



AHRC/ESRC RELIGION AND SOCIETY PROGRAMME

The network project, *Performance, Politics and Piety* will be present at the  
*World Congress for Middle Eastern Studies, Barcelona July 2010*

contributing a two-session panel entitled  
*Islam in Performance: pious arts production in the Muslim World*



**Chair: Dr Karin van Nieuwkerk**  
Department of Religious Studies  
Radboud University, the Netherlands

**Discussant: Dr Kamal Salhi**  
School of Modern Languages and Cultures  
University of Leeds, UK

**Panel session I**

Anne Rasmussen, Williamsburg, Virginia, USA  
Deborah Kapchan, New York University  
Amel Boubekeur, Carnegie Middle East Centre  
Nina ter Laan, Radboud University Nijmegen  
Mona Khedr, Flinders University, Australia

**Panel session II**

Kirsten Scheid, Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin  
Jessica Winegar, Northwestern University  
Joseph Alagha, Radboud University Nijmegen  
Karin van Nieuwkerk, Radboud University Nijmegen  
Kamal Salhi, University of Leeds

*Within the global academic framework, sensitive issues are raised in relation to the study of religion, particularly those associated with postcolonial perceptions of 'the Other', and the formulation of academic material in a rapidly shifting global context. The consideration of contemporary, innovative themes needs to be integrated into conventional methodology, although practitioners may question whether it is necessary to be academically 'impartial' to world events of the scale we know. Students and academics themselves present value judgements, in particular in relation to religion and its overrepresentation. Emotional shock may have caused some to suspend faculties of impartiality.*

*In many parts of the Muslim world as well as among Muslims in Europe and the West, new forms of pious arts have developed and are coming to prominence. In fact, art and religion are creatively merging and a variety of genres, ranging from the more traditional religious anasheed songs to Islamic hip hop, rap, soaps, stand up comedy and video clips, have become popular. While some artists excel in the mainstream, others work in religious niches. In both cases their artistic productions tend to question the categories of Art and Islam. While Art is made to embody 'Islamic values', 'Islamic messages' are being transformed in the process. These productions are contested within and outside religious circles, by several actors within the public and the state.*

*The growing influence of piety among a larger segment of the public in both the Middle East and Europe is contributing to the development of a 'religious market'. Scholarly religious discourses have seen a movement towards 'post-Islamist' inclusive visions on art and entertainment. This panel will look at these developments and address the Islamic ethics and aesthetics of the subsequent productions and their various forms.*



**Anne Rasmussen** is Associate Professor of Music and Ethnomusicology in the Department of Music at the College of William and Mary. She has been performing Middle Eastern music since 1985 in conjunction with her studies at the University of California at Los Angeles and for her fieldwork among Arab Americans in communities across the country. Prior to her arrival in Williamsburg, Rasmussen directed ensembles at Oberlin College and the University of Texas, and she has performed widely as a soloist and with other ensembles in the US and abroad. At the college, Rasmussen teaches a wide variety of courses in music and ethnomusicology, the anthropological study of music and culture throughout the world. She also serves as chair of the Middle East Studies Faculty. She has published widely on American musical multiculturalism, music and culture in the

Middle East, and Islamic musical arts in Indonesia. Rasmussen's articles appear in the journals *Ethnomusicology*, *Asian Music*, *Popular Music*, *American Music*, *the Garland Encyclopedia of World Music*, *The World of Music*, and the *Harvard Dictionary of Music* and she has contributed chapters to various edited volumes. She has also produced four compact disc recordings documenting immigrant and community music in the United States. In addition to her work on music in the Arab world and Middle East, Rasmussen is currently at work on a book, *Women's Voices, the Recited Qur'an, and Islamic Musical Arts in Indonesia*. She is a former Fulbright senior scholar, has served as the First Vice President of the Society for Ethnomusicology, and is the 2001 recipient of the Jaap Kunst prize for the best article published in her field.

