

# international institute ISIM for the study of islam in the modern world

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The ISIM solicits your response to the ISIM Newsletter. If you wish to contribute to the Newsletter, style sheets may be obtained upon request from the ISIM Secretariat or on the ISIM website. In order to offer update information on activities concerning the study of Islam and Muslim societies, along with news on vacancies, grants, and fellowships, the ISIM relies on its readers. The information will be made available on the ISIM Website.

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The question of whether political Islam should be interpreted as a truly successful movement in the Muslim world has been matter of debate for nearly a decade (See 'Vingt Ans Apr s...' conference in Paris p. 3). Those who speak of its failure tend to argue that Islamist groups have failed to realize their goal of Muslim unity through the revival of the *umma* as a political entity and, on the national level, find great difficulty in creating a workable alternative to nationalist or other political trajectories. Whatever ones' viewpoint on the issue of failure or success, the impact of political Islam on politics in Muslim countries and beyond is undeniable. This is partly due to the perception of the phenomenon as a threat to dominant ideologies and structures by its opponents. It is clear that political Islam, both as a discourse and a practice, is established in an increasing number of Muslim countries, but the ways in which Islamic notions exert themselves and relate to local political infrastructures varies greatly. The political discourses of many Muslim countries are experiencing a shift towards a more religious-oriented vocabulary. Opposition movements in some of the few truly Islamic states have also internalized Islamic motifs. In countries such as Iran, where the state system is to a large degree moulded by the clergy, opposition movements have as yet little alternative but to articulate their aspirations in terms of religion. This process may have facilitated one of the more dynamic intellectual and societal discourses in the Muslim world, but its dynamism is limited in terms of political reform (Kian-Thi baut, p. 23; Alamdari, p.22). In sharp contrast with Iran, nearby Afghanistan witnessed the demise of any kind of national debate except that of contending militia organizations, such as the Taliban, in which tribal allegiances are inextricably intertwined with individualist loyalties (Shahrani p. 20-21).

Their use of religious imagery as well as the seemingly cynical uses of Islamic symbol in some other states, indicates that consistent reference to Islamic metaphors is part and parcel of current political parlance. However, political symbolism may merely represent a mechanism for disciplining the populace by way of rituals which are evidently devoid of meaning (Wedeen p. 25). Muslim activists, for instance in the Comoros Islands, are on the alert for – what would be in their eyes – improper appeals to divine principles by those in power (Chanfi, p.16).

One of the main effects of the emergence of political Islam is that, in effect, religion was reinstated as a key instrument of political action. As an instrument, it also now serves groups which are not considered 'Islamist' or 'fundamentalist', including the more heterodox Muslim groups, such as Alevism (Massicard, p. 29).

The increased political participation of what have historically been seen as traditional groups seems to have become a global phenomenon. It may be that these groups have finally adapted themselves to the general conditions of post-colonial rule and are regaining lost ground. Sufism has been part of the Muslim response to the challenges of modernity from the outset (Yavuz, p. 7). The present developments may be partly explained by the renewed attraction that Sufism holds for the emergent urban classes. This trend appears to be global, affecting national politics in countries as far-reaching as Senegal (Samson, p. 28) and Indonesia (Howell, p. 17), albeit in variant manifestations according to established local political cultures.

A new academic debate about the use and function of the so-called new media is emerging. As a result, a fresh body of literature on Islam is becoming available, including 'digital age' versions of time-honoured institutions like *fatwa*-giving (Bunt, p. 12). The new media are limited in relevance, given that the vast majority of Muslims have little or no access to them. Having said that, cyber discourses and satellite images are affecting the lives of an increasing number of Muslims, particularly the youth. For diasporic communities, the Internet may be used as an aid for the creation of a virtual homeland (Khosravi, p. 13). The increased relevance of both old and new media is becoming apparent in countries like Mali, where women's religious organizations have created their own niche in the broadcast media (Schulz, p. 27).

