

Omid Safi's Concept of Progressive Muslims

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Submission date: 25-Dec-2021 01:43PM (UTC+1100)

Submission ID: 1735563254

File name: 1.2019_Omid_Safi_s_Concept_of_Progressive_Muslims.pdf (434.41K)

Word count: 7403

Character count: 40267

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1 Abstract

Omid Safi is a professor of classical and contemporary Islamic studies in North America. His thought influences the contemporary Islamic discourses. It is progressive Muslims, which becomes a new paradigm after liberal Islam. Actually, both of these discourses are almost the same, but Safi tries to present progressive Muslims as a discourse different from liberal Islam. Later, Safi's concept of progressive Muslims can inspire many Muslim scholars in the West. This study concludes that according to Omid Safi, progressive Muslims come from the spirit of renewal Islam and response to modernity. But after research and comparison from many aspects, progressive Muslims are doing a progressive ijtihad and interpretation to show the humanist Islam and tolerant for social issues by engaging both of tradition and modernity as the main characters. The researcher finally concludes that this discourse is redefining Islam in the manner as other several contemporary Islamic discourses, like liberal Islam and neo-modernism did.

Keywords: Progressive Muslims, Liberal Islam, Neo-Modernism, Islamic Contemporary Issues, Omid Safi.

Abstark

Omid Safi merupakan salah seorang profesor dalam studi Islam baik klasik maupun kontemporer yang diakui di Amerika Utara. Pemikirannya sangatlah berpengaruh dalam studi keislaman, yaitu Muslim progresif. Wacana ini menjadi paradigma baru setelah Islam liberal. Meskipun begitu, banyak ilmuwan yang menyamakan kedua diskursus ini. Maka Omid Safi dengan konsep barunya membedakan dengan jelas dalam setiap tulisannya. Sehingga dapat dikatakan konsep tersebut yang menjadi acuan dan inspirasi bagi ilmuwan-

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ilmuwan setelahnya. Berangkat dari latar belakang yang telah disebutkan di atas, penulis berusaha mengkaji dan mengungkapkan konsep Muslim progresif yang dicanangkan Omid Safi. Dalam pembahasan mengenai subyek yang dipilih, penulis menggunakan metode dokumenter. Kemudian penulis menganalisa pemikiran Omid Safi menggunakan metode analisis dan pendekatan filosofis. Dari penelitian ini disimpulkan bahwa diskursus ini dilatarbelakangi oleh semangat pembaharuan wajah Islam sebagai respon dari modernitas. Namun setelah diteliti dari beberapa aspek, tujuan dari Muslim progresif adalah melakukan progresivitas ijtihad dan interpretasi Islam demi menunjukkan wajah Islam yang lebih humanis serta toleran terhadap isu-isu sosial dengan cara memadukan antara tradisi dan modernitas sebagai karakteristik utama. Maka dapat disimpulkan bahwa wacana Muslim progresif hanyalah sebagai bentuk redefinisi dari beberapa wacana keislaman kontemporer lainnya, seperti Islam liberal dan neo-modernis.

Kata Kunci: Muslim Progresif, Islam Liberal, Neo-Modernisme, Isu Islam Kontemporer, Omid Safi.

Introduction

Islam has a big challenge during the time of modernism and post-modernism. The change of the global situation poses challenges and a tremendous anxiety.¹ These challenges of a decline and weakness suffered by the *Ummah* because of the influx of *tackled* and the Western influence in the Muslim world as the result of missionary, orientalist and colonialist.²

In modernity age, every Muslim who still held at al-Qur'an, al-Hadits and the tradition percept, be apathetic with modernism, will be called by radical Islam, traditional Islam, fundamentalist, puritan and exclusive Islam. In other side, there are other kinds of Islamic understanding which break free from the main precept of Islam. They are liberal Islam, modernist Islam, neo-modernist, transformative Islam and progressive Islam, which becomes a new discourse in this last decade.³

Being different from either fundamentalists or radicals, because of their severe criticism toward modernity, or liberal Islam who boldly support modernity, progressive Muslims insists on a serious engagement with the textual and material sources of the Islamic

¹ A. Sudiarja, *Agama (di Zaman) yang Berubah*, (Yogyakarta: Penerbit Kanisius, 2006), vi.

² Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi, *Liberalisasi Pemikiran Islam; Gerakan bersama Missionaris, Orientalis dan Kolonialis*, (Ponorogo: CIOS, 2008), 4.

³ Khaled Abou el-Fadhl, *Selamatkan Islam dari Muslim Puritan*, original title: *the Great Theft: Wrestling Islam from the Extremist*, Terj. Helmi Mustafa, (Jakarta: Serambi, 2006), 24-27.

tradition and interpret it in neo-modernism approach.⁴ Progressive Muslims focus on human rights, gender equality and religious pluralism.⁵ However, Omid Safi argues that it is not a form of Islam that want to be reformed since Islam will always step forward and not be changed by time and place, but change of Muslims' understanding and way of Islamic understanding that there have been many shifts. Therefore Safi and other scholars do not use the term progressive Islam, they intend prefer progressive Muslims.⁶

Things such as mentioned above became a big question about this new Islamic discourse, progressive Muslims and its position from another. To observe more this issue, researcher needs a character that has a major influence on such issues to be the main focus.

