

IRP Conference 2010
Knowledge Exchange
about Muslim Societies:
Policy and Research
Synergies

CAIRO
3/4 NOV
2010

PROJECTS IN BRIEF



Islam Research Programme: **Projects in Brief**

This booklet includes a short overview and up-to-date description of all projects which are included in the programme ‘Strengthening Knowledge of and Dialogue with the Muslim World’ in the autumn of 2010 and is directed at all those who are involved in the IRP as ministerial or embassy staff, researcher or coordinator. The briefing is also composed by way of preparation for all conference delegates of the 2010 IRP Conference, which takes place in Cairo on November 3-4, under the name ‘Knowledge Exchange about Muslim Societies: Policy and Research Synergies’.

The briefing includes details of each project with an emphasis on project objectives and methodology. In the case of projects in the final phase, some intermediary findings may be described. In the case of projects in the primary phase, the piece will stipulate aim and approach. You will see that the contributions vary in size and nature, reflecting the variety of methods and research questions of each individually tailored project. However, the articles will make clear that all projects share the aim of providing academically-researched information about issues in Muslim countries that are of relevance to Dutch policy officers.

Project Office IRP hereby hopes to sufficiently inform all delegates of the most recent developments of projects in other countries in advance of the November conference. This collection of short articles is expected to enhance the quality of the exchange of knowledge at the conference by bringing all delegates up-to-date and thereby facilitate the speed and effectiveness of this meeting.

Strengthening Knowledge of and Dialogue with the Muslim World

Islam Research Programme in General

Since May 2008, the Project Office Islam Research Programme (Project Office IRP) has conducted the coordination and management of the research programme ‘Strengthening Knowledge of and Dialogue with the Muslim World’ (in short: Islam Research Programme) for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (DSO/OO). The Project Office IRP is administered by a consortium between Leiden University and PriceWaterhouseCoopers Advisory.

THE ISLAM RESEARCH PROGRAMME

The contemporary Islamic world is changing, and the revival of ‘Islam’ as a political, socio-economic, and religious factor in this part of the world has received a great deal of attention. Within the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and at a number of Netherlands’ embassies in the Muslim world a need has arisen for more knowledge of societal trends and movements. Considering developments in the relations between Muslim and non-Muslim countries as well as between Muslims and non-Muslims in various countries, investment in knowledge of the Muslim world is clearly of great importance. The increased attention to religion and development in foreign policy also helps to illustrate the need for this knowledge.

The Programme concentrates on research on contemporary developments in the Muslim world that are relevant for Netherlands’ policy development in the field of international cooperation. Research topics fall within the areas of Islamic law, politi-

cal and socio-economic developments, and culture and religion. The research projects are planned and carried out in close consultation with Dutch policy officers at embassies in various Muslim countries, and they are aimed at gaining, sharing and using knowledge of recent developments in the Muslim world. Participation of researchers (m/f) from countries that are part of the Programme contributes to research capacity building in these countries.

Within this research programme, collaborations are commenced between the Netherlands' embassies in the Muslim world, on the one hand, and scholars and research institutions, on the other. Within the programme, scholars carry out research that answers questions relevant to policy formation at the diplomatic mission involved. The research projects are implemented by researchers or research institutions in cooperation with local researchers and in consultation with the Netherlands' diplomatic missions that have commissioned the research. Interaction between the diplomatic mission and the researcher is an integral part of the project. In addition to research activities, so-called "knowledge activities", such as discussion meetings and workshops, are also organised.

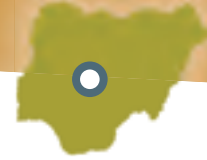
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- **Roos Meertens** (*Project Officer*)
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- **Cheng Yu Kwok** (*Controller*)

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Identities, Politics & Society



Raufu Mustapha

The IRP Abuja research project is a collaboration between the University of Oxford (United Kingdom) and the development Research and Project Centre (Nigeria). The project was commenced in October 2010 and will last until September 2012.

FUNCTIONS AND DYNAMICS OF RELIGION

PROJECT OBJECTIVE

The IRP Abuja research programme is designed to combine the strengths of good academic research with the societal relevance of policy-oriented research. Religious faith and its institutions are of unparalleled significance in Nigerian society today. Exploring their functions and dynamics will therefore help to identify entry points for policy interventions not only in the area of conflict resolution, but also in other areas of socio-economic and human development. In addition to its research sub-projects, the IRP Abuja programme aims to establish an inter-faith dialogue platform for public intellectuals in northern Nigeria. It is hoped that this dialogue platform will help to feed-back the research findings to various religious communities and secondly, assist in refining policy prescriptions.

ISLAMIC ACTORS AND INTER-RELIGIOUS RELATIONS

TWO THEMES

In line with the two priority research themes of the Abuja research programme, this collaborative Oxford-dRPC research

project encompasses two overarching thematic areas: (1) having a better knowledge of Islamic actors as a basis for facilitating dialogue with them; and (2) understanding the interdependent and policy-relevant theme of inter-religious relations. In order to examine these dynamics, it is essential that the research programme focuses on strategic and politically relevant States in contemporary Nigerian affairs, especially Plateau, Kaduna, and Kano. These three States contain important urban clusters: Jos in Plateau was a major centre of mining, a major cosmopolitan centre and a major cultural and spiritual centre for northern Christians; Kaduna has historically been the political capital of the north; and Kano is the acknowledged commercial capital of the region. Unfortunately, despite the pre-eminence of these cities, they have been torn apart and badly ruined by religious conflict, leaving the north even more vulnerable to poverty, rising intolerance, and worsening social indicators. A better understanding of the large populations of Muslims of various ideologies and affiliations, as well as diverse denominations of Christians in this region will facilitate better policy intervention and enhance the promotion of inter-faith dialogue. This project seeks to promote such an understanding. We are concerned with the social dynamics and influence of these diverse religious groups, the relations between them, and the ways in which emerging tensions at times escalate into violence and how best to address episodes of conflict and violence. The research will therefore aim to answer the following questions:

1. What are the characteristics of the main Islamic communities, groups, and actors in Nigeria, particularly in the north?
2. What are the dynamics of inter-faith relations between Muslim groups and between Muslims and Christians?



A subsidised tricycle in Kano as alternative “proper” mode of transport for Muslim women.
PHOTO BY DAVID EHRHARDT, 2006.



Annual Eid celebrations in Kano.
PHOTO BY DAVID EHRHARDT, 2008.

