Imagine a new and different religion gathering on a Sunday in Las Vegas. We may attract every drinker off the wagon and every gambler anxious to repent in scenes reminiscent of “Guys and Dolls” and its up-tempo contrition number, “Sit Down, You’re Rocking the Boat.” And on the off chance that there is a bit of time left for a little sociology, have I got a deal for you!

By now I hope the word on the street has made it into your calendars: this year’s ASA meetings have been shifted from Chicago to Las Vegas, August 20-23, with Religion Section Day on Sunday, the 21st. Our overall theme borrows and specifies Randall Collins’ call for the ASA Meeting overall; namely, “(Religious) Dimensions and Arenas of Social Conflict.” In fact, this is also the topic for one of our five sessions: a panel discussion involving Michele Dillon, Phil Gorski, Mansoor Moaddel, and Rhys Williams. Since these are all distinguished and wide-ranging voices in our multi-part chorus, it is hard to imagine that any form of religious conflict will escape their singing. But if I am wrong, I will try to make it part of my own adenoidal contribution as chair and discussant.

Beyond the panel, four other gatherings are primed and ready with submitted papers. Sally Gallagher is chairing a session in the general area of “Religion and Gender, Class, and Ethnicity;” Prema Kurien is doing the same for “Comparative Religions At Home and Abroad,” as is Rob Robinson in the area of “Religious Movements and Institutions.” Stay tuned for the specific titles Sally, Prima, and Rob choose for the papers they have selected. At the same time, be sure to save time for Doug Marshall’s “Roundtables” and their smaller groupings of submitted papers that are no less deserving for not fitting into the three sessions above. Certainly there is far more discussion to be had around a table than in a large room.

Of course, one of the Section’s major delights is bestowing honors. I am writing this only a few days before the February 28 submission deadline for our three major awards. Kevin McElmurry is chairing the Distinguished Book Award Committee with John R. Hall and Melissa Wilcox. Mark Regnerus is chairing the (Please see Chair, page 2)
Distinguished Article Award committee with Phil Brenner and Erica Wong. Phil Connor is chairing the Student Paper Award with Shaul Kelner and Grace Yukich.

So much for just some of the highlights of our August meetings. And just to name another, surely we all throb in anticipating the annual business meeting. I have it on good authority that Past-President Fred Kniss has submitted a lustrous slate of nominees for this Spring’s election. Of course, Richard Flory, our Newsletter Editor, and Trish Snell, our Webmaster, are standing by to convey important developments and pertinent thoughts. As most of us continue to shiver in Winter’s cold, just imagine Las Vegas in summer’s air conditioning. If it is true that religion loves and depends upon us sinners, this ought to be a stellar weekend.

Jay Demerath, UMass, Amherst

Teaching about Religion:
A Call for Syllabi and Course Activities

Kevin D. Dougherty, Baylor University

Since 1998, the Association of Data Religion Archives (www.TheARDA.com) has been the premiere on-line source for high quality religion data. Thousands of researchers, journalists, clergy, and students visit the ARDA every day. New efforts are underway to improve the teaching and learning functions of the ARDA.

In January, I joined the ARDA as editor of their learning resources. I am responsible for developing and promoting pedagogical content. It is a pleasure for me to take on these duties. Teaching is important to me and I am eager to enhance the ARDA’s usefulness to teachers and students.

One of the first initiatives for me is to create a digital library of teaching resources for courses on religion. I invite fellow members of the ASA Sociology of Religion Section to contribute. Have you developed an effective course to teach about religion and religious topics? Send us your syllabus. Do you have a course assignment or activity on the topic of religion that students enjoy? Send us your instructions. Submissions should be sent as a Word document to learningcenter@thearda.com.

