

Islamic World / General
University of California, USA

This initiative stems from a series of individual meetings held in 1995-96 between the Director of the Humanities Research Institute (HRI), Dr Patricia O'Brien, and members of the humanities and social sciences faculties of the nine universities of the University of California system. Professors in different departments often expressed the need for time in which to examine issues that have risen out of movements associated with Islam and with Muslim communities which have taken place during the twentieth century, especially in recent decades. Faculty acknowledged the large body of work that has been done on these topics, but stressed the need for specialists in the different fields intersecting them to examine the given issues together, in a research setting, for an extended period.

Widening the sphere of involvement in these discussions, in the summer of 1996 the Institute contacted faculty at other universities in the nation about a possible research initiative at HRI. The number of responses received and the comments they contained confirmed that there is a real need for such an undertaking. HRI's next step was to hold an interdisciplinary forum on the topic, in November 1996. The attendees recognized that sometimes even on the same campus scholars are isolated from colleagues working on similar issues, so that Middle Eastern scholars may well be ignorant of Africanists or Asian specialists working on Muslim-based research problems. They all agreed that the tendency toward separation and fragmentation which exists on the departmental and disciplinary levels among Islamic specialists should be overcome, particularly for a research initiative. They emphasized the positive effect that interdisciplinary research on the topic would ultimately have on curricula and the classroom. They also stated the need to have disciplinary configurations reflect shifts in student populations that have occurred as a result of Muslim immigrations in recent decades. By the end of the day-long meeting the broad structure and general research themes of the multi-year research initiative were established.

In the spring of 1997, the Institute applied to and received a grant from the Office of the President of the UC system for seed funding in order to launch the multi-year initiative. We are in discussion with several private foundations about possible funding for the projects that will take place next year. Planning discussions for the second project of the initiative took place at HRI last spring, attended by Professors Leonard and O'Brien, several members of the initiative's special Advisory Council, and several other professors (Georges Sabagh, UCLA; Mehdi Borzorgmehr, CUNY) interested in the initiative as a whole.

Mission of the University of California Humanities Research Institute (HRI)

The principal purpose of the UC Humanities Research Institute is to provide a centre for collaborative, interdisciplinary research in the humanities among the scholars of the nine campuses of the University of California system and their national and international colleagues. Research conducted at the Institute usually requires the participation of scholars in humanities and social sciences disciplines, and may often require the participation of specialists in the sciences.

The Challenge of the Topic and the Goals of the Research Initiative on Islam and Muslims

The intellectual goal of this project is to improve our understanding of Islam and Muslims in the United States and throughout the world by examining the religion and its diverse expressions and practices; the global politics

University of California Humanities Research Institute

Multi-year Research Initiative on Islam and Muslims

of Islamic movements; the ethnic and national identities of Muslims; the importance of gender and citizenship issues, feminism, and family structures in various settings; the relationship between regional expressions and a global market economy, and a particular scrutiny of the development of Muslim communities in North America. The study's pragmatic goals are to produce and disseminate knowledge concerning these questions and issues. This will be accomplished through the publication of research findings, as well as through scholarly conferences, symposia, and colloquia.

Organizational Structure of the Research Initiative

Three core groups of scholars are constructing the studies and, in order to ensure meaningful and objective guidance for the overall project and crucial periodic reviews of progress, an Advisory Council of preeminent Islamicists has been formed. Research will comprise three broad clusters of themes. Each cluster will be addressed by a separate research group in residence at different times at the Institute. A series of workshops for members of all three groups will take place at the Institute during the initiative so that the initiative may be truly comprehensive in its approach and conclusions.

Project Participants

Each of these residencies will include scholars working across a variety of disciplines in the Middle East, Europe, South Asia, the Pacific, and the Americas. Working together in residency is crucial because, although historians, anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists, political scientists, literary theorists, religious scholars, historians, art historians, and others have investigated these questions, many have not had the opportunity to draw their findings together in the intensely collaborative and highly focused forum that a residential research group provides. Every indication from our planning a development is that the value added by collaboration will allow for new findings and new contributions to research development and policy formation. Members of Muslim communities will be visiting participants over the course of this initiative.

Residential Research Group I: Academic Year 1998-99. Gender and Citizenship in Muslim Communities

The role of Muslim women in the family and the community will figure prominently in the study. One of the projects will take as its point of departure the question of how women constitute themselves — as subjects and as citizens — in their social and political communities. Citizenship and related legal and property issues will constitute the core concern of this gendered approach. Issues that stem from certain religious concepts and which relate to the traditional roles and civil rights of women will be examined in light of current Islamic feminist activism. Scholars will look into the impact of

the globalization of women's movements as well as of human rights and cultural movements. This residency will also examine related NGO movements, and the competitiveness between NGO's and nation states. The roles of women's advisory groups, and how they often work through children's advocacy groups, will figure in this residency. The convener (project director) of this research group is Suad Joseph, Anthropology, UC Davis, and other scholars are drawn from the University of California system. Outside participants will be drawn from the local Muslim community.

Residential Research Group II: Academic Year 1999-2000. Muslim Identities in North America.

This residential group will focus on Muslims in North America, especially the United States and Canada. Islam is a fast-growing religion in the U.S., poised to displace Judaism and become second only to Christianity in the number of its adherents. This study will examine directions that Muslims are taking in North America. Scholars will look at how leaders of Islam conceptualize the new communities in North America, and how do they work towards integration in a democratic system. This proposal recognizes the diversity within this major world religion, particularly the diversity among Muslims in North America as immigrant and indigenous Muslims from many national, racial, class, and cultural backgrounds come together. There are African Americans and other indigenous converts, and immigrants from countries as diverse as Lebanon, Egypt, Iran, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. Major topics will be the transmission and reformulation of religious beliefs and behaviours, including gendered practices and the teaching of Islam in families and institutions. The convener (project director) is Karen Leonard, Anthropology, School of Social Sciences, UC Irvine. A call for applications for fellowships has been issued to all humanities and social sciences faculties at the nine universities of the University of California system. Scholars from outside the UC system may also be invited to participate. The group will also benefit from consultations with leaders and members of local Muslim communities.

Residential Research Group III: Academic Year 1999-2000. Islamic Modernities in an Era of Globalization: Discourses, Movements, and Diasporas

This study will be devoted to global economic and political perspectives of Islam. Themes include the Islamic revival, Islam in light of globalization, and the reactions of Islam to modernity. At the same time, the increasing numbers of Muslims in many areas of the globe, including the United States, call for an examination of their communities, their ties to each other and to Islam, and how their presence fits into or is a part of the larger societies in which they are minorities, as well as atten-

tion to those areas in the Middle East and South Asia where they are majority populations. The impact of Islam on the global economy is a subject of utmost importance, and scholars have debated for many years whether Islam is consistent with the logic of market economy. In addition, this study will look into Muslim immigrations and the movement of migrant workers back and forth across national boundaries. The electronic connections linking local communities — and, in fact, creating virtual 'cyber communities' which are much larger than the local communities will be studied. This project will also explore challenges to and opportunities for these communities to coexist and to integrate themselves in to the societies in which they find themselves. The convener of this research group is Paul M. Lubeck, Sociology, UC Santa Cruz. The other scholars who will participate in this study will be selected by April, 1999. A call for applications for fellowships has been issued to all humanities and social sciences faculties at the nine universities of the University of California system. Scholars from outside the UC system may also be invited to participate. ◆

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