TWO PHASES

To address these large questions, the programme has been divided into 10 sub-projects that are to be conducted in two phases. Phase 1 aims at providing overviews of the Islamic communities and institutional actors in the three main northern geopolitical zones (North Central, North East, and North West), as well as a critical review of the literature on inter-faith relations. Building on the insights of these initial studies, Phase 2 will then zoom in, firstly, on specific aspects of Islam in Nigeria's north: its historical development, its relations to youth and education, and the intersections between Islam and ethnicity. Secondly, Phase 2 will also address three crucial aspects of inter-faith relations: strategies of conflict resolution, relations between Muslim and Christian institutions, and the role of the informal economy in patterns of inter-faith conflict and cooperation.

The project involves seventeen researchers and seven senior expert advisers drawn from Nigerian, UK, and Dutch universities, and independent scholars from the US and policy research centres in Nigeria.

→ **Dr. Raufu Mustapha**

(Research Coordinator, University of Oxford)

Managing Religious Diversity in a Changing World

Thijl Sunier, et al.



The VU University Amsterdam and the University of Utrecht conducted a research project that aims to analyse the role of the Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyamet) today, both in the Netherlands and in Turkey. It is impossible to understand the role of Diyanet in the Netherlands without understanding its policies in Turkey in the last decades. The Diyanet project was conducted between October 2009 and November 2010, in which month the final report will be presented.

PROJECT OBJECTIVE

The research started from the assumption that the relation between religion and state in both Turkey and Western Europe is complex and dynamic. Diyanet illustrates this complexity because it is an institution of a secular state that – paradoxically – is a major actor in Turkish religious life. According to the official Kemalist state ideology, Islam may not be labelled ‘state religion’, but in fact there exists an ‘official Islam’, represented by Diyanet, and which is Sunni and loyal to the government.

The research project focussed on the functioning of Diyanet since the coming into power of the AKP-government (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, Justice and Development Party; a party with Islamic roots) in 2002/2003, to be able to come up with some conclusions on the widespread assumption that the AKP tends to stress the important role of Islam in its vision and programmes and therefore could influence the socio-religious and political landscape in Turkey. The central question is: How do the recent changes in the religious and political balances of



power (the coming into power of AKP) influence the position and political-religious decisions of Diyanet, and the relationships with the other players in the 'religious field'. The policy

relevance of the question lies in the fact that an adequate view on the position and political-religious decisions of Diyanet is important for European authorities making policies on issues in which Islam (could) play a role, like immigration, integration or the accommodation of religion. The scholarly relevance is the fact that it questions the view whether and/or how the fault lines between 'official' and 'parallel' Islam are moving since the AKP-government came into power, and provides information on this almost classical mantra about religious division in Turkey.

IMPORTANCE OF DIYANET

Diyanet (which was founded in 1924, after the abolition of the caliphate and to replace the institution of *şeyhülislâmlık*) is an important actor in organising the religious life of Muslims both in Turkey and in Western-Europe. Initially, the institutionalisation of religion in Turkey meant that Diyanet mainly functioned as an apparatus to control religion: the Turkish way of dividing 'state' and 'religion'. In Turkey Diyanet still appoints the imams in mosques and provides religious and moral guidance. In Western European countries with sizable Turkish immigrant communities, including the Netherlands, many Turkish Muslim associations and mosques are affiliated to Diyanet and have an imam appointed by the Directorate. The position of the 'official Islam' in Turkish society and its relations with the 'parallel Islam' is not static, but reflects the movements and shifts within the political and religious field of powers in Turkey since the proclamation of the Republic in 1923 until now.

PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SOURCES

Besides secondary literature, primary sources were used by the researchers, such as documentation and interviews with scholars, politicians, religious authorities and members and boards of civil society organisations. The research was carried out both in Turkey and in the Netherlands. Some tentative conclusions are as follows.

ISLAM FROM OLD-FASHIONED SYMBOL TO ELEMENT OF URBAN MIDDLE CLASS

We observed that during the last three decennia, some important developments took place in Turkey, among which the emergence of a new, urban (Islamic) middle class, the liberalisation of the economy (since the 1980s), the emergence of a ‘civil society’, and (since the end of World War II) democratisation are the most important. Those developments resulted in a changing role of Islam within society. Islam became an element of a relatively highly educated, urban middle class instead of an old fashioned symbol of rural and backward lifestyles. But because Islam settled down in the urban, public sphere, and because a political movement came into existence just because of that development, the political polarisation around Islam in Turkey increased even more than before. It is this background that we should keep in mind while trying to understand the electoral success of the AKP, and, ‘*evet*’ [yes]-result of the referendum on constitutional changes that took place on the 12th of September 2010.

DIYANET AS SOCIAL PARTNER RATHER THAN CONTROL INSTITUTE

Diyanet kept pace with the abovementioned developments. On the one hand, it could be argued that Diyanet is indeed still an instrument of the Turkish State, institutionally connected with the state, and therefore the state and government do have influence on, for example, appointments within Diyanet. On the other hand, we observed a shift of the tasks of Diyanet, from

mainly a controlling apparatus towards providing services and being a partner of the Muslim population rather than a control institute. We called this *vermaatschappelijking*, a stronger emphasis on the social functions of Diyanet. Both in Turkey and the Netherlands we observed a stronger emphasis on societal activities. Theologically speaking, there seems to be a slight move towards a more inclusivist, but also more scientific (Sunni, Hanafi) approach of Islam, and a careful step towards a dialogue with other ‘branches’ within Islam. Among other aspects, the aforementioned change of approach, could be observed by studying the appointed ‘figure heads’ within Diyanet during the last decennium. But this theological change still seems to be a ‘sensitive issue’.

AKP’S ROLE IN A CHANGING RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE

That brings us to the question whether the AKP did, since 2003, cause (or force) a substantial change within Diyanet, or the religious landscape in Turkey as a whole. We tend to say “no”, because AKP seems part of the changes itself as well. But, on the other hand: “Yes, of course, because all governments leave their marks, which is not something unusual.”

THE MEMBERS OF THE RESEARCH TEAM IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER:

- **Alper Bilgili** (*Istanbul University, researcher*)
- **Nazlı Bilgili** (*Sabançı University Istanbul, researcher*)
- **Dr. Nico Landman** (*Associate Professor, Utrecht University, senior researcher*)
- **Heleen van der Linden** (*VU University Amsterdam, researcher*)
- **Dr. Thijl Sunier** (*Professor, VU University Amsterdam, project coordinator*)



Islamic Preaching and the New Media

*Islamic Actors and their Discourses
in the Public Domain*

Sabine Dorpmüller, et al.

The Cairo project consists of an extensive ‘mapping’ of Islamic actors, organisations, their discourses and activities with a focus on the following research question: What communication strategies do Islamic preachers use to address issues of citizenship in the public sphere? The research project on Islamic actors in the Egyptian public sphere is a cooperation between the Netherlands-Flemish Institute in Cairo (NVIC) and Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies (ACPSS). The project started in April 2010 and lasts until November 2011.

