



The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Reform

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CHAPTER

2 The Qurʾān and Islamic Reform

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Abstract

This chapter examines modern reformist approaches to the Qurʾān in response to challenges posed by modernity, distinguishing them from traditional interpretations. It outlines five major categories: modernism, Islamism, contextualism, structuralism/post-structuralism, and postmodernism, with prominent figures representing each trend. Early modernists, such as Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Muḥammad ʿAbduh, emphasize rational approaches and align with contemporary science, while Islamists like Mawdūdī and Quṭb advocate for a Quranic-based political state. Contextualists, including Fazlur Rahman and Asma Barlas, argue for reading the Qurʾān in its historical context to derive principles for modern application. The chapter discusses postmodern approaches that emphasize reader-based interpretation and the dynamic relationship between text and context. Finally, it suggests that these diverse hermeneutical trends will continue to shape Islamic reformism.

Keywords: [reformist](#), [Qurʾān](#), [modernism](#), [Islamism](#), [postmodernism](#), [interpretation](#), [contextualism](#), [structuralism](#), [post-structuralism](#)

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During the past two centuries, some Muslim thinkers have begun to read the Qurʾān to respond to challenges posed by modernity and to explain it according to contemporary needs.¹ This intellectual direction can be dubbed a “reformist” approach to the Qurʾān. It can be distinguished from “traditionalism,” with interpretive positions and hermeneutics dependent on premodern exegesis, which dominates Islamic discourse. Traditionalists here include the *ʿulamāʾ* and the scripturalist Salafi movement.²

Writing a chapter on reformist Quranic interpretation raises the question of categorization. The typology adopted in the following is akin to that of Johanna Pink³ and Aḥmidah Nayfar.⁴ However, unlike these two scholars, I do not include *ʿulamāʾ* or Salafis, though they too are affected by modernity. This reflects a choice to

concentrate on reformist exegetical strategies that depart significantly from traditional modes of interpreting the Qurʾān and to present a finer-grained typology of modernist and postmodernist hermeneutic approaches. The following five categories are analytical constructs rather than restrictive labels, for which I have chosen two figures to represent each trend.⁵ After a survey of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century reformist discourses, these categories provide my section headings:

- (1) Modernism: Muḥammad Asad (1900–1992) and Quraish Shihab (b. 1944)
- (2) Islamism: Abū al-Aʿlā Mawdūdī (1903–1979) and Sayyid Quṭb (1906–1966)
- (3) Contextualism: Fazlur Rahman (1919–1988) and Asma Barlas (b. 1950)
- (4) Structuralism and Post-structuralism: Muḥammad Shaḥrūr (1938–2019) and Mohammed Arkoun (1928–2010)
- (5) Postmodernism: Nasr Abu Zayd (1943–2010) and Amina Wadud (b. 1952)

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Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Reformists on the Qurʾān

The nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw the rise of modernist interpretive approaches.⁶ Modernists emphasized Islam's flexibility and positive dialogue with Western ideas, an optimism later challenged by critical voices. I shall consider two contexts of early modernist Quranic interpretation: the first connected to the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College (now the Aligarh Muslim University) in India, and the second to Al-Azhar University in Egypt.

The founder of the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College was Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan (d. 1898) who was both an important political figure and Islamic scholar during British colonial rule of India. His approach to the Qurʾān responds to a European intellectual milieu that saw traditional religion as anti-rational.⁷ He felt an interpretive program could establish the rational acceptability of the Qurʾān, in which the laws of nature, “the work of God,” cannot conflict with the Qurʾān, “the word of God.”⁸

Through an Urdu *tafsīr* (1882–1904) and other books, Khan pursued a three-pronged exegetical strategy. Texts deemed problematic, especially concerning miracles and unseen realities, would receive (i) an alternative meaning possible from the Quranic wording; (ii) an explanation drawing on psychology; or (iii) treatment as metaphor.⁹ Although these are well-worn hermeneutic procedures, their use to reconcile scripture with natural science is a significant development. In an 1892 correspondence with Mehdi Ali, also known as Mohsinul Mulk (d. 1907), Khan proposed that Quranic interpretation was subject to continuous change as new scientific theories replaced old ones.¹⁰

A different approach was adopted by Ḥamīd al-Dīn Farāhī (d. 1930) who earned his undergraduate degree at the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College in 1895, at which he later taught. Unlike Khan, his research and writing on the Qurʾān used the medium of Arabic to address other scholars, rather than the Urdu vernacular.¹¹ Farāhī focused on the linguistic and rhetorical aspects of the Qurʾān. First, he paid attention to pre-Islamic Arabic poetry as a repository of meanings for exegesis, claiming that the original sense of words in the Quranic lexicon had been neglected. Second, and most famously, he explored the Qurʾān's structural and rhetorical features in original ways.

