

The Figure of Omid Safi: Progressive Muslim, Gender Mainstreaming, and Islamic Education

Rohinah

Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, Indonesia

e-mail: rohinah8o@yahoo.com

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Abstract

This study aims to determine Omid Safi's concept in the current discourse on gender equality and Islamic education. This study uses qualitative methods with critical and philosophical literal studies. It develops methods by collecting related literature, highlights essential concepts, categorizes information, applies similar procedures to other texts, extracts some concepts, and finds other supporting information. The results show that progressive Muslims are the central theme of Omid Safi's concept. Progressive Muslims study textual sources and materials in the Islamic tradition, interpret them and then link the ancient traditions with the contemporary era. Safi calls them as multiple critiques. Safi, in his concept on progressive Muslims, presents writings that offer an agenda of gender equality. It emphasizes a new paradigm of interpretations of the Qur'an and Hadith, which are considered imperfect because they are still based on the interests of particular groups so that the position of women is always marginalized. People's understanding that is still partial to the distinction between feminism and gender is also the cause of gender injustice. Women in their historical trajectory have proven their success in playing a heavier social role than men. Furthermore, Safi's concept in education, especially Islamic education, has a primary focus on the "teacher figure" as a prototype for Muslims who must have a progressive perspective and paradigm. This study highlights and interprets Omid Safi's concept of progressive Muslims in the discourse of gender and Islamic education.

Keywords: *Progressive Muslims, Gender, Social Justice, Pluralism, Islamic Education*

Abstrak

Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk mengetahui kontribusi pemikiran Omid Safi dalam diskursus tentang kesetaraan gender dan pendidikan Islam pada saat ini. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif, dilakukan dengan studi literal kritis dan filosofis, mengembangkan metode dengan mengumpulkan literatur terkait, menyoroti konsep penting, mengategorikan informasi, menerapkan prosedur serupa pada teks lain,

mengestraksi beberapa ide, menemukan informasi pendukung lain. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Muslim Progresif sebagai tema utama gagasan Omid Safi, yaitu mereka yang mengkaji sumber-sumber tekstual dan bahan-bahan dalam tradisi Islam, menginterpretasikannya, selanjutnya mengaitkan tradisi lama dengan era kontemporer, Safi menyebutnya dengan kritik ganda (*multiple critique*). Safi dalam pemikirannya tentang Muslim progresif menampilkan tulisan yang menawarkan agenda kesetaraan gender, yang menekankan pada paradigma baru terhadap interpretasi Al-Qur'an dan Hadits yang dianggap tidak sempurna karena masih berdasarkan kepentingan kaum tertentu, sehingga posisi perempuan selalu dimarginalkan. Pemahaman masyarakat yang masih parsial terhadap perbedaan antara feminisme dan gender juga menjadi penyebab terjadinya ketidakadilan gender. Padahal sejatinya perempuan dalam lintasan sejarahnya telah membuktikan keberhasilannya dalam memainkan peran sosial yang lebih berat dibandingkan laki-laki. Selanjutnya pemikiran Safi dalam ranah pendidikan, terutama pendidikan Islam, memiliki fokus utama pada "sosok guru" sebagai prototipe muslim yang harus berwawasan dan berparadigma progresif. Penelitian ini menyoroti dan menginterpretasikan pemikiran Omid Safi tentang Muslim progresif dalam diskursus gender dan pendidikan Islam.

Kata Kunci: Muslim Progresif, Gender, Keadilan Sosial, Pluralisme, Pendidikan Islam

Introduction

Omid Safi is an Iranian-American Muslim thinker. Therefore, his thinking is influenced by his motivation to reconcile Islam with the "misunderstanding" of the United States of America. His academic career began at North Carolina University as his primary addresser. Here, he earned the position of assistant professor, before finally, in 2010, he was awarded the title of full professor in classical and contemporary Islamic studies. In addition to this university, Omid Safi has received awards as a favorite lecturer and guest lecturer from several other universities in the U.S., such as Colgate University, Duke University, and Harvard University. At Harvard, Safi initiated pluralism studies and led Islamic Studies: the American Academy of Religion. Off-campus, Omid Safi also leads Islamic mysticism societies for American Muslims.

His published books include *Progressive Muslims: On Justice, Gender, and Pluralism*;¹ *The Politics of Knowledge in Premodern Islam*;² *Voices of*

¹ Omid Safi, *Progressive Muslims: On Justice, Gender and Pluralism* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2003).

