

Limacher, Katharina, Mattes, Astrid and Novak, Christoph (eds.) 2019. *Prayer, pop and politics: Researching religious youth in migration society*. Vienna: Vienna University Press. 278 pp. Hb.: 50,00 €. ISBN: 9783847109792.

Book review by

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Post-migrant young adults' religious engagement and the revisited role of religion in Western secular societies have been brought to the forefront of recent academic research from both anthropological and sociological perspectives.

Through a broad spectrum of qualitative research conducted mainly in German-speaking countries, the edited volume *Prayer, pop and politics: Researching religious youth in migration society* intends to approach such issues at the junction of religion, age, and race from both social and political lenses grounded in contemporary (post) "migration" societies.

The book's first part concentrates on methodological observations at the crossroads of age, race, and religion.

In *Chapter One*, Novak takes into account the issue of power relationships and privileges between researchers and their informants during research encounters (p. 23). He focuses on various aspects: a) integrating informants' inconsistencies and flaws in their discursive formations; b) taking into account informants' active role in their narratives; c) adopting a mode of co-constructed and collaborative knowledge production, in which research is carried out with informants, regarded as partners in the process.

In *Chapter Two*, Hafez, an Austrian Muslim male political sociologist studying Muslim youth in Austria and Europe, and Hyökki, a Finnish Muslim female convert scholar focusing on Finnish Muslim converts' experiences of Islamophobia, explore the issue of

the researchers' positionality, particularly in the case of "native research," in which the researchers share commonalities with their object of study. They conclude that odd familiarity requires more epistemological discussions, vigilance, and reflexivity throughout the research process to avoid any moral contradictions and tensions (p. 69).

In *Chapter Three*, Odermatt, a quantitative researcher, highlights that the articulations of the concepts of "identity," "migration," and "youth" have become key issues in quantitative social research. Eventually, he remarks that these concepts need to be more clearly constructed and articulated as variables in religious and migration research, further to the latest research developments in developmental and social psychology.

The book's second part looks at "religious youth and digital spaces." In this line in *Chapter Four*, Mattes develops a conceptual approach to grasp Western Muslim youth religious identifications in the digital sphere. To set up her conceptual framework, the researcher leans on two specific approaches: 1) the "lived religion" approach, which focuses on ordinary individuals and their everyday life religious practices, and 2) Nora Yuval-Davis' concept of "politics of belonging," because it considers individuals "agency and the way they negotiate over position and power by referring to various dimensions of belonging" (p. 110). The disadvantage of this contribution is that the author does not provide a case study to validate her perspective.

In *Chapter Five*, Evolvi, leaning on several examples of digital engagement of young European Muslims after terror attacks, points out that they negotiate religion and religious belonging in the digital sphere with the innovative concept of "hypermediated religious spaces." The researcher notes that the study of such virtual spaces enriches social research perspectives to grasp the various articulations between "religion, race, age, communities and social actions" (p. 139).

In *Chapter Six*, Lohlker reports on a video project shot in Vienna, with various videos intended to produce alternative narratives on "violent extremism." This initiative was conducted by young, marginalized Muslims with the assistance of social workers and academic advisors. However, Lohlker incomprehensibly only adopts the academic perspective and concludes that this project constitutes an example of "participatory action research." How can it be so when the voices of these young Muslims are not even heard in this contribution?

In *Chapter Seven*, Limacher centers upon the issue of religious knowledge and the various ways it can be transmitted, appropriated, and shaped by youth, with the case study of Hindu youth in Switzerland and Austria. Contrary to their parents, young Swiss or

Austrian-born Hindus seem to lack knowledge regarding their religious tradition (p. 169). This apparent ignorance is not only linked to their families but needs to be considered in a broader social context of religiously plural societies and religious minorities in mainly Christian societies such as Switzerland and Austria.

The book's eighth contribution explores which religious authorities Swiss Muslim youth rely on and how they orientate themselves in that respect. Indeed, young people do not necessarily follow "traditional" religious leaders ("imams") but rather envision various individuals or institutions acting as religious authorities in their eyes. In that respect, they use Internet and social networks as religious resources to provide them with answers to their questions regarding religion and society. The researchers convincingly highlight that these patterns of individualization, pluralization and fragmentation of religious authorities do not disconnect young people from their families and the Islamic "tradition."

The last three chapters of the book also underline how young people negotiate their religious belonging in secular and religiously diverse societies.

In *Chapter Nine*, Khaliefi investigates how young Swiss and German people of Vietnamese origin handle the cultural and religious legacy of their parents' country of origin and their family history and combine it their "home" country. Socialized in Western societies and growing up with Vietnamese parenting, the author demonstrates that Buddhism enables them to construct hybrid identities.

In *Chapter Ten*, Wetzel focuses on the processes of academic research and knowledge production conducted in relation to Islam and Muslim issues in contemporary Germany, which are often conducted within a Eurocentric perspective by scholars who are not Muslim themselves. She favors a "decolonial" perspective, resting on Muslims' own perceptions and interpretations of religion and religious practices.

In the final chapter, Loth and Aysel Tepeli concentrate on the various difficulties and challenges of young people of Alevi origin regarding identity formation in Germany, as Alevis form a socially and religiously marginalized minority not officially acknowledged in Sunni-dominated Turkey. In the context of German society, they are often confronted with limited knowledge of their parents' religious legacy and need to look for creative ways to construct "hybrid" identities.

In conclusion, this edited volume is based on a plurality of disciplinary perspectives: (digital) religious studies, migration studies, religious and political sociology, as well as social and cultural psychology. However, despite the diversity of views, one can regret

that out of the twelve contributions in the book, only seven are in English, the rest being in German. Furthermore, some of the conducted research is of questionable academic quality, and only a few of them really address the interrelations between religion, age, and gender, which is the main theme of the book. Despite the above-mentioned reservations, *Prayer, pop and politics* is an interesting volume entailing quite relevant contributions on religiously inspired youth and on the articulations between rituals, popular culture and politics in a post-migration context.