In Farāhī's view, the Qurʾān has a textual structure (*niẓām*) at the level of sura and entire text. Although previous figures, notably Burhān al-Dīn al-Biqāʾī (d. 1480), had explored the connection and coherence between verses, Farāhī analyzes each sura as a unity around a central theme or *ʿamūd* (pillar), describing the compositional role of each sura part.¹² This constituted an apologetic response to European academic criticism

of the Qur'ān as incoherent with a reformist argument for a definitive interpretation replacing traditional exegesis. In terms of the Qur'ān as a whole, he argues that it is split into nine sura groups, each with its own thematic development.¹³

p. 23 Farāhī's output took the form of treatises on Quranic studies, many unpublished during his lifetime, along with an unfinished *tafsīr* applying his ideas. He was also involved with an educational institute called Madrasatul Islah in Sarai Mir that placed instruction in the Qur'ān according to his method at the heart of the curriculum.¹⁴ Amīn Aḥsan Islāhī (d. 1997), Farāhī's student, refined his theoretical ideas and wrote a full Urdu *tafsīr* based on them.¹⁵ This tradition continues to influence diverse scholarship, from Javed Ahmad Ghamidi to Michel Cuypers.¹⁶

The most famous figure in early modernist reformism is Muḥammad 'Abduh (d. 1905) who introduced reforms to Al-Azhar University. His Azharī education was supplemented by ideas of Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (d. 1897) and prevailing currents in Western thought, such as Auguste Comte's ideas of societal progression.¹⁷ Naturalizing this concept within Islamic thought, 'Abduh proposed that in the progression of divine religions, the coming of Islam fits the modern age of science.¹⁸ Like Sayyid Ahmad Khan, this position had hermeneutic implications for the explanation of scriptural texts in line with prevailing scientific knowledge. A well-known example is his suggestion that microbes are possibly a kind of jinn.¹⁹

One of the most important aspects of 'Abduh's stance toward the Qur'ān is that revealed scripture can act as a cure for the ailments of Islamic civilization.²⁰ Thus, 'Abduh's thought calls for a revivalist return to the Qur'ān, unencumbered by scholarly opinion. This tendency was enhanced by the association between his ideas and the name *salafiyya*, though the link was possibly exaggerated by 'Abduh's student Rashīd Riḍā (d. 1935) who was closer to the scripturalist Salafī movement.²¹ 'Abduh's emphasis on the Qur'ān as a unifying force for all Muslims, and the centrality of its guidance (*hidāya*) for their lives, had a major impact on subsequent reformism.²² His rationalistic hermeneutics included a focus on the unity of the Qur'ān and its suras,²³ a rejection of *isrā'iliyyāt*, narrative material drawn from Jewish or Christian sources; and a disinclination to identify figures left ambiguous (*mubham*) by the scripture.²⁴

p. 24 'Abduh's exegetical output mainly stems from the final years of his life, between 1899 and 1905, during which he was mufti of Egypt and delivered a prominent series of lectures at Al-Azhar.²⁵ Although he directly authored some works, such as *Tafsīr Juz' ammā* (1904–1905), most of his contributions to *Tafsīr al-Manār* (1927–1928) were compiled from notes recorded from his lessons. His most important student was Riḍā, the author of *Tafsīr al-Manār* and the editor of *Al-Manār* journal in which it first appeared. In the published version, verses up to Q 4:125 feature the opinions of 'Abduh, who had commented on this portion of the Qur'ān before his death. The rest, which runs until Q 12:52, is solely the work of Riḍā.²⁶ In his exegesis, Riḍā tempers the modernist leanings of 'Abduh with his preference for a more traditionalist approach.²⁷ This means that *Tafsīr al-Manār* is less radical in its reformist hermeneutics than 'Abduh's unmediated writings. Nevertheless, the journalistic origins of the work explain the regular references to contemporary events and technologies.²⁸ The most substantial direct continuation of 'Abduh's exegetical legacy in Egypt is *Tafsīr al-Marāghī* (1946) by Aḥmad Muṣṭafā al-Marāghī (d. 1952), which was published in thirty volumes. The work is distinctive for the author's references to natural science.²⁹

Modernism: Muḥammad Asad (1900–1992) and Quraish Shihab (b. 1944)

Modernism did not disappear in the latter half of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. As I have already discussed the Indian and Egyptian modernist traditions, this section examines the thought of the Austrian Muhammad Asad (d. 1992) and the Indonesian Quraish Shihab.

