



## Europe in the Middle East - the Middle East in Europe



“Europe in the Middle East; the Middle East in Europe” has been founded as a multi-disciplinary research program of the Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften, the Fritz Thyssen Foundation and the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin.

Since 2011 it is continued within the framework of the Forum Transregionale Studien.

The following text is a summary of the proposal of 2006.



The program “Europe in the Middle East; the Middle East in Europe” is oriented toward problems of cultural understanding and political practice; it seeks to rethink key concepts and premises that divide Europe from the Middle East. Within the framework of four research fields in the disciplines of Literature, Political Philosophy, Urban History, Philology-cum-Late Antiquity, and Islamic Studies, the program will attempt to recollect the legacies of Europe in the Middle East and of the Middle East in Europe in an inclusive way that aims to do justice to their entanglements.

The program draws on the international expertise of scholars in and outside of Germany and is embedded in university and extra-university research institutions in Berlin. It supports and rests upon the following four interconnected research fields:

“Perspectives on the Qur’an: Negotiating Different Views of a Shared History” situates the foundational text of Islam within the religious landscape of Late Antiquity and combines a historicization of its genesis with its reception and perception in Europe and the Middle East; “Travelling Traditions: Comparative Perspectives on Near Eastern Literatures” reassesses literary entanglements and processes of canonization between Europe and the Middle East; “Cities Compared: Cosmopolitanism in the Mediterranean and Adjacent Regions” contributes to the debate over cosmopolitanism and civil society from the historical experience of conviviality and socio-cultural, ethnic, and religious differences in the cities around the Mediterranean; “Islamic Discourse Contested: Middle Eastern and European Perspectives” analyzes modern Islamic thought and discourses in the framework of theories of multiple or reflexive modernities.

All four research fields contribute to our knowledge of Middle Eastern cultures and societies and their relations to Europe. At the same time they attempt to re-center the significance of academic disciplines for the study of non-European contexts, in this case the Middle East. The program thus supports historical-critical philology, rigorous engagement with the literatures of the Middle East and their histories, the social history of cities and the study of Middle Eastern political and philosophical thought (Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and secular) as central fields of research not only for area or cultural studies, but also for Europe and the academic disciplines.

A special forum under the title “Tradition and the Critique of Modernity: Secularism, Fundamentalism and Religion from Middle Eastern Perspectives” will accompany the four research groups. The idea is to rethink key concepts of Modernity like secularity, tradition, or religion in the context of the experiences, interpretations, and critiques of Jews, Arabs, and Muslims in the Middle East and in Europe. The program explores Modernity as a historical space and conceptual frame – not as a particular national or European realm, but as a reflexive



modernity, as an uneven, polyphonic, and democratic terrain in which ideas and discourses (no less armies) circulated and were assimilated, contested, reshaped, and redeployed in a variety of ways in Europe as well as in the Middle East. The program puts forward three programmatic ideas: 1) support for research that demonstrates the infinitely rich and complex historical legacies between Europe and the Middle East; 2) a re-examination of genealogical notions of 'mythical beginnings', 'origins', and 'purity' in relation to culture and society; and 3) an attempt to contribute to the rethinking of key concepts of a common Modernity in light of today's perspective on cultural, social, and political entanglements; entanglements that supersede rigid identity discourses, national, cultural, or regional canons, and epistemologies established in the world of the nineteenth century.

The program creates a platform that rests upon the idea of "learning communities" (Wolf Lepenies) and the principle of 'research with, rather than research on'. It allows for the invitation of post-doctoral researchers from the Middle East and the organization of summer academies and workshops that strengthen and modify existing research groups and contexts in Germany, hopefully beyond academic circles.

## **2. Rationale: Europe in the Middle East; the Middle East in Europe**

The public debate in the European and Middle Eastern media, as well as the scholarly discussion in both regions, is shaped by cultural and terminological dichotomies built upon an 'either-or' logic such as Europe/Middle East, the West/Islam, modernity/tradition, war/terror, progressive/static, democratic/despotic, secular/religious, and enlightened/traditional. Not only are such conceptual dichotomies reductive and mystifying, they tend to privilege an idealized and unified narrative of an exclusively European Modernity, erected in the eighteenth and nineteenth century and operative till today.

Europe drew the political boundaries in the Middle East. It also projected these borders onto the geography and history, the art and culture of this region and still claims the largely undisputed right to interpret the fundamental concepts and terms with which societies and cultures all over the world are described. Ideological boundaries are thereby drawn that, here as well as there, lead to the seemingly endless debates about the compatibility of Islam and Modernity and about the notions connected to it, such as human rights, the Enlightenment, secularization, and democracy, as well as to vastly oversimplified eschatological paradigms and hermeneutical concepts like "Rise and Decline", the "Clash of Civilizations", the "New Crusades", or the "End of Europe". The conventional self-image of modern European societies as being essentially non-traditional – as opposed to other (still) traditional societies ("the West against the rest") – has powerful self-legitimizing functions. While the narrative of a unified secular Modernity has been challenged regarding European societies, where diversified accommodations of the modern have been distinguished, for instance within the historical experiences of Germany, France, or Spain, Islam still provides the example par excellence of the prejudicial interpretation of tradition. There it is taken for granted that historical processes, not to mention political and social conflicts within individual societies and between states and regions, are primarily generated by religious motives and concerns and that they are in principle different from similar European conflicts. This misreading requires correction; for it is based on a largely unchallenged paradigm that associates the particular theory of European secularization with universal notions of Modernity and thus produces the tautological dichotomies and self-fulfilling prophecies mentioned above. In Europe today, the Middle East is too often primarily associated with scenarios of threat and crisis, for example September 11, 2001 and its consequences, the Arab-Israeli conflict, despotic forms of government, unenlightened traditions, population explosion, and migration. The issues of demography and terrorism increasingly seem to lend particular legitimacy to socio-political projections of apocalyptic dimensions, not least in Evangelical and Islamist writings.



The program assumes that the future of Europe and the Middle East depends on an inclusive and reflexive rethinking of Modernity, with its foundational conceptual key components science, secularism, and democracy. As such, it is conceived as an enterprise that dissociates Modernity from dominant Western European paradigms; that includes its negations; and that dislodges Modernity from its projected religious, racial, or ethnic origins in order to be faithful to the principles these concepts suggest.

The relationship between Europe and the countries of the Middle East has changed considerably since the colonial period and the decades of the Cold War. The United States has become the most influential world power, both in Europe and the Middle East. The economic dimensions of European (as the European Community) and Middle Eastern entanglements must be complemented by new perspectives of entangled historical legacies and shared destinies. Within the Middle East, nation states with distinct and strong institutional cultures of their own have arisen and continue to evolve. While migrants from Arab and/or Islamic countries of the southern Mediterranean are changing the face of European cities, Europe continues to be present in the Middle East, not least through a long history of political and military interventions. The politics, the economy, science, culture, and religion of the individual Middle Eastern states are shaped by the Arabic, Persian, and Turkish languages and the religion of Islam, but also by other historical legacies, such as those of the ancient and medieval cultures of Egypt, Persia, and Iraq, by Hellenism, Arabism, Christianity, and Judaism, the Ottoman Empire or colonialism and Orientalism, and by modern constitutions, by the economic streams focused on the industrial nations, by universities comparable to those of Europe and the USA, by intellectuals, scholars, and scientists trained in Europe and the USA, by modern forms in film, music, theater, and literature, and not least by an understanding and practice of religion that is based in modernity. At the same time, potentialities for conflict are emerging ever more clearly, as shown by the Arab-Israeli conflict, by the differing assessments of “what went wrong”, of war, terror, and resistance, and by the debates about national or regional dominant cultures or “Leitkulturen”, be they German, European, Judeo-Christian, Islamic, Arabic, Turkish, Mediterranean, or Greater Middle Eastern.