DISCOURSES AND DEVELOPMENT

In the past decades the influence of religion on society and politics in Egypt has grown significantly. For the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Cairo it has become increasingly important to have a thorough understanding of religious discourses in the most populous country of the Arab world in order to analyse domestic political and societal developments. In particular, some Islamic actors within Egyptian society are rather effective in providing certain services at a local level. Being home to the prestigious Azhar University, a plethora of satellite channels and an active blogosphere, the influence of Egyptian Islamic actors also reaches far across the borders of Egypt. It is important to learn where their work and goals converge with

the development cooperation program operated by the Embassy and its human rights policy.

In turn, this can contribute towards advising the Dutch government on its policy towards Egypt. At the same time, the Embassy has a role in explaining Dutch policies and current public debates in the Netherlands to the Egyptian government and public. In order to conduct effective public diplomacy, the Embassy needs to stay fully informed on recent trends in religious discourses and to identify relevant interlocutors for dialogue. The research on Islamic actors and their discourses in the public domain is expected to contribute to all these policy objectives and to help expand the network of the Embassy in this field.

PHASE I: MAPPING OF ISLAMIC ACTORS AND DISCOURSES (APRIL – OCTOBER 2010)

The first phase of the project consists of an overview which aims to map the various Islamic actors active in Egypt today.

These actors have been divided into the following categories:

- Official actors: al-Azhar, Dar al-Ifta'a, The Ministry of Religious Endowments, Committee of Religious Affairs in Parliament
- Political actors: The Muslim Brotherhood, al-Jihad and al-Jama'a, al-Wasat and al-Amal Parties
- Social actors: Sufi Tariqas, Salafi Movements, Islamic NGOs, social clubs, religious salons
- Independent Islamic intellectuals: al-Wasatiyya and critical intellectuals
- New independent preachers

Each of these actors will be examined in terms of their legal and societal status, their activities and target audience, their positions and discourses on certain issues such as human rights, citizenship and poverty alleviation, and their communication strategies.

The final part of the mapping will focus on the use of new media by Islamic actors in Egypt. Special attention will be given to the use of the internet via websites, blogs, chat rooms, etc by various Islamic actors in order to disseminate their ideas and

discourses. The role of satellite television in disseminating various discourses will also be examined.

PHASE 2: RESEARCH ON ISLAMIC PREACHING AND THE NEW MEDIA (NOVEMBER 2010 – OCTOBER 2011)

Within the Islamic public sphere preachers are pivotal figures. They play a prominent role in Egyptian society, engage as social activists and are involved in moulding Islam at multiple levels. It seems that the new media such as Islamic satellite channels and online social media have a considerable impact on religious authority. They enable preachers to reach large audiences both in Egypt and abroad, leading to the question as to whether they increase the opportunities for preachers to touch upon political and social issues. This will form the topic of the second research phase, with which five different researchers will busy themselves. The individual research projects will investigate:

- Islamic Actors as an Agent for Development in Egypt?
- Islamic Groups and Egyptian Identity
- Young Muslim Brothers and the New Media
- Islam Online: Regional Politics, Transnational Media and Global Islam
- The Quest for Authority: How Ordinary Muslims become Preaching Stars

THE MEMBERS OF THE PROJECT TEAM IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER:

- **Rabha Allam** (ACPSS, junior researcher)
- **Meline Arakelian** (Netherlands Embassy, second secretary, press and political affairs)
- **Paulien Baujard** (NVIC, junior researcher)
- **Dr. Sabine Dorpmüller** (Associate Professor, NVIC, senior researcher)
- **Dr. Kim Duistermaat** (Director NVIC, project manager)
- **Hadeer Elmehdaway** (ACPSS, junior researcher)
- **Allaa El Roubi** (ACPSS, junior researcher)
- **Otto Genee** (Netherlands Embassy, deputy head of mission)
- **Eman Ragab** (ACPSS, junior researcher)
- **Dr. Dina Shehata** (ACPSS, senior researcher)

Interview

How does the Cairo project benefit from the cooperation between academics and policy-makers? Project Office IRP asked the hosting country for some internal views. Junior researchers Paulien Baujard and Rabha Allam interviewed Otto Genee and Dina Shehata to find out.

How does the Netherlands Embassy expect to benefit from the project? Does working with researchers in the field meet (some of) the needs of the embassy?

OTTO: “We hope to gain a better knowledge of Islam and its broad array of actors, as well as to extend our network. Things are different when we work together with local actors. In the long term, we have great confidence that the research project will be relevant. The process itself is important - we have been part of the process: it is not just the commission of a report which ends up being shelved a few months later. We have to invest more time in participating, but it will be worth it.

When the project started there was also an in-house need in terms of bilateral relations, hence the focus on important elements of our policies (human rights, gender and equality, poverty alleviation) and the mapping of actors. We hope to be able to use the report in our public diplomacy efforts to promote dialogue between the West and the Islamic world. Over the last year we have intensified our contacts with the official religious organisations, but the report provides many more perspectives.”

How does the ACPSS respond to these hopes and expectations?

DINA: “Well, we are one of the most capable institutions in Egypt to deal with this. We contribute a big wealth of local knowledge and experience of reality on the ground, as well as linkages with local and international actors. We fully take part in the debate, and we are both inwardly focused on Egyptian society and outwardly engaged in dialogue with institutions in the Arab and non-Arab world. It is our role to contribute to this dialogue, to help base decision-making on actual knowledge as opposed to vague opinions and misconceptions.”

How do you regard academic cooperation between Dutch and Egyptian researchers?

OTTO: “We have a general policy of broadening bilateral relations between The Netherlands and Egypt in which context we also want to promote and encourage academic cooperation. Our development cooperation program may be coming to an end, because Egypt no longer qualifies as a poor developing country – the main priority of Dutch development aid. So we are shifting towards partnership with civil society actors, including academic cooperation – we do not want to limit our bilateral exchanges to mere commercial relations. We would instead like to facilitate cooperation between institutions.”

DINA: “Cooperation between researchers from the Arab world and Europe unfolds at two levels: firstly the level of interpersonal exchange, which increases mutual understanding and reduces ‘otherness’. We learn to resolve issues together. Secondly, on the level of the actual research produced itself, the exchange of expertise is very enriching and informing. We bring local knowledge, but we benefit a lot from theoretical and methodological input. Like you said, Otto, there is not enough cooperation, there should be more of it, it leads to better relations and better research.”

The team members of the Cairo project, from right to left: Yusuf Said (trainee), Meline Arakelian, Radwa Khorshid (Press & Public Diplomacy Assistant, NL Embassy), Rabha Allam, Dina Shehata, Eman Ragab, Sabine Dorpmüller, Kim Duistermaat, Otto Genee, Paulien Baujard.



