

ISIM Beirut Meeting

One of the objectives of the ISIM is to build cooperation networks with academics and institutions in other countries in order to develop the field of the study of Islam in the modern world as a scientific discipline and to seek institutional collaboration in this respect. The first of such meetings was held in Beirut on 27 May 1999 with the German Orient Institute in Beirut as host. Scholars from academic institutions in Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan, and Syria attended the meeting.

In addition to the introduction of the ISIM, the agenda of the meeting aimed at, firstly, the development of the field of the study of Islam in the modern world and, secondly, the modalities of cooperation. Martin van Bruinessen presented the research approaches and a thematic profile of the ISIM. He stressed that the institute's approaches are interdisciplinary, grounded in the social and cultural sciences and building upon the insights of history and religious studies. He explained that the Institute will conduct its research on the developments associated with modernity, modernization and globalization. He identified four main areas of interest in this re-

spect: intellectual debates, Islam and State, Muslims in diaspora, and transnationalism. The ensuing discussion recognized the need of closing the gap between Islamic studies and social sciences through comparative and multi-disciplinary approaches. Some commented that in the region, the gap may be too wide, given that Islamic studies are often understood as the reproduction of religious guidance and that it would be difficult to satisfy the entire field. Moreover, the practice of interdisciplinary approaches is rare. It was remarked that the production of a state-of-the-art in relevant fields and discourses in the different regions was vital in order to address the current fragmentation. So far overviews are lacking.

Commenting upon the ISIM Research Approaches and Thematic Profile (see ISIM Newsletter 1, p. 3) most participants expressed that the initiative is remarkably ambitious given its broad orientation and most welcome given the lack of comparable initiatives. Critical remarks on the ISIM profile were invited. Several participants observed that moderate Islam is the mainstream expres-

sion, but that the influence of more radical forms of Islam should not be downplayed because it provides leadership to communities. Moderates, it was said, sometimes lack the confidence needed for political action.

The concern was expressed that social science approaches de-emphasize the more traditional views and the purely religious aspects of Islamic revivalism. On the other hand Islamicists tend to attach too little importance to fieldwork and contextualized understandings of Islam. In particular in the field of gender, fieldwork is imperative because reliance on textual sources only obscures gendered differentiation. It was also stressed that the ISIM research agenda should not be restricted to the Western views and concerns; it must also reflect Muslim voices.

The discussion on possible ways of cooperation focused on the development of resources, in particular source materials, both digital and otherwise, and on the establishment of networks of cooperation. It was agreed that the meeting served as the starting point of building a network for the region. ◆

Participants

- Prof. Aşye Ayata
(Middle East Technical University, Ankara)
- Prof. Mehmet Aydin
(Dokyu Eylül University, Izmir)
- Prof. Sadiq Jalal al-Azm
(University of Damascus)
- Prof. Ahmad Baydoun (Lebanese University)
- Dr Dalal el-Bizri
(Lebanese University/Cairo University)
- Prof. Martin van Bruinessen
(Utrecht University/ISIM)
- Dr Dick Douwes (ISIM)
- Dr Mona Fayad (Lebanese University)
- Dr Nizar Hamzeh
(American University of Beirut)
- Dr Johannes den Heier
(Netherlands-Flemish Institute, Cairo)
- Prof. Fehmy Jadaane
(Jordan University, Amman)
- Dr Farid Khazin
(American University of Beirut)
- Prof. Muhammad Khalid Masud (ISIM)
- Dr Annelies Moors
(University of Amsterdam)
- Prof. Ahmad Moussalli
(American University of Beirut)
- Dr Muhammad Sammak (Ijtihad)
- Prof. Ridwan al-Sayyid
(Lebanese University/Ijtihad)
- Dr Thomas Scheffler (Orient Institute, Beirut)
- Prof. Erik J. Zürcher (Leiden University/ISIM).