



**RSIS
CONFERENCE ON
“ISLAM IN THE
CONTEMPORARY
WORLD”**

Event Report
28 April 2016

Event Report

RSIS CONFERENCE ON “ISLAM IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD”

Report of a conference organised by:

S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS),
Nanyang Technological University (NTU),
Singapore

Editors: Dr Nawab Osman and Ms Saleena Saleem

Rapporteurs: Mr David Han, Ms Sara Mahmood and Ms Aida Arosoaie

28 April 2016

Nanyang Executive Centre, Auditorium
Singapore

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	3
Introduction	5
The Evolution of Islamic Intellectualism	7
Religion, Politics and Violence in the Muslim World	10
The Future of Islam in the Modern World	13
Conference Programme	16
About the Panellists	17
About the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies	20

This report summarises the proceedings of the public panel discussion as interpreted by the rapporteurs and editor. This report does not necessarily reflect the views of RSIS.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) conducted a one-day conference on "Islam in the Contemporary World" on 28 April 2016 at the Nanyang Executive Centre, Singapore. The conference, which examined and addressed the current challenges facing Muslim societies worldwide, was the first of its kind to be organised in Singapore.

The future of Islam in the contemporary world, as a creative civilisation that is open and vibrant and that co-exists confidently within the framework of modern and plural polities, rests upon Muslim societies overcoming a myriad of challenges. The conference aimed to contribute to this timely and much-needed task by providing robust academic approaches that examines these challenges through the multi-faceted prisms of theology, politics and society. In undertaking this initiative, RSIS is positioning itself as a centre for a new paradigmatic and academic-oriented approach to the study of Islam in the contemporary world.

Nine distinguished panellists from diverse academic fields that included political science, sociology, philosophy, anthropology and Islamic studies participated in the conference. These leading scholars engaged in an interactive exchange of ideas over three panel discussions that included audience participation.

The first panel looked at the Evolution of Islamic Intellectual Tradition. Dr Ali Ünsal highlighted the necessary criteria for creating a new breed of Islamic intellectuals that would bring about a second wave of Islamic Renaissance; one of which is the willingness to synthesise knowledge from the East and the West, which is an attitude that was held by the Islamic intellectuals of the past. Dr Syed Farid Alatas stressed that the perpetuation of certain myths in Muslim tradition fuelled extremist beliefs and actions, and this would hinder efforts at revivifying Islamic intellectualism. Dr Robert Hefner noted that the interaction between Islamic scholars and the plural societies in which they live in, for example

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

in Indonesia and in the United States, was positively contributing to a nascent renewal in new approaches to Islamic education.

The second panel examined Religion, Politics and Violence in the Muslim World. Dr Olivier Roy noted there was a discernible shift to growing secularisation in all societies that has caused religious communities to feel under siege. This tension could be managed by adopting a new approach to politics in the Muslim world that synthesises Islamic values with democracy. Mr Said Ferjani drew on his experience as a member of a Muslim democratic political party in Tunisia and suggested that the future of Islam would be shaped by the interlinked nature of the political strategies of Islamist parties and politics. Dr Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid underscored that problems emerge when governments engage in

reverse takfirism (excommunication of Muslims) in a manner very similar to the extremists and violent groups they are opposed to.

The third panel discussed The Future of Islam in the Modern World. Dr Ebrahim Moosa proposed that one way forward is by using the process of ijihad (independent reasoning) that is meant to provide an account of the present by accepting the contemporary knowledge of modernity. Dr Osman Bakar argued that the success of Islam in the contemporary world lies in its capacity to broaden commonalities and to reduce the differences between Muslim values and modern ones. Dr Sahar Amer pointed out that progressive Muslims who prioritise social justice in their religious interpretations are already challenging the various exegeses that have been imposed on women and minorities for centuries.

INTRODUCTION



Ambassador Ong Keng Yong

Ambassador Ong Keng Yong, Ambassador Ong Keng Yong, Executive Deputy Chairman of RSIS, opened the conference with words of optimism on the academic deliberations that would ensue over the course of the day. Associate Professor Dr Yaacob Ibrahim, the Minister for Communications and Information, Minister-in-charge of Cyber Security and Minister-in-charge of Muslim Affairs, was then invited by Ambassador Ong to give the opening address.



Dr Yaacob Ibrahim

In his address, **Dr Yaacob** noted the conference was a timely event given that Muslim communities worldwide are undergoing social transformations and have to deal with questions on various issues such as political participation, secularism, extremism and human rights. There are diverse views on how Muslims should respond to such questions, with each view proclaiming to be the most authentic in terms of Islamic piety and politics.

Dr Yaacob noted that contestations around such issues take place in different forms and vary widely in terms of goals, tactics and strategies. In countries where the society is governed by democratic institutions and rule of law, the discourse takes place in a marketplace of ideas. In other countries, different visions of the future may compete amid violence. He suggested that a contextual approach towards the practice of the faith could ensure that Muslims could hold steadfast to their religious traditions while contributing towards the growth and development of their country.

Dr Yaacob then provided examples from Singapore's Muslim community and its joint efforts with the secular government in strengthening social cohesion among the multi-religious and multi-cultural communities. This included the creation of a centralised authority that regulates Muslim affairs; ensuring Islamic legal heritage is relevant to the realities facing Muslims in Singapore by using ethics and justice and not merely applying the corpus of commandments formulated by classical Muslim jurists; and adopting a conciliatory approach in the search for a common ground.