Dakar

Observations from Dakar



The Dakar project is run by the African Studies Centre in the Netherlands. The project started in September 2008 and lasts until the end of December 2010. Below follow a number of observations from the research coordinator, Mayke Kaag.

The Dakar programme consists of three sub-projects: the first serves to analyse the relationship between Islam and politics, in particular the influence of the Senegalese Islamic brotherhoods on politics and vice versa. The second focuses on the role of Islam (Islamic actors and networks, Islamic values) on the economy and the investment climate, and the third project analyses the role of Islamic actors and ideas in the public debate on good governance in Senegal. What was particularly interesting is that throughout the research, the findings of the three sub-projects came to increasingly reinforce one another, contributing to the emergence of a dense picture of the changes and continuities of the role of Islam in Senegalese society over the last decades.

The first sub-project has painted the longer term historical trajectory, indicating that diverse developments both in the political and the religious domain have contributed to a progressive interpenetration of these spheres. The second and third project have shown how against the background of this historical evolution, Islamic actors reflect, react to and co-shape this historical evolution through their strategies and actions, respectively in the economic sphere and in civil society.

Whereas the first sub-project serves mainly to provide the Embassy staff with background knowledge on the role of Islam in Senegalese society, the second and third sub-projects aim to provide more practical policy recommendations. In the case of the second project these concern recommendations to Dutch

investors in Senegal and to the Embassy as a supporter of these investors. The third project includes recommendations to the Embassy on possible collaboration with (categories of) religious actors in its efforts to contribute to good governance in Senegal.

In addition to the execution of academic research, the programme has aimed at the creation of a knowledge network for the Embassy, consisting of academics, journalists, religious leaders, Islamic organisations etc, that can be consulted by the Embassy concerning questions on Islam in society. For this, a database with relevant actors has been built by two junior researchers and in November 2009, a network meeting was organised during which the Islam programme was presented to a very diverse audience representing a great number of religious and academic categories. At the end of this year [2010], a second network meeting will be held. The Senegalese members of the steering committee have also been very valuable brokers with the Senegalese Muslim community.

The Dakar programme is one of the larger programmes within the full Islam Research Programme. It has run for two years now and is currently entering its final phase. During the past two years, three Senegalese senior researchers, one Dutch senior researcher, three Dutch and four Senegalese junior researchers have worked on the role of Islam in Senegalese society. I, as the Dutch senior researcher, have acted as the academic research coordinator. I was supported by a steering committee, consisting of the ambassador, an Embassy specialist and three Senegalese academics with a special knowledge of, and a special interest in the role of Islam in Senegalese society. The Senegalese members of the steering committee have regularly given feedback on preliminary results of the research during lively debates in which both researchers and Embassy staff also contributed.

I think that the programme has been an interesting and insightful experience for both researchers, embassy personnel and others involved. It has generated knowledge on the role of Islam in Senegalese society, but also on research-policy collaboration. We realised that, particularly in a policy context that is rather fluid (i.a. through policy changes, embassy staff changes, and changing actualities in the countries themselves), collabora-

tion between researchers and policy makers should go beyond answering immediate policy questions in order to be fruitful in the longer term. That is one of the reasons why in the course of the programme, the accent shifted somewhat to capturing the process of knowledge formation and its translation into policy. In fact, we have aimed to set into motion and reinforce a process by which embassy specialists better learn how to think and analyse as academic researchers, and by which academic researchers learn more to think as policy makers. These issues are of course difficult to measure, but I hope the programme will have had some impact in this respect. The programme has certainly had an impact in terms of capacity building of young researchers by offering them chances to work in a policy context that they otherwise would have difficulties to access. For me, it has been a great pleasure in particular to collaborate with this new, bright and ambitious generation of young scholars.

**THE MEMBERS OF THE PROJECT TEAM
IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER:**



- **Dr. Abdoul Azize Kebe** (member steering committee)
- **Selly Ba** (intern)
- **Mamadou Bodian** (intern and researcher)
- **Dorinda ten Brinke** (intern)
- **El Hadj Malick Sy Camara** (intern)
- **Jos van Dijk** (intern)
- **Dr. Cheikh Gueye** (senior researcher)
- **Dr. Mayke Kaag** (research coordinator)
- **Marieke Kruis** (intern)
- **Dr. Penda M'Bow** (member steering committee)
- **Dr. Abdou Salam Fall** (senior researcher)
- **Abdourahmane Seck** (intern)
- **Dr. Ibrahima Thioub** (member steering committee)

Jakarta

Islam in Contemporary Indonesia: New Trends and Contestations

Nico Kaptein



The IRP Jakarta research project is contracted by the Training of Indonesia's Young Leaders Programme which forms part of the Leiden Institute for Area Studies (LIAS). The project started in 2010 and will be completed in December 2012. The project aims to analyse recent religious trends in contemporary Indonesian society.

PROJECT OBJECTIVE

The research programme aims to create a better understanding of issues in relation to Islam which can be used in policy dialogues. Conclusions and observations derived from the research are expected to contribute to estimating the value-add of specific programmes of the Embassy. The Embassy has an interest in looking more closely at the role of religion in the political, cultural and societal context. This is important in a country with the largest Muslim population in the world, consisting of over 200 million people.

The research is mainly executed by Indonesia-based post-doctoral researchers, who in a next phase will be assisted by junior researchers. This will not only enrich the Embassy's understanding on the issues, but will also broaden its network and build up future relations between researchers, policy officers and key figures in Indonesia.

THREE SUB-PROJECTS

In consultation with the IRP Project Office in Leiden and the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Jakarta it has been decided to focus on three issues, which are relevant to Dutch policy development. The project aims to provide ample material for conducting better-informed foreign policy in Indonesia, e.g. related to human rights, (religious) pluralism, and the strengthening of the position of women. The three issues are:

SHARIA-BASED LEGISLATION IN INDONESIA

This research follows developments related to the further implementation of Islamic law in Indonesia, which has become more widespread after the fall of President Suharto in 1998, both on the national level and – in the wake of the decentralisation politics since 1999 – on the regional level. The research will primarily focus on the position of women and children in legal practice by examining a number of laws on familial issues particularly those that relate to women and children such as the Law of Marriage and the *Kompilasi**, and some sharia local regulations such as that of Serang in Banten, and of Cianjur. It will give a comparison between international treaties and local practices with regard to the position of women and children and will look at the different attitudes of various judges and factors influencing the differences. Thus far a number of court cases were collected and court sessions attended.

