ESF Exploratory Workshop on

West Reads East
Interdependent Hermeneutics of European and Middle Eastern Literatures

Berlin (Germany), 22-24 May 2009

Convened by:
**Stephan Guth, Andreas Pflitsch
and Petra de Bruijn**

SCIENTIFIC REPORT

Scientific Report

1. Executive summary (approx. 2 pages)

The Workshop "West Reads East – Interdependent Hermeneutics …" was held at the *Zentrum für Literatur- und Kulturforschung* (ZfL, Berlin/Germany), over two and a half days, from the evening of Friday, May 22, 2009 (informal "get together" dinner), until the afternoon of Sunday, May 24 (final discussion), and in the evening a dinner for those who had not yet had to leave.

Participation numbered 26 people from 14 countries, covering a broad spectrum of specializations; a majority belonged to the younger generation(s) of researchers (see below, section 6 "Statistical information").

The venue was ideal for the workshop's purposes. ZfL offers, on one floor, both smaller and larger rooms with all necessary equipment, which made it easy to convene in smaller groups as well as to meet for plenary sessions. ZfL's location in the heart of united Berlin was also very convenient (easy to get there by public transport, close distance to good hotels & restaurants). The place's bright and spacious layout and the general "spirit" of a centre of high-quality literature and culture studies added to the inspiring atmosphere. Coffee/tea and light lunch (finger food) were served in the corridor connecting the meeting rooms, which permitted to continue discussions without interruption during the breaks while at the same time taking a breath.

The general objective of the Workshop was to outline the overall structure of an ESF Research Networking Programme (with the same or, if deemed convenient, a modified title). Starting point for the discussions (which made up almost the whole Workshop) were a number of documents the invited participants had received in the months preceding the event: a) the main body of the Workshop application that had gained ESF support, b) agendas for 3 discussion groups, c) some texts that had been made accessible on the Workshop homepage (www.westreadseast.info). The groups had been designed (mainly) in February 09 when the applicant (S. Guth) and the two co-applicants (P. de Bruijn, A. Pflitsch) had met, together with a newly won member of the future core planning body (L. Siegwald), in Bonn/Germany. The meeting was arranged in order to prepare the Workshop and lay the course for the follow-up RNP. Another newly won group leader (W. Ouyang) could not participate, but had sent an outline of her agenda beforehand. The planning group had seen it convenient to re-arrange the panels that had been suggested in the Application, in order to allow for additional room for discussion, bundle the subject matter and locate it on a broader theoretical scale. The three groups (which replaced, but at the same time included, the four panels suggested in the Application[1]) were:

> I   Structures and concepts of discourses
> II   Traditions and conceptualizations
> III The dynamics of identity production
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> (For detailed descriptions cf. end of this document / enclosure).

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[1] 1) In-/adequateness of Western terminology for the description of MEL – Genres and periods; 2) Does the 'Empire write back' in the Middle East? – Applicability and inapplicability of approaches taken from postcolonial studies; 3) The dynamics of identification under & through dominant discourses – MELs finding their 'selves' between distinction and alignment; 4) Reading the Others' literatures: Consequences for literature studies in general.

The group agendas had been circulated, and those invited had been asked to register for one of groups I-III and prepare related statements.

The first Workshop day passed as scheduled, while on the following day it seemed necessary to react flexibly to the course of discussions and continue in a plenary session instead of in groups.

All participants showed a high degree of commitment and engaged lively in the discussions which unfolded in a general atmosphere that showed that despite the diversity of specialisation all those present had a common concern. The fact that specialists of modern Arabic and modern Turkish had no difficulty to communicate and were obviously facing very similar problems in their research, showed the *general*, transdisciplinary character of the Workshop's objective and assured the convenors as well as the participants that what in the beginning had seemed to be a substantial shortcoming – the regrettable absence of specialists of modern Hebrew and the under-representation of Persian[2] – would, for the moment, not matter too much.

Although discussions were generally straight-forward and target-oriented, the Workshop's internal dynamic was not without moments of stagnation, given the dimension and complexity of the field that had to be structured. These moments could however quickly be overcome on the basis of a structure proposed by one of the participants (R. van Leeuwen), which came as the cut of the "Gordian knot".

