in times of crisis, under surveillance and/or repression by state and non-state actors and faced with general hostility and insecurity, is not specific to the MENA region. This workshop relies on experiences and debates within the MENA region and beyond in order to think through theoretical and methodological debates. It seeks to contribute to discussions on the relation between empirical research, political liminality, and securitisation by examining contemporary processes of knowledge production in contexts of violence, surveillance and fear, and by analysing concepts of violence and power (including state, non-state and supra state actors) as central to methodological inquiry.

The aim of this workshop is to invite researchers conducting fieldwork in the region, mainly but not only post-December 2010, to exchange insights and fieldwork experiences and to engage in questions

1 See the roundtable at the Arab Council for the Social Sciences Second Conference, Research in Crisis: Ethics and Politics in the Field. Moderator: Lisa Taraki (Birzeit University) Discussants: Ramy Aly (AUC), Omar Dewachi (AUB), Laila Shereen Sakr (Recorded – University of Southern California), Yasser Munif (Emerson College). March 13, 2015.



of knowledge production in contexts of insecurity, violence and surveillance. The workshop is designed as a series of roundtables and panels that will build on the subjectivist experiences of researchers (within roundtables)², and then move beyond the experiential to analyse the cultural and material structures influencing the contexts of conflict and to assess the methodological influences and epistemological consequences of these reconfigurations (within panels).


What kind of analytical challenges do post-2011 realities described as “revolutions/counter-revolutions”, “social upheavals” or “civil wars” present? How can we read the contexts of mass displacement, destruction of material livelihood, necropolitics, and mass impoverishment? How is it different to the decades’ long occupation of Palestine or the War on Terror leading to the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq? What are the common frames representing these realities? How is the researcher perceived and how does s/he position her/himself within these shifting contexts? Can the researcher escape being a witness and what does it mean at the personal level, as well as in terms of interpretation, representation and their limitations?

This workshop is interested in the practical difficulties faced by the researchers, the theoretical questions on power, and the dialectic position of the researcher within these contexts, as benefiter, contributor, and/or victim of emerging power relations. The aim is to allow the workshop participants to engage in theoretical examination of the emotional as political, and the relation between experience, epistemology and theory. The workshop contributes to deconstructing prevailing conceptualizations of “violence”, “conflict” and “crisis” and to revisiting Fanon’s conceptions as analytical frames.

Scholarship dealing with fieldwork under “fire” or instability (Nordstrom and Robben 1995, Greenhouse et al. 2002) does not include experiential accounts from “native” researchers in the region. While recent literature on methodology and fieldwork in the region is rare (Al-Mohammad 2011, de Regt 2015), former work now considered a classic reference is anchored in gender issues concerning “native” women researchers in the field (Altorki and El-Solh 1988). This workshop invites researchers from different parts of the region (both “native” and not) to engage in an exchange, to contribute to contemporary research on knowledge production in contexts of living through violence, and to publish and disseminate contributions on the challenges to ethnographic approaches in the MENA region. The papers presented at the workshop will be invited to contribute to a META (Middle East Topics and Arguments) special issue.

Organizing committee: Helena Nassif, Andrea Fischer-Tahir and Anne-Linda Amira Augustin

² Tentative Roundtable Titles: Encountering the Field: Researching in Precarious Settings; Witnessing and the Politics of Anger; Critical Distance and Challenges of Representation



International Workshop: *Maps and Apps: Mobile media and the reconfigurations of knowledge*. 11 November 2016

On the 11th November 2016, the international workshop entitled "Maps and Apps: Mobile media and the reconfigurations of knowledge" will take place at the CNMS (University of Marburg/Germany). The workshop deals with the myriad ways in which digital and mobile media shape the dynamics of state-society relations and the insights we can extrapolate from this relatively new phenomenon. The workshop takes a closer look at the spatial dimensions of change that reimagine "the political", the community, and identity. More specifically, the workshop seeks to discuss the aesthetic representations of these processes and these changing modes of knowledge production.


