

SOCIOLOGY OF ISLAM & MUSLIM SOCIETIES

SPRING 2008 NEWSLETTER No. 1

VIRGINIA TECH - DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY 560 MCBRYDE HALL, BLACKSBURG, VA 24061 - USA



WELCOME TO THE SOCIOLOGY OF ISLAM & MUSLIM SOCIETIES NEWSLETTER

An Open Publication of News, Announcements, Editorial Comment

Dear All,

Welcome to the Sociology of Islam & Muslim Societies Newsletter at Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University (Virginia Tech). This is our first issue, and we will publish the newsletter three times a year — at the end of each semester in the Fall, Spring and Summer.

In this newsletter we plan to publish Islam and Muslim Societies related news at Virginia Tech, and in general. This will include information about conferences, panels, courses, new books and articles. For the next issue, we welcome your short articles, book reviews, conference and panel information or other work related to Islam and Muslim societies. Please feel free to share your research abstracts and other academic efforts.

On April 10, Gary Wood and Tugrul Keskin, with support of the Sociology Department and the Sociological Association at Virginia Tech organized a lecture by Kemal Silay. Dr. Silay presented a talk titled “Islamist Imaginations of Turkey’s Ottoman Past: Counter-Revolution Through Culture and Politics.” Dr. Kemal Silay is a Professor of Central Eurasian Studies, Ottoman and Modern Turkish Studies Chair Professor, and Director of Turkish Studies at Indiana University, Bloomington. You will find a summary of his speech inside the second page. This summary was prepared by Kathleen Carper, an undergraduate student at Virginia Tech.

For the first time at Virginia Tech a graduate level course on Islamic Political Thought was taught by Dr. Rachel Scott in Spring Semester ‘08. This followed the first undergraduate course, Sociology of Islam, which was taught in Fall ‘07 by Tugrul Keskin. This course, with a high undergraduate enrollment, was possible with support from the Sociology and Religion departments at Virginia Tech.

At the end of Spring ‘08, a long time Middle East expert and historian at Virginia Tech, Dr. William Ochsenwald, was retired. We congratulate him for his long time service to the community and to the study of Middle East history.

A Columbia University Professor, Richard Bulliet, came to Virginia Tech on March 19 and presented a lecture titled “The Case for Islamo-Christian Civilization”. This event was organized by the Middle East Working Group at Virginia Tech.

An Associate Professor of Religious Studies, Dr. Ananda Abeysekara, recently published a book entitled “A Politics of Post-Secular Religion: Mourning Secular Future”, released by Columbia University Press.

The Social Science Research Council (SSRC) has launched a scholarly discussion blog on Secularism, Religion, and Politics. You will find a variety of topics and subjects included at this site, and you can participate in this academic discussion by visiting the following web site:

http://www.ssrc.org/blogs/immanent_frame/

Please consider sending us your announcements, abstracts, short research articles, interviews and other short material. These will necessarily be short pieces of about 1300 words, suitable for this newsletter, but the topic, scope and structure are wide-open. We look very forward to hearing from you. Contact information is included inside.

Peace to you all,

Tugrul Keskin and Gary Wood

May 19, 2008 / Blacksburg, Virginia

Dr. Kemal Silay's at Virginia Tech

by Kathleen Carper, English, kcarper@vt.edu

When I first heard about Professor Kemal Silay's speech here at Virginia Tech, I had no idea what to expect. The topic, Islamist Imaginations of Turkey's Ottoman Past, definitely seemed complex and difficult. After hearing him speak, I stand by my opinion that this subject matter is extremely dense and complicated, but I'm glad that I experienced a subject so different from my normal life.

When he began, Silay spoke about religion. One of his first slides talked about Kemal Ataturk, the founder of Republic of Turkey. One thing mentioned on the slide was, "We are only trying not to mix religious affairs with the affairs of the nation and the state." Silay went on to discuss this topic further with many examples, deliberately explaining that Turkey is a secular and democratic republic.

The next topic he discussed was how Turkey's Ottoman past is big part of history. Silay explained how Turkey needed to go through the many changes they endured in order to have evolved into who they are today. He focused on the many cultural reforms, telling us how Turkey became more political, rigid, and violent throughout history. He also noted the different people who aided these changes.

One reform he specially noted was in 1928. At this time, Turkey went through a script reform. This reform purified the Turkish language. One quote from this change says, "Government sponsored change of alphabet is the most rare. When carried out as effectively as it has been Turkey, it is truly epochal. Reorganizing relationships of literary class by creating a new mode of literacy and access to it, makes it so the alphabet exchange affects a class revolution."

