2 Introduction: Academia in Transformation — Testing the Paradigms of New Knowledge

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The Arab uprisings created a window of change and transformation, thus becoming an event with considerable intellectual as well as political impact. Eventually, they succeeded in changing researchers' perceptions of the "Arab world", leading to the development of alternative forms of knowledge and challenges to the dominant Western systems of representation. People in Arab countries are today no longer considered to be vulnerable "docile citizens" or "resilient bodies" unwilling and/or unable to challenge the status quo and their authoritarian rulers. Scholars from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region are for the most part no longer represented as silent, passive and incapable of resolving conflicts regarding the relationship between power, knowledge, action and thought.

Hence, the Arab uprisings had a deep impact not only on societies in the MENA region, but also on academic disciplines in European and Arab countries, and scientific relations between them. Emerging post-Arab uprising paradigms have brought about changes in the perception and evaluation of institutions, with universities being no exception to this trend. Since the outbreak of the uprisings, scholars from a variety of disciplines have demonstrated renewed interest in protest, contestation and cultural forms of expression and discourse. There have been attempts to understand how the "disciplined society" became aware of its rights and staked a claim to political and economic change. For such scholars, the dominant question was how to theorize political, social and cultural change in societal contexts that have often been viewed by the West as stagnant and hostile to progressive politics.

In fact, academic literature on the Arab uprisings has proved that transformations, regardless of their rapidity and whether they are ongoing, continuous or structural, superficial or complex, visible or invisible, are of great importance to a large number of scholars and analysts who believe that the process of transformation is a vital topic to study. The academic community has thus begun to interpret actions in the region and analyze the new realities. While some scholars have continued to work on tradi-

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tional issues, showing little or no interest in questions raised by non-academics, other Middle Eastern studies, Islamic studies and international-relations scholars have imported analytical tools that have previously been applied to other regions of the world, such as Latin America, Europe, Eastern Europe and East Asia.

Indeed, we have witnessed a proliferation of academic articles, university seminars and conferences devoted to exploring the nature and contours of political and social transformation. However, transformation within the academic setting itself has remained largely hidden and marginalized as a subject of study. This prevailing state of blindness has motivated some scholars to focus on various aspects of transformation in the academic milieu. Some believe it is important to develop new modes of inquiry and forms of knowledge able to help them understand this new historical conjuncture and the nature of transformation. This group of scholars' preliminary focus has been on paradigms and concepts, analytical tools, methodologies, theories, narratives and perspectives. Some have attempted to criticize Western misinterpretations of the rest of the world, along with the respective academic discipline.

The members of the Transformation Working Group at the Arab-German Young Academy of Sciences and Humanities (AGYA) have attempted to improve their understanding of issues related to transformation in post-Arab uprising societies by taking a transcultural perspective. This book is one of the results of the working group's attempts to grasp the complexities that arise from these issues. Over a period of months, members of the working group reflected on how ideas, norms and concepts are diffused in a context of mutual exchange, and how scientific relations between Europe and the Arab world can be improved. There is evidently a shift underway to a focus on understanding the meaning of what others "communicate concerning values, ideals, feelings, moral decisions, and such concepts as freedom, justice, love, labor, autonomy, commitment and democracy" (Mezirow 2003 a: 204).

Coming from a wide range of disciplines, from Arab countries as well as from Germany, the contributors to this volume have sought to reflect together on current challenges. On the one hand, this combination of different disciplines and their respective research objects, methods and overarching theories has provided an excellent foundation for transdisciplinary work. However, we should note that this discussion forum has also led to confrontation and compromises. The participating scholars have started to learn how to think differently, while becoming more self-critical. Their

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goal has been to address major issues confronting today's societies, while simultaneously thinking critically about how best to construct a form of collaborative knowledge. Through both theoretical observations and personal experiences the key objective of the interdisciplinary group has been to demonstrate that the organization of knowledge has changed, not only in countries affected by the so-called Arab Spring, but also in Europe, the United States and Asia.

