



ISSRPL News

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{2009 ISSRPL: Neighborhood and Practice }

The Birmingham Faith Leaders Group and University of Birmingham (United Kingdom) will host the 2009 ISSRPL, to be held 11-21 July. This year's theme—"The Language of Neighborhood and Practices of Public Life"—will explore emergent norms of life in a multi-confessional and multi-ethnic global city. Tensions among different immigrant communities and between them and longer-settled residents often revolve around understandings of what constitutes a neighborhood, and one's obligations to the local community. In a city as culturally diverse as Birmingham, understanding the global connections of local neighborhoods to publics that have radically different visions of what community can mean, is critical to coexistence among communities. Fellows from four continents will bring their diverse perspectives to the neighborhoods in Birmingham as we further our experiences and understandings of urban coexistence.

{Alumni Reunion in Jerusalem }

In February 2009, the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute hosted the first ISSRPL reunion for fellows from the Middle East. In attendance were fifteen former fellows from Israel and the Palestinian Territories. In typical ISSRPL fashion, the day was divided into three sections, with a morning session devoted to academic, theoretical perspectives; an afternoon session devoted to a case study—that of Jaffa as a mixed city; and a third session of reflection and exploring of future possibilities.



ISSRPL Alumni at the 2009 Reunion in Jerusalem: (left to right) Abdallah Tarabieh (2007), Brigitte Milo (2004), guest, and Gila Yakov (2007).

{Creativity and Poverty in Appalachia }

In April, the Fourth World Movement (FWM)—future host of the 2010 ISSRPL—organized a week-long seminar in Dickenson County, Virginia (USA), exploring the importance of art and creativity in bringing people together, and as a tool in fighting poverty. Working with populations living in extreme poverty, the "Free to Be Together to Create" seminar brought together individuals from the local area, the FWM in North America, and the International FWM. The Appalachia Mountain region is among the poorest and least developed areas in the United States, and is famous for its distinct bluegrass music and folk traditions. ISSRPL fellows **Diana Skelton** (France/USA, 2008) and **David Montgomery** (USA, 2003) were participants in the seminar, which continued the planning for the 2010 school to be held in France. For more on the seminar, see <http://sites.google.com/site/freetobetothertocreate/>.



Participants of the 2009 "Free to Be Together to Create" seminar in Appalachia, USA.

{Second Occasional Paper Published }

Following **Adam Seligman's** inaugural Occasional Paper—"Pedagogic Principles and Reflections Developing out of ISSRPL Practice," the second Occasional Paper—"Otherness and the Experience of Difference: From Encountering and Evaluating to Eschewing and Enduring"—has been published. Based on **David Montgomery's** observations of the 2007 school in Turkey, it discusses the dynamics of difference experienced in the ISSRPL. Alumni interested in contributing an Occasional Paper to the series should send proposals to montgomery@issrpl.org.

{ On the ISSRPL Experience }

I grew up in the country of official atheism, I studied philosophical and theological doctrines and theories, but I never looked upon religion's non-philosophical aspects with respect, because for me it was irrational, often bizarre, superstitious, and ritualistic. The direct encounter with people whose life-world revolved around religion, religious truths, and religious practices, made me understand that my disregard of religion was disregard of those persons. Although through this encounter I realized that there were differences that could not be erased or overcome, I also realized that they needed not to be erased or overcome, because the irreducible diversity of our ways of experiencing reality was our advantage, rather than drawback. The critics of tolerance insist that "there are still good things worth fighting for," but what I saw in Bosnia, where the school took place in 2004, clearly indicated to me, that "there exist no good things worth murdering for."

— **Andrei Menchikov** (Russia, 2004)

{ ISSRPL Alumnae Activity }

Evaldo Xavier Gomes (Brazil, 2006) recently presented his paper, "Freedom of Religion: Catholic Perspectives and Approaches," at the Fifteenth Annual International Law and Religion Symposium, hosted at Brigham Young University, Utah.

Radko Popov (Bulgaria, 2006), Orthodox theologian and former editor with the Bulgarian Section of BBC London, has recently published a book, *Jesus Christ in the Qur'an*, which he hopes will stimulate the dialogue between Muslims and Christians in Bulgaria. Popov believes that *Jesus Christ in the Qur'an* "can contribute much to clearing away the build-up over the centuries of prejudices and even clearly wrong ideas about 'The Other'." His book, published in Bulgarian, presents Muslim beliefs about Jesus and related Christian dogmas and is aimed at fostering interreligious understanding.

Eldar Sarajlić (Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2005 and 2007) recently completed his MA thesis on ethnicity and postmodernity, and contributed a chapter titled "Europe as a Media Myth: the Case of Bosnian Muslims" to *Mutual Misunderstandings? Muslims and Islam in the European Media, Europe in the Media of Muslim Majority Countries* (2009, European Studies Centre, St. Anthony's College, University of Oxford).

Dina Sijamhodži-Nadarević (Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2008) will be coordinator for the Bosnian version of the Certificate in Islamic Studies, a 72-hour program organized by the Faculty of Islamic Studies at the University of Sarajevo. The program is offered in English and Bosnian languages and it is designed to provide introductory insight into the knowledge of doctrine, law, history and culture of Islam with special focus on Islam in the Balkans and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Abdallah Tarabieh (Israel, 2007) recently completed his PhD, writing his dissertation on yearning and lamenting for cities in the Arabic and Hebrew poetry in 11th-12th centuries Spain. He focused on four poets of that period in Islamic Spain: two Muslims, Ibn-Hamdīs and Ibn Khafāja, and two Jews, Moshe Ibn-Ezra and Yehuda Halevi. He followed the development of the "Hanīn" genre and the "elegy for cities" in the poetry of these four poets, mainly in their secular poetry. To follow the growth of this genre, he investigated the origins of the elegy in Arabic poetry, starting from the pre-Islamic period up to the Islamic Andalusian period.