#### **Abstract**

#### **The Aesthetics of Arab Music, Language, and Performance in the Worlds of Indonesian Islam**

Although Indonesia is often glossed as 'the country with the largest Muslim population in the world', the country's Islamic traditions are rarely seen as normative. Rather, because of the archipelago's position in the Southeastern Indian ocean, far from the authentic Muslim lands of the Arab world, because of its Hindu-Buddhist cultural legacy, and because of the suppression of Muslim energies during the long period of Dutch colonial rule, Indonesian Muslim practice has often been characterized as impure syncretism. This contribution repositions Indonesia's prominence during the last half millennium in the development of pious art productions by looking at the rich world of Indonesian Islamic music that is produced by women and men in the circum-Indian Ocean Islamic world. Key to Indonesian Islamic arts, from the recitation of the Qur'an are the aesthetics of Arabic language and music, which constitute a global aesthetic system that Indonesian artists both reference and resist depending on their cultural background and political orientation. From seashore to department store the contexts and contents of Islamic music in Indonesia represents a vibrant and meaningful stream of Indonesian culture as well as an aspect of global Islam that is creative, dynamic and sophisticated.



**Deborah Kapchan** is Professor of Performance Studies in The Tisch School of the Arts, New York University. She researches music and narrative in the North African diaspora. She is the author of *Gender on the Market: Moroccan Women and the Revoicing of Tradition* (1996), *Traveling Spirit Masters: Moroccan Music and Trance in the Global Marketplace* (2007), as well as numerous articles on expressive culture, affect and embodiment including most recently, 'The Promise of Sonic Translation: Performing the Festive Sacred in Morocco', and 'Learning to Listen: The Sound of Sufism in France'. She is the editor (with Pauline Strong) of *Theorizing the Hybrid*, a special issue of *The Journal of American Folklore*, and has two manuscripts currently under review: *Intangible Rights: Heritage and Human Rights in Transit*, and *Poetic Justice: An Anthology of Moroccan Contemporary*

*Poetry*. In her teaching she focuses on the role of the public intellectual and the craft of writing. She has been a Fulbright-Hays Fellow, a Guggenheim Fellow, as well as a recipient of grants from the American Institute of Maghrib Studies, the Social Science Research Council and the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research.

#### **Abstract**

#### **Literacies of Listening: sacred affect, aural pedagogies and the spread of Sufi Islam**

How does sound encode sacred affect? And how is sacred sound, and thus sacred emotion, learned? While much has been written on spiritual belief from the point of view of narrative (Harding 2001; Woolard and Schieffelin 1994) and the body (Csordas 1994), less attention has been paid to the power of 'sound' and, more importantly, listening, to shape sacred identities and create community. This contribution attends to the aural dimensions of sacred ritual performance focusing on the role of music, chanting as well as listening and utterance in the performance of "Sufi Music" in public venues in France. Moving respectively through the social context, the ritual form and analytical frames, this analysis will by explaining what is referred here to as a 'literacy of listening' (Kapchan 2008) — that is, the acquired ability to learn other cultures (specifically religious cultures, though not exclusively these) through participating in its sound economy. How do learned auditory and sound practices transport a once local and ecstatic religion (based on one charismatic shaykh in northern Morocco) outside its point of origin? What do these communities of sacred affect perform in the larger public sphere of secular France and how do they transform it?



**Nina ter Laan** is a PhD candidate in the Department of Religious Studies at the Radboud University, the Netherlands. She is enrolled in the research programme, 'Islam and the performing arts in the Middle East and Europe: from cultural heritage to cultural citizenship', under the supervision of Dr Karin van Nieuwkerk. Her research project focuses on new developments in the area of Islamic entertainment and pious performing art productions in the Middle East, with particular emphasis on Morocco. She studies the musical expressions of piety within a context of transnational connections and cultural politics. Nina holds a Masters degree in cultural anthropology and is specialized in art and

cultural identity. She conducted ethnographic fieldwork in the Netherlands, Iran and Morocco and spend a substantial amount of time living and working in Morocco where she conducted research, worked as a tourleader and studied Moroccan Arabic. She wrote her master thesis on the construction of Berber identity within contemporary Moroccan painting. Nina occasionally gives guest lecture's for cultural organizations and museums on contemporary art and cultural identity in Morocco.