The complexity of the subject matter and, consequently, the shortage of time did not allow the accomplishment of all of the tasks that the Application had envisaged. The main aim of the event, however – the sketching of the overall structure of a follow-up RNP – has clearly been achieved and a nuclear network been established. Details will be worked out under the guidance of the respective team leaders during the next weeks, and the network is constantly expanding.

2. Scientific content of the event

After the general introduction and the ESF representative's presentation the Workshop participants convened in separate groups as scheduled in the programme. For each group the **first session** served as an introductory round. The three group leaders (P. de Bruijn, L. Siegwald, W. Ouyang) shortly summarized the objective of their team (as formulated in detail in the descriptions circulated beforehand, see end of this document), and the participants introduced themselves and commented on the workshop's general topic from the perspective of their own research. The **second session** started to collect the multitude of ideas that were brought forward in session 1 and began to think of possibilities to arrange them systematically. **Session 3** tried to bundle the material, further systematize it methodologically and to come up with an idea about how to delineate and structure the group's objectives.

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2   Specialists on modern Hebrew literature are hard to find in Europe. Three of them had been invited and in their replies shown great interest; unfortunately, all of them had already other obligations over the weekend in question. As for Persian, also three had been invited, but one declined because of lack of time and another, who had accepted, cancelled a few days before the workshop started.

As it would be impossible to summarize the discussions, which were characterized by a high degree of spontaneity, flexibility, and "ad hoc" input, it may suffice here to give, as an example, the outline of topics/aspects which Group 1 considered to be desirable focuses of reflexion and rethinking with regard to the "Structures and Concepts of Discourses" aspect of the "West reads East" constellation:

(presentation of Leader Group I in plenary session, 23 May afternoon = **session 4**)

A. Diachronic concepts
- ➢ Western periodization terminology in ME[3] contexts:
  - • Romanticism, • Realism/Naturalism, • Modernism, • Postmodernism, • Magic realism, etc.
  - terms like • "traditional", • "modern", • "contemporary"
  - the cultural premises of periodizational terminology
  - narrative patterns applied in telling the history of Middle Eastern literatures
- ➢ Canonization
  - the criteria of selection/canonization, also esp. with regard to the
  - translation of Western literatures into ME languages, and to
  - translation of MEL[4] into Western languages
  - the problem of dealing with the new phenomenon of Internet literature, so prominent in the ME
    - o what/who is an "author", are writers of Internet literature to be dealt with differently?
    - o political motivation
  - the concept of "literature" itself
- ➢ The History of the concepts and terms and their translations (=> focus of Group II)

B. Synchronic/concepts and categorizations
- ➢ Readers/recipients:
  - Reflection on the reception of literature: In how far do institutions like • audience, • reader, • public
    differ between West and East, and in how far do Western conceptions of these institutions determine our understanding of ME literary fields?
    - o cf. also the different function in the East of the Internet as an emerging forum
  - The social function of literature
  - The nature and role of literary criticism (Ar/Pe *naqd,* Tu *eleştiri*)
- ➢ Author:
  - Deconstruct the Orientalist concept of ME authors acting under the "influence" of others!
  - In how far has the fact of censorship to be taken into consideration for the description of MELs?
  - audience/readership consideration (also foreign publics, when translated!)
    - o auto-exoticization
    - o self-censorship
  - social function and self-perception (Jacquemond: *scribe et écrivain*)
- ➢ Text:
  - genre: Western vs. ME conceptions of genres, esp. the different degrees of prominence/popularity, and different function, of • the "novel", • poetry, • autobiography/biography, • "popular" literature, • oral literature, • melodrama, • political literature
  - the question of high vs. low literature
  - narrative structures, patterns, topoi
  - what is literature?
  - writing technique and styles (esp. "realism", stream of consciousness, fragmentation)
  - poetics/aesthetics (a whole complex!)
  - performativity: seems to be an aspect which until now has not been taken into consideration sufficiently; relevant esp. in the context of • theatre, • film, • television (drama), • music
  - social function

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3   = Middle East(ern)

4   = Middle Eastern literature

The plenary discussion of the first Workshop day concluded with the acceptance of a model based on the suggestions of Group III (which preferred an arrangement strictly according to topics instead of the first group's approach via the "diachronic/synchronic" distinction). Group III (who had approached the complex of questions from the point of view of "The dynamics of identity production", and in this respect had followed a more practice-oriented path) suggested to raise the fundamental questions of Groups I & II in a large kick-off conference in order to stimulate discussions, describe the framework, and raise a general consciousness about the state of the art, then continue with conferences, workshops etc. that would follow more specific arrays but always reflect the general questions raised at the kick-off conference:

> Under the overall question of the *Construction of Self*, desirable focuses would be (for the sake of convenient reading, only the main categories are given here, without the sub-categories, which were also discussed)
>
> 1. canon
> 2. translation
> 3. publics
> 4. literacy & new media
> 5. performativity
> 6. special topics/themes: e.g. the city & urbanity (vs. countryside / rurality)
> 7. (sites and methods of) production

A larger mid-term conference could then try to summarize the results reached so far. The RNP would continue with further events related to the focuses of interest and end with a final sum-up conference.

It was decided to continue in a plenary session the next morning in order to specify the above model.

Session 5: Starting from the question in how far some of the focuses/categories of the above structure would, or would not, belong together and should, or should not, better be organized under a common heading, several people proposed alternative and/or additional axes of organization or tried to "slim down" the structure to basic aspects such as Production, Reception, Institutionalization, with methodological questions as a transversal glue. The multitude of possible ways of accessing the whole complex of related questions produced a moment of stagnation which was however overcome when R. van Leeuwen sketched a possible RNP structure as follows:

> Ateliers
>
> 1. Contexts & ideologies for the study of MEL
>   – institutions
>   – debates (orientalism)
> 2. Translation & literary infrastructures
>   – canonization
>   – publishing market
>   – criticism
>   – policies
>   – cultural exchange / theories
> 3. MELs & idea of World literature
>   – world authors in MEL
>   – ME authors in Europe
>   – migrants' literatures in Europe
>   – MEL influences on European literatures
> 4. MELs, European literatures and the concept of modernism
> 5. Methods and theories
>   – concepts
>   – histories
>
> Transversal themes for research in the above arrays would include
> – reflection on approaches & concepts (& drawing an inventory thereof)
> – frameworks of cultural exchange
> – constructions of identity
> – new approaches

This suggestion was generally approved of as a most valuable and flexible as well as viable solution. In **session 6** the plenum only specified some of the sketch's details, changed the position of atelier 5, added systematically clarifying headers and another thematic focus – and ended with the participants signing up for the 6 groups of the revised structure:

Systematic ateliers
1. Contexts, ideologies for the study of MEL
   – institutions
   – debates (Orientalism)
   – canonization

2. Methods and theories (incl. postcolonial theory)
   – concepts (incl. "author/ship" etc.)
   – histories (grand narratives of MEL and European literary history)

3. Translation
   – infrastructures of translation
   – canonization through translation
   – publishing markets
   – criticism etc. (e.g., book reviews)
   – translation policies
   – cultural exchange/translation theories

4. MEL and idea of World literature
   – world authors in MEL
   – MEL authors in Europe
   – migrant literatures
   – MEL influence on European literature

Topic-oriented ateliers
5. MEL and Western modernisms (or "moments of emergence of new (aesthetic) sensibilities", or "… of (aesthetic) transformation")

6. New media (incl. a questioning of literariness as compared to visuality and orality)

Transversal themes relevant for each of the above ateliers (arrays of research)
   – approaches and concepts
   – frameworks of cultural exchange
   – construction of identity
   – new approaches
   – gender

To the ateliers and the transversal themes A. Pflitsch added a third axis (author/production, text/material, reader/reception), constituting a 3-dimensional model that would allow to address each question from three perspectives and to locate it in the space/continuum of interdependent West-East hermeneutics.
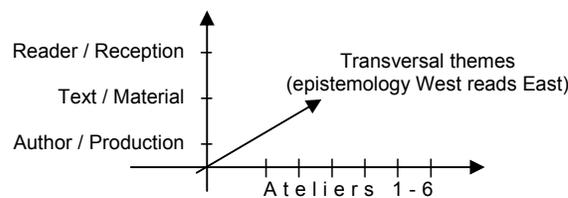
The new groups convened separately in **session 7** in the afternoon and had a brainstorming on which kind of activities would be desirable for each of them, discussed the project's connectivity, and persons to invite to join the networking programme. **Session 8** shortly summed up the suggestions of each group and discussed further proceeding.