Muhammad Asad, formerly Leopold Weiss, was a convert to Islam active throughout the twentieth century as a journalist, political figure, and reformist intellectual.³⁰ Already in his *Islam at the Crossroads* (1934), he regularly

turns to verses of the Qurʾān to support his arguments. He invites Muslims to return to the moral foundations of Islam, shedding tradition and Western patterns of thought. Asad draws deeply from ʿAbduh,³¹ but as a European who grew to adulthood in the aftermath of the First World War, he is far more critical of the West.³² In other works, such as the title essay of *This Law of Ours and Other Essays* (1987)—first published much earlier—Asad places his thought in the lineage of Ibn Ḥazm (d. 1064) and critiques deference to the ʿulamāʾ.³³

At the core of Asad's thought is the principle that reason grants human beings understanding of Islam and especially the Qurʾān.³⁴ In *The Message of the Qurʾān* (1980), he aims to “render its message comprehensible to people who, like most Westerners, do not know Arabic at all or—as is the case with most of the educated non-Arab Muslims—not well enough to find their way through it unaided.”³⁵ In his foreword, Asad reveals why he thinks the message, but not the scripture itself, is translatable. He proposes that the Qurʾān is unique in the integral connection between its meaning and linguistic form and that this untranslatability is recognized by all Arab scholars.³⁶

p. 25 This point is important considering Asad's embrace of Arabian language and culture, including living among Bedouin to imbibe their use of the language, which he saw as closer to the Quranic idiom than that attainable through formal study.³⁷ Asad highlights the Quranic use of ellipsis (*ijāz*) as a flow of associative mental images.³⁸ Since he thinks one cannot capture this quality in English, he frequently adds what he judges as implied inside square brackets.³⁹ In so doing, Asad tries to approach the Quranic message.

The most important interpretive aspect of *The Message of the Qurʾān* is Asad's commentary, presented in 5,371 footnotes and four appendices.⁴⁰ Although he draws extensively from premodern commentaries, he regularly makes modernist exegetical moves to demythologize “irrational” traditional readings. One of the most prominent examples is his discussion of the word “jinn,” which he argues can refer to a range of entities in the Qurʾān.⁴¹ Common to his suggested interpretations is rejection of the jinn familiar to Arabian folklore.

Another way in which Asad's modernism comes to the fore is in treating certain non-prophetic Quranic figures, such as Luqmān; the person identified as al-Khiḍr; and Dhū al-Qarnayn, as legends or allegories placed in scripture to teach moral lessons.⁴² Asad also writes about the “many poetic legends” referenced in the Qurʾān in connection to the Prophet Solomon, which he argues need not be interpreted rationalistically—though he does so in several places—because they had “acquired a cultural reality of their own.”⁴³ Such Quranic texts present him with a more acute conundrum than the Islamic exegetical opinions that he confidently dismisses as based on mere Talmudic stories. But Asad is not averse to using his knowledge of Jewish traditions, for instance when suggesting that the name Āzar for Abraham's father may derive from the Talmud's Zārah or Eusebius's Athar.⁴⁴

In the exegetical solutions that Asad offers, he owes a considerable debt to both Maḥmūd b. ʿUmar al-Zamakhsharī (d. 1144), the influential classical Muʿtazilī commentator, and ʿAbduh. Yet through his original and cohesive rationally inclined exegesis of the entire Qurʾān, which has been translated into Spanish, German, and Turkish,⁴⁵ Asad represents an important European development in Islamic reformism in his own right.

p. 26 A similar modernist perspective appears in the work of Quraish Shihab, the most prominent contemporary Indonesian exegete. He was born in 1944 and grew up learning from his father, a professor of Quranic exegesis at the Muslim University of Indonesia. His secondary education consisted of two years at a *pesantren*, a traditional madrasa, before he went to Al-Azhar, where he completed his preliminary studies, bachelor's, and master's degrees in *tafsīr*, and, after a decade working in Indonesia, a doctorate on the exegesis of Burhān al-Dīn al-Biqāʾī.⁴⁶

Shihab's time in Cairo familiarized him with ʿAbduh and subsequent reformist thinkers. He has since written a dedicated study on *Tafsīr al-Manār* and has praised ʿAbduh for his focus on practical guidance for the common reader.⁴⁷ Shihab is far from the first in Indonesia to be influenced by these reformist ideas. As early as 1906, Muhammad Taher Djalaluddin (d. 1956), an Indonesian student of ʿAbduh and associate of Riḍā, published a

journal titled *al-Imam* in Singapore, modeled on *al-Manār*.⁴⁸ This publication carried translations of its serialized *tafsīr* and was sold throughout the Malay world.⁴⁹ What distinguishes Shihab from earlier Indonesian reformist thinkers is his mastery of traditionalist Quranic exegesis, allowing work in a variety of genres. Thus, while he has written a (partial) chronologically ordered *tafsīr* and a thematic (*mawḍūʿī*) one—both distinctively modernist forms—he has also produced a fifteen-volume encyclopedic commentary in the classical style.⁵⁰ Yet even in this latter traditionalist mode, Shihab draws substantially from the opinions of modernist exegetes, especially those from Egypt.⁵¹