Organizing committee: Andrea Fischer-Tahir, Angela Krewani, Alena Strohmaier

International Workshop: *Talking 'bout my Generation: Concepts of Youth and Generation in Research on the MENA region, five years after 2011*. November 30 – December 02, 2016

The uprisings of 2011 challenged many predominant concepts of 'youth' in the MENA region. Before, youth and young adults were often merely discussed as a 'youth bulge' – a demographic, quantitative problem, even a potential terrorist threat. In other stereotypical representations, youths and young adults hardly appeared as political subjects, but rather as passive victims of a failed generational contract signed between former generations and authoritarian regimes. Movements that contradicted both stereotypes, like the Moroccan and Tunisian unemployed graduates, who had been protesting 'apolitically', negotiating their employment with authoritarian regimes for over a decade, hardly received any attention.

The 2011 uprisings in the MENA region were soon denominated 'Arab Spring' – a term that was coined in the West and went well with generational semantics. A new idol emerged: the 'young Arab protester' was acclaimed as a heroic vanguard against fossilized autocratic regimes ruled by old men. For many, this figure seemed to embody certain democratic ideals and practices that apparently had lost impetus in the established democracies of the West, especially in the wake of the economic crisis. Here, new social movements like the Spanish indignados were highly inspired by the 'Arab Spring'.

Consequently, social research on 'youth' in the MENA region boomed. But many of the studies and policy papers hardly involved critical theoretical reflections of the term 'youth' or 'generation'. Instead, they simply researched youths and young adults as members of an age cohort, defined in quantitative terms. Other interventions identified a neoliberal discourse on youth; they criticized the



tendency to imagine youth as a 'dynamic force' associated with free markets, employing generational narratives for a specific political agenda. Meanwhile, most international debates on the empirical significance of youth in reproducing social inequality and catalyzing processes of social exclusion continue to revolve around the situation of young people in 'the West'. Conceptual discussions here often seem oddly disconnected from the social reality in the MENA region - a region that empirically has been inseparable from 'the West' throughout long histories of colonialism and migration, and in which young people constitute, after all, the majority of the population.

Now, five years into the 'Arab Spring', certain parts of the region – like Syria, Yemen or Libya – are facing civil wars that transgress national borders, producing millions of refugees. In other countries like Egypt, authoritarian regimes have been reinstated. Moreover, for the first time a Jihadist organization – Daesh (ISIS) – has managed to recruit thousands of young men, but also young women, not only from the MENA region, but also from Europe and other Western countries.

Against this background, we suggest a conceptual reflection: How do the concepts of 'youth' and 'generation' help to understand these recent developments? To what extent does social age, a habitus of 'youthfulness' (Bayat 2011) or generationality (King 2010), matter when we discuss power relations, social inequality, and actors' agency in the region? Does it suggest different policy interventions when we frame a certain phenomenon, such as political violence, social exclusion or inequality, as a 'youth' issue? How do actors position themselves in intergenerational relations and refer to generational narratives, on which grounds, and to what purpose? Last but not least: What can we learn from discourses on youth and generation in re-configuration processes in other regions, such as Europe or Latin America?

This international workshop aims at a critical reflection of the concepts of youth and generation employed in former and current research. By bringing together renowned scholars and academics from different research fields, we aim to foster a debate between area studies (of the MENA and other regions), sociology of youth, education, critical youth studies, and social movement theory.

The predominant aim of this workshop is to provide a space for an intensive conceptual discussion in order to inspire new questions for further research.

Organizational Committee: Christoph Schwarz; Anne-Linda Amira Augustin; Helena Nassif; Anika Oettler; Perrine Lachenal