DEVELOPMENTS RELATED TO ISLAM IN ACEH

Aceh is the only province in Indonesia which is constitutionally allowed to implement sharia. In this region, therefore, sharia is no longer a private matter; it is also that of the state. Much research has been done on the implementation of Islam in Aceh in the last decade. The question of how the Acehnese respond to it – especially critically – has so far been neglected. Moreover, most national and international knowledge of the region has been derived mainly from the media, which give the impression



that most of the Acehnese have accepted the state-imposed sharia and there are no dissenting voices. This research aims at uncovering the extent to which the critical and alternative voices to official sharia discourses have developed in Aceh, especially since the Tsunami. Since it is impossible to have a comprehensive survey on this subject due to its sensitivity, data will be collected from interviews, observations, photographs, local newspapers, and other printed sources. Thus far at least one main group which develops an anti-sharia discourse has been identified, namely the Majelis Pengkajian Tauhid Tasawuf (MPTT) which held a conference on 9-10 March 2010. This suggests that the Sufis are one of the most important agents of resistance to 'sharia-isation' in Aceh.

DEVELOPMENTS WITHIN ORGANISATIONS AND PARTIES WITH ISLAM AS THEIR BASIS

The last piece of research looks at contemporary developments by using the press and by fieldwork. The following organisations and parties are followed: Nahdlatul Ulama and PKB, Muhammadiyah and PAN, as well as PKS. This study will focus on the impact of Muslim organisations (NU, Muhammadiyah and

Tarbiyah movement) and the *ulama* group on the three political parties mentioned, with the emphasis on the socio-political attitudes and behaviour of their political elites. These three parties and organisations represent the three main Muslim leaders of Indonesian Islam: NU-PKB represent the so-called traditional Islam, Muhammadiyah-PAN represent the so-called modernist Islam, and PKS which aims for a stronger presence of Islam in public life. Thus far a number of party conferences were attended and contacts with key figures were made.

THE MEMBERS OF THE PROJECT TEAM

IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER:

- **Marise van Amersfoort** (*programme officer*)
- **Dr. Jajat Burhanuddin** (*post-doc researcher*)
- **Dr. Léon Buskens** (*Professor, Leiden University, senior consultant*)
- **Dr. Kees van Dijk** (*Professor, Leiden University, senior consultant*)
- **Dr. Nico Kaptein** (*Leiden University, research coordinator/senior consultant*)
- **Dr. Moch. Nur Ichwan** (*post-doc researcher*)
- **Dr. Euis Nurlaewati** (*post-doc researcher*)
- **Junior researchers** (*still to be recruited*)

- * The *Kompilasi Hukum islam di Indonesia*: a legal reference work with regards to things Islamic, issued in 1991 to be consulted by all judges in religious courts

Khartoum

Islam & Society in Sudan



Eva de Ridder

The overall objective of this assignment is to carry out policy-relevant scholarly research on Islam and society in Sudan. This project is expected to last 12 to 18 months, and will likely commence in February 2011. As the project is still in the tendering phase, the research institutions have yet to be selected.

Project Office IRP asked the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Khartoum, hereby represented by Eva de Ridder, to describe the areas where further on-the-ground knowledge is needed.

THE EMBASSY'S ENVIRONMENT

The Embassy's programmes range from the protection of human rights, promotion of good governance and the rule of law to economic development and the enhancement of security. Seeing the broad range of areas the embassy is involved in, there is a need for a better understanding of the broader context in which it operates. This is even more imperative given the critical juncture with the upcoming referendum on self-determination for South Sudan in January 2011.

It seems that in order to understand Sudan one must better understand the role of Islam in society. The embassy has observed that decades of conflict between North and South Sudan have related in part to different views on religion in society. In North Sudan the majority is Muslim, sharia law has been applied, and an Islamist republic was instituted. In contrast, South Sudan is predominantly Christian and "animist." The signature of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement between the



North and South in 2005 initially brought more stability to the country and opened possibilities for development and peace-building, based *inter alia* on the confirmation that “religion shall not be used as a divisive factor” (Machakos Protocol). In recent years, Sudan has witnessed dramatic changes through the new oil wealth, increased investment, and remittances, as well as new arenas of conflict, for example, in Darfur. These developments have raised a number of important questions. Although the authorities based in Khartoum seem to favour a dominant role for Islamic law and culture in society, how is such ideology implemented in practice? How do scholars, religious leaders, youth and minorities view the role of religion in society? What are the latest religious trends? Which new trends are influencing the society, economy and politics? How influential and successful are Islamic institutions such as *zakat* in the realm of humanitarian assistance? How are the benefits of *zakat* spread and which groups are excluded from those benefits?

A study of the role of religion in society is aimed to help the embassy in their political reporting and identification of possible, interesting discussion partners. The research outcomes can contribute to the future engagements and strategies of the Netherlands in Sudan. With the right kind of knowledge, back-

ground information, and information sources, the Embassy would be better equipped to understand and assess local developments in Sudan, as well as the regional and international contexts.

RESEARCH TOPICS

The following three themes have been identified as relevant topics of research. The project will focus on one or two of the following:

Religion and Economics

Until now there has been little research on the relationship between economic activities and religion, religious leaders, institutions, and movements. Potential topics include the role of economic elites, the influence of religious endowments (*waqf*), Islamic humanitarian assistance, including Islamic NGOs, and/or *zakat* (alms-giving or charity), and Sufi orders. There may also be a focus on the development of the Islamic banking sector in Sudan.

New and Emerging Religious Trends

A second theme which may be explored is new and emerging religious trends. This research theme would consider the role of religious actors and organisations and the discourses on Islam they articulate or to which they refer in the wider society. The emphasis would be on youth and students, such as new kinds of preachers, the influence of Sufi orders and Sufi leaders, and the increased activities of new Islamic groups, including Islamists. Moreover, since women have long been very active in the Islamic movement in Sudan, the study of women's involvement in contemporary Islamic organisations might be included. This sub-project may also look at the discourse of religious actors on issues related to development such as cultural diversity, individual rights, and human rights.

Position of Minorities after the Referendum

Considering the strong interest of the Embassy in issues of conflict prevention, human rights, and cultural diversity, a third possible theme focuses on minorities after the upcoming referendum. This sub-project would therefore consider the role of Muslims in the South and Christians in the North in the aftermath of the planned referendum and the possible independence of the South on the position of minorities and interreligious relations. What has been the position of religious minorities in the country, and how has that changed over time? Such research would be carried out through a select number of case studies.

ENHANCING COOPERATION & DIALOGUE

The research programme will work with a European research institute as well as Sudanese scholars and junior researchers. First, this will help to promote objective academic research capacity in Sudan. Second, by bringing Sudanese researchers and policy officers of the embassy together, new relationships and mutual understanding can be promoted, and this can be mutually beneficial to both parties. If feasible, a conference in Sudan open to academic researchers will be organised in order to foster open dialogue about the research results. The research results and public discussion will assist the Embassy to identify possible future engagement and cooperation in Sudan. By bringing these different groups together, the project would also help to strengthen the relations between different groups within Sudan, as well as between the Netherlands and Sudanese society and research institutions.

