Course Description:
NISIS Spring School 2020

Title	Contesting Authority: Knowledge, Power and Expressions of Selfhood
Academic year	2019-2020
Location	Catania, Italy
EC	2-5
Level	600
Language	English
Keynote Speakers	Marjo Buitelaar
	Suad Joseph
	Hilary Kalmbach
	Siobhan Lambert
	Arshad Muradin
	Muhammad Qasim Zaman
Hosted by	University of Catania

Admission requirements

PhD candidates and research master students active in the field of Islamic Studies may apply for admission via www.nisis.nl. The registration deadline is 25 December 2019.

NISIS junior members qualify automatically, but due to the limited number of participants, also need to apply for participation for the NISIS Spring School via www.nisis.nl.

Description

The NISIS Spring School is usually organised in cooperation with several foreign research institutions and preferably takes place where these sister institutions are based. The programme consists of lectures by keynote speakers in the morning and parallel workshops in the afternoon. In the workshops, a selection of international PhD

candidates and research master students present their research in relation to the general theme of the Spring School and act as discussants.

Participants (PhD candidates and research master students) are required to:

For 2 EC:

- read the prescribed literature in advance;
- give a presentation (15 minutes) in one of the afternoon workshops and act as **discussant*** for the presentations of one of the other participants.

For an additional 3 EC:

- write a paper in which own research is related to the theme of the Spring School (requirements can be found below).

*As a **discussant** during the Spring School, you are required to:

- carefully study the readings as prescribed by the keynote speakers in advance;
- prepare questions for discussion in advance in which you relate the topic of the presentation to the prescribed readings;
- pose the first question about the presentation;
- actively participate in and contribute to the discussion.

Theme

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, Facebook 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 newforms of selfhood? What are the potential political consequences of new forms of selfunderstanding 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 Spring School 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.

Course objectives

- Enlarging and deepening the already existing knowledge of Islam and Muslim societies
- Providing insight and participation in the current academic debate
- Introducing the candidates to an international network of scholars in the field
- Creating an academic community in which research in the field of Islam and Muslim societies can be optimally pursued
- Mediating between a new generation of researchers and innovative disciplinary and interdisciplinary developments, theoretical and methodological initiatives and explorations in the field
- Training presentation, writing and reflection skills.

Time Table

T.b.a. Please make sure to be informed about programme details and updates via our website: www.nisis.nl.

Mode of instruction

- Lecture
- Workshops
- Research

Course load

Total course load for the course is 56 + 84 hours.

For 2 EC:
Lectures during the school: 27 hours
Preparation presentation: 27 hours
Preparation discussant: 2 hours

For an additional 3 EC:
Paper: 84 hours

Assessment method

PhD candidates and research master students will be judged on the basis of:

- attendance and active participation at the keynote lectures and workshops
- presentation in a workshop and discussant for one of the presentations of others
- a paper afterwards in the form of a reflexive essay (see next section for requirements)

Paper requirements

The objective of the reflexive essay to conclude the Spring School, is to relate the theme of the Spring School as presented in the keynote lectures to your own research. To this purpose, you choose at least one keynote lecture and follow these instructions:

A. As a first step, you write a short introductory section. In the first subsection of the introduction you present the objectives, research question, and subject matter of you own research in max. 200 words. In the next subsection (max. 300-600 words) you explain to what purpose you have selected this/these key note lecture(s) from the Spring school to apply to your own research.

B. The next section of 1500 to 2000 words consists of a few paragraphs in which you answer for each of the key note lecture(s) the following questions:

• Which key theories, concepts and ideas are addressed?
• What are the main questions and problems that are addressed?
• What is the nature and content of the empirical data/sources that are analysed and how is (the analysis)of the data organised?

C. The next section of 1500 to 2000 words is dedicated to a two-step 'what if' exercise in creativity:

1. for each of the selected key note lecture(s) you ask yourself: If you were to apply the approach/ line of argument, etc. to your own research, what new questions would you ask of your data, what kind of data would you have to collect alternatively or additionally? If you were to adopt the approach, focus etc. of the lecture to develop an argument along similar lines on the basis your own material, what might that argument look like?
2. For each of the possibilities that you can come up with, you reflect on the pro's and con's and take stock of and explain which options are interesting and feasible to follow up on.

D. In the concluding section you take stock of how the theme of the Spring School, most concretely how the key note lecture(s) selected shed new light on and/or have been helpful for your own research.

In total, the length your essay should be **between 3500 to 5000 words**.

Reading list

T.b.a.

Application

You can apply for participation in the NISIS Spring School as soon as a call for application has been opened. This will be announced on the NISIS website (www.nisis.nl). The registration deadline is 25 December 2019. Please note that the number of available places is restricted.

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Website

www.nisis.nl