Co-producing the good old days

Nostalgia, social media, and the search for a better image of the Egyptian nation

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Het Coproduceren van de Goede Oude Tijd

Nostalgie, sociale media en de zoektocht naar een beter beeld van de Egyptische natie

Samenvatting (Abstract in Dutch)

Gevangen in een aanhoudende postrevolutionaire crisis en verstoken van een toekomst om naar uit te kijken, gebruiken Egyptenaren uit de middenklasse in groeiende aantallen Facebook om oude beelden te mobiliseren van wat zij omschrijven als "al-zaman al-gamīl" of de "goede oude tijd". Deze dissertatie onderzoekt deze nostalgische online gemeenschappen die, onder de extreme depolitisering van de Egyptische publieke sfeer, besloten hebben om zichzelf om te vormen tot "apolitieke" ruimtes, waarbij ze afzien van het definiëren van hun nostalgie aan de hand van een historische periodisering of politiek regime. In plaats daarvan definiëren ze hun nostalgie als gericht op een voorbije morele en sociale orde die Egypte ooit stabiliteit en een authentieke identiteit verschafte.

Ik betoog dat dit nostalgische discours niet alleen een middel is om zich te verzetten tegen of te ontsnappen aan een harde politieke realiteit en moeilijke economische omstandigheden: door beelden van de "goede oude tijd" online te delen, geven gebruikers vorm aan een uitgesproken sociaal beeld van de ideale burger en de ideale natie. Ze wijzen ook op de mogelijkheid van een andere toekomst via een omweg naar het verleden.

In dit proefschrift laat ik zien hoe dit online nostalgische discours wordt gecoproduceerd door het samenspel van drie facetten: (1) de gebruikers met hun ideologieën, (2) de vintage beelden van het verleden die online

geherdefinieerd worden, en (3) het platform met zijn neoliberale logica en complexe *affordances* die vorm geven aan de interactie tussen gebruikers en beelden. Ik toon een online etnografie die het digitale leven en de verbeelding van de leden, en vooral de initiatiefnemers van deze Facebook-gemeenschappen onderzoekt. Ik belicht hoe zij zichzelf identificeren als "amateurarchivarissen" en "populaire historici" met een missie om het nationale erfgoed te behoeden voor verwaarlozing. Voortbouwend op mijn interacties met deze gemeenschappen en mijn observaties van hun dagelijkse socialisaties, schets ik hoe volgers het verleden gebruiken om te onderhandelen over sociale en nationale grieven. Ik bevraag hun ambivalente positie ten opzichte van de revolutie van 2011 en de nasleep ervan. Ik ontleed hun sociale verbeelding en hun verlangen naar een barmhartigere vom van het kapitalisme en een stabiele, hiërarchische samenleving waarin de patriarchale genderrollen gehandhaafd blijven. Bovendien analyseer ik het sociale leven van de vintage beelden en hoe zij deze recirculeren, herinterpreteren en nieuw leven inblazen door er hun morele wereldbeeld in te injecteren. Ik traceer de oorsprong van veel van deze beelden tot eerdere oriëntalistische voorstellingen en problematiseer hoe hedendaagse postkoloniale subjecten zichzelf zien door middel van deze beelden. Ten slotte onderzoek ik hoe de leden van deze online gemeenschappen zich Facebook toe-eigenen om de mediapraktijken van het verleden te recreëren. Ik onderzoek daarbij hoe ze de functies van "Facebook Watch" gebruiken om de televisie-ervaring van de jaren negentig te doen herleven, en hoe ze memes creëren die lijken op de roddelbladen van zaman (toen).

Mijn originele bijdragen liggen op het gebied van geheugenstudies en digitale culturen. Ik heb een complexe maar aanpasbare theoretische benadering ontwikkeld om online geheugenformaties te onderzoeken, met aandacht voor zowel de agency van gebruikers als de structuur van het

platform. Aan dit eerste veld van geheugenstudies draag ik door middel van een empirische analyse bij hoe digitale herinneringsruimten worden geconstrueerd en onderhouden door online gatekeepers. In het tweede veld van digitale culturen bied ik een etnografie van het platform in een belangrijke postkoloniale, autoritaire context, waarbij ik belicht hoe Facebook na 2011 is geherdefinieerd en toegeëigend. Mijn analyse plaatst Egypte in een wereldwijde stroom van digitale culturen waarin nationalistische, identitaire en nostalgische voorstellingen online worden geïnitieerd en verspreid ten dienste van populistische en autoritaire politieke projecten. Ten slotte lever ik een bijdrage aan Midden-Oosten Studies door te onderzoeken hoe de natie en nationalisme momenteel opnieuw worden gedefinieerd door gewone mensen, buiten elitaire en statistische verslagen. Op dit laatste gebied draag ik het begrip bij van een "statistisch ontwikkelingsconservatisme" dat de voorstanders van al-zaman al-gamīl vurig aanhangen en dat in stilte militair autoritarisme reproduceert en ondersteunt.