Dr Ali Allawi

Dr Ali Allawi, the former Iraqi Minister of Defence and Minister of Finance, then set the tone for the conference with his keynote address on The Pathways of Modern Islam. In his address, Dr Allawi noted that modern Islam could be framed as an on-going response to the conquest of Muslim lands and the undermining of Muslim sovereignty where Muslims had once prevailed.

INTRODUCTION

As such, since the 19th century, modern Islam's primary mission to transform the Muslim state, society and consciousness have constituted mostly of reactive responses. Dr Allawi said that modern Islam has pivoted between the idea of a flexible and accommodating Islam that was constrained only by the most basic of agreed principles (on ritual and devotional practice), and an idea of Islam that posited that salvation and worldly success can only come by the strictest adherence to the norms established in the earliest days of Islam.

According to Dr Allawi, this form of modern Islam was approaching a dead end for two reasons: the Salafisation of mainstream Sunni Islam, and the Sunni-Shia conflict. Both factors have contributed to an atmosphere of animosity in the Muslim world, which could prove disastrous. Dr Allawi suggested that Islam needed its own version of the "Romantic Movement" that would privilege the individual; honour the drive for human perfectibility; foster an ethic of toleration, a theology of freedom and justice; and elevate ethics to a central position in Islam.

EVOLUTION OF ISLAMIC INTELLECTUAL TRADITION



Panel 1: (L-R) Dr Farish A. Noor, Dr Ali Ünsal, Dr Syed Farid Alatas, and Dr Robert Hefner

The first panel addressed issues around the evolution of Islamic intellectual tradition. The first speaker in the panel, Dr Ali Ünsal, Director of Fethullah Gülen Chair at the Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University Jakarta, focused his discussion on new approaches to Islamic intellectual tradition. Dr Ünsal explained that Islam can be viewed both as a religion and a civilization. As a revealed religion, Islam gleans knowledge through explication of the Quranic ayah (verses), which provides an understanding of the human world. The Quranic ayah provides knowledge on God, the universe and mankind through the process of naqli (knowledge obtained through religious sciences).



Dr Ali Ünsal (right)

Dr Ünsal noted that Islam, as a civilization, has been shaped by both religious and knowledge sciences (i.e. rational and intellectual sciences). Islamic intellectual tradition is based on aqli (intellectual sciences) which consists of philosophy and reason. Islamic intellectual tradition has historically always interacted with secular trends. As the Islamic civilization expanded geographically and culturally, it encountered other civilizations such as the Greek-Hellenistic, Byzantine, Persian and Harran. As a result of this two-way interaction, Muslim scholars

learned from other cultures, and the other cultures also learned from the Islamic civilization. For example, Muslim scholars translated works from other cultures such as the writings of Plato and Aristotle of the Hellenistic world. As such, Islamic intellectuals were influenced by the West as much as they influenced the West.

Dr Ünsal identified three metaphysical perspectives in the structure of Islamic intellectual thought: kalam (theology), fiqh (jurisprudence) and tasawwuf (philosophy). Kalam touches on issues such as epistemology, political concerns, ethics and cosmology. Fiqh focuses on finding ways to deal and resolve the problems of humans. Tasawwuf explores the thinking and understanding that takes place within the human mind. Specifically in the Sufi tradition, tasawwuf is also related to the seeking of answers for life's existence.

Dr Ünsal acknowledged that traditions within Islamic intellectual thought can be contrasted with the goals of modernity. He noted that while Islamic intellectual tradition has a rich heritage that was developed during the period of its "first renaissance", a new approach was now required for the birth of a "second renaissance."

The new renaissance should be spearheaded by a new breed of Islamic intellectuals. Dr Ünsal identified the criteria for this breed of intellectuals: able to synthesise knowledge of the East and West; be open-minded; combine Islamic sciences, modern sciences, and the spiritual life; have love for truth; have love of research and knowledge; be brave and serious when they represent what they believe; believe in tolerance and dialogue with others; be responsible intellectuals; have

EVOLUTION OF ISLAMIC INTELLECTUAL TRADITION

understanding of civilizational perspectives; be aware of mindsets in modern and post-modern age; have consciousness of problems in the world; revivify tradition by developing various methods for knowledge; consider originality and quality in their work; give importance to institutionalisation of research; accept differences in methods of intellectual and research methods while avoiding dissociation; and lastly be involved in dialogue with and synthesis of different perspectives from other intellectual traditions.

The second speaker, Dr Syed Farid Alatas, Associate Professor of Sociology at the National University of Singapore, provided examples of certain myths in the Muslim tradition that fuels extremist beliefs and actions, which he believes would hinder efforts at revivifying Islamic intellectualism. Dr Alatas highlighted two myths in Muslim tradition that have been accepted uncritically for generations. The first myth is the collective burning of Bani Qurayza, a Jewish tribe in Medina. In this myth, the Bani Qurayza was punished collectively because it had reneged on its agreement with Prophet Mohammed not to aid the Bani Quraysh (a non-Muslim Meccan tribe) during a battle. Dr Alatas questioned the accuracy of this narrative. First, he questioned if a battle had indeed taken place as in the narrative, and suggested it may have been skirmishes instead. Second, he questioned the number of deaths incurred by the Bani Qurayza, which he believed was inflated. He said that the myth created a narrative of Jewish treachery against Muslims, who were then punished for it.

The second myth is that Abdullah ibn Saba, a Yemeni Jew, founded Shiite Islam so as to divide the Muslim world. This myth has been propagated by Salafists and by those who are becoming "Salafised". Dr Alatas said there is wide range of opinions on this, including whether ibn Saba had existed at all. He said that majority of the Sunni and Shiite scholars agreed that ibn Saba was not responsible for the creation of the Shiite sect. The idea for this myth was derived from only one account compiled by Sayf ibn Umar, which was then quoted by Tabari and accepted uncritically by succeeding generations.