The history and culture of Europe and the Middle East have been interwoven since Classical Antiquity and the weave of their relations has grown increasingly tight. Along with conflicts, there have also always been deep cultural entanglements; in most cases, the two cannot be separated. To gain any understanding of contemporary zones of conflict, this common history must be as painstakingly analyzed as the subjective and ideologized epistemologies that emerged in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Past experience justifies the assumption that the energetic historicization of current relations between Europe and the Middle East can contribute directly to illuminating current conflicts and uncovering new historical perspectives on culture and society. In this context, the foundational texts, canons, concepts, and discourses of the respective political, literary, religious, and academic cultures, as they have been interpreted, updated, and presented for specific purposes, are of vital importance.

The mutual transformation of European and Middle Eastern traditions has accelerated and become more radical in recent decades than in past centuries. The phenomenon of “glocalization” (i.e., the encounter between the effects of worldwide globalization and the strong local resistances that arise as a consequence) strikes the shared zone of European-Middle Eastern relationships especially hard. This process in itself further accelerates the transformation of traditions and societies. Competing ordering claims, each justified with recourse to “tradition”, are leading, at an increasing pace, to new unsurveyabilities. These unsurveyabilities are seldom left in post-modern arbitrariness, but are rendered ideological and at the same time made acceptable. In the geographical realm in which this program is located, long-term cultural and social upheavals are deepening as a result of (post-)colonial conditions.



The planned program “Europe in the Middle East; The Middle East in Europe” will examine processes of tradition building and struggles over the past and the modern as connecting themes. Three programmatic ideas and three guiding principles can describe the common agenda of the proposed project: (1) the reconfiguration of historical legacies between Europe and the Middle East; (2) the formation of origins and mythical beginnings; and (3) the role of key concepts of Modernity, both in cultural and political discourse and in the framework of scholarly research. The guiding principles of the latter are (a) the critique of disciplinary nationalism; (b) the emphasis on the need for a ‘research with’ scholars from the region, ‘rather than research on’; and (c) the aim of bridging the gap between scholarship, the arts, and the public.

#### *Historical Legacies between Europe and the Middle East*

The notion of ‘historical legacies’ as formulated by Maria Todorova serves as a way to think of the Middle East and Europe together in a shared framework. According to Todorova, legacies encompass everything that is handed down from the past. They are neither perennial, nor primordial, nor are they confined to geographical areas or spaces. When understood as fixed and objective geographical and cultural areas, the Middle East and Europe become problematic categories. What is Europe, and where are its boundaries? Is it a place, an area in the west of Asia, an idea, or the European Union? In classical mythology, Europe is engendered by a beautiful woman abducted by the Greek God Zeus from the Phoenician coast to become his beloved. In modern times the Middle East is a colonial category that came to be used as a conventional term to describe the totality of countries between Morocco and Afghanistan. As a colonial notion, the Middle East can be understood as the legacy of modern European history. As such it corresponds with, overlaps, and rivals other notions of an Arab, an Islamic, a Mediterranean, a Persian, or a Turkish region, area, or world. There are varieties of individual and collective histories, memories, perspectives, and identities in Europe and the Middle East, but no monolithic cultures or regions. While collective particularities and shared legacies undeniably exist in the societies around the Mediterranean, any discussion of European- or Middle Eastern- or even nation- or community-wide characteristics should be carefully contextualized and historicized.

The attempt to reconsider and re-configure the historic legacies of Europe and the Middle East offers a heuristic approach from which to think, for example, of (parts) of Europe and the Middle East as a legacy of the Ottoman Empire and modern nationalism or to re-assess ancient, medieval, and modern notions of the secular, or of cosmopolitanism and civil society in and beyond the Middle East; the foundational text of Muslim community and faith, the Qur’an, should be situated in the intellectual framework of a shared Antiquity and a filiated religious history. Literature also offers a fruitful perspective in this context, for it opens horizons to problems of translation and canon formations as well as to the intellectual and intertextual entanglements of Europe and the Middle East, expressed for example in works such as Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, medieval troubadour lyrics, travelogues, and modern novels.

Without an intellectual perspective that reconsiders the historical legacies of Europe and the Middle East in a common perspective of references, neither democracy in the Middle East nor the integration of Muslim minorities in Western societies stands a chance.

#### *Mythical Beginnings: Foundational Discourses and the Formulation of Origins*

The program places special emphasis on constructions and narratives of mythical beginnings, which are related to the question of legacies. These narratives of beginnings have been crucial in the development of nation states and in the identity constructions of ethnic, religious, and national groups. Since the Renaissance, and especially since the eighteenth century, the strategic identification of beginnings, origins, and roots has served to legitimize and mythologize



territorial and political claims as well as collective historical identities and self-representations. The function of these narratives is to erect boundaries, inclusions, and exclusions and consequently to occlude the entanglement of historical legacies. The centrality of these processes in the past and in the processes of modernization has been recognized by many scholars, especially in relation to – and in times of – religion-based nationalisms and ideologies. Ironically, foundational narratives and concepts are difficult to constrain within the demarcating boundaries they intend to establish and to solidify. Nationalists in Germany drew upon ideas developed in France and elsewhere. The idea of Europe was developed in relation to its negation, the Orient. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century Arab, Turkish, and Iranian intellectuals read and referred to Voltaire, Herder, Fichte, Rousseau, Montesquieu, Renan, Nietzsche, Spencer, or Tolstoy, while all of these writers referred to the Middle East. Revolutionary Islamists like the Egyptian Sayyid Qutb or the Iranian Ali Shariati related explicitly to the works of Alexis Carrel in their constructions of community, in their notions of ‘modern barbarism’ (*jahiliyya*) and their analysis of ‘degeneration’ and ‘decay’. In the last quarter of the twentieth century, Anglo-American postcolonialisms emerged from the encounter with Third World liberation theory. From the early medieval period on at least, the literatures of the Middle East and Europe have been interwoven in a rich intertextual tapestry that complicates and betrays the narrow concerns of more recent national philologies. This attitude implies neither an unvaried homogeneity nor an ambiguous hybridity. In their perspectives on mythological beginnings and with regard to their epistemological tools, intellectuals and scholars in the Middle East are firmly rooted in European thought as well as in particular Middle Eastern texts and contexts. This historical and intellectual entanglement is not only characteristic of, for example, the debates and struggles surrounding the history and the future of the Holy Land in Palestine; it is also characteristic of dominant European narratives that link their historical present to mythical beginnings in the Middle East via the notions of a classical Graeco-Roman Antiquity and an exclusively European Renaissance, an ‘age of discovery’, and an unreflexive and teleological modernity. These narratives of beginnings explicitly refer to those territories, people, cultures, or ideas they intend to exclude (like the Persians, the Jews, the Arabs, the Turks, Islam, the savages), be they noble or vicious. Historical markers like Modernity or Antiquity are not objective concepts, but are rather embedded in discourses of beginnings and origins, shaped in particular Western European readings, and injected into notions of progress and decline, into the organization of historical time, and into the academic disciplines.

The question of beginnings marks an essential point of departure in most attempts to explain the success of a specific European modernity and general Eastern alterity. The alleged origins of the Enlightenment in Western Christian Europe have been criticized by scholars like Reinhard Schulze or Nelly Hanna but remain a paradox in themselves. As a paradox, this perspective is mirrored in the writings of many Arab/Muslim reformists of the nineteenth century who agreed by and large with the analysis of a particular Western Modernity that emerged from the separation between the Church and the State. However, for the most part, they rejected the universalist dimensions implicit in this conclusion, precisely because of its particularistic perspective that excluded their experience of how religion and politics came to their lands not separated, but unified in the form of colonialism. In turn, the reasons for an Arab or Muslim ‘decline’ have been explained as an uninflected ‘paradise lost’: a fatal departure from former grandeur, original purity, and religious-political unity. The outcome has been a fragmentation of history and modernity not only within contemporary Middle Eastern societies in relation to their own past, but also between Europe and the Middle East.