Omid Safi is one of the Muslim scholars in America, focus on Sufism, Islamic history and contemporary Islamic thought.⁷ He is a figure of progressive Muslims both in academic and movement. As the writer can refer to him for progressive Muslims is the same as referring to Charles Kurzman for liberal Islam.⁸ His book, *Progressive Muslims; on Justice, Gender, and Pluralism*, becomes the reference of many scholars whole the world to discuss the concept of progressive Muslims.⁹

Short Biography of Omid Safi

Omid Safi is a figure of American-Iranian scholar who was born in Jacksonville, Florida in the South East of America on December 12, 1969.¹⁰ His family originally come from the city of Esfahan, the third bigger city in Iran. Since seventeen years old he interested with a figure of Malcolm X. He was a human right prime mover which came from African-American. From here, Safi began to understand the social injustice around his circles and it will be his foundation

⁴ Omid Safi, "What is Progressive Islam?" in ISIM Newsletter Vol. 13, December 2003.

⁵ Omid Safi (ed), *Progressive Muslims: On Justice, Gender, And Pluralism*, (Oxford: One World, 2003).

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ www.onbeing.com, accessed August 18, 2015, 04.45 PM.

⁸ Martin van Bruinessen and Julia Day Howell (Ed.), *Sufism and the 'Modern' in Islam*, (London: I.B Tauris, 2007), 5.

⁹ Kamaruzzaman Bustaman-Ahmad, "Contemporary Islamic Thought in Indonesian and Malay World: Islam Liberal, Islam Hadhari, and Islam Progresif, in *Journal of Indonesia Islam*, V. 08, 117.

¹⁰ Edward E. Curtis IV, *Muslims in America: A Short History*, (London: Oxford University Press, 2013), 116.

for the later discussion about progressive Islam.¹¹

Safi grew in family whom thought him by both moral of Sufism and Shi'a tradition.¹² But in one time he also life in America by its freedom. This condition shapes his thought to meet the misunderstanding of Islam to America and vice versa in agreement toward humanism. Islam can be gathered with American and the contemporary problems in modern life.¹³

Omid Safi learns Persian, Arabic, and Turkish since a long time to assist his understanding toward a classical manuscript. In his first academic career, he centered on Islamic history and Sufism, especially in Jalaluddin Rumi's poet and considered. After the tragedy of World Trade Centre (WTC) in September 11, 2001, Safi and other American Muslims try to cover a new view of Islam by progressive Muslim.¹⁴ By this accident, Omid Safi has an attention to develop progressive Islamic thought in this latter twentieth century and he has worked to familiarize contemporary Muslim intellectual discourse.¹⁵

Omid Safi got his first education in Jacksonville, Florida at Wolfson High School in 1987. Later graduating from high school in the year 1988 he continued his bachelor, master and doctoral program in Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. Safi was a lecturer at Colgate University, the University of North Carolina, and today he is the director of Duke Islamic studies in Duke University. At Harvard University, he was the forefather of pluralism studies and lead American Academy of Religion (AAR). His activity out on campus is to be a leader in American Muslims mysticism (Sufism) group.¹⁶

In 2005, Safi, Hussein Ibish and Sarah Eltantawi found an arrangement of progressive Muslims, Progressive Muslims Union (PMU). It was the outcome of the confluence of many scholars in the end 1980 to develop the progressive Islamic discourse at Southern

¹¹ Safi interview with North America radio, February 2016.

¹² *Ibid.*, 56

¹³ Mohammad Thoha, "Paradigma Baru Fiqh Perempuan (Studi Analisis atas Gender Mainstreaming Omid Safi dalam Agenda Muslim Progressive)" in *al-Ihkam* journal, Vol. 8, No. 2, December 2013.

¹⁴ Muhammad Faisal Ashari, *ibid.* See also Farid Essack, "Beyond 9/11" in Omid Safi (Ed.), *Progressive Muslims: on Social Justice, Gender and Pluralism*, (New York: One World, 2003), 33-47.

¹⁵ Martin van Bruinessen and Julia Day Howell (Ed.), *Sufism and the 'Modern' in Islam*, (London: I.B.Tauris, 2007), 5.

¹⁶ Mohammad Thoha, "Paradigma Baru...", 8.

California.¹⁷ But Safi resigned in 2006 because he saw that PMU cannot realize the progressive Muslims' hope.

His education grows his framework, classical and contemporary Islamic thought and Sufism. Nowadays Safi is the mentor of progressive Muslims.

