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# The Acquisition of Performance Practices in Faith Settings

An International Symposium

Friday September 11 & Saturday September 12 2015

Interdisciplinary Centre of the Social Sciences, University of Sheffield, England

**The network's first symposium focuses on how performers acquire, or are socialised into, the competencies, identities and subjectivities needed for religious performance and will include presentations by network members and, in liaison with local partners, a performance showcase event.**

**Speakers include:** Professor MICHAEL FRISHKOPF, University of Alberta (Ethnomusicology), Professor PHYLLIS CHEW, University of Nanyang, Singapore (Sociolinguistics), Dr HOLLY HEARON, Christian Theological Seminary, Indianapolis (Biblical Studies), Dr JOSHUA EDELMAN, Manchester Metropolitan University (Performance Studies), Professor RUSI JASPAL, De Montfort University (Social Psychology), Dr VALLY LYTRA, Goldsmiths University (Literacy/Multilingualism), Dr CARL MORRIS, University of Central Lancashire (Religious Studies), Professor TOPE OMONIYI, Roehampton University (Sociology of Language and Religion), Dr RUPERT TILL, University of Huddersfield (Music), SHAIMAA EL NAGGAR, University of Lancaster (Sociolinguistics), ARANI ILANKUBERAN, Goldsmiths University (Literacy/Multilingualism), Dr ANNA GLUKHANYUK, Ekaterinburg State Drama School (Theatre Studies), DR ANDREY ROSOWSKY, University of Sheffield (Language and Education)

## Symposium administration

Lindsay Farnsworth ([L.J.Farnsworth@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:L.J.Farnsworth@sheffield.ac.uk))

<http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/education/research/projects/heavenly>

## Heavenly Acts

### Aspects of Performance through an interdisciplinary lens

This AHRC-funded Heavenly Acts international interdisciplinary network (comprising sociolinguists, ethnomusicologists, educationists, social psychologists, anthropologists, religious studies, translation studies, and drama/theatre academics) seeks to understand performance and aspects of performance as central or as important to accounts of a wide range of religious devotional practices.



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## Introduction

### Heavenly acts: aspects of performance\* through an interdisciplinary lens

In the second half of the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty first, a substantial body of thought, research and writing in a range of disciplines has been devoted to exploring areas of human experience and activity that can be understood as performance-oriented. This early research has been built upon to such an extent that there are now a number of distinct, but related, threads in evidence in the fields of human arts and sciences that represent different disciplines, diverse settings and a range of methodological approaches, all approaching 'performance' from one direction or another. In linguistic anthropology the work of Bauman and Briggs (1991) has understood performance through the process of entextualisation; in identity studies Butler's (1997) performative notion of the 'repetition of stylized acts in time' is how she theorises gender and sexuality; drawing on reader response theory, speech act theory and theatre studies, Biblical Studies scholars have developed Performance Criticism as a discrete and fruitful lens through which to view performance; ethnomusicologists, in particular, are exploring new configurations around musical performance and global impact deriving from transnational and diasporic processes.

A common characteristic uniting all these threads is the nexus formed by performance and religion. Much of the early anthropological gaze was upon ritual and ceremony. More recent activity is exploring how performance informs and is informed by religious experience and activity whether that performance is musical, linguistic, theatrical, identity-oriented or ritual (Rosowsky, 2012, 2013).

These trends indicate that a much wider cross-disciplinary approach to this topic is now needed. This international network, for the first time, brings together scholars researching in these different areas to share the insights and expertise they have of their own fields, to explore the potential there evidently is for cooperation and collaboration across these disciplines, to seek to develop both theory and methodology in a trans-disciplinary manner and to make an important contribution to knowledge about performance in religious settings and contexts. Furthermore, with these different researchers carrying out their studies within and across a variety of religious traditions and contexts, the network has an explicit and integral inter- and cross-faith dimension that is of interest and importance to non-academic beneficiaries who, it is intended, will use the network to further their own agendas in respect of inter-faith cooperation, understanding and collaboration. The contribution to social cohesion and cultural understanding in this respect is potentially significant.

