



# RELIGION AND IDEAS ROUNDTABLE

## MODERN THINKING IN ISLAM SERIES 2019



**SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES &  
COMMUNICATION ARTS**

Religion and Society Research Cluster,  
School of Social Sciences & Psychology

Western Sydney University

By Dr Milad Milani (WSU)  
& Dr Vassilis Adrahtas (Macquarie)

**ABSTRACT**

It is a common assumption that since the so-called closing of ‘the gates of *ijtihad*,’ there has been no genuine intellectual activity on the part of Islam. Such a view is undoubtedly fiction but the bias nevertheless persists, especially under the guise of the Muslim world’s alleged inferiority to the West. The ongoing intellectual engagement of Islam with modernity is well documented, yet what remains unaddressed is the extent and scope of the originality and creativity of the Muslim thinkers involved therein. Thus, the present roundtable aspires to answer the following question: How has Islam contributed to the prime production of ideas in the modern period?

Certainly, to answer adequately such a question one must consider the specifics of time and place, context and circumstance, as well as individual idiosyncrasies. Moreover, no answer

can just assume that originality and creativity are given; what has to be explored and delineated is where, why, and how Muslim thinkers have been original and creative. Islamic modernism in all its forms – liberal, reformist or moderate – is the most promising field of reference with regards to the exploration of the alternatives that Islam may present to standard Western versions of modern theory and critical thinking.

The discussion series will delve into a wide range of areas of thought, such as political theory, philosophy, sociology, art and literature, theology, education and historiography, and at the same time consider a diverse number of Muslim thinkers, including Shariati, Taha, Nurbakhsh, Ahmed, Nasr, an-Naim, Soroush, and Kermani. These figures are not cases of passive and/or benign modernisation or even westernisation, but on the contrary represent instances of a robust and sustained encounter with the challenges of the West; this encounter becomes especially intriguing as it is about ideas that remain controversial for dominant Muslim perspectives throughout the world today.

**DESCRIPTION**

The 2019 series will run every month on a Friday from March–June and



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August–November. It will host invited speakers leading discussion on suggested topics.

The roundtable aims to foster inter-institutional collaboration on cutting edge scholarship in relevant fields of the study of religion. The objective of the seminars is to provide a platform for discussion of key issues in relation to religion in the modern world. Proceedings will be submitted for publication in a special series/edited volume.

### LOCATION AND TIME

Western Sydney University  
Parramatta South Campus, The Female Orphan School, PS-EZ.1.57 (Geoffrey Roberson Boardroom)  
Fridays, 10.00am – 12.00pm

### LIST OF PRESENTERS

Professor Bryan Turner (ACU)  
Friday 22 March  
*Orientalism: From Edward Said to Wael B. Hallaq*

Emeritus Professor Garry W. Trompf (USYD)  
Friday 5 April  
*Questions of Gnostic Islam*

Dr Aydogan Kars (Monash)  
Friday 3 May  
*Soroush Between Tradition and Innovation*

Dr Vassilis Adrahtas (Macquarie)  
Friday 7 June  
*From Tradition to Modernity and Vice Versa: The Progressive Islam of Mahmud Muhammad Taha*

Dr Maria Bhatti (WSU, Law)  
Friday 2 August  
*The Interaction between Islamic Law and Secular Law*

Dr Lucia Sorbera (USYD)  
Friday 6 September  
*Beyond the Modernity–Tradition Binary: For a Women’s Intellectual History of Islam*

Associate Professor William Shepard, retired (UC, Christchurch)  
Friday 4 October  
*The Islamist Paradox*

Dr Milad Milani (WSU)  
Friday 1 November  
*Shahab Ahmed and the Hermeneutics of Islam*