Silay also discussed the physical changes from the Ottoman times. He particularly noted things such as tulip gardens being transformed into neon avenues. With sadness in his voice, Silay explained how all that was left was the physical image of what used to be. As a whole, Turkey was a completely different social and political space.

Silay spent a large amount of time talking about the importance of Ottoman literature. He thoroughly covered a poetry collection called *Divani*. The first form of this collection was published in 1966. This version was very plain, seeming to not reflect modern art; it also steered away from marketing or populist concerns. The only defining mark on its front was the Ministry of Education logo in the middle of the cover. In 1992, this original version was remade. Unlike the original, this modern version had color and a graphic border on the cover of the collection. Also, the dashes of the text inside the book were removed. This version continued to differ from the original because it had the logo of the publisher, AKCAG, right on the front of the cover, instead of the simplistic Ministry of Education logo. Silay didn't like this addition to the cover, or any the other changes, because he thought it took away from the authenticity of the book. He was highly upset about the regression from the scholarly first version, to the Islamist remake. Silay was a deep believer that the beauty of this collection was on the inside, so he much disliked the visual changes to the cover. In his Silay's own words, he thought it was "an extremely cheap imitation."

Silay ended by summing up the current state of Turkey and his beliefs about where they might be in the future. He said that anti-Semitism and anti-Americanism were rising, claiming that this was particularly noticeable at a book fair recently. Another

element of current Turkish lifestyles that he shared was NUR TV. Also, he shared that in Turkey, you cannot be Muslim and secular at the same time; you must make a choice. Finally, he shared his opinion that Turkey is a regressive and not progressive regime.

Silay gave a powerful and informative speech. His professional dress and passionate voice definitely helped him in the challenge of engaging his audience on such a vast subject matter. Honestly, I don't know much about the Ottoman Empire or Turkish history, but after hearing his speech, I feel as though I have a better understanding of this concept.

One of the parts of his speech that I most appreciated was his humor. In order to get an audience to connect with a speaker, involving humor is a must. My favorite humorous references were when he talked about being an "Ottomanist," making a pun out of furniture, and when he offered us another education at the University of Allah. These references brought the audience back to reality and gave them a break from this dense, historical subject.

When he began his speech by talking about not mixing religious affairs of the nation and state, I immediately connected to him. This is definitely something I strongly believe in. Many nations around the world are starting to pick up on this extremely important concept, allowing their people to worship without judgment.

When Silay discussed the physical changes of Turkey, I understood his sadness about the changes. I could not help thinking of our fast paced, profit seeking world, even here in Blacksburg. So many people tend to ignore beautiful elements of nature, building up more retail shops, only focusing on the profit. It's almost like if there is an open field anywhere, profit seeking people jump on the opportunity and plan up some establishment. They completely overlook the beauty of the natural world. This is evident in the town of Blacksburg, too. There have been so many changes in this town, even since I have come to college. So many new shops, retail stores, and food chains have been popping up everywhere. It's extremely sad to see the beauty of this town in the mountains disappear into grey buildings.

Perhaps the part of his speech that I related to the most was his discussion of *Divani*. As an English major, I much appreciate the beauty of poetry and literature as a whole. Not only that, but I'm a huge believer in the genuineness of originality. I totally understood why Silay was so upset about the changes to this powerful collection. Changing an original version of anything in life is difficult, but when it comes to a collection of poetry that was already so pure, it makes the process even harder. Even minor changes on something as simple as the cover can truly take away from the beauty of the collection as a whole.

Overall, I was much impressed by the incredible knowledge Silay possessed for Turkish studies. He was extremely informative, explaining all aspects of his speech, and then answering all of the audience's questions in depth. Even though I didn't know about or relate to most of his subject matter, I'm definitely glad I was exposed to such a different culture and its components.



Upcoming Conference

The **Second International Conference on Religion and Media** will be held in Tehran and Qom, Iran, from November 9th to 12th, 2008.

Further information could be found at conference website:
<<http://www.religion-media.ir/>>

Mahdiye Tavakol, Conference Coordinator
IRIB University

New Journal

You are invited to participate in **Awqaf Journal**, a biannual refereed journal in Islamic World focused on 'waqf' (endowment) and charitable activities. Topics include Waqf in Islamic history, Waqf and Civil society in contemporary Muslim world, Waqf and sustainable Development, Waqf and State strategies, Western experience on Foundation and Trusts. Papers can be submitted in English, French or Arabic.