Dr Alatas argued that the ideas from the two myths contribute to Islamophobia targeted

against Muslims and anti-Semitism within the Muslim world. The lack of a critical approach to understanding the myths continues to this day. Dr Alatas gave the example of Malaysia where the second myth was propagated in social media and by state-sponsored ulamas (religious scholars), so that Shiite Islam is now perceived as deviant and created by the Jews. Dr Alatas expressed pessimism about the revivification of Islamic intellectualism given the unwillingness of religious scholars to refute such damaging myths.



Dr Robert Hefner

In contrast to Dr Alatas' pessimism, **Dr Robert Hefner** Professor of Anthropology and Director of the Institute on Culture, Religion, and World Affairs (CURA) at Boston University was optimistic about the direction of changes in Islamic education in modern plural societies. He noted that the views of extremist groups such as the Taliban, Indonesia's Jemaah Islamiyah, Daesh and Boko Haram that intellectual education was antithetical to Islam are exceptions and not the norm in the Muslim world. Dr Hefner stressed that Islamic education in Muslim communities is presently undergoing changes. He cited the example of Zaytuna Institute, a Muslim seminary in the United States, and Indonesia, where Muslim scholars are adapting Islamic traditions to the context of modern pluralism.

He acknowledged there would be several challenges in revivifying Islamic intellectualism through education. One pertinent challenge is the question of how to remain faithful to God's word in the face of modernity. Dr Hefner suggested that one way was to refer to the Muslim world's experience with plurality during the Islamic golden age, particularly during the 8th and 9th centuries. He argued that it was the acceptance of plurality, rather than theological reforms, that resulted in

EVOLUTION OF ISLAMIC INTELLECTUAL TRADITION

the dynamism of Islamic intellectualism during that era, and which is now being recovered today. He noted that the availability of mass education, the growing acceptance of educating Muslim women, and attempts by Muslim scholars to revive pragmatic and rational scholarship are all positive developments.

Dr Hefner also explained that military threats (e.g. the Mongol sacking that included the burning of libraries that contained a wealth of knowledge) and colonisation resulted in the decline of plurality in education in the Muslim world. The emphasis of education gradually shifted to the transmission of religious tradition, while the other aspects such as jurisprudence and research in sciences declined in importance, which hastened the decline of Islamic intellectualism.

Dr Hefner said that Muslim “renewalist” intellectual scholars, such as Tariq Ramadan, Khaled Abou Fadl and Dr Moosa, argue that to be a good and moral Muslim, one should attain religious knowledge, as well as attain knowledge of the natural sciences as derived from empirical sources. Dr Hefner was optimistic about the efforts of such “renewalist” scholars to integrate the two areas of knowledge that would help to modernise Islamic education. Dr Hefner pointed to Indonesia as having one of the best systems of Islamic education that teaches secular subjects in the natural sciences and the social sciences, as well as religious studies.

During the question and answer session, the moderator, Dr Farish A. Noor from RSIS noted that much of the Muslim world was now mired in political instability, which could hinder willingness to engage with other cultural traditions. In the past, engagements between the Islamic civilization and other cultural traditions took place when the Muslim polity was stable. Dr Ünsal acknowledged that political instability could hinder the progress of Islamic intellectualism, but an emphasis on changing mindsets through education was an important step nevertheless. These changed minds could lead to a wave of progress. Dr Hefner suggested that pluralism is already a reality in the Muslim world, as it is elsewhere. This is evident with the rise of modern

markets and capitalism in the world. This plurality may exist in different contexts in the West and in the East, but capitalism is intrinsically plural and competitive. The question was rather on how to ethicise the modern marketplace. If the modern marketplace was properly ethicised, it could then be a foundation for plurality and dynamism in the Muslim world.

A conference participant suggested that a reformation of Islamic education would require a critical mass of support, and that it would likely take place away from centres of established orthodoxy, such as in the United States. He drew on the example of the Protestant Reformation, which was carried out in places located away from established political and religious power centres. He identified three “laws” for reformation: (i) it has to occur on the periphery and not at the centre; (ii) mass support comes from those who are marginalised; and (iii) it occurs in a place where it has room to grow (for example, secular states that allow intellectual freedom of thought versus dictatorial states that punish thought). In that vein, another conference participant pointed out that Wahhabism, which was originally a fringe radical movement outside of the state power centre, eventually became the state religion in Saudi Arabia. The participant also said that the position of the Mufti was a fairly recent concept in Muslim countries. Traditionally, Muslim countries had relied on judges to manage religious affairs. The participant suggested that the position of the Mufti was created by the state to control Islam.

Dr Hefner said that it was premature to ascertain the quality of Islamic scholarship in the United States, as it is still in the preliminary stages. However, he noted that the American Muslim community was highly plural (30 per cent of them were black Muslims) and the acceptance and dissemination of this plurality will have demonstrative effects in Muslim societies elsewhere. Dr Noor concluded the first panel by noting that the prevalence of the Internet has created a virtual marketplace to propagate ideas on religions, which would have a significant impact on the development of Islamic education in Muslim societies.

