Africa has traditionally been viewed through a bifocal lens in which the Sahara Desert has been perceived as an impenetrable barrier dividing the continent into the northern “white” and sub-Saharan “black” Africa. Despite trans-Saharan cultural contact spanning centuries, the conceptual divide separating North and sub-Saharan Africa remains strong. Countries to the north find themselves placed in Mediterranean, Islamic, and Middle Eastern studies with little consideration of cultural, historical, or artistic contact with sub-Saharan countries, which are often considered more authentically "African.” Much scholarship has failed to recognize that communication, correspondence, trade and travel has been going on for several millennia, often in partnership with nomadic movements across the Sahara. In fact, the arbitrary and removed perception of Africa as separate zones may be growing. We seek to counteract this tendency. Reality is and has been quite different. Contact among traders, scholars, artisans, and nomads set the stage for the emergence of richly diverse aesthetic expressions along the web of North to South and East to West routes crossing the Sahara as well as at their beginning and ending points. The Sahara and its peripheries have been platforms of interconnected peoples and cultures.

**Saharan Crossroads** invites papers in the fields of art history, literature, anthropology, folklore, cultural history, geography, film, performing arts, and music addressing the methodological, conceptual, stylistic or technical aspects of artistic creativity, culture, and performance, both contemporary or historic, which reflect the nature of this artistic discourse and illustrate how the Sahara has been a porous boundary, a bridge rather than a barrier, for the transmission and exchange of arts and culture through time.

**Saharan Crossroads: Views from the North**, the 2009 AIMS Conference, is the first of a two-part conference. “Views from the South” will take place a year later in West Africa.

A delegation of scholars from the West African Research Association in Dakar (WARA) will participate in **Views from the North**. For Part II in 2010, “Views from the South,” we envision reversing these roles so that WARA takes the lead, incorporating a delegation from AIMS. In this way, the conferences should lead to new and enduring scholarly linkages.

We underline the significance of **Saharan Crossroads: Views from the North**’s artistic and cultural theme of historical and contemporary connections across Saharan space.

Themes to be considered may include, but are not restricted to:
- Historical Construction of the Sahara as a Barrier
- Behavioral, Geographic, and Conceptual Space of the Sahara
- Libraries and the Challenges of Archival Preservation
- Cultural Manifestations of Slavery in North Africa
- Sufi Brotherhoods and their Role in Cementing Relations Across the Sahara
- The Sahara as a Geographic and Cultural Space of Amazighité
- Nomadic Cultures as Agents of Contact
- Saharan Oases as Zones of Cultural Contact
- Saharan Arts, Architecture, and Design
- Music and Performance in and across the Sahara
- Deconstructing North/South Identities: Artists’ Roundtable

Paper proposals of one page, accompanied by a CV, should be submitted electronically to WARA (wara@bu.edu) no later than February 1, 2009. Priority for acceptance and funding will be given to scholars from AIMS and WARA affiliate countries (Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, and the 18 countries comprising West Africa), and from the US.

For Information, contact
Dr. Cynthia Becker
Boston University
cjbecker@bu.edu

Dr. Jennifer J. Yanco
West African Research Association
wara@bu.edu