#### **Abstract**

#### **Contemporary Artistic Expression: Islamic songs in Morocco: contesting the sacred**

As part of upcoming transnational religious markets, one of the forms of Islamic pious entertainment which have become very popular are Islamic songs, also known as *anasheed*. Though traditionally performed in specific settings such as zawiyas and childbirth celebrations, they are now performed in front of a live audience, addressing a young public and diffused through modern communication technology such as CD's, videoclips and youtube. This contribution will focus on contemporary *anasheed* (religious songs) in Morocco. Two cases will be presented and analyzed against the background of transnationalism and cultural politics. Transnational connections established through migration and new media have influenced experiences of local identity and cultural productions. Simultaneously, Morocco's complex entanglement between nation, king and religion forms the background against which Islamist parties are trying to influence artistic expressions in the public sphere. This contribution will show how both forces influence the creation and consumption of contemporary *anasheed* in Morocco.



**Mona Khedr** has recently completed a doctoral research at Flinders University of Adelaide, South Australia. Her thesis, "Negotiating Muslim Identity on Egyptian, Australian and Malaysian Stages" compares the nuances of representing an Islamic identity on stage across these three cultures. She holds an MA in the semiotics and textual analysis of drama from the University of Tanta, Egypt where she teaches English language and literature. Khedr's academic interests include semiology of theatre and drama, translation and interpreting, religious studies and interculturalism in art and literature. Recent publications include "Islamic Sufism and Malay Adat in two plays by Malaysia's Noordin Hassan", in *Ecumenica* (2008) and "Introduction and Translation of Khaled El-Sawy's *Messing with the Mind*", in *African Theatre: Disapora*. (2009).

Conference contributions include: "Experiencing the Global on One's Own Terms, at 'Globalising Religions and Cultures in the Asian Pacific' conference, University of Adelaide, 1-5 December 2008; and "Mediation and Conflict: Translation and Culture in a Global Context 3rd Conference of the International Association for Translation and Intercultural Studies (IATIS)", conference held at Monash University in Melbourne, 7-10 July 2009.

#### **Abstract**

#### **The Gendered Identities of Egyptian Women in Performance**

Gender representations and the position of women in Islam are issues of ongoing debates in both the Muslim world and the West. This contribution will discuss the manifestation of religiosity among Egyptian female artists who publically occupy a religious space to identify themselves and/or their artistic expressions, and examine more closely the representation of a Muslim femininity on stage in a reading of Egyptian playwright Alfred Farag's *The Last Walk* (1999). This contribution will therefore look at the dominant discourses of gender in the context of contemporary Egypt and the influence of these discourses on artistic expression of femininity on stage. The open-ended, Scriptural text has given enough room for other creative discursive strategies to take shape. To represent in performance or not has generally been a debatable question that polarized Muslim communities of old and new. This has particularly been pertinent to women's performance given the proscriptions on a woman's bodily display inherent in the religious text. This contribution explores a performance of gender inequality in the Islamic context of Egyptian society. Farag's one-woman-show play problematizes notions of agency, responsibility and victimhood. The diversity of ambivalent attitudes towards women performers influenced by the Egyptians' religious outlook is explored through the examination of the case of the "repentant" Egyptian female artists. Repentant artists include actors, vocalists and belly-dancers, who due to their varying modes of performance debate the decision of their repentance or retirement differently. The various brands of religiosity that these female artists demonstrate explicate new forms of non-Western feminist agencies which are otherwise unexplored or reductively deemed marginal, precisely because born within an Islamic culture.