RELIGION, POLITICS AND VIOLENCE IN THE MUSLIM WORLD



Panel 2: (L-R) Dr Ahmed S. Hashim, Dr Olivier Roy, Mr Said Ferjani, and Dr Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid

The second panel considered the relationship between Islam, politics and violence in the Muslim world. The first speaker in the panel, Dr Olivier Roy, Professor at the European University Institute, said that there was a need to re-examine the failure of political Islam in the post-Arab Spring context. He noted the failure of political Islam is a conceptual failure while the concept of political Islam is an oxymoron. He stressed that religion does not make politics, but rather politics defines the space for religion in an Islamic state. This brings about the question of who represents religion in a state. The Taliban aimed to solve this issue by stating that Shariah (Islamic law) is the law of the country, i.e., the religiously-oriented would be in charge. In this scenario, there is a need to realise that Islamists are not necessarily doomed to failure. Islamists have managed to mobilise support by fighting and acting in the name of Islam. Islamists have also won elections and staged coups. However, Dr Roy believes that it is unlikely that Islamists would be able to build a sustained Islamic state, and this includes the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).



Dr Olivier Roy

Dr Roy then provided two main perspectives for understanding the nature of political Islam: (i) the neo-fundamentalism that reflects Wahabbi-Salafism; and (ii) democracy. He suggested that the Muslim Brotherhood in Tunisia and the Justice and Development Party (AKP) in Turkey had dropped Islamist ideology when they entered politics. Rather, they gained and maintained control through campaigning on countering corruption and progressing the country through democratic values. While the AKP showed a shift towards authoritarianism, it is nevertheless resisted, even within the party. This correlates with Erdogan's recent attempts to prevent the removal of secularism from the Egyptian constitution.

Despite such developments, Dr Roy suggested that in order to recover from the failure of political Islam, there should be a focus on integrating norms into values within the constitutional and legal system. He said that freedom of religion in the Middle East meant one would have the right to practice one's religion, but not the right to change religion. For example, apostasy is not legal in the Tunisian constitution, even though it is widely regarded as the most "secular" constitution in the Middle East. The issue is that personal practices are conflated with values. The question that follows then is what kind of values are upheld or propagated? Does the Muslim world have a system of Islamic values that is different from Western values or common values?

Dr Roy said that politics should be autonomous from religion. For instance, issues relating to gender and women are not specifically restricted

RELIGION, POLITICS AND VIOLENCE IN THE MUSLIM WORLD

to values within the Quran, but possess a broader social context. Similar debates had existed in Europe between the Catholic Church and the state regarding values on family and women. The issue was about religious versus secular values. Therefore, the issue at hand today is not one solely linked to Islam, but instead to the dichotomy between religious values and secularism. Secularism has been referred to as a product of the West. However, the growing secularisation in all societies has left religious communities feeling under siege in the West as in the East. For example, similar debates on women and homosexuality, with strong opposition from the conservatives, occur in Europe too. Dr Roy said that this tension could be managed with the secularisation of religious values. This necessitates the adaptation of a new approach to politics in the Muslim world, one which synthesises Islamic values with democracy.



Mr Said Ferjani

The second speaker, **Mr Said Ferjani**, drew on his experience as a member of the Ennahda political party in Tunisia. He said that the direction taken by Islamist parties in the Muslim world in the post-Arab Spring context, specifically in Tunisia, emerged from a glaring dilemma prior to the revolution. This dilemma is linked to whether the state belonged to the people or the people belonged to the state. In a state that belongs to the people, those governing are subject to the decisions and will of the people, which is representative of a democracy. Mr Ferjani provided ibn Khaldun's analysis of the state: in the "state of nature", the strongest rule by force, while in the "state of reason", there are choices instead of overt coercion. Mr Ferjani said that the "state of reason" is applicable in Tunisia and it represents

the spirit of the democratic system. The state of reason is the state of rationality, and is attuned to the values within Tunisia.

He noted that the system in Tunisia shares similarities with Morocco, Libya and Algeria as well. Within the context of these countries, democracy is not a tool used to gain recognition from the West. He also said that democracy is a vehicle that contrasts with the French concept of the *laicite*, which has been imposed by the minority elite. The minority elite focuses on the concept of hard-line French secularism. The Ennahda party regards politics as a route to good governance—as means to guarantee employment, medical care, educational facilities and an independent judiciary to the people. He noted that Ennahda has also relied extensively on the institutionalisation of religious values through democracy.

However, despite these efforts, the connotation of modern Islam is a misnomer. While it is true that there are many modern understandings of Islam, there is no unified version of modern Islam that has consensus from the people. Regardless of this modern compartmentalisation, Islam iterates there is no compulsion on the people. In this sense, people cannot be forced to internalise what is sacred, and similar efforts have been made in Tunisia, where freedom remains the precondition for belief.

For example, Mr Ferjani said that Tunisia has suspended *hudud* (Islamic criminal law), and called for limits, but not a punishment system. He suggested that those who advocate *laicite*, claim that the church is not a civil institution, while the mosque is regarded as a civil and sacred institution in Islam. The issue regarding secularism does not relate to the concept itself, but rather the presence or absence of choice and the source of the concept. He said that the roots of the Ennahda party are Muslim, and it espouses a synthesis of Islam and democracy to promote prosperity and provide security for the people of Tunisia. In this sense, the strategies of Islamist parties for staying in power are interlinked to the development of Islamist politics in shaping the future of Islam.

RELIGION, POLITICS AND VIOLENCE IN THE MUSLIM WORLD



Dr Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid

The third speaker, **Dr Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid**, a Visiting Senior Fellow at the ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute said that there was a need to regain the centre as it has been lost partly due to the perception that Islam has been hijacked. As such, there is a need to understand the difference between Islam and Islamism. Specifically, in the Malaysian context, Islam is the religion of the federation. However, recently Islamism has begun to emerge as the religion of the federation. This perception contributed towards the overlooking of the peaceful and non-violent aspects of Islam. In addition, the onslaught of Wahabbi-Salafism has denigrated the peaceful and harmonious intellectual traditions of the religion. The concept of tradition resonates heavily in Islam, and even maintains a presence in Sufi Islam whereby the chain of traditions is linked directly to the Prophet.