### *Key Concepts of Modernity*

Modernity is a central problem for all scholars who deal with societies, cultures, states, and disciplines located beyond their own borders. Since the early modern period, social, political,





and cultural change has been accompanied by a transformation of governing concepts. Beyond Europe and the Middle East, old terms and concepts like city, nation, state, freedom, history, religion, renaissance, tradition, and secularity have gained new meanings and have been situated in a particular relation to Modernity. Many of these terms and concepts have acquired a centrality in academic and political discourses and have been ideologized as abstract singularities that necessarily lend meaning to any societal or political form of organization and to any understanding of history and culture in the modern sense. Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, and Reinhart Koselleck have presented a sophisticated perspective on key concepts of modernity in their pioneering “Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe” (historical key concepts) in the German context. While this work introduces a systematic study of the change and development of concepts in their historicity that sheds light on the key transformations of Modernity, hardly anything comparable exists in relation to the Middle East or any other non-European context.

The history of concepts, or ‘Begriffsgeschichte’, offers a fruitful perspective but remains limited in certain ways mentioned in the critical debate it stimulated during the last years. It remains limited to a particular German/European historical understanding and experience and loses its value as soon as one moves beyond the borders of Western Europe. It therefore misses the transformative potential of re-formulating key concepts in light of other historical experiences. In medieval times almost every important concept - and thus the foundations for modern thought - was shaped through processes of translation, transmission, and reformulation through the Greek, Syriac, Arabic, Persian, and Latin languages and cultures. Today, in contrast to these conceptual entanglements of the past, every modern concept that is used to describe politics, history, and culture worldwide shares a similar particularist perspective – a position that scholars like the German Ulrich Beck describe as “methodological nationalism” and the Indian Social Scientist Ashis Nandy as “conceptual colonialism”.

There are Middle East encyclopedias discussing words and concepts, but they are either limited to the contemporary world or – as in the Encyclopaedia of Islam – tend to explain a certain word or concept in its original or fundamental meaning. In his book on ‘the Notion of Freedom’, the Moroccan historian Abdallah Al-‘Arwi asks rhetorically whether the contemporary Arabic word *hurriya* was merely a translation of the European word ‘freedom’, which has no relation whatsoever to its Arabic roots. He asks whether the notion of freedom was indeed entirely taken from Western culture without any correspondence in Arab-Islamic culture and whether emancipatory practices were really alien to traditional Muslim societies because they somehow failed to develop a notion of freedom in the modern sense as defined by the European encyclopedias. He concludes by dismissing the very questions itself – ‘is there a notion of freedom in Islam?’ – because it is posed in a way that already suggests the answer. Instead, Al-‘Arwi offers a discussion of some foundations for the notion of freedom that come from within Arab-Islamic history and culture, as manifested in mysticism, in Bedouin and tribal customs, and in the Islamic notion of *taqwa* (love and fear of god). This he combines with a discussion of the changing meaning of the word since early modernity within the European and the Arab contexts. In a similar vein, the authors of the most recent Arab Human Development Report ‘Towards Freedom in the Arab World’ devote a large part of their discussion of the state and future of democratic development in the Arab countries to a relational discussion of the concepts of freedom and good governance in Arab/Muslim and Western thought. They draw upon the legacies of Islam, the European Enlightenment, Arab thought of the *nahda* (Renaissance), the Universal Declarations of Human Rights, and contemporary discussions in the West and the Arab World, as well as on the ideas of Indian thinkers such as Amartya Sen. In doing so, they provide a reading of the concept of freedom in which tradition and modernity are not separated, but go together in an inclusive way. Perhaps most importantly, a discussion like this is addressed to the perceived needs of Arab societies and their future, for it broadens the emphasis on



individual freedom in its conventional liberal meaning to include collective social rights like economic development, civil emancipation, and political liberation.

*Disciplinary Nationalism: Areas, Disciplines, and People*

In the framework of the program, Middle Eastern societies and cultures and their interplay with other societies – especially European – are given high priority. An inclusive, relational, and introspective scope, which includes Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and secular traditions in the Middle East as well as the fate of the European Jews and the rise of Islamic communities in Europe, is of great importance. The program will relate questions regarding Middle Eastern objects of research to European experiences and discussions in a self-reflexive way that insists on an awareness of the history and context of its own disciplinary framework.

Beyond Europe and the Middle East, academic research is characterized by a tendency of parochialism and disciplinary nationalism. Since the nineteenth century, the university, especially in its humanities disciplines like History, Theology, or various Philologies, sustained particular national cultures and depended upon them for a role in public life. As the autonomy, even the conceptual clarity, of the nation state and national culture has become blurred, the problematic inherent in exclusive projections has raised doubts about the orientation of these and other disciplines of the humanities and the social sciences. The relation to other geographies, areas, cultures, or countries has gained increasing attention. However, the study of the Middle East in Germany, as in most other Western countries, is often too limited to the framework of Area Studies, monolingual philologies, or monoethnic cultural studies, like Arabic, Jewish or Iranian Studies, Turkology, Kurdology, or Coptology.

The problems inherent in the academic division of labor between Area Studies and the systematic disciplines have long been recognized. The problematic issue of disconnecting the History of Europe from the Orient was addressed in Germany already at the beginning of the twentieth century by scholars like Carl Heinrich Becker and has been debated ever since in various forms. Whereas representatives of Area Studies in recent years have systematically begun to embrace the methodologies of the social sciences and cultural studies, disciplines like History, Literary Studies, Political Science, and Law persist in delegating the study of non-European cultures and societies to regional experts and institutionally small disciplines, such as African, Asian, and Oriental and Islamic Studies. In the latter disciplines, Jews, Christians, Muslims, Arabs, Turks, Persians, and other Middle Eastern people and their societies and cultures have been separated into distinct institutional structures emphasizing one or the other feature of community, be it racial, ethnic, linguistic, religious, or national.

Scholars from the Middle East are usually caught up in similar self-referential structures of their own national or cultural parochialism. As a rule, Egyptian historians, for example, rarely relate their own work to zones beyond the borders of their own country, while contemporary Turkish Ottoman historians tend to focus their work on the Turkish parts of the Empire and are usually not aware of ongoing research in the former Ottoman provinces. However, as long as they do not work in Western universities, scholars in the Middle East are neither area specialists nor experts on exotic cultures, but historians, sociologists, jurists, or theologians who work in disciplines. Paradoxically and as a result of the colonial legacy and of post-colonial developments, the ecumenicism embedded in the notion of a Middle East hardly exists in the academic reality of Middle Eastern states.

*Research with, rather than research on*

The principle of “research with, rather than research on” will ensure that scholars from Europe, the Middle East, and other regions can work together as equal partners. This will familiarize scholars with different national scholarly traditions and approaches and thus help to overcome



problems of disciplinary nationalism. It provides for better access to relevant scholarly debates in the Middle East in terms of new fields of study and current research. Scholars in the humanities and the social sciences should be obliged to try to understand the sense of words, sentences, texts, and facts from within the context in which they emerged. This can hardly be achieved through a limitation to texts; it requires the formation and interaction of scholarly communities. In his mid-eighteenth-century travelogue, “Uncovering the Secrets of European Civilization”, Ahmad Faris Shidyaq addresses this necessity when he describes in detail problems in the translation of Arabic prose, poetry, and religious texts into the English language. He recounts dialogues with prominent Orientalists of his time. In one of these dialogues, he refers to serious translation mistakes and asks his colleague why he does not intermingle with Arab scholars in the course of his work; the answer he receives states that this should be superfluous, since no one intermingles either with the Romans or the Greeks when studying their texts. This episode shows that a deep awareness of local traditions, languages, and frameworks of knowledge is of crucial importance, as is the critique of any claim to pure objectivity. The integration of different perspectives, approaches, pre-judgments (Gadamer), as they developed in the respective fields of research, into processes of understanding and interpretation is a necessary condition for any and all scholarly undertakings.

