



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

Editorial

Pelkmans, M.

Citation

Pelkmans, M. (2007). Editorial. *Isim Review*, 19(1), 4-4. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/17108>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

License: [Leiden University Non-exclusive license](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/17108>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

MATHIJS PELKMANS

Market expansion and technological innovations have aided (or forced) the global movement of ideas, people, and commodities. But the directions, contents, and consequences of these movements continue to defy simplistic categorizations: they broaden horizons and have synergetic qualities, while also producing frictions and reinforcing attempts to fortify boundaries. Desire and disillusion, hope and fear are propelled side by side in a globally interconnected world. Connectedness also produces disconnectedness, as illustrated by the pictures on the back cover. Driven by hopes of a better life and enticed by images of the modern, migrants risk everything to reach desired destinations in Europe, only to find themselves stuck in refugee camps on the Canary Islands, waiting to be “returned” to square one. Their faces show exhaustion and despair, reflecting their encounter with an entrenched Europe as much as the arduous journey. What, then, does global connectedness mean for the less fortunate, what paths do people, ideas, and goods follow, and what forces try to curtail these flows? By looking at the mechanisms that govern connectedness we highlight its unevenness and unforeseen consequences.

Demonstrating that you are “connected” is often crucial for establishing authority, even among groups that are usually portrayed as local or “traditional.” The female marabouts in Dakar described by Gemmeke (p. 36) boost their authority not only by demonstrating links to the divine, but also by stressing their credentials of international travel and a clientele which extends beyond national boundaries. As Howell (p. 22) shows, urban Sufi groups in Indonesia de-emphasize links with the past, instead using the language of “modern-style general education” to attract middle and upper class Indonesian cosmopolitans. While this desire to connect to the modern can be detected in many cases, the models to which people aspire are no longer singularly located in “the West.” Muslim businessmen in India look to the cities of the Arab Gulf for models of a “Muslim modernity” (Osella and Osella, p. 8). In post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan, following a 70-year separation from the rest of the Muslim world, residents are rediscovering Islam through the Orientalized images of Moroccan Muslims featured in Brazilian soap operas. Ironically, these images enable Kyrgyzstani watchers to overcome Soviet stereotypes and conceive of a modern Islam (McBrien, p. 16). Such perceptual shifts regarding the locus of the modern may reflect the waning desirability of Europe, certainly for Muslims.

The title of Arjun Appadurai’s recent book *Fear of Small Numbers* (2006) poignantly captures this trend. He links the new xenophobic sentiments in Europe to “the anxiety of incompleteness” (p. 8), a fear produced by the effects of global transformations yet projected

onto minority groups. European fears concerning Muslims—fear that migrants will flood the continent even though their labour is direly needed (Albahari, p. 30); fear that an increased Muslim presence will undermine freedom of expression (Caeiro and Frank, p. 26); and recent Dutch fears that dual citizenship breeds disloyalty to the nation—show the way connectedness breeds obsessions with purity and homogeneity. Remarkably, these anxieties are based on the behaviour of small, and often low-key, groups of people, as Moors shows in her analysis of the “burka” debate in the Netherlands (p. 5). This suggests that these fears are equally propelled by the looming threat of an uncontrollable flux as they are informed by a lack of concrete interaction with “otherness.” Focusing on the UK, Tarlo shows that the media spectacle surrounding a face-veil controversy actually conceals the variety of opinions of British Muslims on veiling, thereby fostering the idea of British—Muslim incompatibility and bolstering politicians’ arguments on anti-immigration policies. Fear of difference, particularly of religious difference, is clearly mocked in the title “The Islamists are Coming!” (Noor and Zöller, p. 15). Despite the cynical title, the authors optimistically conclude that more face-to-face contact would lessen the misunderstandings and miscommunications that feed these anxieties. By reflecting on the desires and worries that promote, discourage, and channel movement, the articles in this issue contribute to the ongoing discussion of how Muslim societies and communities continue to shape themselves in an increasingly interconnected world.

ISIM

The International Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World (ISIM) conducts and promotes interdisciplinary research on social, political, cultural, and intellectual trends and movements in contemporary Muslim societies and communities. ISIM was established in 1998 by the University of Amsterdam, Leiden University, Utrecht University, and Radboud University Nijmegen in response to a need for further research on contemporary developments of great social, political, and cultural importance in the Muslim world from social science and humanities perspectives. ISIM’s research approaches are expressly interdisciplinary and comparative, covering a large geographic range which includes North Africa, the Middle East, Sub-Saharan Africa, Central Asia, South and South East Asia, and Muslim communities in the West. Broad in scope, ISIM brings together all areas of disciplinary expertise in anthropology, sociology, religious studies, political science, and cultural studies.

ORGANIZATION

Board

Ton van Haften (Chair)
Vice-Rector of Leiden University
Karel van der Toorn
President of the University of Amsterdam
Yvonne van Rooy
President of Utrecht University
Roelof de Wijkerslooth de Weerdesteyn
President of Radboud University Nijmegen

Advisory Council

Nicolaas Biegman
Photographer, former Netherlands Ambassador
Job Cohen
Mayor of Amsterdam
Sadik Harchaoui
Director of Forum Institute for Multicultural Development
Farah Karimi
Senior Consultant UNDP, Kabul
Els van der Plas
Director of the Prince Claus Fund for Culture and Development
Paul Scheffer
Wibaut Chair at the University of Amsterdam, writer

Chairs

Asef Bayat
ISIM Chair, Leiden University
Martin van Bruinessen
ISIM Chair, Utrecht University
Annelies Moors
ISIM Chair, University of Amsterdam

Staff

Asef Bayat
Academic Director
Marlous Willemsen
Deputy Director
Nathal Dessing
Researcher & Educational Coordinator
Mathijs Pelkmans
Editor
Dennis Janssen
Publications & Projects Officer
Sandra van der Horst
Office Manager
Yvonne van Domburg
Soumia Middelburg-Ait Hida
Ada Seffelaar
Secretariat