

VICISU

Vienna International Christian-Islamic Summer University 2018



Vienna International Christian-Islamic Summer University

29 July to 18 August 2018

First Week

Prof. Dr. Volker Stümke
University Rostock, Germany
“Introduction to Christianity“

Prof. Dr. Nahide Bozkurt
Ankara University, Turkey
“Introduction to Islam“

Prof. Dr. Irmgard Marboe
University of Vienna, Austria
“Introduction to International Law“

Prof. Dr. Stephan Prochazka
University of Vienna, Austria
„Islamic Diversity“

Second Week

Dr. Dalia Ghanem-Yazbeck
Carnegie Middle East Center,
Lebanon
“Women in Jihadism“

Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Müller-Funk
University of Vienna, Austria
“Censorship – History in Europe and Beyond”

Mag. Adel-N. Reyhani
Ludwig Boltzmann Institut,
Austria
„Freedom of Expression“

Prof. Dr. Ann Black
University of Queensland,
Australia
“Islam, Sharia and Politics in Southeast Asia: the Role of the Law to Transform Society“

Dr. Edward Salifu Mahama
University of Development
Studies in Tamale, Ghana
“Religious Pluralism”

Dr. Gudrun Harrer
University of Vienna, Austria
“Religion and Politics”

Third Week

Conflict Management Training
Dr. Blanka Bellak &
Gudrun Van Pottelbergh

The Vienna International Christian-Islamic Summer University 2018

by Irmgard Marboe and Katharina Albrecht-Stadler



The Vienna International Christian-Islamic Summer University (VICISU) is a three week summer programme that aims at bringing together students and professors from universities spanning across all continents. It evolved from the “Vienna International Christian-Islamic Round Table” (VICIRoTa), an initiative by academics from different fields of specialisation, such as law, theology, and social sciences, which met between 2000 and 2006 for an exchange of ideas and discussion about topical from a Christian and from a Muslim perspective. Four resulting edited volumes and a “VICIRoTa-manifesto” were published in German, English, Arabic and Urdu (see <http://www.rti-stgabriel.at/book-listings/vicirota.html>).

The Summer University of 2018 lasted from 29 July to 18 August 2018 and took place, for the sixth time, at Stift Altenburg, a Benedictine monastery in Lower Austria. The monastery is well known for its Garden of the Religions and combines the atmosphere of a spiritual baroque building with the amenities of a campus. Rooms and modern equipment for teaching and studying as well as a variety of sporting facilities and comfortable living spaces – used during the year by the monastery’s boys’ choir – are available to the participants of the Summer University.

30 students from universities in different European and non-European countries, such as Australia, Ghana, Germany, Indonesia, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Pakistan, Turkey, USA and Austria took part in the VICISU 2018. The academic programme included lectures and tutorials on “Introduction to Islam”, “Introduction to Christianity”, “International Law

and Human Rights”, “Islamic Diversity”, “Religious Pluralism”, “Women in Jihadism”, “Religion and Politics”, “Islam, Sharia and Politics” and “Censorship – History in Europe and Beyond”. In the third week, for the first time a professional conflict and management training with experienced professional trainers complemented the programme.

Father Michael, the Prior of the monastery and responsible for guest relations, gave a guided tour through the Abbey of Altenburg and the Garden of the Religions. On 9 August, Abbot Thomas Renner and the community of the Abbey of Altenburg invited all the participants of the Summer University to a celebratory summer reception.

The cultural programme of VICISU 2018 included an orchestra concert of the regional music festival “Allegro Vivo” which took place in the baroque library of the abbey. As part of the VICISU tradition an excursion to the world-famous abbey of Melk, a boat trip on the Danube, and a visit to the castle of Rosenberg were organised. A number of social events and sporting activities completed the extracurricular programme. The multicultural talent show and the intercultural dinner, where the participants performed dances and songs from their home countries and cooked traditional meals, were highlights of the inter-cultural and inter-active social activities.

The last days of the Summer University took place in Vienna where the students received their certificates of participation by Vice-Dean Prof. Franz-Stefan Meissel of the Faculty of Law of the University of Vienna. They visited the city, including the main building of the University of Vienna and the United Nations, and were invited to a reception in the Vienna City Hall. The farewell dinner took place in a typical Viennese restaurant.

The Vienna International Christian-Islamic Summer University is organised by the University of Vienna and mainly funded by Ministry of Education, Science and Research (BMBWF) since 2008. Additional sponsoring is provided by the Dreikönigsaktion (Austrian Childrens’ Charity Fund), the Province of Lower Austria, the City of Vienna, and some private donors. ■

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Preface

by Abbot Thomas Renner, OSB

Concerns for themselves let the other, the next person, be lost from sight very quickly. They completely forget that a crown has value only if it reflects the love of God towards every single creature.

It is probably one of the most valuable and beautiful moments in life, one of the most precious experiences of us humans, when we open a space of encounter through the turn to the other and thus facilitate exchange and sometimes even find friendship. This other person also gives me a completely new view of God – because I am allowed to recognise God in him.

These thoughts come to my mind when I think back to the last VICISU 2018. In a time of worldwide tensions and crises, the most diverse conflict zones due to polarising approaches to politics, culture and religion, spaces of encounter and exchange of ideas between people of different origins,

traditions and religious conviction are needed.

Once again, in the summer of this year our Altenburg Abbey became such a space, a meeting place and an exchange of ideas for many young people from the most diverse areas of the world.

I hope and I wish that these weeks here in Altenburg have helped the participants to gain a new perspective not only of themselves and their own lives, but also to get an entirely new look at God – through the encounters, conversations and experiences with the others.

A very warm thank-you goes therefore to all teachers, supervisors, students and financiers for the good cooperation, which made VICISU 2018 again a special experience for all.

Sometimes it is necessary to “bow” – only then we will be able to recognise God in the other! ■

In an old legend, a disciple asks his spiritual teacher, “Why did people see God in the first place and why do they not see him today?” After a brief silence, the teacher replied, “Because nobody likes to bow anymore!”

Maybe our time has really lost something essential. The willingness of each individual to bow – that is, to turn to the other, sometimes the unknown and stranger, and to meet him at eye level.

Many people today have invisible crowns and are afraid of losing anything if they bow! They remain immobile, rigid, and stiff and pay attention only to their own dignity.





Preface

*by Prof. Heinz Faßmann,
Minister of Education, Science and Research (BMBWF)*

In 2018, the “Vienna International Christian-Islamic Summer University – VICISU” has been held for the sixth time already as a magnificent inter-disciplinary summer programme organised by the University of Vienna. It again assembled students, professors, and lecturers from renowned academic institutions from many different countries. The Summer University is dedicated to the scientific reflection of characteristics, similarities and differences of the two major religious movements, Christianity and Islam.

The unique location at the Abbey of Altenburg in the countryside in

Lower Austria offers an inspiring atmosphere for academic debates. Austria is proud of its long tradition in “building bridges” between cultures and religions. The Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research has been supporting the academic Christian-Islamic dialogue activities for many years in cooperation with other Austrian authorities to stimulate intercultural and interreligious exchange and understanding. For one decade, VICISU has been organised by the University of Vienna every two years at the Abbey of Altenburg and I would like to especially thank Abbot Thomas Renner, his predecessor Abbot Emeritus Christian Haidinger, Prior Michael Hüttl, and the congregation of the Abbey of Altenburg for welcoming and hosting the young participants from all over the world with open arms and minds. This dialogue evolved from

the “Vienna International Christian-Islamic Round Table”, an initiative by academics from different fields of specialisation, such as law, theology and social sciences, in order to discuss the most important questions concerning today’s world, from a Christian and from a Muslim perspective.

In view of the worrying global political developments and numerous religious conflicts in the past years we are fortunate to have intercultural academic programmes like VICISU dedicated to rational dialogue, seeking mutual understanding and consensus in the tradition of enlightenment. Therefore I am especially grateful to the faculty and in particular to Prof. Irmgard Marboe and her team for their enthusiasm and continued personal dedication to this important international initiative. This report clearly proves that such a dialogue is necessary and that it works. ■



Graduation Ceremony Vienna International Christian-Islamic Summer School

17 August 2018

Address by Prof. Franz-Stefan Meissel, Vice-Dean of the University of Vienna Law School



It is a pleasure for me to welcome you on behalf of the University of Vienna, and more particularly the School of Law, at the graduation ceremony of this year's Vienna International Christian-Islamic Summer School.

