The Innovative Training Network "Mediating Islam in the Digital Age" (MIDA) and the European Network for Islamic Studies (ENIS)
organise the

MIDA/ENIS Spring School 2020, Catania, Italy

Contesting authority: knowledge, power and expressions of selfhood

Date: Monday 2nd - 8th of March 2020
Venue: Catania, Sicily
Premises: Università degli Studi di Catania, Palazzo Pedagaggi, Via Vittorio Emanuele II 49, 95131 Catania, Sicily (Italy)
Application deadline: Wednesday, 25th of December 2019

Theme: Contesting authority: knowledge, power and expressions of selfhood

The ENIS Spring School 2020 addresses two closely interrelated aspects of Islam in the digital age. Firstly, how (past and contemporary) technological revolutions have informed the performance of selfhood (including gender), the modes of engagement with society, and the political consequences of shifting boundaries between public and private spheres. Secondly, it addresses the construction and transformation of religious authority and religious knowledge production, and concomitant questions of legitimacy, power and discipline, under changing circumstances.

Presently there is a mushrooming of YouTube channels presenting testimonials and life accounts, face book pages providing space for minority groups (e.g. homosexuals or ex-Muslims) that publicise previous hidden aspects of identity, as well as blogs and homemade videos communicating everyday life events or short clips showing artistic performance in an affordable non-celebrity style sharing them with a wide audience. Quite often they contain an (implicit) political statement about the societies in which the expressions are uttered, not only in the message but also in the mere fact of the utterance.

(Young) people in the Muslim world, like elsewhere, share more and more aspects of self, including more intimate and previously hidden ones, or experiences with 'illegality'. These new digital forms of self-expression also entail a claim to space for individualised selfhood. Out of sight of different regimes of surveillance, forms of marginality, secret lives and intimate experiences take on a more public form. With that it questions dominant forms of authority, whether parental, communal, religious or political. The Muslim / Arab world is usually characterised as stressing communal or relational forms of identities and putting less emphasis on individualised selfhood in comparison to the West. The Arab Uprisings first seemed to overturn some deeply rooted forms of authority, including with respect to political power, but now long-established authoritarian forms of power with their different nuances appear to be square back. Yet several observers notice a 'silent revolution' taking place on an individual level, asserting individual selfhood and rights. Do these new forms of self-narratives and artistic performances offer us insight into the development of new forms of selfhood? What are the most important characteristics and expressive forms of these new forms of selfhood? What are the potential political consequences of new forms of self-understanding and expression?

Issues of selfhood and artistic performance are closely linked to questions of legitimacy, power and discipline. Muslims have held varying, sometimes conflicting, views on the extent to which knowledge and authority are exclusive of a single figure, a masculine 'professional' group, or distributed in society, how knowledge should be transmitted and controlled, and the literary forms that it should take, and how it should be reproduced.

The widely held assumption that in the pre-digital era Islamic reasoning was a collective matter of established scholars and theology-centred argumentation lacks historical pedigree. The individual as a political subject emerged centuries before the dawn of digital technology. This also questions

the assumption that religious authority was uncontested, only to be challenged very recently by the same technological innovations. Questioning 'established' religious authorities and addressing new audiences is as old as Islam. The invention of paper, the rise of literacy and the emergence of 'calligraphic states', and not least the spread of print technology have had profound influence on authority and knowledge production, but also generated new expressions of selfhood. Digitisation has intensified this process in an unprecedented way, resulting in the rise of new intellectuals, the feminisation of contestation, the 'democratisation' of knowledge production, the emergence of new audiences and discursive communities, the relocation, subjectivation, and fragmentation of authority, but also in new forms of community building, online and offline. Finally, digitisation also prompted 'established' religious authorities to reflect upon these newly arising challenges and how to effectively cope with them.

The organisers of the MIDA/ENIS Springschool 2020 invite researchers to reflect on these issues from the perspective of their own research and present their work. In order to enhance historical comparison and analytical depth, we very explicitly call not only on researchers working on contemporary issues, but also those who deal with Islam in the past.

Requirements for applications
PhD candidate students and advanced MA students, whose research focuses on this topic without limitation to Islamic societies or Islam, are invited to apply for participation.

Please note:
Candidates enrolled at French and Spanish universities are invited to apply at IISMM
giulia.galluccio@ehess.fr
Candidates enrolled in Italian universities are invited to apply at SeSaMO melfa@unict.it
Candidates enrolled in Dutch universities are invited to apply at NISIS nisis@uu.nl
Candidates enrolled in German universities are invited to apply at the CNMS maike.neufend@uni-marburg.de

Candidates enrolled in other universities than the ones mentioned are requested to apply at one of the four institutions only.

It is mandatory to specify in the application: Application Springschool 2020
Successful applicants may receive some funding from the Selection Committee.

Scientific Committee
Prof. Pascal Buresi (CNRS, EHESS-IISMM)
Prof. Albrecht Fuess (CNMS/University of Marburg)
Maike Neufend (CNMS/University of Marburg)
Dr. Jens Heibach (German Institute of Global and Areas Studies, and Marburg University)
Prof. Christian Lange (Director NISIS)
Dr. Pénélope Larzillière (IRD)
Prof. Daniela Melfa (SeSaMO president, University of Catania)
Prof. Karin van Nieuwkerk (Radboud University Nijmegen)
Prof. Thijl Sunier (Stichting VU)
Prof. Gerard Wiegers (VUA)

Applications must include the following:
- a CV
- a motivation letter
- a one-page description of your PhD or MA project

- a title and an abstract* of 300 words (max.) of your presentation (15 minutes) to be given at the spring school
- a short biography* of 50 words (max. in the third person)

Please note the following:

Successful applicants must arrange their own visa (if applicable), transport and accommodation (except for the participants through IISMM, whose transport and accommodation will be taken care of).

About MIDA

The MIDA-project rests on the premise that technological innovations today and in the past have had a tremendous and unprecedented influence on Islam: on the modes of expression and communication of religious messages and traditions, and on the modes of engagement with society, and ultimately also on religious doctrines. In short, they have unleashed forces that have ultimately changed the face of religion This holds true as much for contemporary digitisation as for previous technological transformations. Instead of singling out one specific technological landmark as unique, subsequent innovations and transformations must be brought together into one analytical frame.

About ENIS

ENIS (European Network for Islamic Studies) stems from the collaboration of various European academic institutions: NISIS (the Netherlands Interuniversity School for Islamic Studies), IISMM (l'Institut d'études de l'Islam et des sociétés du monde musulman), CSIC (Consejo superior de investigaciones científicas), Philipps-University of Marburg, and SeSaMO (Società Italiana di Studi sul Medio Oriente).

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* If your application is successful these will be used in the digital program booklet