Overview of articles

The book includes 9 articles that build on and communicate with one another and present a general reflection at the end. In his article *"Middle East Studies and Academic Cooperation in the Wake of the Arab Uprisings"***,** Florian Kohstall sheds light on the field of Middle East studies, a very interesting area. Since 2010, as coordinator for research and teaching programs at the Freie Universität Berlin's Cairo office, he has engaged critically with a number of issues such as "inequalities, especially between researchers working on the ground and those observing the events from the outside". Positioning himself simultaneously as a witness, observer and scholar, Kohstall describes "the role of students and professors in Egypt's uprising", along with that of other new actors. In addition, he criticizes various concepts and theoretical tools, and highlights new paradigms used to analyze transformation processes.

While seriousness is presented in academia as the normative standard of all critical thinking and writing in the humanities, Kohstall in contrast argues that expressing one's emotions (empathy, joy, fear, discomfort or disorientation, for example) during the Arab uprisings was a "liberating experience". After analyzing cases of transformation, Kohstall "suggests new avenues for cooperation and proposes employing a more comparative approach in the further development of the field of Middle East studies".

In his article *"Political Science in Egypt: Talkin' Bout a Revolution",* Jan Claudius Völkel explores the conditions for researchers teaching political science or social sciences under authoritarian regimes in the Arab world, and particularly in Egypt. He points out that if "political science in Germany is to a substantial extent understood as 'democracy science'", this field of research is "dangerous" and represents a risk in other countries. In fact, many scholars in the Arab world remain under state control and suffer under a lack of academic freedom. Although they participated

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in the transition process and engaged in critical teaching and research, such scholars are no longer able to contribute to forming democratic societies. According to Völkel, "the current developments in Egypt represent a missed chance to develop political science further into a meaningful discipline that would not only prepare students for the job market, but also contribute to improving the overall quality of Egypt's academic landscape".

Despite such challenges, the "exchange of faculty and students through workshops and conferences [has] helped trigger fresh ideas about modern teaching methodologies". There is no doubt that scholars and students alike will struggle to establish a new environment in which academic freedom is respected. We should bear in mind that one of the rights people ought to seek is the right to knowledge, as this is essential to democratic citizenship.

In their article *"Opening Up the Text. Arabic Literary Studies on the Move",* Barbara Winckler and Christian Junge highlight the relationship between art and literature in times of political and social transformation. They demonstrate how Arab writers revisited the societal roles of art and literature in a time of political upheaval. Additionally, Winckler and Junge discuss the involvement of Arab literature scholars in teaching "new text forms (e.g., blogs, graffiti and slogans) and explor[ing] their sociopolitical conditions and the socio-cultural practices of writing". Winckler and Junge further show how writers and scholars have been involved in "the unleashed creativity of the uprisings". While scholars in the West often neglect "research conducted at universities in the Arab world, particularly if published in Arabic or by an Arab publisher...and exclude Arab scholars in the region from contributing to internationally acknowledged knowledge production", the authors note that new initiatives and programs promoting the exchange of perspectives and experiences between scholars from universities in Germany and in the Arab world are being implemented today. The Arabic language is, as a consequence, increasingly being practiced as a living language of knowledge production and academic communication.

In consideration of the situation of Syrian refugees, Winckler and Junge suggest that "to study Arabic literature at German universities, selected seminars and lectures should be conducted in Arabic. As a positive side effect, this would also improve the language skills of other students of Arabic". Moreover, Winckler and Junge think that it is urgent to encourage Syrian "authors to gain more visibility and improve their reputations within the German cultural sphere". In this regard, activism and academia can be combined in a creative process of writing symbiosis, creating the

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possibility of collaborations that facilitate the development of new skills, and helping to introduce different understandings of literacy.

In their article *"An Uprising in Teaching Arabic Language"*, Bilal Orfali, Rana Siblini and Maha Houssami draw from the field of education to explore another case of transformation involving language, thinking here in terms of "transformative pedagogy". They describe the motivations of students traveling to the Middle East today, who show an interest "both in the events surrounding them as well as in the ongoing transformations, not only of political regimes but also of the surrounding culture and values". Aware that Arabic has become a language of change, protest and revolution, Orfali, Siblini and Houssami discuss recent developments in teaching the Arabic language from different perspectives (exposing students to the language by having them listen to native speakers, participate in community social work, attend clubs focusing on Arab culture or listen to folk music, for example). These scholars focus on new teaching techniques created by a Lebanese institute that teaches the Arabic language, including colloquial speech, to foreign students. According to Orfali, Siblini and Houssami, the "Summer Arabic Program already provides some models that can be emulated and developed further when dealing with the refugee crisis in various Arab states and in Europe".