His thematic *tafsīr*, *The Qurʾānic Perspective: Thematic Interpretation of Various Community Problems*, demonstrates his own reformist thought. Drawing verses from various places within the Qurʾān, he explores thirty-three themes over five broad areas: faith, basic needs and human relations, society, human activity, and contemporary issues. The topics covered range from perennial questions of belief to specific cultural and political concerns.⁵²

To reconcile revealed Quranic texts with modern concerns, Shihab adopts the utilitarian *maṣlaḥa* (benefit) theory favored by many reformists. For social issues that are subject to change, as opposed to the core of faith and worship, he argues that the Qurʾān provides only general principles to guide implementation in new environments.⁵³ Although Shihab thinks that the text holds definite meanings, he argues that it must be made to speak by its readers and that this allows diverse interpretations to emerge.⁵⁴

Shihab has even engaged with contemporary hermeneutics in a 2013 book, *Principles of Tafsīr*. He lays down the ground rule that such interpretive strategies cannot be used to challenge the authenticity of the Qurʾān as revelation.⁵⁵ Shihab is critical of twentieth-century approaches that foreground the reader to the extent that texts are no longer anchored in the intentions of their authors. This, he avers, contradicts the basic goal of Muslim Quranic interpretation: uncovering God's purpose.⁵⁶

p. 27 The intellectual contributions of Quraish Shihab are accompanied by his efforts to speak to ordinary Indonesians, as well as to develop his country's academic infrastructure.⁵⁷ While Shihab is comfortable with tradition, his reliance on twentieth-century reformist authors, his investment in thematic *tafsīr*, and his emphasis on the scripture's role as guidance underscore his modernist credentials.

Islamism: Abū al-Aʿlā Mawḍūdī (1903–1979) and Sayyid Quṭb (1906–1966)

Proponents of Islamism focus intensely on the example set by the first generations of Muslims. In this respect they are akin to Salafīs, yet they are distinguished by taking the Qurʾān and Sunna as the model for a radical politico-religious movement and a modern Islamic state. Central to this is the struggle to reform any order not enshrining the political and legal sovereignty of God through unmediated reference to scriptural sources.⁵⁸

Two key figures are the Indo-Pakistani Abū Aʿlā Mawḍūdī (d. 1979) and the Egyptian Sayyid Quṭb (d. 1966).

Mawḍūdī was born in 1903 in India and studied the Islamic disciplines with his father before continuing at local madrasas and with tutors. By his own account, he showed great facility in both his native Urdu and his acquired Arabic at a young age.⁵⁹ As an extension of his early career in journalism, Mawḍūdī bought the journal *Tarjumān al-Qurʾān* in 1932, becoming its editor, a position he retained for life.⁶⁰ He also used it to start publishing his major work, the commentary *Tafhīm al-qurʾān* (*Making the Qurʾān Understandable*), in February 1942, a year after he launched the political party Jamāʿat-e Islāmī. It was eventually completed in 1973.

Tafhīm al-qurʾān features a running Urdu translation next to the Arabic text, explanatory footnotes, and sura introductions. These features are shared by Asad's *The Message of the Qurʾān*, though *Tafhīm al-qurʾān* is longer, due to its far more extensive commentary. Mawḍūdī's translation is praised for uncovering implicit meanings and his use of appropriate Urdu idioms.⁶¹ His stated intention was to capture the meaning conveyed to him by the Qurʾān, as well as something of its literary power.⁶²

Mawdūdī's focus on making scripture accessible to the Muslim public dovetails with his broader Islamist project. Although performing traditional linguistic and contextual analysis, he frequently adopts a polemical tone against the ills of modern society. For Mawdūdī, the Qur'ān was the manifesto for Islam envisaged as a reformist movement, one that cast off ignorance and idolatry once and can do so again.⁶³ The idea that Muslims are mired in modern forms of the *jāhiliyya* (ignorance) criticized in the Qur'ān is a central pillar of Mawdūdī's thought.⁶⁴ His campaign to rectify this situation is not solely moral but must be realized through obedience to God via an Islamic political state,⁶⁵ which follows the principles of the Qur'ān and Sunna.⁶⁶