² Omid Safi, *The Politics of Knowledge in Premodern Islam: Negotiating Ideology and Religious Inquiry*, 1st Edition (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

Change;³ *Memories of Muhammad: Why the Prophet Matters*;⁴ *Voices of American Muslims*.⁵ Meanwhile, his published articles are: “On the path of love Towards the Divine”⁶ “A Muslim Spiritual Progressive Perspective on Palestine Israel”;⁷ “I and Thou in a fluid world: Beyond 'Islam vs. the West”;⁸ “Between 'Ijtihad of the Presupposition' and Gender Equality: Cross-Pollination between Progressive Islam and Iranian Reform”;⁹ “The Emergence of Progressive Islam in America,” in Stephen Prothero, ed., *A Nation of Religions*;¹⁰ “Islamic Modernism,” in Lindsay Jones et al., ed., *Encyclopedia of Religion*, Second Edition, pp. 6095–6102; “What is Progressive Islam?,” *Newsletter for the International Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World* 13, December 2003, pp. 48–49.¹¹

No	Publication	Year
1	Muslim Progressive on Justice, Gender and Pluralism	2003
2	What is Progressive Islam?	2003
3	Modernism: Islamic Modernism	2005
4	Omid. A Path to Peace-Rooted in Justice	2005
5	Voices of American Muslims	2005
6	The Politics of Knowledge in Premodern Islam	2006
7	Challenges and Opportunities for the Progressive Muslimin North America	2006
8	A Nation of Religions	2006

³ Omid Safi, *Voices of Islam: Voices of Change*, 2017.

⁴ Omid Safi, *Memories of Muhammad: Why the Prophet Matters*, Illustrated edition (HarperOne, 2010), 36.

⁵ Linda Cateura and Omid Safi, *Voices of American Muslims: 23 Profiles : Breaking a Long Silence Since 9/11, 23 American Muslims from All Levels of Society Speak Up about Islam, Our Nation, 9/11, Its Effects on Their Lives, and Their Hopes for the Future* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 2005).

⁶ Omid Safi, “On the ‘Path of Love’ Towards the Divine: A Journey with Muslim Mystics,” *Journal of Scriptural Reasoning* 3, no. 2 (2003).

⁷ Omid Safi, “A Muslim Spiritual Progressive Perspective on Palestine/Israel: (With a Dash of Obama),” *Tikkun* 23, no. 3 (2008): 67–68.

⁸ Safi, O. (2007). I and Thou in a Fluid World: Beyond ‘Islam versus the West’. *Voices of Islam: Voices of Change*, ed. O. Safi, 5, 199-222.

⁹ Omid Safi, “Between ‘Ijtihad of the Presupposition’ and Gender Equality. Cross-Pollination between Progressive Islam and Iranian Reform,” in *Rethinking Islamic Studies: From Orientalism to Cosmopolitanism*, 2010.

¹⁰ Stephen Prothero, ed., *A Nation of Religions: The Politics of Pluralism in Multireligious America*, New edition (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

¹¹www.religionnews.com/././omidsafi. accessed on 20 January 2015

9	Memories of Muhammad: Why the Prophet Matters	2009
10	Rethinking Islamic Studies: From Orientalism to Cosmopolitanism	2010

Talking about the discourse of Omid Safi's concept, of course, cannot be separated from the theme that progressive Muslims want to create as a broad framework. In Safi's view, being a progressive Muslim cannot be separated from three big agendas, i.e., realizing social justice, gender equality, and pluralism.¹² Safi's concept can also be drawn in the realm of education, especially Islamic education.

Therefore, before entering into the realm of understanding gender equality and Islamic education, according to Safi, of course, one must first examine Safi's concept regarding progressive Muslims from various angles of the question of what is progressive Muslim, who and how they are, what methods are used to solve the contemporary social problems within the conceptual framework of progressive Muslim. In the author's opinion, these are basic but fundamental questions related to studies on Safi's progressive Muslims concept. Therefore, this study begins with this discussion.

This study uses a qualitative method with critical and philosophical literal studies. This study develops its method by collecting related literature, highlighting important concepts, categorizing information, applying similar procedures to other texts, extracting some concepts, finding other supporting information. With a hermeneutic and phenomenological approach, the researcher makes an effort to interpret the texts related to Omid Safi's concept so that the results are adjusted to form a coherent argument.

