

Atelier

The ISIM atelier, 'Africa and Islam: moral discourses on Islam and the construction of identities in local, national and transnational perspectives', will take place from February to May 2001. The focus will be on the dynamic relationship between supposedly global processes like Islamic resurgence, seemingly uniform Islamic and Islamist discourses, and the construction of local identities and transformations from the perspectives of local groups and communities.

One of the challenges of this atelier, in which researchers from the South and the North will participate, is the possibility of formulating a research proposal with researchers from different African areas. Such a proposal could further develop methodologies in an interdisciplinary perspective. Emphasis is placed especially on analysing texts in relation to contexts.

Resurgence of Islam

In the last decades, both the popular media and academic works have focused on the so-called resurgence of Islam. In these discussions, emphasis has been on areas that are traditionally associated with the Middle East, including North Africa, while large parts of the Islamic communities outside this area (e.g. Sub Saharan Africa) are often ignored. In 'peripheral' regions, challenges posed to Islamic communities by processes of modernity, modernization and globalization in some cases differ from and in others resemble processes taking place elsewhere in the Islamic world. One such

issue is the Islamic resurgence also referred to as fundamentalism, political Islam, or Islamism.

Islamist movements make use of 'moral discourses' which prescribe the 'right' attitudes, beliefs and conducts of Muslims. Similarities in rhetoric within these discourses which occur in different parts of the Islamic world might suggest uniformity both in the way they construct Islamic subject positions and in the meaning of Islam in everyday life. Nevertheless, differences in historical background have their bearing on current political, social-economic and cultural processes, and in turn influence the interaction of local groups with these Islamic discourses.

When studying Islam in Africa, Orientalist debates intersect with ideas related to 'Africanism'. The imagery related to Orientalism/Africanism results in diverse and peculiar notions and presuppositions among scholars about the ways in which Islam in Africa has influenced local communities and the formation of group identities.

Textuality

Related to the problem of Orientalism/Africanism is the implicit association of Africa with oral traditions. Though the latter are unmistakably of great importance for the dissemination of all kinds of knowledge, the existence of written traditions in various Islamic societies and the centuries-long existence of Islamic Universities in Africa should not be ignored.

Another assumption related to the neglect of textuality is that syncretism of Islam with local oral religions is seen as characteristic of 'African Islam'. Moreover, this local Islam, perceived by scholars as accepted and practised by all members of certain Islamic communities, is presented as homogeneous and static. Deconstruction of these presuppositions is necessary in allowing for greater understanding of simultaneously-occurring globalizing and localizing tendencies. Comparison of phenomena in specific contexts, and specific historical periods, is vital to understanding perceptions, interpretations, and reflections on Islam by

diverse groups in African societies.

Conference

During the 3 months of the atelier, two scholars from the South will be invited for more in-depth discussion, study, and analysis. Towards the end of that period (April 2001) a conference will be held with the (yet provisional) title: 'Standing on heaven/pulled into hell: Islam, globalization, and the construction of multiple identities'. The conference also takes as point of reference the transformations occurring all over Africa due to the processes of 'globalization' and 'modernization'. The main question is to what extent Islam and Islamic principles form part of processes of constructing identities of social groups in the face of current political, economic, social and cultural changes. How do different groups relate to Islam? Can new social groups be detected and how does Islamic identity converge in these new configurations? What other identities are of importance to understand the processes of identity constructions in Islamic societies and communities? What are the similarities and differences when comparing these processes of identity construction in different parts of Africa, and in different eras?

The outline of the conference is set, but as the coordinators of the atelier want it to be a conference with discussions on new themes and current issues, they will leave room for input from other colleagues, especially those working in Africa. The final programme will therefore be formulated once the major research topics of conference participants have come to the fore.

Format of the atelier

The atelier is based on current research conducted by José van Santen, coordinator of the atelier, who has vast research experience in Islamic Northern Cameroon (since 1986); and Karin Willemse has conducted fieldwork in Darfur, Sudan, since 1985. Two researchers from the South will be added as soon as possible.