p. 28 To sustain his ideological interpretation of the text, Mawdūdī sometimes stretches the meanings of Quranic passages. For instance, he interprets references to people establishing justice in Q 57:25, or those made masters of the land in Q 22:41, as the "State." Ultimately, this leads him to fall back on an unreliable *ḥadīth*: "God brings to an end through the State (*sultān*) what he does not eradicate with the Qur'ān."⁶⁷ Here Mawdūdī faces the same hermeneutic question as other contemporary exegetes: How can the Qur'ān be read as alive to the conditions of modernity? He acknowledges that the Qur'ān must be made relevant, but his method is to treat the scripture as timeless and then flatten the intervening historical time by invoking the possibility of gaining unmediated access to its clear meaning.⁶⁸ His argument is that exegetes were mistaken in allowing historical developments to shape their interpretations. What is needed instead is to take eternally valid principles from the Qur'ān and to apply them to make people obey God's commands. Ironically, although Mawdūdī treats the temporal order as inferior to the eternal verities of Islam, practical reform of the former becomes his overriding focus.⁶⁹

Tafhīm al-qur'ān has witnessed tremendous popularity in South Asia, translation into many other languages,⁷⁰ and reception by scholars, intellectuals, and preachers.⁷¹ With it, Mawdūdī has left a legacy of Quranic interpretation in the mode of Islamist activism, not least via Sayyid Quṭb, who read his works in Arabic translation in the 1950s.

Sayyid Quṭb was born in 1906 in a village in Upper Egypt and was educated in a teachers' training college in Cairo. Although he worked as a teacher and then as an inspector of public schools until 1952, his employment was paralleled by nationalist activism and literary production as a poet, novelist, and critic.⁷² From the late 1940s, Quṭb became increasingly attracted to Islamist thought, writing *Al-ʿAdāla al-ijtimāʿiyya fī al-islām* (*Social Justice in Islam*) in 1949 and officially joining the Muslim Brotherhood in 1953. He was soon appointed to lead the "Propagation of the Call Department," the organization's ideological hub.⁷³ After a period in prison in 1954, Quṭb's Islamist ideas became more radical, and he began to call for the violent overthrow of Gamel Abdel Nasser's secularist regime.⁷⁴ This led to further lengthy spells in prison and his eventual execution in 1966.

Quṭb's scholarship on the Qur'ān began in two works on its literary and aesthetic qualities. *Al-Taswīr al-fannī fī al-qur'ān* (*Artistic Imagery in the Qur'ān*), in 1945, and *Mashāhid al-qiyāma fī al-qur'ān* (*Scenes of the Resurrection in the Qur'ān*), in 1947, contain analyses of Quranic imagery and its emotional power. These elements remain in Quṭb's focus on Quranic structure, thematic unity, and immediacy in his exegesis *Fi zilāl al-qur'ān* (*In the Shade of the Qur'ān*), written between 1951 and 1965, albeit joined to his political agenda.⁷⁵

p. 29 The core message in *Fi zilāl al-qur'ān* is a radical development of the ideas espoused by Mawdūdī and other Islamist precursors. Whereas Mawdūdī seeks to reform Muslim society corrupted by Western *jāhiliyya*, Quṭb applies this label more forcefully to the Islamic world.⁷⁶ The reason for this ignorance is that Muslims no longer legislate by God's laws nor affirm His sovereignty (*ḥākimiyya*). By this, he accuses modern Muslims of deifying humans.⁷⁷ This is the worst transgression against God and a direct cause of social injustice.⁷⁸

Yet there is a deeper metaphysical dimension to Quṭb's vision. He presents Islam as an order provided by the creator to meet the needs of humanity.⁷⁹ Because Muslims failed to live by the Quranic blueprint, their societies have declined.⁸⁰ Unlike Sayyid Aḥmad Khan, revelation is not reinterpreted to fit the laws of nature, but the Qur'ān in its immediate sense must be in perfect harmony with the universe. His new reading is provoked by

Muslim loss of fortitude in implementing the divine way, rather than any increase in knowledge.⁸¹ Thus, Quṭb's interpretation is not meant as a pedagogical or research aid, but to inspire reflection, activism, and holy struggle, or jihad. This explains its influence among some modern groups and movements, such as Jihādī-Salafis.⁸²

Contextualism: Fazlur Rahman (1919–1988) and Asma Barlas (b. 1950)

Contextualism emerged from modernism in the second half of the twentieth century. Its central idea is that the universal import of Quranic discourse should be interpreted by contextualizing it in the time and place it was revealed.⁸³ Hence, contextualists argue that an appropriate reading of the Qur'ān for today can be found in principles uncovered from its message in seventh-century Arabia. Two notable figures are Fazlur Rahman Malik (d. 1988) and Asma Barlas (b. 1950).