**Amel Boubekeur** is an associate scholar at the Carnegie Middle East Centre in Beirut. Prior to joining Carnegie she was head of the Islam and Europe Programme at the Centre for European Policy Studies in Brussels. She is a research fellow at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales and has taught at the École Normale Supérieure and the Stanford University Center in Paris. Her research focuses on North African politics, Euro-Arab relations, and Islam in Europe. She has been a visiting scholar at the University of Chicago and is a regular consultant for various United Nations agencies, the European Commission, and the Open Society Institute. Boubekeur has published very widely and participated in numerous international conferences and colloquia. As a prominent scholar and commentator she has been a guest speaker in the international media.

Boubekeur has recently co-authored with Roy Olivier the book, *Whatever Happened to the Islamists? Salafism, Heavy Metal Muslims and the Lure of Consumerist Islam*, (London / New York, 2009).

#### **Abstract**

#### **Islamic militancy and arts mobilization in France**

Increasingly publicly engaged Muslims in France are relying on arts and culture for their identity claims. Abandoning the meetings and political groupings of classical Islamism; they are now choosing Islamic arts mobilizations (Islamic pop or rap, theatre, television shows, stand up comedy, etc.) which provides them a new repertoire of artistic and cultural action that is used to continue to mobilize their peers for the Islamic cause but in a more secularized and less controversial way than the traditional Islamic militancy. Far from the bloody images of jihad and the obsession with combat "against the Western enemies of Islam," young Muslims have been searching instead for the ambience of a "cool" Islam, freed from the stigma of the "old" Islamist rhetoric. During national tours of the Islamic concerts one could listen to singing imams with the look of pious crooners, guitars in hand. In the way of American gospel singers, these imams are getting hundreds of young men and women worked up, waving their arms in the air, lighting lighters, asking for autographs, and crying out *takbir*, that is *Allahu Akbar* (God is great) — to encourage the performers on the stage. This contribution will explore how these new Islamic cultural mobilizations empower young French Muslims by showing them a mode in which they can be politically engaged Muslims without explicatory religious intermediaries, whether of a normative, textual, or political kind, or being stigmatized as dangerous Islamists because of their political inclinations.



**Kirsten Scheid** is an anthropologist and art historian specializing in modern and contemporary visual arts in Lebanon. She studied art history at Columbia University (1992) and cultural anthropology at Princeton University (2005). She is Assistant Professor of Anthropology at the American University of Beirut and her research interests include the history of painting in Lebanon and the Arab world, colonialism and aesthetics, cross-cultural investments in fine art, and the use of art for negotiating ambiguous social identities such as gender and class. She is working on a book, *On Civilized Art in Primitive Places: Modern Art and the Formation of Lebanese Society*; and her recent articles include, "The Agency of Art and Studying Arab Modernity", in *MIT*, 2007, "Missing Nike: On Oversights, Doubled Sights, and Universal Art Understood through Lebanon", in *Museum Anthropology*, 2009, and "The Necessity of the Nude: Being Painter, Man, and Intellectual in 1920s Beirut", in *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 2009). Kirsten has also curated several exhibitions including on-line shows for Arteeast.org and at Nadi al-saha, a cultural facilities center she co-founded. Scheid conducted independent field research on the contemporary Palestinian painting movement in the West Bank, and her newest research has taken two parallel paths: funding of contemporary Arab art and audience cultivation, on the one side, and elite youth subjectivity formation, on the other.

#### **Abstract**

##### **Landscapes of Secular Piety: First-hand documents of an experiment in modern citizenry**

Arab art stemming from the artist's religious affiliation and that stemming from a humanist, secular nationalism are often assumed to be at odds due to their conflicting essences. Indeed, the rise of an art market is often treated as a sign of secularization of the Arab world. Yet during the *Nahda* pious and humanist positions were not polarized. Lebanese artists believed in an art that would reconcile all three. They envisioned something we could call secular piety that would unite aesthetically activated viewers in nation and faith, transcending emerging sectarian boundaries. Modern Lebanese artists provide an important means for studying the relationship between, citizenship, market, and aesthetic imagination. Generally, the aesthetic is subordinated in social analyses to political and economic structures. What this assumption overlooks is the possibility that art forms actually participate in social debates and crystallize positions by offering alternate articulations. This contribution will discuss changing notions of the meaning of religious belonging in nascent nation contexts by looking at the market for Arab-Lebanese nationalist landscape "views" as the production of a modern, secular piety that could address an inherent, physical aesthetically modern citizen. Data used for this research will be from archival sources, including exhibition catalogues, sales records, and artists' diaries, as well as oral histories and object analyses.



