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International AGYA Conference The Place of Humanities in Research, Education and Society: An Arab-German Dialogue

Freie Universität Berlin, 08–10 November 2019

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The Place of Humanities in Research, Education and Society: An Arab-German Dialogue

Humanities comprise a wide range of subjects, from history, philosophy and archaeology to language, literature, religious studies and the fine arts.

In recent years, the idea that the humanities are in a crisis has been a topic of much public debate in many parts of the world. In Germany, other parts of Europe, the United States, Australia and India, numerous commentaries paint a bleak picture of the humanities in decline. With the rise of the digital era and the increasing role of data and technology in almost every aspect of life, the value of studying the humanities has been increasingly called into question. Once valued as an indispensable public good, today students, parents, the academy, industry leaders and funders, both public and private, are frequently asking: what are the humanities good for? Over the past half century, a utilitarian focus on 'useful' and 'practical' science has emerged in higher education that emphasizes employability, while increasingly denigrating what some dismiss as 'ridiculous' humanities subjects as 'impractical' and ill-suited to meet the demands of the modern workforce. In much of the Arab world, the humanities are held in low esteem by students, parents and society in general. The 'elite' university departments with the most prestige and promising career prospects are typically considered to be medicine and engineering, followed by business and law, IT and communications.

The conference invites Arab and German key players – scholars from various academic disciplines, university officials, policymakers, outreach professionals, educators and other creative minds – to explore the potential and challenges of the humanities by engaging in a multilateral dialogue. Experts from Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia, Kuwait, Iraq, Germany, Switzerland and other Arab and European countries discuss questions like: What are the most challenging issues facing the humanities today, both in academia and beyond? How do the humanities help us understand social change and what might it take to bridge the gap between the sciences and humanities? The aim of the conference is to raise awareness about the relevance of the humanities, discuss examples of best practice in research, teaching and outreach to society, and develop new visions and new formats of collaboration between the two regions.

We will start with a kick-off event on 8 November, as part of Berlin Science Week. Günter M. Ziegler, President of Freie Universität Berlin, and Abdullatif Abuhijleh, President of Birzeit

University, West Bank, will discuss how to bridge Sciences and Humanities in the 21st century. The evening will conclude with a dinner reception providing the opportunity to meet and network with esteemed international guests.

On 09 and 10 November, the conference offers invigorating interdisciplinary workshops, panel discussions and keynotes by Randa Aboubakr, Cairo University, on 'Digital Citizen Media and Emerging Modes of Knowledge Production', Claudia Mareis, FHNW Academy of Art and Design, Basel, on 'The Design Turn: Bridging the Humanities and Sciences Divide', and Jamila Al-Daily, National Museum Sanaa, on 'Cultural Heritage at Risk'.

Among the topics addressed during the workshops are questions of, first, how to teach humanities (both at universities and in schools), second, how to translate academic knowledge to a broader public, while the third workshop will be held in five parallel working groups. We will discuss in greater depth issues related to the disciplines of History and Archeology, Literary and Cultural Studies, Philosophy and Ethics, Law, and Gender Studies. University officials and representatives of funding institutions are invited to meet in a closed session. Recommendations resulting from the workshops and panel discussions will be published in a policy report.

In the framework of the conference, a prize will be awarded to projects with special achievements in communicating the role and value of the humanities to the general public. We invited 10 projects to present their work in a poster exhibition. Two of them will receive the award during the ceremony on Saturday evening.

Berlin, 01 November 2019

Nuha Alshaar

American University of Sharjah, UAE

Beate La Sala

Freie Universität Berlin, Germany

Jenny Rahel Oesterle

University of Heidelberg, Germany

Barbara Winckler

University of Münster, Germany

Conference Program

Friday, 08 November 2019

Freie Universität Berlin, Silberlaube, Hörsaal 1a

17:15 **Registration**
18:00 **Welcome Addresses**
18:30 **Opening Statements and Discussion:**
How to Bridge Sciences and Humanities in the 21st Century?
Abdullatif Abuhijleh, President of Birzeit University, West Bank | Günter M. Ziegler, President of Freie Universität Berlin

20:30 **Reception & Poster Presentation 'AGYA Humanities Award'**

Musical interludes: Berlin Oriental Quartet
Conference host: Julia Gerlach

The opening event is part of Berlin Science Week 2019.