Content from any course pertaining to religion will be considered. ARDA staff will review submissions and make selections for inclusion in the Teacher Sharing Center (http://www.thearda.com/learningcenter/learningresources/teacherssharing.asp). Our ambition is to provide a virtual space for those teaching about religion in varied disciplines to share constructive teaching materials. I look forward to your contributions.
People

Lisa Pearce (UNC Chapel Hill) and Melinda Lundquist Denton (Clemson University) published a column in the Huffington Post titled “What Being Religious Really Means to Young People” based on their recent book, A Faith of Their Own.

Christian Smith’s (University of Notre Dame) recent book, What is a Person? Rethinking Humanity, Social Life, and the Moral Good from the Person Up (University of Chicago Press, 2010) won Honorable Mention in the Philosophy category of the PROSE Award, the American Publisher’s Award for Professional and Scholarly Excellence (http://proseawards.com/current-winners.html).

Fenggang Yang (Purdue University) and Rodney Stark (Baylor University) were quoted in a Huffington Post article on findings from the Chinese Spiritual Life Survey. Fanggang Yang was also quoted in a November 2010 New York Times article, “The Rise of the Tao,” on Daoist revivals in China.

Publications


Member News

Special Issue:
Journal for Peace & Justice Studies

Fall 2010 Volume 20: Number 2
"Peacebuilding in Africa"

This special issue is a collection of essays edited by Ron Pagnucco (College of St. Benedict/St. John’s University) and Chris Hausmann (University of Notre Dame)

Contents:


"How Small Christian Communities Promote Reconciliation, Justice and Peace in Eastern Africa," by J. Healey

"My Tribe is Humanity': An Interview with Archbishop John Baptist Odama," by T.D. Whitmore

"The Peacebuilding Potential of Catholic Relief Services Savings and Lending Communities in Rwanda," by S. Toton

"In Search of Justice: African and Western Approaches to Transitional Justice," by J. Steyn Kotze


For information on ordering copies, please contact: Sharon Discher
sharon.discher@villanova.edu
610-519-4499

The state of Israel was established in 1948 as a Jewish democracy, without a legal separation between religion and the state. Ever since, the tension between the two has been a central political, social, and moral issue in Israel, resulting in a cultural conflict between secular Jews and the fundamentalist, ultra-orthodox Haredi community. What is the nature of this cultural conflict and how is it managed?

In *Theocratic Democracy*, Nachman Ben-Yehuda examines more than fifty years of media-reported unconventional and deviant behavior by members of the Haredi community. Ben-Yehuda finds not only that this behavior has happened increasingly often over the years, but also that its most salient feature is violence—a violence not random or precipitated by situational emotional rage, but planned and aimed to achieve political goals. Using verbal and non-verbal violence Haredi activists try to push Israel toward a more theocratic society. Ben-Yehuda shows how the political structure that accommodates the strong theocratic and secular pressures Israel faces is effectively a theocratic democracy. Characterized by chronic negotiations, tensions, and accommodations, it is by nature an unstable structure. Ben-Yehuda demonstrates how it allows citizens with different worldviews to live under one umbrella of a nation-state without tearing the social fabric apart.


The Brave New World of genetic enhancement does seem to be approaching, suggesting a political debate that could dwarf the abortion debate. Some basic studies have shown that religious people will be the primary opponents of reproductive genetic technologies (RGTs), but there has been no in depth empirical study examining their views. In this book Evans describes the reasons for religious opposition to reproductive genetics using in-depth interviews and surveys. He also examines the foundational question in the “culture wars” debate of whether liberals and conservatives will have a shared moral language with which to discuss these new issues. Taking the abortion debate as the paradigmatic polarized issue, Evans asks whether the debate about reproductive genetics will become a part of the abortion debate, with people on both sides of the abortion debate unable to have a conversation about RGTs. He shows that a future RGT debate will largely be part of the abortion issue for abortion opponents. However, he also shows that for many people, there is a shared language across the abortion divide with which to talk about RGTs. This then shows that the premise of much of the discussion about polarization and culture wars is wrong.