You find yourself now at the top floor of our law school building, an award winning architectural landmark inaugurated more than 30 years ago. This venue has two paintings by Max Weiler, a spectacular view of the city and is used only for our formal meetings and festivities.

As you might know, the University of Vienna boasts the honour of being the oldest university in the German speaking world, an institution which goes back to the year 1365. Theology and jurisprudence were among the first academic disciplines which were taught. Today, although law and religion are not as intimately linked as they used to be in medieval Europe, they still are closely connected in various ways.

The University of Vienna Law School is not only the oldest but also the largest law school in the Germanic countries, consisting of approximately 12.000 students and 80 tenured (full or associate) professors. Our concept of a legal education is inspired by the theories of universal legal education, which places emphasis not only on the dogmatics of current law but also integrates philosophy of law, history of law, sociology and cultural and religious aspects of legal development. We also place an emphasis on international law and international relations. Respect for human dignity and fundamental rights is at the center of our academic and educational work.

Thus, it brings me great pleasure that this summer programme on Christian-Islamic dialogue is organised by a distinguished colleague from our Law

Faculty, Prof. Irmgard Marboe, from our Department for International, European and Comparative Law.

It is remarkable that this Summer School (which was first organised in 2008) already celebrates its 10th anniversary, a sign that the topic is one of continuing (and I would argue growing) interest, which is absolutely vital for the peaceful development of our societies and the world at large.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Prof. Marboe and her marvellous team, particularly Katharina Albrecht-Stadler, the tutors and the faculty members, for their dedication to this programme and all the time and effort they regularly invest to provide the students and participants with excellent academic input while also making them feel welcome in Austria.

When I was asked to represent the University in today's ceremony I accepted gladly, knowing from



personal experience how mind-shaping and even life-changing such intensive summer programmes can be. When I was a student this Summer School did not yet exist, but I had the chance to participate in a similar programme, the University of Vienna's International Summer School on European and International Studies (Sommerhochschule). It was founded immediately after World War II and is organised every year in the vicinity of Salzburg on the shores of Lake Wolfgang. For many years now I have had the pleasure of organising this other summer school and I can therefore well imagine how intensive and eye-opening your own experience must have been.

Over the last three weeks you have followed an interdisciplinary academic programme combining courses on religion, languages and law with an overall focus on intercultural understanding and learning. You did this in a truly international context with students from 13 different nations and very different cultural, religious and social backgrounds.

I do not doubt that it was a challenge but I hope it was also a rewarding experience to learn from each other; to discover not only similarities and common traditions but also differences and an appreciation of the rich diversity of culture that is present in your student body and faculty.

The acknowledgement of diversity is not the end in and of itself, but can be and must be the beginning of a process of communication, the beginning of an open discourse which allows for a respectful dialogue and for the cultivation of tolerance and peaceful co-existence.

Receiving your diplomas and your transcripts is only the physical proof of your participation – the much more important thing you take with you should be the memories you are taking back from these unforgettable weeks in Altenburg and Vienna.

I am convinced that this has been a unique experience; an intellectual as well as an emotional journey which you will always treasure and which will help you to cope with whatever individual challenges and difficulties may arise in the future.

Please, do keep your memories of this University of Vienna Christian-Islamic Summer School. Keep Austria and all the friends you made here in your hearts and help to make this planet a better place for all human beings.

After all that is our common responsibility, and it is not an easy task.

Thank you. ■



Ten Things about VICISU 2018

by Prof. Ann Black, Australia



When asked to write a reflection on VICISU, my initial question was, where do I start? I noted down some thoughts and then wondered which one or two should I explore. In the end I decided to be eclectic rather than thematic

and share my “top ten” highlights with you.

1. The creation of VICISU

Everything needs a beginning. It seems to me that the creation of VICISU was a touch of genius. All credit to the visionaries a decade ago at the Vienna International Christian-Islamic Round Table, and Prof. Irmgard Marboe who took the initiative to bring VICISU to fruition along with Mag. Katharina Albrecht-Stadler, the University of Vienna, and the Austrian Ministry of Education, Science and Research.

At the final dinner in Vienna City’s Hall, as I talked with previous attendees who came to share the evening with us, it was clear that VICISU had been significant in their lives and they wanted to be connected to the growing VICISU family.

2. Monastery of Stift Altenburg

Removed from the distractions of city life, the monastery was the ideal venue. It provided an oasis of serenity. We all were grateful to the monks who shared their home with us, and just as their lives were in tune with the rhythm of the bells, soon ours were too.

I have given classes and attended conferences in many parts of the world but the room we had for the sessions at Stift Altenburg with its spectacular frescoes was inspirational. With angels in the vaulted ceiling looking down on us, how could we go astray?

3. Pervading sense of history

Reflected in the walls, cloisters and grounds of the Abbey is the history of Europe. To walk through the original 12th cloisters and courtyard gives a window into another time. What would those founding monks have made of its 21st century VICISU guests – both genders, diverse religious faiths and levels of adherence, and from nations and continents not yet discovered? I hope they would be pleased that religion, even if not as they knew it, is still vibrant and vital in many people’s lives today across the old and the new world.

The sectarian religious, ideological and territorial wars also permeate. The Hussite wars, attacks and occupation by Bohemians, Hungarians, Ottoman Turks, Swedes, right through to the Nazi and then Russian occupation served to remind us of the fragility of peace and tolerance.



4. Relevance of religion in today's world

Although the secularisation thesis holds that in this post-modern era religion is dying due to science and reason supplanting belief, VICISU reminds us that religion is far from moribund. Faith remains as central to the identity and culture of people in the world today as it was in past eras. We discussed the challenges for “secular” states in accommodating religious differences and the challenges too for religions in resolving internal tensions between fundamentalisms and modernist re-engagements with holy texts.

5. Distance travelled

All travelled some distance from our homes to join the monks at Stift Altenburg. For me, it was from the other side of the world, Australia; for others it was America, Middle-East, Africa, and Asia. The Europeans too, including the Austrians had left the familiarity of their homes and university to embrace the “unfamiliar”. Physical distance brings mental distance. English scholar, Samuel Johnstone, believed “distance has the same effect on the mind as on the eye”. Artists and writers find distance allows new perspectives and sometimes greater clarity. I think VICISU facilitated both.

6. Our hosts, the Benedictine monks

By their example, the monks showed us the grace and simplicity of a contemplative life. At a time when the church elsewhere is beset with scandal and error, the brothers and Father Michael with his wonderful sense of humour and enthusiasm for sharing his love and knowledge of the monastery with us were a positive endorsement of devotional life.

7. Evenings

The ideal way as the sun set on warm summer evenings was to sit outside in the courtyard with other professors and students discussing all manner of things – often with a glass of Stift Altenburg wine in hand.

8. Friendships

The friendships that the students formed will be as lasting and durable as the knowledge and insights they took away with them from VICISU. For me and other professors it gave us a perfect opportunity to make friends with scholars from other countries and different disciplines. I also left with new insights and new friends.

9. Respectful debate

Throw a couple of atheists into the mix of some very devout and some cultural, Muslim and Christian students from many countries and different sects, there could be “fireworks”. However, I saw no explosions as there was always an aura of respect over our discussions. The old English saying that it is impolite to talk about religion or politics simply did not apply as at VICISU as we all talked about both – constantly but respectfully.

10. Garden of the Religions

One of the better known and loved features of Stift Altenburg is the Garden of the Religions. I would like to end on this because when you visualise the garden it provides the perfect metaphor for VICISU. ■



Teaching Conflict Management

Interview with Dr. Blanka Bellak: Conflict Management Training

by Clara Baumgartner, Austria



Blanka Bellak is a Director at Leadership Associates and works as a designer of adult learning, facilitator, and coach on leadership development. Together with Gudrun Van Pottelbergh, she held a two-day Conflict Management Training at the

VICISU in Altenburg. We had the chance to speak with her about her job, her motivations, and her thoughts about Conflict Management Training.

You are engaged in capacity development of individuals and organisations. What does this mean?

Capacity development of individuals and organisations means, to me, enabling people and their various groups to better meet the challenges that they are facing. For some, this may mean better communication, better and more effective ways of dealing with conflicts, for others it may be the ability to delegate, to prioritise, yet for others the ability to improve their arguments and to organise themselves better. For many, leadership development means to increase their capability to cooperate with people and to make better decisions that are more attuned to the complexities that we face.