In her article *"Justice in Transformation: Rethinking Theory and Practice of the Global Transitional Justice Model"*, Fatima Kastner analyzes the socio-legal studies discourse on transitional justice, focusing on the evolution of the global transitional justice model. After studying the emergence of several related concepts and discussing different ways of understanding them, Kastner analyzes the complex factors involved when governments attempt to develop and promote lasting periods of peace, or sustain processes of democratization and reconciliation in post-uprising societies. It is clear that resolving crisis situations requires critical decisions that balance the conflicting claims of established systems and possible future outcomes. Kastner highlights the changes arising from the "Arab Spring" transitions, such as "the demand to include economic and financial crimes within the liberal normative concept of transitional justice". She argues that "there is a strong demand to widen the present liberal understanding of transitional justice both in the direction of local notions of justice and toward economic accountability". Her article argues that instead of maintaining its precarious critical role, the humanities should become a creative laboratory for future forms of intellectual labor. There is no doubt that the passage from authoritarianism to a new order of society

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will take time, and push scholars to rethink the processes of reconciliation, democratization and the establishment of the rule of law.

In his article *"Philosophy in Transition — Philosophy of Transition",* Sarhan Dhouib compares the role of philosophy in an authoritarian state to its transformative role in a post-revolutionary context. Dhouib takes the reader through a transcultural philosophizing approach, in which he — as an observer, witness and actor — narrates transformation from personal experience in both Tunisia and Germany. Despite the lack of academic freedom under the Ben Ali regime, some philosophers were involved in combating "cultural and intellectual poverty" and in building "intercultural and interdisciplinary dialog". Convinced that the Arab uprisings radically defined new ways of existing in the world, Dhouib writes that discussion, debates and seminars have since served as mini-democracies, and that professors and students alike have been involved in the creation of a learning society. After analyzing the relationship between philosophy, human rights and democracy, Dhouib moves toward rethinking the aims of higher education as a community of rational and democratic discourse, within which democracy is learned and practiced. Focusing on "a (self-) critical look at academic life in Europe and Germany, particularly with regard to the issues of equality of opportunity and support for young talents", Dhouib acknowledges the advantage of "German–Arab networks". For him, "German–Arab exchange in times of political transformation not only enables us to think through questions of human rights, experiences with injustice and the culture of remembrance from a dual perspective, and to advance the idea of a transcultural philosophy. It also serves to dismantle prejudices and blinders".

Drawing on Jack Mezirow's descriptions of new forms of knowledge, in which transformative learning is "the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action" (Mezirow 2003 b: 58 f.), we can say that Dhouib defends the idea that philosophy is a "school of freedom". For him, university is creating new opportunities and spaces for discourse among young scholars. In addition, the role of professors is to attempt to create a community of critical reasoning, critical reflection, and free and critical conversations. Such "decolonized" universities would not only teach democracy and human rights as subjects of study, but also teach democratically and, in the process, create

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and support a democratic society. In this sense, higher education would itself become a learning society.

The article by Carola Richter and Hanan Badr, *"Communication Studies in Transformation — Self-Reflections on an Evolving Discipline in Times of Change"*, deals with the transformation of the scientific knowledge produced in communication studies of post-Arab uprising media. By reflecting on the phenomenon of mediatization, Richter and Badr show how scholars "shift their focus from the mass consumption of media to individualized forms of media production and use". The authors criticize the methodologies and concepts used by many communication studies scholars as tools for understanding the Arab uprisings. In fact, "scholars referred to the events in the Arab countries as long as they seemed to support particular favored academic approaches, but stopped doing so as soon as their concepts proved no longer able to encompass the complexities of the interactions between the region's media, society and processes of transformation". Like Winckler and Junge, Richter and Badr hold that "scientific knowledge generated in Arabic remains largely unknown and disconnected from international research". From their point of view, it is urgent "to focus less on technology and more on people-centered analyses of media practices".

