



## Unruly Voices, Images, and Bodies: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Maghreb

This interdisciplinary and multi-modal April event week, *Unruly Voices, Images, and Bodies*, explores themes of knowledge, culture, and power across the Maghreb. The lens of the *unruly*, a concept in formation, acts to create a point of discussion, debate, and comparison between disparate disciplinary approaches and topics spanning different historical and geographic regions.

The *unruly* evokes but does not aim to essentialize critical engagement with questions of marginality, invisibility, disparities, borders, noncompliance, authorization, containment, disorder, and agency, among other disobedient formats. A thread weaving across various tapestries, the *unruly* guides us through the disparate methodological and theoretical questions represented in the panels of this conference. Whether in relation to topics of art, music, media, language, performance, institutions, law, migration, and passports and through archival, discursive, textual, and oral historical and ethnographic methodologies, among others, this thread helps us find our way through a labyrinth of events, processes, and challenges of a region in constant flux.

Within this frame, this conference acts as a venue for sharing the progress and findings of MECAM fellows and creating a conversation between them. Through this conversation, we invite participants to think with us on what this research might help us understand about the pasts, presents, and imagined futures of the Maghreb. As such, we aim to create an atmosphere for productive discourse that focuses on the possibilities allowed by each style and method of thinking represented among the presentations.

### Research questions

- What insights can an interdisciplinary approach to the study of unruly voices, bodies, and images trigger in relation to concepts such as resistance, hybridity, and agency in cultural, artistic, and political spheres?
- How can unruly voices, “minor” linguistic images, and subversive bodies be preserved and redefined within dominant paradigms?
- In what ways can sociogenic approaches open onto desalienating forms of knowledge counter to inherited colonial paradigms of knowledge as power and their order of historicity as reason?
- Through what deconstructive practices can unruly voices, images, and bodies in flux reconstruct migration discourse, and how can this new discourse be elevated as authoritative?
- In the wake of popular activism, as in the wake of Algerian Hirak, how can unruly popular voices deconstruct elite fears of constituent assemblies, preserve local public space, and reconstruct decolonial authorities against post-colonial authoritarianism?

### Objectives of the Event-Week

- Present the findings of MECAM research projects, fostering knowledge exchange and collaboration among the participants.
- Reflect on the potential insights brought forth through unruly voices, bodies, and images in relation to concepts presented within each panel and presentation.
- Invite productive conversation concerning fellows’ research projects and findings.
- Explore the *unruly* in relation to the thematic clusters of *Imagining Futures and Dealing with Disparities*.
- Promote critical and experimental multidisciplinary approaches to the study of the Maghreb from the lens of the *unruly*



MECAM Fellow Cohort 2025-2026, Université de Tunis

## Programme

**Day 1: Tuesday April 14, 2026**

Venue: MECAM

<b>9:30 – 10:00</b>	<p><b>Welcoming remarks</b> Emna Beltaief &amp; Julius Dihstelhoff (MECAM Directors) <b>Introduction to the Event Week</b> Imene Gannouni</p>
<b>10:00 – 11:00</b>	<p><b>I. Unruly Voices in Music: An Ethnomusicological Analysis of Marginalized Voices</b> <b>Chair: Mohamed Ben Hamouda</b> <b>Participant 1: Souhir Zekri</b> <i>Decolonizing Western and Masculine Ethnomusicological Concepts: “Folk Music” and “Folklore” Deconstruction through Auto-Ethnomusicology</i> <b>Participant 2: Omotolani Ekpo</b> <i>Stambeli - Ajonkpa: Bridging the Sustainability Challenges of Marginalized Sacred Music of Healing in the Maghreb and Sub-Saharan Africa</i></p>
<b>11:00 – 11:15</b>	<b>Coffee Break</b>
<b>11:15 – 12:15</b>	<p><b>II. Tunisian Amazigh Languages Within the North-Eastern Context</b> <b>Chair: Souhir Zekri</b> <b>Participant 1: Neila Saadi</b> <i>La Berbérîté en Tunisie : Aspects et Questions de Recherche</i> <b>Participant 2: Valentina Schiattarella</b> <i>Amazigh Languages in Tunisia: Comparative Perspectives from the Matmata, Tataouine and Djerba Regions</i></p>
<b>12:15 – 13:15</b>	<b>Lunch Break</b>
<b>13:15 – 14:00</b>	<p><b>III. Book Project Presentation: Between the Aesthetics of Democratization and the Appearance of Development: Contemporary Public Arts in Tunisia After the Revolution</b> <b>Chair: Imene Gannouni</b> <b>Book author: Justin Malachowski</b></p>
<b>14:00 – 15:00</b>	<p><b>IV. The Franco-Algerian Crisis (2024–2025): Between Colonial Nostalgia in France and the Advocates of Memory Laws in Algeria — The Unspoken Dimensions of the Crisis</b> <b>Chair: Julius Dihstelhoff</b> <b>Participants: Massensen Cherbi &amp; Adlene Mohammedi</b></p>

