

## Open letter to Madame Catherine Bréchnignac, Présidente du CNRS

June 24, 2009

Dear Madame la Présidente:

We write as academics, independent scholars, and writers based outside France to express our concern regarding the disciplinary hearing convened by CNRS on June 29, 2009 for our colleague Vincent Geisser. Many of us are scholars of France and/or the Muslim world, and we believe that Mr. Geisser has made, and continues to make, valuable intellectual contributions to the study of Islam, the Maghreb, and Muslim minorities in France. Regardless of whether we agree or not with his scholarly conclusions or political positions, all of us are adamant that Mr. Geisser's academic freedom and freedom of expression be respected.

We are concerned that Mr. Geisser is the subject of a disciplinary commission in large part because of his work on Islam in France, a concern already expressed publicly by numerous colleagues of Mr. Geisser's, including many at CNRS. If this is the case, Mr. Geisser's disciplinary hearing and the charges against him of a lack of political neutrality in public discourse (*le manquement grave ... à l'obligation de réserve*) constitute a form of ideological surveillance, a deeply disturbing occurrence that is contrary to the spirit and laws of a democratic republic that claims the Rights of Man and Citizen as its founding principle. We believe that Mr. Geisser's research should be evaluated by his peers on scholarly rather than ideological grounds – to do otherwise would constitute a grave violation of academic freedom.

We support the call by the *Comité de soutien à Vincent Geisser* for the immediate revocation of the disciplinary procedure against Mr. Geisser.

We also echo the *Collectif pour la sauvegarde de la liberté intellectual des chercheurs et enseignants-chercheurs de la fonction publique* in underscoring the importance of academic freedom, which is foundational to our research and our intellectual and scientific legitimacy as scholars. While the majority of scholars in France may also be public servants, they cannot thereby be considered subservient to political institutions and political power and must be guaranteed the same academic freedom and intellectual liberty as all scholars. Intellectuals in a free society best serve the public interest when left free to make critical judgments, especially unpopular ones, about taken for granted political views. Liberty of thought, of opinion, and of expression is indispensable to critical thinking, which is in turn necessary for any democracy to function.

Respectfully,

Mayanthi Fernando, Assistant Professor of Anthropology, University of California, Santa Cruz

Talal Asad, Professor of Anthropology, Graduate Center, City University of New York

Dina Al-Kassim, Associate Professor of Comparative Literature, University of California, Irvine

Paul Silverstein, Associate Professor of Anthropology, Reed College

Joan W. Scott, Harold F. Linder Professor, School of Social Science, Institute for Advanced Study

Miriam Ticktin, Assistant Professor of Anthropology and International Affairs, New School for Social Research

Ruth Mas, Society for the Humanities, Cornell University

Lisa Rofel, Professor of Anthropology, University of California, Santa Cruz

Cathy Lisa Schneider, Associate Professor, School of International Service, American University

Yarimar Bonilla, Assistant Professor of Anthropology, University of Virginia

Paul Amar, Assistant Professor, Law and Society Program, University of California, Santa Barbara

Caren Kaplan, Professor of Women and Gender Studies, University of California, Davis

Dorian F. Bell, Assistant Professor of French and Italian, University of California, Irvine

Saree Makdisi, Professor of English and Comparative Literature, University of California, Los Angeles

Richard Falk, Professor of International Law (Emeritus), Princeton University  
Visiting Professor, Global Studies, University of California, Santa Barbara

Sondra Hale, Professor of Anthropology and Women's Studies, University of California, Los Angeles

David Theo Goldberg, Director, University of California Humanities Research Institute

Dennis Korteuer, Department of History, California State University, Long Beach

Gillian Hart, Professor of Geography, University of California, Berkeley

Edmund Burke III, Professor of History and Director of the Center for World History, University of California, Santa Cruz

William I. Robinson, Professor of Sociology, Global Studies and Latin American Studies, University of California, Santa Barbara

Swati Chattopadhyay, Associate Professor, History of Art and Architecture, University of California, Santa Barbara