Lisa Pearce (UNC-Chapel Hill) and Melinda Lundquist Denton (Clemson University), *A Faith of Their Own: Stability and Change in the Religious Identity of America's Adolescents* (Oxford University Press), 2011.

Adding to the contributions made by *Soul Searching* and *Souls in Transition*—two books which revolutionized our understanding of the religious lives of young Americans—Lisa Pearce and Melinda Lundquist Denton here offer a new portrait of teenage faith.

Drawing on the massive National Study of Youth and Religion's telephone surveys and in-depth interviews with more than 120 youth at two points in time, the authors chart the spiritual trajectory of American adolescents and young adults over a period of three years. Turning conventional wisdom on its head, the authors find that religion is an important force in the lives of most—though their involvement with religion changes over time, just as teenagers themselves do. Pearce and Denton weave in fascinating portraits of actual youth to give depth to mere numerical rankings of religiosity, which trend to prevail in large studies, and provide a new set of qualitative categories—Abiders, Assenters, Adapters, Avoiders, and Atheists—quoting from interviews to illuminate the shading between them. Pearce and Denton offer a rich understanding of the dynamic nature of faith in young people's lives during a period of rapid change in biology, personality, and social interaction. Not only do degrees of religiosity change, but so does its nature, whether expressed in institutional practices or personal belief.

Jeffrey Ian Ross (University of Baltimore) *Religion and Violence: An Encyclopedia of Faith and Conflict from Antiquity to the Present* (M.E. Sharpe) 2010.

International and interdisciplinary—as well as historical and contemporary—in scope and coverage, this encyclopedia provides background information and authoritative analysis on a broad array of questions and issues related to the intersection of religion and violence. It offers a comprehensive but concise approach to the most important individuals, historical events, groups and practices, theories, movements and processes, causes and effects connected to religious-driven violence.

Religion and Violence integrates scholarly analysis with current events, and discusses the global ramifications of religious violence both historically and in today's world. It covers major religions of the world and their different approaches to violence, along with country and regional studies. More than 130 signed A-Z articles provide in-depth perspectives on a wide variety of subjects and issues connected with religion and violence, including Osama bin Laden, Gerry Adams, the Crusades, Rwandan genocide, September 11th, Falun Gong, al Qaeda, skinheads, witchcraft, anti-abortion protests, new religious movements, the Internet, and much more. Photos and tables accompany select entries, and all entries include bibliographic

(Please see Books, page 5)
Position Opening
Assistant Director, Center for the Study of Religion, University of Notre Dame

Oversee the day-to-day management of a dedicated sociology research and training center. Works with the Director to facilitate the work of the Center, collecting, analyzing, presenting, and publishing on research projects, grants management, student supervision. This is a 40 hour/week Administrator/Professional job, which includes the following:

1. Research data collection and analysis.
2. Research project findings dissemination through presentations and publications.
3. Supervise students in data collection, transcription, analysis, and dissemination.
4. Supervise staff in completion of research, grant, financial, and event work.
5. Coordinate center faculty, graduate student, and undergraduate student center affiliation by regular communication, meetings, events, etc.
6. Co-author, edit, and prepare grant proposals, budget narratives, IRB proposals. Monitor grant spending and progress reporting; facilitate timely completion of grant-funded projects.
7. Create and maintain center communications - reports, website, materials, etc.
8. Administration of center logistics, organizational communication, etc.

Minimum Qualifications

The best qualified applicant will have at least an M.A in the social sciences, preferably sociology. Must also possess 5-6 years of experience which includes: advanced social research, statistical interpretation, grant writing, personnel management, technical analysis and website software (Stata, SPSS, Atlas.ti, Contribute & Dreamweaver), and administration skills.

Salary Range

$36,000 - $45,000

Timetable

The start date is somewhat flexible, although training (by the current Assistant Director, Trish Snell) will optimally take place during June. The Assistant Director must be trained and working by July 1, 2011. Applications are now being received and will be reviewed until the position is filled.