It is envisaged that the convergence of activities from these diverse fields, and the opportunity to bring together these pioneering scholars from around the world, with varying levels of research experience, and performers, practitioners and audiences from diverse faith communities, will be a very efficient and economical way to forge academic and public engagement and to share expertise and knowledge between researchers, including matters of methodology and new theoretical developments. At a time where religious performance, after a long period of exile, is once again being admitted, or being forced to be admitted, into hitherto secularised public space, it is timely to address the issues and challenges such convergence presents.

*\*Performance here is understood in as wide a perspective as possible to include the linguistic 'performativity' of Austin and Searle, the 'performance' of identities/subjectivities in the Butlerian sense, societal performativity in the Lyotardian sense, the performance-oriented verbal art of Bauman and the theoretical perspectives on performance articulated through 'performance studies' by Schechner, Conquergood and others (Edelman 2013, Carlson, 2003).*

## Programme for Heavenly Acts I

### The Acquisition of Performance Practices in Faith Settings

*Friday 11 and Saturday 12 September 2015*

*University of Sheffield – ICOSS*

#### *Day One*

**9.30** Coffee/Tea. Registration

**10.00** Welcome and Introduction – *Performance, faith and interdisciplinarity* -Dr Andrey Rosowsky, University of Sheffield, UK

**10.40** *Biblical Texts in Oral Performance: An exploration of the intersection of modalities, competencies, and socialization* – Dr Holly Hearon, Christian Theological Seminary, Indianapolis, USA

**11.20** Coffee/Tea

**11.40** *Becoming socialised into Temple worship: Exploring children's language and literacy learning and faith membership through text and talk* – Dr Vally Lytra, Goldsmiths University, London, UK

**12.20** Lunch

**1.20** *Entrancement and entrainment: techno-shamans from prehistory to the nightclub* – Dr Rupert Till, University of Huddersfield, UK

**2.00** *Coping with threatened faith identities: Insights from social psychology* – Professor Rusi Jaspal, De Montfort University, Leicester, UK

**2.40** Coffee/Tea

**3.00** *Films and Faith: Exploring identities of British Tamil Hindu teenagers through the act of viewing, reflecting upon and performing Tamil Hindu films* - Arani Ilankuberan, Goldsmiths University, London, UK

**3.40** *Learning to go on: The development rituals of assertion, healing and forgiveness in the wake of the Irish Catholic Church's sexual abuse scandal* – Dr Joshua Edelman, Manchester Metropolitan University, UK

**4.20** End of Day One of Symposium

**6.00-8.00** *Heavenly Acts Performance event* – The Auditorium, University of Sheffield Students' Union

**8.30** Dinner at restaurant in West Street (optional)

## **Day Two**

**9.30 Coffee/Tea.**

**10.00 *Islamic Reform and the Acquisition of Muslim Language Performance Practices: From Human to Material Mediation*** – Professor Michael Frishkopf, University of Alberta, Canada

**10.40 *Pressure of religious context: Russian Theatre and Orthodox Church*** – Associate Professor Anna Glukhanyuk, Vice-Rector of Ekaterinburg State Drama School, Ekaterinburg, Russia

**11.20 Coffee/Tea**

**11.40 *Language and Performance in Daoist temples: a case study of three spirit-mediums*** – Professor Phyllis Chew, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

**12.20 Lunch**

**1.20 *Sounds Islamic? Understanding and theorising Muslim musical practice in contemporary Britain*** – Dr Carl Morris, University of Central Lancashire, UK

**2.00 *The changing face of religious discourse: A Multi-modal analysis of televangelists' performance***– Shaimaa El Naggar, University of Lancaster

**2.40 Coffee/Tea**

**3.00 *Roundtable discussion. Heavenly Acts – future developments*** (with Professor Tope Omoniyi, University of Roehampton, from Ghana via Skype)

**3.40 Close of symposium.**

## **Abstracts**

## **Performance, faith and interdisciplinarity**

Dr Andrey Rosowsky, University of Sheffield, UK (a.rosowsky@sheffield.ac.uk)