I focus on so-called vertical leadership development, a type of leadership development that concentrates on the changes in the way people understand the world around them. So this type of leadership development does not primarily focus on one's skills and behaviors but goes beyond this. I work with people to help them to understand their mental models that make them see the world in one way or another. From that point, if they choose to, I can support them in changing this so that they overcome their fears and become more creative. Ultimately, a good leader needs a combination of mental models that allow her to be creative and engage constructively with others and as well as a set of technical skills, know-how, to excel.

What would you say are the challenges of your work?

My biggest challenge is that the day only has 24 hours which I want to spend with my children, with my work and with moments for myself. I love all this.

You have long-term experience in Conflict Management Training. Are there still situations or reactions by participants that surprise you?

Indeed, most of my professional life has revolved, in one way or another, around conflicts. My interest in conflicts was sparked in 1995, when I had the opportunity to distribute humanitarian assistance in Chechnya and Ingushetia. Since then, I have been interested in conflicts between ethnic, territorial or religious groups. Later, I focused my interest on value conflicts and various approaches to human rights. Finally, following a rich experience in real world leadership in the UN and at the Austrian Study Centre for Peace and Conflict Resolution, I realised that my work on conflict is lacking the most important perspective, namely the personal, individual, one. Then, I started working on conflict management skills with groups and individuals from a different, much more effective perspective. Today, there are fewer and fewer situations that surprise me in the classroom or outside of it. I have been saying for quite some time that there are no difficult groups or difficult participants but there are under-prepared, inexperienced or immature trainers and facilitators. I can of course imagine situations that are difficult to deal with and yet in most cases these situations could have been avoided through better preparation, design, planning and communication prior to the training. I do not believe that there is a situation that cannot be dealt with constructively if we approach it with empathy and with the right set of skills and competencies.

The students at the VICISU come from Christian or Muslim majority countries. Religiously motivated disputes and their reasons were also discussed a lot during the three weeks. Would you say that religious conflicts are different from others?

From my current point of view, there aren't necessarily huge differences between religious and other value-based conflicts. Any value-based conflict can be very deeply entrenched and very difficult to resolve.

At the VICISU, you worked with young people with different cultural and educational backgrounds. How did you experience these days?

For me personally, the few days I have spent with the students of VICISU were extremely humbling and rewarding. I have been deeply touched by many of the stories of young women from Muslim countries about the struggles with values, about the courage with which they were opening spaces for their development, for their education, for their self determination. At the same time, compared to some other work on leadership or training, I found my work with this particular group more demanding. This perhaps was the result of the diversity of participants.

Why do you think is it important to offer trainings like this? Do you think that conflict management training at schools would also have an impact on international conflicts?

I believe that exchanges with people from different cultures, with people who have different perspectives, are necessary for our personal and professional growth. I do believe that our personal growth is the reason why we are on Earth. I have learned to value safe spaces for respectful and at the same time challenging dialogue, spaces that invite introspection and contribute to better self-awareness. Self-awareness and awareness in general are in my view the most critical prerequisites for living a life in which we do not inflict pain on others, for example in the form of conflict. In my view too often our European, Western



culture focuses on our knowledge and we leave our emotions and values out of the picture. This of course does not work and in trainings like this I invite participants to actively gather the courage to face who they are, what their values are, and how these influence their actions. Exchanges like this can be bridges to a better, more reflected and peaceful future at individual and group level. Also, I would like to thank Prof. Marboe and her team for all the energy with which they make these exchanges possible. ■

Blanka Bellak, PhD, is the founder and Director of Leadership Associates (www.leadership.associates). Between 2014 and 2017, she was the Director of the Austrian Study Centre for Peace and Conflict Resolution in Stadtschlaining (Austria), a UNESCO award-winning training and research centre on peace and conflict. She has more than 20 years of work experience at UN agencies, the OSCE, civil society, think-tanks, and academia on peace, conflict, on leadership and evaluation. She supports individuals and groups in reaching their leadership potential. She can be reached at blanka.bellak@leadership.associates.

The Contextual Approach: Towards A Common Word, Work and World

by Ahmad Muttaqin, Indonesia



It cannot be denied that the scriptural text of the Qur'an is one of the sources of the negative views towards adherents of other religions that characterises some Islamic communities. Some of the Qur'anic verses used to legitimise hatred,

intimidation and violence to others. Therefore, the first step to reduce violence must be reinterpreting and contextualising not only those verses promoting peace, good relations and cooperation among religions but also verses that are explicitly negative and polemical towards other faiths.

Prof. Nadine Bozkurt, in a lecture at VICISU 2018, explained that one important methodology for understanding the Qur'an is the contextual approach. This approach interprets the Qur'anic text by considering its historical context both micro (asbabun nuzul) and macro (social, cultural, political conditions including religious situations) at the time and place when the verses were revealed. So, what does such an approach reveal when examining the relations between Muslims and Christians in the Qur'an?

The legitimacy of the position that Muslims should maintain peaceful relations is always derived from the explanation of verses that are inclusive to others, but tend to avoid discussions of exclusive or polemic verses. However, I would argue these more hostile verses are important to understanding the true religious doctrine of Islam at the time of its revelation and the response by Islam as a new religion to other faiths at the time. Such verses must be understood if we are to grapple with the history of Islam and what Islamic theology says about the world today.

What needs to be re-understood are the polemic verses in the Qur'an. It is well-known that particular verses read as hostile to outsiders. I would argue that these verses should be read with the aforementioned contextual approach. The Islamic world, and the world

more generally, is a markedly different place than it was in 7th century Arabia. A context-driven reading of polemic Qur'anic verses will improve relationships between Muslims and adherents of other faiths.

Additionally, interfaith dialogue is an important step towards building understanding and eliminating negative prejudices that have been constructed over decades and centuries. By listening to how those of other faiths understand their own religion, we can correct misunderstanding and restore trust in each other. This is what I have taken away from VICISU. The spirit of the VICISU programme is to link a variety of religions, countries, cultures and diverse academic backgrounds in the spirit of open discussion of religious issues. Through this programme we also exchanged religious experiences between participants from various countries. Discussions were made richer and more interesting when issues were viewed from a variety of perspectives. The programme encouraged us to broaden both our personal and academic horizons.

Discussions related to Muslim and Christian relations need to be continued to establish mutual understanding both as people and of our respective religious doctrines. In establishing a common word, we should engage also in common work to address the pressing challenges that affect all of humanity. Without this translation from discussion into action, any gains in shared understanding are likely to remain transitory.

We must take concrete actions in order to promote and contribute to the world, emphasising the importance of mutual cooperation in pursuit of peace, prosperity and justice. These social issues are the real issues of humanity and they may only be addressed when we come together notwithstanding our differences. The contextual approach allows us to emphasise our shared context regardless of faith or background. ■



Common Grounds of Religion and Atheism

by Alexandra Staudinger, Austria



Having exchanges and meeting with people from, in various ways, different backgrounds, the most valuable insight is that, basically, we as humans are all the same. While every person is unique and every culture/religion/ethnicity/coun-

try is different, basic human needs, wishes and desires do not change much from place to place. We all want food, love, and recognition in some way or another. In the Christian and Islamic Summer University, the basic human need we focused on was, needless to say, on self-fulfilment and spirituality. In particular in its more organised shape as religion. During one of the evenings of that summer course, the monk Father Michael generously gave us a tour of the monastery of St. Altenburg's remarkable Garden of Religions, dedicated to the four world religions apart from Christianity: Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, and Buddhism. Father Michael explained basic concepts of the separate religions on that evening stroll through the garden, and elaborated upon traditions of prayer and the core beliefs of each creed. Prayer to alternating higher beings,

community service, modesty and kindness to self and others seemed to be recurring themes in every one of those organised beliefs.

Contemplating the stripped-down version of the five major world religions, we as students had just been presented with, the aspect of religious belief clearly left out was the absence of such a belief, atheism. If devoted time to one or multiple gods, regard for oneself and others and refutation of worldly goods and pleasures are at the heart of most organised belief systems, what then are the bare bones of atheism?