**Jessica Winegar** is a sociocultural anthropologist in the Department of Anthropology at Northwestern University who is primarily concerned with how understandings of history and social change are articulated through cultural production and consumption, in particular through competing notions of culture and culturedness. Her research and teaching interests are sociocultural anthropology, cultural politics and culture industries, material and visual culture, the culture concept, class, gender, Islam, Middle East and North Africa. Her first book, *Creative Reckonings: The Politics of Art and Culture in contemporary Egypt* (2006) focuses on the visual arts. It is an ethnographic study of the intense debates over cultural authenticity and artistic value that occur in a postcolonial society undergoing market liberalization. It examines how culture elites reckon with the legacies of colonialism, socialism, and modernism in order to produce meaningful, yet competing, versions of national visual culture in a

context where 'culture' itself is becoming increasingly globalized and commodified. Her second book project examines the tensions and overlaps between various secular and Islamic notions of culture and culturedness as they are embedded in particular institutional projects in Egypt. The book explores why 'culture' has become so important to postcolonial state governance, and to religious projects to create moral communities, in an era of waning state legitimacy, transnational media and religious movements, and economic restructuring. It is based on comparative ethnographic research on the cultural programs of the Egyptian Ministry of Culture and private Islamic organizations, especially those aimed at women, youth, and rural people. Winegar has also published numerous scholarly articles on Middle Eastern visual arts and artists, North African visual culture, American consumption of Middle Eastern arts, American media coverage of the Middle East, and on American academia. She has played an active role in ArteEast, an arts organization dedicated to supporting and promoting artists from the Middle East and its diasporas. Winegar is

also a founding member of the Task Force for Middle East Anthropology, a group dedicated to increasing the relevance, visibility, and application of anthropological perspectives on the Middle East. Winegar has received grants and fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities, American Council of Learned Societies, Social Science Research Council, Fulbright, and the Mellon Foundation. She has enjoyed postdoctoral fellowships at the University of California at Berkeley, Cornell University, and the School for Advanced Research.

#### **Abstract**

##### **Secular and Religious Regimes of Value and the Making of a Contemporary Islamic Art**

This contribution examines new attempts to create a category of "contemporary Islamic visual art" in Egypt in the context of broader calls for "purposeful art" within the Islamic Revival. It argues that secular and religious regimes of value both intertwine and diverge in such projects, especially in their relationship to state and private sector institutions, to historical and modernist notions of art, and to social class formation. Through an in-depth examination of the continuities and shifts in the execution of art works and of how the process of art-making is conceived, the paper shows the similarities and differences between this new category of art and those that came before it.



**Joseph Alagha** received his Ph.D. in Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies from the Free University of Amsterdam. Alagha, senior researcher at Radboud University Nijmegen, the Netherlands, is the author of *The Shifts in Hizbullah's Ideology* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006). He has published widely on Islamic movements, Iran, Lebanon, Hizbullah, the Palestinian *Intifada*, *jihadi* Salafism, and the performing arts in the Middle East. He is presently a post doc researcher in the project "Islam and the performing arts" and conducts research on the shifts in religious discourses on art and entertainment, the reception of the pious art productions by various audiences, and the ways in which Islamic ethics are translated into aesthetic forms. These themes are studied from the perspective of his research interests in Sunni and Shi'a discourses on music and performing arts; jihad with music among Islamic movements; Salafi conception of *anashid*; the Taliban's '*taranas*', a form of *anashid* without musical instruments; and Hizbullah's music theory. Hizbullah refers to this trend of Islamic art as 'resistance art'. Resistance art is a specific genre of art with a purpose that is distinguished by its subject matter, content, and message that deals with

political and social themes such as jihad, sacrifice, and patriotism. His forthcoming article entitled "Pious Entertainment: Hizbullah's Islamic Cultural Sphere" will appear in an edited book by Karin van Nieuwkerk: *Performing Arts, Islamic Ethics and Aesthetics* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010).

