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European Islam Between Religious Traditions and Secular Formations

ALEXANDRE CAEIRO & JEANETTE JOUILLI

The workshop "European Islam between Religious Traditions and Secular Formations" was held in Slubice (Poland) from 7-10 February. It was jointly organized by ISIM, Casa Arabe and its International Institute of Arab and Muslim World Studies, Kompetenzzentrum Orient-Okzident Marinz, and Europa-Universität Viadrina Frankfurt/Oder. The workshop was a collaborative achievement between thirty participating scholars (see the full list at www.isim.nl under Events).

The convenors—Alexandre Caeiro (ISIM), Jeanette S. Jouili (ISIM), Frank Peter (Frankfurt-Oder) and Armando Salvatore (L'Orientale, Naples)—took Talal Asad's work on tradition and secularity as the starting point for a reflection on the structures of European secular formations in their double relation to Christianity and the Enlightenment.

The workshop opened with a lecture by Armando Salvatore entitled "What Went Wrong with Tradition in Europe? Post-Christian Secular Order and the Challenge of Reformed Tradition," where he proposed a re-thinking of secularity on the basis of a re-reading of Habermas' work on communicative action.

The workshop then took the form of a reading seminar divided into three thematic sessions. Participants critically discussed key texts from

the disciplines of philosophy, political theory, sociology, and anthropology, in a deliberate attempt to connect the study of European Islam more closely to important debates in the social sciences.

The first session, "The European State and Historical Time: The Dialectics of Assimilation and Marginalization," attempted to question the assumptions upon which the binary opposition of continuity versus change—common in studies of European Muslims—rests. It began with a lecture by Ruth Mas (University of Colorado at Boulder) focusing on how calls for the reform of Islam relate understandings of time and history to specific sentiments and affects.

The following session, "A Living Tradition? Subject Formation, Disciplines and Bodily Practices," was introduced by a lecture by Mohamed Tabishat (UAE University/WIKO Berlin) on "The Body, the Secular, and the Islamic: An Exploration." Drawing closely on Asad's anthropology of the body, Tabishat questioned the body-mind dichotomy still dominant in European conceptualizations of religion, as reflected in understandings of rituals in terms of symbolic practices.

The last session on "The Structures of Dialogue: Disciplining, Antagonism, and Resentment" started with a lecture by Maleiha Malik of King's College London where she explored how European liberal democracies might design a political "dialogue" with Muslims whose political views seem to be incommensurable with liberal principles, notably by implementing what Malik, following William Connolly, calls "agonistic respect."

The workshop closed with an open discussion in which participants reflected upon the ways the theoretical texts of the previous days could or should be incorporated into the study of Islam/Muslims in Europe. The exercise and format of the workshop were stimulating for all participants, and a follow-up is already being considered.

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