## Day 2: Wednesday April 15, 2026

Venue: MECAM

9:30 – 10:30	<p><b>I. The Unruly Body from Al-Shidyaq to Karabala: Innovation of the Sacred and Poetic</b></p> <p><b>Chair: Saniya Taher</b></p> <p><b>Participant 1: Christian Junge</b> <i>Sound and Soma: On Sensing Religion and Critique in al-Shidyaq (d. 1887)</i></p> <p><b>Participant 2: Cyrine Kortas</b> <i>Somatic Images in Shi'i Poetry During the Holy Walk to Karbala: Re-Enacting Religious Memory and Performing Masculine Martyrdom</i></p>
10:30 – 11:00	<b>Coffee Break</b>
11:00 – 13:00	<p><b>II. Images, Migration, and Passports: (In)visibilising Migrants in the Southern Mediterranean</b></p> <p><b>Chair: Max Ajl</b></p> <p><b>Participant 1: Yazid Benhadda</b> <i>The Passport in Pre-colonial Morocco: The Makhzen, Moroccan Society, and the "Outer World" (1880-1912)</i></p> <p><b>Participant 2: Giulia Sezzi</b> <i>The Disappearing Multitude: For a Politics of Re/Appearance in the Central Mediterranean</i></p> <p><b>Participant 3: Imene Gannouni</b> <i>Unruly Voices: Humanitarianism and Security in Representations of Sub-Saharan Migrants in Tunisia (2025)</i></p> <p><b>Participant 4: Esther Möller</b> <i>Mediterranean Migrations the Other Way Round: Narratives and Agency of and Towards European Refugees in North Africa during World War Two</i></p>
13:00 – 14:00	<b>Lunch Break</b>
14:00 – 14:30	<p><b>III. Are the People Greater than the Constitution? A Case Study through the Algerian Hirâk</b></p> <p><b>Chair: Adlene Mohammedi</b></p> <p><b>Participant: Massensen Cherbi</b></p>
14:30 – 16:00	<p><b>IV. Filiation and Alterity: On Desalienation in Frantz Fanon and Essedik Jeddi</b></p> <p><b>Chair: Valentina Schiattarella</b></p> <p><b>Participants: Essedik Jeddi &amp; Saniya Taher</b></p>

Day 3: Thursday, April 16, 2026

Venue: MECAM

10:00 – 10:45	<p><b>I. The early Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood between National and Islamic Identity</b></p> <p>Chair: Imad Alsoos Participant: Ivesa Lübben</p>
10:45 – 11:00	Break
11:00 – 11:45	<p><b>II. Educating the Tunisian Nation: Between Arabo-Muslim Identity and Pluralism</b></p> <p>Chair: Faten Bouchrara Participant: N.N</p>
	Closing Conversation
18:00 – 20:00	<p><b>MECAM Rencontre Ibn Khaldun: Film Screening</b> <i>Désaliéner l'institution pour désaliéner le malade: l'expérience en psychothérapie institutionnelle à El Razi, projection de La Porte (El Baab) (1980) et échange avec le Dr Essedik Jeddi.</i></p> <p>Venue: CinéMadart, Av. H. Bourguiba, Carthage The event will be followed by a small reception. Welcome: Clara Süß Introduction and moderation: Saniya Taher Participant: Dr. Essedik Jeddi</p>

Convener: MECAM Fellows of the Cohort 2025-2026 – All affiliated at the Université de Tunis

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## Abstracts

### **Sound and Soma: On Sensing Religion and Critique in al-Shidyāq (d. 1887)**

*Christian Junge*

This paper examines the somatic and sonic dimensions of religious experience and critique in the work of Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq (c.1805-1887), one of the most provocative public intellectuals of the nineteenth-century Arab Nahḍa. Focusing on his experimental proto-novel al-Sāq ‘alā al-sāq (Leg over Leg, 1855), the paper argues that al-Shidyāq develops a distinctive anthropology of the body through which religious authority and communal discipline are subjected to critique. Moving across different confessional contexts—Maronite monasticism, Protestant missionary culture, and Roman Catholic institutions in the Bilād al-Shām and the Mediterranean—his writings stage religion not primarily as doctrine but as a regime of embodied practices that shape the senses, appetites, and affects of believers.

Rather than approaching religion exclusively through abstract theological and intellectual debate, al-Shidyāq foregrounds the lived body as a site of epistemic testing and ethico-aesthetic experience. In al-Sāq ‘alā al-sāq, the protagonist al-Fāriyāq encounters religious communities whose norms are experienced through somatic sensations such as pain, disgust, pleasure, and desire. These bodily reactions become a form of critical knowledge: by “thinking through the body” (Shusterman), the narrative exposes how religious disciplines regulate everyday practices—from food and sexuality to language and sound—and thereby inscribe power onto the body.

Building on this observation, the paper proposes the concept of “sensing religion.” Al-Shidyāq’s literary experimentation turns sensory and somatic experience into a method of critique, using the body itself to test, evaluate, and contest religious regimes.

### ***Somatic Images in Shi’i Poetry During the Holy Walk to Karbala: Re-Enacting Religious Memory and Performing Masculine Martyrdom***

*Cyrine Kortas*

Folkloric poetry recited during the Arbaeen pilgrimage to Karbala’s shrine commemorates Imam Hussein’s martyrdom and sacrifice, evolving from the traditional Iraqi Shia lamentation poetry, collectively known as Housa, or Latmiyya. The walkers engage in citation of emotional poems that vividly describe the suffering of their Imam and his companions. The collective citation is transformed into a spiritual zeal that encourages the walkers to reach the shrine and pay tribute to their saint. This devotional journey recalls that of the fidèles of Sunni Sufi shrines. Actually, this study proposes a close textual analysis of a selection of Karbala poems and compares them to the Sufi poetic treatment of saints, especially through the motif of the perfect man. This methodological interest can be explained by the Shi’i poems’ dependence on somatic images of wounded flesh, thirst, and martyrdom, that transcend the boundaries between the historical body and the eternal, ethereal one. The study further argues that the re-enactment of pain in Arbaeen poetry is also an enactment of religious memory and a performance of a male identity inspired by the archetypal image of the Imam, who may stand for the saint in a Sunni Sufi context.

