MUBIT Inter-University Doctoral Cooperation in Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies
Basel/Zurich
&
Middle Eastern Studies
The Graduate School of Social Sciences (*G3S*)
University of Basel

Call for Applications

6th Annual MUBIT Doctoral Workshop in Late- and Post-Ottoman Studies in Basel

Digital Media, Islam, and Politics in the Middle East

A Workshop with

Assist. Prof. Dr. H. Akın Ünver
(Kadir Has University / Oxford University / Alan Turing Institute)

September 28-29, 2018

@MiddleEastBasel
#DigitalMediaIslam&Politics

Organized and hosted by

Dr. Selen Etingü
Alexander Balistreri, M.A.

Digital Media, Islam, and Politics in the Middle East

This workshop immerses students in comparative studies of Islamist politics in the Middle East and North Africa through the lens of how violent and non-violent Islamist state and non-actors, as well as their opponents, use and manipulate digital and social media to further their goals. The workshop is specifically interested in exploring themes in how the region's religious, political and social forces interact and mobilize in digital space, including their competing organizational networks and narrative claims.

As an increasingly more popular and politically-relevant topic in the region and beyond, we seek applicants whose work lie at the intersection of ICTs (information and communication technologies – such as Whatsapp, Signal, Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat and other web channels) and social media platforms on the one hand, and religion, politics, culture, and mobilization on the other. Those that are interested in, and work on how online and offline mobilization, behaviour and organization interact in the Middle East are particularly encouraged to apply.

Related questions that this workshop will explore include:

1. The definition of "Islamism," Islamic vs. Islamist vs. jihadist hierarchies, communication strategies, and organizational networks of influence in the digital world

a. How existing religious hierarchies adapt to digital media? Formal religious institutions, traditional pipeline of fatwas, how do traditional formal religious communication differs from online?

b. Digital culture of ICT-imams: How off-the-grid imams and religious figures emerge and gather followers on Twitter, Youtube etc. and create a wedge between the ummah and traditional sources of Islamic authority?

c. Networks of extremism and tolerance: which types and formations of religious hierarchies and networks preach extremism online and which others emphasize tolerance, integration and co-existence.

d. How do ICTs impact religious resource mobilization? How digital technologies impact the way in which religious groups organize, maintain ties and act in a uniform matter?

e. Islamist political parties and voter mobilization in digital space: How do various strands of Islamist movements interact with the digital space and other types of party formations?

2. Digital Surveillance, Censorship, Protest, Voice, and Opposition in the Middle East

a. Online and offline interaction in protests: What is the role of ICTs and platforms in voicing grievance, mobilizing resources and challenge hegemony?

b. Protest technology in the Middle East: How do protest technologies (drones, encryption, messaging) impact the way in which protests are organized and mobilized? Do they provide a significant advantage to opposition groups, or have the region's states fully developed capabilities to counter them?

c. Circumvention and privacy: To what extent could the post-Snowden awareness on state censorship enable technologies that disable surveillance and government monitoring? Have they been successful in enabling freedom of expression and voice?

d. "Who Censors What?" Allowed vs. criminalized forms of digital expression: what types of content get censored in which Middle Eastern country? All countries officially censor content that is against moral values, but censorship is also a highly political issue whose content that varies across different countries in the region.

e. External Actors of Middle Eastern Surveillance: Although surveillance and censorship is rampant in the Middle East, most of the technology that enables the region's states to do so come from democratic countries. What are the stakes of Western surveillance companies in the region and how do they impact surveillance politics?

3. Organized Diversion: Fake News, Trolls Bots

a. Purpose and mechanics of organized diversion: The influence of digital spoilers and distractors on the region's politics has grown significantly in the last few years, from the Saudi-Qatari-UAE dispute to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, such digital diversion methods have grown into an analytical field of their own.

b. Regime type and narratives of diversion: We have to focus on which actors have created fake news concerning these moments, the tools and techniques that have enabled the creation and dispersion of such narratives, political uses and abuses of such narratives, and motivations for their creation and international ripple effects of especially potent fake news narratives and dispersal strategies.

4. Online Radicalization and ICT Use of Extremist Groups

a. How jihadi groups recruit, track and mobilize online: social media allows extremists to recruit and propagandize across borders, in a way that 20th-century technology never allowed. This renders modern extremism deadlier, given their reach and ability to trigger coordinated, as well as lone-wolf attacks.

b. Power bargaining and networking behaviour or radical groups: Extremist groups not only compete with their declared enemies, but also with each other in recruitment and diffusion of extremism messaging. How these groups compete in digital space gives us a clear idea on how their offline interests structures and strategies are shaped?