Fazlur Rahman was born in India in 1919 and studied Islamic disciplines with his father, before attaining a degree in Arabic at Punjab University and a doctorate on Ibn Sīnā (d. 1037) at the University of Oxford. Since his time as the head of the Central Institute of Islamic Research in Karachi between 1962 and 1968, his initial focus on Muslim philosophy gave way to study of Islamic history, law, and the Qur'ān. His reformist ideas encountered opposition in Pakistan from traditionalist *ulamā'* and he was forced to leave for the United States. He moved to the University of California, Los Angeles, for a year and then joined the University of Chicago for the remaining two decades of his life.

Fazlur Rahman examines the Qur'ān via hermeneutics and as a subject for thematic analysis, especially on ethical topics. These strands are found traced through his books *Islamic Methodology in History* (1965), *Islam* (1966), *Major Themes of the Qur'an* (1980) and *Islam and Modernity* (1982), as well as his articles. His hermeneutics represent both an extension of and reaction against his prior interest in Muslim philosophy. As early as *Prophecy in Islam* (1958), he writes about Ibn Sīnā's understanding of revelation in the following way:

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[T]he prophet is endowed with such a strong power of imagination that he can recapture the intellectual truth by figurization in visual and acoustic symbols in waking life and . . . although these symbols may be private and not public, this fact does not interfere with their objective validity.⁸⁴

This bears direct comparison with his own prophetology, asserting “an organic relationship between feelings, ideas and words. In inspiration, even in poetic inspiration, this relationship is so complete that feeling-idea-word is a total complex with a life of its own.”⁸⁵ Although he acknowledges that the Qur'ān is Divine Word, he suggests that “it is equally intimately related to the inmost personality of the Prophet Muḥammad whose relationship to it cannot be mechanically conceived like that of a record.”⁸⁶ It can be appreciated that Fazlur Rahman repurposes universalized Neoplatonic rationality for particularized history.

His *Major Themes of the Qur'an* provides a thematic *tafsīr* of Muslim theological topics, such as God, humanity, prophecy, and eschatology. While his introduction shows awareness of Western scholarship,⁸⁷ he rarely cites this body of work, nor specific texts of *tafsīr*. The book remains influential, however, for his perceptive line of questioning and commentary. His most important hermeneutic legacy is his double-movement theory. Here he draws from the ideas of the philosopher Emilio Betti (d. 1968) to argue that God's intentions in revelation can be discovered and brought into the present.⁸⁸ This methodology puts universalistic historicism in service of an ethical goal. The divine purpose in Quranic communication can be recovered in the form of extra-historical values,⁸⁹ which can be used to determine norms and laws for Muslims living in modernity.

Fazlur Rahman can be critiqued for an overly positivistic approach to the complex discourses of the Qur'ān, for insufficiently considering the subjective aspects of interpretation, and for failing to carry out the ethical project that he envisages.⁹⁰ Nevertheless, he has arguably provided a more coherent answer than many other thinkers to the question of how the Qur'ān should be understood in the contemporary world.

A second contextualist is Asma Barlas. She was born in Pakistan in 1950, three years after the country's independence. Her higher education consisted of a bachelor's degree in English and a master's in journalism. Barlas was dismissed from the Foreign Service after political dissent, received political asylum in the United States, and earned her doctorate in international studies. She joined the Politics department of Ithaca College in 1991 and retired in 2020.⁹¹ During the mid-1990s, Barlas's scholarly interests turned toward Quranic hermeneutics and she became a prominent reformist academic.⁹² The main book outlining her ideas is *"Believing Women" in Islam* (2002), which she expanded in 2019. As well as its theoretical and methodological arguments, the longer book covers themes such as anti-patriarchal readings of God and prophets, equality between genders, and the family and marriage. She has resisted the label of feminism despite its connections to her concerns because she feels it takes away from her more significant identity as a Muslim woman.⁹³

p. 31 Like Fazlur Rahman, the key hermeneutic employed by Barlas is contextualism. She acknowledges the debt to his double-movement theory, stating that "moral-social" principles distilled from scripture can apply to the modern contexts of women.⁹⁴ She openly draws from the early work of Amina Wadud, who initially used a similar methodology before developing her ideas in a postmodernist direction.⁹⁵ Barlas is less positivistic than Fazlur Rahman. She acknowledges her own subjectivity and interpretive agency. At the same time, she sees the Qur'ān as egalitarian and looks to uncover "its own 'intrinsic sense' and truth claims."⁹⁶ She criticizes contemporary feminists who argue that the Qur'ān cannot be divested of patriarchal discourses directed toward its initial audience. Such readings undermine its teachings about equality and lead to questioning its sacrality.⁹⁷ Similarly, she reproves the postmodern turn in reformist Quranic hermeneutics, which she sees as relativizing meaning.⁹⁸