Since atheists, unlike any other religious identity, are not an organised group and share no essential truths other than disbelief, but not the active belief in something, none might be the most accurate answer. However, things that all humans do, during all times and in all places, suggest that they respond to some innate need that is specific to our species. Talking to another student after the garden tour, it became clearer that more individual practices, less openly promoting a certain belief, like meditation, mindfulness and the new-age practice of gratitude, could be the atheist equivalent to religious prayer. Prayer, essentially, is the communal or individual calling to a higher being, a practice that requires a break from any other occupation, be it work or leisure, and that expresses humbleness and gratitude for what life has given. Modern-day meditation, a flourishing ritual and business in many secular countries, too, boils down to the same theme: the meditator takes a given time out of their day, focuses on breathing and frequently expresses gratitude at the end of the meditation. Furthermore, mindfulness is nothing more than the acknowledgment that there is something more worthwhile to life than daily occupations, be they petty or grave. That time is fleeting and life precious and therefore demands awareness and presence in all moments as well as respect for other living beings. Messages of that like can be found in the pamphlets of an urban yoga studio just as in age-old religious scriptures.

To conclude, an atheist searches for meaning in life no less than a religious believer, albeit in a distinct way. The recognition of common needs is the baseline for any respectful discussion of how differing peoples can their respective desires and needs in a peaceful way. ■



Believing and Living

by Asmatullah Kakar, Pakistan



I felt a change coming in my life when I read a message from Justice Nasira Iqbal that I had been selected for the Vienna International Christian-Islamic Summer University (VICISU) 2018. Representing my country by participating in

such a wonderful cultural and religious programme was a unique experience. Discussing contemporary religious, cultural and legal issues changed our perspectives. VICISU 2018 had an everlasting effect on our minds such that, despite being back at home, we could remember everything as though we were still in the Abbey of Stift Altenburg. The discussion with renowned Professors, discussing possible solutions to problems pertaining to religion from different religious and cultural perspectives made us look into the problems realistically; although we had different beliefs from each other. I could never really have expected the long-lasting exposure from this programme that I got and the unique atmosphere of the Abbey of Stift Altenburg made it unforgettable.

All of us could share what we had in our minds and the image that we could make of any ideas related to religion. We know that religion is based on beliefs and beliefs are based on assumptions. Human beings assume the image of God in their minds which famous psychologist Carl Jung termed as archetypes. Kirkpatrick says that the more positive the image we make of God, the more secure attachment a person makes. I can remember believer and unbeliever participants but because of human tendencies such as the perceptual set, our religiousness and irreligious natures depend on our perception that can be affected by our expectations, assumptions and prior learning. This is the reason why we largely see what we expect to see and our beliefs are greatly affected by such mental phenomenon. As a psychologist, I could realise how participants from different parts of the world had different beliefs.

The discussion on the first day with Father Michael and two participants who were not religious, taught me that apart from religion, humanity and our sameness can be the major reasons for being connected to each other although we had come together for a programme of religious learning. The curiosity of all the participants in understanding each other was so enthusiastic that we would share our perspectives to conclude what differences existed. We could have disagreed with each other on religious problems in an attempt at proving our beliefs' accuracy on the bases of events consistent to our beliefs, such as confirmation



bias theory argues. However, the participants understood each others' religious and cultural perspectives in a way that cultural relativism teaches us. Our personal opinions would be appreciated so much throughout the duration of the programme that post-modernists would undoubtedly have approved. Because participants did not have the problem of cognitive fixation that they would be unable to understand problems from other perspectives, our discussion was fruitful and the conclusions were clear. The world may not know what we discussed in the Abbey of Stiff Altenburg, but in some ways this productive learning programme can be considered a laboratory which tested how people from different religious, cultural and language differences can peacefully discuss problems and happily coexist. The curiosity was obvious from the fact that the Christian believers would ask Islamic believers religious questions and vice versa starting in the morning and continuing into the night. This can be a great message for the world that religion may not be an issue, but our way of behaviour can be the reason issues arise. Every religion teaches humanity that

peace, tolerance and patience can be the best way to get rid of the current religious issues if such principles of peace are followed. God teaches in the Quran "the believers are but brothers, so make settlement between your brothers, and fear Allah that you may receive mercy (49:10). God teaches us to live as brothers and sisters. I believe God wants us to live in harmony despite our differences. Because of the acceptance of the existence of so many religious groups, our peaceful discussion would result in better learning for all. This acceptance of religious groups is necessary if we are to see peace in our time. Some of the religious problems may have been the result of a failure to accept those of different religious beliefs.



Shermer says, beliefs can be dangerous if they are maintained against evidence; this is stated in confirmation bias theory and it can lead to intolerance and conflict. This factor of intolerance is also part of some of these contemporaneous religious issues. On the other hand, Kirkpatrick's theory argues that turning to religion in a time of crisis can be related to a perception of God as an attachment figure who can provide safe haven. Similarly, positive impacts of religious beliefs are provided for in the research of Schottenbauer, Fallot and Tyrrell that believing in religion may have a constructive role in the lives of peo-

ple with severe mental disorders. Some studies also concluded that spiritual struggle with understanding of God or one's own inner conflicts can lead to psychological distress as well.

Our beliefs can result in jeopardising our peaceful living but can also result in recovering from psychological disturbances. Thus, religion as a positive tool can help us rehabilitate lives and teach people to remain peaceful as every religion teaches peace but I believe misunderstanding and intolerance regarding religion can aggravate problems which badly affect mankind. If we accept racial, cultural and language differences, we must also learn to accept religious differences. ■

Why Diversity?

by Asadour Manjrian, Lebanon



In a world consisting of networks that connect everything and everyone together, nonetheless diversity continues to prevail in different regions and countries around the world. It is fascinating to me that not only every country,

but indeed every city, is comprised of people very different from each other. When asked about my identity my answer tends to be more complex than most. I was born a Syrian, am Lebanese by nationality, and Armenian by ethnicity. In reflecting on my three identities, I can understand what diversity is. These three identities differ very much from one another. Syria is a majority Islamic country, in which Christians are a minority that are still allowed to practice Christianity more or less openly. Armenia is approximately 97% Christian and there are almost no Armenian Muslims in the world. Lebanon is the middle ground of these two extremes in which there are three dominant religions divided by eighteen different sects each with a hand in governing the country. Living my childhood and adolescence in Syria, being raised as Armenian culturally, and now living in Lebanon gives me the opportunity to grasp the idea of diversity beyond abstract academic papers and news articles. I have lived my entire life surrounded by people who are different from me.

What follows is in my opinion the most important question concerning diversity: Why do we allow diversity? Is it necessary? Would it not

be simpler to erase difference and have only one language, one culture, one way of thinking? My answer to this question is no. Humans are not designed to agree with each other on every detail; humanity's nature is

to be different with divergent opinions and preferences while simultaneously understanding and accepting the positions of others. How boring society would be if all people liked football and supported the same team, or everyone liked the same color and wore the same clothing, or ate the same food and had the same hobbies. We can feel suffocated by routine because we are not designed to live predictably our entire lives. We were made to experience new things and changes. So, instead of arguing constantly over what is right and what is wrong, we should strive where possible to accept and accommodate difference and in doing so make all our lives richer.

The Vienna International Christian-Islamic Summer University has left a permanent impression on my understanding of diversity. Meeting people from five different continents was a unique experience; learning about people from countries that I otherwise only hear described by the news or on the internet. Meeting with those people created and sometimes reshaped my impression of some countries, cultures or religions. Paired with an excellent series of lectures that broadened my understanding of different religious doctrines and how they shape politics around the world, I have received an education I doubt I could have gained anywhere else.

I'm very glad that I was part of such a programme, I'm thankful that my university, Haigazian University, sent me and that the University of Vienna accepted



my application. If you are reading this article and are in a position to apply for yourself, I would encourage you to do so. It is a life-changing experience that will change and expand your worldview for the better. ■

Different in Positions, United in Needs

by Clara Baumgartner and Cathy Weihs, Austria



Why VICISU?

As two Christians, studying law in the capital of Austria, your only information about and personal contact with Islam and the Islamic daily routine is usually marginal. Of course the opportunity exists to attend university courses dealing with the basics of this religion or its position in the Austrian legal framework. What might be even more remarkable is the daily information from the press or social media about conflicts all over the world connected with Islam that will be discussed by you and your colleagues.

Many people in Austria form their opinions about current political events influenced by prejudice about Islam and its culture while most of them have never even spoken to a practising Muslim for more than three minutes. When it comes to Islam they stonewall and cite social media presenting this foreign religion as the reason for conflicts worldwide. They state it as a danger – a danger that eventually will conquer Europe and relegate Christianity to the second row.

But how can you make assumptions in such a discussion without even knowing the other side of the story? Shouldn't you first talk to the people that are actually living Islam before you blindly believe what politicians or social media try to make you believe about this way of thinking and feeling?

We think so, and this was why we chose to apply for this Summer university.

Altenburg: Get to know Islam in a Christian monastery?