Saturday, 09 November 2019

Freie Universität Berlin, Silberlaube, Hörsaal 1a

08:30 **Registration**
09:00 – 09:30 **Introduction**
09:30 – 10:15 **Keynote I: *Digital Citizen Media and Emerging Modes of Knowledge Production***
Randa Aboubakr, Professor of English and Comparative Literature, Cairo University
10:15 – 11:00 **Keynote II: *The Design Turn: Bridging the Humanities and Sciences Divide***
Claudia Mareis, Professor of Design Theory and Design Research, FHNW Academy of Art and Design Basel
11:00 – 11:30 **Coffee Break & Poster Presentation 'AGYA Humanities Award'**
11:30 – 13:30 **Workshop Sessions I: *Teaching Humanities at Universities and Secondary Schools***
Hörsaal 1a **Workshop I.A: *Teaching Humanities at Universities***
Chair: Tarek Tawfik, Cairo University, AGYA Alumnus | Anne Clément-Vollenbroich, University of Bern | Fadi El Hage, Saint Joseph University of Beirut | Andrea Geier, University of Trier | Bashshar Haydar, American University of Beirut | Christian Junge, University of Marburg, AGYA member | Rasha Sharaf, Egyptian National E-Learning University
Room L115 **Workshop I.B: *Teaching Humanities at Secondary Schools***
Chair: Marko Demantowsky, University of Basel | Bassel Akar, Notre Dame University Lebanon | Shaimaa Atef, Boldan for Vernacular Heritage, Cairo | Inken Heldt, University of Kaiserslautern | Nariman Moustafa, Mesahat, Cairo | Irene Pieper, University of Hildesheim | Susanne Popp, University of Augsburg

13:30 – 14:30 **Lunch**
14:30 – 16:00 **Panel Discussion I: *Arab-German Cooperation in the Humanities***
Chair: Florian Kohstall, Freie Universität Berlin, AGYA Alumnus | Fadma Ait Mous, Hassan II University of Casablanca | Mohamed Refâat Chaâbouni, University of Tunis El-Manar | Christian Hülshörster, German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) | Georges Khalil, Forum Transregionale Studien, Berlin | Angelika Neuwirth, Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities
16:00 – 16:30 **Coffee Break & Poster Presentation 'AGYA Humanities Award'**
16:30 – 18:30 **Workshop Session II: *Translating Knowledge to Society***
Chair: Luise Fischer, Fraunhofer Center Leipzig, AGYA member | Amro Ali Abdelmonem, American University of Cairo, AGYA member | Ashraf Amin, Al-Ahram Newspaper, Cairo | Aisha Deemas, Sharjah Museum of Islamic Civilization | Claus-Peter Haase, ehem. Staatl. Museen zu Berlin / Museum für Islamische Kunst | Mona el Tobgui, Academy of Scientific Research and Technology in Egypt | Ricarda Ziegler, Wissenschaftsbarometer, Berlin
18:30 – 19:00 **AGYA Humanities Award Ceremony**
Initiatives and projects promoting the role and value of humanities in research, education and society