The German tradition of scholarship on the Middle East and its experience of colonial and post-colonial encounter with Middle Eastern societies, communities, and scholars differ from that of countries like Great Britain, France, and the USA. These different histories may have contributed to the strength of German Orientalism, namely Philology, but also to the greater attraction of British, French, and American universities for Middle Eastern scholars. Therefore, forming scholarly communities on the principle of ‘research with’ gains special importance in the German context, where scholarship and debate on the Middle East is too often based on texts, and scholarly exchange with the Middle East is too much limited to the sciences.

#### *Scholarship, the University, the Arts, and the Public*

The program emphasizes the need to tie research more strongly back to the university. This is why the research fields and groups connected in this proposal are embedded both in non- and in university institutes. Scholars at various stages of their career working mostly at university institutes are participating in the program. Where possible, the program will try to contribute to the transfer of approaches, scholarly debates, and insights developed in the frame of this program into research and teaching at the university, through the association of its fellows with university institutes, the possibility for students to participate in seminars and workshops, and by addressing questions of curricula, for example in the Berlin Seminar.

‘Europe in the Middle East; the Middle East in Europe’ will also try to reach out to the public and to the arts. Already in the framework of the Working Group Modernity and Islam, fruitful experiences emerged when scholarly debates were conducted in public venues such as the Volksbühne, the House of World Cultures, the Berliner Festspiele in Berlin, or other institutions. Similarly, combining scholarly discussions with representations of fine and performing arts in workshops and seminars (as in the former projects ‘Cultural Mobility in Near Eastern Literatures’ or the ‘West-Eastern Divan’) also offers productive cultural and intellectual entanglements. Music is a particularly interesting field in this framework. For example, the well-tempered tuning system – one of the key concepts of Western European music – has been seen as the defining parameter of European music. Thus, composers like Hans Neusiedler (1505-1563) in his “Der Jude tanzt” drew a line between “European” and Jewish music by portraying Jewish music as dissonant. At the same time, this anti-Semitic polemical piece anticipated certain forms of modern classical music. Similarly, Oriental features in European classical music, as in Mozart’s “Alla turca”, always preserved a certain popular appeal. “Oriental” themes in nineteenth-century operas or symphonies also constituted a field of interest for the





construction and portrayal of an imaginary Middle East in Europe's aesthetic tradition. Art history likewise offers additional points of interest. Starting in the nineteenth century, Orientalism became a topic in paintings in various European schools – paving the way for images that have lasted until today. On the other hand, the entanglements of European arts and music with the cultural space of the Middle East can also illustrate interwoven translation patterns, especially during the last two centuries. Clichés such as “iconoclastic Islam” or explanations of modern Middle Eastern art as mere “imitations” could be brought into question by revisiting the various forms of artistic traditions, including the modern ones. Even in the field of (popular) religious book production today, images are used, some of which (the portrayal of the devil for instance) seem to reflect a Western Christian imagery that made its way to the region through the activities of Christian missions and schools.

The program will therefore attempt, where possible, to bridge the gap between extra-university and university scholarship, between scholarship and art, but also between scholarship and the public. This aim is expressed through the participation of the musician Stefan Litwin in the Program Collegium and of the writer Navid Kermani in the advisory board of the program. The program will certainly thereby enter new methodological territory: through new forms of collaboration, new research perspectives will be developed to find ways out of polemical dichotomies and sterile culturalistic attributions. In this way, research on social, cultural, religious, scholarly, and artistic topics can contribute to the urgent need for a vision of a shared history and culture in and across both regions. The point is not to privilege a specific viewpoint, but to initiate a parallel action in regard to scholarship and to scholarship policy.

### **3. Research Fields**

The attempt to contribute to a reflection on fundamental concepts and premises that can do justice to the profound social and cultural changes on both sides of the Mediterranean will be undertaken in a common framework resting upon four individual projects contained within ‘Europe in the Middle East; the Middle East in Europe’.

These four individual projects address research fields that are explained briefly below and in more detail in the section research fields on the website of ‘Europe in the Middle East; the Middle East in Europe’. The projects cover disciplines ranging from Philology and the History of Religion, through Literary Studies, Urban and Social History, Philosophy, Political Science, and Sociology, to Oriental and Islamic Studies.

All of the projects or research fields proposed are especially suitable for promoting self-reflexive and innovative research beyond disciplinary, national, linguistic, and religious boundaries. They all promise strong research in their particular fields and share the goal of addressing their subject matter with academic rigor in their particular field and within the common perspective promoted by ‘Europe in the Middle East; the Middle East in Europe’.

These research fields are accompanied and complemented by a special forum under the title “Tradition and the Critique of Modernity: Secularism, Fundamentalism, and Religion from Middle Eastern Perspectives”, which provides a framework to rethink key concepts of Modernity like secularity, tradition, and religion in the context of the experiences, interpretations, and critiques of Jews, Arabs, and Muslims in the Middle East and in Europe as a common concern of all research fields.

The program can thereby build upon existing research institutions, groups, and networks as well as a series of earlier works. Through the researchers involved in the four fields of research, the program is connected in Berlin to the Institute for Arabic Studies, directed by Angelika Neuwirth, and the Institute for Islamic Studies, directed by Gudrun Krämer, both at the Free



University Berlin, and to the Center of Modern Oriental Studies, directed by Ulrike Freitag, who also teaches at Free University Berlin. The projects and scholars involved are themselves embedded in close working relations with scholars at Berlin universities, with the Center for Literary Research, the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences, the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin, and a host of other institutions in and outside Berlin. Worth particular mention here are the working group “Modernity and Islam”, which was founded at the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin in 1996 and expired in September 2006, and its adjunct projects “Cultural Mobility in Middle Eastern Literature”, “Jewish-Islamic Hermeneutics as Cultural Criticism”, “Forum Museum: Non-European Art and Culture in European Metropolises”, “West-Eastern Divan”, and “New Approaches to the History of Trading Cities in the Ottoman Empire”. The program “Europe in the Middle East – Key Political Concepts in the Dialogue Between Cultures” also belongs here. “Europe in the Middle East – The Middle East in Europe” will cultivate and expand these experiences and close contacts with people and institutions in the international scientific community and with scholars in the Middle East – including the Institutes of the German Oriental Society in Beirut and Istanbul.

The program will support young scholars in a variety of ways (post-doc fellowships, summer academies, seminars, and inclusion in the processes of agenda setting) and, of course, cooperate with other scholarly institutions in Germany and abroad.

### **3.1 Perspectives on the Qur'an: Negotiating different views of a shared history**

(Islam Dayeh, Michael Marx, Ghassan Al-Masri, Angelika Neuwirth, Nicolai Sinai, Stefan Wild)

Against a widespread tendency to view the Qur'an as a text that is essentially alien to 'Western' culture, the project's primary objective will be to situate it within the religious landscape of Late Antiquity, a cultural legacy shared by European and Middle Eastern history. While this objective implies a fundamentally historical interest in the mythical construction of beginnings, the project's main concern will be to historicize not only the Qur'an itself, but also the history of its reception and presentation. Such a two-tiered approach aims to generate an atmosphere of critical reflection on the assumptions and methods applied in contemporary Qur'anic research, thus opening a discursive forum where scholars from different religious, cultural, and disciplinary backgrounds will be able to interact.

