

Progressive / Liberal 'Islam'



overview:

- **introduction: beginnings and context**
- **overview of Safi's 'introduction'**
- **methodology and hermeneutics**
- **progressive / liberal: hijab**

At present Islamic intellectualism is virtually dead, and the Muslim world presents the uninviting spectacle of a vast intellectual desert in the depths of whose wilderness there hardly stirs a thought, but whose deadening silence itself may sometimes resemble the apparition of a flutter. This is the community for whose younger generation Muhammad Iqbal addressed his earnest prayer about four decades ago:

*"May God introduce your spirit to a [new] tempest,
for there is hardly a stir in the waters of your sea!"*

Rahman, *Islam*. p. 263

‘...Why has the half-century since been so barren? One answer may be that the Muslim world has been preoccupied in this half century with liberation struggles against western colonialism and, subsequent to liberation with reconstruction programmes. But it is also true that when people are pressed hard by challenges and are engaged in dangerous struggles, their creativity reaches unusual heights. And what 'reconstruction' is this, of which intellectual reconstruction and spiritual regeneration form little or no part?’

Rahman, *Islam*. pp. 263-264



Abdullahi an-Na'im



Abdol Karim Soroush



Ziba Mir-Hosseini



**Nasr Hamed abu Zayd
(d. 2010)**



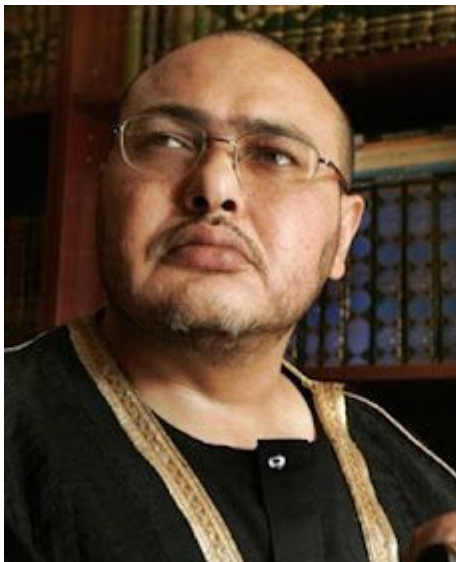
Omid Safi



Amina Wadud



Fatima. Mernissi
(d. 2015)



Khaled Abou El-Fadl



Farid Esack



Ebrahim Moosa



Asghar Ali Engineer
(d. 2013)

Progressive Dawoodi Bohras:
www.dawoodi-bohras.com



Nurcholish Madjid
(d. 2005)

'I view Wahhabism...as the single greatest source of impoverishment of contemporary Islamic thought.' Safi, *PM*, p. 8

islamic humanism

‘At the heart of a progressive Muslim interpretation is a simple yet radical idea: every human life, female and male, Muslim and non-Muslim, rich or poor, "Northern" or “Southern”, has exactly the same intrinsic worth.’ Safi, *PM*. p.3

““Progressive,”... a relentless striving towards a universal notion of justice in which no single community's prosperity, righteousness, and dignity comes at the expense of another.’ Safi, *PM*. p.3

...being a [PM] means not thinking more about the Quran and the life of the Prophet, but also thinking about the life we share on this planet with all human beings and all living creatures...our relationship to the rest of humanity changes the way we think about God, and vice versa.

Central to this notion of a [PM] identity are fundamental values that we hold to be essential to a vital, fresh, and urgently needed interpretation of Islam for the twenty-first century. These themes include:

social justice: 'The term 'social justice' may be new to some contemporary Muslims, but what is not new is the theme of justice in Islam. **Justice lies at the heart of Islamic social ethics'** ...Yet how many people have also realised that the Mu'tazilites...so valued justice that they identified themselves as the folk of 'Divine Unity and Justice'.' Safi, *PM*, p. 9

gender justice: '...there can be no progressive interpretation of Islam without gender justice...Muslim feminism is the radical notion that **Muslim women are full human beings. The human and religious rights of Muslim women** cannot be 'granted,' 'given back,' or 'restored' because they were never ours to give - or take - in the first place.' Safi, *PM*, pp. 10-11

pluralism (beyond 'tolerance'):

*'Human beings are like members of one body
created from one and the same essence.*

***When one member feels pain,
the rest are distraught.***

*You, unmoved by the suffering of others,
are unworthy of the name human!'* Sa'di (quoted in Safi, *PM*. p.12)

methodology & approach:

'The progressive Muslim project represents an ongoing attempt at an Islamic *ijtihad*, or committed critical thinking based on disciplined but independent reasoning, to come up with solutions to new problems.' Safi, *PM*, p. 8

hermeneutics

- literariness of the qur'an: qur'an is created - language subject to modern literary criticism
- do not subscribe to ethical voluntarism: ethico-moral considerations privileged over literal readings of legal texts (justice, dignity, equity, mercy)
- historicist / contextual readings of the texts
- thematic-holistic approach to the interpretation of qur'an (?)
- critical approach to hadith

the veil (*hijab*): liberal & progressive approaches

[Prophet], tell believing men to lower their glances and guard their private parts: that is purer for them. God is well aware of everything they do. And tell believing women that they should lower their glances, guard their private parts, and not display their charms beyond what [it is acceptable] to reveal; **they should let their head scarves fall to cover their necklines** and not reveal their charms except to their husbands, their fathers, their husbands' fathers..."

Q. 24.30-31 (trans. Abdel Haleem)

Prophet, tell your wives, your daughters, and women believers to **make their outer garments hang low over them** so as to be recognized and not insulted: God is most forgiving, most merciful.

Q. 33.59 (trans. Abdel Haleem)

Mernissi:

“The *hijab*...was the incarnation of the absence of internal control; it was the veiling of the sovereign will, which is the source of good judgment and order in society.”

Mernissi, *Women and Islam*, p. 185

“In the logic of the *hijab*, the law of tribal violence replaces the intellect of the believer, which the Muslim God affirms is indispensable for distinguishing between good from evil...The *hijab* reintroduced the idea that the street was under the control of the *sufha*, those who did not restrain their desires and who needed a tribal chieftain to keep them under control.”

ibid. 187

Wadud:

“If the overall thrust of Islam with regard to social decorum is one of modesty, the idea that you can associate modesty with any singular item of dress is ludicrous...So the idea of struggling with modesty is in fact the element that is Islamic. And that the *hijab* might be one of the ways in which this modesty has manifest itself does not mean that modesty is equal to the *hijab*. The *hijab* has no hierarchy over the concept of modesty. So it is at one and the same time a mixed symbol that people will identify for the sake of religion, but also for the sake of personal identity with that religion, even though in and of itself, has no religious meaning.”

<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/muslims/interviews/wadud.html>