Ouagadougou

Islam in Burkina Faso:

What is at Stake for Development?



Dutch Development Cooperation in Burkina Faso – one of the poorest countries in the world – has been active over the last forty years. The Netherlands are also one of the most important OECD development partners of the country, especially in the fields of education, health, gender and human rights. Within the framework of the Islam Research Programme by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Dutch Embassy in Ouagadougou has formulated a research theme that aimed at making an inventory of the characteristics, activities and importance of the Islamic actors in contemporary Burkina Faso.

The Ouagadougou project is a cooperation between the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies (IHEID) in Geneva, École des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (EHESS) in Paris and Institut de Recherche pour le développement (IRD) and the Department of History and Archeology of the University of Ouagadougou. It is administered by Radboud University Nijmegen in the Netherlands. The project started in July 2009 and is at the time of writing (October 2010) in the phase of completion.

RESEARCH TOPICS

The project deals with three interrelated research areas. The first, mainly conducted by Dr. Fabienne Samson concerns the various Islamic groupings. The second, mainly investigated by Dr. Fenneke Reysoo is an inventory of Islamic civil society organisations and their main activities. The third area of the

Mosque, Ouagadougou.

PHOTO BY SALIF OUÉDRAOGO, 2009.



research, jointly undertaken by Dr. Reysoo and Prof. Issa Cissé, addresses the educational, health and economic sectors of society and how various Islamic actors operate in these fields.

Typology of the Plurality of Islam

Islam in Burkina Faso is diverse and consists of various groupings with their particular historical development, interpretation of the sources and socio-political strategies. The first part of the research has resulted in a typology of the plurality of Islam: “*Communauté musulmane du Burkina*”, the Tidjanis, the “*mouvement Sunnite*” and the Ahmadis. Despite an urge for unity, inter- and intra-group disputes have resulted in fragmentation.

Civil Society

After the introduction of the 1992 Law on Free Association, civil society organisations have proliferated (more than 2000). Islamic organisations add up to about 200 and are active in various sectors: private sector education, health care, humanitarian action, but also media, organisation of the pilgrimage to Mecca and of religious festivals. Many have contacts abroad and open up opportunities for young people to study outside Burkina Faso, particularly at the main universities of the Arab world.

Private Initiatives in Islamic Education

Burkina has its own particular history of private initiatives in Islamic education compared with neighbouring countries. These schools (adding up to around 10% of the total, the majority of which in rural areas) satisfy a need of Muslim parents to have their children educated in an Islamic environment. They also allow young professionals with a diploma of higher education from the Arab states to integrate into the job market.

Implementation of Reproductive Health Programmes

Fifteen years after the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD, Cairo 1994) Burkina Faso still knows high fertility rates, high maternal and infant mortality rates, and low contraceptive prevalence. Recently, UNFPA has deployed specific strategies to integrate Islamic leaders in promoting the principles of the reproductive health programmes. The creation of the *Réseau Burkinabé des Organisations islamiques pour la Population et le Développement* (RBOIPD) is part of this plan.

Islamic Actors and the Economy

Commerce and Islamic expansion in the region are historically linked. Less documented is the fact that the hesitation of Islamic parents to send their sons to Catholic schools under colonial occupation opened up avenues for young Muslims to enter business. This historical process is reflected by the number of Muslims that occupy key positions in the Chambers of Commerce and Industry.

THE MEMBERS OF THE PROJECT TEAM

IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER:

- **Dr. Issa Cissé** (Professor University of Ouagadougou, researcher)
- **Dr. Fenneke Reysoo** (IHEID, research coordinator)
- **Dr. Fabienne Samson** (EHESS and IRD, researcher)

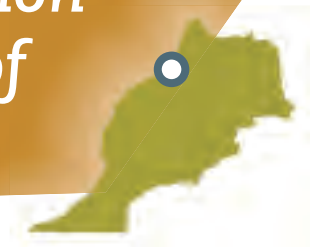
Mosque, Ouagadougou.

PHOTO BY SALIF OUÉDRAOGO, 2009.



Policies Crossing Borders: **the Impact on Integration & Identity Formation of Dutch Moroccans**

Krista Schram



The Rabat project of the Islam Research Programme is a collaborative initiative of FORUM, the Dutch Institute for Multicultural Affairs and Leiden University. The project started in September 2008 and will be completed in January 2012.

PROJECT OBJECTIVE

The Rabat project both serves as a PhD research programme as well as a knowledge source for Dutch policy makers vis-à-vis Morocco and Moroccans in the Netherlands. The aim of this research is to present an analysis of Moroccan policy, both its objectives and instruments, directed at Moroccans who live abroad, in particular the Netherlands. In Morocco, this policy is meant to create and/or strengthen links with the country of origin. The questions that the research will aim to address include whether and how Dutch Moroccans experience the effects of these policy initiatives. What impact, for instance, do these policies have on the integration process and identity formation of Moroccans in the Netherlands?

The research project aims to generate sufficient knowledge to allow these questions to be answered in the long term. In addition, the programme aims to provide the knowledge necessary for the Dutch Embassy in Morocco to improve their understanding of Moroccan policies in this respect.



INTERMEDIATE RESULTS

The first phase of the project consisted of mapping the Moroccan governmental institutions and policy instruments in Morocco directed at Moroccans who live abroad. At this point in time it is possible to draw some preliminary conclusions about the effectiveness

of these instruments. It has been observed that the different (semi-) governmental institutions have overlapping tasks. This leads to the conclusion that there may well be strong internal competition, and at least a lack of efficiency. There seem to be a few other reasons why the effect of these policy instruments is limited, including the hierarchical top-down structure, a shortage of financial means and a mutual lack of confidence.

Recently, field work in the Netherlands has started in order to gain better insight into the consequences of Moroccan policy on Dutch Moroccans. In this respect, the project distinguishes itself from the other projects of the Islam Research Programme with an emphasis on the relation and interaction between Dutch Moroccans and the Moroccan state. At the start of 2011 a Moroccan researcher will be appointed to undertake research activities in Morocco.

INTERACTION BETWEEN ACADEMICS AND POLICY OFFICERS

The Rabat project is a multi-year programme with the intention to set aside sufficient opportunity for knowledge sharing and discussions between scholars, experts and diplomats. Intermediate results are presented bi-annually in a policy-friendly format in order to make the information accessible and available for immediate use by policy makers. At the start of the project an introductory meeting was organised in Rabat, in which scholars sketched an idea of the public orientation of Dutch Moroccans and the developments in this respect through the

different generations. Moreover, the development of Moroccan foreign policy was discussed within the historical and politico-social context of Morocco. The role of religion within Moroccan society as well as religious adherence of Dutch Moroccans with particular focus on Dutch Moroccan youngsters, were topics that were given much attention. The meeting was important as it allowed the researchers to discuss the current state of knowledge on these issues and thereby sharpen and define further the research questions.