#### **Abstract**

##### **'Resistance Art': Hizbullah's Islamic cultural sphere and the dance debate**

Hizbullah argues that Islamic art is a cause, a passion, and a life. When a passionate activity is not related to revolution, then it is void of any worth and beauty. Revolutionary activity is part of Islamic art because it is purposeful; its purpose is to transform society and reform it. In here lies its aesthetic dimension. Islamic art is the art of resistance; it resists tyranny, oppression, and purposeless art: "art for the sake of art". Islamic art stresses creativity in relation to context and content; a transparent content that is the basis of influence and movement. By this it creates a realistic revolutionary art that does not seek perfection. Thus, the message of the purposeful and committed Islamic art of resistance with a mission is a different message; it is the message of ideologically motivated art. This contribution discusses the concept of purposeful art of Hizbullah and the recent attempt in Egypt to include dance into the concept, examining the reasons why this endeavour has apparently failed in Egypt, while it was partially successful in Lebanon.



**Karin van Nieuwkerk** is an anthropologist and associate professor in the Department of Religious Studies at Radboud University, the Netherlands. She is the author of *A Trade Like any Other: Female Singers and Dancers in Egypt* (1995). She guest edited the special issue of the journal *Contemporary Islam* 3 (2) 2008 entitled, *Creating an Islamic Cultural Sphere: contested notions of art, leisure and entertainment*. She has also edited the book *Women Embracing Islam: Gender and Conversion in the West* (2006). Her other key publications are "Piety, Penitence and Gender: the case of repentant artists in Egypt" in *Journal for Islamic Studies* (vol 28, 2008); "Time and Migration: Changes in Religious Celebrations among Moroccan Immigrant Women in the Netherlands" in *Journal of Muslim Minority*

*Affairs* 25(3), 2005; "Veils and Wooden Clogs don't go Together" in *Ethnos Journal of Anthropology* 69(2), 2004; "Religion, Gender, and Performing: Female Performers and Repentance in Egypt" in *Music and Gender. Perspectives from the Mediterranean*. Tullia Magrini (ed., 2003). Karin van Nieuwkerk has led several, funded research projects of great importance and supervises doctoral research in the field anthropological Islam and the performing arts.

#### **Abstract**

##### **Embodying Piety through Art: Islam and performing arts in Egypt**

Since the 1980s, Islamist preachers in Egypt have persuaded a number of artists, mainly women, to abandon the artistic scene (i.e. the stage). Singing, dancing, and acting were considered sinful activities from which artists had to repent. Several performers stepped down from art. Female artists veiled and covered their bodies. Since the middle of the 1990s, however, a wave of 'new religiosity' came to the fore. It can be characterized as a moderate consumerist middle-class combination of piety and modern lifestyles. In the 'lite' version of Islamism, or post-Islamism, art has become an important topic. It has become a salient way to

distance the 'modern' Islamist thinking from the previous 'hard-liners' intolerant Islamism.' According to the moderate *wasatiyya* discourse, Islam and arts are compatible if it is performed in a religiously correct, *multazim*, way. Several of the stepped-down performers decided to make a comeback and to produce pious art or 'art with a mission' '*fann al hadif*'. These productions aim at supporting a pious lifestyle and providing an alternative to 'lowbrow' art. Female performers experimented with acting veiled roles. This contribution will use the stories of some female artists and Islamic soaps in which veiled actresses act to discuss how female performers try to embody piety and morality in their artistic productions. The research is based on personal interviews with 'repentant' artists and artists who have returned to produce 'art with a mission' as well as consumers and critics of pious art in Egypt between 2005 and 2009.