3. Assessment of the results, contribution to the future direction of the field, outcome

Ending with the structure sketched above in section 2, the workshop had not yet designed the future RNP in detail, but it had achieved its major aim – to lay the foundations for an application. It was agreed that the team leaders (**T1** E. Köroğlu, **T2** L. Siegwald, **T3** T. Rooke, **T4** M.-S. Omri, **T5** R. van Leeuwen & A. Pflitsch, **T6** P. de Bruijn), in exchange with the participants (and potential new contributors), should compose an outline of the case for each atelier (background & rationale, suggested activities, connectivity, persons to draw in) by the end of July, so that the texts could be harmonized and moulded into a coherent whole (by August), which in turn could be evaluated by specialists and improved, if necessary, in due time. Deadline for the RNP application is 22 October 2009, 16.00hrs CET.

Meanwhile, the Workshop has probably achieved no less than sketching a general system, a holistic view, of how the hermeneutics of Middle Eastern and Western literatures are interconnected and which fields should be given a priority of interest in shedding light on this interdependence. The focus on (reciprocal and interdependent) identity production and the consequences and modifications this shift of perspective necessitates for the approach esp. to Eastern literatures, together with the fields of research and topics that emerge from this "turn" are certainly the most important results of this workshop.

It was however also especially encouraging to learn that representatives of different disciplines, who until now had been more or less ignorant about the respective others' activities and concerns, experienced the broader and much more general relevance and range of their own research – participants spoke a common language, had a common understanding of the basic constellations, and of the tasks to approach within a Research Networking Programme. This is an achievement in itself and can be seen as an indication for that the future network, the nucleus of which has now been established and which will become virulently operative in the future, will rest on firm foundations and have the capacity of attracting and including a large number of researchers. The Convenor has already become active in drawing in researchers on modern Hebrew and Persian literature as well as world literature.

4. Final programme

Friday, 22 May 2009

afternoon   *Arrivals, check-in at Hotel Pankow resp. Hotel Albrechtshof*

19.30   *Dinner, informal get together at restaurant ViaNova 2, Universitätsstr. 2-3a*

Saturday, 23 May 2009 (Venue: ZfL)

09.00-09.30   *Reception: Coffee / Tea*

09.30-09.45   **Welcome / Introduction by S. Guth** (convenor, IKOS, Oslo), also in the name of the co-convenors, **A. Pflitsch** (ZfL, Berlin) and **P. de Bruijn** (Turkish Studies, Leiden)

09.45-10.05   **Presentation of the European Science Foundation (ESF)**
        Bohuslav Mánek (ESF Standing Committee for the Humanities SCH)

        Groups I-III separated

10.15-11.15   **Session 1:   Keynote addresses** by **group leaders**. Introductory round, **presentation of statements, ideas, comments**, … by **participants**

11.15-11.40   *Coffee / Tea*

11.45-12.45   **Session 2:   Discussion, open floor**

12.45-13.50   *Lunch*

14.00-15.30   **Session 3:   Discussions continued** – Preparation of statement for plenary session

15.30-15.55   *Coffee / Tea*

        Groups meet for plenary session

16.00-17.30   **Session 4:   Presentation of 'mid-term' results**. Open floor

19.00   *Dinner at Restaurant Valmontone, Friedrichstr. 50-55.*

Sunday, 24 May 2009 (Venue: ZfL)

        Groups continue in plenary session

09.30-11.30   **Session 5:   Reflection** on presentations **continued**, identification of problems

11.30-12.00   *Coffee / Tea Break*

12.00-13.30   **Session 6:**   Reflection continued & **Re-structuring** the general outlook of the program

13.30-14.15   *Lunch*

        Groups I-VI separate

14.15-15.30   **Session 7:**   teamwise **Collection of data:** research agenda, connectivity, persons to approach, desirable events, etc.

        Groups meet for plenary session

15.30-16.30   **Session 8:**   Short **Presentation of outcome of Session 7 & How to proceed from here**