IMPORTANCE OF REMITTANCES

Further dissemination of knowledge takes place through a yearly fact sheet of the topics that are relevant for policy makers. The first fact sheet gave an overview of the research done into remittances. This piece of research looked at the developments, both in terms of nature as well as size, of money transfers by Dutch Moroccans to their home country. If trends can be distinguished, the fact sheet can help the embassy and researchers understand a possible link between remittances and the more general policy of the Moroccan state in respect of Moroccans living abroad.

MEMBERS OF THE PROJECT TEAM

IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER:

- **Dr. Maurits Berger** (*Professor, Leiden University, supervisor*)
- **Dr. Léon Buskens** (*Professor, Leiden University, supervisor*)
- **Halim El Madkouri** (*FORUM, advisor*)
- **Merel Kahmann** (*Leiden University, researcher*)
- **Krista Schram** (*FORUM, project coordinator*)

Riyadh

Reform and Change in Saudi Arabia



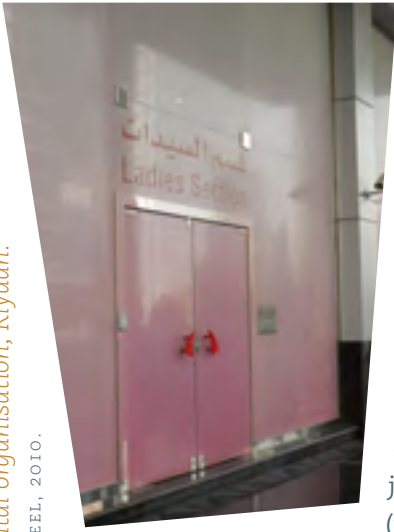
Roel Meijer, et al.

The Riyadh project is a collaboration between Clingendael Institute (the Netherlands) and Radar Groep BV. The project was commenced in April 2010 and will be completed in December 2011. The Riyadh project aims to collect empirical evidence about the most recent developments in Saudi Arabia in relation to the role of civil society, the position of women and the occurrence of intellectual debates. The importance of the Riyadh project also lies in the fact that Saudi Arabia is regarded as a central actor within the region.

PROJECT OBJECTIVE

The goal of this research project is, on the one hand, to gain an insight into the developments in the fields of civil society, the rise of women, and intellectual trends & debates, and on the other to promote and foster practical cooperation between researchers and organisations in Saudi Arabia and the Netherlands. For the latter, one can think of the fields of civil society, culture, science and education.

Having an open inter-cultural dialogue in a constructive way is a meaningful instrument to create mutual understanding and more respect for cultural diversity. The project therefore seeks to gather more knowledge about the local society, its values and beliefs. This will equip the Embassy to better understand and assess local developments and their Saudi, regional and international contexts. Furthermore, the project will help to build up a durable network in a society that is socially and culturally very different from that of the Netherlands. It is hoped



this network will contribute to cooperation between the two countries. The focus areas of this research project are civil society, the rise of women, and intellectual trends and debates in Saudi society. The three projects are, of course, related to each other. Whereas the project on the role of women focuses on interviewing women and analysing their ideas on *ikhtilat* (gender mixing), the “intellectual trends and debates” project concentrates on interviewing the male counterparts (male journalists, intellectuals and religious scholars (*ulama*) and the textual side of these debates

found in the printed press and other publications, including those written by women. The Saudi civil society project focuses on this topic as a whole, interviewing intellectuals, journalists and activists, while the second project focuses only on the contributions of Saudi civil society actors to intellectual trends and debates on women’s issues and minority rights in the context of Saudi citizenship.

THE RISE OF WOMEN FROM SEX SEGREGATION TO PARALLEL FEMALE INSTITUTIONS

The overarching research question is: to what extent do Saudi women perceive and experience the creation of parallel female spaces in education, the workforce and civil society as a viable strategy for furthering the “rise of women”? This project investigates which developments have been taking place in three subfields (education, the labour market and civil society) with regard to the construction of separate female spaces and how these developments are valued by women themselves.

This proposal works from the idea that policies can only be successfully implemented if it works from the own understandings and experiences of women in the region. Sex segregation is a cornerstone of the Saudis’ interpretation of Islam. In Western analyses female segregation is usually understood as an important barrier to women’s advancement and participation. Yet in accordance with the Arab Human Development Report it could

also be understood as epitomising “difference between the sexes”, of which “the most should be made”.

During the first fieldwork period in KSA (June 2010), female students and young working women were interviewed in Jeddah. Results showed that both segregation and *ikhtilat* are occurring in the public space in Jeddah. Some women believe segregation should be strengthened in order to increase their participation in public life, others claim segregation is a first step that should be taken on the way to *ikhtilat*, and yet others believe segregation should be weakened and *ikhtilat* should become more accepted without delay. There seems to be an agreement that change is best achieved by means of dialogue, not confrontation.

In the second phase of the research project, the research will be extended so as to also include the opinions of religious teachers and preachers, businesswomen and activists.

INTELLECTUAL TRENDS AND DEBATES ON ISSUES RELATED TO SAUDI CITIZENSHIP

This project focuses on the following question: what intellectual trends and debates can be discerned in Saudi society as expressed in the media, civil society, fatwas etc. about issues related to Saudi citizenship and how can they help or hinder societal and political reform? By concentrating on debates about women’s segregation in Saudi society and citizenship rights, this research investigates who participate in these debates, what their points of view are and to what extent they can contribute to a fuller citizenship for both women and religious minorities.

The research for this project has so far concentrated on an extensive reading of the existing secondary literature. This has yielded a historical framework through which the current attempts to stimulate or stop reform in the areas concerned should be seen, showing that present-day viewpoints are actually strongly rooted in the history of Saudi Arabia and are not just tied to ideological convictions but also to questions of influence and interests. Although the various protagonists in debates sometimes have different points of view depending

on the subject, generally speaking three main groups appear to exist in the trends and debates: those who want to keep the current system of unequal rights in its entirety, those who are prepared to make small concessions in order to preserve the system as a whole and those who want to reform the system altogether.

Since only a small part of this project takes place during its first phase, in 2010, no fieldwork has been conducted yet. During the second phase, fieldwork in Saudi Arabia will focus on interviewing some of the protagonists in the debates, including religious scholars, writers and representatives of women's/minority rights groups.