As radical Islamists have violated the peaceful tendencies, there is a need to observe the question of moderation as reflected by the concept of *Ummatan Wasatan* (moderate community) in the Quran. This concept not only refers to the moderate community, but also the just community. Thus, the presence of *adl* (justice) in practice is central to the regaining of the centre.

However, the concept of justice is manipulated by the Islamists groups and parties that claim to

fight for Islam, such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the AKP in Turkey. For instance, the long history of Islam in Southeast Asia initially reflected Sufi influence, and was subsequently affected by colonialism, which contributed to the bureaucratisation of Islam. However, the roots of violent and non-violent extremism in contemporary Muslim societies emerged from Wahabbi-Salafism, the unique brand that is a consequence of the petro-dollar. Wahabbism has co-opted Salafism and destroyed the early ideals of Salafism, while institutionalising an extremist world view. The role of the state and religious establishment is important in containing the violence in the Muslim world. However, governments and institutions tend to engage in reverse *takfirism* (excommunication of other Muslims). In this sense, they re-impose *takfir* in a similar manner to the extremists and violent groups they are fighting against.

The theological distinctions between the moderates and puritans have drawn a divide between peace, rigidity and violence. The overwhelming presence of the latter is preventing the centre from regaining its presence. Dr Hamid said that it is pertinent to understand that being moderate meant striking a balance. In this sense, the prospects of a new moderate form of political expression within the Muslim world are linked to Islamic countries looking within themselves, and dedicating themselves to recovering the centre. Moreover, Muslim intellectuals also play an integral role in disowning scholars with rigid interpretations of Islam such as Abul A'la Maududi, Zakir Naik and Syed Qutb. Lastly, the concept of reverse *takfirism* requires rethinking, and anti-Salafists should disown their rigid leanings to promote an atmosphere of moderation in society.

THE FUTURE OF ISLAM IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD



Panel 3: (L-R) Dr Mohammad Hannan Hassan, Dr Ebrahim Moosa, Dr Osman Bakar, and Professor Sahar Amer

The third panel discussed the future of Islam in the modern world, and the importance of restoring the culture of *tajdid* (renewal) in the Muslim world. In this context, Dr Ebrahim Moosa, Professor of Islamic Studies at the University of Notre Dame, pointed out that critical traditionalism provided a useful pathway for balancing tradition and innovation. Critical traditionalism, a notion also put forward by Ashish Nandy, implies the use of the history and knowledge of the past in order to engage with the present. Dr Moosa also offered a critical traditionalist perspective on the meaning of *ijtihad* as the capacity for establishing new paradigms and conceiving new knowledge. As such, instead of simply embracing certain traditions whose meaning has been centralised centuries ago, *ijtihad* is meant to provide an account of the present by accepting the contemporary knowledge of modernity, which will lead to *tajdid* in the Muslim world. According to Dr Moosa, the ontological tradition of modernity is the same for followers of any religion, including Muslims.



Dr Ebrahim Moosa

In the context of ISIS and the enslavement of Yazidi women, Dr Moosa drew upon the works of Muhammad Taqi Usmani, an important Pakistani Hanafi scholar, and Yusuf al-Qaradawi, a prominent Egyptian theologian, who refuted the Salafi scholars who argued that four options were permissible regarding the treatment of prisoners of war: enslavement, execution, freedom or ransom. Qaradawi argues that prisoners of war are regulated by international laws on human rights, which are signed on to by Muslim states. Therefore, enslavement or execution are not permissible options, and further the options to free or ransom the slaves already abrogates these other two options.

As a solution to the dangerous lack of critical engagement with tradition, Dr Moosa cited the work of Abu Hamid al-Ghazali as an important example of a Muslim thinker calling for intellectual humility, the possibility of plurality, the multiplicity of meanings of Islamic scriptures and the openness to multiple ways of interpretations. In *Qanun al Ta'wil* (Principle of Interpretation), al-Ghazali provides advice in the interpretation of problematic hadiths (Sayings of Prophet Muhammad): (i) do not refute reason; (ii) do not say one knows it all; and (iii) when there is ambivalence in an interpretation, do not stick to one. Therefore, al-Ghazali acknowledged that there are multiple trajectories of knowledge. On the way forward for Islam, Dr Moosa said there is a need to re-think the *deen* (Islamic system of faith), emphasise human dignity and self-worth and consider a return to Islam's tradition of mysticism.

THE FUTURE OF ISLAM IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

Dr Osman Bakar, Professor at the University of Brunei Darussalam, argued that the success of Islam in the contemporary world lies in the capacity to broaden commonalities and to reduce the differences between Muslim values and modern ones. Dr Bakar suggested that most differences emerged as a consequence of accidents of history, which then became institutionalised by means of a collective misunderstanding. As a method of broadening commonalities, Dr Bakar suggested a return to the inner resources of Islam, the most important of which is Sufism, in both its spiritual and intellectual dimensions, and philosophy. As opposed to both traditional and modern Islamic institutions which turned out detrimental to the conceptualisation of a peace-driven universal ethic, Dr Bakar suggested that Muslim NGOs would play the most critical role in building bridges in inter-faith dialogue. Dr Bakar suggested that the synthesis of ideas was the *raison d'être* of Islam. As such, the synthesis of Islamic and Western knowledge is deemed feasible and desirable.