16.30   *End of Workshop and departure resp. …*

19.00   *Dinner*

5. Final list of participants

	NAME		AFFILIATION
1.	Randa	**Abou-bakr**	Cairo University, Dept. of English and Comparative Literature
2.	Nadia	**Al-Bagdadi**	Central European University, Dept. of History
3.	Lorenzo	**Casini**	Università di Messina, Dipt. di Lingue, Letterature e Culture Straniere
4.	Petra	**de Bruijn**	Leiden University, Dept. of Turkish Studies
5.	Susanne	**Enderwitz**	Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg, Seminar f. Sprachen u. Kulturen d. Vorderen Orients (Islamwissenschaft)
6.	Özkan	**Ezli**	Universität Konstanz, Exzellenzcluster "Cultural Foundations of Integration"
7.	Gonzalo	**Fernández Parrilla**	Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Dept. de Estudios Árabes e Islámicos
8.	Stephan	**Guth**	Universitetet i Oslo, Institutt for kulturstudier og orientalske språk
9.	Nicholas	**Harrison**	University of London, Kings College
10.	Sibel	**Irzik**	Sabancı University, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
11.	Engin	**Kiliç**	Sabancı University, School of Languages
12.	Verena	**Klemm**	Universität Leipzig, Orientalisches Institut
13.	Erol	**Köroğlu**	Boğaziçi University, Dept. of Turkish Language and Literature
14.	Barbara	**Michalak-Pikulska**	The Jagellonian University of Cracow, Institute of Oriental Philology
15.	Mohamed-Salah	**Omri**	Washington University in St. Louis, Dept. of Asian and Near Eastern Languages and Literatures
16.	Wen-Chin	**Ouyang**	University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies
17.	Andreas	**Pflitsch**	Universität Bamberg, Professur f. Arabistik / Zentrum f. Literatur- & Kulturforschung Berlin
18.	Francesca	**Prevedello**	Ca' Foscari University of Venice, Dept. of Eurasian Studies
19.	Tetz	**Rooke**	Göteborgs Universitet, Inst. för orientaliska och afrikaniska språk
20.	Börte	**Sagaster**	University of Cyprus, Dept. of Turkish Studies and Middle Eastern Studies
21.	Christiane	**Schlote**	University of Berne, English Department
22.	Lukasz	**Siegwald**	Universitity of Wrocław / Universität Heidelberg
23.	Zeynep	**Uysal**	Boğaziçi University, Dept. of Turkish Language and Literature
24.	Richard	**van Leeuwen**	University of Amsterdam, Dept. of Religious Studies
25.	Madeleine	**Voegeli**	University of Basel, Orientalisches Seminar
26.	Barbara	**Winckler**	Freie Universität Berlin, Seminar f. Semitistik u. Arabistik

6. Statistical information on participants

Age: the exact age of the participants being a) something private and b) not very telling in our branches, the following categories have been chosen instead:

y   =   young promising scholar
ne   =   newly established
m   =   middle aged, i.e. between "ne" and the following
we   =   well-established

Scientific speciality

Ar	=	modern Arabic	Migr	= Migrant Literature
Comp	=	Comparative Literature	Pe	= modern Persian
CS	=	Cultural Studies	PoCo	= Postcolonial Studies
Eng	=	English Literature	Tu	= modern Turkish
Ger	=	German Literature		
Hist	=	History	**Bold names** and grey shading mark
Magh	=	Francophone Maghreb	leaders of teams 1-6

	NAME	AGE	FROM	SEX	Field of specialisation	Contributing to team no.					
						1	2	3	4	5	6
1.	Abou-bakr	y	EG	F	Ar / Eng / Comp	X		X			
2.	Al-Bagdadi	m	HU	F	Ar / Hist				X	X	
3.	Casini	y	IT	M	Ar	X				X	
4.	**de Bruijn**	m	NL	F	Tu					X	X
5.	Enderwitz	we	DE	F	Ar (Class & Mod) / Hist				X	X	X
6.	Ezli	y	DE	M	Tu (/Ar) / Ger / migr / CS				X	X	X
7.	Fernández Parrilla	m	ES	M	Ar			X			
8.	Guth	ne	NO	M	Ar / Tu / Comp				X	X	
9.	Harrison	ne	UK	M	Magh	X					
10.	Irzik	we	TR	F	Tu / CS				X	X	
11.	Kiliç	y	TR	M	Tu	X					
12.	Klemm	we	DE	F	Ar (Class & mod) / Hist	X					
13.	**Köroğlu**	y	TR	M	Tu	X	X				
14.	Michalak-Pikulska	ne	PL	F	Ar (Gulf Area)			X	X		
15.	**Omri**	y	US	M	Ar				X		
16.	Ouyang	m	UK	F	Ar / Comp (Chinese)						X
17.	**Pflitsch**	y	DE	M	Ar	X			X	X	
18.	Prevedello	y	IT	F	Ar			X	X		
19.	**Rooke**	m	SE	M	Ar				X		
20.	Sagaster	ne	CY	F	Tu	X		X			
21.	Schlote	ne	CH	F	PoCo / Eng				X		
22.	**Siegwald**	y	PL/DE	M	Ar (Class)	X	X				
23.	Uysal	y	TR	F	Tu	X					
24.	**van Leeuwen**	m	NL	M	Ar			X	X	X	
25.	Voegeli	y	CH	F	Pe	X	X				
26.	Winckler	y	DE	F	Ar				X		

