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Institute for Advanced Study
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The Working Group Modernity and Islam is a Berlin-based interdisciplinary research network of scholars working at various universities and extra-university institutions on the questions of modernity and Islam. The Working Group, hosted by the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin (Institute for Advanced Study, Berlin) is committed to fostering a deeper understanding of Muslim cultures, their histories, and their social structures with the two-fold aim of revealing their complexities and of offering deeper insights into the phenomena of 'modernity' and 'modernization'.

This should be of interest to scholars well beyond the fields of Islamic Studies. The project Modernity and Islam was launched in 1995 with the support of the Körber Foundation in Hamburg. From 1996 on, the German Federal Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Technology has funded the Working Group's scientific programme, while the Land Berlin finances its business office.

The Working Group was initiated under the impression that in Germany, and indeed in Europe as a whole, the level of scientific and intellectual interest in Islam neither reflects its growing political importance nor its role as a reference for modern and post-modern criticism. Whereas traditional Islamic Studies, as a 'small discipline' – not in relation to the object of study but in comparison to the institutional size of the main academic disciplines – methodically started to embrace the social sciences, history, and economics, representatives of the latter persist in delegating the study of Islam to regional experts. The notions of civilizational or cultural clashes, conflicts and exceptionalisms aptly express Western neglect of the analysis of non-European societies, in particular, the world of Islam. A survey of the social and cultural studies on the Muslim world in the Federal Republic of Germany, funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education (see ISIM-Newsletter No 1, p. 40), gave empirical evidence of the need for additional effort to overcome the 'dual marginalization' of Islamic Studies. On the basis of the survey, the Ministry asked the Working Group to formulate recommendations to adequately support and strengthen studies on the Muslim world in Germany.

The Working Group Modernity and Islam does not wish to suggest a fundamental polarity between Muslim societies on the one hand and the modern world on the other. Modernity here also refers to an inherent crisis and thus reflects a genuine European preoccupation as well. The group therefore tries to examine the assimilation of modernity within Islam in conjunction with a range of varying experiences in other parts of the world. The proposal is to articulate common problems facing modern societies, conduct relevant fieldwork in Islamic regions and refer the findings to the analysis of, for instance, European societies. We hope this will pave the way for useful interaction between Islamic Studies and other disciplines. Considerable stress is laid on the principle of 'research with' as opposed to 'research on', the traditional asymmetrical European relationship to Islam ('Orientalism') being replaced by one of genuinely mutual collaboration with researchers from the Islamic world.

Cooperative Framework

The Working Group aims to create optimum working conditions for talented young scholars engaged in innovative projects. In an environment conducive to interdisciplinary cooperation, less orthodox issues also feature high on the agenda. The international character, firmly established through a growing network of foreign institutions, ensures the high quality of the work. Collaboration within the Working Group has assumed various forms. Three elements constitute the basis of its scholarly programme.

The Working Group Modernity and Islam

The Berlin Seminar

The Berlin Seminar, a regular fortnightly event following the rhythm of the academic year, forms the central pivot of the Working Group Modernity and Islam. It fosters communication amongst the various Berlin institutions, ensuring in particular that younger researchers are no longer arbitrarily, but rather systematically, informed of other activities in the field. The seminar creates an opportunity for younger scholars from Berlin to develop an appropriate style of research by presenting their own work and familiarizing themselves with the work of colleagues from various disciplinary and geographical backgrounds invited within the Working Group's postdoctoral fellowship programme. The seminar thus serves as a bracket for all other activities in an interdisciplinary research environment. Fellows of the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin are present in a consultative capacity. Since 1996, the Berlin Seminar was held on themes such as 'processes of modernization', 'the transferability of concepts', 'modernity and the past', 'the relation of modernists to popular Islam' and 'Islam in Europe'. The theme of the seminar in the summer semester of 1999 will be 'notions of law and order in Muslim societies'.