From 29 July on we spent every day with 30 people from 13 different countries in the lovely premises

of the Monastery of Altenburg in Lower Austria, far away from the distractions of the capital. Our new colleagues came from Africa, America, Asia, Australia and Europe. Among them were Christians – Catholics and Protestants, Muslims – Sunnis, Shiites and Ibadi – and Atheists. We all came from different regions of this world, different religions and cultural backgrounds. Not to mention our different personalities and individual ways to live our daily lives or to deal with conflicts.

If you ask some people in Austria, they would tell you that Islam and Christianity would be too different and that a peaceful coexistence would just not be possible with views so dissimilar from each other. Well, guess what.

Peacefully living together, different in culture,...

They are wrong.

We did not just come to Altenburg to learn facts and dates in our lessons but also to exchange opinions, ideas, beliefs and thoughts with people from other religions and cultures. It became even more than that: in this three weeks we developed strong bonds crossing any border – no matter the different ways of life we have. Everyone plunged with joy into this adventure of new experiences in this safe place of a catholic monastery.

On many occasions, we had the opportunity to get to know each other's cultures and variation of customs. At the cultural evening for example we learned more about omani or indonesian songs and dancing styles and at the international dinner we tasted delicious traditional dishes from all over the world. In our leisure time, we were able to try on Pakistani Salwar Kamiz and in return our friends borrowed our Dirndl.

Also every single one of us got in touch with an unfamiliar eating habit at least once – some of us even picked those ideas up, developed them and created something new! None of the Austrians will ever forget the moment when we witnessed the experiment of Mohnnudeln (a sweet Austrian pasta, usually eaten with poppy seeds and sugar) combined with Ketchup. As funny as this situation was for us, at least it included the will to try something new, without knowing about the outcome.

Even though we were culturally so different, we did not experience one single moment during those three weeks of distance or hostility; instead there was naught but openness and interest for each other's ways of living.

... different in religion,...

In classes like "Introduction to Islam" or "Introduction to Christianity" we learned about the main principles and history of the world's two largest faiths. In addition to this theoretical knowledge, we also experienced the practice of these faiths by observing each other's rituals.

By spending all our time together, not only in the class room, but also on the football field or at lunch or dinner, Islam as the everyday companion for many of our colleagues also became conversant to us Christians. By implication, this process also worked the other way around. We saw how similar we all were despite our religious and cultural differences.

One of the most touching moments during those three weeks was the first Mass we attended all together. Not only Christians from VICISU were asked to read an intercession, also two Muslims came forward and participated by bringing forward our hopes and wishes. This demonstrated to us that Islam and Christianity

do not exclude but can complete each other and it might be one of the most important messages received in these three weeks.

... united in needs.

Which was followed by the next essential point: Not only in our free time but also in class, of course, we experienced that all human beings regardless of their religion or their cultural background have the same basic needs that make us all equal.

In the last two days of our stay in Altenburg, we attended the course Conflict Management. In these classes we learned about the main reason for many conflicts or misunderstandings: Even if two parts have the same needs – namely Protection, Understanding, Creation, Identity or Freedom -, if their positions and interests in a certain situation are oppositional, a conflict is unavoidable.

Ignorance will never assist in such a situation, it will only make matters worse. The same phenomena appeared to us in the Introduction courses about Christianity and Islam. Although the way we practice our religion may be different, we recognised many parallels. Even being different in so many ways, not just concerning our religious beliefs, we were united in our will to learn something new, to meet new people and





to understand the reasons for the many international conflicts that are conducted in the ‘name of god’.

A class that definitely changed the thinking of many of us as well, especially in connection with Islam and armed conflicts, was “Women in Djihadism”. Dr. Dalia Ghanem Yazbeck from Beirut gave us an understanding of the reasons why women would join the IS or fighting groups in general. And again, what might be frightening but should not be surprising to be honest: most of their needs did not really differ from those of every other woman in similar situations.

Understanding and meeting their needs and reasons would probably help to prevent numerous participation in armed conflicts in the future. One should never stop inquiring in order to prevent prejudices and precipitate actions. Our needs are just the same, it doesn’t matter if you pray to your god as a Christian or as a Muslim. Or even if you are an atheist. To get to know each other, to understand the interests of the other and the link to their needs that lies under the surface is the indispensable first step in a conflict to achieve a peaceful solution.

What we learned...

Looking back on this time, the three weeks in Altenburg were a life changing experience. We learned a lot, we found new friends and gained the understanding

that it IS possible that Islam and Christianity may be present next to each other – in a moment of complementation.

To solve conflicts, you have to understand the needs and hopes of your counterpart. This realisation is not limited to personal discrepancies between two individuals but even more important for international conflicts between groups of different cultures or religions. Especially in cultural conflicts not reaching the threshold of armed conflicts, like many would see the refugee crisis in Europe for example, one should start with approaching and getting to know the other’s needs better before forming an opinion and acting. It starts on a small scale, but maybe one day humanity will be ready to understand and act with respect for each other.

VICISU was a great chance to realise the importance of approaching each other and we are grateful for this opportunity. It has enriched our lives with priceless experiences and loving friendships we would not have wanted to miss out on for all the money in the world. Contrary to all assumptions in the media that Islam and Christianity are not meant to coexist, we enjoyed the living together and exchanging – most importantly we complemented each other. Thank you for this opportunity! ■

Reap the Harvest

by Kawtar Al-Harthy, Oman



For a decade, VICISU has held its summer programme every two years in an effort to foster understanding and promote peaceful co-existence, irrespective of difference, by educating young adults about those subjects which so often

seem to foster division in our world. No matter what my religion is, what place I come from, which ethnic group I belong to, my skin color, my personal background, culture etc., what matters is creating dialogue and understanding that allows us to bridge difference. In this respect, the programme has had

a pronounced influence on me. It gave me a clearer view of my own beloved country and its place and potential role in the world. In every lecture I learned more about tolerance and its necessity in a diverse world. It made me appreciate how blessed I was to grow up in a place that cared not for my race or ethnic group. In my country we do not judge those of other faiths just as I learned that I am not a God to judge others. Through VICISU, I have many friends from the East to the West, from all continents. Every participant taught me something. I learned how to be calm and observe, how to handle tough conversations about difficult topics and how to open myself to more and very different friend. Although saying goodbye and leaving my VICISU family behind was difficult, it nonetheless gave me lessons and experiences that I can share in my own teaching and amongst my own people in Oman. ■



While at the VICISU 2018

by Kizito Tadeo, Uganda



I had such an amazing opportunity to be the first Ugandan selected among other participants from all over the World to attend the Vienna International Christian- Islamic Summer University (VICISU 2018) programme that was

held in Stift Altenburg, Austria. I must also thank God and all those who helped on the process of getting a visa as it is not always an easy one.

So many impressions and experiences including my first flight, the new foods among which lasagne was my favourite :-). Most importantly, however, was our time together as participants for three weeks. The mix with other participants from different cultural beliefs and religious backgrounds was extraordinary as we learnt a lot from each other and indeed lived together as one. It was an environment where Muslims freely prayed with Christians in church and also Christians praying with Muslims. This was so remarkable as it strengthened our bond and unity. We treated each other as brothers/sisters rather than as Muslims/Christians.

Having done Arts Education at University with History and Christian Religious Studies as the main subjects, I was so privileged to get exposed to topics/courses like International Law and Human Rights, Islamic diversity, Censorship in Europe and Beyond, Freedom of Expression, Religion and Politics, Conflict management among others, which were really a resource to a young motivated African like me.

All these new experiences and the knowledge I got during the three weeks' discussions and interactions on the current world affairs based the Christian – Muslim perspective were not only a resource to myself as an individual, but also to the youth in the high schools back in Uganda who I mentor. As I will occasionally be sharing the basics and the importance of dialogue with them, be it religious or in other aspects of our daily lives for the improvement of our communities, country, and the whole world.

VICISU 2018 gave us the opportunity to give a presentation about our home countries, which helped us have indeed a broad view and a clear image of every participants' home country. More than that we also had opportunities to share our countries' perspectives on particular topics either during the lectures or in the tutorials. The Multicultural Talent Show was yet another amazing opportunity to learn more about the different cultures as they presented songs, dances and the traditional dress codes that indeed differed from culture to culture. It would be unfair not to mention the multicultural dinner where participants prepared local dishes from their countries, for which I cooked "Matooke" that I carried all the way from Uganda and surprisingly all were fresh after two weeks in the fridge :-). All these VICISU efforts and ideas helped us to connect with each other easily and lived as one family as we ate from the different dishes.



