

*Please join us for a panel conversation:*

**The Many Faces of Islam:  
Drawing a Distinction Between Culture and Religion**

Marianne Combs, arts reporter, Minnesota Public Radio, will moderate a panel of five Muslim women from the Twin Cities community. Each will share her experiences with Islamic culture.

**Rauenhorst Ballroom, St. Catherine University  
7–9 p.m. Tuesday, March 2, 2010**

Islam is a multicultural religion: many share it, but they may come from many different cultures. Our panelists will help us think about the following questions:

What is the difference between culture and religion?  
Why has it been so hard to see that Islam is a multicultural religion?  
What are common fears and misperceptions about Islam?

Our panelists will encourage a dialogue that will promote a deeper understanding of the diversity within Islamic culture, help break stereotypes, and stimulate conversation beyond religious and ethnic debate.

**Panel members:**

**Safiya Balioglu**, Outreach Coordinator for Islamic Resource Group, German convert to Islam.

**Latifah Kiribedda**, Representative, Muslim Student Association and St. Catherine University international student from Uganda

**Hend Al-Mansour**, Artist from Saudi Arabia

**Imani Jaafar-Mohammad, Esq.**, Attorney, Mohammad Jaafar-Mohammad, LLC, Lebanese American

**Ladan Yusuf**- Executive Director for Crossing Barriers, from Somalia

The panel discussion will be held in conjunction with the international art exhibition:

**Breaking the Veils: Women Artists from the Islamic World**

February 6–April 1, 2010

Opening reception: February 6 • 6-8 pm.

Catherine G. Murphy Gallery, St. Catherine University

2004 Randolph Ave, St. Paul, MN 55105 • (651) 690-6644 • [stkate.edu/gallery](http://stkate.edu/gallery)

Hours: Monday – Friday 8 a.m. – 8 p.m. Saturday – Sunday Noon – 6 p.m.

This international art exhibition challenges contemporary stereotypes about the lives of women in the Islamic world and celebrates their artistic contribution to shaping a rich cultural heritage. The goals of the exhibit are to present a broader view of today's Muslim women, to promote mutual respect, understanding and tolerance, and to build a culture of peace and non-violence.

**All events are free and open to the public.**

\*For more information about the panel or the exhibit contact: Kelly Povo, Project Manager, [kapovo@stkate.edu](mailto:kapovo@stkate.edu) or 612-708-9555. *Large groups please RSVP for Panel Discussion.*

## Panelist Biographies

**Safiya Balioglu**- Outreach Coordinator for Islamic Resource Group. Safiya has been speaking about Islam and Muslims in many different settings.

She states: My background is German. We (my husband, our five children, and I) moved to MN in 1998 for my husband's work. We decided to stay after we realized how open and friendly people are here and how much easier it is to live as a Muslim here. I was brought up catholic and have a M.A. as a translator for English, German, and Italian from the University of Heidelberg in Germany. I have translated several books and numerous children's books about Islam from English into German. When we came here I volunteered, substituted, and worked at Al-Amal School, the private Islamic school our children attend. Three years ago, I became the outreach coordinator and speaker for the Islamic Resource Group (IRG). I first came in contact with Islam during the last year of high school when I met my husband who is from Turkey. We went to college in different cities and his roommate was a practicing Muslim. I had many talks with him about Islam and after he gave me a book that explained the beliefs and practices I knew that this was what I had been looking for. So, I embraced Islam at the age of 23. I used to be active in a youth church group, but never felt at complete peace with the Christian belief and the church. When I read about Islam and talked with Muslims it felt like I had found the missing puzzle piece. It all just made so much sense to me. I started wearing the hijab one year after I had embraced Islam.

**Latifah Kiribedda** is an International Student at St. Catherine University from Uganda. Latifah is majoring in Public Health with a minor in Women Studies. She believes that it is important for people to realize the diversity of Islam in other countries. She feels this dialogue will create a platform to break stereotypes about Islam that have been highlighted in mainstream media. She hopes that the discussion will also promote cross cultural learning and social justice, which are core values at St Catherine University and why she chose to become a student here.

**Imani Jaafar-Mohammad** is an attorney with the law firm of Mohammad & Jaafar-Mohammad. She practices in the areas of business law, criminal defense and estate planning with a specialty in Islamic Estate Planning. Imani received her J.D. from William Mitchell College of Law and her B.A. in English Literature magna cum laude from the University of Minnesota- Twin Cities. She is a former law clerk for the Honorable Judge Lloyd Zimmerman and a former staff attorney for the Legal Aid Society of Minneapolis. Imani is a board member of the William Mitchell Alumni Committee, a board member of the Minnesota Justice Foundation, and a member of the William Mitchell Women in Law Committee. She was named an "Up and Coming Attorney" by *Minnesota Lawyer* in 2009. She is also a senior speaker for the Islamic Resource Group. Imani was featured on National Public Radio, Minnesota Public Radio, and WCCO Radio. She was also featured in *Minnesota Law and Politics* magazine. Imani has taught several Continuing Legal Education courses on Islamic issues throughout the Twin Cities.

Imani states: I had the privilege of growing up in the American Muslim community which is a melting pot of cultural traditions. I am excited to participate on this panel because I feel that the rich diversity of the Muslim community is often lost in the false portrayal of Islam as a homogeneous religion. I hope that as people look deeper into this issue they will see the interesting and varied cultural practices of Muslims from around the world and realize that Islam does not erase a person's culture or ethnicity but in fact celebrates the vast diversity of its followers.

## Panelist Biographies, cont.

**Hend Al-Mansour** is a visual artist who came from Saudi Arabia. In 2002 she obtained a Master of Fine Art from Minneapolis College of Art and Design. She has participated in local and national shows, lectures about Arab women and art and her personal journey, and has curated exhibitions for other Arab and Muslim artists. Al Mansour's work makes references to the identity and gender politics in Arab society and in Islamic teaching. Her style pays homage to Arabic and Islamic art forms. Currently, Al-Mansour is pursuing a master of art history specializing in Arab art at the University of St. Thomas.

**Ladan Yusuf** is the Executive Director of CrossingBarriers, a grassroots organization that works with diverse immigrant students to develop leadership skills and community organizing to improve education and related systems in and around the Twin Cities. Ladan has been working in the area of community development, international development, public administration, human rights and public policy in international and national non-profits for the last 15 years. She moved to Minneapolis from New York City in 2002. She has a Master's degree in Public Administration from New York University and B.A in International Development/Development Economics.