Dr Sahar Amer

Dr Sahar Amer, Chair of Department, Arabic Languages and Cultures at the University of Sydney, decried the position of Muslim women as victims of both the rise of violence and Islamism, and the Western misunderstandings of Islam. The latter, initiated during colonial times and institutionalised in the Western world from the 1990s onwards, is constantly being perpetuated in the West. A good example of such stigmatisation represents Western feminists and politicians who vehemently criticise the decision of designer houses that cater to the Muslim fashion industry. The misunderstanding lies in the belief that Muslim conservative dress is a sign

of extremism, or radicalisation, or an example of female subordination and oppression. This entirely overlooks the new politics of piety in Muslim societies worldwide, as well as the moral agency of women.

As a counter-movement, Dr Amer emphasised that an important development in the Muslim world at the moment is the rising visibility, activities and advocacy of progressive Muslims. This social category is deemed crucial for the updating of Islamic tradition according to modern values, and comprises of academics, theologians, lawyers, intellectuals, as well as individuals from diverse backgrounds and occupations, including artists. They challenge perceived notions about Islam and question the assumption that Islam is incompatible with progressive ideals or human rights. It is such progressive Muslims who confront Euro-American stereotypes, Islamophobia and dispute restrictive interpretations of Islamic texts. As they prioritise social justice in religious interpretations, progressive Muslims are systematically peeling away the layers of exegeses that have been imposed over religious texts over the centuries and which have effectively silenced women and other minorities. Good examples of progressive Muslims who represent women in the Western world are those who lead Friday prayers to mixed congregations of men and women, and the Muslims imams (religious leaders) who have come out publicly as gay, thus engaging in the creation of more inclusive spaces for people of faith, who are speaking against homophobia in the Muslim community.

During the question and answer session, Dr Moosa suggested that there is a need to undo a theology of empire. In that vein, Dr Amer suggested that taboos on sexuality in the Muslim world are in fact residues of the Victorian era that were inherited during colonialism. She noted that Muslims should liberate themselves from their inherited anxieties and attempt to recover the authentic past of the Islamic traditions where many of the practices around sexuality today that are considered haram (forbidden) were perceived in the past as intrinsically human.

THE FUTURE OF ISLAM IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

In answering a question related to the legitimacy of the tradition outside of the Quran in the context of slavery, Dr Moosa drew attention to the importance of historicising the hadith in order to provide it with a new articulation and voice that would enable the practice of democracy.

Dr Amer replied to a question by a National University of Singapore (NUS) student regarding the role of religion in engaging with technology and popular culture. The student asked if all present manifestations of popular culture, such

as music, comedy shows, or performances in general, should be acknowledged as relevant avenues of communication. In response, Dr Moosa emphasised the importance of cultural practices in regulating the social life of human beings. As such, he mentioned that efficient and effective cultural, economic and governing practices would leave religion to tackle only the ineffable, which would then certainly help a critical reconceptualisation of the sacred in the post-modern world.

CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

<p>0830hrs REGISTRATION</p>	<p>1330hrs PANEL 2: RELIGION, POLITICS AND VIOLENCE IN THE MUSLIM WORLD</p> <p><u>Moderator</u> Dr Ahmed Salah HASHIM <i>Associate Professor, Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies, RSIS</i></p> <p><u>Panellists</u> Dr Olivier ROY <i>Professor, Joint Chair RSCAS, Chair in Mediterranean Studies, European University Institute</i> Revisiting the Failure of Political Islam: Prospects for a Third Way</p> <p>Mr Said FERJANI <i>Member of Tunisian Ennahda Party</i> Islamist Parties and the Modern State after the Arab Spring</p> <p>Dr Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid <i>Visiting Senior Fellow, ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute</i> Regaining the Centre: Moderation and its Discontents</p>
<p>0900hrs WELCOME REMARKS Ambassador ONG Keng Yong <i>Associate Dean, RSIS</i></p>	<p>1530hrs COFFEE BREAK</p>
<p>0910hrs OPENING ADDRESS Dr Yaacob IBRAHIM <i>Minister for Communications and Information, Minister-in-charge of Cyber Security and Minister-in-charge of Muslim Affairs</i></p>	<p>1545hrs PANEL3: THE FUTURE OF ISLAM IN THE MODERN WORLD</p> <p><u>Moderator</u> Dr Mohammad Hannan HASSAN <i>Assistant Director (Education), MUIS and Vice Dean, MUIS Academy</i></p> <p><u>Panellists</u> Dr Ebrahim MOOSA <i>Professor of Islamic Studies, Kroc Institute of International Peace Studies, University of Notre Dame</i> The Burden of Modernity: Critical Islam between Tradition and Innovation</p> <p>Datuk Dr Osman BAKAR <i>Chair Professor and Director of the Sultan Omar 'Ali Saifuddien Centre for Islamic Studies (SOASCIS), University of Brunei Darussalam</i> Enhancing Dialogue between Religious Traditions: An Islamic Perspective</p> <p>Dr Sahar AMER <i>Chair of Department, Arabic Languages and Cultures, School of Languages and Cultures, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, The University of Sydney</i> The New Horizons of Piety: Religiosity and Moral Agency in the Modern World</p>
<p>0930hrs KEYNOTE ADDRESS Dr Ali ALLAWI <i>Former Iraqi Minister of Defence and Minister of Finance</i> The Pathways to Modern Islam</p>	<p>1200hrs LUNCH</p>
<p>1015hrs COFFEE BREAK</p>	<p>1745hrs END OF CONFERENCE</p>
<p>1030hrs PANEL 1: THE EVOLUTION OF ISLAMIC INTELLECTUAL TRADITION</p> <p><u>Moderator</u> Dr Farish (Badrol Hisham) AHMAD-NOOR <i>Associate Professor and Coordinator of PhD Programme, RSIS</i></p> <p><u>Panellists</u> Dr Ali ÜNSAL <i>Director of Fethullah Gülen Chair, Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University Jakarta</i> A New Approach to Islamic Intellectual Tradition</p> <p>Dr Syed Farid ALATAS <i>Associate Professor of Sociology, National University of Singapore</i> Reviving Islamic Intellectualism</p> <p>Dr Robert HEFNER <i>Professor of Anthropology and Director of the Institute on Culture, Religion, and World Affairs (CURA), Boston University</i> Islamic Education in Modern Plural Societies</p>	