My humble prayer is that the whole world would/live the same way we lived during the VICISU not as Christians or even Muslims but rather as friends, brothers and sisters. If only the world borrowed the VICISU ideas and the philosophy, it would no doubt be the best place to live in. However, I am quite confident this can be realised in the long run with programmes like VICISU that gives the opportunity for individuals from different Continents to take part and later become ambassadors of this great wave of transformation back in their communities and countries.

With less doubt in my mind, therefore, the VICISU effect and influence, the future seems bright as the whole world will with ease live together loving, respecting and tolerating each other as one people. ■

Cultivating Harmony, Friendship and Respect!

by Maheen Ditta, Pakistan



“We can solve many problems in an appropriate way, without any difficulty, if we cultivate harmony, friendship and respect for one another.”
Dalai Lama

Little did I know that programmes like VICISU are working so diligently on cultural and religious harmony, or that being a part of it would be such a life-altering experience. Learning about the programme prior to attending, the more I learned the more passionately I wanted to be a part of it. My hope was that it would be an opportunity to bring lessons of religious and cultural harmony back to my own country. However, getting there was no easy task, consisting of a long selection process and a series of interviews. Getting a Schengen visa from Pakistan was no piece of cake; I was refused the first time as the embassy staff feared I wouldn't return to Pakistan. This initial disappointment was heart-wrenching but God is the God of the impossible. He sent two amazing people – Justice Nasira Iqbal and Dr. Irmgard Marboe, to my rescue. They wrote to the embassy and my visa was approved. My joy knew no bounds when I finally received the news. I started dreaming of Vienna, the enchanting Austrian landscape and the great learning experience I was going to receive.

After a rigmarole of flight booking and flight cancellation I reached Vienna – my dream land. I was initially perplexed and confused by the new environment and all the people with diverse cultural backgrounds and languages. I adjusted quickly and was feeling quite at home after few hours. I was well-looked after by our organiser Katharina Albrecht who welcomed us warmly; the arrangements made for our comfort were beyond my expectations. The other participants all felt the same. I met people from different countries with diverse cultures and ideologies, though after a few days I could see that in many ways they were not so different from my friends in Lahore.

It was a true conglomeration of people. Everyone had their own food cultures but loved the Austrian food we were served. I was particularly impressed when participants from three different countries wore Pakistani clothing to show solidarity and extend a message of friendship. My memories of the multicultural dinner are particularly precious. There was such a large variety of food with different flavors and aromas that I can still recall the smell of even if I cannot remember their names.

The “Women in Jihadism” topic of study was a high learning point. The lecturer was engaging and clearly passionate about her topic. Learning about religious pluralism has helped me to initiate a dialogue with my Muslim friends in Pakistan without causing any offence. I cherish the memory of Altenburg as one of the most peaceful places on this earth thanks primarily to the humility and kindness of the monks in the Altenburg. I wish the world was like Altenburg and its people like the monks.

The freedom of thought, expression and religion was overwhelming. My individuality, ideology and points of view were greatly respected. Everybody in the group was treated equally and there was no hierarchy. All these factors were conducive to making this a great learning experience.

It was inspiring how readily both the participants and the tutors accepted and respected each other's religious beliefs without any criticism. Religious tolerance, so sorely needed in this world, is enhanced by the existence of VICISU. I believe the seeds sown by VICISU will turn to saplings, which will in time grow into strong, shady trees promoting religious tolerance and harmony which will eventually make our world a better place to live. ■



A Global Village

by Mohamad Khadra, Morocco



For the duration of the programme, more than 30 individuals, many of us from countries with long histories and a rich heritage, came together in a small monastery in Lower Austria. At first, it seemed that we had little in com-

mon; the only thing we shared was our respective knowledge of the English language. As the days went on, we came to know one another, becoming friends with amazing people from places we've only heard of on the news (and not always for the best of reasons).

We had many discussions, ranging from the controversial to the everyday. We were in an open/inclusive environment where we could all empathise with something about where each of us was coming from. On that basis, we tried to identify with what each of us was sharing with the other rather than convincing anyone of what we believed to be true. The programme facilitated engagement in open dialogues and acceptance between individuals from inter-cultural groups, promoting coexistence, based on the notion that individual responsibility is the catalyst of change, a message that is often missing today. The world appears to be turning away from the promises of globalisation. We've all been noticing in recent times, with a certain amount of despair, that people are all too willing to victimize others. There is a sense that the world is moving too fast for us; a sense that in politics, for example, we cannot make a difference. A sense that religion has become superficial, a mere façade, no longer defined by faith but rather by institutions

– a camouflage for cynical individuals to manipulate their surroundings.

Most people in the world believe that such circumstances are beyond their control. If you believe that the circumstances of life are out of your control, you will do nothing in the face of the world's wrongs. But if you decide to take responsibility, you will find that you have taken ownership of your life and that which effects it. It's a question of what kind of person you want to become. It all depends upon you, the essential being, to choose.

Looking back at the programme, it is apparent that no one left exactly as they came. The experience has changed us all and showed us that while we are individuals, we have an obligation to the (global) society we live in. For if we truly want a change we, each one of us as individuals, need to start with ourselves, because society is the total sum of all individuals.

We can live together, if somehow we as individuals and collectivities have a similar spiritual experience as that of Ibn Arabi. There is a part of ourselves, whom we share with the 'others'; and while religion and politics are important, they are not everything in life:



“There was a time, when I blamed my companion if his religion did not resemble mine. Now, however, my heart accepts every form. It is a pasture for gazelles, a monastery for monks, a temple for icons/idols, and a Kaaba for pilgrims, love alone is my religion.” ■

Assessing Limitation against Religious Freedom in the Case of Face Veil Banning in Indonesia and France

by *Trie Yunita Sari (Nita)*, Indonesia

Center for Religious and Cross-Cultural Studies (CRCS) at Gadjah Mada University (UGM)



This article is the result of my knowledge on the issue of religious freedom and reflection after attending courses on freedom of expression and religion in the Vienna International Christian Summer University (VICISU)

2018. With this, I intend to show the decision to limit religious freedom in some countries including in my country Indonesia, Morocco and France is problematic. Indeed, although we did not deeply discuss the restriction of religious freedom as a fundamental right, I have been interested in this topic and have gained new insights, particularly after discussions on human rights, freedom of expression and religious freedom throughout VICISU.

I recall what our lecturer in the class on Freedom of expression, Adel-Naim Reyhani, said about the importance of freedom of expression by citing Hannah Arendt's thoughts. He argues that human beings as zoon politicon, political animals, are born equally. This nature therefore enables them to orient themselves and to express self-determination in the public realm. It does not mean an annihilation of the individual to achieve plurality; instead it requires equal treatment of individual humans as members of a social group in spite of differences. If one accepts that we should acknowledge both equality and plurality then why there should be limitation one's right to freedom of religion or belief?

In my country, the state protects freedom of religion but limits it under certain circumstances, so too in countries like Morocco and France. I will use the example of the wearing of the face veil. Though it is likely surprising to some, since Indonesia and Morocco are countries with Muslim majority populations, the prohibition on wearing face veils exists in many educational institutions. Two recent cases occurred at the State Islamic University in Yogyakarta named

UIN Sunan Kalijaga and in Bukittinggi, Padang. The prohibition is intended to curb radicalism or anti-nationalism movement in campus, hence these campuses ban the Niqab and Burqa. In the same manner, in 2017 the Moroccan government banned face veils for government employees. A few months after that, the Moroccan Ministry of Education in October 2017 issued a ministerial note to all schools to ban any face veils.¹ Mohammed Hassad, the Moroccan Minister



of Education, explained that this instruction was designed to "preserve the independency" of schools and their "pedagogic and intrinsic function." Troublingly, the banning of the production and sale of the Burqa was done without any legislative backing (Magdalene, 2017).²

¹ <https://www.morocoworldnews.com/2017/10/231353/moroccan-ministry-of-education-bans-niqab-in-schools/>

² <https://magdalene.co/news-1088-why-morocco%E2%80%99s-burqa-ban-is-more-than-just-a-security-measure.html>

In my opinion, this attitude is the result of an unfounded paranoia about radicalism in academic environments. The ban of face veils is considered a preventative action to protect national security and public safety from any terrorist treat. Further, those opposed to face veils do defend such policies on the grounds that they are out of step with national identities. In Morocco and Indonesia, the niqab and burqa are not considered a part of the developing Islamic tradition in these two countries. Morocco has its traditional djellaba, whereas in Indonesia the moderate veils like tudung or kudung have been worn by In-

research, I argue that the reasons presented for opposing face veils are merely majoritarian; such bans are against religious freedom as well as women's rights. According to my analysis, in maintaining national identity, the state overlooks cultural markers including religion as indicators of diversity, which may serve as the basis for construction of a national identity. Secondly, they inaccurately conflate radicalism or extremism with the use of symbol. It is important to understand that radicalism is an ideology that is often tied to invisible, cultural and economic factors rather than face veils. Thirdly, restricting women's



onesian women since before effects of the Iranian revolution were felt in Indonesia, bringing the spirit of conservatism (Candraningrum, 2013). Face veils are viewed as worsening gender inequality through the marginalisation of women; literally limiting their ability to express themselves by hiding their face.

