

*Progressive Muslims on Justice, Gender and Pluralism*, ed. Omid Safi. Oxford: Oneworld, 2003. 351 pp.

In the wake of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, Islam and the Muslim community in America have been exposed to harsh criticism. On the one hand, Islam was condemned as an ideology prompting violence and on the other hand, Muslims in America were accused of being collaborators of the terrorists. American Muslims took on different attitudes to respond and neutralize these criticisms, the most widespread of which is the apologetic approach, epitomized in the slogan "Islam is the religion of peace". Unlike this well-known approach, Omid Safi and the other fourteen contributors of the volume, people "whose understanding of Islam has been shaped by the academic study of Islam in western institutions" (p. 18) adopted a stance which they define as "progressive".

Although they did not have a declaration that stated the ideas they shared, some common inclinations of the contributors can be discerned throughout the volume. They generally ascribed the responsibility for the negative images of Islam and Muslims to fundamentalist interpretations, which, according to them, have been dominant among Muslims in the second half of the twentieth century. Moreover, they desired to reinterpret the image of Islam, in the light of its basic sources and to form a new Islamic thought, taking present day needs into account. Thus, they have examined current Islamic thought in general, as well as in some specific subjects, like social justice, democracy, human rights, gender justice and pluralism, offering some suggestions for new directions to be taken.

In Part I, contemporary Muslim ideologies are criticized and the ways that can be implemented to establish new Islamic thought are explored. Khaled Abou El Fadl traces the history and basic premises of the so-called contemporary fundamentalist ideology viz. *Salafism*. Farid Esack explores the external and internal conditions that have led some Muslims to radical interpretations and argues for the need for new perspectives. Ahmed Karamustafa discusses the nature of Islam and defines it as a civilization interacting with other civilizations. Ebrahim Moosa skillfully shows the necessity and legality of *ijtihad* in the contemporary age, while Tazim R. Kassam deals with the responsibilities of Muslim scholars in America. The common thread that goes through this part is the need to challenge the fundamentalist interpretations of Islam, characterized by the "literalist-exclusivist" approach (p. 8) and by "authoritarianism" (p. 115), i.e. the assumption that there is only one true Islam; there is also seen to be a need for the preparation of the ground for diversity in theory and practice, which will thus lead to new interpretations of Islam.

Part II and Part III are made up of articles that deal with the specific issues faced by Muslims, especially those in America. Some of them are tracts calling Muslims to change their religious thought and practice. Gwendolyn Zoharah Simmons prompts Muslim women to reinterpret the Islamic sources and to “rescue” Islamic thought from its “patriarchal” flaws. Amina Wadud, as an African-American Muslim, traces race, class and ethnic discrimination among the American Muslims and demands equality in representation between the different races and ethnic groups. Marcia Hermansen, a university teacher, tackles the state of Muslim university students in America; condemning their “extremist attitudes” and suggesting the development of a “moderate pluralistic culture” among the youth.

Other articles in the volume attempt to analyze Islamic sources and to produce a new discourse on specific subjects. Kecia Ali engages the traditional and modern Islamic discourses on gender issues. Showing the discrepancy between the contemporary cast of mind and these discourses, she argues for the creation of a new jurisprudence free from “patriarchal parameters”. Scott Sirac Haqq Kugle is primarily interested in finding a place for homosexual relationships within the boundaries of Islam and, for this, has analyzed the story of Lot in the Quran. Amir Hussain shows the examples of interfaith dialogue in traditional and contemporary Muslim communities and emphasizes the necessity and importance of a “pluralist approach” for minority Muslim communities. Ahmed Moussali searches for roots in the Quran, which might prepare ground for democracy and pluralism. In the last article, Farish A. Noor presents his ideas on pluralism, gender justice and globalization, urging Muslims to “catch the international currents”, and to contribute to and benefit from the so-called universal system.

*Progressive Muslims* is an attempt to stimulate change in Islamic thought and practice, and to help to change the image of Muslims. The major shortcoming of the book is its America-centricity. In most cases, the experiences of Muslims living in America constitute the starting point for the contributors. They believe that “in many ways, North American Muslims are in a position to influence what happens in the rest of the Muslim world” (p. 266). America-centricity determined the selection of the subjects, like democracy, human rights, gender justice, pluralism and the development of ideas. The authors want to see Muslims all over the world be able to articulate values that are universally recognized. However, it is almost undeniable that the current status of these values in Middle Eastern societies is closely interconnected with a range of social circumstances that stem from the modernization process. On the other hand, some contributors, like many American writers, are unaware that the majority of Muslim elites and intelligentsia underwent similar and

nearly synchronic experiences in modern times, and illustrate *Wahhabism* of Saudi Arabia as the main source of fundamentalist interpretations.

Like so many books made up of articles, the articles are of an uneven quality. The majority of the articles are based on an understanding of Islam which recognizes the authority of the basic sources, the Quran and Sunnah, and the value of tradition as an example for dialogue with these basic sources. However, to take the modern practices for granted and then to speculate on the basic sources in order to find a ground for these practices seems to be unethical. In dialogue with the revelatory texts, the resulting norm could be democracy, or something opposing or qualifying democracy. If one takes on "sexuality-sensitive readings" (p. 203) or democracy-sensitive readings of the Quran, then one finds what one looks for. In that context, to make the statement "what is western becomes indeed Islamic" (p. 300) is to neglect the authenticity and idiosyncrasy of Islamic civilization.

*Progressive Muslims* is a very interesting book that particularly reflects the ideas and feelings of a group of the Muslims living in America after the attacks of 9/11. Their call for Muslims to change and to become members of the universal community makes the book important for the Muslims in other parts of the world.

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*Çağdaş İslâm Düşünürleri*, ed. Cağfer Karadaş.  
Bursa: Arasta Yayınları, 2003. 192 sayfa.

Günümüzde adını sıkça duyduğumuz ve bazıları İslâm dünyası çapında etkili olmuş sekiz ilim adamı ve düşünürü ele alan *Çağdaş İslâm Düşünürleri* bu konuda yazılmış ilk telif derlemedir.

Eserin editörü Karadaş, kitabın başlığında yer alan "çağdaş" kelimesiyle neyin kastedildiğini açıklamak amacıyla çeşitli sözlüklerde bu kelimeye yüklenen anlamları aktardıktan sonra, "çağdaş İslâm düşünürleri" sözü ile, içinde bulunduğumuz çağda yaşamış ya da yaşayan ve hitap ettikleri toplumun sorunlarına nasları hesaba katarak ve/veya bu sorunları yeniden değerlendirerek çözüm önerileri sunma çabasındaki kişilerin kastedildiğini ifade etmektedir.

Eserde, çağdaş İslâm düşünürlerini ele alan makalelerden önce, çağdaş İslâm dünyası hakkında genel mahiyette bilgiler veren iki makale yer almaktadır. Söz konusu makalelerin ilkinde Karadaş, modernleşme sürecine kadar İslâm dünyasında yaşanan siyasî ve fikrî gelişmeleri ana hatlarıyla tasvir etmeye