<u>Enclosures</u>

Details on the three groups formed before the event and constituted the initial discussion forums

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Group I: "Structures and Concepts of Discourses"

This group discusses conceptual and structural terminology commonly used in the description of MEL, be they of European origin or indigenous.

It looks at Western genre and periodization terminology, the meaning, scope and history of relevant concepts and terms[5] as well as their borrowings into, or calquing[6] in, Middle Eastern meta-languages of literary studies and criticism. For example, what is meant by *modernism* in a Western context, what in Middle Eastern contexts? Is *hadātha* equivalent to *modernism*? Do terms such as *author* or *writer* correspond to *mu'allif*, *kātib*, *yazar*, *nevisande*, or *adīb*? How can we define a *köşe yazarı*, and does s/he write *literature*? If not, so what? – aren't *köşe yazıları* something more like *journalism…*? When did a term such as *adabiyyāt* emerge, and how did *edebiyât* come to mean *literature* (if it does…)?

The group also examines the internal relations and interactions of genre concepts, periodization and structural terminology within indigenous systems: how did *postmodernism*, for example, once transferred into the Middle Eastern context, come to take on a distinctive indigenous meaning and begin to live a 'life of its own', and why was/is that so? And, are terms like *postmodernism* pervasive in the Middle East, or are there regional or local differences? Do histories of contemporary literature in the Islamic Republic of Iran identify a *postmodern* period in the same way as Turkish and Arab critics do for the literatures of their countries?

The group will draw an inventory of terms and concepts of hermeneutical relevance, but also of structures (esp. commonly used categorical dichotomies such as *individual vs. society*) and narratives (e.g. the *birth – death – rebirth* pattern, the *maturation* narrative, etc.) and discuss also their implications (e.g., with regard to the 'starting point' of *modern* MELs, the assumption of an 'evolutional' *time-lag*, the 'universality' or 'non-universality' of *global* periods, etc.).

The main purpose is to arrive at some clarity regarding the terminology used and the scope it covers and to, at the same time, identify the aspects which are overlooked *because of* the dominance of Western terminology.

As the whole Workshop and follow-up Programme, this group too asks this kind of questions not only in order to sharpen terminological tools, but also to question current terminological normativity and reflect about the underlying epistemological premises that are informed by, and produce themselves, the identity of those who apply this terminology.

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5   Such as 'literature', 'national literature', 'novel', 'short story', 'повесть', 'fiction', 'representation'; 'renaissance', 'enlightenment', 'romanticism', 'realism', 'modernism/modernity', 'postmodernism/postmodernity', *adab*, *nahḍa*, *assāsiyya jadīda*, 'postcolonial', 'hybrid', 'globalization', …

6   Such as *riwāya* for 'novel', *hikâye* for 'short story', *madhhab al-ḥaqā'iq* and later *wāqiʿiyya* for 'realism', *adab multazim* for 'littérature engagée', ...

Group II: "Traditions & Conceptualizations"

This group examines the distinctive characteristics of Western perceptions of Middle Eastern literatures, the ways these have been translated into academic structures and cultural institutions, and how they in turn formed traditions of intellectual and ideological conceptualization and practice.

For this purpose, the group makes it its task to assess and map, in a historical context, the *main theoretical currents* that are biased, and continue to shape, Western readings of non-Western cultures and literatures from their pre-modern beginnings until its 'postmodern' present. The *general directions* and *turning-points* of these traditions will be interrogated in order to reveal the processes of their translation into *academic practice*. This survey of current theoretical and methodological approaches to MELs will be carried out against the *background of anthropological, linguistic and literary theory* in general.