In addition to the presentations and discussions by the guest lecturers, the workshop will offer the participants a one-to-one session with the lecturers, in order to create an opportunity to expand and explore specific questions related to the workshop and/or to the participant's own research. Due to limited time, approx. 20 minute, one-to-one sessions will be offered on a first come basis.

Guest Lecturer:

Assistant Professor Dr. H. Akın Ünver

Kadir Has University/Oxford University/Alan Turing Institute

Akın Ünver is a computational conflict researcher, with a specialization in extremist non-state actors. He is also interested in different ways in which Internet data can be harvested, visualized and modelled. Based at Kadir Has University, he is a non-resident fellow at Oxford University (Center for Technology and Global Affairs, DPIR) and the Alan Turing Institute, London. Previously, he was the Ertegün Lecturer of Near Eastern Studies at Princeton University and a post-doctoral fellow at the University of Michigan's Department of Sociology. He is the winner of MESA's 2010 Malcolm H. Kerr 'best dissertation in the field of social sciences' award.

Organization

The 6th Annual *MUBIT* Doctoral Workshop in Late- and Post-Ottoman Studies in Basel, *Digital Media, Islam, and Politics in the Middle East*, is a two-day intensive seminar (from September 28, 12:30 pm to September 29, 12:30 pm, 2018) organized by Dr. Selen Etingü and Alexander Balistreri, M.A. at the Middle Eastern Studies of Department of Social Sciences at the University of Basel.

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The doctoral workshop is funded by *MUBIT* Inter-University Doctoral Cooperation in Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies Basel/Zurich and is a part of the curriculum of the Graduate School of Social Sciences (*G3S*), University of Basel.

For previous *MUBIT* Doctoral Workshops in Late- and Post-Ottoman Studies in Basel, please see:

2013: *Turkish Nationalism: Approaching Ottoman and Islamic Legacies beyond Ethnicity, Secularism, and Westernism*, with Prof. Dr. Erik J. Zürcher (University of Leiden) and Prof. Dr. M. Hakan Yavuz (University of Utah), report written by Alexander E. Balistreri (Princeton University): http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trx=vx&list=H-Turk&month=1310&week=d&msg=QNJ9%2BG13sCevwyrQQMkKXQ

2014: *Arab Nationalism: From Ottoman Empire to Colonial Mandates*, with Assoc. Prof. Dr. Hasan Kayalı and Assoc. Prof. Dr. Michael Provence (University of California, San Diego), report written by Nova Robinson (Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey): https://networks.h-net.org/node/11419/discussions/46669/workshop-report-"arab-nationalism-ottoman-empire-colonial-mandates"

2015: *A Modern World in Flux: Studying Migration, Refugees, and Settlement Regimes from the Middle East and Beyond*, with Assoc. Prof. Dr. Isa Blumi (Georgia State University), for the program of the workshop see: https://nahoststudien.unibas.ch/fileadmin/orientsem/user_upload/redaktion/Dokumente_MUBIT/Booklet_1.0.pdf

2016: *The Main Intellectual Currents in the Late Ottoman Empire*, with Prof. Dr. M. Şükrü Hanioğlu (Princeton University), report written by Onur Ada (Leiden University): https://networks.h-net.org/node/73374/announcements/145981/workshop-review-%E2%80%9C-main-intellectual-currents-late-ottoman-empire

2017: From Unionism to Kemalism: Social and Political Transformation of Turkey, with Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ahmet Kuyaş (Galatasaray University) and Prof. Dr. M. Asım Karaömerlioğlu (Boğaziçi University), report written by Burak Başaranlar (Binghamton University): https://networks.h-net.org/node/11419/discussions/960549/workshop-review-%E2%80%9C-unionism-kemalism-social-and-political

Unfortunately, the organizers cannot assume any travel and accommodation costs. However, a limited number of cheaper accommodation options will be available, which include staying with local undergraduate and graduate students. Please contact Dr. Selen Etingü for information and questions regarding organizational matters at: g.etingue@unibas.ch.

For more information see: https://nahoststudien.philhist.unibas.ch/de/doktorat/mubit/annual-doctoral-workshops/

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Application Procedure

PhD students who wish to attend the workshop are asked to write an email to Dr. Selen Etingü (g.etingue@unibas.ch), with a biographical abstract explaining their research interests and projects as well as their academic background (max. 400 words, in 3rd person singular, in English). *The deadline for the application is August 6, 2018*. Applicants will receive an answer regarding their participation by August 10.

Requirements for Successful Participation

Participants are entitled to 3 ECTS points for successful participation. Participants will receive a list of readings, to be completed prior to the workshop, by August 10, 2018. Successful participation at the workshop is subject to the mandatory completion of the required readings in advance and active participation in the workshop discussions.

Contact

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