## **Mediterranean Migrations the Other Way Round: Narratives and Agency of and towards European Refugees in North Africa during World War Two**

*Esther Möller*

In order to situate the current movement of migrants from North Africa to Europe in a larger perspective, this contribution suggests going back in history and looking at the important number of European refugees who crossed the sea the other way round and sought refuge in North Africa some decades ago. The focus will be on World War Two and German-speaking refugees who arrived in different North-African countries, in particular Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, and Egypt. The migrants' interactions with state institutions, international organisations, and local groups and individuals will be analysed by taking into account their particular situation as Europeans who were both precarious and privileged. One important aspect is to underline the agency of local actors, because in the 1940s already, associations and individuals in North-Africa interacted with these refugees, by providing aid, by working in camps built up for them or by hiring them for work. Another aspect is the colonial and postcolonial dimension, as the first legal regulations of migration movements were done by European governments and Western-dominated international agencies such as the League of Nations and later the United Nations with little right to say for the national governments in Cairo, Tunis, Algiers, or Rabat. Based on personal papers of the refugees, on state archives in France, Tunisia, and Egypt, as well as on sources by international humanitarian organisations, a presentation of my current research project will be followed by a common discussion about different case studies.

## **The Disappearing Multitude: For a Politics of Re/Appearance in the Central Mediterranean**

*Giulia Sezzi*

The Mediterranean has increasingly become a space of death and disappearance. EU and non-EU authorities wield their power through a "necropolitics" that manifests in drifting lifeboats, invisible shipwrecks, and illegal rejections. The sea becomes the main stage for an aesthetic regime of dis/appearance, legitimized by complex, overlapping, and constantly contested racial hierarchies that sustain the very production of lives and deaths that do not count. Against this background, people on the move and their families resist disappearance by enacting a "politics of re/appearance" through individual/collective, on/off-line practices between the realms of the in/visible. Drawing from an ethnographic research conducted between Sfax and Tunis with sub-Saharan families of disappeared individuals along the Tunisian-Italian route, this contribution seeks to enrich the expanding literature on migration-related disappearance by mapping the various contesting actions that counter this invisible form of border violence, while highlighting subaltern claims of re/appearance advanced by people on the move and their affective networks.

## **Unruly Voices: Humanitarianism and Security in Representations of Sub-Saharan Migrants in Tunisia (2025)**

*Imene Gannouni Khemiri*

This paper explores how Tunisian media outlets oscillate between portraying Sub-Saharan migrants as a security risk and a humanitarian concern, while migrant voices themselves emerge as unruly, resisting, appropriated, or disciplined within competing discourses of migration governance. Using Entman's framing theory in combination with Ruth Wodak's discourse-historical approach, the study examines problem definitions, causal

interpretations, and proposed solutions to the so-called migration “crisis,” linking these frames to strategies of nomination, predication, argumentation, and perspectivization. Mainstream media construct migration as a security threat requiring orderly management, portraying Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) as a humanitarian solution. In these narratives, migrants are portrayed as agents whose voices are largely silenced. Independent media, however, frame migration within asymmetrical power relations and global migration governance and allow migrants to articulate their own experiences and perspectives.

### **The early Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood between National and Islamic Identity**

*Ivesa Lübben*

Identities shape worldviews, political agendas, and actions, as well as relationships with other actors. But identities are not abstract, rather, they are themselves shaped by local and national social contexts. Using the example of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, which serves as a reference point for most Arab Sunni movements of political Islam, we will examine how Islamists navigate between their Islamic identity and the universal concept of the Ummah on the one hand, and the framework of the nation-state on the other and how has this shaped their relationship with other liberation movements, and how have they translated Islamic concepts into their project for a postcolonial regional order with a particular focus on North Africa.

### **Between the Aesthetics of Democratization and the Appearance of Development: Contemporary Public Arts in Tunisia After the Revolution**

*Justin Malachowski*

This book explores the dynamic intersection of contemporary art and development in post-revolution Tunisia, where foreign-funded art projects have become a significant part of the cultural landscape. These projects, often presented as catalysts for social change, navigate a dual role as both artistic expressions and development initiatives. However, the book critiques the model, suggesting that such projects frequently fail to deliver lasting impact, instead prioritizing exhibitions and media, subjecting artistic endeavours to a development spectacle.

Introducing the concept of “a politics of non-sense”, the book highlights how elements of artistic practice that elide dominant narratives within a global contemporary art field, because they are unintelligible or inadmissible, consequently enable political work. This idea challenges conventional understandings and a tendency both within art practice and scholarship of art to imbue artistic practice with transcendent powers.

The study also examines the broader implications for the global south, discussing how art from these regions is perceived and utilized in an international art festival structure still very much oriented around a Euro-American metropole. It questions the ways in which these festivals appropriate and theorize art from the global south toward mapping out, defining, and even contriving ideas of power, oppression, and resistance. Ultimately, the book offers a nuanced understanding of the complex relationship between art and development, contributing to ongoing discussions about the role of art in fostering social change and the challenges of foreign-funded Art initiatives in post-revolutionary Tunisia and beyond.