Definition of Progressive Muslims

Progressive Muslims roots to the word progress, means the process of improving or developing, or getting nearer to achieve or complete something.¹⁸ Omid Safi defines progressive Muslims as the realization of the urgency of changing times and looks for the implementation the Divine revelation to enact the justice and *ihsan* which derive from the Islamic tradition.¹⁹ This term is agreed by Ebrahim Moosa, Khaled Abou el-Fadhl, Farid Essack and Farish Ahmad Noor, who set the progressive Muslims by the new actualization, understanding and approach of Islam that concern on social problem in the contemporary world.²⁰

Ebrahim Moosa argues that progressive Islam is a horde of Muslims who cares social justice, politics, religion, and do their progressive Islamic ritual by interpreting a holy text with the modernistic trend.²¹ This definition should be agreed with Farish A. Noor, a Malaysian scholar, describes progressive Islam as a culture and policy movement which cares a social justice. It adds up to criticizing both fundamentalists-radical Islam and liberal Islam. Progressive Islam for him is to respond many discourses which Western gives.²² Alparslan Acikgenc, the Turkish Muslim scholar, says that progressive Islam is the absolute Islamic vision of reality and truth as understood and applied in life from the position of a

¹⁷ Muhammad Faisal Ashaari, "Islam Progresif: Suatu Tinjauan Awal". In *Pemikir Journal*, Vol. 43, January-May 2006.

¹⁸ A S Hornby, *Oxford Advance Learner's Dictionary*, Eighth Edition, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 1214.

¹⁹ Omid Safi, "The Times They are a-Changin' – A Muslim Quest for Justice, Gender Equality and Pluralism", in Omid Safi (Ed.), *Progressive Muslims on Justice, Gender and Pluralism*, (London: One World, 2003), 1.

²⁰ Read: Ebrahim Moosa, *Islam Progresif: Refleksi Dilematis tentang HAM, Modernitas dan Hak-Hak Perempuan di Dalam Hukum Islam*, Terj. Yasrul Huda, original title: *The Dilemma of Islamic Rights Schemes*, (Jakarta: LKiS Pelangi Nusantara, 2004),

²¹ Ebrahim Moosa, *Islam Progresif...*, xi.

²² Farish A. Noor, *Islam Progresif: Peluang dan Tantangannya di Asia Tenggara*, Terj. Moch. Nur Ichwan and Imran Rosyadi, (Yogyakarta: Samha, 2006).

balanced mental state. Because the main problem of Muslim today, for him, is that they practice Islam in an 'unbalanced state of mind', which results in the opposite of progressive Islam with regard to religion.²³

According to Abdullah Saeed²⁴ on his book "Islamic Thought: An Introduction", he uses the 'progressive ijtihadis' term to explain one of the varied voices of contemporary Islamic thought rather progressive Islam. By this term, he needs to bring a change, especially through interpretation of text and tradition. Because the world changed and the reality is followed that change too. Now is the time for Muslims to engage social justice and *ihsan* in their community.²⁵ The main task of progressive Muslims is to rethink, reinterpret, and uphold the universal values of Islam.²⁶

From all definition above, the researcher can make a conclusion that the agreement and difference definition on progressive Muslims do not take much more, because all of them want to apply Islam around societies to be more ethic and relevant in contemporary age. It is humanism which taken by liberal interpretation of traditional sources.

Term of Progressive Muslims

Omid Safi prefers to use 'progressive Muslims' term for his work. He does many comparisons with several discourses. For him, another term in Islamic discourses does not match with his concept. In his written, he compares progressive Muslims by liberal Islam, critical Islam, progressive Islam and American Islam. But the researcher will add this comparison with other Islamic discourses.

He compares progressive Muslims with American Islam.

²³ Alparslan Acikgenc, "Progressive Islam in Turkey" in *Progressive Islam and the State in Contemporary Muslims Societies* report on March 7-8, 2006 at Marina Mandarin Singapore, (Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies-IDDs), 7.

²⁴ Professor of Islamic studies in Melbourne University and his research is focus on the negotiation of text and context, *ijtihad* and interpretation. He advocates a reformation of Islamic thought by hermeneutics. Saeed's publications are Qur'an and hermeneutics, Islam and human rights, Islamic law reform, Muslim in Australia, Islam and freedom of religion. www.abdullahsaeed.org accessed December 17, 2015 on 16.23.

²⁵ Abdullah Saeed, *Islamic Thought: An Introduction*, (London: Routledge, 2006), 150.

²⁶ Abdullah Saeed, "Progressive Muslims and the Interpretation of the Qur'an Today" in *Progressive Islam and the State in Contemporary Muslims Societies* report on March 7-8, 2006 at Marina Mandarin Singapore, (Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies-IDDs), 5.

The researcher agrees with this because it will result another kinds of Islam as well as Arab Islam, Nusantara Islam, Africa Islam, etc. These arguments are not clear. He assumes that American value is not connected with Islam.²⁷ In his works, he tries to respond it to be suitable until Muslims in America have an image as liberal and progressive.²⁸

For Omid Safi, Muslims with progressive understanding are not only in America, but several countries such as Iran, Malaysia, and South Africa that have progressive Muslims movements and scholars there.²⁹ But most of the thought of this discourse have taken Western worldview, or at less they have been inspired by Western or American thought as the basis of their argument.