Both in European and American historical narratives, the ancient Middle East figures prominently as the cradle of civilization and as the birthplace of monotheism. Up until the Islamic conquests of the seventh century, the Middle East is considered to have been the setting of important developments in Western history, most notably the emergence of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament and the writings of the Church Fathers. The subsequent advent of the Arabs, however, supposedly led to a cultural disconnection of the Middle East both from its own past, be it Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Phoenician, or Hellenistic, and from Judaeo-Christian tradition. Yet the underlying assumption that the emergence of Islam resulted in a near-complete alienation of the Middle East from Western culture can hardly withstand critical scrutiny. Important aspects of the Islamic Middle East, no less than European Christianity, can be viewed as a creative reworking of Late Ancient culture. This is true already for Islam's foundational text itself, the Qur'an: Even though situated at the periphery of the Byzantine and Sassanid empires, the Arabian peninsula, where the Qur'anic text came into being, was connected to intellectual developments that were crucial for what was later identified, and more specifically monopolized, as the cultural heritage of Europe.



In fact, it would be unfair to suggest that modern research has entirely missed this obvious truth. The idea that Judaeo-Christian textual legacies inform the Qur'anic text was a vision deeply anchored in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scholarship, as represented by Abraham Geiger, Theodor Nöldeke, and Josef Horowitz, among others. Yet even though scholars such as these have successfully unearthed innumerable Qur'anic references to ideas and narratives current in Jewish, Christian, and other writings, their work often proceeded on the basis of a questionable paradigm of influence, where the Qur'an's author (i.e., Muhammad) is depicted either as having faithfully duplicated his sources or as having 'misunderstood' them. This approach neglects the formative significance of the Qur'anic community in the appropriation, negotiation, and creative reconfiguration of existing ideas.

To sound out such communal interactions in a hermeneutically more sophisticated way, it is imperative to gain a clearer understanding of the Qur'an's literary make-up. Not only is the Qur'an accepted by Muslims as divine revelation, it also displays a sustained effort to present itself as such through a wide variety of rhetorical devices. While it is thus consistently marked as mantic speech, i.e., a speech form thought to emanate from a supra-human realm, it also admits other speakers and listeners into its discourse. An important part of the project will therefore consist in unraveling these different voices and thereby elaborating a more refined literary phenomenology of the Qur'an.

From the earliest period on, the reception and perception of the Qur'an has been intimately bound up with political struggles and interfaith polemics. It is precisely because the text has emerged from a historical milieu shared by Christianity, Judaism, and Islam that its religious authority and truth have been so vigorously debated. Because the polemical disputes that have historically surrounded the text, both within and outside of the Islamic community, in many respects still determine the way it is encountered today, they will form an important axis of the project. At the same time, attention to issues of historical context is by no means limited to Western research, but also plays a significant, yet often underestimated role in its Islamic reception: traditional Qur'anic exegesis, for example, is acutely interested in identifying the text's 'occasions of revelation' (asbâb an-nuzûl). It is especially against the background of this interest in methodological and historical reception issues that a participation of scholars from Islamic and non-Islamic backgrounds promises to help break down the mutual indifference of Qur'anic studies conducted in the West and in the Middle East and to develop an awareness of the Qur'an as a legacy common to Europe and the Middle East.

'Perspectives on the Qur'an: Negotiating different views of a shared history' is a project that will be integrated into the particular research context provided by scholars at the Institute for Arabic Studies, chaired by Angelika Neuwirth. It is part and parcel of her and some of her students' ongoing research focus on the genesis of the Qur'an. Currently the establishment of a research group at the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences is planned under the title "Corpus Coranicum – textgeschichtliche Dokumentation und historisch-kritischer Kommentar zum Koran" ("Corpus Coranicum – text-historical documentation and historical-critical commentary on the Koran"). This project is conceived as a long-term documentary study on a documentation of the texts of the Qur'an and its genesis, combined with the edition of a historical-critical commentary of the Qur'anic text.

The framework of 'Europe in the Middle East; the Middle East in Europe' offers opportunities for systematic exchange with other research fields that deal with questions of literary entanglements and canon formation or the contemporary readings of the Qur'an, and to broader conceptual debates that are a necessary complement to this philological enterprise.

### **3.2. Travelling Traditions: Comparative Perspectives on Near Eastern Literatures**



(Friederike Pannewick, Samah Selim, Kader Konuk, Angelika Neuwirth, Andreas Pflitsch, Barbara Winckler)

This project offers a unique, comparativist approach to the study of literature in and across the Middle East and Europe, from early modernity on. The goal of the project is a critical re-evaluation of the texts, methods, and concepts that have dominated and maintained the discursive and disciplinary divides between ‘Occident’ and ‘Orient’ on the one hand, and narrowly defined national philologies on the other. The project thus focuses on canon formation and, in a parallel gesture, the basic permeability of literary traditions within and across national and regional borders. It attempts to discover and foreground the historical and structural dialogue between texts and movements as a way out of the impasse created by essentialist concepts of culture and civilization. It also aims to interrogate the disciplinary structures that shape the study of literature, of Self and Other, in both the centers and peripheries of institutional power.

New perspectives on historical legacies, literary histories, and critical methodologies will be fostered by a group of scholars working in their specialized fields as well as related fields of literary theory and cultural studies. The first part of the project is constructed around a basic revision of the foundational orientalist and Europe-centered paradigms that have structured the field of literary studies in the past. Thus, one starting point will be the interrogation of the quasi-biological paradigms of “the rise and fall of civilizations” that color the practices through which literary genealogies – and particularly those emerging in modern times – are erected and maintained. Canon formation, historical memory, and the problem of ‘beginnings’ thus mark one major field of inquiry that scholars will be invited to address, with the concrete aim in mind of uncovering new epistemological and textual constellations through which to consider and refashion alternative perspectives on both Middle Eastern and European literary modernity. The centrality of key cultural and literary concepts and critical tools like ‘renaissance’ or ‘genre’ will be addressed, as will the variety of heretofore unconsidered relationships between discrete literary movements and cultural genres. Most importantly, the project hopes to emphasize the porousness and mobility of literary texts and movements across cultural and national borders. A connected major concern will thus be historical practices of translation in relation to both popular and elite narrative traditions, literary criticism, and theory. Moreover, in a move away from a certain strain of postmodernist identity politics, the project will also focus on the ‘rootless’ postcolonial text – not as a singular instance of a monolithic globalization, but in a relationship of direct filiation to the concrete languages, canons, and politics from which they emerge.

The second part of the project interrogates the institutional hierarchies and the academic divisions of labor that inform disciplinary categories like Area Studies, Comparative Literature, and World Literature between European and Middle Eastern universities and research institutes. The aim here is to explore and critique institutional situations that produce centers and peripheries of knowledge production and consumption in relation to literary canon formation and cultural discourses about Self and Other. Taken together, the two parts of the project intend to create a forum in which a critique of the vertical and strictly demarcated discursive relationship between Europe and the Middle East of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries can be fruitfully replaced by a rigorous exploration of the horizontal and constantly mobile entanglements and legacies that have historically shaped this profoundly ambivalent encounter.

‘Travelling Traditions: Comparative Perspectives on Near Eastern Literatures’ emerged from the Working Group Modernity and Islam’s project on ‘Cultural Mobility in Near Eastern Literatures’. This project does not rest on a single institutional framework, but is already based within a strong scholarly and institutional network developed in the last three years. Part of this framework is the close connection to the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin’s own thematic



emphasis on 'Cultural Mobility', developed by Stephen Greenblatt. The reformed project 'Travelling Traditions' can further benefit from close working relations with the research group 'Perspectives on the Qur'an' in regard to the questions of canon formation, intertextuality and translation. It shares central concerns with the group working on 'Cities Compared: Cosmopolitanism in the Mediterranean and Adjunct Regions' since certain genres like the novel or theater are connected to the life in and the audiences of cities.