This Newsletter offers a bird's-eye view on various other topics in the lives of Muslims over the globe, including matters of health (Hoffer, p. 8) and death in Western Europe (Andrews and Wolfe, p. 15). The complexities of carving out space in host societies for the identities of immigrants, whether in Switzerland (Haenni, p.31) or Argentina (Brieger, p.) remain an important field of research, one on which the ISIM is currently designing a project entitled the 'Production of Islamic Knowledge in Western Europe' (to be announced shortly on the ISIM website). ♦

## Editorial

DICK DOUWES | Editor

### ANNOUNCEMENTS

## Summer Academy: 'The Local Production of Islamic Knowledge'

The Working Group Modernity and Islam and the ISIM, in cooperation with Yildiz University, are organizing a joint Summer Academy on: 'The Production of Islamic Knowledge'. The Summer Academy will be held in Istanbul, from 3-14 September 2001, under the direction of Prof. Martin van Bruinessen and Dr Altan Gokalp. In a multidisciplinary exchange between the humanities and the social sciences, supervised by a group of internationally-renowned scholars from various disciplines, participants will be given the opportunity to present their projects and to discuss new research as well as issues of theory and methodology relevant to their field of study. Travel and accommodation expenses will be offered to the participants.

#### Theme: The production of local knowledge

With the expansion of Islam through conversion and migration, Islam has

taken root in many parts of the globe. With this spread to a large variety of societies and cultures, Islam has undergone a dual process of universalization and localization, a process which is still ongoing. Its universal message was – and continues to be – adapted to local needs. This also holds true for areas in which Islam was introduced in the modern period, in particular Western Europe and the Americas. Divergent historical trajectories have meant that each region may have its own distinctive Islamic practices, discourses, and infrastructures. Diasporic communities, in the West as well as in predominantly Muslim countries, add to the complexity of the interplay between local and transnational contexts in which Islamic knowledge is produced. The new media – and some of the old ones as well – play a crucial role in this production.

#### Conditions of application

The programme addresses postgradu-

ate (doctoral) and postdoctoral researchers in Islamic as well as relevant area studies, history, anthropology, law and social science. The researchers' work should be clearly relevant to the theme as described above. A broader outline of the theme, including sub-themes, can be found on the websites of the ISIM ([www.isim.nl](http://www.isim.nl)) and the Working Group Modernity and Islam (<http://www.wiko-berlin.de/>). The working language of the Summer Academy is English. A completed application form (either to be requested from the ISIM secretariat or downloaded from the ISIM website), accompanied by a curriculum vitae, a five-page outline of one's current research project with a brief summary thereof, and two letters of recommendation from university faculty members should be submitted, in English, by 15 January 2001 to:

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The working group Modernity and Islam (Arbeitskreis Moderne und Islam) is a research network of Berlin universities and extra-university institutions committed to promoting a deeper understanding of Muslim societies, their cultures, history, and social and political orders.

For information, please contact:

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## ISIM Master Class: 'Key Issues in Human Rights'

The ISIM invites applications for the ISIM Master Class 'Key Issues in Human Rights' by Professor Abdullahi An-Naim (Charles Howard Candler Professor of Law, School of Law, Emory University). The class is to be held for 12-15 PhD students.

Dates: 27-30 November 2000

Time: Daily from 11:15 to 13:00 and from 14:15 to 16:00

Venue: In Leiden, to be announced

#### Course Outline

Objective:

In addition to giving a general introduction to human rights, this course

will focus on key issues (economic and social rights, and rights of the child) in order to emphasize the evolving and far-reaching implications of human rights to global social, political, and cultural development.

Description:

During the first two days, the course will cover the concept of human rights and their universality and cultural/contextual relativity; give an overview of the main treaties and their implementation; and discuss the role of non-governmental organizations, all with special reference to Islamic societies. The third day will focus on a discussion of

economic, social, and cultural rights, and the fourth day on children's rights issues, in a comparative national context (European and developing countries). Professor C. Flinterman and Professor F. van Hoof of the SIM, Faculty of Law, Utrecht University, will lead the course discussion on Wednesday and Thursday.

Course materials:

Henry J. Steiner and Philip Alston, *International Human Rights in Context: Law, Politics, Morals*, 2nd edition. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000. A detailed outline, prescribing specific readings from this book will be distributed to

successful applicants at least four weeks prior to the course for advance reading.

Fee:

The fee for the master class is NLG 750.- Fee waivers may be granted in certain cases.

Applications:

The ISIM invites PhD students wishing to participate in the master class to send a brief curriculum vitae and an explanation of why they wish to attend to N.M. Dessing at the ISIM by 1 November 2000.