Conceptual Framework: Understanding the Meaning of Progressive Muslims

Omid Safi's view to bring up the term "progressive Muslim" actually originated from a series of events in several Muslim-populated places such as Palestine, Afghanistan, and others. These events made religion a means to

¹² Ali Murfi and Rahmad Nursyahidin, "'Muslim Progresif' Omid Safi dan Isu-Isu Islam Kontemporer," *Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam* 12, no. 2 (December 2, 2015): 229–42, doi:10.14421/jpai.2015.122-08.

ignite the masses' emotions and anger to achieve something outside of that religion. According to Safi, the spirit of compassionate humanity is currently starting to fade among contemporary Muslims. It is shown by some Muslims' attitude to easily label other Muslims as *kafir* (infidel), accusing others of shirk, performing heresy, and so on.¹³

Safi also feels uneasy seeing religious thinkers who have not explained how to interpret Islam in the contemporary era during a multireligious and multicultural society. Therefore, people can only voice change but do not make much change for the community at large. Religious scholars can only say: "According to the teachings of Islam ... Islam says ... according to the Qur'an ...", but they do not want to study the Qur'an and Islam comprehensively by interpreting in line with the breath of Islam, namely humanizing humans. People are only good at criticizing, but after that, they just sit around and do nothing about the things they criticize.

Therefore, the idea of bringing up the term progressive Muslim for Safi is appropriate—if not the most correct, most advanced, and so on—compared to using the term "critical Muslim." For example, according to him, people are only good at criticizing but unable to make changes at the grassroots level.¹⁴ In this case, Safi emphasized the following sentence:

"Critical Muslims" can sound like a bunch of whiners who sit around and complain. For some, the term "critical Muslim" also implies pontificating about Islam without changing Muslim societies' realities on the ground level.¹⁵

Substantially, it may not be much separate from other terms, such as "Inclusive Islam," "Transformative Islam," and "Liberal Islam," and others. However, the term "Progressive Islam" is a term that is still considered new in contemporary Islamic studies, which academics and activists have used since recent years. It aims to label Muslims' understandings and actions who struggle

¹³ Omid Safi, "'Introduction', The Time They Are a Changing—A Muslim Quest for Justice, Gender Equality, and Pluralism," in *Muslim Progressive on Justice, Gender and Pluralisme* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2003), 13.

¹⁴ Ibid., 6.

¹⁵ Ibid., 18.

to uphold humanist values, such as developing civil society, democracy, justice, gender equality, defense of the oppressed, and pluralism.¹⁶

In the definition offered by Nur Kholis Setiawan, Progressive Islam is an advanced Islam, or in other words, it can be translated as "*al-Islam al-Mutaqaddimah*" and "*al-Islam al-Ijtihadiyah*." From this linguistic point of view, it can be concluded that this movement makes an effort to give a new interpretation to Islam so that it is more suitable and in tune with the demands of progress and modernity today.

Based on the definition presented by Nur Kholis Setiawan, we can see that there are two essential elements in progressive Islam: (1) progress (*al-mutaqaddimah*), and (2) making a new interpretation (*al-ijtihadiyah*). These advanced criteria cannot be separated from their view of the West. The West is considered advanced and modern. Therefore, by being oriented to the West, they also feel that they are advanced people. Meanwhile, making a new interpretation departs from their view that the current Islamic scientific tradition—from the first generation of Islam to contemporary scholars who still hold the mandate of the legacy of *anbiya'*—cannot accommodate every occurring new problem.¹⁷

According to Farish A. Noor, the perspective, critical attitude, and action of Progressive Islam should all be progress-oriented. It is on this basis that it is called "progressive." Meanwhile, according to Amin Abdullah, Progressive Islam has its flexibility compared to Liberal Islam. Progressive Islam refers to an Islamic concept orientation that looks to the future, rather than only exploiting its liberalization, even though it could reach the area. Therefore, the benchmark is "progressivity" future orientation.¹⁸

Meanwhile, Omid Safi himself formulated the meaning of progress by providing the condition that something was considered advanced if it provided changes for a better, more practical, and more efficient direction for human

¹⁶ Farish A. Noor, *Islam Progresif: Peluang, Tantangan, Das Masa Depan Di Asia Tenggara*, trans. Moch. Nur Ichwan and Imron Rosyadi (Yogyakarta: SAMHA, 2006), 23.

¹⁷ Nur Kholis Setiawan, *Akar-Akar Pemikiran Progresif Dalam Kajian al-Qur'an* (Yogyakarta: Elsaq Press, 2008), 26.