Fellowships/Postdoctoral Stipends

Doctoral stipends are already provided by the various Berlin institutions. An international programme for postdocs has been conceived in order to anchor individual themes in a framework of more complex issues and to strengthen dialogue between the various disciplinary and geographical areas of research. In addition to researchers of Islamic Studies, candidates for the postdoc programme include doctors of the social sciences, historians, law graduates, economists and urban planners. The latter should be formally qualified in the subject of Islam, while those whose background is Islamic Studies should have scientific exposure to some other discipline. Without losing sight of broader issues not specifically connected to Islam, the scholarship holders are given the opportunity to work for one year on a research project related to the Islamic world. In this way, regional findings can be channelled into the mainstream institutional disciplines. Since 1997, ten postdoctoral researchers from Algeria, the Comoro Islands, Georgia, Egypt, Iran, Turkey, the Western Sahara and Germany have been invited to work in Berlin on issues of modernity from architectural, cultural, historical or social-scientific perspectives. The fellowships for the academic year 1999/2000 have been announced under the theme 'notions of law and order in Muslim societies'.

The Summer Academy

In order to guarantee the international and interdisciplinary nature of the programme to promote young scholars, an annual two-week summer academy has been organized since 1996. The venue is either one of the institutions involved in the Working Group Modernity and Islam or a research institute of the Middle East / North Africa. The Academy focuses primarily on doctoral and postdoctoral researchers, offering them a forum to present their research. The

idea is to draw up a sort of interim status report, so that the critical findings of the academy can be integrated into the further work of the young scholars. The programme differs from the normal lecture-hall set-up, since the main contributors are the young researchers themselves. Leading scholars attend the academy in an advisory capacity, adding their own methodical questions. After the first pilot academy, directed by Rémy Leveau on 'modernity and Islam' at the French-German Centre Marc Bloch in Berlin, the second academy, directed by Peter Heine on 'processes and counter-processes of modernization' took place in 1997 at the Humboldt University in Berlin. In 1998, the academy was held at the German Orient-Institute in Beirut under the direction of Angelika Neuwirth on 'crisis and memory'. 'Notions of law and order in Muslim societies' will be the theme of the 1999 academy. It will be directed by Gudrun Krämer and be held in cooperation with the Moroccan Fondation du Roi Abdoul-Aziz Al Saoud in Casablanca.

Scholarly Partners

The Working Group Modernity and Islam aims at conducting research on socio-scientific, historical and cultural developments in Islam within a European and trans-mediterranean dimension. In this respect, Berlin, with its wealth of university and non-university institutions, provides considerable scholarly potential. Members of the Working Group are:

- Prof. Dr Ingeborg Baldauf, Mittelasienswissenschaft, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin;
- Prof. Dr Friedemann Büttner, Arbeitsstelle Politik des Vorderen Orients, Freie Universität Berlin;
- Dr Gérard Darmon, Centre Marc Bloch, Berlin;
- Prof. Dr Yehuda Elkana, Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin;
- Prof. Dr Ulrich Haarmann, Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften; Geisteswissenschaftliches Zentrum Moderner Orient Berlin;
- Prof. Dr Peter Heine, Institut für Asien- und Afrikawissenschaften, Humboldt Universität zu Berlin;
- Prof. Dr Gerhard Höpp, Geisteswissenschaftliches Zentrum Moderner Orient Berlin;
- Prof. Dr Gudrun Krämer, Institut für Islamwissenschaft, Freie Universität Berlin;
- Prof. Dr Wolf Lepenies (chairman), Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin;
- Prof. Dr Angelika Neuwirth, Orient-Institut der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft, Beirut;
- Prof. Dr Udo Steinbach, Deutsches Orient Institut, Hamburg;
- Prof. Dr Fritz Steppat, Institut für Islamwissenschaft, Freie Universität Berlin;
- Prof. Dr Dieter Weiss, Fachgebiet Volkswirtschaft des Vorderen Orients, Freie Universität Berlin.



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