

Re-Centering a Region: the Maghreb in Motion

Veranstalter: Centrum für Nah-und Mitteloststudien, Philipps-Universität Marburg; Universität Aix-Marseille

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The conference „Re-centering a Region: The Maghreb in Motion“, February 15-17 2018 organized at the Centre for Near and Middle Eastern Studies, PhilippsUniversität Marburg aimed to bring together existing research on the Maghreb and to initiate a more thorough-going scholarly engagement with the region in German academia combining the fields of political science, literary and cultural studies. The relevance of a focus on the Maghreb was based on the belief that the so-called ‘Arab Spring’ did not coincidentally start in Tunisia, a country in the Maghreb. Instead, the organizers were convinced that being ‘in Motion’ characterizes this cultural region since long before 2010/2011. The Maghreb contains revolutionary tendencies and anticolonial insurgencies since the colonization of Algeria in the 19th century. They also believed that multiple entanglements are exemplary not only of the region’s internal structure, but also of its relationships with Europe, Africa and the Arab world. However, in the Islamic and Arabic Studies departments at German universities, a thorough scientific engagement with the Maghreb has mostly failed to happen. Therefore, one of the goals of the conference was to begin to rectify this. In addition, a collaboration with scholarly institutions and researchers from the Maghreb, other European countries, North America and beyond was aimed for.

FRIEDERIKE PANNEWICK (Marburg) opened the conference, by presenting the evening lecture with Moroccan novelist FOUAD LAROUI. Laroui gave a keynote speech entitled „Does the Maghreb actually exist?“ The talk, which was open to the public, was followed by a reading from his novel *Les Tribulations du dernier Sijilmassi* (2014) in French, by the author, and in German by

the actor TOM GERRITZ.

The next day, RACHID OUAISSA (Marburg) provided an introduction to the conference’s overall topic. Ouaissa elaborated on the question, why it might be necessary to speak of a „re-centering“ of the Maghreb. According to him, to refocus the geographical area means to study the entanglements that characterize the region – to study not only its internal structure, but also its relations with Europe on one hand, Africa and the Arab East on the other, as well as to study its being „in motion“. Ouaissa stressed that despite the Maghreb’s centrality as a geopolitical link, it is usually perceived as doubly peripheral, both in relation to the Middle East and to Europe. Oftentimes it is merely conceived as an area of influence and competition without its own dynamics. This was another desideratum the conference strove to address.

The introduction was followed by short greetings from RICHARD JACQUEMOND, director of Iremam, Aix-Marseille and co-organizer of the conference and from HABIB KAZDAGHLI (Tunis), guest in Marburg at the time.

The opening panel, chaired by Rachid Ouaissa, focused on „Historical Entanglements in/of the Maghreb.“ The panel was based on the understanding that the Maghreb is characterized by an immense identitarian and linguistic plurality that on the one hand leads to a considerable internal social dynamic, while on the other it opens the region onto the outside and thus creates a highly mobile transregional field of interaction. The panel examined how the region has historically and geographically distinguished itself from its surroundings and thus constituted itself. In the first talk of the conference, „Entre géographie humaine et histoire politique, unité et diversité du Maghreb contemporain“, FRANCOIS BURGAT (Aix-Marseille) spoke about the diversity of the Maghreb formed through political, economic, and historical dynamics and the interaction between the Maghreb and the Orient, exemplified by Algeria and Yemen. He pointed out that the Orient tends to see the Maghreb through two prisms: The Maghreb as a place of resistance against colonization (positive perception); and the Maghreb as looser of cul-

tural battles, e.g. with regards to the state of the Arabic language in the region (negative perception). BURGAT stressed that the Maghrebi countries form a territory which is at the same time very homogeneous and very diversified. One example that he employed was the disparity in the endowment of national elites in terms of resources, both economic and symbolic and how this influences the respective per-for-man-ces of the regimes. Subsequently, CLAUDIA GRONEMANN (Mannheim) gave her presentation „Saint Augustine as a figure of memory in North Africa.“ Gronemann discussed the late antiquity theologian and philosopher, as a figure of identification in the Maghreb and problematized this function with the perspectives of the Catholic church and the local population of North Africa itself. In the third presentation, „Approche anthropologique de la conscience nationale au Maghreb,“ LAHOUARI ADDI (Lyon) got back to some of Burgat's topics. He highlighted the Maghrebi countries' differences in terms of their national construction. As a result, he argued, they have not managed to form a unified region.