V. Notes from the field

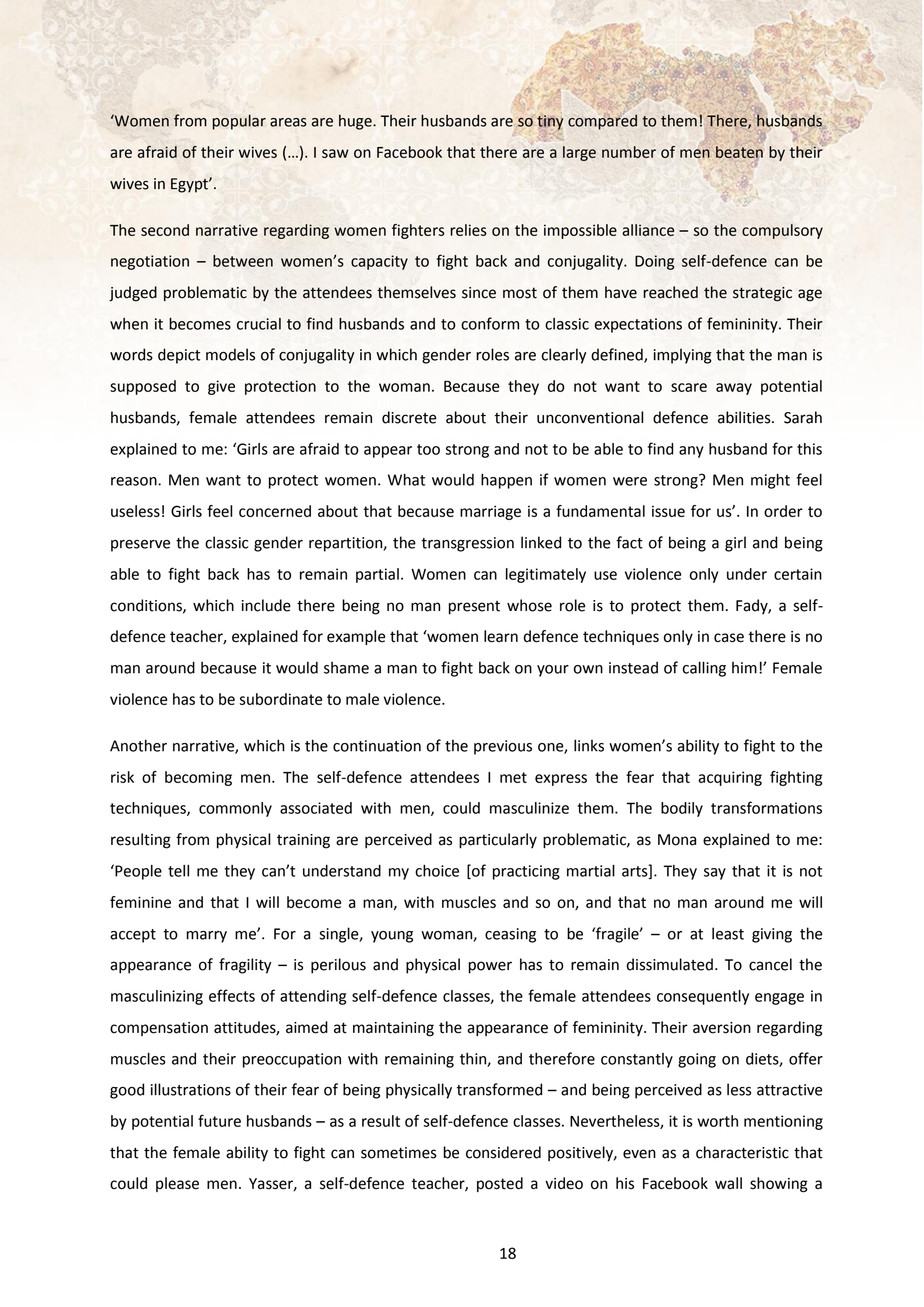
Self-Defence Classes for Women in Revolutionary Cairo

By Perrine Lachenal

Self-defence courses for women initially emerged in the Cairene urban landscape in the wider context of the mobilization of civil society to fight sexual harassment. Harassment in turn had become a worrying trend and a public cause. The first women's self-defence training was probably organized around 2002 at a cultural center close to downtown Cairo. In the years that followed, similar courses multiplied in social centres and NGOs, and the popularity of self-defence classes for women continued to grow. The revolutionary period can be seen as a turning point since it gave birth to a huge 'security market' that included self-defence classes as well as private security services and self-defence accessories like pepper sprays. The marketing was mainly aimed at women in the socially affluent districts of Cairo. The deep feeling of vulnerability that spread across Cairo after January 2011 contributed to legitimizing the choice, for a woman, to learn how to fight back and to acquire combat skills such as throwing kicks and punches.