Safi does not agree use progressive Islam to define his concept, because progressive Muslims as ideology of Muslim group cannot be equal with Islam as religion. Islam always progressive, but Muslims are not always so.³⁰

Mohammed Arkoun emphasizes the comparison between Islam and Muslims in his book *Rethinking Islam*. He argues that Islam means to surrender to God, whereas Muslim means ideal religious manner. If we do not differ both of them, Islam will be responsible to social manner.³¹

Progressive Muslims, for Safi, is different with liberal Islam. Even Many scholars define progressive Muslims as same as liberal Muslims, because their characteristics rather same. Both of them are loose and not strictly following Islamic teaching.³²

Liberal Islam is derived from liberalism. Domenico Losurdo defined liberalism as the tradition of thought concern in liberty of

²⁷ Omid Safi, "Islamic Modernism" in Lindsay Jones (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Religion*, Second Edition, (Farmington Hills: MacMillan, 2006), 6095.

²⁸ Yuting Wang, *Between Islam and the American Dream: An Immigrant Muslim Community Post-9/11 America*, (New York: Routledge, 2014), 40.

²⁹ Omid Safi, *Introduction...*, xxvii.

³⁰ Omid Safi, "The Times They are a-Changin' – A Muslim Quest for Justice, Gender Equality and Pluralism", in Omid Safi (Ed.), *Progressive Muslims on Justice, Gender and Pluralism*, (London: One World, 2003), 17-18.

³¹ Mohammed Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam*, 17-20. In his book, Arkoun made an example by using 'Islam World' and 'Muslim World'. He said that it is not necessary to use 'Islam World' to point citizens who live in certain country.

³² Omid Safi, *Progressive Islam...*, 20. and read also: Khaled Abou el-Fadhl, *Muslim Puritan*, Abdul Aziz Said (ed.), *Contemporary Islam: Dynamic, Not Static*, 65. *Between Islam and American Dream*, 35, Clinton Benett, *Muslims and Modernity: an Introduction*, xxviii.

the individual.³³ Liberation as the Western identity is too enamored modernity and become modern Islam. Whereas progressive Muslims, even identify themselves as Islamic modernism, they are not modern Muslim, but those Muslims who see something and respond of modernity as a constitutive element of their worldview and practice.³⁴

The previous generations of liberal Islam pursued a purely academic approach.³⁵ That is a task of liberal scholars who sees the responsibility to keep Muslims' moral and ethics from the science and wisdom of God.³⁶ But for Safi, progressive Muslims have done such activism than vision in academic side.

This comparison is agreed by Farid Essack, one of progressive scholars from South Africa. Because liberal Islam just emphasize the social change, while progressive would additionally interrogate to benefit that change.³⁷

Progressive Muslims also has a different meaning and definition to critical Islam. Because it refers to those who criticize, sit around and complain with no action. Critical Islam trying to prove Islam to be relevant today and it can produce a more just, tolerant and peaceful society.³⁸ Safi says that progressive Muslims criticize many things as their character, such as tradition, modernity, contemporary issues, Islamic practices and interpretations. But it always does so to activate and solve.³⁹ Both of definitions have similar purpose to critic the tradition and to change it to be relevant in this contemporary world.

Safi describes progressive Muslims rather same with modernist Islam, because both of them are dynamic, more liberal, inclusive, humanistic, secular interpretation of Islam and distrustful of Islamist political discourses.⁴⁰ As Charles Kurzman describes that modernist Islam is a movement in the middle of the twentieth century who down

³³ Domenico Losurdo, *Liberalism: A Counter History*, original title: *Controstoria del Liberalismo*, Terj. Gregory Elliot, (London: Verso, 2011), 1.

³⁴ Omid Safi, *Introduction...*, xix.

³⁵ Omid Safi, *Learned...*, 53

³⁶ Read: Nurcholish Madjid, *Fatsoen Nurcholish Madjid*, (Jakarta: Republika, 2002), 218. Tazim R. Kassam, "On Being a Scholar of Islam: Risks and Responsibilities" in Omid Safi (Ed.), *Progressive Muslims...*, 128-141.

³⁷ Farid Essack, *"In Search of..."*, 79.

³⁸ Ziauddin Sardar and Meryll Wyn Davies, *The No-Nonsense Guide to Islam*, (Oxford: New Internationalist, 2007), 6.

³⁹ Omid Safi, *"The Time They .."*, 19.

⁴⁰ Omid Safi, "Islamic Modernism" in Lindsay Jones (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Religion*, Second Edition, (Farmington Hills: MacMillan, 2006), 6095.

played the importance of Islam in the modern age.^{41 42} But in his work, Kurzman put Ahmad Dahlan and Hasyim Asy'ari as the modernist Muslims in Indonesia.⁴³ They do not respond the modernity as well as Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Hasan Hanafi and Fazlur Rahman so called by modernist, but they were revivalist as Sayyid Quthb, Muhammad Abduh and Rasyid Ridho did at Egypt.⁴⁴

From these comparisons of Islamic discourses with progressive Muslims above, researcher takes a conclusion that the main issue on contemporary Islamic thought is how they respond the modernity. Progressive Muslims tries to redefine modern Islamic thought and activism for its similar definition.

But it cannot be moderate Islam as Omid Safi and Khaled Abou el-Fadhl do.⁴⁵ Progressive Muslims will never can link the traditional sources and teaching by new interpretation with modernity, because they use modernity as their worldview. It is the way of liberal Islam who says that they do a moderation of Islamic thought.