More information can be found at the Awqaf website: <<http://www.awqafjournal.net/>>.

Tarak Abdalla, Editing Advisor
College of Art and Sciences
Zayed University, Dubai

Web Site of Interest

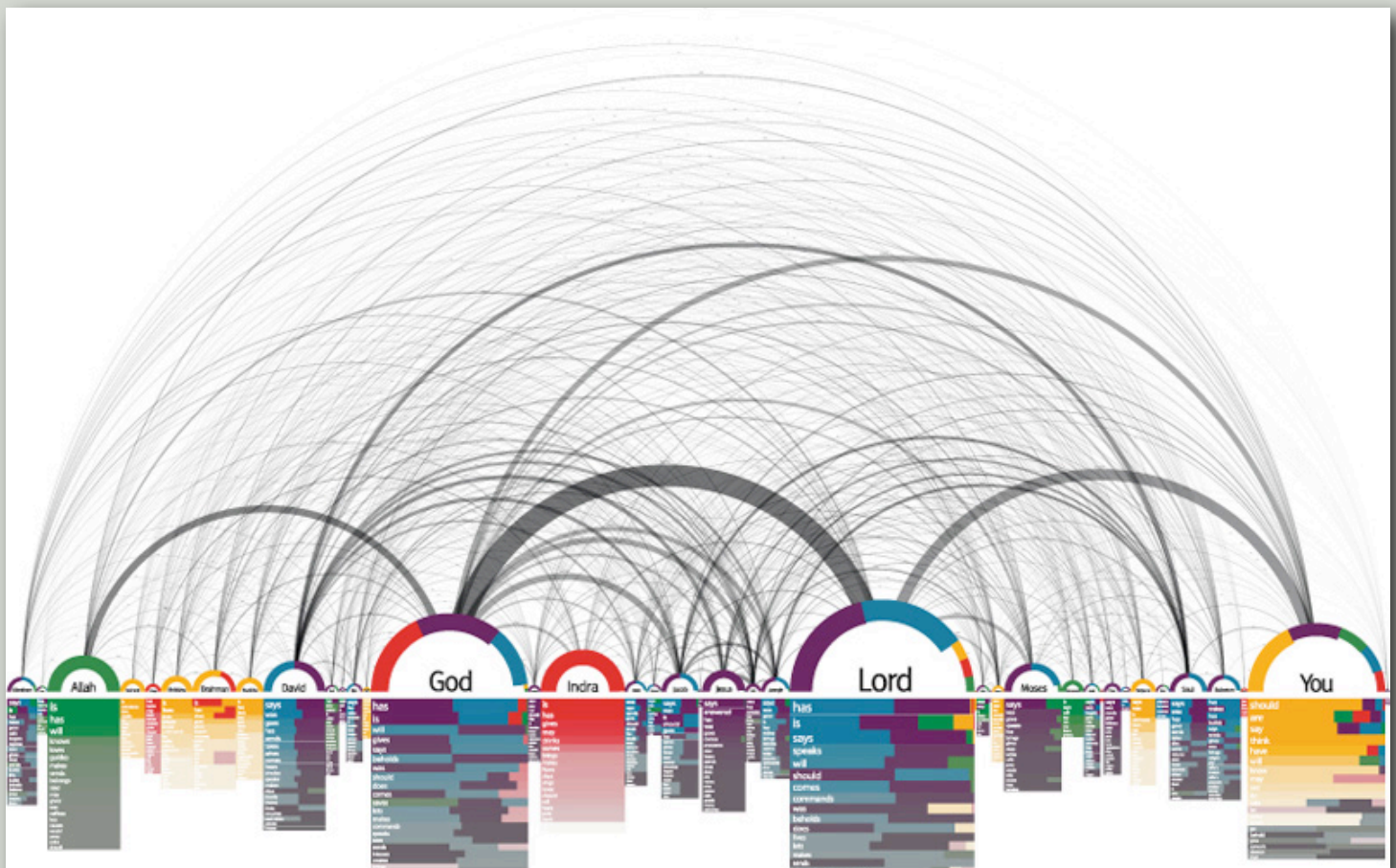
Are we all more alike than we are different? Can an examination of religious texts help answer that question? What would a visual 'map' of the world's major religious texts tell us about our commonality and about our difference?