The second panel considered the topic of „Mobility and Change“ and was chaired by BETTINA DENNERLEIN (Zürich). This panel dealt with movements and change within Maghrebi societies. The themes of mobility and migration as well as the rise and blockage of social groups were addressed – both in the cultural and the political field. ALFONSO DE TORO (Leipzig) stated in his presentation „Les ‘constructeurs de passages’. Voix et discours en ‘mouvement’. Mathias Enard – Abdelkebir Khatibi – Fouad Laroui – Abdelwahab Meddeb – Boualem Sansal“ the need for tolerant voices in favor of dialogue between cultures, in this time of rising intolerance, nationalism and xenophobia. ÉRIC GOBE (Aix-Marseille) approached the subject of Mobility and Change through a discussion of transitional justice in his presentation „La justice transitionnelle au Maghreb: un processus dépolitisé?“. Transitional justice was presented as a process of change whose objective is reconciliation in the face of oppression and violence through a past authoritarian regime in the hope for a just future. HAKIM ABDERREZAK (Minnesota)

presented his research under the title „Al-hijra as-sirriya and the Maghreb in Literature and Cinema.“ Through cinematic and literary productions, he examined clandestine migration („al-hijra as-sirriya“ in Arabic) from and through the Maghreb. Abderrezak showed short movie extracts from various Mediterranean countries that illustrate the consequences of this „secret“ migration, two of which being exploitation and poverty experienced by the newcomers in the „host“ countries and women who are left behind, waiting for news from their husbands and sons.

The session Maghreb in Marburg. A Networking Event was dedicated to researchers based in Marburg or associated with the Marburg based research projects (e.g. Reconfigurations and Turning Points). They had the opportunity to showcase research activities related to the Maghreb on posters as well as display previous publications (books and articles). After a short introduction of the session by its organizer, CHARLOTTE PARDEY (Marburg), conference participants and guests were invited to engage in conversation with the presenters. The goal of the session was to foster networking and exchanges between local researchers and guests.

The third panel dealt with „Actors of Change.“ It was chaired by Isabelle WERENFELS (Berlin) and tackled the roles of different actors: It addressed to what extent certain actors influenced social and cultural change in the Maghreb on the one hand and how they were and are influenced by change itself on the other. The actors themselves were discussed as to whether they are driving the change or struggle to maintain the status quo. Their motivations were addressed, whether they hope to democratize or want to have access to rent sharing, for example. In her introduction, Werenfels stressed that the emergence of truly new elites has been limited, that however, outside the political classes new social actors have developed bargaining power to affect elite policies, to varying degrees in Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria. In view of the following round table, FADMA AIT MOUS (Casablanca) addressed the role of intellectuals in change processes. She highlighted an identity crisis of the intel-

ligentsia in the Maghreb. JULIUS DIHSTELHOFF's (Marburg) contribution dealt with Islamists as part of governmental elites in the Maghreb. He highlighted that at different times in the national history of Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia, the respective governmental elite was shaped by rapprochements of Islamists and established (mostly secular nationalist) forces. He suggested that this is precisely what occurred in Tunisia as a post-revolutionary „elite compromise.“ HOUDA LAROUCSI (Tunis) addressed economic actors by discussing the social and solidarity economy (SSE) approach in Tunisia since the revolution. She showed the SSE both as a social alternative and as a tool for political instrumentalization and highlighted the emergence of new civil society actors promoting this economic approach.

The fourth panel „Media of Change“ was chaired by CATHERINE MILLER (Aix-Marseille). It was based on the premise of the Maghreb's linguistic, cultural and religious plurality. The panel centrally addressed the question of how these heterogeneous, complementary and competitive identity frameworks are negotiated in the different countries that encompass the Maghreb. The panel opened with a presentation on the self-affirmation of a Berber presence since the independence of the Maghrebi countries by KARIMA DIRÈCHE (Aix-Marseille). She addressed several Berber resistance movements in the Maghreb throughout history in order to argue that there is an essential connection between Berber activism and a critique of state suppression. Accordingly, she claimed that the first „printemps,“ („spring“) was the Berber „Grève en Kabylie“ in Algeria in 1980. Therefore Dirèche suggested the expression „printemps des peuples ou de démocratie“ instead of „printemps arabe.“ In the subsequent talk, „Multilingualism as a Framework to Study the Maghreb: Moroccan Literature as a Case-Study“, KARIMA LAACHIR (London) talked about her Morocco case study that forms part of a research project that compares three multilingual regions (North India, the horn of Africa and the Maghreb): the ERC funded Multilingual Locals and Significant Geographies. The goal of the project is to develop a new approach to

world literature through a south-south comparison. Laachir stated that „[a] monolingual reading and framing of the Maghreb's postcolonial multilingual literacy is problematic“. She suggested that in multilingual contexts, literary ideas and practices can challenge the linguistic divides and offer a more nuanced understanding of the co-constitution of languages and cultures. SAMIA KAASAB-CHARFI's (Tunis) lecture, „La question du multilinguisme au Maghreb: représentation de la langue et postures d'appropriation“ developed the question of multilingualism further. Kaasab-Chafri suggested language as a laboratory of the forces that are in place in society. For example, linguistic insecurity was shown as the result of the colonial situation and multilingualism. Another outlined consequence was the ease of being in another language, the effortless flow from one language into another that forms a common language.