### **Are the People Greater than the Constitution? A Case Study through the Algerian *Hirâk*.**

### *Massensen Cherbi*

A peaceful movement that had opposed both President Bouteflika's fifth term and called for a "radical change of system", the Algerian *Hirâk* rejected the re-election of a President of the Republic within ninety days, on the grounds that this risked perpetuating the authoritarian political system. Invoking popular sovereignty, it thus called for an extra-constitutional democratic transition. The Chief of Staff at the time, however, opposed this, pointing to the risk of a "constitutional vacuum," and ultimately initiated repression of the movement in order to expedite the desired presidential election. Meanwhile, the *Hirâk* itself became divided over the stages of the transition, particularly around the question of a Constituent Assembly — a demand that had, by contrast, been central to the Kasbah 1 and Kasbah 2 sit-ins in Tunisia in 2011. This division reflected a fear of bottom-up democracy: whether in the name of national constants or democratic prerequisites, against a backdrop of the absence of transitional justice and the still unhealed wounds of the Black Decade. Thus, is the people greater than the Constitution? In other words, this question invites us to examine both the shared demand within the *Hirâk* for an extra-constitutional transition and, at the same time, the fear of a transition from below through an elected Constituent Assembly — that is, the fear of an uncontrolled democracy.

### **The Franco-Algerian Crisis (2024–2025): Between Colonial Nostalgia in France and the Advocates of Memory Laws in Algeria — The Unspoken Dimensions of the Crisis**

*Massensen Cherbi & Adlene Mohammedi*

The Franco-Algerian crisis provided an opportunity to pit the Algerian and French governments against one another, publicly opposing nostalgics of *Algérie française* in metropolitan France and proponents of memory legislation in Algeria. Beyond these historical disagreements — deep-rooted and genuine as they are — the crisis between the two countries also brought to light the continuing restriction of rights and freedoms in post-*Hirâk* Algeria, which French realpolitik had until then largely chosen to overlook. It also highlighted the official alignment of the Quai d'Orsay with the Moroccan position advocating autonomy for Western Sahara, in contrast to the policy of self-determination supported by Algeria and, until recently, by the United Nations. This panel, therefore, proposes to explore the unspoken dimensions of this crisis, examining both the domestic policies of the two countries and their diplomatic relations.

### **La berbèrité en Tunisie : aspects et questions de recherche**

*Neila Saadi*

La Tunisie appartient à l'aire géographique et culturelle des Berbères. De nombreux éléments en témoignent, qu'il s'agisse de traces matérielles ; comme l'architecture ou les objets des savoir-faire, ou de traces immatérielles comme les contes, les traditions. Ces traces attestent de la permanence et de la persistance d'une culture berbère de Tunisie malgré le faible nombre et dispersion des locuteurs de la langue berbère aujourd'hui.

Longtemps marginalisée ou oubliée dans les récits ou les discours nationaux et dans les politiques culturelles, cette composante a disparu de l'espace et des débats publics. On observe depuis quelques années (depuis 2011), l'émergence de nouvelles dynamiques de reconnaissance et de valorisation de cet héritage. La création d'associations culturelles, l'organisation d'événements dédiés à la culture amazighe ou encore la réactivation de certaines célébrations témoignent d'un processus de redécouverte et de réappropriation

patrimoniales. Dans ce cadre, cette communication propose de présenter un aperçu des différentes composantes de cet héritage ainsi que les dynamiques contemporaines de sa reconnaissance et de sa valorisation.

### **Stambeli - Ajonkpa: Bridging the Sustainability Challenges of Marginalized Sacred Music of Healing in the Maghreb and Sub-Saharan Africa**

*Omotolani Ekpo*

The sustainability of minority ethnic musical heritage remains precarious within contemporary cultural and political economies shaped by uneven state intervention, commodification, and rapid processes of cultural hybridization. This presentation focuses on two similar sacred musical traditions of minority ethnic communities in Tunisia and Nigeria. It reconciles the negotiation efforts of the custodians regarding the survival and visibility of their cultural heritage within the contexts of state cultural policies. It situates the trajectory of the two musical traditions within broader discourses of cultural sustainability, inequality, and social politics of migration. Central to this study is the examination of custodians' agency in responding to these pressures. Beyond the perception of the minority communities as passive victims of marginalization, the research findings foreground the adaptive and creative strategies employed by heritage custodians to sustain their musical traditions. These strategies include intentional hybridization, selective incorporation of modern instruments and performance contexts, digital dissemination, and engagement with transnational cultural networks.

### **Désaliénation: Frantz Fanon and Essedik Jeddi**

*Saniya Taher*

In this presentation, I introduce the pioneering Tunisian psychiatrist Dr. Jeddi, focusing on his work of desalienation through the implementation of institutional psychotherapy at El Razi Hospital. His project emerges in the aftermath of—in both continuity with and rupture from—the revolutionary work of Frantz Fanon, the Martinican-Algerian psychiatrist, thinker, and combatant, whose interventions at El Razi and Charles Nicolle Hospitals remain foundational. At stake is the delineation of the filiation and alterity of Frantz Fanon and Dr. Jeddi in their conception of desalienation as a work of culture—one that centers a sociogenic approach in their confrontation with the coloniality of power and its order of racial historicity. I examine how Dr. Jeddi reframes this project as one of *savoir* rather than *pouvoir*, a shift that emerges through his reformulation of institutional psychotherapy in his work with psychosis among Tunisian subjects across France and Tunisia in the postcolonial period. In elaborating the insistence of the sociogenic approach in Dr. Jeddi's work as crucial to a work of desalienation, I show how his project extends the work initiated by Fanon during the anti-colonial struggles and wars of national liberation across France, Algeria, and Tunisia. I situate Dr. Jeddi's work in conversation with Fanon's transformation and departure from institutional psychotherapy as pioneered by Catalan radical psychiatrist Franscec Tosquelles, once in the colony — across Algeria and Tunisia — in his encounter with the colonial psychiatry of the School of Algiers in Blida-Joinville hospital and amidst the Algerian war of national liberation in Tunisia.