By making visible the socially and sexually situated modalities by which categories such as 'legitimacy' and 'illegitimacy' are produced with respect to violence, self-defence classes for women constitute a valuable vantage point from which to contribute to a wider discussion about 'dangerous women'. In self-defence classes, how do attendees and teachers describe and label violence? In which ways do they frame and justify the possibility for a woman to react physically? By focusing on the ways female violence is articulated in self-defence classes – the words and categories used to describe it – it is possible to identify different kinds of narratives used to describe women fighters.


The narrative to which people most commonly appeal relies on the association between female violence and 'popular' or working class areas, reflecting some mechanisms of social distinction at work within Egyptian urban society. It is important to specify here that most of the self-defence classes organized in Cairo take place in the wealthiest neighborhoods of the city. The attendees I met explained that they chose to learn how to fight 'just in case' and that they want to acquire techniques they plan never to use. According to them, there is a huge difference between being able to use violence and actually using it. They clearly oppose the possibility of violence (what might happen) to its actual performance (what does happen). The second option is rejected to the side of social otherness – and to 'other' women to whom they cannot be compared. The capacity of these female figures for being violent is articulated with specific representations of their bodies, depicted as oversized – sometimes monstrous – and scary. Mona, one 40 year-old attendee, explained to me:



'Women from popular areas are huge. Their husbands are so tiny compared to them! There, husbands are afraid of their wives (...). I saw on Facebook that there are a large number of men beaten by their wives in Egypt'.

The second narrative regarding women fighters relies on the impossible alliance – so the compulsory negotiation – between women's capacity to fight back and conjugality. Doing self-defence can be judged problematic by the attendees themselves since most of them have reached the strategic age when it becomes crucial to find husbands and to conform to classic expectations of femininity. Their words depict models of conjugality in which gender roles are clearly defined, implying that the man is supposed to give protection to the woman. Because they do not want to scare away potential husbands, female attendees remain discrete about their unconventional defence abilities. Sarah explained to me: 'Girls are afraid to appear too strong and not to be able to find any husband for this reason. Men want to protect women. What would happen if women were strong? Men might feel useless! Girls feel concerned about that because marriage is a fundamental issue for us'. In order to preserve the classic gender repartition, the transgression linked to the fact of being a girl and being able to fight back has to remain partial. Women can legitimately use violence only under certain conditions, which include there being no man present whose role is to protect them. Fady, a self-defence teacher, explained for example that 'women learn defence techniques only in case there is no man around because it would shame a man to fight back on your own instead of calling him!' Female violence has to be subordinate to male violence.

Another narrative, which is the continuation of the previous one, links women's ability to fight to the risk of becoming men. The self-defence attendees I met express the fear that acquiring fighting techniques, commonly associated with men, could masculinize them. The bodily transformations resulting from physical training are perceived as particularly problematic, as Mona explained to me: 'People tell me they can't understand my choice [of practicing martial arts]. They say that it is not feminine and that I will become a man, with muscles and so on, and that no man around me will accept to marry me'. For a single, young woman, ceasing to be 'fragile' – or at least giving the appearance of fragility – is perilous and physical power has to remain dissimulated. To cancel the masculinizing effects of attending self-defence classes, the female attendees consequently engage in compensation attitudes, aimed at maintaining the appearance of femininity. Their aversion regarding muscles and their preoccupation with remaining thin, and therefore constantly going on diets, offer good illustrations of their fear of being physically transformed – and being perceived as less attractive by potential future husbands – as a result of self-defence classes. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that the female ability to fight can sometimes be considered positively, even as a characteristic that could please men. Yasser, a self-defence teacher, posted a video on his Facebook wall showing a



woman successfully decking ten male opponents, and wrote underneath the following comment: 'What a girl! I would love to marry her!' Here, the reference to conjugality seems to undermine the feminine transgression by integrating it in a more conventional experience. Teachers also sometimes address female fighters in esthetic and even sexualized ways: the feminine use of violence is admitted under the condition of remaining connected to heteronormative matrimonial and seduction projects and of not threatening the sexual order.

