

Press Release September 2023

Imagining Futures – Dealing with Disparity

The Merian Centre for Advanced Studies in the Maghreb (MECAM) launches its main phase by welcoming its new Fellows in Tunis after a positive evaluation, a successful grant application and with the intention to establish a sustainable academic institution for free academic exchange in the Maghreb with support by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research and the Université de Tunis.

The Merian Centre for Advanced Studies in the Maghreb (MECAM) has been founded in 2020 at the Université de Tunis/Tunisia as a German-Tunisian project to establish the first Institute for Advanced Studies in the Maghreb. Under the guiding theme “Imagining Futures: Dealing with Disparity” and its five research fields: “Aesthetics and Cultural Practice”, “Inequality and Mobility”, “Memory and Justice”, “Resources and Sustainability” and “Identities and Beliefs” MECAM supports research and academic exchange on questions of the state and the future of democracy and culture, the rule of law, of migration, the allocation of resources, the negotiation of religious and ethnic conflicts, and social disparities.

“I am convinced that MECAM will increasingly become a forum for intellectual exchange that will make groundbreaking and relevant research in the humanities and social sciences in and about Tunisia and the Maghreb more visible,” says Dr. Khaled Kchir, Professor of Medieval History at the Faculty of Human and Social Sciences of the Université de Tunis who directs MECAM together with Dr. Rachid Ouassa, Professor of Political Science at Philipps-Universität Marburg.

During its preliminary phase, spanning from 2020 to 2023, MECAM built up structures, formats, and networks. Despite the challenge of beginnings under the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic, the center hosted 28 scholars as Fellows from Germany and Tunis, the Maghreb and Europe and other countries and regions, engaged in publications and knowledge transfer, organized over 80 academic activities and events in and outside Tunisia.

MECAM will launch its next main six-year phase with renewed vigor. Nine individual Fellows (8 months from September 2023 to April 2023) and three long-term Fellows (3 years) institutionally affiliated in Algeria, France, Germany, Italy, Tunis and Qatar will start their fellowship by September in Tunis and will work on their self-chosen projects on migrants from sub-Saharan Africa in Tunisia, freedom of Conscience and LGBT rights in Tunisia and Morocco, on issues of democratic transformation and transitional justice in Algeria, the reconfiguration of cultural spaces, or female rebels in Late-19th and Early 20th century Tunisia.

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MECAM is an endeavor of a consortium of six Tunisian and German universities and research institutions: Philipps-Universität Marburg, Université de Tunis, Universität Leipzig, the German Institute for Global and Area Studies (GIGA) in Hamburg, the Forum Transregionale Studien in Berlin, and Université de Sfax. The fellowship program is supplemented by Traveling Academies at different places in the Maghreb or the Mashreq, by exploratory workshops, by mobility grants for research stays of scholars from the Maghreb in Germany, and by forms of research and knowledge exchange among the academic community and beyond, e.g. in the context of the public event series “Rencontres Ibn Khaldun” and through open-access publications and blogs. For its work, MECAM can rely on the expertise, the existing formats and networks of the partner institutions in Tunis, Marburg, Sfax, Berlin, Hamburg and Leipzig.

The Maria Sibylla Merian Centres for Advanced Studies are international research centres promoting the internationalization of the humanities, cultural and social sciences and sponsored by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research of Germany. The Merian Centres are located at scientific institutions of the host country and are set up and operated by German research institutions in partnership with the respective host institution. Research centres of this kind have already been set up in India, Mexico, Brazil and Ghana. The centres are named after the naturalist and artist Maria Sibylla Merian (1647-1717).

More information : www.mecam.tn

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