How to Apply

Go to https://jobs.nd.edu/applicants/jsp/shared/search/Search_css.jsp and click on Search Posting; type sociology in Enter Keyword space, then click on Center Assistant Director.

Dissertation in the Pipe

Peter Mundey, University of Notre Dame

"Religion & Consumerism: Exploring how American Religion may Encourage and Counteract Consumerism."

This dissertation aims to assess the role of religion in forming consumer culture and how, if at all, religion influences the extent to which individuals participate in consumer culture, and their style of consumption. The key research questions are: 1) What are the operative causal mechanisms by which religion encourages consumerism, and 2) What are the causal mechanisms by which religion counteracts consumerism?

Fenggang Yang (Purdue University) and Graeme Lang (City University of Hong Kong), eds., Social Scientific Studies of Religion in China: Methodology, Theories, and Findings (Brill Academic Publishers) 2011.

The revival of religious belief and practice in China over the past thirty years, after decades of severe repression, has attracted much attention by scholars. Social scientific studies of religion by mainland Chinese scholars has also increased in recent years, using theories and methods developed mainly outside China. Increasingly, mainland scholars are also debating whether theories and concepts developed in western societies are fully appropriate for the study of religion in Chinese societies. This volume presents a selection of papers by sociologists, anthropologists, and historians of religion on these themes. The chapters include rich field studies of particular religions and religious activities, along with theoretical and historical reflections by scholars inside and outside China on problems and opportunities in the revival of the social scientific study of religion in Chinese societies.
Science of Generosity Dissertation Fellowships

We are pleased to announce five (5) one-year doctoral dissertation fellowships of $25,000 each, to be awarded for the 2011-2012 academic year. The aim of these dissertation fellowships is to support highly promising graduate students who are conducting research and writing empirically-grounded, social science dissertations examining the origins, manifestations, and/or consequences of generosity. Proposals must clearly demonstrate how the research described in them will directly and noticeably contribute toward a greater understanding of generosity. Doctoral students in sociology, psychology, economics, political science, and anthropology with dissertation projects that clearly fit the stated criteria are welcome to apply.

We are particularly interested in projects that aim to investigate one of three key aspects of generosity:

- The sources, origins and causes of generosity
- The manifestations and expressions of generosity
- The consequences of generosity for both the givers and receivers involved

The following are examples of topics and questions that may be of interest for funding:

- How people originally learn to be generous or not
- The relationship between generosity with money, time, helping, and emotional support
- Institutional and cultural generators of generosity
- The mental and physical health consequences of generosity
- Contributions of voluntary generosity to the common good of society

We are now accepting applications for the 2011-2012 academic year, which must be postmarked no later than March 31, 2011. Fellowship awardees will be notified no later than May 1, 2011.

Prospective fellowship applicants should carefully study the entire Science of Generosity website to familiarize themselves with the concerns and goals of the initiative and to determine the suitability of their particular dissertation project for this fellowship (http://generosityresearch.nd.edu/).

Association for Jewish Studies Dissertation Fellowships

The Association for Jewish Studies is pleased to announce the call for submissions for the Berman Foundation Dissertation Fellowships in Support of Research in the Social Scientific Study of the Contemporary American Jewish Community. The application deadline is April 7, 2011. The Berman Fellowships--two awards of $16,000 for the 2011-12 academic year--aim to support the development and expansion of the field of the social scientific study of Jewish Americans and the contemporary Jewish-American experience; enhance funding opportunities for up-and-coming scholars in the midst of institutional cutbacks in higher education; and encourage graduate students in sociology, social psychology, social anthropology, demography, contemporary history, social work, political science, geography and education to expand their research to include the study of North American Jewry.

Fellowships will be awarded for one academic year, with the possibility of renewal for a second year. Preference will be given to applicants seeking support for doctoral research, but requests for funding to support the writing phase of the dissertation will also be considered. Support for this project is generously provided by the Mandell L. and Madeleine H. Berman Foundation.