Sunday, 10 November 2019

Freie Universität Berlin, Silberlaube, Hörsaal 1a

08:30	Registration		
09:00 – 10:30	Panel Discussion II: <i>Research Funding in the Humanities</i> Chair: Bilal Orfali, American University of Beirut, AGYA Alumnus Amani Albedah, Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences Sabine Behrenbeck, German Council of Science and Humanities Hans-Dieter Bienert, German Research Foundation (DFG) Beatrice Gründler, Freie Universität Berlin Rima Mismar, Arab Fund for Arts & Culture, Beirut		
10:30 – 11:00	Coffee Break		
11:00 – 13:00	Workshop Sessions III: <i>Disciplinary Perspectives</i>		
<i>Room L 115</i>	Workshop III.A: <i>History and Archaeology</i> Chair: Jenny Oesterle, University of Heidelberg, AGYA Alumna Ammar Abdulrahman, Freie Universität Berlin, AGYA Alumnus Abdulhadi Alajmi, Kuwait University Nadia El Cheikh, American University of Beirut Julia Hauser, University of Kassel, AGYA Alumna Haidar Lashkry, Koya University Birgit Schäbler, Orient-Institut Beirut (OIB)	<i>KL 29/208</i>	Workshop III.D: <i>Law and the Humanities</i> Chair: Lena-Maria Möller, Max Planck Institute for Comparative and International Private Law, AGYA Co-President Marie-Claire Foblets, Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology Sabine Frerichs, Vienna University of Economics and Business Samer Ghamroun, Saint Joseph University of Beirut Anna-Bettina Kaiser, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin Asem Khalil, Birzeit University, West Bank Oday Talal Mahmood, Al Iraqia University, Baghdad Amr Shalakany, American University in Cairo
<i>Room L 116</i>	Workshop III.B: <i>Literary and Cultural Studies</i> Chair: Barbara Winckler, University of Münster, AGYA Alumna Marie Thérèse Abdelmessih, Cairo University Ursula Frohne, University of Münster Kristina Petzold, University of Hildesheim Ali Souleman, Higher Institute of Dramatic Arts, Damascus/University of Oxford Fatiha Taïb, Mohammed V University in Rabat Daniel Weidner, Leibniz-Zentrum für Literatur- und Kulturforschung Berlin	<i>KL 29/111</i>	Workshop III.E: <i>Gender Studies</i> Chair: Antje Flüchter, University of Bielefeld Shereen Abouelnaga, American University in Cairo Lama Abu-Odeh, Georgetown University of Washington, D.C./ American University of Beirut Rouba El Helou-Sensenig, University of Erfurt Lydia Potts, University of Oldenburg Sabine Schülting, Freie Universität Berlin
<i>Room L 113</i>	Workshop III.C: <i>Philosophy and Ethics</i> Chair: Beate Ulrike La Sala, Freie Universität Berlin, AGYA member Nuha Al-Shaar, American University of Sharjah, AGYA Alumna Mohammad Alwahaib, Kuwait University, AGYA member Anne Eusterschulte, Freie Universität Berlin Elizabeth Suzanne Kassab, Doha Institute for Graduate Studies Andreas Lammer, University of Trier Jean-Christophe Merle, University of Vechta		13:00 – 14:00 Lunch 14:00 – 15:30 Panel Discussion III: <i>Digital Humanities</i> Chair: Carola Richter, Freie Universität Berlin, AGYA Alumna Usama Gad, Ain Shams University, Cairo Najla Jarkas, American University of Beirut Zena Kamash, Royal Holloway University of London Daniel Kinitz, University of Leipzig Michael Krewet, Freie Universität Berlin
			15:30 – 16:00 Coffee Break 16:00 – 16:45 Keynote III: <i>Cultural Heritage at Risk</i> Jamila Al-Daily, Director of the Cultural Heritage and Handicraft Museum, National Museum Sanaa, Yemen in discussion with Ronny Vollandt, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München (LMU), AGYA Alumnus
			16:45 – 17:30 Report of Workshop Results 17:30 – 18:00 Closing Words & Final Discussion

Workshops

Workshop I A:

Teaching Humanities at Universities

Chair: Tarek Tawfik, Cairo University, AGYA Alumnus

Teaching humanities at universities has become a challenge, as voices have started to question the relevance of these studies in our modern and more profit-oriented academic world. How can we reach and attract students who are raised in the digital era? What modern means can we use in our teaching? Are our examination methods still valid? How far do we go with interdisciplinarity? How can we develop our curricula to make humanities students better-suited for the demands of the labour market? No one is better placed or more capable than humanities specialists, equipped with academic skills in critical thinking and analysis, to discuss these questions and propose solutions. This fact, in and of itself, underlines the continuing importance of humanities and the ability of these fields of study to adapt to modern academic life.

Workshop I B:

Teaching Humanities at Secondary Schools

Chair: Marko Demantowsky, University of Basel

This panel brings together education experts from Egypt, Lebanon and Germany. Together we want to apply the basic questions of the conference to a particularly important area: the education of young people. Experts from the fields of educational sciences, historical and political education, museum pedagogy and literature didactics will discuss these issues. All these fields are united by the common horizon of the humanities. The presentations and exchange of experiences will be structured by three guiding questions: How do you assess the status and future of the humanities and humanistic ideas in your respective professional area within your nation or culture? What do you see as a possible contribution of your respective professional area to humanistic education? From the perspective of your national and cultural background, what do you see as the humanistic learning potential of intercultural exchange, particularly, in this case, with regards to Arab-European and Arab-German cultural contacts?

Workshop II:

Translating Knowledge to Society

Chair: Luise Fischer, Fraunhofer Center Leipzig, AGYA member

This panel reflects on ways in which academic knowledge, particularly knowledge of the arts and humanities, can be 'translated' and 'transferred' to the wider public. The assumption here is that scholars can and should have an impact on society beyond the usual teaching and academic publishing. The panel thus elaborates on the conditions and spaces that enable or inhibit interaction between scholars from the humanities and the wider public. It will provide a comparative perspective by bringing together scholars and practitioners working in universities, academies, museums and other spaces in different contexts in the Arab world and Germany. In doing so, the panel aims to offer new insights on the roles of and possibilities for engaging with society through 'public humanities'.