Despite this, it is possible to critique her own openness to consider any reading of the Qur'ān supporting her principles. For instance, in the context of the husband's response to marital disharmony found in Q 4:34, Barlas understands the verb *ḍaraba* ("strike [them]"), which some modern figures have translated as "set an example," "symbolically strike," and "hold in confinement," as ambiguous. Hence, she argues that it should be understood through Quranic texts promoting sexual equality and marital harmony.⁹⁹ Yet Barlas admits to lacking knowledge of Arabic, a precondition for evaluating different translations. She has defended her stance on the grounds that these are mere "linguistic quibbles" and can be overcome through adopting a global hermeneutic of the text.¹⁰⁰ This, however, arguably contradicts the basis of her contextualist project: how can one extract the moral principles of a scripture with reference to its history without the requisite linguistic tools?

Structuralism and Post-Structuralism: Muḥammad Shaḥrūr (1938–2019) and Mohammed Arkoun (1928–2010)

The twentieth-century discourses of structuralism and post-structuralism are represented in reformist approaches to the Qur'ān by the Syrian Muḥammad Shaḥrūr (d. 2019) and the Algerian-French Mohammed Arkoun (d. 2010), respectively.

Muḥammad Shaḥrūr was born in 1938 in Damascus. His formal education was not centered on Islam: he traveled to Russia to study civil engineering and to Dublin for postgraduate qualifications, received a doctorate in soil mechanics and foundation engineering in 1972, and returned to lecture at Damascus University.¹⁰¹ Yet Shaḥrūr privately developed his ideas of Quranic interpretation until publishing in 1990 his first and most influential work, the 800-page *Al-Kitāb wa-l-qur'ān*. The book was wildly popular. It soon sold 20,000 copies in Syria and was in demand in intellectual circles across the Arab world. Although it was officially banned in Egypt and temporarily forbidden in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, it continued to be sold illicitly, and pirated copies circulated throughout the region.¹⁰² The key attraction was to offer Arabic-speaking professionals a modern vocabulary to decode the text. Shaḥrūr followed up with further books in 1994, 1996, 2000, and 2008, which expanded his ideas, but none have received the attention, or critical response, of his first publication.¹⁰³

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Structuralism is at the heart of Shaḥrūr's interpretive program. He sees revelation as part of a meaning system. A series of binary oppositions, such as divine-human, infinite-finite, and universal-particular, which are philosophically knowable, exist as a structure both inside and outside the text.¹⁰⁴ Shaḥrūr's structuralist analysis is applied to draw a distinction between "the Book" and "the Qur'ān," so that "Qur'ān" denotes only a portion of the material in the transmitted Book.¹⁰⁵ Such destabilization of familiar language makes Shaḥrūr's work radical in a distinct way: by revisiting basic terminology, Shaḥrūr reinterprets the entire message of Islam.

His argument is that by reading the Book through structuralist categories, the understanding of its audience can develop through history.¹⁰⁶ This means that rather than extracting an extra-historical meaning from revelation by contextualizing it in seventh-century Arabia, the Book must be exclusively read with a contemporary philosophical understanding. Thus, he states, "If Islam is suitable for every time and place, it is necessary to start from the hypothesis that the Book came down upon us . . . and it is as if the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, recently died and delivered to us this Book."¹⁰⁷

An illustration of the practical results of Shaḥrūr's system is his theory of limits (*ḥudūd*). He understands revealed legislation to fall under "definite verses." These verses are called the Mother of the Book, because they allow an unlimited variation of legislation within certain limits.¹⁰⁸ Shaḥrūr argues that revealed injunctions play a role parallel to upper and lower limits in the natural world. Thus, some prohibitions are lower limits that cannot be transgressed due to harm. In contrast, other commandments, such as the punishments for theft and murder, are treated as upper limits: the maximum penalty that can be applied.¹⁰⁹

A figure who has gone beyond the structuralism of Shaḥrūr by integrating the philosophy of post-structuralism into his intellectual project is Mohammed Arkoun. He began life in a Berber village in Algeria in 1928 and, following study at the University of Algiers, completed his doctorate at the Sorbonne in 1968. He lectured at French universities, eventually becoming a professor at the Sorbonne, editing the journal *Arabica*, and publishing widely on philosophical and historical aspects of Islam in French, Arabic, and English.