Further information, including application instructions, can be found on the AJS website. Please contact Karen Terry, AJS Program and Membership Coordinator, at ajs@ajs.cjh.org or 917.606.8249 if you have any questions regarding the application process or fellowship program.

New Website For ASR

The URL is the same: www.sociologyofreligion.com

Please visit the new site and note that the 2011 conference of the ASR has moved cities (from Chicago to Las Vegas) and dates (now the 18-20 August 2011).

The call for papers, which you can find here, has also been changed, with new and extended deadlines for paper and session proposals.

Peter Beyer
President, ASR
2010-2011
OurValues.org: An Online Experiment About Values and Ethics in America

Wayne Baker, University of Michigan (wayneb@umich.edu)

OurValues.org is a blog I write five days a week about values and ethics in America. Its purpose is to stimulate civil discussion. Religion is a chief area I cover, given its prominence in American society. I’ve written about religious symbols on license plates, Palin and Pentecostals, Muslim Americans, atheism, prayer, and many other religion topics. In addition to religion, I blog about politics, elections, bailouts, race, immigration, education, constitutional issues, culture, healthcare, the economy, holidays, Wall Street (I called for bank reparations), core American values (based on my surveys), family, and more.


Why write a blog?

I’ve written OurValues.org since May 2008, so we are coming up on the third anniversary of this online experiment. The question I often get is: What’s it like writing a blog? Writing a blog is like having a pet. You have a lot of affection for it, but you have to walk and feed it each day. To have that commitment, you have to be clear about why you are blogging.

I started the blog to break through a brick wall in my research on values. I had written a book about values in America and an article about values across cultures.1 These relied on secondary survey data. As a next step, I wanted to explore the possibility of creating an ongoing survey of American values, but I needed to design an original survey instrument. I examined over a hundred questionnaires, looking for items to borrow but conclude that different items were needed. I thought that blogging might be a disciplined way to think about values as they are revealed in current events and to devise survey items. Eventually, it worked as I hoped. With the help of researchers at the Institute for Social Research, we designed a survey of American values that has been administered four times in national surveys during 2009 and 2010. These surveys were funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York and ISR. I reported some of the basic findings on OurValues.org, focusing on core American values.

A reason to continue to blog is that, fortunately, OurValues.org has built up a readership and it continues to grow. Many posts are syndicated and appear in AnnArbor.com (which, despite its name, has a broad readership outside Tree Town). Posts often migrate from AnnArbor.com to MLive and eventually to the parent Conde Nast. Sometimes, posts (such as those on Ecklund’s Science vs. Religion) are picked up by the University of Michigan and reposted on the university’s home page. This always produces a boost in readership. We recently started reposting on CNN and Reddit, which can produce as many as 80 comments on a single blog entry (as it did for a post about Fea’s book on America’s Christian roots). Comments are very hard to get for any blog. Many more read than are willing to make a comment.

Behind the scenes

OurValues.org is not just me. It’s one of several blogs under the umbrella of ReadTheSpirit, an online magazine founded by David Crumm. David is an author and journalist. For more than 20 years, he was the Religion Writer for the Detroit Free Press, Knight-Ridder newspapers and finally Gannett. RTS covers religion, spirituality, popular culture, values and diversity. David’s partner, John Hile, is the technical wizard. Among other things, he’s an expert on search engine optimization.

Early on, David and I settled on a format and routine that seems to work. The structure of every post on OurValues.org is (1) a question, usually the title itself; (2) an interesting or unusual fact, feature, or insight; and (3) another question, which invites readers to think about the topic and join the discussion. Every week has a theme, which we announce on Monday morning in a very short email message to readers who signed up to get it. Every day, I email David a Word document (never more than one page, single spaced) with the next day’s post. He edits the post, selects an image to illustrate it, and then posts it with a timer set for midnight. Comments made by readers are moderated to ensure civil remarks.