### **Decolonizing Western and Masculine Ethnomusicological Concepts: "Folk Music" and "Folklore" Deconstruction through Auto-Ethnomusicology**

*Souhir Zekri*

After reading important references, mostly by American women ethnomusicologists who specialize in the Tunisian context, and paying a visit to IBLA (*Institut des Belles Lettres Arabes*) to access a crucial French (Père Blanc) source on Kerkena and its traditional wedding rituals and singers (“machtat”), I have since been considering a perspective that would reassert my own feminine and Tunisian positionality within this Western and Masculine web of voices and discourses. It is on the occasion of a very informative conversation with my colleague and friend, Dr. Nouri Boukhchim, an archeologist, from whom I learned that the very term “folklore” was too obsolete, simplistic, and derogatory, that Tunisian scholars use the term: “Popular Arts and Traditions” and “Live Heritage.” This multi-modal presentation will thus introduce the progress of my research in terms of the most recent findings of the last two months. It will use photos, written extracts from important sources, extracts from Dr. Boukhchim’s vocal messages, as well as my own personal observations and anecdotes.

### **Amazigh Languages in Tunisia: Comparative Perspectives from the Matmata, Tataouine and Djerba Regions**

*Valentina Schiattarella*

This presentation offers a comparative analysis of three Amazigh-speaking regions in Tunisia (villages located in the Matmata and Tataouine areas, as well as on the island of Djerba), focusing on the status, visibility, and presence of Amazigh languages in both public and private domains. Drawing on past sources, personal preliminary data and observations gathered during fieldwork stays, the study examines the contemporary linguistic realities of these communities. In addition, the presentation situates Tunisian Amazigh varieties within the broader context of North-Eastern Amazigh languages, highlighting both shared features and salient differences. These linguistic patterns are interpreted in light of distinct historical trajectories and sociocultural interactions, including varying relationships with the principal Amazigh-speaking countries of Algeria and Morocco and with transnational Amazigh diasporas. Finally, the presentation showcases documentation efforts conducted during the fellowship program, illustrated through selected audio-visual materials.

### **The Passport in Pre-Colonial Morocco: The *Makhzen*, Moroccan Society, and the “Outer World” (1880-1912).**

*Yazid Benhadda*

This paper will shed light on the emergence of the passport in Morocco during the late nineteenth century as well as the encounter of this technology by Moroccan migrants in French Tunisia. While the introduction of passports in other contexts is linked to attempts of strengthening state authority and control, its introduction in Morocco in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century is a sign of the decay of the *Makhzen*. The passport entered the Moroccan imaginary with the introduction of consular protection during the second half of the nineteenth century. The passport was used by scholars as a signifier to engage with protection and the subsequent blurring of the inside/outside dichotomy in Moroccan society. This is reflected by the heated discussions around “*ashab al-bassbor*” among Moroccan Islamic scholars. The passport was also a sign of the acceleration of the opening up of Moroccan society and its blossoming trading bourgeoisie to the world. Beyond traders, Moroccan migrants – be it pilgrims or workers – were also confronted to this new technique of government in other imperial contexts. This paper will take Moroccans in French Tunisia as a site for inquiring about this encounter.

## **Educating the Tunisian Nation: Between Arabo-Muslim Identity and Pluralism**

*N.N*

Schools are principal institutional venues for state-sanctioned social engineering and identity formation. At the same time, they are embedded in societal structures and political contexts and thus become sites where different actors and agendas meet and compete, i.e., educational institutions are also sites of struggle. This paper analyzes school textbooks in the fields of history, civics, and religion used in the years after 2011 and until today, compared to textbooks used in earlier decades. It explores grey zones and spaces of contestation in the field of education with regard to these disciplines even during the leaden years of authoritarian rule, and it scrutinizes changes and continuities after 2011.

This paper interrogates the narrative of a plural Tunisia by looking at state-sponsored identity narratives pre and post 2011 in the field of school education. It assesses the changes that took place in this regard at two crucial moments: in the early 1990s, when Ben Ali had just succeeded Bourguiba as president, and again after his removal from office by the 2011 revolution. To what extent did state-sponsored narratives transmitted at school accommodate the religious, cultural, social, and political diversity of Tunisian history and contemporary society? What changes occurred in this regard after the revolution of 2011?

The inquiry shows a remarkable degree of continuity between pre- and post-2011 within the Tunisian school system and little development on the level of curricula and textbooks. I argue that the country's eroding and static education system continues to promote homogenizing accounts of an Arab-Muslim Tunisian nation and remains ill-prepared to foster pluralistic value orientations among Tunisia's younger generations. At the same time, it is far from actively spreading enmity towards non-Muslims or non-Arabs. Despite its shortcomings, the Tunisian education system enabled the emergence of a critical and informed citizenry that ousted a dictator in 2011 and subsequently engaged in building a democracy and in pronounced public debates over Tunisian history and identity.

