

Call for Papers

Religion and Secularism as Problem Space in Postcolonial Occidental Discourses within the MENA Region

International Workshop at the Centre for Advanced Studies “Multiple Secularities – Beyond the West, Beyond Modernities”, Leipzig University, 3–4 November 2022

Organisers:

- Housamedden Darwish, Centre for Advanced Studies “Multiple Secularities”, Leipzig University
- Markus Dreßler, Institute for the Study of Religions/Modern Turkish Studies, Leipzig University

The workshop aims to discuss the question of religion and secularity/secularism in (postcolonial) Occidental discourses and their critiques in the MENA region. The question of religion plays a pivotal role in both the Orientalist view of the “Orient” and the Occidental view of the “Occident”. While the Orientalist view is indebted to a binary perspective on religion and the secular, with stereotypical essentializations of the religious dimensions of the “Orient”, the Occidental view oscillates between two apparently contradictory reductions, which present the “Occident” alternatively as Christian or as secular. Furthermore, dominant Occidental discourses in the MENA region self-identify with Islam in a way that overlaps with Orientalist imaginaries of an essentially Islamic Orient.

The workshop intends to explore the trajectories of postcolonial Occidental discourses in the MENA region. It aims to reflect on their various genealogies, forms, and contents. Postcolonial Occidentalism draws heavily on Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978), and Hassan Hanafi’s *Introduction to the Science of Occidentalism* (1991). Critical stances of postcolonial Occidental discourses towards the “West/Orient” are thereby often entangled with academic critiques of secularism (e.g. Asad, and Mahmood), democracy and liberalism (e.g. Massed), the modern state (e.g. Hallaq), as well as modernity and civilisation (e.g. Abdel-Rahman and El-Messiri).

This workshop endeavours to bring together empirical case studies on particular Occidental debates, including their historical trajectories with theoretical reflections on Occidentalism and Orientalism in the MENA region. The guiding research questions of the workshop are:

- What role does the question of religion and the secular as a problem space of modernity play in MENA-region Occidental discourses as well as critiques directed against them?
- What are the characteristics of Islamic postcolonial Occidentalism, compared to other forms of Occidentalism?
- To what extent and how do postcolonial Occidental discourses in the MENA region relate to postcolonial theories and (the critique of) Orientalism?
- What is the role of Occidental and Orientalist imaginaries in the formation and contestation of cultural, social, religious and political identities in the MENA region?
- What role do Occidental discourses and their critiques play in political projects in the MENA-region (within national contexts, regionally, within international Islamic publics, as well as in the political relations of MENA-region states to Europe)?

Costs for travel and accommodation will be covered for all invited participants without institutional funding of their own. Please state in your application whether you require funding. In case of travel restrictions due to the pandemic, the workshop will be held in a hybrid format, allowing for virtual participation. The workshop language will be English.

The workshop will be supported and co-funded by Academics in Solidarity, the Centre for Advanced Studies in the Humanities and Social Sciences "Multiple Secularities – Beyond the West, Beyond Modernities", and the Institute for the Study of Religion/Modern Turkish Studies at Leipzig University.

We intend to publish selected papers in a special journal issue or an edited volume and are therefore interested in original contributions.

Please send your applications and direct all inquiries to Housamedden Darwish:
housamedden.darwish@uni-leipzig.de.

Timeline

- 30 March 2022: Deadline for abstract (300–400 words) and short biography
- April 2022: Notification of acceptance
- 30 September 2022: Deadline for draft version of full paper
- 3–4 November 2022: Workshop