The opening session of the symposium seeks to do a number of things. It will, I hope, set the scene for not only the two days of the symposium but also the *Heavenly Acts* project as a whole. I will share some of my own research and thinking around performance, faith and language and I will also make some comments about the interdisciplinary task we have set ourselves. The way I am going to set the scene is to share my own journey towards this scholarly focus on performance and faith. For reasons that will become obvious I will sub-title my presentation, 'From Readings to Verses to Acts'. This approach will help me introduce some of my contextual, theoretical and methodological background, arising mostly from the field of language, but also from elsewhere, such as more general considerations arising from, for example, the academic study of performance itself and to sociocultural theory relating in particular to identity. In particular, I discuss theory and present data linked to two major areas related to performance. The first is an exploration of faith-oriented language practices analysed through the lens provided by Richard Bauman's theory of performance within the verbal arts. The second orientation, inevitably more complex, is the role of faith-oriented performance in the nexus between orality and literacy, between sound and silence, between enchantment and disenchantment. Data from liturgical literacy, and devotional song and poetry will be shared in order to illustrate these theoretical musings.

**Paper Title: Biblical Texts in Oral Performance: An exploration of the intersection of modalities, competencies, and socialization**

Dr Holly Hearon, Professor Emirita, Christian Theological Seminary, Indianapolis

The Bible, simply put, is a collection of writings to be read. Increasing awareness of the complex relationship between written and spoken word in antiquity has led some biblical scholars to propose that these written words were intended to be spoken and heard: to be performed. This has led them to explore these written texts for verbal cues that point to their oral performance and aural reception. Collaborative work with the Network of Biblical Storytellers in the U.S. has provided an opportunity to explore the practice of performance in contemporary settings, while research through the Nida Institute (Bible translators) has provided a theoretical framework for examining the semiotic impact of shifting from one modality to another. I will draw on this collaborative engagement to describe competencies that move to the fore in oral performance of the biblical text and to reflect on how the shift in modality from written to spoken word alters the socialization of the community in relation to the text.

## **Becoming socialised into Temple worship: Exploring children's language and literacy learning and faith membership through text and talk**

Dr Vally Lytra, Goldsmiths University of London (v.lytra@gold.ac.uk)

Although Temple worship is not mandatory in Hinduism, from a very early age, Tamil Hindu/Saiva children go to the Temple with their parents, older siblings, grandparents and other family members to pray. They become socialised into Temple worship during these recurring visits as well as on auspicious festivals. By observing and imitating other more competent faith community members, children cultivate age-appropriate routines, practices, embodied dispositions and emotional responses as they strive to become expert members of the Hindu/Saiva faith community. This paper draws upon data from our project "Becoming Literate in Faith Settings: Language and Literacy Learning in the Lives of New Londoners" (Gregory et al. 2009), a three-year multi-site collaborative team ethnography whose aim was to examine how sixteen children aged between four and twelve from Bangladeshi Muslim, Ghanaian Pentecostal, Polish Catholic and Tamil Hindu/Saiva communities become literate through faith activities in London.

In this presentation, I discuss examples from the scrapbooks children created for the project to document their religious practices and experiences over a year as well as from their interviews after the scrapbooks were completed. Inspired by the multimodal and syncretic nature of children's learning and religious socialisation in faith settings (Gregory et al. 2013, 2015), I seek to illustrate how through their text and talk children internalize, express and perform their developing understanding of prayer rituals, symbols and beliefs associated with Hinduism/Saivism in general and Temple worship in particular, creating threads of continuity across generations, continents, settings, experiences and discourse genres.



## **Entrancement and entrainment: techno-shamans from prehistory to the nightclub**

Dr Rupert Till, Reader in Music, University of Huddersfield (r.till@hud.ac.uk)

Music and dance are a fundamental part of human activity, emerging alongside shelter and fire as a communal technology that enabled people to build cultures that held knowledge and relationships together, that built what we know today as humanity. We have evidence of musical culture from as long as 40,000 years ago. So what was the music of the past like and how does it relate to music today? This presentation explores why people across the world and across the millennia have sought entrancement from music by entraining their bodies to external musical rhythms. It will discuss how and why we explore altered states of consciousness through music, travelling to other places within ourselves. It will examine the similarities between the ritualistic cultures of the ancient past and the electronic cultures of today, and hope to learn something as result of what it means to be human.