(Please see OurValues.org, page 10)
Islam is the fastest growing religion in Western Europe today. As a consequence, the emergence and growth of Muslim religious congregations is one of the most important changes that have taken place within the European third sector in the last 20 years. However, more often than not, these congregations are described as “enclaves” or “integration traps” isolating new citizens from the rest of society, a picture that has remained largely uncontested due to a lack of more extensive research.

The intention of the Swedish Muslim Congregation project is to present—for the first time in Europe—nationally representative data about the activities and roles of local Muslim congregations. We have concentrated primarily on three problem areas:

Our aim, first, has been to map the congregations’ demography and activities (especially the extent of voluntary social work). Second, we have investigated Muslim experiences of the reactions of others in their surrounding environments, as reported by congregation representatives. To what extent do Muslim congregations encounter local opposition and support? Third is our focus on Muslim congregation collaboration with other organizations and public institutions. The Scandinavian welfare model boasts a long established emphasis on collaboration between third sector, municipal and state organizations. Are the Muslim congregations able—and willing—to connect to the established forms of cooperation that already exist in Sweden between the public and third sectors?

An essential part of the project is the nationwide questionnaire sent to the 147 local Swedish Muslim congregations that we identified, to which we received 105 replies (a 71 percent response rate). Non-response analysis showed no statistically significant differences in response propensity that could be connected with the different existing schools of Islam, nor with the type of municipality (metropolitan, small town, rural district, etc.)

**Muslim congregations – A demographic profile**

The largest group among Muslim congregation members comes from Europe, defined as persons from member countries of the Council of Europe (44.9 percent). Next follows the group comprising the various Arab nations (26.2 percent), then other countries of Africa (14.5 percent) and the other Asian countries (14.4 percent).

The congregations’ ethnic composition varies from the homogeneous to the widely heterogeneous. Ethnic diversity is the dominating characteristic, however, and the average of distinct ethnic groups is four. Only about one-fifth of the congregations are entirely homogeneous, i.e., contain only members from in effect a single ethnic group. In other words, the vast majority of Muslim congregations in Sweden are a melting pot for the faithful with backgrounds in different cultural and local Islamic traditions.

Women make up 40 percent of the membership and stand for most of the congregations’ social work. Roughly 40 percent of members are 17 years or under, while 10 percent are over 65.

**Voluntary social work**

Muslim social work embraces both mutual support among congregation members and social activities within the surrounding local community. Outreach activities of different kinds make up an important part of the voluntary social work. Almost half of the congregations organize visits to hospitalized persons and organized activities directed to older persons in various forms of senior housing are common. More than one-fourth of the congregations carry out activities for persons incarcerated in prisons. The Imam or specially appointed visiting groups meet with inmates who wish to discuss religious issues or who simply want some social exchange. Some of the larger congregations also have special follow-up programs for released prisoners.

Another important part of congregation activities is offering support to persons newly arrived in Sweden. Organised activities for recent immigrants exist in roughly one-fourth of the congregations. The forms of these activities cover a wide register and can be anything from informal study circles in the Swedish language to lectures on the functioning of the Swedish society.

In the congregations’ inner work, family counseling and conflict guidance play a large part. Roughly 60 percent of the responding congregation representatives stated that they were active in the area of guidance and counseling. Further, activities directed to children and youth are an often highly prioritized area. The kernel of these activities is study of the Qur’anic classes, which is tradition in the mosques of countries with a Muslim majority population and takes place also in the majority of Swedish Muslim congregations. Here, studies of the Qur’an, and of the common theological language of Islam, Arabic, is central, but there is a great deal to suggest that these religious courses increasingly are being expanded to include discussion of how one can live as a Muslim in Sweden.

(Please see Research in Progress, page 9)
Besides studies of the Qur’an, about half of the congregations carry out other organized activities for children and youth. The forms of these activities vary from simple outings and sports activities in the smaller congregations to ongoing summer vacation activities, summer camps and scout groups in the medium and large sized ones (see Borell & Gerdner, 2011a).

