

Vortrag im Oberseminar

Montag, 27.06.2022

18 - 20 Uhr, Raum L-155

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Algorithms, Anti-Semitism, and Alleged Jewish Life in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan

The number of Jews living in Pakistan is clouded in mystery. While some say that all Jewish communities left the Islamic Republic a few decades ago, others claim that hundreds live disguised as Christians or Parsees. While Pakistan's society had not exhibited significant anti-Semitic tendencies until the 1960s, mixing criticism of Israel's policies with anti-Zionism and anti-Semitic rhetoric has become normalized in Pakistan's public discourse today.

In this paper, I am interested in how the coming of social media has further exacerbated this anti-Semitic atmosphere and how it has brought new ways to reproduce the narrative of "the hidden Jew" in Pakistan. Especially one video, circulating on YouTube since 2016, has captured people's fantasies in Pakistan and abroad. It shows a group of around 150 people dressed in traditional Jewish praying attire and facing towards the direction of Jerusalem while singing the Shema Israel, one of the most central prayers in the Jewish faith. For many, this served as the ultimate proof that Jews lived in hiding in Pakistan.

This paper is a part of my upcoming book on the politics of visibility of non-Muslims living in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan today. Based on my ethnography with Pakistani Jews in Israel and my work with the Bene Ephraim community in Karachi, I will show how, in the case of Pakistan, the age-old, anti-Semitic narrative of the hidden Jew needs to be turned on its head. It is not that Jews have been hiding as Christians in Pakistan, but that YouTube and Facebook algorithms have recently supported a process of "Judaization" of Pakistan's Christian community.

Oberseminar

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