

**ميكام**  
مركز ميريان  
للدراستات المتقدمة  
في المنطقة المغاربية



**MECAM**

**Merian Centre  
For Advanced Studies  
In The Maghreb**

# CALL FOR APPLICATIONS

**Extended Deadline 15 October 2020; 24.00h CET.**

The Merian Centre for Advanced Studies in the Maghreb (MECAM) will be established this year at the Université de Tunis/Tunisia to strengthen cooperation in the Humanities and Social Sciences in and across the Maghreb, the Middle East, and Europe. The overall theme “Imagining Futures: Dealing with Disparity” guides MECAM’s research agenda on questions of Aesthetics & Cultural Practice, Inequality & Mobility, Memory & Justice, Resources & Sustainability, and Identities & Beliefs. These constitute the core issues of MECAM’s five thematic research clusters and Interdisciplinary Fellow Groups (IFG). For its first Interdisciplinary Fellow Group (IFG) “**Aesthetics & Cultural Practice**”, MECAM invites applications for **five short-term fellowships for researchers at different career stages** for the period from April to July 2021.

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UNIVERSITÄT  
LEIPZIG



Forum  
Transregionale  
Studien



## CALL FOR APPLICATIONS

### MECAM-Fellowships for the IFG “Aesthetics & Cultural Practice”

The Merian Centre for Advanced Studies in the Maghreb (MECAM), based in Tunis, is a new institutional initiative that intends to be a hub for interdisciplinary, transregional, and intergenerational research. It focuses on complex social and political processes and issues of common interest that divide and connect the Maghreb, the Middle East and Europe historically and in our time – e.g. beliefs, distribution of resources, migration, rule of law, socio-economic conflicts, and (transitional) justice. MECAM aims to construct and strengthen scholarly networks between Tunis and Germany, and across the Maghreb, the Middle East, and Europe. From a vantage point in the Maghreb, MECAM's guiding theme "Imagining Futures - Dealing with Disparity" addresses the complex processes of (re-)negotiating societal experiences into ideas for the future ('imagining futures') within the context of different forms and scales of disparity and unequal conditions ('disparity'). It explores the connection between multidimensional disparity and the possibilities of building and negotiating future-oriented ideas and models through five thematic clusters, which represent important issues of common concern in the Maghreb, the Middle East, and Europe. The clusters correspond with the respective Interdisciplinary Fellow Groups (IFG): “Aesthetics & Cultural Practice”, “Inequality & Mobility”, “Memory & Justice”, “Resources & Sustainability”, and “Identities & Beliefs”. The analysis proceeds from both a historical and geographically comparative perspective.

In its first call for short-term fellowships, MECAM invites applications for five fellowships for researchers in the context of its Interdisciplinary Fellow Group (IFG) "Aesthetics & Cultural Practice" for the period from April 2021 to July 2021. The members of the group will be required to participate regularly in the activities of the IFG programme and MECAM, to present their research projects and to submit a report on the progress of their research project at the end of the fellowship. In addition, a joint working paper will be prepared and published by the IFG.

The main focus of the IFG "Aesthetics and Cultural Practice" is as follows: It seeks to address and redress entanglements and disparities, and to consider the profound influence that societal changes have exerted on aesthetics and cultural practices (and vice-versa). It is the main goal of this cluster to investigate how aesthetic representations of disparity and entanglement are narrated, visualized, and performed in order to present the futures on offer to their respective societies. Authors, artists, filmmakers, and scholars in and of the Maghreb and the Middle East have projected possible futures including a reworking of the past, and the analysis of the present in the future tense. Cultural production has transformed experiences of disparity, trauma, violence, emotion, the abject and, more recently, feelings of 'hogra' (institutionalized humiliation) into images. These images have enabled scholars and the lay audience to gain a better understanding of clandestine migration, the refugee crisis, and the Arab Spring. Because literature and art generate and engage with a multiplicity of perspectives, they present us with a diversity of scenarios, a variety of potential futures, and the possibility to relate even contradictory experiences and perspectives into a narrative, artwork or performance. Similarly, fiction (re)presents reality and sometimes even precedes or exceeds it. Researchers with a disciplinary background of literary, theatre and media as well as cultural studies dealing with the following questions are invited to apply for the fellowships: How do



aesthetic forms and cultural practices influence the process by which models and imaginations of the future are (re-)negotiated in the Maghreb? How do they reflect disparities? And, vice-versa, what influence do societal transformations have on aesthetic and cultural practices?