The final narrative I identified while doing my fieldwork at self-defence training classes for women in Cairo is related to the Egyptian revolution. The revolutionary period has indeed given birth to a new frame in which the use of violence by women is admitted (accepted) and even positively represented. The transgression – the fact that women are not supposed to employ fighting techniques in their daily lives – is justified by the historical importance of the events. In times of emergency or exception, violence can be seen as a possible feminine resource. Radwa explained to me that she was fully part of the contestation since its first days, standing at the front lines and throwing stones at policemen: 'Women always fought hand in hand with men. Even the Prophet was helped by women fighters during some crucial battles'. Quoting famous female figures, especially from the Qur'an, the attendees justify their choice to practice self-defence by referring to the intensity of the crisis and to the political cause. Not to mention that the deep feeling of insecurity that arose with the revolution gave obvious intelligibility to self-defence initiatives. This revolutionary narrative reveals a spectacular and heroic form of feminine violence, which nevertheless has to remain temporary. Women can exceptionally exceed their conventional attributions, but only until the end of the crisis and the restoration of the classical gender roles.

Popular, monstrous, subordinate, masculinizing, sexy, spectacular or even revolutionary: the words of Cairene self-defence attendees and teachers reveal different representations regarding the use of violence by women in times of political transformations. All these narratives give visibility to female fighters while undermining the subversive potential of their experiences. The transgression of being a woman and simultaneously capable of physical violence – of being a 'dangerous woman,' so to speak – destabilizes social and sexual hierarchies, and must be carefully restrained and framed.

VI. Recent and upcoming publications (Selection)

Journal Articles


- Augustin, A. A 2016: Der Krieg im Jemen aus der Perspektive des Südens. *Jemen Report*: 109-112.
- Augustin, A. A 2015: Aden wird siegen – Der Südwidestand. *INAMO* 83: 11-16
- Rohde, A. 2016: Gays, Cross-Dressers, and Emos: Non-Normative Masculinities in Militarized Iraq. *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 12, 3 (forthcoming).
- Rohde, A. 2016: Krieg gegen den "Islamischen Staat " in Irak und Syrien – Zerstörung einer regionalen Ordnung. *Zeitschrift für Friedens- und Konfliktforschung* 5, 1: 79-84.
- Salehi, Mariam und Williams, Timothy. 2016: Beyond Peace vs. Justice: Assessing Transitional Justice's Impact on Enduring Peace using Qualitative Comparative Analysis. *Transitional Justice Review* 1, 4: 96-123.

Edited Volumes

Hagener, Malte; Hediger, Vinzenz; Strohmaier, Alena (Eds.). 2016. ***The State of Post-Cinema. Tracing the Moving Image in the Age of Digital Dissemination.*** London: Palgrave Macmillan

This book is based on a conference conducted by the research network in 2014. It approaches the topic of the state of post-cinema from a new direction. The authors explore how film has left the cinema as a fixed site and institution and now appears ubiquitous - in the museum and on the street, on planes and cars, and on new digital communication platforms of various kinds. The authors investigate how film has become more than cinema, no longer a medium that is based on the photochemical recording and replay of movement. Most often, the state of post-cinema is conceptualized from the "high end" of the most advanced technology; discussions usually focus on performance capture and digital 3-D, 4-K projection and industrial light & magic. Here, the authors' approach is focused on the "low-end" of the circulation of filmic images. This includes informal networks of exchange and transaction, such as p2p-networks, video platforms, and so called "piracy", with a special focus on the Middle East and North Africa, where political and social transformations make new forms of circulation and presentation particularly visible.

(Forthcoming, Fall 2016).



Ribas-Mateos, Natalia (Ed.). 2016. ***Migration, Mobilities and the Arab Spring. Spaces of Refugee Flight in the Eastern Mediterranean.*** Cheltenham / Northampton: Edward Elgar

This book is based on a conference held by the research network in 2014, while the editor was a visiting scholar of the network. Confronting questions of globalization, mobilities and space in the Mediterranean, and more specifically in the Eastern Mediterranean, this book introduces a new type of complexity and ambiguity to the study of the global. In this theoretical frame, an increasingly urban articulation of global logics and struggles, and an escalating use of urban space to make political claims, not only by citizens but also by foreigners, can be found. By emphasizing the interplay between global, regional and local phenomena, the book examines new forms and conditions, such as the transformation of borders, the re-configuration of transnational communities, the agency of transnational families, new mobilities and diasporas, and transnational networks of humanitarian response. With a foreword by Saskia Sassen.