**Kamal Salhi** is Reader in Francophone, Postcolonial and North African Studies at the University of Leeds, and Deputy Director of the Leeds Centre for African Studies. He is leading the network/workshops project, *Performance, Politics, Piety: music as debate in Muslim societies of North Africa, South Asia, West Asia and their diasporas*, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the Economics and Social Research Council. He wrote and directed plays, made documentaries and co-directed the film, *Pour la Liberté*, about the Franco-Algerian conflict. He worked as a cultural consultant in North Africa and he led artistic groups and conducted research in North and Sub-Saharan Africa. He held two consecutive research fellowships at the University of Exeter, investigating religious performances and their postcolonial impact on North African popular celebrations. His research translated into papers he presented during his fellowships. He compared various religious and secular celebrations and festivals. He

has since then developed a strong interest in performance theory and ritual analysis. Salhi's research lies in the area of Francophone and post-colonial studies: the politics and aesthetics of African cultural production, postcolonial theory, North African cultural and language policies, and, currently, "the legacies of conflicts in the cultures of independence" and the diaporas. His interdisciplinary research has often incorporated ethno-cultural approaches, music, performance, film, popular culture, religion and ritual. Examples that illustrate these approaches can be found in his publications: *The Politics and Aesthetics of Kateb Yacine: From Francophone Literature to Popular Theatre* (1999); *African Theatre for Development: An Art for Self-determination* (1998); "The Pragmatics and Aesthetics of Kateb Yacine's Theatre Practice", in *Modern African Drama*, (Norton, 2002); "Theatre of Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia" in *A History of Theatre in Africa* (CUP, 2004); "Essentials for Rethinking Postcolonial Cultures: The Problematic of Minoritizing in North Africa", in *Mosaic North Africa: a Cultural Re-appraisal of Ethnic and Religious Minorities* (CS, 2007); "Theatre, Politics and National Identity: the Ambiguous Compromise", in *Journal of Algerian Studies* (2000); "Slimane Benaïssa from Exile in the Theatre to Theatre in Exile: Ambiguous Traumas and Conflicts in the Algerian Diasporic Drama", in *Journal of North African Studies* (2006); "Religion in the Francophone Postcolonial Word", in *A Historical Companion to Postcolonial Literatures: Continental Europe and its Empires* (EUP, 2008). He is currently advising an American doctoral thesis on "The Perception and Depiction of Religion in North African literary works".

#### **Abstract**

#### **Performing Islam: new approaches to new artistic and cultural challenges**

Within the global academic framework, sensitive issues are raised in relation to the study of religion, particularly those associated with postcolonial perceptions of 'the Other', and the formulation of academic material in a rapidly shifting global context. The consideration of contemporary, innovative themes needs to be integrated into conventional methodology, although practitioners may question whether it is necessary to be academically 'impartial' to world events of the scale we know. Students and academics themselves present value judgements, in particular in relation to religion and its overrepresentation. Emotional shock may have caused some to suspend faculties of impartiality.

In many parts of the Muslim world as well as among Muslims in Europe and the West, new forms of pious arts have developed and are coming to prominence. In fact, art and religion are creatively merging and a variety of genres, ranging from the more traditional religious *anasheed* songs to Islamic hip hop, rap, soaps, stand up comedy and video clips, have become popular. While some artists excel in the mainstream, others work in religious niches. In both cases their artistic productions tend to question the categories of Art and Islam. While Art is made to embody 'Islamic values', 'Islamic messages' are being transformed in the process. These productions are contested within and outside religious circles, by several actors within the public and the state.

The growing influence of piety among a larger segment of the public in both the Middle East and Europe is contributing to the development of a 'religious market'. Scholarly religious discourses have seen a movement towards 'post-Islamist' inclusive visions on art and entertainment. This panel will look at these developments and address the Islamic ethics and aesthetics of the subsequent productions and their various forms.