Cooperation

The new Muslim congregations increasingly are becoming partners in the established forms of local cooperation between the third sector and the municipalities. Almost half of the congregations are represented, for example, in local consultation organs or in housing area committees of various kinds.

It is also relatively common for Muslim congregations to initiate contact with local politicians, with 47 percent stating that they have invited representatives of political parties to participate in mutual discussions.

But Muslim congregations do not only involve themselves with the municipality and local politicians. They also cooperate with other third sector organizations, e.g., tenant associations, educational associations, women’s crisis centers, temperance organizations and other religious communities. One-third of the congregations collaborate in local cooperation groups for religious communities and many more congregations state that they would be positive to such cooperation if only given the chance.

At the same time, there are reservations. Islam in Sweden is a heterogeneous and complex mosaic of different directions, traditions and practices. In this heterogeneous context, there are both tendencies to openness and to introversion. There are Muslim communities in Sweden where far-reaching demands for religious purity obstruct the work of overcoming segregation and growing alienation. However, the available data show that openness and a desire for cooperation are in general the dominant characteristics among the congregations. Through this research project, it has also been possible to study the inner and outer factors that support and encourage openness and cooperation.

Internal factors

In the West European discourse on Islam, it is sometimes argued that the social work of the Muslim communities is part of a self-elected isolation from the surrounding society. Our project shows that statements of this type are without true foundation. The Swedish Muslim congregations that carry out the most extensive social work are also those that are most open, most involved in cooperation with other organizations and institutions, and have the most positive experiences of the Swedish society.

But what other characteristics do the communities share that are important for the degree of openness and cooperation?

Such factors as the age of the congregation, it turned out, had no bearing on the degree of openness or inclination to cooperate. Neither was the extent of openness and cooperation affected by to which of the schools of Islam the congregation adhered. However, the number of different ethnic groups within a congregation correlates positively with openness and inclination to cooperate. This means, in brief, that openness to different religious traditions within Islam—the precondition for a multi-ethnic community—also corresponds to a greater openness towards the society at large and a strong emphasis on collaboration with other organisations.

External factors

The internal characteristics of the congregations are naturally not the only factors that influence cooperation in practice. Cooperation demands two sides, and various conditions in the surrounding environment may either encourage or be detrimental to such relations. So, what outer conditions may have a bearing on Muslim congregation cooperation with other groups?

An entirely fundamental precondition for any cooperation is the Scandinavian welfare model, which boasts a long established emphasis on collaboration between third sector, municipal and state organizations. For Islam in Sweden, which is so highly synonymous with local, from each other independent organizations, opportunities for cooperation are above all created within the local community.

We found—hardly surprisingly—a connection between inclination to cooperate and experience of support from the surrounding local community. More unexpected, however, was that cooperation is also positively correlated with the amount of opposition, for which the explanation is as follows. When religious communities are exposed to hostility, e.g. through aggressive letters to the press or the vandalism of property, this seems to have a mobilizing effect on the potentially sympathetic organizations and individuals in the community, who rise up to defend the right of Muslim congregations to practice their faith. When these opposite forces become visible, it then also becomes possible for Muslim congregations to identify allies and to develop cooperation with new partners.

We found as well that congregation’s attitudes to cooperation are connected to local socioeconomic conditions. Cooperation is less extensive in large and relatively well-off municipalities, and more widespread in smaller and socioeconomically less favored ones. The explanation for this is a combination of opportunities and problems. The dealings of Muslim congregations with public municipal sector organizations, but also with other third sector organizations, are probably facilitated in smaller
where there is also greater incentive to cooperate in order to meet and master the social challenges.

Opposition and anti-Islamic currents

As the immigrants Muslims in Western Europe often are, they encounter xenophobic hostility, exclusion and discrimination, but added to this, they also encounter anti-Islamic prejudice. Anti-Islamic attitudes have deep roots in Europe and—above all since the September 11 terror attacks—these negative trends have intensified.