However, I believe that this negative positions on face veils are misleading and oversimplified. In my

choice to wear face veils is itself an attack on women's choice. Those who preach gender equality but restrict face veils are adopting a narrow view of autonomy. In fact, Muslim women that I have interviewed during my research project on face veils and corresponding news analysis shows that they feel like they have greater personal agency when allowed to wear face veils. Face veils, worn as religious symbols, are not in and of themselves sources of oppression or radicalism. ■

ADR in Ghana

by Janet Suuk Lasisa, Ghana



Conflict, which is an inevitable and unavoidable part of any society, has caused most societies to develop ways of managing and resolving conflicts erupting at various levels of the societal structure. Ghana in response to various

kinds of conflict has had comprehensive and pragmatic mechanisms put in place dating as far back as the pre-colonial era. Before colonisation, Ghana, which was organised into ethnic groups, and clans, with the extended family as the smallest unit, traditional process of dispute resolution was being used to good effect. The traditional process here implies the use of indigenous processes and mechanisms hinged on cultural and belief systems to manage and resolve conflicts. Though there are similarities in these processes, it is important to highlight that there are some variations among the various ethnic groups. Settlement of disputes was often through chiefs, elders, heads of clans and heads of families in each ethnic group or community. The process is such that, for disputes in a family for example, parents referred such disputes to the head of the family who tried to resolve the dispute and when this effort failed, the clan head is called in to help and when that proves futile, the last resort was the chief, who gives a final and binding determination of the conflict issue. Conflict resolution techniques that were unconsciously employed were mediation at the family or clan level and arbitration at the community level where the chief served as the arbiter.

The advent of colonisation and modernisation in Ghana saw the establishment of the court system by colonial administrators which supplemented (and at times supplanted) traditional resolution institutions. However, this orthodox court system of dispute resolution, which was held in high esteem for its substantive, procedural and evidentiary features, started experiencing a series of defects ranging from delays, backlog of cases, high cost for justice and denied justice as result of corruption. Most importantly, this legal rational system had failed to preserve the

relationship and ties which Ghanaians so much cherish, causing the existence of so many protracted conflicts in the country as a result of the bitterness and divisions created by the court system which often give a win-loss ruling. This could lead to a relapse of the resolved conflict as a result of one party/ethnic group feeling unfairly treated.

This situation in the country's legal system, as it depicted the absence of an appropriate and time bond resolution mechanism to effectively and efficiently bring dispute to a closure, led to the adoption of ADR as a means of relieving the burden of courts and ensuring overall peace and security in the country. ADR is used as an acronym for Alternative Dispute Resolution and can be defined as the process or procedures other than adjudication by a presiding judge in court-litigation, in which a neutral third party participates as a facilitator to assist in the resolution of issues in a controversy. This definition takes us back to dispute resolution in pre-colonial Ghana, where Ghanaian scholars seem to prefer the name "African Dispute Resolution". As this principle has remained embedded in various traditional norms and values in almost all the Ghanaian social systems after the introduction of litigation by the colonial administration also used more extensively after independence. However, it is important to note that ADR is not meant to replace the court system in Ghana but to provide an alternative to litigation and also modify the country's dispute resolution system including litigation, to make it more suitable for parties especially in a commercial dispute.

Through the comprehensive updating and revision of the laws governing domestic and international arbitration in Ghana, the country passed into law an ADR Act (2010). However, before the act came into force various legislations and acts promoted the use ADR mechanisms including the Arbitration Act 1961 (Act 38) which is still the main reference legislation that regulates arbitration practice in the country. However, other forms like customary arbitration have also been in practice under the customary laws as recognised by the National Constitution of the Republic of Ghana. There was also the Courts Act of 1993 (Act 459), sections 72 and 73 of which encouraged the use of ADR to resolve disputes pending courts trial. Based

on this Act, the Judicial Service of Ghana introduced a National ADR Programme as a mainstream process of resolving cases pending in court through Court-Connected Mediation. In this programme, trained mediators are attached to selected courts to assist parties to resolve their disputes. The Labour Act in 2003 which established The National Labour Commission (NLC) of Ghana (www.nlcghana.org) was further legislation that promoted ADR. The Commission was required to maintain a database of qualified persons to serve as Labour Mediators and Arbitrators who will assist the Commission and also disputing parties to mediate or arbitrate their disputes.

Another means of promoting ADR in Ghana was through a Community Mediation programme introduced by the Legal Aid Board of Ghana with donor support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Centers were set up by this community mediation programme in selected regional and district capitals to encourage members of the community to resolve their disputes with the help of trained community mediators. Finally, the Christian mediation also exists in the country. This is the Centre for Mediation and Conflict Resolution under the leadership of Rev. N. M. Ghartey as well as an ADR Consultancy, Gamey & Gamey Academy of Mediation (www.academyofmediation.com) both specialised in Christian mediation. It could therefore be seen that the prudence of ADR manifested in these programmes and Acts greatly influenced the finalisation of a landmark ADR legislation (ADR Act 798 (2010), after going through several years of consultation, bill drafting, and consensus building, among others.

A study, which I carried out in the ADR unit of the Kumasi court of Appeal (Ghana), uncovered that parties who have resolved their disputes through this process are not only satisfied but wished they would have discovered this resolution method earlier, they are also often prepared to recommend it to others. ADR was also found to be very suitable to the nature of the people of Ghana as relationships were forged. Above all, it was found to enhance access to justice by all persons because the process presents itself

as more affordable and flexible and hence easier to undertake in all communities in the country. Despite the many advantages associated with the use of ADR in the country, as was revealed by my study and many other studies, a wide range of challenges engulfing its practice in the appeal court was also brought to bear. Some of the challenges included; Insufficient ADR centers, inadequate practitioners, lack of awareness of this all-important resolution strategy by most Ghanaians, insufficient funding, etc.

To ensure the effectiveness of ADR, in my study, I recommended among others; the urgent establishment of more ADR centres and other related infrastructure and allocation of sufficient financial resources to strengthen ADR practice in the country. It is also important that adequate and intensive ADR advocacy and public sensitization programmes be undertaken to further establish the practice of ADR in Ghana. Even though some advocacy continues to be done, a lot more is needed to fully achieve the level of acceptance and popularity of the ADR concept. Also as the global consensus on expected outcomes of ADR mechanisms, point to the fact that qualification and skills of neutrals or practitioners are a major factor to achieving good results. There is also the need for an intensive training of neutrals to ensure an effective and standardised practice of ADR in the country.

In conclusion, the future of ADR in Ghana looks very promising as with each passing day more and more disputes pass through this process. ADR is indeed good news to the Ghanaian. ■



VICISU 2018 – Stereotypes and Identity

by Mouna Massaoudi, Morocco



As a Moroccan woman, I have spent half of my life trying to fit the stereotype of what a good Muslim Moroccan is, and the other half trying to defy the stereotype in whatever way I could. The transition between the two phases was

realising that identity is personal, and that unlike what I had been taught all my life, heritage and identity are not synonymous. Don't get me wrong; I like Couscous, I love mint tea, and there are few things I enjoy as much as dancing at a Moroccan wedding. But there are other aspects of what a stereotypical Moroccan identity entails and it is with these aspects that I feel conflicted.

For instance, Moroccan culture is communal; the way we are raised to think always incorporates the well-being and the opinions of our entourage. An example of this would be that Moroccan parents will not allow their child to suffer in poverty and loneliness, and therefore, living at your parents' home until you are married and ready to start your own home is common practice. But it also means that Moroccan children have to tailor their career choices and lifestyle to the liking of their parents.