Background of Progressive Muslims

If the world will be changed as the theory of Scott Gordon in "The History and Philosophy of Social Science" that all must change to something new and something strange,⁴⁶ the respond of modernity should be changed as the change of time.

For Safi, the beginning of progressive Muslims discourse comes from the shift respond of modernity. It began from nineteenth century with revivalist who tried to muffle the conflicts and challenges of the modernity.⁴⁷ At twentieth century with liberal Islam which enormous with modernity then progressive Muslims comes for the

⁴¹ Charles Kurzman (Ed.), *Modernist Islam; A Source Book*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 4.

⁴² Nurcholish Madjid in his book, *Islam: Doktrin dan Peradaban*, disagree to use modern as an age, to be Modern Age. Modern or modernism is an antropocentrist and world culture signed by the creativity of human beings to solve their problems. The most important thing, he said, that modernism is not westernism. Read: Nuscholish Madjid, *Islam: Doktrin dan Peradaban*, sixth printed, (Jakarta: Paramadina& Dian Rakyat, 2008), 446-454.

⁴³ Charles Kurzman, *Modernist Islam...*, 23.

⁴⁴ Ali Rahnema (Ed), *Pioneers of*, 52.

⁴⁵ Read: Khaled Abou el-Fadhl, *Selamatkan Islam ...*, 27.

⁴⁶ Scott Gordon, *The History and Philosophy of Social Science*, (New York: Routledy, 1991), 148-154.

⁴⁷ John Obert Voll, "The Revivalist Heritage", on *The Contemporary Islamic Revival: a Critical Survey and Bibliography*, (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1991), 23.

next century.⁴⁸

Responding the modernity in one hand is to develop Islamic teaching. Because for modernist Islam, Muslims have been comfortably relying or falling back on old interpretation for much too long. This is their reason of stagnation of interpretation and feeling so painful in the contemporary world, so uncomfortable with modernity.⁴⁹ Modernist Islam tries to be opponents of taqlid and proponents of ijithad. They hold the view that Islam is a progressive, dynamic and rational religion.⁵⁰

Contrary with modernist Islam, modernity, for Safi, is caused of exile the spiritual domains of Islam. It seeks enlightenment version of Islam. It is progressive Islam.⁵¹

Another aspect is come from the aftermath of September 9, 2001 ago. It pushes the boundaries of public engagement of Islamic matters.⁵² Seemed that Islam has a big responsibility for the death of millions people, the break of the big power of America and the disadvantage of America economic.

Omid Safi writes about three main perspectives in discuss about 9/11 from both of American and Muslims' view.⁵³

From this tragedy with its perspectives, progressive Muslims acknowledge this accusation as their anger and resentment at a civilian target and that they have sought to justify their actions through Islamic rhetoric.⁵⁴ Then, as Muslims we have to realize that face terrorism is not the true faith of Islam. That's not what Islam is all about. Islam is peace. These terrorists don't represent peace, they represent evil and war.⁵⁵

First, the atrocities of 9/11 were not committed by Muslims. They were part of an elaborate plot by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency or Israel's Mosad to discredit and defame Muslims and pave the way for a brutal attack on Muslim lands. Second, the action of 9/11

⁴⁸ Omid Safi, *Introduction...*, 20.

⁴⁹ Sohail Inayatullah (Ed.), *Islam, Post-Modernism and Other Features: Ziauddin Sardar Reader*, (Sterling: Pluto, 2003), 32.

⁵⁰ Tauseed Ahmad Parray, *ibid*, 53.

⁵¹ Omid Safi, *Progressive.....*, 280.

⁵² Abdul Aziz Said (Ed.), *Contemporary Islam.....*, 107.

⁵³ Omid Safi, *Learned*, 50.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 51.

⁵⁵ Omid Safi, "Progressive Islam in America" on Stephen Prothero (Ed.), *A Nation of Religions: the Politics of Pluralism in Multi-religious America*, (USA: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 43.

were indeed committed by Muslims, the next approach was to save Islam by declaring al-Qaeda beyond the pale. *Third*, it may prove to be the most intellectually and spiritually fruitful: acknowledge that there is a spectrum of interpretations of Islam, including some that attempt to justify violence via Islam symbols.

The most terror represent by Wahhabi and Taliban. When they say that jihad or holy war is a command of the Qur'an, they try used the name of religion to express the hatred.⁵⁶

The ways to cure it are to be more humanist and can be realized that Islam is a religion that values human rights, justice and freedom as the American (or West need). It can engaged Islam to be public (American) religion.⁵⁷ It will increase tolerance towards one another and to achieve a more tolerant society to represent Islam.⁵⁸

This genesis is similar with the genesis of liberal Islam. The effect of post 9/11 results liberalisation in Islam. It is adapted from Western liberal concept to against extremism and fundamentalism.⁵⁹

Aims of Progressive Muslims

The aims of progressive Muslims are to have progressive interpretation in Islamic teaching caused of modernity and represent Islam as the humanist religion. It comes to problematize, resist, and finally replace the lifeless, narrow, exclusivist, and oppressive ideology.⁶⁰

The progressive interpretation uses contemporary ijtihad.⁶¹

⁵⁶ Karen Armstrong, *Berperang Demi Tuhan: Fundamentalisme dalam Islam*, Kristen, dan Yahudi, Terj. T. Hermaya, origin title: *The Battlee of Good: A History of Fundamentalism*, (Bandung: Mizan, 2013), 12.