Verta Taylor, Chair and Professor of Sociology, University of California, Santa Barbara

Hilal Elver, Distinguished Visiting Professor of Global & International Studies, University of California, Santa Barbara

Leila J. Rupp, Professor of Feminist Studies, University of California, Santa Barbara

Omnia El Shakry, Associate Professor of History, University of California, Davis

David Lloyd, Professor of English, University of Southern California, Los Angeles

David Klein, Professor of Mathematics, California State University, Northridge

Jonathan M. Hall, Assistant Professor of Comparative Literature/ Film & Media Studies, University of California, Irvine

Claudio Fogu, Associate Professor of French and Italian Studies, University of California, Santa Barbara

Paola Bacchetta, Professor of Gender and Women's Studies and Director of the Beatrice Bain Research Group, University of California, Berkeley

Nancy Gallagher, Chair, Middle East Studies Program, and Professor of History, University of California, Santa Barbara

Nubar Hovsepian, Associate Professor of Political Science, Chapman University

Manzar Foroohar, Professor of History, California Polytechnic State University (Cal Poly)

Rabab Ibrahim Abdulhadi, Associate Professor of Ethnic Studies, San Francisco State University

Edie Pistolesi, Professor of Art, California State University, Northridge

Sunaina Maira, Associate Professor of Asian American Studies, University of California, Davis

Lara Deeb, Associate Professor of Anthropology, Scripps College

Hugh Roberts, Independent writer and consultant, Cairo

Chris Toensing, Editor, Middle East Report

Mark Kesselman, Professor of Political Science (Emeritus), Columbia University

Jess Ghannam, Clinical Professor, Department of Psychiatry and Global Health Sciences, University of California, San Francisco

Jonathan Boyarin, Professor of Religious Studies, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

Shira Robinson, Assistant Professor of History and International Affairs, The George Washington University

Michaëlle L. Browsers, Associate Professor of Political Science and Junior Faculty Fellow (on leave 2008-2009), Wake Forest University

Martha Mundy (in a personal capacity), Professor of Anthropology, London School of Economics

Peter Loizos, Emeritus Professor of Anthropology, London School of Economics

Judith Butler, Professor of Rhetoric and Comparative Literature, University of California, Berkeley

Ryme Seferdjeli, Assistant Professor of History, University of Ottawa

Joel Beinin, Professor of History, Stanford University

Susan J. Terrio, Professor of Anthropology, Georgetown University

Inderpal Grewal, Professor, Women's Studies and Program in Culture and Theory, University of California, Irvine

Charles Butterworth,, Professor Emeritus, University of Maryland

Gabriel Piterberg, Professor of History, University of California, Los Angeles

Virginia H. Aksan, President, Middle East Studies Association 2009, and Professor of History, McMaster University

Maboula Soumahoro, Adjunct Assistant Professor, Africana Studies- Institute for Research in African American Studies (IRAAS), Barnard College-Columbia University

Jens Hanssen, Assistant Professor of History and Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations, University of Toronto

Beshara Doumani, Associate Professor of History, University of California, Berkeley

Laurie A. Brand, Director and Professor, School of International Relations, University of Southern California

Clement Moore Henry, Professor of Government, University of Texas at Austin

Mark LeVine, Professor of History, University of California, Irvine

Rafael Bustos, Coordinador del panel Magreb-Oriente Medio, Opex-- Observatorio de Política Exterior, Madrid

Randi Deguilhem, CNRS, Directrice de Recherche (Professor), IREMAM, Aix-en-Provence

Howard Winant, Professor of Sociology, University of California, Santa Barbara

Guenter Meyer, Director of the Centre for Research on the Arab World, University of Mainz, President of the World Congress for Middle Eastern Studies (WOCMES)

Eric Smoodin, Professor of American Studies and Film Studies, University of California, Davis

Zachary Lockman, Professor of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, New York University

Eileen Boris, Professor and Chair, Department of Feminist Studies, Professor of History, Black Studies, and Law and Society, University of California, Santa Barbara