Similar Diversity is an information graphic exhibition which opens up a new perspective on the topics of religion and faith by visualizing the content and connections of the Holy Books of five world religions. Commonalities and differences between Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Judaism are shown in this data visualization. The basis of the graphical analysis is an objective computerized text analysis of the English translation of these five Holy Scriptures, and works without any interpretations from the creators. Despite - or even because of this abstraction - the artworks are not only working on an informal but also on an emotional level. The viewers should be inspired to think about their own prejudices and current religious conflicts, as well as about the similarity between the world's major religions.

Similar Diversity is a project by Philipp Steinweber and Andreas Koller.

<http://similardiversity.net>

Graphic below from Similar Diversity



**Forthcoming Edited Volume:
Survey of Islamic Ideas and the
Sociology of Islam & Muslim Societies**

by Tugrul Keskin & Gary Wood, Editors

Dear Colleagues,

Today, Islam is a belief system that represents one-fifth of the World's population located from Morocco to Indonesia, and one of the world's fastest growing religions. The contribution of Islam to world civilization is undeniable, however in the last one hundreds years, Muslims have been faced with economic underdevelopment, dictatorship and antidemocratic regimes, and most importantly, modernity. What does modernity mean for Muslims? Will there be an Islamic renaissance? How about an Islamic reformation?

At the Southern Sociological Society annual meeting 2007 in Atlanta and 2008 in Richmond, we organized nine panels on Islam and Muslim Societies. We are planning to publish an edited volume on Sociology of Islam and Muslim Societies focusing on social, cultural, political, economic and religious lives/situation of Muslim Societies. We invite articles to be included in this volume.

Those who would like to contribute can send us their proposals or abstracts (300-500 words) and articles (5000-6000 words) on the following (though not necessarily limited to these) topics:

- Islam, Modernity and Secularism
- Islamist Movements and Collective identity
- Islam and Muslims in Europe and US (Migration)
- Islamic Political Thought & Social Policy
- Islam and Economic Life (Capitalism)
- Islamic Architecture

We will be pleased to receive articles on these and similar topics concerning Sociology of Islam and Muslim Societies.

Deadline for abstract submission: June 30, 2008

Please send article submissions or abstracts to both editors:

Tugrul Keskin
tugrulk@vt.edu

Gary Wood
garywood@vt.edu

Web Site of Interest

TABSIR

Insight on Islam and the Middle East



<http://www.tabsir.net/>

Tabsir website was created and has been updated by Dr. Daniel Martin Varisco at Hofstra University. There are many scholars who contribute to Tabsir regularly. On Tabsir, you will find book reviews, comments and news on Islam and the Middle East. On the website, Dr. Varisco says:

“We are scholars concerned about stereotypes, misinformation and propaganda spread in the media and academic forums on Islam and the Middle East.

We are committed to fair, open-ended scholarly assessment of the current political issues of terrorism, gender inequality and intolerance.

We encourage informed debate rather than partisan posturing on all issues.

We believe in active involvement as public intellectuals communicating the best of available research.”

We recommend everyone to visit Tabsir and contribute to this Anthropological understanding of Islam.

Tabsir.net

SOCIOLOGY OF ISLAM & MUSLIM SOCIETIES

SOCIOLOGY OF ISLAM LISTSERV AT VIRGINIA TECH

We have created a listserv for scholars who may be interested in exchanging academic information related with Islam. You will find the information necessary to be a subscriber to this list. Please circulate this email widely.

The Sociology of Islam Academic Mailing list at Virginia Tech University is a new free professional and academic networking tool to encourage interaction between individuals & organizations involved in Islam/Sociology of Islam/Islamist Movements and related fields worldwide. Members and subscribers are encouraged to dialogue and share resources on books, articles, conferences, teaching, and other related purposes.

Listserv Archive

If you want to subscribe to the list, please send me an email.

tugrulk@vt.edu OR garywood@vt.edu

We also created an archive for the listserv and you can reach the archive at the following homepage:

http://listserv.vt.edu/archives/sociology_of_islam.html

New Virginia Tech Organization

Devoted to Islam scholarship and academic exchange.

Formed in 2008, we welcome your participation on the Sociology of Islam listserv.



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* Japan	4
* Lebanon	2
* Malaysia	35
* Morocco	1
* Netherlands	5
* New Zealand	1
* Pakistan	6
* Singapore	3
* South Africa	4
* Spain	4
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* Taiwan	1
* Turkey	39
* United Arab Emirates	5
* United Kingdom	25
* United States	446

Total number of users subscribed to the list: 660

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