The final session, entitled „Reflections on Maghrebi Studies,“ was a discussion between Rachid Ouaisa and HASSAN RACHIK (Casablanca) on the state of the discipline and the past three days of the conference. Ouaisa summarized the themes and issues that were dealt with in the individual sessions and linked the individual topics to the conference theme. Rachik approached the conditions of the production of sociology and anthropology in Morocco. Rachik suggested that: „the more restricted a field is, the greater the interdisciplinary mobility of its actors. They are more likely to play several roles and not to specialize in one discipline. To mix genres: the anthropologist becomes a political scientist, or sociologist and vice versa.“

The principal aim of the proposed conference was twofold: first, to bring together existing research on the Maghreb and, second, to initiate a more thoroughgoing scholarly engagement with the region in the fields of political science as well as literary and cultural studies, which has so far been conspicuous by its absence in Germany. The conference provided a platform not only for existing approaches to the Maghreb, but also for a consideration of how new international and interdisciplinary perspectives might prove productive in the future. The questions the individual panels dealt with purposefully ad-

dressed both politico-economic and socio-political as well as cultural questions. The Maghreb could indeed be shown as a region of entanglements, in connection with other Arabic-speaking countries, across the Medi-terranean and with the rest of Africa.

Conference Overview

Opening Evening:

„Does the Maghreb actually exist?“ – A lecture of the Moroccan novelist Fouad Laroui followed by a reading from his literary work

Chair: Friederike Pannewick (CNMS)

Introduction and Framing of the Conference; Greetings

Rachid Ouaisa (CNMS), Richard Jacquemond (IREMAM Aix), Habib Kazdaghli (Université de la Manouba)

Entanglements

Chair: Rachid Ouaisa (CNMS)

François Burgat (IREMAM Aix) : „Entre géographie humaine et histoire politique, unité et diversité du Maghreb contemporain“

Claudia Gronemann (Universität Mannheim): „Saint Augustine as a figure of memory in North Africa“

Lahouari Addi (IEP Lyon) : „Approche anthropologique de la conscience nationale au Maghreb“

Mobility and Change

Chair: Bettina Dennerlein (Universität Zürich)

Alfonso de Toro (Universität Leipzig): „Les ‘constructeurs de passages’. La culture comme arme contre l’extrémisme: Mathias Enard – Abdelkebir Khatibi – Fouad Laroui – Abdelwahab Meddeb – Boualem Sansal“

Eric Gobe (IREMAM Aix) : „La justice transitionnelle au Maghreb: un processus dépolitisé?“

Hakim Abderrezak (University of Minnesota): „Al-hijra as-sirriya and the Maghreb in Literature and Cinema“

Maghreb in Marburg – A Networking Event, Presentation: Charlotte Pardey (CNMS)

Actors of Change (Roundtable)

Chair: Isabelle Werenfels (Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik)

Fadma Aït Mous (Ain Chok-Universität, Hassan II de Casablanca): „Quel rôle pour les intellectuels dans les processus de changement?“

Julius Dihstelhoff (CNMS): „Islamists as part of governmental elites in the Maghreb: The Tunisian example.“

Houda Laroussi (Université de Carthage): „L’économie sociale et solidaire en Tunisie - Nouvelle approche, nouveaux acteurs“

Media of Change

Chair: Catherine Miller (IREMAM Aix)

Karima Direche (IREMAM Aix): „L’affirmation berbère, des indépendances à nos jours. Pour en finir avec un Maghreb arabe?“

Karima Laachir (SOAS): „Multilingualism as a Framework to Study the Maghreb: Moroccan Literature as a Case-Study“

Samia Kassab-Charfi (Université de Tunis) : „La question du multilinguisme au Maghreb: représentations de la langue et postures d’appropriation“

Reflections on Maghrebi Studies

Hassan Rachik (Hassan II de Casablanca) : „Sciences sociales: Conditions structurelles de production et de dissémination“

Tagungsbericht *Re-Centering a Region: the Maghreb in Motion*. 15.02.2018–17.02.2018, Marburg, in: H-Soz-Kult 13.07.2018.