The main mode of exchanging ideas and experiences will be the workshops, held once every fortnight with members of the atelier and other invited scholars. They will be organized by contacting members of different networks both in the Netherlands and abroad. ◆

Those interested in participating in the regular discussion may contact the ISIM or one of the organizers:

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EDUCATION AND TRAINING

ISIM MPhil Programme in Islamic Studies

The one-year ISIM MPhil programme in Islamic Studies was inaugurated in November 1999. The first group of ISIM MPhil students obtained their degrees on Monday, 24 July 2000, with a graduation ceremony in the historic Academy Building in Leiden. The ceremony was followed by a reception at the Hortus Botanicus. The academic quality of the MPhil students as well as their enthusiasm and hard work greatly contributed to the success of the programme in this first year. A group photograph of the students and the titles of their theses can be found on the ISIM website under the link 'Education and Training'.

Seven students, from Germany, Pakistan, Sudan, Taiwan, the USA, and the Netherlands, were admitted to the MPhil programme in 2000-2001. Professor Johan ter Haar (Department of Languages and Cultures of the Islamic Middle East, Leiden University) delivered the opening lecture on 'Recent Developments in Iran: Progress in the Persian Style'. This year, the programme consists of eight courses and a thesis. A number of scholars from abroad, including Professor Maribel Fierro (Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Madrid), Professor Abderrahmane Lakhsassi (Université Mohamed V, Rabat), and Professor William Roff

(University of Edinburgh), will contribute to the programme. The dates of their lectures will be announced on the ISIM website.

The MPhil prospectus for 2000-2001 and an application form for next year can be found on the ISIM website; a paper copy may be obtained from the ISIM office. The deadline for applications for the MPhil programme is January 1 of the calendar year in which one wishes to begin the programme. ◆

ISIM PhD News

The first ISIM PhD students, Welmoet Boender and Gerard van de Bruinhorst, started their research in September 2000. Welmoet Boender's research project is entitled 'The Role of the Imam in Turkish and Moroccan Mosque Communities in the Netherlands and Flanders', and is supervised by Professor Sjoerd van Koningsveld (Faculty of Theology, Leiden University); Gerard van de Bruinhorst's project is entitled 'Animal Slaughtering and Sacrifice in a Modern Islamic Society: Textual Knowledge, Ritual Practice and Collective Identity in Tanga (Tanzania)', and is supervised by Professor Léon Buskens (Faculty of Law, Utrecht University, and Department of Languages and Cultures of the Islamic Middle East, Leiden University).

PhD Students' Conference

The ISIM held a conference on 14 June 2000 for PhD students at Dutch universities working in the field of Islam and Muslim societies. The conference was attended by 40 PhD students of the universities participating in the ISIM, as well as the Erasmus University of Rotterdam, the Free University of Amster-

dam, and Tilburg University. The morning session included lectures by Muhammad Khalid Masud on 'Islam or Muslim Societies? A Question for the Students of Islam in the Modern World', by Sami Zubaida on 'The Idioms of Democracy and Civil Society in Modern Islamic Discourses', and by Professor Martin van Bruinessen on 'Ulama and Muslim Intellectuals'. Four PhD students presented papers on their research in the afternoon session: Karin Willemse on 'One Foot in Heaven: Gender, Islam, and the Construction of Multiple Identities in Darfur, West Sudan', Paul Schrijver on 'Governmental Policies towards Islamic Education in Sudan', Clementine van Eck on 'Honour and Honour Crimes among Turkish People in the Netherlands', and Oussama Cherribi on 'Moroccan Imams in Amsterdam'.

This one-day conference for PhD students will take place twice per year. It aims to promote communication and the exchange of ideas among Dutch-based researchers. If you wish to be kept informed of the PhD students' conferences, please contact Nathal Dessing (dessing@rullet.leidenuniv.nl) at the ISIM.

Key Issues in Human Rights: Master Class by Professor Abdellahi An-Naim

Professor Abdellahi An-Naim is the principal lecturer and convener of a master class for PhD students on 'Key Issues in Human Rights'. The course will take place in Leiden from 27-30 November 2000. It will cover the concept of human rights and their universality and cultural/contextual relativity. Furthermore, it will offer an overview of the main treaties, their implementation, and the role of non-governmental organizations, with special reference to Islamic societies. (See for the announcement of the masterclass p. 2).

The ISIM invites PhD students who wish to participate in the master class to send a brief curriculum vitae and an explanation of why they wish to attend to Nathal Dessing (dessing@rullet.leidenuniv.nl) at the ISIM by 1 November 2000. The fee for the master class is NLG 750.- Fee waivers may be granted in certain cases. ◆