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Call for Papers

Intersections of Youth, Gender, and Religion under Digital Media in the MENA Region

Workshop

26-27 September 2024, Leipzig University, Germany

German Research Foundation Project “Contested Pieties and Secularities: Family and Youth Politics in (post-Kemalist) 'New Turkey'”

Digital media and online communication technologies have a deep impact in shaping the expressions, experiences, and governance techniques concerning the religious lives and affiliations of individuals across the globe. This transformation takes place under a myriad of features introduced by digital media such as the fast-paced, multi-directional, and global character of information flows, the monetization of content production, the algorithmic architecture of digital platforms, and dataification of social life. In this environment, digital media has proven to serve as a particularly significant medium for religious actors to connect with believers and spread their beliefs among new populations. Simultaneously, digital media opens up spaces hybridizing and diversifying religious discourses, identities, and authorities, along with enabling platforms of connectivity and circulation to challenge those.

Youth and gender are particular areas of interest within digital religion studies considering a variety of circumstances. Younger generations use online technologies more intensely to interpret and interact with the social world while, correspondingly, social media platforms become the prominent ground for the production and popularization of youth cultures. In this respect, digital media is a consequential site to observe the contemporary strategies of religious authorities for reaching out to the youth along with how the youth engages with religious discourses and form religious identities. With respect to gender, on the one hand, digital media facilitates discourses, practices, and opportunities that can challenge hegemonic and traditional gender roles that are tied to religious traditions, as well as bringing in alternative religious identities that can incorporate gendered forms of rights and visibility politics. Yet, on the other hand, digital media also provides a pivotal environment for the circulation of anti-gender ideology, which draws from religious fundamentalisms along with other forms of far-right politics.

The literature on digital media and digital religion has hitherto focused predominantly on Global North and Western historical experiences, while frequently overlooking the particularities and experiences of non-Western contexts. In this light, this workshop aims to



offer a platform to case studies and theoretical undertakings concentrating on the intersections of youth, gender, and religion under digital media in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Digital media played a central role in the popular social movements in the recent history of the region - namely the Arab Spring and the Gezi Protests a decade ago and most recently the protests in Iran. The prominence of the youth, women, and LGBTQ in these movements and the multiple ways in which religion and religiosities are addressed therein, render the MENA region an important site to study the intersections of youth, gender, and religion under digital media.

Some possible themes and topics for contributions to be analyzed within the framework of youth and/ or gender, religion, and digital media in the MENA region are:

- Expressions and performances of religious identities
- Governance strategies and policies targeting the youth, gender, and sexuality
- New age religions and spiritualities
- Social media influencer economies
- Trans-regional and global flows and networks enabled by the digital condition
- Youth cultures
- Feminist and LGBTQ politics and collective movements
- Anti-gender politics and ideologies
- Negotiation of the religious-secular divide
- Anti-religious and secularist politics and post-secularity on digital media

Travel and accommodation costs of the selected participants will be covered or subsidized. However, due to limited budget, participants are encouraged to use their institutional funding if available. One of the aims of the workshop is producing a special journal issue or a joint publication. After the workshop, submission of the final papers for publication will be expected within a reasonable amount of time.

Please send your abstracts of up to 500 words accompanied by a short bio and information regarding whether you will need financial support for travel and accommodation to uelker.soezen@uni-leipzig.de by May 3, 2024.

Convener: Dr. Ülker Sözen, Institute for the Study of Religion, Leipzig University & Associate Member, Multiple Secularities Research Team

Deadline for abstracts: 03 May 2024

Announcement of the selected papers: 17 May 2024