## ELIGIBILITY & MOTIVATION

Applications are welcome from researchers at all stages of their academic career:

advanced PhD OR postdoc OR advanced researchers in any discipline of the humanities or social sciences.

- You are interested in discussing your own research in the framework of MECAM's main theme "Imagining futures – Dealing with disparity" with colleagues from the Maghreb, the Middle East and Europe.
- You are eager to do collaborative work, engage in collegial debate and exchange within an interdisciplinary group of fellows on questions of "Aesthetics & Cultural Practice".
- You are interested in revisiting your own research questions from a different vantage point.
- You want to become part of a (new) network of interdisciplinary, intergenerational, and transregional exchange and debate on disparity and the competing models for the future that co-exist in the societies of the contemporary Maghreb, Europe, and other parts of the world.

## OUR OFFER

### MOBILITY

MECAM's resident fellowships are awarded to individuals for four months from 1 April to 31 July 2021 on the basis of innovative and high-quality research projects that correspond to the IFG's focus. In exceptional cases due to the pandemic, the fellowships can be arranged in hybrid and/or sur-place ways, where the individual fellow remains at her/his place of actual residence for part of or for the whole fellowship period. Successful applicants will become '*MECAM fellows*' with all relevant rights and obligations for their fellowship period. The stipend/salary costs of the fellows will be covered by MECAM according to the principle '*no gain, no loss*' on an individual basis: The financial agreement aims to enable the invited fellows to stay at MECAM without reducing their income. In addition, all fellows who are not residing in Tunisia prior to the fellowship will receive a one-time lump sum of 1000 EUR for relocation/housing. In addition, all fellows will receive a one-time lump sum of 500 EUR for general research costs.

### NETWORK

MECAM Fellows will become part of a network, which will be built up by subsequent groups of fellows over the next years, and by the scholars of the institutions that are involved in the institutional framework. In the initial phase, each IFG includes doctoral students, postdocs, as well as advanced researchers from Germany, Tunisia, the Maghreb, the Middle East, Europe, and other regions and countries. There are also networking opportunities via the specific networks of IFG representatives from MECAM's partner institutions, as well as with scholars that may be invited within the IFG as guests.

### EXCHANGE AND DEBATE

The primary aim of all fellowships is to create a high-quality and flexible setting for a peer-to-peer exchange and debate between researchers from different countries, disciplines, and in different phases of their academic career: The IFG combines virtual and in-person forms of exchange and co-working, provides space to concentrate on individual work and scope for intensive debate. It focuses on research questions which are specific to the topic, and which can be modified and explored following the process of discussion, presentation, and debate within the IFG. To steer and enable the communication, an IFG coordinator will support the work of the fellows, and the group. This includes holding weekly colloquia with lectures on individual projects, collective writing processes and, if appropriate, organizing an initial and/or concluding workshop.

### INDEPENDENCE

MECAM offers the freedom to pursue individual projects on a topic of personal choice, such as an academic article, an essay, a policy paper, a book, a report, etc.

### SUPPORT

MECAM provides its fellows with office workspaces equipped with digital infrastructure as well as publication facilities for open-access and peer-reviewed formats of publication through the infrastructures of its partners. It offers assistance in finding accommodation and other organisational aspects. Moreover, the exchange between fellows is supported by a secure digital workspace (TrafoHub) and other digital tools.

## YOUR APPLICATION

MECAM assigns its partner institution, Forum Transregionale Studien in Berlin, with the processing of personal application data. Therefore, we kindly ask you to submit your application via the secure online application platform of the Forum Transregionale Studien by 15 October 2020, 24.00h CET: [application.trafo-berlin.de](https://application.trafo-berlin.de)

Applications by email will not be considered. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact MECAM's coordination team: [mecam-office@uni-marburg.de](mailto:mecam-office@uni-marburg.de)

As part of your application, you will be asked to prepare and upload:

- **Curriculum vitae including publications** (2-3 pages),
- **Research proposal:** Short abstract of your project (max. 1000 words/4 pages),
- **Two references** (university faculty members or practitioners in a field relevant to the applicant's project) who can serve as referees (no letters of recommendation required),
- One recent **writing sample:** journal article (published or forthcoming), book or thesis chapter.

