

## ■ A new crosscultural think tank

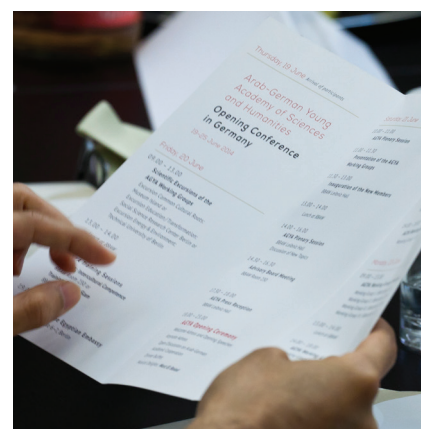
### The Opening Conference of the Arab-German Young Academy of Sciences and Humanities (AGYA) in Germany, Berlin, 20-24 June 2014

Early Sunday morning in a conference room of the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities (BBAW): members of the AGYA working group "Common Heritage and Common Challenges" meet up to finalize the proposal for its first international conference. Just the day before, the AGYA celebrated its Opening Ceremony in Germany. But this morning the celebrations with lively discussions on Arab-German Academic Cooperation and dancing to the rhythms of the famous Egyptian soft-rock band Wust El-Balad are over: now it is about time to start working in the AGYA working groups meetings.

Celebrations – all 50 AGYA members came together for the first time to exchange their visions and interdisciplinary project ideas. In addition to the two mentioned groups, AGYA-members chose to work on the topics Arab and German Education, Energy, Water and Environment and Transformation Processes.

## ■ A QUEST FOR NEW, UNCHARTED APPROACHES IN ARAB-GERMAN ACADEMIA

AGYA is a new cross-cultural think tank promoting and supporting Arab-German exchange based on the idea of scientific excellence and societal commitment of early career scholars. AGYA President Prof. Dr. Verena Lepper is one of the masterminds behind this first bilateral academy worldwide. She explains that the main goal of the AGYA is to gather outstanding young researcher of both the Arab world and Germany to face global challenges in terms of research questions and policy advice to the benefit of the societies north and south of the Mediterranean.



## ■ QUESTIONS OF IMPORTANCE BEYOND DISCIPLINARY LIMITATIONS

This first project of one out of several AGYA working groups is an international conference on Malta as a contact zone in cultural encounters throughout history. Because of its island character, Malta offers a fascinating case for studying the complexities of exchange and knowledge transfer. The realization of this interdisciplinary conference will substantially deepen our understanding of contact zones and processes of exchange across the Mediterranean. Next door, another working group consisting of Arab and German AGYA members with various disciplinary backgrounds is in the course of foundation – "Innovation". Their goals: the achievement of a common understanding of innovation and its impact on society as well as the identification of best practices of innovation and enabling society and individuals to support innovation in Arab countries and Germany. At the AGYA Opening Conference in Germany, 20-24 June 2014 – with the inauguration of the new members and the Opening

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The AGYA newsletter will appear twice a year. Soon, further information about the AGYA events, members and working groups will be available on our new website.



## ▀ Beyond boundaries

### Prof. Dr. Klaus Lucas, Co-Chair of the AGYA Advisory Board, on the need of interdisciplinary exchange

Science adequately dealing with societal problems should be all-embracing. In addition to the specialized knowledge of disciplinary experts it is desirable and in many cases even indispensable to look at an issue in a broader perspective, by transgressing the boundaries of particular disciplines. So, it is now generally accepted that handling such technically oriented issues as energy or nutrition supply, mobility, climate change and others requires not only knowledge of engineers, natural scientists, food biologists etc. but also, in order to find acceptance in the society, knowledge of organization and guidance as generated in the social and economic sciences and in the humanities. The same broadness of consideration should be applied to issues such as social stratification, education, cultural heritage, decision on research agenda and others. Interdisciplinary research, reflection and discussion in this general perspective is constitutive for the intellectual activities of any institution dealing with the future development of societies. This is the principle of operation postulated as early as in the year 1700 by the famous German mathematician and philosopher Johann Gottfried Leibniz for scientific academies.

#### ■ OPENING SCIENTIFIC MINDS

It can generally be observed that especially young scientists are rather reserved with respect to an engagement in interdisciplinary research projects because their career chances are much more furthered by recognition in their own narrow communities. This

unfortunate situation is frequently owed to the misunderstanding that transgressing beyond the narrow limitations of a single discipline in occupation with a scientific issue may take away time and energy for more fruitful disciplinary research. Experience shows, however, that opening a scientific mind to the thoughts and instruments of other disciplines generates new ideas and fresh looks that may even stimulate work in one's own scientific community. Clearly, this does not apply to each and every topic, but frequently to those of societal relevance. Clearly also that such a broad intellectual activity is only open as a chance to the best talents in their various fields.