## **Coping with threatened faith identities: Insights from social psychology**

Dr Rusi Jaspal, Professor in Psychology & Sexual Health, De Montfort University, Leicester

Identity Process Theory from social psychology specifies that an individual's sense of self must be characterised by (1) self-esteem, (2) continuity, (3) self-efficacy, (4) distinctiveness, and (5) coherence. These are referred to as identity principles. Dominant social representations, including group norms and state ideologies, can enhance or challenge these identity principles, resulting in identity threat. This paper presents data from three case studies in which faith identity may be challenged due to dominant social representations. The paper draws on interview data on the identities and experiences of (1) Muslims in Britain in the context of Islamophobic prejudice, (2) British Asian gay men of religious faith living in a heteronormative context, and (3) Jews in the Islamic Republic of Iran. The results of various qualitative empirical studies of identity and experience among these groups suggest that individuals strive to maintain a sense of faith identity that is characterized by the aforementioned principles. They engage in intrapsychic, interpersonal and intergroup strategies for coping with threat. Social psychology has tended to focus on cognition, rather than social practice. This talk highlights the importance of examining how identities can be enhanced and protected through social and symbolic practice.

**Films and Faith: Exploring identities of British Tamil Hindu teenagers through the act of viewing, reflecting upon and performing Tamil Hindu films.**

Arani Ilankuberan, PhD student, Goldsmiths University of London (arani.kuberan@yahoo.co.uk)

This paper draws upon data collected for the study which is at the intersection of identity, religion and film research. The study was a three-year longitudinal ethnography (2011-2013) whose aim was to examine the ways three British Tamil Hindu teenagers (two 13 and one 16 at the beginning of the study) engaged with Tamil Hindu films and what effect it had on their faith literacy, socialisation and identity construction.

The study takes an interdisciplinary approach as there is little research which covers faith literacies, identities, film and religion and research into Diaspora film and its effect on an Asian Diasporic identity has concentrated on Hindi popular and religious film (Gupta, 1989; Mankekar, 1999; Durham, 2004 and Dwyer, 2006). Thus, there is a clear gap of knowledge into Tamil Hindu mythological films predominantly from the 1950s and 1960s and their effects on a Diasporic audience developing a British Tamil Hindu identity which this study seeks to rectify.

Examining the viewing of Tamil Hindu religious film is particularly pertinent as it is a highly visual religious culture; 'Hindu religious worship strongly emphasis[es] the power of vision [making] the experience of viewing [itself] a devotional experience (Gillespie, 2005, 163). Against this backdrop, the teenagers' act of viewing a religious film becomes a religious experience. Findings from the data show how the three teenagers' skills gained through their socialization into their faith where they had to navigate the multiplicity and plurality of voices which make up Hinduism's vast and complex mythologies enables them to develop a similar approach to manage their religious and cultural identities within a secular society with ease and develop creative ways to balance aspects of both identities. The teenagers' also changed over the course of the study and their development is seen through their performance of the films in their interviews, both becoming analytically and critically advanced whilst developing a deeper engagement with the film by actively adopting the voices of the film and taking on the role of performer when performing dialogues in their discussions.

In this presentation, I discuss examples from the in-depth interviews conducted throughout the viewing of the religious films to illustrate how the teenagers' personal response to the films is indicative of their emerging faith identity connected to their spiritual, emotional and moral development.

## **Learning to go on: The development rituals of assertion, healing and forgiveness in the wake of the the Irish Catholic Church's sexual abuse scandal**

Dr Joshua Edelman, Birkbeck College, University of London (j.edelman@bbk.ac.uk)

How can learned performative practices help religious communities to heal after serious betrayals? From the disciplinary background of theatre and performance studies, this presentation will look at the development of two new models of performance and the processes of communal and institutional learning that led to and shaped them. One is a particular form of Christian worship developed by a group called Christian Survivors of Sexual Abuse (CSSA), a support group for those who have been sexually abused by Christian clergy but who nevertheless wish to remain part of the Church. As standard Christian rituals did not address their particular needs—and, in fact, could be quite traumatic—the group developed its own, quite challenging, style of worship and Christian self-assertion, which it conducted in churches around Britain and Ireland in the 1990s and 2000s. The second is the Liturgy of Lament and Repentance, which took place under the leadership of two archbishops at St Mary's Pro Cathedral in Dublin in February of 2011. Drawing on a decade of attempts by the Catholic Church to appropriately and effectively atone for its past sins, this was an effort by the institutional Catholic Church in Ireland to repair its relationship both to abuse survivors and to Irish society as a whole.