¹⁸ Amin Abdullah, "Pengantar," in *Islam Progresif: Peluang, Tantangan, Das Masa Depan Di Asia Tenggara*, by Farish A. Noor, trans. Moch. Nur Ichwan and Imron Rosyadi (Yogyakarta: SAMHA, 2006), ix.

life and the world. Furthermore, Omid Safi formulated that something is better when it fulfills two keywords, justice (*al-'adl/justice*) and goodness or beauty (*alihsân*). These two keywords are then translated into social justice, gender equality, and pluralism. Regarding this, Omid Safi said:

We have aimed to envision a socially and politically active Muslim identity that remains committed to ideals of social justice, pluralism, and gender justice.¹⁹

The meeting point between Safi's and Farish's concepts, according to Amin Abdullah, emphasizes issues of justice, gender, and pluralism, even though the two backgrounds are diverse. His practical involvement more shapes Farish's religious concept as a human rights activist and his existence as a political expert. and a researcher in Malaysia and Europe. Therefore, Farish is thicker with the paradigm of justice and is critical of American policies in Palestine, Afghanistan, and other Third World countries. Meanwhile, Safi is more shaped by the academic tradition as a Sufism lecturer at a university in the U.S., so that it is more prominent in the perspective of inclusiveness and pluralism that is extracted from the values and traditions of Sufism. However, Amin Abdullah also emphasized that there is a point of difference between the two. Farish uses the term "Progressive Islam," "Progressive Islamism," while Safi prefers the term "Progressive Muslim."

Farish uses the word "progressive" to emphasize the agenda of the Islamic concept and movement. Meanwhile, Safi emphasizes that Islam is essentially progressive and Muslims whose understanding can be progressive or not progressive.²⁰ About this, Safi said:

We felt adamant that this work's title should be "Progressive Muslims" and not "Progressive Islam." The distinction may be irrelevant to some, but it matters a great deal to us. On the one hand, as one of the contributors to this volume has stated, "Islam has always been progressive. It is Muslims that have not always been so."²¹

In this case, Omid Safi's concept seems more logically acceptable. Islam exists because there is God's revelation, and God's revelation is a passive and

¹⁹ Safi, "Introduction', *The Time They Are a Changing—A Muslim Quest for Justice, Gender Equality, and Pluralism*," 6.

²⁰ Abdullah, "Pengantar," xi–xii.

²¹ Safi, "Introduction', *The Time They Are a Changing—A Muslim Quest for Justice, Gender Equality, and Pluralism*," 18.

meaningless text if there is no effort to read the text. The spirit of Islamic teachings in religious texts indeed teaches universal and global goodness. Therefore, there is no real doubt that Islamic teachings will never teach discrimination, exploitation, marginalization, and other things that can negate the human existence of God's creatures called humans, regardless of the type and regardless of form and origin. Therefore, if there are still forms of oppression, deviance, and behaviors that distort human values in the name of religion, the problem may arise from a different reading of the Islamic teaching text, in this case, Muslims. Therefore, it is true what Safi conveyed that "Muslim" humans can think progressively or otherwise not progressively, depending on how this "Muslim" person reads and articulates Islam according to the level of ability and knowledge the person has.

Thus, progressive Muslims' ideas pressure "Muslim" humans to read religious teachings comprehensively and integrally. The aspirations of justice originate from a "Muslim" who can understand "*kaffah*" Islam.

Omid Safi's Concept of Progressive Muslims

Understanding the progressive Muslim concept's interpretation is a radical but simple idea: every human life, female and male, Muslim and non-Muslim, rich or poor, "North" or "South," has the same intrinsic value. Human life's essential value is God-given and is not connected with culture, geography, or privileges. A progressive Muslim is committed to the controversial idea that the value of a human being is measured by a person's character, not the amount of oil under their land, nor by the color of their flag. The progressive Muslim agenda is concerned with the consequences of the premise that all members of humanity have the same intrinsic value because as the Qur'an reminds us that each of us has the breath of Allah.²² To achieve the goal of progressive Muslims, Safi tries to offer criticism called multiple critiques.