#### ■ GENERATING NEW IDEAS

Current university structures are not favorable to this type of interdisciplinary exchange. They are organized in a disciplinary manner and this for good reasons in view of their role as instruments of mass education. Other structures as exemplified by a scientific academy based on the Leibniz tradition are needed for unfolding exceptional talents. AGYA is meant to become such an academy: a society of young excellent researchers from Germany and the Arab world geared to discussion and research on topics of mutual relevance in these two worlds. Interdisciplinarity is the natural platform of its work. This requires disciplinary excellence in combination with a commitment to addressing societal problems in a broad perspective, certainly an adequate definition of the qualifications of the AGYA members. The work format in which such interdisciplinary research and discussion can put into practice is intellectual exchange in workshops in combination with writing up manifestos and an adequate transfer to political leaders and the public.

### The AGYA Advisory Board

The Arab-German Young Academy of Sciences and Humanities is supervised by an Advisory Board consisting of five German and five Arab representatives of internationally renowned academic institutions. The Advisory Board is responsible for the final selection of the AGYA members.

#### **Prof. Dr. Klaus Lucas (Co-Chair)**

Vice-President of Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities (BBAW)

#### **Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c. mult. Jörg Hacker**

President of the German National Academy of Sciences Leopoldina

#### **Prof. Dr. Klaus-Dieter Lehmann**

President of the German Goethe Institute

#### **Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c. mult. Hermann Parzinger**

President of the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation

#### **Prof. Dr. Margret Wintermantel**

President of the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD)

#### **Prof. Dr. Wyatt Roderick Hume (Co-Chair)**

Director of Education, Training and Development - Research Division of Qatar Foundation

#### **Prof. Dr. Khalid Abdul Rahman Al-Ohaly**

President of the Arabian Gulf University (Bahrain)

#### **Prof. Dr. Edgar Choueiri**

President of the Lebanese Academy of Sciences

#### **Prof. Dr. Mahmoud M. Sakr**

President of the Egyptian Academy of Sciences

#### **Prof. Dr. Abdelhadi Soudi**

Ambassador Scientist of the Alexander von Humboldt-Foundation Morocco



**Klaus Lucas** is Vice-President of the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities. He is Co-Chair of the Advisory Board and Honorary Founding Member of the AGYA.





## Media in transition

International communication scholar Carola Richter and political philosopher Sarhan Dhouib discuss the role of the media in Tunisia and Egypt, expectations and challenges.

### ■ WHAT ARE THE MAIN FEATURES OF THE CURRENT MEDIA LANDSCAPES IN TUNISIA AND EGYPT?

#### Sarhan

Currently, Arab television channels offer an unexpectedly high number of talk shows – this indicates that there is strong need for discussion. This applies on Tunisia, too. When you compare Tunisia to other Arab countries in transition, the plurality of opinions is more tangible in the media. All groups of the heterogeneous Tunisian civil society use the media as a mouthpiece and might even maintain their own broadcasting, whether these are committed democrats or sceptics of democratic systems or actors who just pursue radical goals under the guise of civil society.

#### Carola

The crucial need to transform state-owned television into public service broadcasting for example, is delayed in all Arab countries due to inner conflicts about their control in the long run. In Tunisia and Egypt, there is a tendency to simply reallocate ownership of media to crony business elites that already made their money during the time of the former dictators. Additionally, we have social media as a new communication tool which dramatically changed the possibilities of gaining public access for diverse actors. Using social media, most actors feel empowered to voice their own concerns and avoid governmental control. Although this can be a delusive impression it encourages participation.

#### Sarhan

Like for example the Tunisian organization Al Bawsala. Since 2012 it tries to build a bridge between Parliament and citizens through a website and Facebook.

### ■ WHAT SHOULD BE THE FUTURE ROLE OF THE MEDIA?

#### Carola

Most civil society actors are very much aware of the important

role of media in disseminating information, educating the people and being a critical watchdog of the political elites. Therefore, journalism and media literacy trainings are highly appreciated to help transform the formerly politically exploited media into a true fourth estate of society.

#### Sarhan

Media should function as a platform in the development of a critical public, channel the flow of information and present polyphony of opinions. To give just one example, the media in Tunisia is expected to play a vital role in tackling and handling the injustices committed by the regime during the dictatorship.

### ■ WHAT ARE THE DANGERS IN THE CURRENT SITUATION?

#### Carola

The liberalization of media systems in Arab countries must be seen critically. In Egypt, during the time of Mursi's reign, there was a strong polarization of pro-Mursi and pro-military media that resulted in slanders. After his ouster, the media is characterized by conformity due to state repression but also due to the loyalty of most media owners.

#### Sarhan

Unfortunately, political positioning and economic interests of the media can result in escalations. Media channels spread resentment and stage hate speeches, and even risk the division of society. To completely understand the situation, the definition of "media" has to be expanded: spaces of communication such as mosques and public preacher platforms have to be included. The radical polarization between „truthful“ and „false“ Muslims, between „Muslims“ and „non-Muslims“ might have dangerous political and social effects in these public spaces. On the other hand, it is the duty of the media to capture social, religious, ideological conflicts in a nutshell and to proactively support the dynamics of a society.

#### Carola

There needs to be more space and funding provided for independent, non-partisan media to overcome this stage of polarization and conflict. Promising examples are the internet based citizen journalism platforms in Egypt or local media such as community radios in Tunisia. This not only guarantees authenticity but helps to transform people into participating citizens.