(Forthcoming August 2016).

Fischer-Tahir, A. und Lange, K. (Eds.). 2016. ***Ethnografien des Wandels im Vorderen Orient und Nordafrika.*** Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag.

Given the events of the “Arab Spring” and subsequent dramatic developments, many other ongoing processes of political, social, and cultural change in the Middle East and North Africa have been overlooked. The following book addresses these overlooked processes of change. The authors highlight specific facets of social and cultural upheaval in certain regions from an ethnographical perspective. The transformations can be described as open-ended processes in which collective actors situate themselves in local, national, regional as well as global interaction systems and negotiate their positions. The result is the testing of new rules and norms, the modification of old ones, and the “reinvention of traditions”. The articles of the book examine continuities and breaks in the social practices and cultural interpretations of the respective actors. Furthermore, the production of Middle East ethnological knowledge is analyzed in its historical context.

(Forthcoming, July 2016).

META releases

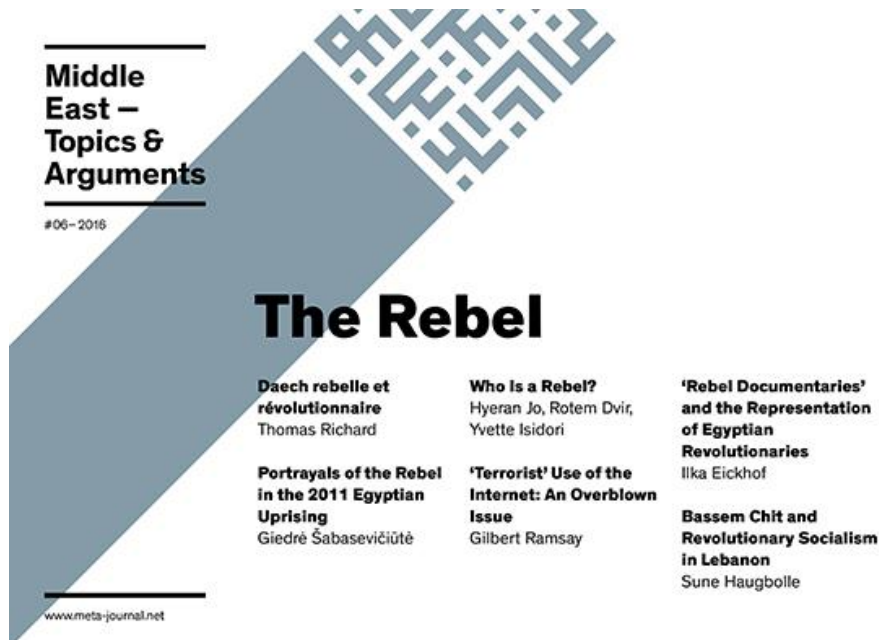
Middle East –Topics / Arguments (META)

The peer-reviewed online journal “Middle East – Topics & Arguments” (META) has released its sixth issue – The Rebel, edited by Felix Lang and Malcolm Théoleyre.

Abstract

Who is the rebel in the Middle East and North Africa? Translating the 'rebel' in the Arab Spring context bears lexical and semantic difficulties, but, most of all, it requires to guard oneself from western liberal bias. Discussing different notions of ‘the rebel’ and related Arabic terms such as ‘thā’ir’ and ‘mutamarrid’, this article introduces META issue #6 on ‘The Rebel’.

Keywords: Rebel; Arab Spring; 1848; Terrorists; Translation; Revolution; Islamism



<http://www.meta-journal.net/>

Forthcoming Issues

META's seventh issue focusing on **Culture** to appear in Fall 2016, edited by Igor Johanssen and Pierre Hecker.

META's eight issue edited by Perrine Lachenal and Georg Leube will appear in Spring 2017 and will focus on **Iconography**.