## Participants' Bios

### Adlene Mohammedi:

Dr. Mohammedi holds a PhD in Geopolitics from Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne University. He also has degrees in contemporary history, international law and Russian language. His work focuses on the Arab world and the Russian foreign policy in the MENA region. He teaches Geopolitics at Paris 3 Sorbonne Nouvelle University.

### Christian Junge:

Dr. Junge is a Senior Lecturer in Arabic Literature and Culture at the Center for Near and Middle Eastern Studies at Philipps-Universität Marburg. His research focuses on modern Arabic literature, affect and emotion, and the intellectual history of the Arab Nahḍa. He is currently preparing a monograph on emotion and affect in contemporary Egyptian literature. As part of the LOEWE Center DynaRel – Dynamics of the Religious: Ambivalent Neighborhoods between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in Historical and Contemporary Contexts – he conducts a research project on the role of empathy in multi-religious neighborhoods in Germany. Among his recent publications are “Tarab: Sonic Affect” (PMLA) and studies on the nineteenth-century intellectual Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq.

### Clara Süß:

Dr. Süß is the Outreach and Transfer Manager for the Merian Center for Advanced Study in the Maghreb (MECAM) at the German Institute for Global and Area Studies (GIGA) in Hamburg, Germany. She is in charge of organizing and coordinating MECAM’s outreach events, effectively the Rencontres Ibn Khaldoun and the MECAM Policy Talk, as well as MECAM’s representation at (inter)national scientific conferences.

Her research focuses on social movements and social (in)justice, political violence and radicalization, as well as dynamics of political transformation. She holds a PhD in Political Science from Goethe University Frankfurt with a dissertation entitled “Radicalization of the Marginalized? Dynamics of Islamist Radicalization in Tunisia post-2011”. She is currently preparing a related book manuscript.

### Cyrine Kortas:

Dr. Kortas is an assistant professor of English Literature at the University of Gabes, Tunisia. She is also a member of the Research Unit LAD at the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Sfax. Her current research focuses on the influence of modernist English authors such as D. H. Lawrence on the rise of the modernist novel in the Maghreb region; it explores the concept of the New Man in a selection of novels published in Tunisia and Morocco while introducing Sufism as a theory of analysis.

### Emna Beltaief:

Dr. Beltaief is a professor of French Language and Literature and a researcher at the Faculty of Social and Human Sciences, Tunis University. She is specialized in French literature and has held several key administrative roles, including department head and contributor to the development of university programs. Her career is marked by significant academic contributions that integrate teaching, research, and institutional leadership within the

Tunisian university system. She is currently the Vice Rector of the University of Tunis and the Tunisian Director of MECAM.

#### Essedik Jeddi:

Dr. Jeddi is a physiologist, neuropsychiatrist, and psychoanalyst. He was President of the Tunisian Psychiatric Association, and Professor and Head of the Department of Psychiatry and Medical Psychology at Al-Razi Hospital and at the Faculty of Medicine in Tunis. He also founded the Arab Research Group in Social Psychiatry and Social Analysis, in addition to the International Avicenna-Henri Collomb Symposia. He published many articles and books and directed three films. He participated in the compilation of the Unified Arabic-French-English Medical Dictionary. He holds a doctorate in Medicine and a Diploma in Neuropsychiatry from the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Lyon. Among his most prominent publications in French: *Transplantation arabe en France et manègements des idéologies, Filiation et Altérité: psychanalyse et malaise dans la psychiatrie, Psychothérapie institutionnelle et Musicothérapie, Errances.*

<https://arabthought.org/en/speaker/211/professor-essedik-jeddi>

#### Esther Möller:

Dr. Möller is a professor of global history with a focus on the Middle East at the University of Marburg/Germany, after previous positions at the Centre Marc Bloch Berlin, Sciences Po Paris, the University of the German army in Munich, and the Leibniz-Institute of European history in Mainz. She is a specialist in the history of the Arab world and its relations with Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries and has done extensive research on and in Lebanon and Egypt. Her fields of interest and expertise cover the history of humanitarianism, cultural policy and colonial education, and most recently migration, but also the history of the Mediterranean. Her habilitation thesis “Claiming Humanitarian Sovereignty in the Middle East. The Egyptian Red Crescent, 1940-1975” is currently under review with Cambridge University Press. Among her recent publications are (with Katharina Stornig) “(Un)Settling Intimacies. Boundaries of Aid in a North African Refugee Camp, 1944-1946”, in: Marie-Luce Desgrandchamps, Laure Humbert, Bertrand Taithe, Raphaëlle (Hrsg.), *Medical Care, Humanitarianism and Intimacy in the Long Second World War, 1931-1953*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 109–130. and (with Shaimaa Esmail El-Neklawy) “Between Local Philanthropic Traditions and State Politics: Endowments and Charitable Associations in 19th- and 20th- Century Egypt”, in: *Endowment Studies* 06/2022, S. 192-220 (mit Shaimaa Esmail El-Neklawy), [https://brill.com/view/journals/ends/6/1-2/article-p192\\_007.xml](https://brill.com/view/journals/ends/6/1-2/article-p192_007.xml)

#### Faten Bouchrara:

Bouchrara is a PhD candidate in Heritage at the University of Manouba, member of the MECAM team and collaborator at the Liaison Office of Philipps-Universität Marburg in Tunis. She coordinates exchanges between researchers, students, and alumni of Philipps-Universität and Tunisian institutions. She provides guidance and support to researchers before and during their stay in Tunisia. Faten Bouchrara holds two research-based Master’s degrees – one in Gender, Culture, and Society and the other in Heritage.