⁵⁷ Omid Safi, "Progressive Islam in ...", 43.

⁵⁸ Omid Safi (Ed.), *Progressive...*, 23.

⁵⁹ Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi, *MISYKAT: Refleksi tentang Westernisasi, Liberalisasi dan Islam*, second printed, (Jakarta: INSIST-MIUMI, 2012), 127, Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi, "Geneologi Liberalisasi Pemikiran Islam", in national seminar on Pembaharuan Pemikiran Islam dan Tantangan Liberalisasi at June 15, 2009, Antasari Islam Institute, Banjarmasin.

⁶⁰ Tariq Ramadan, *Islam, The West, and the Challenges of Modernity*, Terj. Said Amghar, (Leicester, UK: the Islamic Foundation, 2004), xiii-xx.

⁶¹ *Ijtihad* in Arabic is from tsulatsi mujarrad, ja-ha-da, means problem (*masyaqqah*), power (*tlaqah*), effort (*juhdu*) and wide (*wus'u*). The word ja-ha-da adds by ta and become *ijtahada* means assemble all of powers and capabilities. Al-Azhari made a different in using *jahada* and *ijtahada*. He used *jahada* for effort and power, but *ijtahada* for idea. Read: *Al-Mu'jam al-Wasit*, 142, *Lisan al-'Arab*

In Islamic jurisprudence, *Ijtihad* means the effort and struggle for understanding the relative law of sharia (*al-hukmu asy-syar'i az-zanni*). And for completing this meaning,

Busthami, in this case, wants to find the next Martin Luther in Islam who will open the gate of *ijtihad* which is closed for a long time during the stagnation of interpretation at eighteenth century.⁶² But this stagnation had been solved by revivalist before.

The old interpretations no longer provide suitable answers facing modernity. Muslims need to improve themselves in this age.⁶³ It is not just a revival (*ihya*) of Islamic thought, but it is a renewal and reform which want to develop the creative *ijtihad*.⁶⁴ *Ijtihad*, in progressive Muslims, is not just in Islamic law, but rather all aspects of thought.

Progressive Muslims too have turned to the rich reservoir of *ijtihad*, the notion of principled, systematic, and independent reasoning to come up with new answers to new problems.⁶⁵ In this contemporary age, *ijtihad* is not just in the *furū'* (branches), but also in the *uṣūl* (principles).⁶⁶ It is the contrary concept of *ijtihad*. Muslims are forbidden to interpret the absolute text and the principle teaching. *Ijtihad* in the branches is one of benefit of Islam. By new concept of progressive *ijtihad*, they are trying to reform the absolute part of Islam to be more relative. Relativism as liberal Islam characteristic should to forbid all authorities. *Ijtihad* for liberal Islam is unlimited for all human beings.⁶⁷

It has similar aims with modernist Islam which comes to formulate new responses to the challenges of modern life by

⁵ *Ijtihad* can be the exertion of mental energy in the search for legal opinion to the extent that the faculties of the jurist become incapable of further effort. *Ijtihad* is the maximum effort expended by the jurist to master and apply principles and rules of legal theory for the purpose of discovering God's law. We cannot do *ijtihad* in absolut law because it had been written in the Qur'an. Read: *Al-Mausu'ah al-Fiqhiyah*, j.1, 18-19.

⁶² Busthami M. Said, *Pembaharuan....*, 204. Many modern scholars assume that *ijtihad* is ceased about the end of the third-ninth century. It is known by closing of the gate of *ijtihad*. The Qur'an and the sunna of prophet, as a rule, specify the law as it might be stated in specialized law manuals, but only contain some rulings (*ahkam*) and indications (*dalalat* or *imarat*) that lead to the cause ('illah) of the rulings. Read: Wael B. Hallaq, "Was the Gate of *Ijtihad* Closed?" in *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 16 No. 1, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 3-41.

⁶³ Omid Safi (Ed.), *Progressive Muslims....*, 9.

⁶⁴ Radwan Masmoudi, in the United States Institute of Peace and the Study of Islam Workshop entitled: "*Ijtihad: Reinterpreting Islamic Principle for the Twenty-First Century*" on March 19, 2004.

⁶⁵ Omid Safi, *Between Ijtihad....*, 85.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 88.