In describing these performances, as well as their development out of the social and liturgical backgrounds, I hope to also demonstrate how analytical techniques derived from the study of theatre and aesthetic performance can be useful in understanding the lived, performative reality of religious life.

## **Islamic Reform and the Acquisition of Muslim Language Performance Practices: From Human to Material Mediation**

Dr Michael Frishkopf, Professor of Music, University of Alberta (michaelf@ualberta.ca)

Underlying the ubiquitous linguistic recitations of public Muslim rituals—Qur’anic cantillation (tilawa), call to prayer (adhan), canonical prayer (salah), Sufi ritual (hadra), —traditional Islam features richly expressive paralinguistic sound, replete with melodic sophistication, improvisation, and vocal nuance (even if not considered music per se) – varieties of what I have called “language performance” (Frishkopf 2013). These paralinguistic sonic traditions were embodied, humanly mediated: carried primarily in oral tradition, incrementally ramifying across the generations, but lacking any absolute reference. Through centuries of Islamic expansion, such embodied models for sonic ritual performance diversified in adaptation to local cultures, absorbing regional musics and forging local solidarities, empowered by their flexibility. Fixed texts adapted sonically to maximize emotional power and social connection in each situation—the adhan or a ubiquitous Islamic poem such as the Burda could sound Turkish, West African, Syrian, or Javanese. A situation of inward unity and outward diversity thus prevailed in the Muslim world.

From the 19th century, in response to European colonialism’s disempowering of Muslim societies, reform (islah) movements in Islam have gradually transformed this situation. Silencing localized humanly-mediated musicality as mere “culture” or even bid`a (heresy), reformism’s discourses and practices have tended to attenuate humanly mediated traditions. Human mediation links people via sound (thus “oral tradition”), through intersubjective relationships developed in social-sonic interaction, facilitating the acquisition of performance practices while promoting sonic diversity. By contrast, reformism advocates material mediation: dissemination of disembodied, standardized, material models precluding localization. With this radical shift in the acquisition of performance practices, reformism thus inverts the embodied tradition, emphasizing an outward performative unity, without ensuring a corresponding inward one. Examples include the proliferation of text-centric Qur’anic recitation; the architectural displacement of traditional Sufi devotions; the use of media representations; and the silencing of musical ritual in Canada.

Building on Habermas, I theorize this transformation as a colonization of the Muslim lifeworld, more specifically what I term the soundworld, by Islam qua system. Reformism’s erasure of localized sound aesthetics instantiates Islam’s shift from communicative towards strategic action. Drained of adaptive power, unresponsive to the subtleties of the local, the sounds of a uniform religious ritual become coercive, not communicative, its models now perceived as lying outside the corporate body of the Umma. This constriction of the ritual soundworld supports reformist Islam as a system in search of political power through ritual conformity.

## Pressure of religious context: Russian Theatre and Orthodox Church

Dr Anna Glukhanyuk, Associate Professor at Ekaterinburg State Drama School  
(aglukhanyuk@yahoo.com)

In historical retrospective Russian culture was mostly based on Orthodox influence. The combination of official directives and inner influence created a special attitude towards art in Russian cultural experience. Theatre as a synthetic type of art absorbed different aspects of religious context – from content to forms of presentation. Following the words of the Russian religious philosopher of the beginning of 20th century V. Rozanov we can confirm that scenic views of Evangelical and Biblical stories were an old tradition in Russia which had been established by the Church and recognized by people. Without a detailed overview of historical heritage it is possible to mention the obvious connection between Holy Stories and persons with performance nature, Orthodoxy and Theatre. Another question is the attitudes of religious people towards theatre as art, performance as visual representation. Again, historical analyses show us that the conflict, which seems like an aspect of cooperation, arises not from the Church as a Social Institution but from personal desire to protect “feelings of believers”. Today the Orthodox Church in Russia is becoming an influential organization, providing its views and opinions on most social matters. In situation with the art industry, religious context has not only ethical aspects, but structural, organizational and political ones.