With this multiple critique method, progressive Muslims must be able to criticize both ways simultaneously, i.e., criticizing themselves on the one hand (in this case, the rich and diverse Islamic tradition) and criticizing the West (modernity) on the other. Dual criticism is also based on using a multi-headed

²² Ibid., 19.

approach based on simultaneous criticism of various communities and discourses in which we are directly involved. In this case, Safi said:

Feminist scholars have introduced the proper concept of “multiple critiques,” an idea with great relevance for Muslims committed to social justice, pluralism, and gender justice. In short, multiple critiques entails a multi-headed approach based on a simultaneous critique of the many communities and discourses that we find ourselves positioned in.²³

With this multiple critique method, it is hoped that Muslims will not be trapped in only one interpretation alone but can link one problem to another to provide a more comprehensive meaning. A clear example of Safi's progressive thinking using this multiple critique method is interpreting the discriminative Islamic legal text against women, which orthodox fundamentalists often use. Meanwhile, on the other hand, progressive Muslims also reject women's exploitation by the West with the jargon of gender equality. In this case, Safi criticizes orientalist's mindset who blindly think that Islam has limited women's rights due to differences with men in polygamy and Islam's prohibition for women to marry non-Muslim men. Meanwhile, the prohibition does not apply to men. In the view of progressive Muslims, they do not read the principle of benefit (*al-maqâsid al-syar'iyah*) contained in the existence of these provisions.²⁴

With his multiple critique method, Omid Safi criticizes the people he calls ultraconservatives or those who are not only anti-Western, Jewish, and Christian, but they are also hostile to Muslims who do not share their beliefs. On the other hand, progressive Muslim criticism is also directed at the liberal group because it makes modernity (which tends to make peace with colonialism and imperialism) its main goal and is desperately defended. On the other hand, Progressive Muslims saw that colonialism and imperialism should be criticized. In Omid Safi's view, modernity with all its arrogance has succeeded in stealing the Muslims' ideology by turning it into worshiped,

²³ Ibid., 2.

²⁴ William Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Fundamentalism and Modernity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), 114.

transmitted, and discussed idol, and even making it the estuary of regeneration.²⁵

To create a progressive Muslim as Safi wants, how should a progressive Muslim be?

First, a progressive Muslim has to understand Islamic traditions as a whole (engaging traditions). The Islamic tradition's partial understanding will be dangerous because it cannot read problems and understand them simultaneously. Therefore, being a progressive Muslim must understand Islam universally with qualified religious knowledge (*'ulum al-din*). It is because understanding Islamic tradition as a whole will provide a complete understanding of the existing problems. However, what is important to note is that the Islamic tradition is possible to open to new *ijtihad* relevant to the current era's conditions.²⁶

Second, a progressive Muslim must not be apologetic toward Islam (No More "Pamphlet Islam"). Being a progressive Muslim must not be easy to speak in the name of Islam, in the name of God, in the name of the Qur'an, in the name of Hadith, and so on, only to solve social problems without having to examine them deeply. It is a form of Safi's criticism of people who easily "simplify" Islam only because it is used as an excuse to avoid discussion, debate, and even dispute. For Safi, Islam is not simple. Therefore, it needs to be resolved with deep and comprehensive concepts, studies, interpretations, and this is where 'ijtihad' is needed. As Safi said:²⁷

To me, Islam has never been simple. I remember having worked my way through some of the most important Muslim primary sources such as Ghazzali's *Ihya'* and Rumi's *Masnavi*, as well as the masterpieces of scholarship on Islam like Marshall Hodgson's *The Venture of Islam* and Harry Wolfson's *The Philosophy of Kalam*. "Simple" is not exactly a word that comes to mind in describing any of them. "Islam is simple" is a slogan used all too often as an excuse to avoid discussion, disputation, and even disagreement.

Third, being a progressive Muslim must be in line between ideals and facts, vision and action. Safi strongly criticizes Muslims who can only speak but

²⁵ Safi, "Introduction", *The Time They Are a Changing—A Muslim Quest for Justice, Gender Equality, and Pluralism*, 4.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 18.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 22–23.

do not make any changes to the surrounding community. It is in line with how he criticizes the liberals. Therefore, for Safi to become a progressive Muslim, an individual must unify the vision and what concrete steps are taken to achieve this change. Safi's fascinating statement on this subject is, "A good vision but not accompanied by the concrete implementation, in Safi's view, will soon become irrelevant and will disappear with time. Likewise, [activism] without vision is doomed from the start. Vision without activism quickly becomes irrelevant".²⁸

Fourth, progressive Muslims make the basis of their behavior on ethical values (*adab*) and humanism. Seeing at Safi's background, who is engaged in the field of Sufism, it is very natural that his concept about the prototype of a progressive Muslim is like a "Sufi." According to him, Sufis practice goodness for themselves (individually) and teaches goodness for their surrounding community (communal). With this, Safi emphasized '*al-tasawwuf kulluhu al-adab*'.²⁹

Fifth, Safi suggested that progressive Muslims should not be anti-secondary texts, even those produced by non-Muslim thinkers.