⁶⁷ Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi, *MISYKAT: Refleksi....*, 230.

reinterpret and reapply principles and ideals of Islam.⁶⁸

In the other side, the aftermath of September 11, 2001, the term *jihad* is too familiar to most people. But it has become so misunderstood. *Jihad* is simply holy war declared by Muslims against Westerners.⁶⁹ The term is used both Muslim extremists and Western Islamophobes to mean a literal holy war.⁷⁰

Progressive Muslims tries to recover the term *jihad*. The root of *jihad* is not holy war or violence, but rather resistance and struggle. The notion of *jihad* moves them to resist entrenched systems of inequality and injustice through non-violent conflict. The goal is peace derive in justice.⁷¹ By simple word, Seyyed Hossein Nasr describes *jihad* by social justice. To keep the rights of human being is our small *jihad* and our big *jihad* is the actualization of syahadat (confession of the Oneness of Allah and Muhammad is His prophet).⁷²

Omid Safi relates *jihad* and *ijtihad* by new definition, *jihad* for him is to exercise human's inner demons and bring about justice in the world at large is to engage in progressive and critical interpretation of Islam (*ijtihad*).⁷³

Justice ('*adl*) and the actualisation of goodness (*iḥsān*) are the things he concerning about. The spirit of justice (social, gender and pluralism) is new *jihad*. To critic and make a new interpretation of Islam is *ijtihad*. The researcher thinks that Safi does agree by many scholars idea. The twenty-first century need a new interpretation as many things in the world gradually improve.⁷⁴

Other aim, to be humanist religion, bring progressive Islam has another task to advocate all human beings who through no fault of their own life. In this context is to give voice to the voiceless (*mustaḍ'afūn*). It is the cause of the issues that progressive Muslims bring is human rights according to social justice, gender equality and pluralism.⁷⁵

A progressive Muslims agenda is concerned that all members of humanity have the same intrinsic worth because each member of

⁶⁸ Tauseed Ahmad Parray, "Islamic Modernist...", 79.

⁶⁹ Omid Safi (Ed.), *Progressive Muslims...*, 9.

⁷⁰ Omid Safi, *Progressive Islam in...*, 55.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁷² Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islam Tradisi di Tengah Kancah Dunia Modern*, original title: *Traditional Islam in the Modern World*, Terj. Luqman Hakim, (Bandung: Pustaka, 1994), 23.

⁷³ Omid Safi (Ed.), *Progressive...*, 8.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁷⁵ Omid Safi, *Progressive...*, 23.

humanity has the breath of God breathed into them.⁷⁶

Tolerance and humanism will keep the balance on plurality societies and understanding of religion. For Fazlur Rahman, Islamic humanism is towards liberation.⁷⁷ Liberal Islam argues that humanism will treat Muslims from the challenges of modernity. Modernity causes a personalization and alienation.⁷⁸

For neo-modernism, the actualization of faith (īmān) is to keep the rights and justice of human beings in society.⁷⁹ But it is just to develop the study intellectual the reformation rather than administration reforms.⁸⁰

Humanity is the main issue of progressive Muslims and other Islamic discourses. It works along all discourses just redefine and reimage how they concept. The core of this matter rather same. Afterwards all contemporary discourses are trying to beat the divine and make man as a source of value.

Characteristic of Progressive Muslims

Progressive Muslims insist on a serious engagement with the full spectrum of Islamic thought and practices. There can be no progressive Muslim movement that does not engage the very “stuff” of the Islamic tradition.⁸¹ To move beyond certain past interpretation of Islam, progressive Muslims have to go critically through them (both of tradition and modernity).⁸²

The modernity comes not to be abandoned, but to be responded. Safi says that the more Muslims get to modernity, the more Muslims actively work to exile any and all facets of the spiritual domains of Islam.⁸³ For liberal Islam, tradition is not an enemy of change, but that is a subject to change.⁸⁴ And to approve and accept the foreign

⁷⁶ Omid Safi, *Voices of Change...*, xxiv.

⁷⁷ Ebrahim Moosa, on preface of Fazlur Rahman, *Revival and Reform in Islam: A Study of Islamic Fundamentalism*, (Oxford: One World, 2000), 4.

⁷⁸ Nurcholish Madjid, *Islam Kemodernan dan Keindonesiaan*, new edition, (Bandung: Mizan, 2008), 115.

⁷⁹ Hasan Hanafi, *Islamologi 3: Dari Teosentris ke Antroposentris*, original title: *Dirasat Islamiyah*, Terj. Miftah Faqih, (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2004), 4.

⁸⁰ Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of Intellectual Tradition*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1982), 64.

⁸¹ Omid Safi, *Between Ijtihad of the Presupposition*, 83.

⁸² Omid Safi, *Progressive...*, 7.

⁸³ Omid Safi, *Learned...*, 280.

⁸⁴ Daniel W. Brown, *Rethinking Tradition in Modern Islamic Thought*, (Cambridge:

tradition is necessary to abandon Muslims from the thinking of authentic Islam. It will cause a closed and negation with modernity.⁸⁵

The engagement between traditional and modernity as the critique and respond to both of liberalist and fundamentalist, is the defining characteristic of progressive Islam/Muslims.⁸⁶ However, they can only faithfully claim that position after a serious engagement with the tradition.

Benazir Bhutto also said that progressive Islam need a deal to restore Islamic ascendancy is in her past. It means that any idea has to be located to legacy (turath).⁸⁷ This argument, engage tradition and modernity, also be agreed by Tariq Ramadan. He tries to be respectful of tradition and progressive that follows the guidance of the Prophetic tradition.⁸⁸ He saw that by this character we can do some reformation as his aim is to increase the Western Muslims. By Amin Abdullah word, Islam and the West, tradition and modernity, are the sibling. They can be engage by adaptation and adoption.⁸⁹

Engagement traditional and modernity is the way of progressive Muslims to define and identify their thought. From this way, progressive Muslims can be formed as Islamic humanism.⁹⁰ They conceive of a way of being Muslim that engages and affirms the humanity of all human beings, that actively holds all of us responsible for a fair and just distribution of God-given natural resources, and that seeks to live in harmony with the natural world.⁹¹ Progressive Muslims translate the social ideals in the Qur'an and Islamic teachings into a way of action that those committed to social justice today can relate to and understand.⁹²

Cambridge University Press, 1996), 2-3.