Workshop III A:

History and Archaeology

Chair: Jenny Rahel Oesterle, University of Heidelberg, AGYA Alumna

This workshop brings together speakers from six Arab and German universities to discuss the current situation and future prospects of Arab-German cooperation in the fields of history and archaeology. In ten-minute participant statements followed by a panel discussion and audience dialogue, the workshop will address questions like: What are specific challenges for historical research in the 21st century? How could the positioning of history among other disciplines within the humanities be described, particularly at Arab and German universities? What historical research topic would be well suited for an Arab-German joint venture in historical research? Should historians intervene in or respond to political and/or societal questions? If so, what are some examples of how this can best be done? Finally, how can we attract more students, both in Arab and German contexts, to engage in historical studies?

The Workshop III B:

Literary and Cultural Studies

Chair: Barbara Winckler, University of Münster, AGYA Alumna

If the humanities in general are often perceived as less apt to address actual challenges than the social, natural and life sciences, this is even more so for disciplines dealing with fictional works and aesthetics. This workshop brings together scholars of literary studies, art history and theatre studies from Arab and German universities to jointly explore the potential and challenges of their disciplines in research, teaching and outreach to a broader public. It asks: what are the most topical issues in research, and how can innovative approaches, particularly interdisciplinary work, provide new insights? How can teaching literature and visual and performative arts – involving the critical reading of both texts and images – train students to understand the past and meet actual and future challenges in a world shaped by digitization, globalization, populism and political unrest? And finally, how can we make these skills and knowledge accessible to a broader public?

The Workshop III C:

Philosophy and Ethics

Chair: Beate La Sala, Freie Universität Berlin, AGYA member

This workshop is dedicated to an exchange between three Arab and three German philosophers. They will discuss what answers philosophy has had and continues to offer in the face of social and cultural diversity and transformation across different historical periods, cultural contexts and intellectual settings. How have philosophical debates impacted intercultural exchange and the construction of moral and cultural paradigms and values? What is the role of philosophy as a discipline and how is it defined within academic discourse and in terms of social relevance? What kind of answers to these questions have philosophers provided throughout the centuries and where are contemporary philosophical debates heading? What is the specific contribution of philosophy in addressing questions raised by ongoing globalization, an increasingly technologized and digitized world, and new forms of political radicalization? Finally, should philosophy and philosophers have a stronger influence on public and policy debates?

Workshop III D:

Law and the Humanities

Chair: Lena-Maria Möller, Max Planck Institute for Comparative and International Private Law, AGYA Co-President

This workshop will investigate the interaction between legal studies and humanities, addressing their commonalities and differences, as well as their potential methodological and pedagogical impact on one another. The workshop brings together Arab and German scholars of law with diverse interdisciplinary research interests, including legal anthropology, law and economics, and the sociology of law. Overarching themes guiding the individual presentations include the nature of legal studies as an academic field and the role legal education allows for methodological approaches from the humanities; the specific institutional structures of legal studies programs at different universities and their interaction with the humanities and social sciences; as well as the use and potential of humanities approaches in legal research and their acceptance among local academic communities. The workshop will conclude by thinking through recommendations for the future of legal research and education in Arab and German contexts.

Workshop III E:

Gender Studies

Chair: Antje Flüchter, University of Bielefeld

In many parts of the world today, the humanities are under threat of elimination or face further cuts to their already meagre budgets. Academic research must increasingly prove its worth, often meaning its financial worth. As an academic discipline, gender studies has been disputed from the beginning. Yet, today, Hungary is in the process of abolishing it from its universities, claiming that it undermines the fundamentals of Christian family and thus society. Despite gender studies' many successes over the last decades, today's 'new right' and populist movements defame it as ideology, as un-academic and dangerous. Through challenging traditional gender roles, the power of gender studies lies in its critical and empowering potential. This panel will discuss the role and relevance of gender studies in Germany/the West and the Arab world, tackling crucial topics in our research, problems we face as scholars, as well as the relationship between academics and politics.

Panel Discussions

Panel Discussion I:

Arab-German Cooperation in the Humanities: Towards a more inclusive approach

Chair: Florian Kohstall, Freie Universität Berlin, AGYA Alumnus

This panel will discuss different successful and less successful formats of Arab-German cooperation in the humanities and social sciences, where the number of cooperation projects has steadily increased in recent years. We observe, in fact, a shift from mainly individual-driven cooperation towards institutional projects, with the latter now frequently acting as frameworks for the former. While institutional projects may increase the visibility of Arab-German cooperation, multiple challenges exist, such as limited access to archives, financial restrictions and the valorization of local scholarship in global knowledge production. Meanwhile, volatile political environments continue to significantly impact the success or failure of many projects. Given these circumstances, we ask: Are current funding formats adequately crafted to strengthen cooperation in the social sciences and humanities? Are there specific fields that need special attention? How can universities and faculty better foster cooperation and play a constructive role in specific contexts of political, economic or social conflict?