The project will cultivate the close ties with the Center for Literary Research, the Institutes for Arabic, Turkish, and East Asian Studies at the Free University Berlin and with the ForLaBB (Forschungsverbund Lateinamerika Berlin-Brandenburg) established in recent years.

### **3.3. Cities Compared: Cosmopolitanism in the Mediterranean and Adjacent Regions**

(Ulrike Freitag, Nora Lafi)

This project brings together research on cosmopolitanism in order to study cities of different regions bordering on the Mediterranean and the Red Sea. The comparative methodology embedded in this project takes into account various disciplinary perspectives on cities and urban history, from history to political sciences and political philosophy. The aim is to confront different theories of cosmopolitanism and civil society with concrete historical urban case studies. Thus the attempt will be made to push forward the theoretical discussion of two key concepts of Modernity – cosmopolitanism and civil society – beyond disciplinary nationalism and at the same time to connect recent research on Mediterranean cities to ongoing theoretical debates.

The questions of how people of different cultural and religious background live together increasingly exercises people's minds, notably in conjunction with an increasing awareness of global connectivity. What is the historical experience of diverse urban communities in the Middle East? And how does it compare with the experience of diverse communities in European towns? How are such concrete examples of entanglements conceptualized, how are they translated into practice? How are urban societies dealing with the impact of global changes and the change from empires to nation states? How have urban traditions been reinterpreted, and what bearing does this have on modern conceptions of multicultural societies? Often the concept of cosmopolitanism is invoked to conjure up the image of citizens of the world, easily fitting into different contexts that openly receive them. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are often seen as the golden age of this easygoing interaction. Similarly, present debates on cosmopolitan governance in a time of confrontation between global trends and reinterpreted traditions will figure prominently. At the same time, and quite in contrast to the above notion, the descriptions of urban realities and of diverse societies often focus on local or foreign communities that are described as being autistic, hostile to their environment, and potentially subversive to the societies' integrity. This contrast is to be systematically explored and discussed. In this context, the role and conceptualization of intermediate societal groups on both sides of the Mediterranean will be investigated, with specific stress on the Ottoman Empire and changes due to the advent of the modern nation states. In addition, denominational and professional communities, and their role in urban politics and governance, will play an important part in the investigation of urban cohabitation. This links the investigation of cosmopolitanism closely to questions of the development of civil society in a non-Western context. Similarly, the process of administrative "modernization", which includes the official approach to diversity and social relations in cities and which can also be framed in terms of a transition from old to new regimes of governance, will figure prominently in this project.





The project will be conducted at the Centre for Modern Oriental Studies in Berlin. There, it will complement a research project on "Migration and changing urban institutions in the late Ottoman period", which comprises a group of four researchers, headed by Nora Lafi and including Ulrike Freitag, Malte Fuhrmann, and Florian Riedler and which is funded by the German Research Council. Although the theoretical as well as the spatial foci of the two projects are different, we envisage close cooperation between the two project groups. This will include a number of joint working group meetings as well as collaboration in the planned workshops of the respective projects. It also applies to the envisaged summer school.

Since the imagination of the urban social panorama, of pluralism, and of cosmopolitanism is also significantly shaped through literature, movies, and photography, cooperation with 'Travelling Traditions' within the framework "Europe in the Middle East; The Middle East in Europe" is expected to be particularly fruitful. Interpretations of tradition in the evolution of the urban social organization also rely on research and reflection on the relationship between tradition and modernity. Therefore, the connection to the research field 'Islamic Discourses Contested' and the forum 'Tradition and the Critique of Modernity' should be productive.

### **3.4. Islamic discourse contested: Middle Eastern and European perspectives**

(Gudrun Krämer)

This project analyzes modern Islamic thought and discourses in the framework of theories of multiple or reflexive modernities (Eisenstadt, et al.). "Islamic" thought and discourse, more specifically concepts of the good life, good society, and good governance that are defined with reference to the Islamic legacy, are situated between the local and the global, spanning what for lack of a better term are still called the Islamic and the Western worlds. Islamic discourse therefore offers a particular fruitful opportunity to critically examine intellectual entanglements and contesting interpretations of the processes and consequences of Modernity.

Islamic discourse is part and parcel of a contest over moral values, social norms, and political institutions on a local as well as a global level, in Europe and the Middle East. All speakers have to rationalize their choices in the public sphere and in a pluralistic setting. But they are not equal, for the global asymmetry of power impacts strongly on the character and content of the debates: international agencies from the World Bank to human rights organizations to the European States join in demanding that "Islam" (meaning present-day Muslims) undergo a process of reform and enlightenment and that they accept the rule of law, good governance, and human rights, first and foremost in the realm of gender relations. External pressure tends to put Middle Easterners, and not just Muslims, in a defensive mood. There are many who see no threat to their "identity" in adopting and adapting modern norms and values precisely because they are not uniquely Western, or exclusively tied to their historical origins in the West, but universally valid. Yet they cannot do so without defining their relationship vis-à-vis the West (as the quintessential and overpowering "Other") and vis-à-vis Islam (as the supposed expression of self, identity, and authenticity). The debates on values, proper conduct, and good governance, therefore, cannot be separated from the issue of identity and of identity politics.

Like any other thought and discourse, the Islamic one is constructed: its advocates may claim to represent Islam writ large. What they offer are *readings* of tradition based on a *selection* of references, textual and otherwise. Like any other intellectual tradition, the Islamic one is rich and plural and filled with discordant voices. Both observations are particularly relevant to modern Islamic thought, and Islamist thought more specifically. Islamists constitute only one discursive community among others, although over the last few decades they have come to set the tone of public debate and to define some of its most salient features. Islamists claim that Islam provides



a distinct, coherent, and comprehensive set of norms and values that makes it into a unique *system* competing with other religious, cultural, and political systems. They further claim that in order to establish an “Islamic order” on any given territory, the Sharia has to be “implemented” in its entirety and at the expense of all other sources of morality and normativity. The project will explore the inherent tension between this tendency to draw clear boundaries and the implicit recourse to universal norms and values that has been a distinguishing mark of the Islamic reformist tradition going back to the late nineteenth century. Given the present dominance of Islamist discourse and its advocates, it becomes all the more important to consider its critics, and not only those who openly declare themselves to be secularists. Attention should also be paid to the proponents of a New Center (*wasat*) who have emerged in a number of Middle Eastern societies, with the aim to develop a new synthesis between Islamic values and modern concepts and institutions of the good life and good governance.

Critical scholarship has tended to emphasize processes of individualization of religious experience, practice, and orientation. At the same time, we are witnessing the emergence of various types of religious authorities, some traditional but subtly transformed (imams, muftis, preachers, Sufi *shaykhs*), others altogether new (not just Islamic intellectuals, but also Islamicists and social scientists), and new forms of articulating authoritative statements on all matters Islamic (collective *fatwa* bodies, media muftis, Internet *fatwas*, etc.). One aim of the present project will be to link specific visions of an Islamic order with specific authorities, their scope of activities, and their respective audiences. In addition to analyzing the contents, i.e., the norms and values discussed (e.g., justice, freedom, equality) it involves looking at the references used; the hermeneutics employed; the individuals and groups involved; the authorities invoked; and the audiences targeted.