CIVIL SOCIETY

The overarching research question is: to what extent does Saudi Arabia's civil society have a socio-political transformative potential? Related sub-questions are: what are the main developments of political and social reform in Saudi Arabia in the aftermath of the 1990-91 Gulf War? What are the main drivers of change? What is 'civil society' and who are its main actors? How do the actors themselves envisage their role within civil society? Can political attitudes be inferred from social attitudes (i.e. is there a simple linear movement from religious conservatism to social conservatism to political conservatism — or even support for political authoritarianism?).

During the last two decades, the concept of 'civil society' has become a coin of wide circulation in all Muslim countries in the Middle East. Usually it is referred to in an unequivocal positive way by intellectuals, human rights activists and (some) politicians alike. As such, it is widely regarded as an ideal to strive for by all actors who aim for progress and democratisation in the Middle East. However, contrary to optimistic predictions, and after more than two decades of civil society promotion, not much improvement has been made and it increasingly looks like civil society is not the force of democratisation as it was supposed to be. This research project therefore aims to consider the role of civil society in Saudi Arabian reform.

The field research in June consisted of interviews with members of civil society to get access to their ideas and expectations and to find out whether they could play a positive role in the processes of change in the Kingdom. The research will also include a literature study and will mainly involve the use of secondary literature and media analysis of newspapers and digital web-sites. Special attention will be paid to the Internet and the way people in Saudi Arabia deploy modern communication technology. This is important because different users of the Internet in Saudi Arabia organise themselves as voluntary groups on the net and it provides a forum for different initiatives. One even could speak of an emerging ‘digital civil society’ in Saudi Arabia.

MEMBERS OF THE RESEARCH TEAM

IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER:

- **Paul Aarts** (University of Amsterdam, research coordinator; supervisor “civil society” project)
- **Mohammed Cheppih** (advisor)
- **Annemarie van Geel** (researcher “the rise of women”)
- **Dr. Mariwan Kanie** (researcher “civil society”)
- **Dr. Roel Meijer** (research coordinator; supervisor “intellectual trends & debates” project)
- **Dr. Karin van Nieuwkerk** (supervisor “the rise of women” project)
- **Joas Wagemakers** (researcher “intellectual trends & debates”)



IRP's Objectives and Aims: Views from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs

The Project Office IRP interviewed the officer responsible for the Islam Research Programme at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, Dr. Fon van Oosterhout, to find out what the Ministry's aims and objectives are with the programme.

“What does the Directorate of Social Development hope to gain from ‘Strengthening Knowledge of and Dialogue with the Muslim World’, i.e. the Islam Research Programme? Or: what are the underlying motives for the Islam Research Programme?”

“Well, the Islam Research Programme actually started in 2005 and was an initiative of the Directorate for Culture, Education and Research (DCO, which later turned into DSO). At this time, a new policy document was developed with a strong focus on the *use and usefulness* of research for policy making. Research and policy relevance had to be intrinsically linked.

At this time, Dutch embassies sought for better and more-informed knowledge about the Muslim contexts in which they were operating due to the fact that the Muslim world rapidly underwent and witnessed new developments and movements. In order to make appropriate and effective policy, the Dutch representation in Muslim countries needed to better understand the context in which they operated. In order to do so, they looked for academic viewpoints on the practical issues they had to deal with.

For these reasons, there was both a need for a better understanding of particular issues, as well as for knowledge exchange among researchers and embassy staff, and between different embassies. To address these needs, the Islam Research Programme was established, firstly within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs itself; due to its popularity and its consequent expan-

sion from two projects to ten, the programme was outsourced in 2008.”

“What areas of research is the ministry particularly interested in (politics, economics, jurisprudence, religion, culture)?”

“In fact, the programme does not have any limitations or strict stipulations in terms of its research areas. This comment must be placed within the recent developments in the Muslim world, which I described above: the project needs to fall within the larger context of religion and specifically Islam and Muslims. The main focus point is ‘Research & Innovation’ as part of the programme of *National Innovation Systems* and elements that are related to ‘good governance’. This may include all the research areas you mention above, to the extent in which they impact governance. This is closely related to the idea that the new policy document came forth from the more general development goal of capacity building in the South. Besides, we wanted to challenge those scholars to step down their Ivory Tower.”

“What types of methodologies and eventual output are in your view of most use to policy officers?”

“We do not have one single preferred methodology; it is up to the embassy to decide the research theme and up to the researcher to propose a methodology in agreement with the embassy. What I can say though is that the Ministry supports guiding principles with a focus on demand articulation, user-friendliness and policy relevance. I could also say that in general the embassies prefer qualitative methods, as they give a better insight into the sensitivities and preferences of particular issues.

In terms of the output, we find it difficult to make full use of long reports, books or PhD theses. Academic articles serve our needs better, as do fact sheets, seminars and conferences. However, what eventually is presented is always embassy-dependent.”

“In what ways can, according to you, the cooperation between academics and policy officers be improved?”

“This is not an easy question. For years both scholars and policy officers have noted that the cooperation between the two parties is not self-explanatory or necessarily fruitful. Both parties agree that it needs to be improved. I believe that the necessary pre-condition is that it is a joint undertaking from start to end. I also believe that academic research can be extremely useful to policy officers, whilst at the same time scholarly work can become more precise and focused by keeping policy directives as a frame.

There is another aspect to the programme, which makes it unique. This concerns the fact that the informal exchanges can be as productive as, or even more useful than, formal outputs. I am hereby, for example, thinking of the expansion and updating of the embassies’ networks and contacts. The process is as important as the result and there is a huge potential for a dynamic piece of research.”

“What does the Directorate hope to gain from the November 2010 conference?”

“The November conference has two main focus points. The first is *reflection* on what has been achieved up until now: ‘where are we in the process?’, ‘what lessons can be learned about the link between research and policy?’ are some of the questions included in this first aim. It has been noted that the previous conference which was held in November 2009 was rather academic. In the 2010 conference there needs to be more emphasis on the exchange and discussion of on-the-ground experiences. This is important for it allows the programme to analyse which problems are common or exceptional. This brings me onto the second goal of the 2010 conference, which is the *practical application of academic knowledge*. The conference will include workshops and discussions about skills training in order to improve the effectiveness of the cooperation between scholars and policy officers. This means that both sides will need to consider more successful ways to translate research results into policy recommendations. If we can achieve those two aims, we should applaud the initiative.”

COLOPHON

- Editors **Hannah Mason, Dennis Janssen**
- Design **De Kreeft, Amsterdam**
- Print **EPS, Amsterdam**

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Upper right: Al-Azhar Mosque, Cairo.

SUHAIB SALEM/REUTERS, 2006.

Below right: The Al Faisaliyah Tower, Riyadh.

FAHAD SHADEED/REUTERS, 2010.

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