ABOUT THE PANELLISTS

Dr Ali Ünsal is the current director of the Fethullah Gulen Chair at Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University, Jakarta, where he is also a lecturer. He graduated from Ankara University Divinity School in 1994, and received his master's degree from Marmara University, Istanbul in 2009 followed by a PhD in Islamic Theology from Selcuk University, Konya. Previously he was the president of American Turkish Friendship Association in Fairfax, VA in the United States and he served as a chaplain for the Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Washington DC. Dr Ünsal volunteered as the Chairman of the Board of Rumi Forum between 2003 and 2009. In 2007, he founded the Institute of Islamic and Turkish Studies and served as its executive director before moving on to Jakarta. He has published several books in Turkish on Islamic theology and community, and his research areas include Islamism, secularism and other aspects of the Gulen movement. His most recent books were published in Turkish in 2009: *Cennet ve Cehennem* (Heaven and Hell), *Melekler* (Angels), *Ümmetim Hakkında Korktuklarım* (What I am Scared About my Community) and *Dünden Bugüne Haricilik* (From Past to Present "Kharijiah").

Dr Syed Farid Alatas is Associate Professor of Sociology at the National University of Singapore, where he has been teaching since 1992. He lectured at the University of Malaya in the Department of Southeast Asian Studies prior to joining NUS. He also serves on the executive committee of UNESCO's International Sociological Association. His areas of interest are historical sociology, sociology of social science, sociology of religion and inter-religious dialogue. Dr Alatas has authored and edited numerous books, including *Alternative Discourses in Asian Social Science: Responses to Eurocentrism* (2006) and *Democracy and Authoritarianism in Indonesia and Malaysia: The Rise of the Post-Colonial State* (1997). He also published books on the thought and sociology of ibn Khaldun (2012, Oxford University Press and I.B. Tauris and 2014, Routledge).

Dr Robert W. Hefner is Professor of Anthropology and Director of the Institute on

Culture, Religion, and World Affairs (CURA) at Boston University. At CURA, he has been directing the program on Islam and civil society since 1991. He has also coordinates interdisciplinary research and public policy programs on religion, pluralism, and world affairs and is currently involved in comparative research on citizenship and civic enculturation in Muslim-majority and Christian/post-Christian societies. Dr Hefner has directed 18 research projects and organised 15 international conferences, and authored or edited 18 books. Among the most recent are *Shari'a Politics: Islamic Law and Society in the Modern World* (Indiana University Press, 2011) and *Muslims and Modernity: Culture and Society Since 1800* (Cambridge University Press, 2010).

Dr Olivier Roy (1949) is presently Professor at the European University Institute (Florence). He heads the Mediterranean programme at the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies and the ReligioWest research project (funded by the European Research Council). He has been a Senior Researcher at the French National Center for Scientific Research (since 1985), Professor at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (since 2003), and visiting professor at Berkeley University (2008/2009). He headed the OSCE's Mission for Tajikistan (1993-94) and was a Consultant for the UN Office of the Coordinator for Afghanistan (1988). His field works include Afghanistan, Political Islam, Middle East, Islam in the West and comparative religions. Dr Roy received an "Agrégation de Philosophie" and a PhD in Political Sciences. He is the author of *The failure of political Islam* (Harvard UP 1994), *Globalized Islam* (Columbia University Press, 2004), and more recently of *Holy Ignorance* (Hurst/Oxford UP, 2010).

Mr Said Ferjani is a member and spokesman for the Tunisian Ennahda Party. A student of Rashid al Ghannoushi, he was arrested in 1987 under Ben Ali's regime and spent 18 months in prison where he was often subjected to torture. Mr Ferjani managed to escape Tunisia and acquire asylum in London, where he lived in exile for several years and met with Islamist circles. The Ennahda Party won the elections after the 2011

ABOUT THE PANELLISTS

Jasmine Revolution and stepped down in January 2014 to make way for the final drafting of a new constitution. Nidaa Tounes, the biggest secularist party in Tunisia, won the elections of December 2014, overtaking the Islamist Ennahda.

Dr Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid is Visiting Senior Fellow, ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore (1 September 2015 – 31 May 2016) and Professor of Political Science, School of Distance Education, Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), Penang, Malaysia. A graduate of the universities of Oxford, Leeds and Newcastle in the United Kingdom, he has published articles in leading journals such as *Indonesia and the Malay World*, *Islamic Studies*, *Asian Studies Review*, *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, *Asian Journal of Political Science*, *Japanese Journal of Political Science*, *Asian Survey*, *Pacific Affairs*, *Sojourn* and *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*. He has published research monographs with both RSIS and ISEAS, entitled *Islamic Education in Malaysia* (2010), *Political Islam and Islamist Politics in Malaysia* (2013) and *Middle Eastern Influences on Islamist Organizations in Malaysia: The Cases of ISMA, IRF and HTM* (2016 – co-authored with Che Hamdan Che Mohd. Razali). A regular contributor to edited volumes, his recent book chapters are *Sociopolitical Developments in West Asia and Their Impact on Christian Minorities in the Region*, in Felix Wilfred (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Christianity in Asia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); *The Hudud Controversy in Malaysia: Religious Probity or Political Expediency?*, in Daljit Singh (ed.), *Southeast Asian Affairs 2015* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2015); and *Globalization of Islamic Education in Southeast Asia* in Ken Miichi and Omar Farouk (eds.), *Southeast Asian Muslims in the Era of Globalization* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015). His latest contribution to knowledge, published in April 2016, is an article, “Syariahization of Intra-Muslim Religious Freedom and Human Rights Practice in Malaysia: The Case of Darul Arqam”, *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, vol. 38, no. 1 (2016), pp. 28-54.

