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Gestures Religion qua Performance

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Gestures

Religion qua Performance

**MARTIN
VAN BRUINESSEN**

On 9 and 10 July 2008, the Netherlands Science Organization (NWO), in co-operation with ISIM, organized a conference titled "Gestures: Religion qua Performance" at Utrecht University. This conference, convened by ISIM's Martin van Bruinessen with Prof. Anne-Marie Korte of Utrecht University, is part of the large NWO-funded research programme "The Future of the Religious Past," which examines new forms of the religious. Following earlier conferences dedicated to "Conceptualizing Religion," "Powers: Sovereignty, Media and Beyond," and "Things: Material Religion and the Topography of Divine Spaces," the conference on "Gestures" focused on the performative aspects of religious phenomena, from ritual and liturgical acts to dramatic expressions and various forms of embodiment.

Over thirty papers were presented, about half of them by junior and senior scholars taking part in the "Future of the Religious Past" programme. Major themes were introduced with keynote speeches by John R. Bowen, Kim Knott, Brent Plate, and Regina Schwartz, and further fleshed out in papers and comments by various other invited scholars, including Peter Clarke, Michael Lambek, Yvonne Sherwood, Ward Blanton, Meerten ter Borg, Annelies Moors, Christoph Baumgartner, and Thomas Quartier.

The conference was expressly multidisciplinary, with contributions from anthropology and sociology, literary studies, ritual studies, philosophy, cultural studies, and musicology all discussing religious phenomena in four continents and concerning various religious traditions. The "Gestures" discussed included pilgrimage, sacrifice and martyrdom, as well as theatrical and musical performances, blasphemy, religious fashion, and spirit possession.

Largely thanks to ISIM's participation in the event, Islam and Muslim societies were strongly represented, with papers on religion and secularism in the late Ottoman Empire, martyrdom for love and nation, Sufi ritual and modernity in Sudan, Islamic fashion in Europe, musical performances with an Islamic message, and blasphemy and the ritual of insulting Muslims in contemporary European societies. A detailed programme of the conference and the abstracts of all papers presented are published on the ISIM website.

Martin van Bruinessen is ISIM Chair and professor at Utrecht University.

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