MECAM kindly requests that applications are submitted in English or French. MECAM's working languages are English, French or Arabic. Applicants should be able to communicate in at least two of these languages.

The applications are evaluated by renowned international academics who are members of MECAM's International Advisory Board. All applicants will be informed of the outcome of the selection process in January 2021. The main selection criteria are academic merit and the quality of the project proposal, as well as the relation of the project to the thematic frame of the respective IFG. The experience and ability of the applicant to conduct the research project will also be taken into account.

Interregionalism, interdisciplinarity, and intergenerationality will be reflected in the fellowships: We therefore welcome academic cooperation between researchers from Germany, Tunisia, from the wider North African and Middle Eastern region, and the international academic community. We also want to promote diversity through interdisciplinary perspectives from various social science and humanities disciplines and contribute to strengthening academic cooperation between leading academics and young researchers. The latter is intended to help younger academics to integrate into research structures and thus build up sustainable interregional networks.

MECAM is monitoring the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the safety and mobility of people closely, but for now MECAM is hoping to go ahead with the fellowships as announced in this Call for Applications.

## INSTITUTIONAL FRAMWORK – WHAT IS MECAM?

The “Merian Centre for Advanced Studies in the Maghreb” (MECAM) was founded in April 2020 as an international centre for interdisciplinary research and academic exchange. It is located at the Université de Tunis/Tunisia with branches that shall be developed in Casablanca/Morocco and Beirut/Lebanon. MECAM is a joint endeavour of a consortium of renowned Tunisian and German research institutions: It is coordinated by the Philipps-Universität Marburg and the Université de Tunis and supported by the Universität Leipzig, the German Institute for Global and Area Studies (GIGA) in Hamburg/Germany, the Forum Transregionale Studien in Berlin/Germany, the Institut Tunisien des Études Stratégiques (ITES) in Tunis/Tunisia, and the University of Sfax/Tunisia. During a three-year preliminary phase (2020-2023), this consortium is entrusted with the institutional development of MECAM and the preparation of the project’s main phase (2023-2032).

MECAM's partner institutions:

- **Philipps-Universität Marburg, Marburg:** Philipps-Universität Marburg, Marburg: The Philipps-Universität Marburg, with its 25,000 students, has a research focus on the Area Studies, which is reflected for instance in the Center for Near and Middle Eastern Studies (CNMS). The CNMS is involved in MECAM, alongside other interdisciplinary institutions and departments, including the Centre for Conflict Studies, the Department of History and Cultural Studies, the Institutes of Media Studies and Romance Philology, and the Department of Mathematics and Computer Science.
- **Université de Tunis, Tunis:** The Université de Tunis was founded in 1960 and is today, with some 20,000 students, one of the largest universities in Tunisia, boasting a wide-ranging research and teaching portfolio with an outstanding reputation for research excellence across the region.
- **Universität Leipzig, Leipzig:** The Universität Leipzig is a German university with around 30.000 students. Within the MECAM institutional structure the University is represented by the Institute of Geography, the Institute for Oriental Studies, and the Small Enterprise Training Program (SEPT). The Institute of Geography’s regional focus is the Mediterranean region.
- **German Institute for Global and Area Studies (GIGA), Hamburg:** GIGA is an independent research institute based in Hamburg, Germany, which conducts research on politics, economics, and society in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East as well as on global issues. Within MECAM, the GIGA Institute for Middle East Studies (IMES) is particularly involved.
- **Forum Transregionale Studien, Berlin:** The Forum Transregionale Studien is a platform that promotes the internationalization of research in the humanities and social sciences. It enables collaboration among researchers with different disciplinary backgrounds and awards fellowships to researchers from all over the world.
- **Institut Tunisien des Études Stratégiques (ITES), Tunis:** ITES is a think tank based in Tunis. ITES prepares studies and analyses in the field of applied policy research, strategy development and policy advice on various current issues in Tunisia, the Maghreb and other MENA countries.
- **Université de Sfax, Sfax:** The Université de Sfax is located in Tunisia's second largest city and important economic centre in the south of the country. It is attended by 35,000 students.

The Federal Ministry of Education and Research of Germany sponsors the establishment of the international centre for research in the Humanities and Social Sciences with 1.7 million Euro in the first three years. The Université de Tunis offers complementary resources.

For further information on MECAM, please visit: [www.uni-marburg.de/en/cnms/mecam](http://www.uni-marburg.de/en/cnms/mecam)