Dr Ebrahim Moosa’s interpretative and historical research on questions related to Islamic tradition, ethics and law includes two monographs as

well as several edited and co-edited books. His prize-winning book *Ghazali and the Poetics of Imagination* (University of North Carolina Press, 2005) was awarded the Best First Book in the History of Religions by the American Academy of Religion. He is also the author of *What is a Madrasa?* (University of North Carolina Press, 2015). His publications include several co-edited books, among them, *The African Renaissance and the Afro-Arab Spring* (Georgetown University Press, 2015); *Islam in the Modern World* (Routledge, 2014) and, *Muslim Family Law in Sub-Saharan Africa: Colonial Legacies and Post-Colonial Challenges* (Amsterdam University Press, Spring, 2010). He is also the editor of the last manuscript of the late Professor Fazlur Rahman, *Revival and Reform in Islam: A Study of Islamic Fundamentalism* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2000). Dr Moosa has published influential essays on Islamic law, theology as well as contemporary Muslim ethics, bioethics, biotechnology and political thought. Dr Moosa is also regarded as a prominent public intellectual. In 2007, he was invited to deliver the 2007 King Hasan Lecture (*Durus Hasaniyya*) to his Majesty King Mohammed VI of Morocco in Arabic.

Dr Osman Bakar, who earned a doctorate in Islamic philosophy from Temple University, Philadelphia is currently Distinguished Professor and Director of Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddin Centre for Islamic Studies (SOASCIS) at Universiti Brunei Darussalam. He was formerly Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic & Research) of University of Malaya, Malaysia Chair of Southeast Asian Islam at the Prince Talal al-Waleed Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, Georgetown University, Washington DC and Deputy Chief Executive Officer (CEO), International Institute of Advanced Islamic Studies, Malaysia (IAIS). An Emeritus Professor of Philosophy of Science at the Department of Science and Technology Studies, University of Malaya, he was also the founder of the University’s Center for Civilizational Dialogue (1996). Dr Bakar is an author of 20 books and more than 300 articles on various aspects of Islamic thought and civilization, particularly Islamic science and philosophy and Islam in Southeast Asia. He was a member of the Council of 100 Leaders of the West-Islamic

ABOUT THE PANELLISTS

World Initiative for Dialogue founded by the World Economic Forum, Davos, Switzerland. He has been named several times among the 500 most influential Muslims in the world (including the latest 2016 edition). In 1994, he was made a Dato' by HH the Sultan of Pahang and in 2000 a Datuk by the Malaysian King. His two most well-known books, *Classification of Knowledge in Islam and Tawhid and Science* have been translated into numerous languages. His latest books are *Islamic Civilization and the Modern World: Thematic Essays* (2014), *Quranic Pictures of the Cosmos: The Scriptural Foundation of Islamic Cosmology* (2016), and *Islamic Perspectives on Science and Technology* (co-editor, 2016).

Dr Sahar Amer (PhD, Yale University) is Professor and Chair of the Department of Arabic Language and Cultures at the University of Sydney. Her research focuses on gender and sexuality in Arab and Muslim societies, comparative and cross-cultural relations between Arab Muslim societies and the West, and postcolonial identities. She is especially interested in the notion of borders (cultural, linguistic,

historical and geographic), not as elements of separation and division, but rather as fluid spaces of cultural exchange, adaptation and collaboration. Her third book entitled, *What Is Veiling?*, published by the University of North Carolina Press in Fall 2014, is being distributed in Australia through Edinburgh University Press, and it has appeared in Arabic translation through Cairo's Soutour Press. Dr Amer has also published *Crossing Borders: Love between Women in Medieval French and Arabic Literatures* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), which was awarded the 2009 Aldo & Jeanne Scaglione Prize for Comparative Literary Studies by the Modern Languages Association of America. In addition, she published a comparative study of medieval Arabic and French fables: *A Feminine Esopé: Marie de France and the Politics of Interculturality* (Rodopi Press, 1999). She has co-edited two volumes about Franco-Arab encounters (*Contemporary French and Francophone Studies* and *New Francographies*), one special issue of *Yale French Studies*, as well as one art catalogue. She is recipient of several national awards, including a National Humanities Center Fellowship and a Fulbright.

ABOUT THE S. RAJARATNAM SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

The **S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS)** is a professional graduate school of international affairs at the Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. RSIS' mission is to develop a community of scholars and policy analysts at the forefront of security studies and international affairs. Its core functions are research, graduate education and networking. It produces cutting-edge research on Asia Pacific Security, Multilateralism and Regionalism, Conflict Studies, Non-Traditional Security, International Political Economy, and Country and Region Studies. RSIS' activities are aimed at assisting policymakers to develop comprehensive approaches to strategic thinking on issues related to security and stability in the Asia Pacific.

For more information about RSIS, please visit www.rsis.edu.sg.