A mapping of the current disciplinary or interdisciplinary landscape of the study of MELs should further unveil, within the Western scene, the *differences among national traditions* which result from inner-European historical and cultural diversity. The political involvement of French or British Oriental studies in the colonial project (cf. Edward Said, 1978), e.g., is in marked contrast with the rather aesthetic, "contemplative" character of early modern German "armchair Orientalism" (cf. Todd Kontje, 2004). Similarly, the distinctive features, rooted in still other historical-cultural conditions, of Eastern or Southern European approaches to Middle Eastern literatures (and cultures in general) have not yet been studied sufficiently – despite the striking geographical vicinity and, in the case of the Balkans, a shared Ottoman history.

A major topic of discussion should also be the character of *current studies of ME literature* as arising from their being located and anchored in *specific academic structures*. In the US, academic structures are quite different from their European counterparts. This has led to different conceptualizations and research aims and definitely formed other scholarly traditions. Compared to MEL studies in the US, similar studies in Europe appear, on the one hand, jammed between the "time-honoured" traditions and structural constraints resulting from their attachment to "Oriental Studies", and the exploding demand in theoretical foundation and professional sophistication on the other.

As the whole Workshop and follow-up Programme, this group too asks this kind of questions essantially also in order to become clearer about the processes of identity-production involved in the hermeneutical process of "reading the Others".

Group III: "Dynamics of Identity Production"

Identity is always, inevitably, a site of struggle. Its contours, if one ventures into any discourse on identity, are unstable, drawn by numerous elements configured in a myriad of ways. However, discourses on 'Eastern' (Middle Eastern) identity, whether 'Western' or, on occasion, 'Eastern' academic discourses on identity formation and politics are seemingly informed by a number of conceptual categories translated, adapted and adopted from 'Western' epistemology (cf. Group I). Terms such as 'national', 'modern', 'post-modern', 'cosmopolitan', 'traditional', 'fundamentalist' are all, one may argue, traceable to origins in 'Western' thought, discourses, and cultural histories implicated in the production of 'modern' identity (17th to the 20th centuries) in the 'West' (cf. Groups I & II). These terms and the conceptual categories they denote are, more importantly, identifiable, perceivable and equally productive in the Middle Eastern context, where equivalent terms may arguably be found (*qawmī, adīth/ adāthī, mā ba'd al- adātha, 'ālamī, u ūlī*). Is this a coincidence? Or, is there complacency in accepting such easy mobility of conceptual categories from one culture to another, and from one system of thought to another? Do different cultures use differing vocabulary to speak of the emergence and maintenance of identity?

This Group looks at the **travels**, **transfers** and **transformations** of identitarian paradigms, discourses, politics and production, **across cultures** and examines them in a comparative framework, as a process of **'East' reading and translating 'West'** that is of itself implicated in (necessarily?) a parallel process of 'West' reading 'East'. It interrogates the recurrence of these terms in **discourses on Middle Eastern literature as well as Middle Eastern literary representations** and asks the following questions:

- How do epistemological and ontological frameworks and paradigms travel across cultures (and different semiological systems)?
- What happens to these when they travel, move, come to reside, perhaps even settle in a new culture? Do they retain their original shape, and politics? Do they become 'mythologized', emptied of their historical context? If they do, how do the 'local' cultures 'flesh out' the 'myths', inhabit them, and mobilize them for 'local' production of individual or group identity?
- Is identity production in the 'East' necessarily a 'translation' of 'Western' epistemological/ontological frameworks and paradigms? What happens during 'translation'? What is lost and what is gained? Is translation equivalence or negotiation and transaction?
- What are the intersections between 'imported' and 'indigenous' or 'local' epistemes? In what ways do 'local' epistemes tinker with the 'imported' ones?
- How do we know the 'local' epistemes? Is it enough to study them in a class? Check a dictionary? Are people who live with them aware of them? Do they necessarily exist? Is it possible that the terms for identity are superfluous and unnecessary, whether in the 'West' or 'East'?
- Are 'translations' of 'Western' terms rhetorical? Are their 'purely' local epistemes operative in identity formation, politics and discourses?
- Is identity production necessarily dynamic locatable at an intercultural site? Even if it is, does identity production detectable in Middle Eastern literatures follow one and the same trajectory? Or are there various patterns of identity production? What are they? Is it

possible to identify, categorize and theorize them?
- In what ways can 'gender' problematize these epistemes?
- Is 'identity' coterminous with 'subject' or 'subjectivity'?