⁸⁵ Azyumardi Azra, *Jejak-Jejak Jaringan Kaum Muslimin: Dari Australia Hingga Timur Tengah*, (Jakarta: Penerbit Hikmah, 2007), 13.

⁸⁶ Omid Safi, *Progressive Islam in ...*, 44.

⁸⁷ Clinton Bennet, *Muslims and Modernity...*, 37.

⁸⁸ Tariq Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 106.

⁸⁹ Amin Abdullah, *Studi Agama: Normativitas atau Historisitas?*, (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2015), fifth printed, 199.

⁹⁰ Humanism is a cultural movement and thought which come from literature course of old Greek and Rome. Its value is humanity by focusing on human beings' benefit. Read: Anis Malik Thoha, *Tren Pluralism Agama: Tinjauan Kritis*, (Depok: Gema Insani, 2007), third printed, 52.

⁹¹ Omid Safi, *Progressive Islam...*, 54.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 49.

Hasan Hanafi saw the problematic from this. Trying to engage both of tradition and modernity begot damage, because it will never reconcile the conservative with progressive. Their characters are too different. This discourse just a hot air with no real application.⁹³ Modernity, by its nature to be innovative and creative, was less the value of traditional on intellectual manifestation and artistic.⁹⁴

But by this way, to engage tradition and modernity, Safi wants to engage all fellow human beings at the level of what makes us human and through the cultural different.⁹⁵ It can be significant whom doesn't follow his concept will be in low level and non-progressive.

2 Maybe it can be seen in the first way that they take. They begin by refusing to admit the absolute distinction between the religious and political domains, and many of the issues that Muslim progressives debate intensely (human right and democracy).⁹⁶ Even they try to engage both of them, progressive use modernity as their basic worldview.

The characteristic of progressive Muslims is confused. When they try to engage tradition and modernity while they use modernity as the worldview, it will make tradition defeat and cannot be compete with tradition. As neo-modernism do on their character, to not leave tradition in modernity, it results a new interpretation and reform the tradition.

All of the concepts which researcher describes and analyses above about progressive Muslims conclude that this discourse does not differ too much with other Islamic discourses in term, background, aim and character. It is like a new case from a same core.

Closing

Omid Safi is the forward proponent progressive Muslims. He put his great endeavour to present progressive Muslims as a discourse different liberal Islam, critical Islam and American Muslim. He defines progressive Muslims as the realization of Divine revelation to enact justice which derive from the Islamic tradition. But the researcher finally proves that it is not so, since it also promote

⁹³ Hasan Hanafi, *Turas dan Tajdid: Sikap Kiat terhadap Turas Klasik*, Terj: Yunan Wahyuni, *Al-Turats wa al-Tajdid*, (Jakarta: Titian Ilahi Press, 2011), 61-62.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 97.

⁹⁵ Omid Safi, *The Times They are...*, 24.

⁹⁶ Omid Safi, *Progressive...*, 46.

humanism as other discourse do.

The concept of progressive Muslims is closely related to the momentous tragedy of September 11, 2001 which gave bad image of Islam. Safi tries to present a new image of Islam in the more humanist form as a religion of peace and by reforming traditional teaching of Islam.

The main characteristics of progressive Muslims, which Safi believes to be distinct from liberal Islam (something that many people take these definitions into the same) is engaging tradition to modernity. The reformation that progressive Muslims wants to promote are reformation for making distinction between religion and all understanding of religion, and developing understanding of religion in modernity by resoring to tradition understood in a new approach.

This reformation needs a new interpretation. The gate of *ijtihad* is open widely and the meaning of *jihad* is not only restricted to the holy war. Omid Safi relates *jihad* and *ijtihad* by new definition, *jihad* for him is to exercise human's inner demons and bring about justice in the world at large and to engage in progressive and critical interpretation of Islam (*ijtihad*). *Ijtihad* is not only in the branches (*furu'*), but also in the basic principal of religion (*usul*).

Safi applies these concept in general contemporary issues, such as social justice, gender and pluralism which bind with humanism and equality. Social justice in progressive Muslims view is trying to be port of all *mustadh'afun*, such as the poor, the orphan, the downtrodden, the wayfarer, the hungry, etc. Special thing related to gender is that they do not just talk about marginal women, but also about man. Although most of the problem in gender justice is concerned with women. Ethics will be the main consideration to promote tolerance by resorting to pluralism which derives at values from secular humanism and trying to sets out tolerance.

Progressive Muslim is the same discourse as other contemporary Islamic discourse. It can be seen from its concept and its application as well. Their method to interpret the Qur'an and response to modernity are very loose. They want to promote the new image of Islam by reforming Islam from its root to suit the value of humanity.[]

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