



Economy, Law and Culture in Islamic Societies: Historical Roots and Contemporary Dilemmas

Prof Timur Kuran

Duke University, North Carolina, US

“Islam and Economic Underdevelopment: Legal Causes of Organisational Retardation”

A millennium ago the Middle East was not an economic laggard, but by the 18th century it exhibited clear signs of economic backwardness. The reason for this transformation is that certain components of the region’s legal infrastructure stagnated as their Western counterparts gave way to the modern economy. Among the institutions that generated evolutionary bottlenecks are the Islamic inheritance regime, which inhibited capital accumulation; the absence in Islamic law of the concept of a corporation, which weakened civil society and delayed the transition from personal to impersonal exchange; and the waqf, which locked vast resources into unproductive organizations for the delivery of social services. All of these obstacles to economic development were overcome through radical reforms initiated in the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, traditional Islamic law remains a factor in the Middle East’s ongoing economic disappointments. The current weakness of the region’s private economic sectors and its human capital deficiency stand among the lasting consequences of traditional Islamic law.

Prof Riaz Hassan

Flinders University, Adelaide, Australia

“Interrupting a History of Tolerance: Anti-Semitism and the Arabs”

Anti-Semitic rhetoric, literature and films emerge from modern Middle Eastern society, and yet there is little evidence of deep-rooted anti-Semitism in classical Islamic society. Like most adherents of any religion, early Muslims regarded their religion as superior to others and treated non-believers with contempt. But unlike European Christians, they did not actively target Jews over the centuries. Throughout the 19th century, European emissaries to the Middle East encouraged anti-Semitism, particularly among Arab Christians. Germans exploited the sentiments in the mid-20th century. Specific books, radio shows or films may fall out of favour, but the legacy of hatred and distrust can linger for years afterwards.

All Welcome

Thurs 14 Aug 2008

10:30am – 12:30pm

Coffee/Tea

available from 10:00 am

*****Banksia Room***
Function Centre
Flinders University**

Enquiries: 08 8201 2265, trish.amee@flinders.edu.au

TIMUR KURAN is Professor of Economics and Political Science, and Gorter Family Professor in Islam and the Social Sciences at Duke University. He has held positions at the University of Southern California, Princeton University, Stanford University and the University of Chicago. His teaching and research draw on multiple disciplines, including economics, political science, history, and legal studies. He has written on Islam and the Middle East, with an initial focus on contemporary attempts to restructure economies according to Islamic teachings. Several of his essays on this topic are included in *Islam and Mammon: The Economic Predicaments of Islamism* (Princeton University Press, 2004). Much of his current work concerns the conundrum of why the Middle East, which once had a high standard of living by global standards, subsequently fell behind in various realms, including economic production, organizational capability, technological creativity, democratization, and military strength. He has also written extensively on the evolution of preferences and institutions. His best known theoretical work is *Private Truths, Public Lies: The Social Consequences of Preference Falsification* (Harvard University Press, 1998), which deals with the repercussions of being dishonest about what one knows and wants.

RIAZ HASSAN is an Australian Research Council Professorial Fellow and Emeritus Professor in the Department of Sociology, Flinders University in Adelaide, South Australia. He has held positions at the National University of Singapore, Oxford University, and the University of California-Los Angeles. In his academic career spanning over 40 years he has conducted research in a number of areas including sociology of housing, sociology of suicide, organizational culture and Muslim societies. He has recently completed a 10 year multi-country study of Muslim religiosity in which he explored key aspects of Islamic consciousness. The findings from this study have been published in, *Faithlines: Muslim Conceptions of Islam and Society* (Oxford University Press, 2002) and *Inside Muslim Minds: Understanding Islamic Consciousness* (Melbourne University Press, 2008). He is currently conducting research on “Suicide Terrorism: The Use of Life as Weapon”.