The project builds on earlier work and present research within the framework of AKMI and beyond, involving notably the Freie Universität Berlin and the Max-Weber-Kolleg Erfurt. Current research includes doctoral and postdoctoral studies dealing with Islamic socio-political thought and aspects of Sharia legislation in the Middle East, and with religious authorities among Muslims in Western Europe and the United States. Participants are connected to a network of scholars and academic institutions in the Middle East, Europe, and the United States of America. Within the framework of “Europe in the Middle East, the Middle East in Europe”, links will be closest conceptually and methodologically with the forum *Tradition and the Critique of Modernity*. Given the salience of Qur’anic references in contemporary Islamic discourse, appropriate ways to interact with the *Qur’anic project* will have to be established. There will be significant overlap with *Travelling Traditions*, especially with regard to the processes of canon building and translation. Cooperation with *Cities Compared: Cosmopolitanism in the Mediterranean and Adjacent Regions* should prove particularly fruitful, since it will help scholars of Islamic thought and discourse to situate their subject in a given context.

### **3.5. Forum Tradition and the Critique of Modernity: Secularism, Fundamentalism, and Religion from Middle Eastern Perspectives**

(Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, Beer Sheva)

“Tradition and the Critique of Modernity: Secularism, Fundamentalism, and Religion from a Middle Eastern Perspectives”, is conceived as a special forum for intellectual and scholarly debate that will accompany the program and its four research groups. It is dedicated most explicitly to the attempt to rethink key concepts of Modernity like secularity, tradition, and religion by confronting them with different interpretations of the political, religious and cultural origins, experiences, and consequences of secular Modernity.



Since there is neither a universally accepted definition of modernity, nor of secularism, religion, or tradition, it is necessary to dissociate the particular theory of European secular Modernity, which is based on the separation and privatization of religion, from general theories of modernization that impose universalized European and Western/Christian forms of secular differentiation as a measure for all societies worldwide. In this process of rethinking key concepts of Modernity, Jewish, Arab, and Muslim perspectives, both from the Christian West and the Middle East, but also from other non-European contexts, especially India, are of crucial importance.

Secular Modernity is seen by its critics as a narrative or as an ideology that obscures its own theological roots and the human sufferings that were caused in its process. It is furthermore interpreted as of limited use in explaining the ongoing significance of religion not only in the Middle East, but also in Europe, the United States, and other parts of the world, as a phenomenon that emerged with the rise of the discourse of Modernity, which in turn is embedded in particular frameworks of the understanding of religion, nation, ethnicity, culture, and race.

In Europe secularism is perceived as a historical notion in the context of particular struggles and polemics during the nineteenth century. As a polemical concept, today it still shapes the debates in and on the Middle East. Secularity as a truly universal principle requires a historicization of its narrative and the inclusion of precisely those perspectives and positions it excluded. This means, for instance, that the theological and Orientalist connotations (not only the European ones) of its construction have to be taken into account, as do the violent consequences of processes of modernization and secularization following, for example, the politics of modernization of the Ottoman Empire and its subsequent break-up into national states, for they were - and often still are - accompanied by ethnic cleansing, separation, sectarianism, and modern (secular) despotism.

Within the framework of the overall proposal "Europe in the Middle East; The Middle East in Europe", the study of Jewish and Muslim, Arab and Israeli debates and reflections on secularity, secularization, and secularism are of central importance. Jews and Arabs and their religions were as significant in the genesis of the discourse of secular modernity as was the model of a Western/Christian secular Modernity, for example for Kemalist Turkey, Ba'athist Iraq, or for the separation of Jews and Arabs in Palestine and the Arab world. From a European political as well as theological perspective, the (historical) separation between "the Jew" as the theological enemy and "the Arab" as the political enemy still finds its expression in the maintenance of distinctive discursive spheres. The negation of these historical legacies complicates the situation of Jews and Arabs (Muslim, Christian, and secular) in the Middle East and also disconnects the question of minorities in Europe (Jews and Muslims) and in the Middle East (Christians and Jews) from their past and future.

Two other concepts, "tradition" (not in a nostalgic sense) and "exile" may contribute to further critique. Tradition stands against its negation, as demanded by the discourse of secular Modernity. Thus the inclusion of tradition(s) of the secular often expressed in traditional or religious terms, and of experiences and conceptualizations of conviviality in Arab, Islamic or Jewish culture and thought may lead to a different formulations of secularity, which could contribute to overcome existing divisions, not only in terms of concepts. Can a revisiting of Arab/Islamic thought and practice since early medieval times, as such different thinkers like Ebrahim Moosa and Aziz Al-Azmeh suggest, lead to more fruitful interpretations of the relation of the divine and the secular? Exile in its particular Jewish meaning claims a perception of history that opposes modern concepts such as progress and authenticity.



The reformulation of “religion” as a distinctive category played a significant role in the European and in the modern Middle Eastern debates on the integration of “minorities” into the emerging national states. While the formulation of the secular in Europe was somehow linked to the question of whether the Jews constituted a religious group or a nation, (religious) “minority” is a category contested by many scholars and intellectuals in the Middle East who prefer to think in terms of citizenship. From that perspective, Zionist (as well as certain religio-national trends in Arab, Turkish or Islamist) discourses can be seen as exceptional manifestations in the construction of the myth of a modern purified and/or secular nation. In fact, in this context secularization and nationalization meant the formulation of the millenarian myth of the return of the Jews, of the Arabs, and of Islam and Western Christian Modernity in terms of modern nationalism and colonialism.

It is in these dimensions that the various narratives and perceptions of the secular Modernity and their translations in Europe and the Middle East will have to be examined. Secularity has to be linked to the discourse on the secularization of the Jews in the early modern period, to the Arabs’ (Muslims, Christian, Jewish, and secular) reflections on and experiences of secularism, to the processes of politicization, and - more recently - to the privatization of revivalist religion, as well as to the question of minorities today. Modernity and tradition are crucial foci not only of all research fields embedded in this program, but also central and contested concepts in the debate of scholars and intellectuals in Middle Eastern as well as in European/Western countries. The critical and historical scrutiny of these notions allows for linking the assumptions to questions and fields of research addressed to the different parts of the overall program.

Analyzing these notions from the Arab/Muslim and from the Jewish points of view leads to different views on Modernity, like the ones proposed by Aziz al-Azmeh and Shmuel Eisenstadt. Secularization, analyzed in the European and Arab/Muslim context of today, discloses the different historical legacies entangled in this political dispute, historicizing also the use of the concept as part of the “colonialism of concepts”.

The discussion of the secular and secularism can therefore serve as a central node for the synthesis of various basic conceptual assumptions and critical positions. The different facets of the overall program recur in this resepective theme: text, tradition, politics, or the social construction of identities.

#### **4. Organization and Scholarly Program**

##### **4. 1. The Responsible Institutions and the Collegium**

The program ‘Europe in the Middle East; the Middle East’ is carried out under the responsibility of the President of the Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften, the head of the Advisory Board of the Fritz Thyssen Foundation and the Rektor of the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin.

In scholarly terms, the program is directed by the representatives of the research fields. They form the Collegium of the program.