Panel Discussion II:

Funding Research in the Humanities

Chair: Bilal Orfali, American University of Beirut, AGYA Alumnus

Funding for the humanities usually represents a small portion of national research budgets. This panel will discuss the impact of humanities research as a form of inquiry distinct from the social, natural and life sciences. Funding instruments and organizational effectiveness are key variables in supporting humanities research. Accordingly, this panel brings together representatives from a range of funding agencies in the Arab world and Germany to tackle issues like agency structures for supporting humanities research; the importance and sustainability of interdisciplinary research; means of fostering knowledge transfer; the pros and cons of open access in the humanities; and the future prospects for digital humanities.

Panel Discussion III:

Digital Humanities

Chair: Carola Richter, Freie Universität Berlin, AGYA Alumna

This panel seeks to explore how digital methods, tools and approaches can be meaningfully incorporated into the humanities. 'Digital humanities' refer to a broad set of new possibilities for making knowledge and artefacts (of the past or hidden in books and archives) better accessible to academia and society. Against this background, the panelists will assess the potential of digital humanities to stimulate the advancement and reinvigoration of societies in the 21st century. The panelists will share their experiences from different projects and a variety of disciplines, particularly in the realm of Arab-European transregional cooperation. Achievements and successes will be addressed, as well as challenges in implementing digital humanities approaches. The question of how to avoid 'digital colonialism' will be specifically tackled when looking to the future of digital humanities.

AGYA Award for Innovative Initiatives in the Humanities

Within the framework of the conference, AYGa is holding a prize competition to recognize innovative initiatives or projects in the Arab world and Europe that promote the role and value of the humanities in research, education and society. In response to the call for nominations, ten initiatives representing activities in six countries will compete for the prize. Among them, some drive humanities forward in educational settings,

while others translate knowledge to the public through journalism. Some raise awareness for the role of humanities through art, while others facilitate access to knowledge through open source and digital means. Posters presenting all ten nominated projects can be found on display at the conference venue. The prize will be announced on Saturday, 09 November at 18:30.

Nominated Projects

Al Hamesheyoun – The Undercommons

Cairo, Egypt

Represented by Dina Eldeeb

Taking the Humanities on the Road. Collaborative Learning between Bern and Cairo

University of Bern, Switzerland

Represented by Hussein El-Hajj, Nariman Moustafa and Anne Clément-Vollenbroich

Medical Anthropology for Health Professionals in Egypt and the Arab World

A collaboration between FU Berlin, SFU Vienna, Austrian Cultural Forum Cairo, DAAD Cairo and FU Cairo Liaison Office, Egyptian Universities

Represented by Mustafa Abdalla and Margret Jäger

Mesahat: Liberating Learning Spaces

Cairo, Egypt

Represented by Nariman Moustafa and Sarah Sallam

www.facebook.com/sde.egypt

Mubtadaa' Initiative – Critical Humanities for Teenagers

CARE International, Egypt

Represented by Hend El-Ghazaly, Ayman El-Houseini and Mae Saafan

Peace of Art. Promoting Peace and Fighting Discrimination and Violence through Art

North Bekaa, Lebanon

Represented by Mahdi Yahya

www.peaceofartlb.com

www.facebook.com/peaceofart

SAWA – Transcultural Capacity Building Program for Current and Future Museum Personnel

A collaboration between Sharjah Museums Authority, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, University of Applied Sciences Berlin (HTW) and the Goethe-Institut

Represented by Aisha Deemas

goethe.de/ins/ae/en/kul/sup/sawa-museum-academy.html

Sidcastic. Digital Content Creator

Algeria

Represented by Sid El-Mohri

www.facebook.com/sidcastic

The Poetry Project: Capturing Voices along the Faultlines of Conflict

Berlin, Germany

Represented by Laura Daub

thepoetryproject.de

From University to Secondary School: Making Academic Knowledge Relevant to Society. Project-Seminar on the Arab 19th Century Nahda

University of Kassel and University of Marburg, Germany

Represented by Julia Hauser and Christian Junge

Information

Conference Venue

Freie Universität Berlin

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Conference Website

www.agya.info/humanities-conference2019

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The conference is organized by the Arab-German Young Academy of Sciences and Humanities (AGYA) in cooperation with Freie Universität Berlin, Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster, Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg and the American University of Sharjah. It is funded in the framework of AGYA by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF).

The opening event is part of Berlin Science Week 2019.

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