#### Giulia Sezzi:

Sezzi is a PhD candidate in Transnational Governance at Scuola Normale Superiore, specializing in critical border and migration studies. She holds a bachelor's degree in political philosophy and a master's degree in global culture, from the University of Bologna. Her current research focuses on the topic of disappearance in migration, examining both its governmental implementation by European and third-state border authorities across the Central Mediterranean region and the strategies employed by people on the move and their broader social network to resist it.

#### Imad Alsoos:

Dr. Alsoos holds a Gerda Henkel Stiftung scholarship to conduct a comparative study of Muslim political thought in the Mashreq and Maghreb, examining how their interactions have influenced the development of the Ennahda Party's political thought. Between 2023 and 2025, he was a Fellow at the Merian Centre for Advanced Studies in the Maghreb (MECAM) studying the Ennahda Party in Tunisia. He earned his Ph.D. in 2017 from the Free University of Berlin, focusing on Hamas's political discourse and organisational mobilisation in Gaza. Between 2018 and 2023, he continued his research on Hamas at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle. Now, he is an affiliated fellow at MECAM, where he explores a genealogy of the concept of the state of Al-Madina.

#### Imene Gannouni Khemiri:

Dr. Khemiri is a short-term fellow at MECAM for the 2025 cohort. She is an assistant professor in the English Department at the Faculty of Letters, Arts and Humanities, la Manouba, Tunisia. She holds an MA and a PhD in cultural studies from the University of La Manouba. Her doctoral research focused on the representation of Tunis in British travel writing (1815-1910). Her research interests include travel writing, migration studies, media studies, and visual culture. She has recently published "The making of "migration crisis": Representing Sub-Saharan migrants in Tunisian online media outlets," *Crossings: Journal of Migration & Culture, Special Issue: 'In Transit: Mapping Digital and Transnational Narratives across Tunisian Borderlands'* (2025). She has recently developed a strong interest in migration studies as she is a participant in the "Migrant in Transit" program for emerging migration scholars in Tunisia.

#### Ivesa Lübben:

Lübben is a political scientist specialized in the history of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and other Sunni Islamic Movements in North Africa. From 1990 to 2006 she has he has lived in Egypt where she worked as journalist and author of academic publications. From 2009 to 2015 she was part of a research project at the CNMS (Center for Near and Middle East Studies) at Marburg University on Islamic Movements in North Africa. From 2017 until her retirement in 2020 she served as director of the North Africa office of the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation in Tunis.

Among her publications are *The Economic Ideology of Hasan al-Banna and the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood*. In: Elsenhans et al.: *The Transformation of Political Religion. From Zealots into Leaders*. Farnhem/Burlington (2015); *Mittelklasse, Religion und Widerstand: Die sozioökonomischen Faktoren für das Scheitern der Muslimbrüder im ägyptischen Transformationsprozess* [Middle Class, Religion, and Resistance: The Socioeconomic Factors Behind the Failure of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt's Transition Process] In Daniel et al.: *Mittelklassen, Mittelschichten oder Milieus in Afrika*. Baden-Baden (2016); *Der Begriff des*

religiösen Feldes bei Bourdieu und die Neuordnung der Beziehung zwischen islamischem und politischem Feld in Tunesien und Ägypten im Kontext der Arabellion. [Bourdieu's Concept of the Religious Field and the Reconfiguration of the Relationship Between the Islamic and Political Fields in Tunisia and Egypt in the Context of the Arab Spring]. In: Demmelhuber et al.: Arabellion. Vom Aufbruch zum Zerfall einer Region. Leviathan, Sonderband 31 (2017).

#### Julius Dihstelhoff:

Dr. Dihstelhoff, from May 2020 to December 2024, was the academic coordinator for the international "Merian Centre for Advanced Studies in the Maghreb (MECAM)," based in Tunis. Now, he is MECAM's German Director. He is also a post-doctoral research fellow in the Department of Politics at the Centre for Near and Middle Eastern Studies (CNMS) at Philipps University Marburg. His research focuses on Political Islam and German foreign policy in the Arab world since the so-called Arab Spring, with a special focus on Tunisian transformation processes.

#### Justin Malachowski:

Dr. Malachowski is a postdoctoral researcher at the Institute of Sociology and Cultural Organization at Leuphana University. He is a short-term fellow at MECAM for the 2025 cohort. He holds a PhD in social anthropology from the University of California at Davis. His research focuses on themes of art, media, urbanism, development, and family. For over ten years, Malachowski has conducted long-term ethnographic research in Tunisia on the transformation of contemporary art following the 2011 revolution. His current work examines cultural development in North Africa and the circulation of artistic discourses from the Global South in Europe. In addition to his academic research, Malachowski is also an artist and curator. Among his recent publications is "Staging Arts in the Historic City: Development Funding, Social Media Images, and Tunisia's Contemporary Public Art Scene" (*Journal of City and Society*, 2022).

#### Massensen Cherbi:

Dr. Cherbi is a long-term fellow at MECAM. He holds a doctorate in law from the University of Paris II Panthéon-Assas, where in 2019 he defended his thesis on "the limits of Algerian constitutionalism," which happened to coincide with the Algerian Hirak, which he experienced in situ during its first year in Algiers. He works more generally on authoritarianism in the Maghreb, from independence to the Hirak, through the prism of law, but also on issues of democratic transition and transitional justice in the region. His research focuses on constituent processes, citizenship, relations between civilians and the militaries, the place of Islam, the status of women, and questions of identity, through a legal and more particularly constitutional prism. To this end, he works on case laws, preparatory works, parliamentary debates, alternative draft constitutions, and political speeches, particularly through archives. For several years, he taught general constitutional law, the Fifth Republic, and the Constitutions of the MENA region at the Ecole de Droit de la Sorbonne, the universities of Le Havre and Amiens, and Sciences Po Toulouse, Paris, and Grenoble.