A communal culture also means that we grow up calling everyone our "uncle" and "aunt", and that we (at least try to) have close ties with members of our extended family. However, the most problematic aspect of this communal life is that in order to maintain harmony, we are expected to live up to the stereotypes set for us. Deviating from the norm leads to H'shouma (Shame, dishonor, disgrace), which is why many Moroccans will opt for unhappy lives in order to satisfy their relatives.

In my first year of elementary education, I was the only student in class whose answer to "What is your mother's occupation?" was something other than "Housewife". This was one of the first instances

in my life where I recall feeling like an outsider. This also meant a different upbringing; my father helped in household chores and was not the only breadwinner. This led to a duality that I still experience to this day. At home, I saw strong female figures showing me that womanhood transcends all. At school, I learned that women had to wear a hijab, be obedient wives, and are naturally and inherently weaker.

My first instinct was to try to reconcile both sides. I could pursue my education while still being quiet and conformist, I thought. But the illusion did not last long, and I grew resentful and bitter towards the only culture I had ever experienced, and the only place I had ever called home. How could I be complicit in the very same system that sought to silence me? I still ask myself this question very often.

Nonetheless, I have reached a more nuanced understanding of my struggle between choosing my identity and fitting a stereotype, which is that if my culture tries to dictate my identity, as a citizen of this culture, I had a role (and an obligation) to break the stereotype and ultimately reshape what a Moroccan Woman's identity is. This experience, although obviously very personal, is one I believe is shared by many women throughout the world. Thanks to the privilege of education, in cultural contexts that otherwise discourage women from becoming educated, many women today are actively working towards progress.

It is important to note that this is not a dichotomy between "Moroccanness" and Progress. I still want a Morocco where we trap guests into having way more meals than they planned for, where we wear Caftans and Jellabas, and where mint tea is still and always the national drink. These things do not contradict women's emancipation, they simply add cultural flavor. ■



The Relativity of Space and Time

by Michael Friedl, Austria



Most certainly, a lot has happened between the first time I was here in Altenburg and the second time now, as a tutor. In the very moment when I arrived at the gate to the monastery again it seemed that those two years evaporated.

Nothing had changed. Every little detail was just as I remembered it. It is strange, how similar it felt and how strong the connection to this place must be that, after two years, it shook me that much to come back.

These halls, courtyards and parks are filled with happy memories. I see people sitting around and listening to music, making jokes. I join the shadowy characters of my memories on a walk through the nearby forest. This place is as welcoming as it was two years ago. It is open, open for people and open for thought. Maybe, this time around, it was sometimes too open for the thoughts, running through my mind. Memories of people, fellow participants are crossing my mind. Some proved to be dear friends; some were just passers by. Some of these people I haven't seen or spoken to in years or months. Still, my VICISU family will be in my heart forever and I wouldn't want to miss any one of them.

These feelings and experiences shaped my expectations for this year, of course. I was careful, though. I somewhat considered my VICISU family of 2016 exceptional, not being able to believe in a true possibility of repetition or recreation of that feeling. I anticipated interesting people from all over the world, young and aspiring academics, ready to change the world.

In one way, I got what I expected. In another, it couldn't have been more different. I came into contact with interesting young aspiring academics, ready to change the world. It did not feel the same way as it did two years. One might say this is natural, since

I myself grew, became a different person. One might say that no two experiences in life will be completely alike, no matter what the context is. One might say that my altered role as a tutor this year entails changes in perception of this edition of the summer university necessarily.

While all these considerations may bear a little bit of truth in them, I want to address the last one especially. As one of my best friends put it on a different occasion, where both of us were working as tutors: the difference between being a participant and being a tutor? It's basically the same, except you don't get to know the (other) participants very well. This was something I struggled with particularly during VICISU. It wasn't easy to accept this difference and, at times, distance. In contrast to other jobs and tutorships though, there is a feeling or timbre underlying the three weeks in



Altenburg. Apart from the warm feelings for each and every one of the participants, there is something one might call institutional love. It seems to be a deep connection and affinity, which is inexplicably created by confinement to a Catholic monastery with roughly thirty other young people.

While I was as lucky as to experience this again this year, sometimes it felt like, in this place, the love for my 2016 VICISU family fills all of my heart. No matter where I go, they will be in my heart. No matter how much time will have passed, Altenburg will always be dedicated to this memory and affection. I am convinced this year's participants will feel the same. This is, as Father Michael put it, evidence for the relativity of space and time. ■

A Hope

by Aygün Yılmaz, Turkey



I haven't watered you for a long time
I forgot!
Don't ask me its reason.
Saying "What is the thing that caused you to forget me?"
Don't increase my desperation.
I couldn't give you the value you deserve.
I know knowing is not enough.
Don't blame me saying "You've valued someone else outside of me."
Saying "you didn't respond to my love"
Don't hate my mistake.
If you knew its reason
Did you say ever these words?
In reality you've already understood my trouble.
You didn't break your silence because of your anger
Saying "Leave her to herself! I waited long enough"

You wanted to pull out the despair of the same wait.

I forgot, but you didn't know how I was scared when I remembered,

How the fear of losing accelerates the rhythm of my heart.

You don't know I can't do without you.

So I came to you suddenly when I remembered.

And now I ask you:

Tell me!

If I water you with my tears,

Then can you forgive me?

You know I can't coax,

Don't turn your head.

Whether you want or not,

Those tears will drip

You know me, it doesn't drip for someone else, except you...



Child of Farmers Labor Fish-Ponds

by Riska Dwi Agustin, Indonesia



I am a child of farmers labor fish-ponds
 Living by the fishy air that stung
 I do not know what is happening across the
 pond acreage
 Small huts where I lived with my father
 Kids are running fast in the mud streets
 Dispersed a swarm of storks to look for
 many germs
 An entertainment when blazing a sunlight
 Brother, sister do not you want it?
 Break through the tree of fires to the
 boundaries of dreams
 Until we gain the hue of sun
 I want to build another life out from here
 To be more extensive my knowledge about
 this earth
 Our families have been stay here
 Was builded the life as a labor
 I do not want to continue this
 I already lawless to go
 (Surabaya, 2 December 2012)

Child of Peasant

by Riska Dwi Agustin, Indonesia

I child of peasant

Since I was a little kid, forced to familiarise
 myself with paddy

Sleep in the mother's arms while pounding
 rice

Stunned with a song of empty bam

Practiced by walking among the piles of
 bunch of straws

Clinging to the side by side until around the
 household

My mom said it was a supplied for the cows

That for the sale busting a restless

I want to open up my horizons mind

With another dream of me

Not just accept what my mother habits

Then had the same fate until discharged my
 descendants

Sailing through the overseas

Trying unmasking a future

I trust then believe, with what I'm doing

(Surabaya, 2 December 2012)



My Wonderful Experience as Both a Tutor and Former Participant

by Magdalena Nemeth, Austria



As part of our stay, we had a tour with one of the priests (Father Michael) through the monastery; in the church, he explained us how the shapes, connections and the intensity of the colors change adorning the walls as change de-

pending on where you stand. During VICISU we were able to make so many connections: Some may have found a connection to God or spirituality, but connections were also found in friendships, deep philosophical conversations, in greater understanding of oneself and in connections between different cultures and faiths.

The stained glass windows and the entry door to the church are the only natural sources of light in the interior. During the day, the light from the oculus moves around this space in a reverse sundial effect. From my perspective, my time at the Summer University was not only delightful, but also enlightening and colourful. Meeting so many different individuals with different cultures, religions, fields of study and personalities was such an enriching, horizon-expanding and fun experience!

The thickness of the walls inside the church also serve to cool the interior and provide a place of stability during storms. This group of students was also able to remain calm despite obvious differences: No matter how vivid and controversial the discussions were during the tutorials, after classes the group was always one happy family.

VICISU gives the opportunity to position yourself, but also the chance to see others' positions and perspectives. In this way your own view becomes broader, more colourful and sharper.

I personally had a different position and experience than during my own time as a student of the programme, VICISU 2016. This year I was accompanying the group as a tutor. Having already been acquainted with some of the professors, the intensity of the experience and the setting, I really enjoyed being able to observe others have the same kinds of experiences I did.

There were of course differences to the group from 2016, but also many commonalities. You get to know the traditions of other countries, especially during the talent show. Moreover, you find yourself having a mind-blowing and delicious culinary experience in the multicultural dinner! And most importantly, you find lifelong friends who, although they may have opinions contrary to your own, you can be confident will always be there for you. ■





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