From the description of a progressive Muslim image and how to become a progressive Muslim, Safi's unique and critical thinking is very evident. However, what needs to be an important note here is Safi's attempt to unify Islamic concepts with Islamic practice, which has perhaps not been widely studied by contemporary thinkers. The idea of maintaining traditional values by interpreting and criticizing Islamic teachings is the true meaning of "*Ijtihad*" in Safi's view.

Gender Mainstreaming in Omid Safi's Progressive Muslim Agenda

Gender studies in Safi's progressive Muslim agenda are part of the concern that must be made to make changes to a humanist and just Islam. In Omid Safi's view, gender equality does not always connote discrimination against women, but men's idealization will also be a gender issue that must be resolved. In this case, Safi explained:

²⁸ Ibid., 7.

²⁹ Ibid., 14.

Let us be clear that by “gender,” we are not just talking about women. Far too often, Muslims forget that gender injustice is not just something that oppresses women. It also debases and dehumanizes the Muslim males who participate in the system.³⁰

In this case, gender issues do not only revolve around issues of *jilbab*, *hijab*, and other feminist attributes. However, gender is more focused on studying women's existence in the public sphere, which may differ from one region to another. This public movement includes equal opportunities for men and women to learn, work, organize, and so on. Also, the following is an essential note in Safi's words regarding gender:

Let us be clear that by “gender,” we do not mean to focus exclusively on the hijab (head covering worn by some Muslim women). The hijab is, no doubt, a critical marker of identity for many Muslim women who choose either to wear or not to wear it. It is also an important marker of social regulations when many Muslim women are forced to wear it. However, it is futile to engage in conversations about gender that reduce all women's religiosity and existence to the hijab. There are many more fundamental issues at stake in the social constructions that affect both men and women's lives, and we aim here to engage many of them.

An important note from Omid Safi's concept is that gender equality and justice must be given to women not as a gift or mercy to them but because they are part of humanity who have inherent rights over everything they deserve.³¹ Among the authors who contributed their concepts to this study was Sa'diyya Shaikh, a Muslim woman of South African nationality and Indian origin. She is a senior lecturer at the University of Cape Town. Shaikh's research and teaching are focused on Islamic studies with a focus on Sufism and feminism. She has previously worked on Muslim women and gender violence; feminist approach to Hadith and interpretation; contraception and abortion in Islam; theoretical reflection on Islam and feminism; and Sufism, gender, and Islamic law. At the time of writing, she is finishing a text on gender and sexuality in the work of a 13th-century Sufi thinker, Ibn Arabi.³²

She argues that gender equality has occurred since the early period of Islam. The Prophet (PBUH) often delegated ‘Aisyah to teach certain materials

³⁰ Ibid., 10–11.

³¹ Ibid., 11.

³² Safi, “A Muslim Spiritual Progressive Perspective on Palestine/Israel,” x.

in Islamic teachings, or vice versa female companions have the same access as male companions to ask questions, discuss, and receive teachings directly from the Prophet (PBUH). If at a later Tim there was gender discrimination, then it was due to an imperfect interpretation of the Qur'an and Hadith texts based on the interests of certain groups, so that the position of women was always marginalized. Therefore, according to Safi, "there can be no progressive interpretation of Islam without gender justice."³³ The system of slavery and discrimination against women and men should have been abandoned with the passing of colonialism and imperialism.³⁴

The following are several essential notes in Shaikh's concept regarding gender justice and feminism:

First, there is the importance of providing a gender-equitable interpretation of the text. In Safi's point of view, there must be an interpretation with the breath of progressive Islam.