#### Max Ajl:

Dr. Ajl is a long-term fellow at MECAM/University of Tunis, a senior fellow at the Department of Conflict and Development Studies at Ghent University, and a researcher in the Tunisian

Observatory for Food Sovereignty and the Environment. He is the author of a recent book titled *A People's Green New Deal*, as well as an editor at *Agrarian South* and *The Journal of Labor and Society*. A prolific writer, Max's work has appeared in *Agrarian South*, *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, *Globalizations*, *Review of African Political Economy*, *Middle East Report*, and many other scholarly and popular journals, including *The Guardian's Comment is Free*, *Boston Review*, and *Monthly Review*. He researches climate politics, Tunisian national liberation, agrarian politics in the Arab region, ecological planning, and Arab-North African intellectual history.

#### Mohamed Ben Hamouda:

Prof. Ben Hammouda is a Full Professor at the Higher Institute of Music at the University Sfax where he was director. He is a prominent Tunisian researcher in the fields of arts and culture. He is recognized for his academic and intellectual contributions and has authored several publications in the fields of media studies, anthropology, and the arts.

#### Neila Saadi:

Dr. Saadi is a university lecturer and researcher at the University of Tunis and a researcher at the IRMC. She obtained a doctoral thesis from the University of Tunis in Heritage Sciences. She is interested in the role of heritage in cultural policies, particularly Amazigh heritage. She studies the dynamics of negotiation between different stakeholders.

#### Omotolani Ekpo:

Dr. Ekpo is a short-term fellow at MECAM for the 2025 cohort. She is an ethnomusicologist, composer, and innovative advocate for cultural sustainability, deeply passionate about preserving threatened African musical traditions. Originally from Nigeria, she has conducted pioneering research on the musical practices of the Jukun people, focusing on how indigenous music conveys social equity, environmental protection, public health messages, preserves cultural identity, and promotes peacebuilding. She is the lead author of "Documenting distinctive features of 'Keku' dance ensemble of the Jukun nation of Sub-Saharan Africa" and has presented her works at leading academic forums, including global ICTMD conferences and symposiums, the ASUK conference, and the Pandemic Sciences International conference at the University of Oxford in the UK. She is an active member of interdisciplinary research teams and professional organizations. Her creative works, ranging from musical compositions to visual narratives, serve as tools for advocacy, education, and empowerment, especially among underrepresented communities.

#### Saniya Taher:

Dr. Taher is a short-term fellow at MECAM for the 2025 cohort. She earned her PhD from the Department of Comparative Literature with a Designated Emphasis in Critical Theory at the University of California, Berkeley, in the Fall 2024. Her research situates Fanon within the archives of the Middle East and North Africa, establishing a South-South intervention that elaborates on the issues of coloniality and anti-colonialism, particularly in its national specificity and its global dimension. Saniya was a postdoctoral researcher affiliated with the Europe in the Middle East, Middle East in Europe (EUME) research program in Berlin during spring/summer 2025. She is currently affiliated with the research project *Madness, Media,*

Milieus: Reconfiguring the Humanities in Postwar Europe (Volkswagen Stiftung/Bauhaus-University Weimar).

#### Souhir Zekri:

Dr. Zekri is a short-term fellow at MECAM for the 2025 cohort. She earned a PhD degree in English studies from the University of Strathclyde (Glasgow, Scotland) and currently teaches at the Higher Institute of Digital Engineering of Tunis (University of Tunis). Her main research areas are autobiographical writing theory, motherhood, and gender studies. She is also specialized in the Italian diaspora in Scotland and spatial theory/geographical humanities. She produces literary creations and focuses on the form of testimony in relation to the theme of motherhood. Her doctoral thesis was published under the title *Mapping Metabiographical Heartlands in Marina Warner's Fiction* in 2019, and her upcoming book *Metaphors of Motherhood in Marina Warner's Fiction* will be published by Routledge in 2026.

#### Valentina Schiattarella:

Dr. Schiattarella is a short-term fellow at MECAM for the 2025 cohort. She is a linguist specializing in the description and documentation of minority languages, particularly those of the Berber/Amazigh family. She earned her PhD from the École Pratique des Hautes Études (Paris) in 2015, with a dissertation on the Siwi Berber language. Since 2016, she has conducted postdoctoral research and teaching activities in Italy (University of Naples "L'Orientale"), Germany (Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, University of Hamburg), and France (ILARA, Paris), focusing on Siwi and other Amazigh languages of Libya. Her research combines linguistic analysis and documentation based on field data. She is the author of *Berber Texts from Siwa* (Köppe, 2017) and has recently submitted a comprehensive grammar of Siwi.

#### Yazid Benhadda:

Dr. Benhadda is a short-term fellow at MECAM for the 2025 cohort. He holds a PhD in political science and international relations from the University of Exeter (United Kingdom). His research intersects critical security studies, colonial migration history, and North African studies. During his time at Exeter, he also fulfilled teaching duties. He has been a guest researcher at the University of Marburg within the CRC138 "Dynamics of Security" program. His work has been published in *International Political Sociology* and *Migration Studies*.