How, then, are active Muslim believers and congregations in Sweden affected by these anti-Islamic tendencies?

An alarming finding is that one-fourth of Muslim congregations have suffered criminal forms of harassment. Such actions have a strong coupling to two types of situation. First and foremost international events associated with Islam. The repercussions of these events on the local plane illustrate the close relation between local resistance activities and the national and international anti-Islamic discourse. The other type of situation concerns local visibility. When a congregation launches plans to build a new mosque or to inaugurate new premises, the presence of Islam in the public space becomes concrete and antagonists find that they have a representation of the “alien” in their midst against which to direct their rage.

However, a majority of the representatives of Muslim congregations are of the opinion that they most often encounter respect. The situation can thus be described as complex rather than only negative. Such a view is also close to the ones communicated in comparative European studies concerning general public attitudes to Islam. Xenophobia and anti-Islamic sentiment appear to be less prevalent in Sweden than in other investigated West European societies (for more details and for a list of publications, see Borell & Gerdner, 2011b).

References


A list of publications from the project is available here.
From the Editor

As I’m writing this, winter is almost over--and yes I know, it is hard to consider what we have in southern California as actual winter--which means that we are that much closer to summer and the annual meetings. As I’m sure you are all now aware, the meetings have moved from the Chicago for Las Vegas...in August! Just thinking about that makes me happy for air conditioning. The average high temperature for Las Vegas in August is 103 degrees and the low is a balmy 74. But it is a dry heat...

Although most of us who don’t live in Las Vegas automatically think of “The Strip” as being Las Vegas, there is much more to the city than the gambling, tourists, shows, and what I like to call the “margarita bongs” that tourists schlepp around with them up and down the strip, with whatever remains of their formerly refreshing beverage. (If you haven’t seen these, once you have, my term will make perfect sense to you--although perhaps I’m divulging too much of my misspent youth.) I would encourage you to check out the strip--it is a sociological experience in itself--but get beyond it as well to see what the rest of Las Vegas looks like.

I would like to offer my own Las Vegas challenge. I used to teach an undergraduate class in which we spent time in three urban settings, Los Angeles, Tijuana, and Las Vegas. I loved teaching this class (a perk of my particular geographic location), but when we visited Las Vegas, it was uncanny how many times a particular sign promised something that I could never find. One in particular was the Starbuck’s sign on the outside of the Paris casino, promising a Starbuck’s inside, which I never found! Now I haven’t been to Vegas in about four years, but my hunch is that sign is still there, and the Starbuck’s is just as elusive. Here’s the challenge: I will buy coffee (or beverage of choice) for the first person who takes me to that Starbuck’s during the August ASA meetings. Maybe your sense of space and direction is better than mine.

A brief word about the photo on the first page of this issue of the newsletter. The photo is of Leonard Knight, who you may not have not heard of, but who you might recognize from the movie “Into the Wild.” Leonard has been building Salvation Mountain for the last 24 years, and is one of many unique people that can be found in this barren part of southern California. This area, and in particular the Salton Sea, was heavily promoted in the 1950s and 1960s as a resort and recreational area centered around water skiing, fishing and other outdoor activities. The area has garnered attention over the years from researchers and artists, two of whom merit attention here. One, photographer Kim Stringfellow has produced an interesting photographic and historic presentation that presents the Salton Sea and what remains of its marinas, housing, and residents. The other, is a project being conducted by USC Center for Religion and Civic Culture Research Associate, and photographer, Matt Gainer, that investigates the “Slabs,” a transient community adjacent to the Salton Sea, filled with lots of interesting people living in a particularly harsh landscape.

The next issue of the newsletter will be out in early July, and I’ll be asking for contributions in June. In the meantime, as always, if you have an idea for an article or other contribution to the newsletter, please send it to me and we’ll work at getting it into the newsletter.

Richard Flory, University of Southern California