**Sarhan Dhouib** is Assistant Professor for Philosophy at the University of Kassel. His research focuses on political and Arab-Islamic philosophy, theories of justice and trans-cultural theory. Currently he is working on the philosophy of human rights viewed from a trans-cultural perspective. Since 2013, he is head of the German-Arab research project: Responsibility, Justice and Memory Culture.

Both scholars are members of the AGYA working group "Transformation Processes".

**Carola Richter** is Assistant Professor for International Communication at Freie Universität Berlin. Her main research interests include Arab media systems and political communication in the Muslim world, as well as media in relation to political transformation, religion and migration. In 2014, she started a German-Arab dialogue project: Communication in Transformation – Transforming Communication Studies.





## ► The new AGYA logo

The acronym AGYA stands for the Arab-German Young Academy of Sciences and Humanities. The logo was designed by a team of designers from Egypt and Germany. The Arabic letter on top of the G brings verve into AGYA corporate identity: It can be read as both the Arabic letter 'ayn (stands for arabi = Arabic) and the letter alif with hamza (stands for almani = German). Thus the dynamic Arabic element of the logo symbolizes the two partners in cooperation of this first bilateral young academy worldwide: the Arab world and Germany.

## ► Latest News

■ The AGYA Vice-President **Alaa el-Sadek** was appointed to the Regional Water Center for the Arab Countries in Bahrain and to the chair of the scientific committee of the 11th Gulf Water Conference, Oman, 20-22 October 2014.

■ **Abdalla Ahmed Elbashir**, University of Khartoum, currently is Visiting Professor at the Sultan Qaboos University, Oman.

■ **Henda Mahmoudi** and **Ali El Battay** received a grant from the Young Water Scientist Partnership (YWSP) for their research project on improving agricultural soil properties in dry lands.

■ Together with a colleague, **Tobias Redlich** obtained a grant from the Hamburg Academy of Sciences to host the first trans-disciplinary conference on "Technical Support Systems that People Really Want", Helmut-Schmidt University, 15-16 December 2014.

■ Together with Mourad Ismail, **Ahmed El-Guindy** has been awarded a grant on "Some Questions in Partitions, q-series and Asymptotics" by Qatar National Research Fund.

■ **Tamirace Fakhoury** has been offered the Humboldt Fellowship for Advanced Scholars. She will become Visiting Assistant Professor at the German Institute for

Global and Regional Studies in Hamburg.

■ In October 2014, **Julia Hauser** was promoted to Junior Professor for the History of Globalization Processes at the University of Kassel.

■ **Hanan Badr** and **Carola Richter** collaborate on a research project at the Freie Universität Berlin on the "Contested Public Sphere in Egypt" with a grant from the German Academic Exchange Service.

■ Together with his research group, the computer scientist **Kalman Graffi** has been awarded one of only six NRW Progress Groups to conduct interdisciplinary research with strong exchange with practitioners.

■ **Vanessa Lux** was selected as member of the Young Center of Interdisciplinary Research at the University of Bielefeld.

■ **Bilal Orfali** was appointed to the Sofia Chair of Arabic Studies at Ohio State University.

■ **Khalid Talahma** became Legal Expert for the Development of the New Legal Framework for Governorate Offices in Palestine, a project of the UN Development Program.

■ **Christian Klein-Bösing** has been promoted to Academic Councillor at Institute for Nuclear Physics, University of Münster.

## ► Upcoming events

**20-22 November 2014**

**Doha, Qatar**

Annual AGYA Conference in Qatar in cooperation with Qatar Foundation

**23-24 November 2014**

**Manama, Bahrain**

Workshop of the AGYA working group Arab and German Education at the Arabian Gulf University

**February 2015**

**Cairo, Egypt**

Workshop of the AGYA working groups Innovation and Energy, Water and Environment

**4-6 March 2015**

**Féz, Morocco**

Humboldt Kolleg "Beacons of Hope in the Quest for the Next Einstein in the MENA region". A session on Transformation Processes in the Arab World will be co-organized with the AGYA

**May 2015**

**Munich, Germany**

Writing Workshop of the AGYA working group Transformation Processes

Annual AGYA Conference in Germany

**May 2015**

**Malta**

International Conference "Fluid Nature, Fluid Culture. Malta and the Mediterranean" of the AGYA working group Common Heritage and Common Challenges.

## ► About us

The AGYA has been established in 2013 at the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities (BBAW) and the Arabian Gulf University (AGU) as the first bilateral young academy worldwide. The AGYA is currently funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF), Qatar Foundation and AGU. Following the public Calls for Membership in 2013 and 2014 more than 600 early career scholars from 22 different countries and from various fields in Natural Sciences, Life Sciences, Humanities, Social Sciences, Technical Sciences, and Arts submitted their applications to the AGYA. The Advisory Board of the AGYA selected 25 Arab and 25 German applicants as the first members who are now working on research projects and initiatives that transcend disciplinary borders. Moreover, the AGYA fosters the intercultural experiences of its members and promotes them as ambassadors of sciences and culture.

## ► AGYA

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