Project 5: Digital relationships and local religious communities

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3. Examples for theoretical positionings of PostDoc project

Basic assumption based on Boellstorff (2012):
Digital realities and non-digital realities are in principle emically distinguishable; they possess some crucially different attributes, although they may interact closely. Which aspects of religiosity are perceived as how digitable (or: function primarily/exclusively digitally) and why, has not yet been exhaustively researched - nor how digital aspects of religiosity can be perceived in a hierarchical relation to non-digital aspects of religiosity.

Basic assumption based on Trigg (2021):
Shared moods, emotions, and commonly experienced atmospheres are central to any sense of reality and communality. In principle, this is true both online and offline, but both forms of reality/community (digital and non-digital) are emically compared with each other, weighed against each other, and emically positioned in assumed hierarchical relationships to each other.
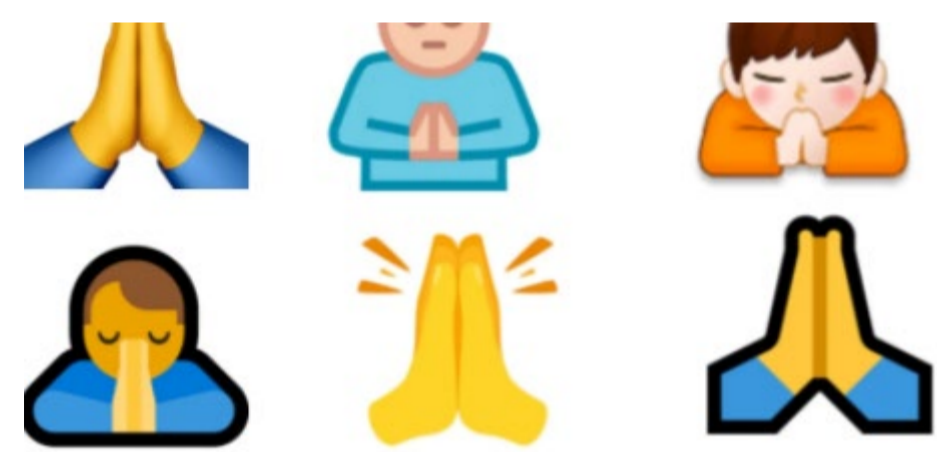
Buddhist Meditation & Teaching via Zoom
September 12, 2020 @ 6:30 pm - 8:30 pm

1. Focus:

Ethnographic fieldwork and interviews with (trans)migratory digital natives in CH

Long-term participant observations (1yr+), complemented by semi-structured and informal interviews, pile sortings, rankings, …

4. Initial question PostDoc project:
How are religious communality and religiosity perceived in terms of their digitability among digital natives with (trans)migration histories in Switzerland?
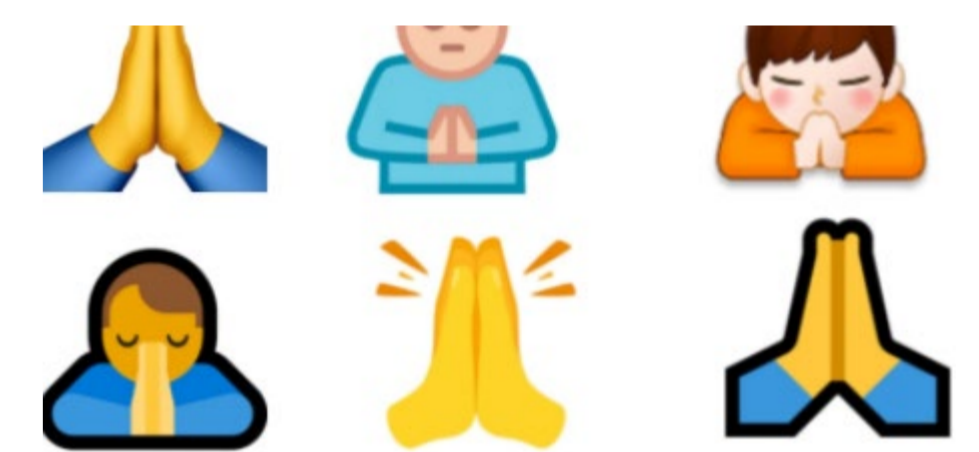
2. Two sub-projects:

Virginie (PhD project):
...works on concepts of community and digital religiosities among refugee migrants and transmigrants.

Researches, among others, young refugees collaborating with an artist in a studio and/or belonging to religious and non-religious communities.

Range of interlocutors: Asylum seekers from Eritrea, Ethiopia, Syria, and Somalia.

Mira (PostDoc project):
...focuses on digitabilities of religious knowledge and action in the perception of digital natives with transnational biographies, living permanently in Switzerland.

Researches, among others, young adults visiting Muslim communities which were fundamentally founded virtually & today offer online and offline interactions at the same time.

Range of interlocutors: from Swiss young officer who is also imam of a mosque to Egyptian-born Muslim women interested in Instagram witchcraft tips.

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First results (PostDoc project): TRENDS IN THE FIELD

Religious activity and knowledge are generally considered digitable, which is not always the case for religious communality - and the assumedly reduced digitability of religious communality can be experienced as particularly attractive or particularly unattractive

Position 1:
Religion is almost or in fact completely digitable, but communality is not.
Hierarchy perception: non-digital religious community > digital religious communality

Position 2:
Religion is completely digitable, communality is not always digitable, and digital communality is more pleasant in the religious context than non-digital communality.
Hierarchy perception: digital religious communality > non-digital religious communality

Position 3:
Multiple religious self-positionings are characteristic; geographic proximity/distance determines access to religion online or offline; different religiosities possess different digitabilities (e.g., biographical religion of origin "had to" become digital, yet in principle non-digital gathering/blessing would be preferred - but mostly for reasons of communality & less for reasons of supposedly decreased efficacy or factuality).
Highly conditional-situational hierarchy perception: non-digital religious community > digital religious community

Position 4:
Religion is fully digitable; non-digital communality is suspicious (online environment offers variety of religious sources from which one can pick the most compelling, and according to which one can then practice privately. Online environment and private practice according to online sources "protect" against supposedly distorted religiosity in in-person communities).
Hierarchy perception: digital religious communality > non-digital religious communality

Caution:

Analysis still ongoing. Above, you see a pointed presentation of initial trends discernible from the data analysed so far.

Not an exhaustive list of all possible positionings, just a list of noticeable trends.

Many respondents are completely indifferent to digital vs. non-digital, or their assessment is highly situation-dependent!