Second, feminism and masculinity are both cultural and anthropological. Each region has its own rules regarding the boundaries of both. For example, the hijab and *jilbab* applied by Arab tribes are an attempt to cover their genitals or protect women from sexual temptation and be part of the Arabist culture. Therefore, the ways and methods of *jilbab* and *hijab* do not have to be applied precisely in Arabian regions. It is possible in other areas to wear other means to protect women's security.³⁵

Third, there is an importance of distinguishing between feminism and gender. When women are associated with feminism, it should be noted that it is nothing more than just talking about women from the physical side, who have different origins, and are created differently from men. However, if it has touched on gender, then the connotation must shift to reading the psychological condition, ratio, intelligence, desire, and imagination, which of

³³ Safi, "Introduction', *The Time They Are a Changing—A Muslim Quest for Justice, Gender Equality, and Pluralism*," 10.

³⁴ Sa'diyya Shaik, "Transforming Feminim: Islam, Women, and Gender Justice," in *Progressive Muslims: On Justice, Gender and Pluralism*, by Omid Safi (Oxford: Oneworld Academic, 2003), 148.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 152.

course, all humans have without having to distinguish between men and women.³⁶

In Shaikh's view, many female Muslim scholars have succeeded in offering a paradigm of religious text exegesis that provides more significant space for women. They, among others, are Amina Wadud Muhsin, an African female thinker with her work *Qur'an and Women: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*; Moroccan sociologist Fatima Mernissi with her movement *The Veil and the Male Elite* has offered a more harmonious relationship between men and women; and Karamah, an American legal practitioner, who has made an effort to color the law with a touch of gender.³⁷

It shows that women really cannot be underestimated, but it must be admitted that in quantity, they still cannot beat men. Therefore, according to the author, this is a challenge in itself, that women should not only sit there lamenting their fate but must rise up and immediately make meaningful changes to create progress.

Safi and his colleagues' presence provides a breath of fresh air to a balanced meaning of gender between Islamic traditions and modernism. Therefore, this flow of feminism can be said to be a "flow of progressive feminism" to review the following three previously developed feminist schools: (1) radical feminism, which holds the view that the structure of society is based on hierarchical relationships and sexuality based on sex, in which men are positioned to occupy high social strata and are entitled to positions of leadership in society, while women are positioned as fulfilling the needs of sexuality; (2) liberal feminism, which believes that every man and woman has the right to develop their abilities and rationality optimally; (3) socialist feminism, which argues that the domination of men is related to capitalism—this school conflicts with the two previous schools.³⁸

³⁶ Ibid., 154.

³⁷ Ibid., 155.

³⁸ Ratna Saptari and Brigitte Holzner, *Perempuan Kerja Dan Perubahan Sosial: Sebuah Pengantar Studi Perempuan* (Jakarta: Pustaka Utama Grafiti, 1997), 48–54.

The Contribution of Omid Safi's Concept in Islamic Education

Safi's concept regarding progressive Muslims is drawn from the realm of education, especially Islamic education. The main focus is the “teacher figure” as a Muslim prototype whose characteristics must be insightful and have a progressive paradigm. These include:

First, teachers must master Islamic sciences, be they Islamic Education teachers or teachers who teach in Islamic education, because this is the primary provider for understanding Safi-style Islamic traditions.

Second, teachers must carry out a progressive interpretation—or *ijtihad* in Safi's language. Therefore, they do not get trapped in "Islamic pamphlets," which can only read Islamic slogans, but do not understand their universal meaning.

Third, teachers must make changes in their minds and make changes to the world of reality. Therefore, concerning gender teachers, they must be gender-equitable in their classroom learning process.

Fourth, teachers must behave like "Sufis" who are kind to themselves and teach kindness to others. Therefore, teachers can become role models for their students.

Fifth, teachers must also study various sciences, primary science, the teaching material, and secondary sciences. Therefore, they have broad insight and knowledge not easy to trap into partial and narrow understanding.

Conclusion

This study aims to determine Omid Safi's concept in the current discourse on gender equality and Islamic education. Safi's concept regarding progressive Muslims is a paradigm of thinking to create a Muslim order and a society that strives for the values of justice and humanity—globally and universally.

Understanding "*kaffah*" Islam cannot be separated from this progressive perspective. The progressive paradigm unites between textual and contextual, between vision and action, Islamic tradition and modernity, both of which do

not confront each other but can be discussed using Safi's multiple critique method.

With this concept's impetus, it is hoped to enlighten Muslims in general and humankind universally. If the connection is drawn into the world of education, then the fundamental change to achieve progressive Muslim goals is the teacher's figure, especially a religious teacher who must have a progressive vision and action as Safi aspires to be a just and civilized society. This study highlights and interprets Omid Safi's concept of progressive Muslims in the discourse of gender and Islamic education.

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