Bearing in mind the widely known conflict with Pussy Riot in contemporary Russia, I want to present a brief preliminary analysis of a recent situation with the Opera “Tannhäuser” on the stage of Novosibirsk Opera House. Religious pressure is really influenced in the contemporary Russian art scene and is supported at the organizational level (“Why we can’t get a permission of the Church for such performances as Mel Gibson did with his “The Passion of the Christ”) and spiritual one (“Don’t take the Lord’s name in vain” as justification of the performance director’s guilt). We can easily follow the similar situation with the Opera “Tannhäuser” 100 years later. One priest creates “moral panic” around the performance. Being out of the political context of the situation which obviously exists I decided to focus on the content of religious discourse in social networks Facebook and Vkontakte (Russian popular social network). Preliminary pilot research shows following results – discussion is far from contextual faith meanings in the performing material. Anyway several tendencies could be mentioned:

1. *Western discourse*. It is used like a contradiction with Western values (European values). Those who are against the Opera consider that Western influence destroys ‘Russian traditional values’ based on Orthodoxy. Those who are for the Opera speak about music, talent, doubtless artistic value of Wagner which couldn’t be spoiled by anyone.
2. *“Religious obscurantism”* as a term used by both sides. Those who are against the Opera discuss obscurantism, pornography, blasphemy, etc. in performance. The other side applies to obscurantism and paganism of priests, Orthodox Church as a social institution.
3. *Contradiction of “Temples”*. Art could be prohibited only in the case when people believe in it. So, we have a conflict between two temples – Temple of art and Temple of Orthodoxy.
4. *Historical truth*. It has been destroyed in the performance – truth of Holy History, even if the story is moved by the director into the 21<sup>st</sup> century
5. *Fall of man and redemption* as a symbolical content of the performance.
6. *Love and punishment*. Contradiction between Orthodox love and humanity and desire to punish, destroy, forbid.

## **Language and Performance in Daoist temples: a case study of three spirit-mediums**

Dr Phyllis Chew, Professor at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore (phyllis.chew@nie.edu.sg)

In the Chinese temple, the gestalt effect is the form-generating capability of our senses, particularly with respect to the visual recognition of figures and whole forms instead of just a collection of simple lines and curves. The meaning is acquired from the product of complex interactions pertaining to the language of invocation, chant, and music, talisman, among other visual, musical and ritualistic stimuli present in the temple environment. While an altered state of consciousness can be attained through hypnosis, meditation, prayer, mantra, etc; in Daoism, it is invoked by the total performance of all these elements. There is no canon in popular Daoism – meanings are communicated intuitively with the aid of music or through visuals which manifest themselves in charts, symbols and calligraphy on the walls, tapestries, and personal seals. Daoist mediums vary widely in age and every sort of personality and may be of both sexes. They are able through the use of special language and performance to travel and retrieve ancient wisdom from other worlds and/or dimensions. They help misguided souls and ameliorate illnesses of the human soul caused by foreign elements. Their successful intervention depends primarily on their evocative performance of sacred language, music as well as dance.

## **Sounds Islamic? Understanding and theorising Muslim musical practice in contemporary Britain**

Dr Carl Morris, University of Central Lancashire (CJMorris2@uclan.ac.uk)

Over the last fifteen years Britain has seen the continued growth of a vibrant Muslim musical culture that attempts to fuse religious observance and spiritual expression with global pop sounds and the faint traces of an Islamic musical/poetic tradition. Characterised by both stylistic and conceptual syncretism, this musical phenomenon can often elude straightforward cultural and religious theorisation. This paper therefore attempts to provide a typology based on two identifiable streams of musical practice amongst British Muslims today – ‘Islamic music’ and ‘Islamically-conscious music’.

Islamic music is overtly immersed within Islamic discourse and attempts to reinforce the moral coherence of a distinct Muslim community. It is partly defined by sounds and lyrical content that reference the traditions, beliefs and religious figures distinguishing Islam as a unique religion. Yet it also includes music that deals with broader concepts of Islamic morality and spirituality. Crucially, in all instances there tends to be a clear rootedness in specific Islamic practices or beliefs.