The Collegium steers the scholarly program and is responsible for common activities. It will convene jointly with the Berlin Seminar. The Collegium ensures the quality and the visibility of the common agenda of the project. It provides the links to the participating institutes and disciplines

The Collegium currently consists of the following persons:

- Prof. Dr. Ulrike Freitag, (Director of the Zentrum Moderner Orient)



- Prof. Dr. Gudrun Krämer (Institut for Islamic Studies, Freie Universität Berlin)
- Nora Lafi, Ph.D. (Zentrum Moderner Orient)
- Prof. Dr. Angelika Neuwirth (Seminar for Semitic and Arabic Studies, Freie Universität Berlin)
- Prof. Dr. Friederike Pannewick (Centrum für Nah- und Mitteloststudien/Arabistik, Philipps-Universität Marburg)
- Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, Ph.D. (Lecturer of Jewish History, Ben-Gurion University, Beer Sheva)
- Samah Selim, Ph.D. (Rutgers University, New Jersey)
- Prof. Dr. em. Stefan Wild (Islamic Studies, Universität Bonn)
- Prof. Dr. Stefan Litwin (Department of Music, The University of North Carolina/ Chapel Hill, Hochschule für Musik Saar)
- Prof. Dr. Cilja Harders (Otto-Suhr-Institut for Politic Studies, Freie Universität Berlin)
- Dr. Stefan Weber (Direcotr, Museum for Islamic Art, Berlin)

#### **4.2 The Advisory Board**

The project will be supervised by an academic advisory board that consists of distinguished scholars in the research fields with institutional responsibilities in Berlin and personalities who represent the cultural and political dimensions of ‘Europe in the Middle East; the Middle East in Europe’. The project will furnish the advisory board with a progress report once a year. The Board will then discuss the report with the Collegium and report to the Rektor and the President.

The Advisory Board consists of the following persons:

- Prof. Dr. Yehuda Elkana (Sociology, Rektor of the Central European University, Budapest, Senior Advisor to the Rektor of the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin)
- Prof. Dr. Dr. hc. Hartmut Kaelble (Social History, Humboldt Universität Berlin)
- Navid Kermani, Dr. phil. (writer and scholar, Köln)
- Prof. Dr. Christoph Marksches (Church History, Humboldt Universität Berlin)
- Prof. Dr. Thomas Risse (Political Science, Freie Universität Berlin)
- Prof. Dr. Sigrid Weigel (Literary Studies, Technische Universität Berlin and Director of the Zentrum für Literaturforschung, Berlin)





### **4.3. Instruments**

The scholarly program of the project provides for the following instruments: 1) a fellowship program, 2) a joint Berlin Seminar, 3) workshops, 4) summer academies, and 5) invited lectures and support for publications resulting from the project.

#### **4.3.1. Fellowship Program (Postdoctoral Fellowships)**

The postdoctoral fellowship program is conceived as the main element of the project 'Europe in the Middle East; the Middle East in Europe'. Each year 10 fellowships shall be granted, on the basis of an international competition, to postdoctoral students to fund projects of their own choice. These postdoctoral fellowships are mainly addressed to young researchers from the Middle East who wish to explore issues related to one field of research within the current projects run in Berlin. Scholarships are also available to scholars from the cultural and social sciences in other countries who are interested in working together within the suggested framework.

The fellowship program is instrumental in anchoring individual and specific themes and case studies in the framework of the fields of research and the project as a whole. It is crucial for arriving at a meaningful and fruitful scholarly dialogue with researchers from the Middle East. In Berlin the postdoctoral fellows will be integrated, in accordance with their disciplinary fields or themes, into one of the university or extra-university research institutes connected to the project in the way mentioned in the sketches of the fields of research above. This will provide them the opportunity to advance their own research topics in close communication with Berlin colleagues working in similar disciplinary frameworks and areas of research. The fellows' participation will in turn also contribute to the specific disciplinary questions raised in respective research groups and encourage exchange with scholars working in those disciplines relevant for the four fields of research, such as Church History, Jewish Studies, and Patristics (Perspectives on the Qur'an), Urban History and Political Philosophy (Cities Compared), Literary Studies, and Comparative Literature (Travelling Traditions), and Political Science, Philosophy, History, and Islamic Studies (Islamic Discourses Contested).

The scholarships are generally fixed for a 10-month period, but are also available in exceptional cases for shorter periods of at least 3 months and can be prolonged. It is expected that the fellows of the project assume responsibilities within their particular project groups and in regard to the project as a whole. We are thinking here, for example, of the conceptualization and organization of workshops or particular seminars, as well as support in the edition of publications resulting from the program.

The fellows also have to participate actively through presentations of their work in the Berlin Seminar.

#### **4.3.2. The Berlin Seminar**

The Berlin Seminar serves as a bracket for all other activities and provides an interdisciplinary research environment, which is one of the strengths of any area-related form of academic communication. It is planned as a regular fortnightly event to give fellows of the Project, the members of the Collegium, fellows of the project 'Europe in the Middle East; the Middle East in Europe', and scholars from Berlin universities and extra-university institutions an opportunity to



meet and discuss their ongoing work. On the basis of individual research cases, questions related to the common agenda of 'Europe in the Middle East; the Middle East in Europe' will be debated. The Seminar facilitates the development of innovative ideas and research approaches in relation to key questions of the humanities and social sciences, which will have an impact on the ways research and teaching is undertaken. It also allows fellows of 'Europe in the Middle East; the Middle East in Europe' and fellows of the Wissenschaftskolleg a structured access to the Berlin research milieu and enables young scholars in Berlin to consider their work in a broader, interdisciplinary, and international context.

Each Seminar focuses on a particular theme. The seminars are held during the academic year, either at the Wissenschaftskolleg, the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences, or another of the participating research institutes in Berlin.

#### **4.3.3. Workshops**

The instrument of 2- to 4-day workshops with 10 to 18 participants allows for intense discussions of specific issues within – and also between – the individual projects. Apart from the integration of the fellows in the respective Berlin-based research groups, the workshops are primarily planned to be a central instrument in advancing the particular research agendas of the participating scholars.

Each year, one or two smaller workshops also involving the opportunity to invite scholars from abroad are available for each of the abovementioned research fields. Workshops within the individual projects are ideally steered and undertaken in close cooperation with the fellows working in the respective fields and by including scholars working on similar issues in other historical, geographical, or cultural settings. In this way, regional findings can be channeled into the mainframe institutional disciplines.

The workshops should lead to publications.

#### **4.3.4. Summer Academies**

Each field of research – or two together – run their own Summer Academy. This gives young scholars an opportunity to discuss relevant issues within an international group of 20 doctoral and postdoctoral colleagues in an international and multidisciplinary framework. Summer Academies also contribute to the internationalization of the scholarly program and the enlargements of the implied scholarly networks and serve as an instrument for the recruitment of emerging young scholars for the postdoctoral program. In the past years, summer academies have been a very successful instrument in the experience of the Working Group Modernity and Islam, for they allow the creation of an ideal community of scholars over a limited period of time, in a way that is difficult to achieve in the frame of an institution.

Applications are advertised internationally, and candidates are selected based on the relevance of their research to the specific agenda. The program deviates from the normal lecture-hall set-up, since the main contributors are the young researchers themselves. Leading scholars attend the conference in an advisory capacity, adding their own methodical questions. The Summer Academy is held either in Berlin, at a European partner institute, or at a research institute in a Middle Eastern country.



#### **4.3.5. Carl Heinrich Becker Lecture of the Fritz Thyssen Stiftung**

Named after the German Orientalist and Prussian Minister of Culture and Education, Carl Heinrich Becker, this lecture shall acquaint, once a year, a broader public with central themes and questions of the research program 'Europe in the Middle East - the Middle East in Europe'. Carl Heinrich Becker (1876 – 1933) was an Orientalist who is remembered as one of the founders of modern Islamic Studies in Germany and for his vision of entangled Histories and Culture of Europe and the Muslim world. As Prussian Minister of Culture and Education he supported the study of foreign languages, histories and culture as a part of national education and as a means to avoid conflict.

#### **4.4. The Business Office**

The Collegium of the project 'Europe in the Middle East; the Middle East in Europe' and the individual projects are supported by a business office, which is located at the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin or at the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences. The office is administrated by Georges Khalil, the executive director of 'Europe in the Middle East; the Middle East in Europe'. He supports the communication between the members of the Collegium, the advisory board, and the scholars and institutions involved in the project and supports, organizes, and administrates the scholarly program. He coordinates and administrates the funds and the development of the project.

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