Drawing on the widespread observation that the Arab uprisings were characterized by the strong use of social media tools and familiar internet platforms, Tobias Amft's and Kalman Graffi's article, *"Webs of Change? The Transformation of Online Social Networks and Communication Infrastructures from a Technological Point of View"*, examines the impact of the Arab uprisings on academic thinking in the field of computer science, especially with regard to topics such as privacy, anonymity and security in networking and communications. After discussing "the technological weaknesses that allow these networks to be spied on, censored and blocked, thus hindering the dissemination of information", Amft and Graffi present practical solutions for combating surveillance and censorship, such as encryption and proxy-based routing. These "solutions originate from the computer science subject areas of security and dependability" as well as "operating, communication, database and distributed systems". Despite some regimes' attempts to block information and punish activists, Amft and Graffi affirm that "new forms of secure communication will be developed. In the end, information will flow".

In his article *"The Damage Done: the 'Arab Spring', Cultural Heritage and Archaeologists at Risk",* Ammar Abdulrahman takes an archaeolo-

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gist's point of view in highlighting the challenges his field faces with regard to safeguarding valuable historical artifacts particularly in Syria, but also in Iraq and Egypt. Artifact trafficking is also flourishing in Libya, Yemen and Tunisia, he notes. In this war against cultural memory, organized networks take advantage of the lack of law enforcement and surveillance in broad areas to buy and sell valuable antiquities, with "most of the artifacts illicitly traded find[ing] their way into markets in European and other Western countries". Despite the dangers of the current environment, archaeologists are still working to preserve and restore monuments that have been damaged in the Syrian conflict. In addition to his account of the situation in Syria, Abdulrahman describes the efforts of many local actors and international organizations to raise awareness regarding the value of this cultural heritage, as well as to combat the illegal trafficking of artifacts. Abdulrahman believes that responsibility implies knowledge as well as action. In order to move forward, he calls for greater efforts both from those within and outside the academy. Abdulrahman suggests that "Syrian archaeologists currently living abroad can support students of archaeology inside Syria through their scientific networks and thereby help establish the next generation of experts. In addition, networks of local and foreign experts must be maintained". The reason to promote greater involvement, according to Abdulrahman, is that "Syrian cultural heritage is much more than a local issue; as a global matter, it concerns all of humanity".

In sum, this book marks a new trajectory for studying the Middle East. It offers a theoretical discourse that can be transformed into research and action with regard to academic liberties and the preservation of cultural heritage in conflict zones. By tackling the question of how cultural paradigms influence changes within academia, and by demonstrating "collective engagement", the volume's contributors are in fact developing ways of confronting problems from multiple directions rather than compartmentalizing knowledge. From their point of view, transformation, or this act of unveiling the reality behind culturally influenced academic discourses, is an ongoing, never-ending and dynamic process. By presenting various examples of researcher mobility and connectivity, as well as collaboration between scholars living in Europe and the Arab world, the members of AGYA and their co-authors aim to explore the contemporary configurations of knowledge, culture and connection that come about through researchers' cross-border movements. Indeed, AGYA's researchers have been interacting with such productive intensity that they

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themselves have had a transformative effect on the scholars around them, and even on their broader academic disciplines.

Finally, it is clear that transformation as described in this book can be regarded as a creative environment rather than a destructive one. Scholars are sharing knowledge and ideas through a process of cultural exchange and agency. Most importantly, for all those writing here, the goal is not simply to interrogate knowledge, but rather to experience it first hand, learning how to produce ruptures and negotiate and overcome barriers. The experience of composing this book has enabled the creation of places and spaces of knowledge production, while also creating new solidarity and collaborative relationships among AGYA members. Alongside the transformations of identity, memory, awareness and other modes of consciousness, a new "transnational imagination" is emerging. Indeed, it is evident that an emancipatory transformation is taking place within academia. The strengths of this book, with its focus on "Academia in Transformation", are numerous. The contributors revise structures of meaning; think through new kinds of research methodologies and methods in a way which is attentive to their ontological and epistemological anchors, and explore options for new roles, relationships and actions. However, the overarching hope is that each of the articles provides promise of a better future within academia. As Boaventura de Sousa Santos rightfully argues, "[t]here is no guarantee that a better world may be possible, nor that all those who have not given up struggling for it conceive it in the same way" (Santos, 2006: 52). If we lose sight of the possibility of new ways of learning and producing knowledge, or of the fact that spaces can be produced from an assemblage of linkages, experiences and practices that are different from what might be visible today, then we become complicit in silencing voices and eliminating alternative forms of existence and opportunities for more democratic politics.

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