In contrast, Islamically-conscious music is marked by a desire to universalise the values and beliefs of Islam – to take an Islamic/Muslim worldview and express it in language that will resonate with both Muslims and non-Muslims. Such music will therefore often focus on social and political issues that are especially – but not narrowly – relevant for Muslims, as well as spirituality and religion in a broader and less specifically ‘Islamic’ sense. In contrast, Islamically-conscious music is about self-expression and individuality – it places an emphasis on reaching out, rather than laying down the tracks of community.

As I will argue, this musical bifurcation points toward the complex attitude that Muslims in Britain have adopted towards wider society. There is a simultaneous and not necessarily paradoxical desire to reinforce Muslim communal identity, but also to bring Islamic beliefs to play within wider social and cultural conversations.



## **The changing face of religious discourse: A Multi-modal analysis of televangelists' performance**

Shaimaa El Nagggar, PhD student, University of Lancaster (s.elnagggar@lancaster.ac.uk)

Televangelism or the use of satellite television/YouTube to preach religion has become one important media phenomenon, *inter alia*, among Muslim communities in minority contexts such as the United Kingdom and the United States of America (e.g. see Echchaibi, 2011). In a similar way to public figures, televangelists have become media celebrities with hundreds of thousands of fans and followers on YouTube and social media networks. The celebrity status that some televangelists have acquired raises the important question as to what self-presentation strategies televangelists draw upon (e.g. see Goffman 1959), i.e. what identities they present for themselves and what multi-modal features they use to appeal to their audiences.

The aim of this study is to examine the performance of three American Muslim televangelists who have achieved popularity in the West: Yusuf Estes (born 1944), Hamza Yusuf (born 1958) and Baba Ali (born 1975). The study explores the performance of these televangelists on YouTube, being one important medium for the dissemination of televangelists' programmes.

Thematically, the study is divided into two main sections. First, I present an explanatory framework for the rise of the phenomenon of televangelism, relating it to the broader dynamics of media power, the rise of e-religion and the emergence of transnational Islam. Then, I move on to examine the performance of the three case studies being examined.

Using an innovative synergy of visual grammar (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996) and the Discourse Historical Approach (e.g. Wodak, 2001), I explore three main aspects that are central to televangelists' performance: a) the use of discursive strategies (e.g. recurrent topics in televangelists' sermons); b) drama-related features (e.g. dress code) and c) cinema techniques (e.g. close up shots and graphic effects). The data comprises excerpts of televangelists' YouTube sermons, songs integrated in their programmes and users' comments on YouTube.

Using a range of examples, I highlight the changing face of religious discourse. I argue that in a similar way to political entertainment (e.g. Wodak 2009), religion has gone down the route of entertainment.

One contribution of the study is that it turns attention to religious discourse, which has been little examined from a critical (multi-modal) perspective (e.g. Chilton 2004: xi). Moreover, the study contributes to the growing interdisciplinary research on new media and religion (e.g. Campbell 2010); it provides some insights, from a multi-modal perspective, as to what happens when religion meets new media.





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# Heavenly Acts!

## Devotional Performances

Experience music, word & movement performances inspired & shaped by faith and spirituality. Muslim Boys' Choir / Shonaleigh / Alan Williams and Aida Foroutan / Irshad / Shahe Mardan.

**Friday  
September  
11th** 6pm to 8pm  
University of Sheffield  
Students' Union Auditorium  
Western Bank, S10 2TG

Shahe Mardan

Shonaleigh

**FREE**  
ENTRANCE

Aspects of Performance through an interdisciplinary lens.  
This event forms part of the AHRC-funded Heavenly Acts international interdisciplinary network (comprising sociolinguists, ethnomusicologists, educationalists, social psychologists, anthropologists, religious studies, translation studies, and drama/theatre academics) which seeks to understand performance and aspects of performance as central or as important to accounts of a wide range of religious devotional practices.

Irshad

Alan Williams and Aida Foroutan

Muslim Boys' Choir (Fir Vale, Sheffield)  
Shonaleigh (Yiddish/Jewish Storyteller - Dronfield)  
Alan Williams & Aida Foroutan (Rumi - Buxton)  
Irshad (Whirling Dervish - Sheffield)  
Shahe Mardan (Qawalli Ensemble - Yorkshire)

**Friday**  
**September**  
**11th 6pm to 8pm**

University of Sheffield  
Students' Union Auditorium  
Western Bank, S10 2TG

Shahe Mardan