The flavor of Arkoun's work can be conveyed through his analysis of the Quranic discourse in seventh-century Arabia. To represent the semiotic relations between God, the Prophet, his helpers, and his opponents, he produces a diagram with terms such as "Subject Actant 1, 2, and 3," and "Addressee-mediator." Realizing the unfamiliarity of this apparatus for his audience in the Islamic studies journal *Die Welt des Islams*, he argues that it is "not for the sake of complexity or 'Parisian mode,' but in order to accomplish a specific intellectual task . . . showing how God and Revelation exist in the special sphere of Qur'ānic discourse—and similarly in the sphere of Biblical discourse, which has the same semiotic structure."¹¹⁰

p. 33 Unlike Shaḥrūr, Arkoun calls for a reading that pays attention to the historical particularities of the Qur'ān's movement from oral discourse to interpreted canonical text.¹¹¹ He argues that the technical terminology of semiotics reveals the underlying discourse structure shared with the Bible.¹¹² Arkoun proposes the concept of "societies of the Book-book,"¹¹³ by which he refers to a common way in which a holy book profoundly impacts written works, even after the rise of secularism.

Arkoun is also indebted to post-structuralists, such as Michel Foucault. The most obvious borrowing from this tradition is the concept of the "unthought." This refers to ideas systematically censored by power and orthodoxy, remaining "unthinkable" due to the lack of suitable conditions for their expression.¹¹⁴ Only a thorough deconstruction of the genealogies of knowledge formation within Islamic civilization will unearth the preconceptions that have led to such lacunae. It is the unthinkability surrounding Quranic canonization that has led to the failure of Muslim scholars to produce a critical edition of the scripture.¹¹⁵ This suggestion could be read as an imposition of Western-inspired norms regarding scriptural canonization, as well as his objective to draw the Bible and the Qur'ān closer to each other within secular modernity. Moreover, a proposed

“critical edition” of the *muṣḥaf* is unlikely to be a reformist panacea—the idea tends to act mainly as a symbol against traditionalist opinion.

The work of Arkoun has been praised by some academics, though it has remained on the periphery, and it has not had significant impact on Muslim intellectual culture.¹¹⁶ One difficulty is that both his philosophical lexicon and his interlocutors are situated within the French academic tradition. Thus, his arguments do not fully translate into other intellectual contexts.¹¹⁷ This is a problem that will have to be faced by any future reformists seeking to build on the structuralist and post-structuralist movements.

Postmodernism: Nasr Abu Zayd (1943–2010) and Amina Wadud (b. 1952)

Postmodernism here indicates a hermeneutic that treats the Qurʾān as a discourse and emphasizes meaning constructed by readers. Postmodernists thus seek to rebalance authority from the text to those who interpret it.¹¹⁸ Key reformist figures are the Egyptian émigré Nasr Abu Zayd (d. 2010) and the American Amina Wadud (b. 1952).

Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd was born near Cairo in 1943. He joined the Muslim Brotherhood at an early age and was impacted by the writings of Sayyid Quṭb—he was even briefly imprisoned at age eleven for his connection to the movement. As he grew older, he left Brotherhood ideas and focused on Arabic literature at Cairo University, subsequently receiving his master’s degree and then a doctorate in Islamic studies in 1981. He worked at Osaka University in Japan, before taking up a professorship at his alma mater. From 1993, Abu Zayd’s scholarship on the Qurʾān began to receive serious opposition from the Egyptian religious establishment and he was accused of apostasy. He was embroiled in two years of legal battle, which resulted in a forced dissolution of his marriage in 1995. Soon there were calls for his execution or assassination, and he left Egypt with his wife to become a professor at Leiden University until his death.¹¹⁹

p. 34 What intellectual position could cause such controversy? The ostensible reason was the nature of the Qurʾān. Abu Zayd had published a book, *Naqd al-khiṭāb al-dīnī* (1992), in which he had argued:

Perhaps we are now in a position to say that religious texts are texts just like any other texts in culture and that their divine origin does not mean that, when we study or analyze them, we need special methodologies that suit their special divine nature.¹²⁰

Such ideas provoked the ire of ‘Abd al-Ṣabūr Shāhīn, one of the professors assessing Abu Zayd’s case for tenure, setting in motion the series of events that led to his exile. Worries over the historicization of the Qurʾān had a precedent in twentieth-century Egypt. A similar heated debate had taken place in the 1940s over the doctoral dissertation of Mūhammad Khalafallāh, supervised by Amīn al-Khūlī, which subjected the stories in the Qurʾān to literary analysis.¹²¹ Abu Zayd had also severely critiqued Islamist hermeneutics, represented above all by Sayyid Quṭb. Shāhīn was himself an Islamist preacher and was connected to a financial scandal that Abu Zayd had criticized.¹²² Finally, like Fazlur Rahman before him, Abu Zayd had embraced contextualism and challenged the dominant traditionalist conception of revelation. He argued that the Qurʾān is to be read by the active shift between present context and “original” meaning.¹²³ For his reflections on revelation, it was the Muʿtazila, the subject of his first book, published in 1982, and the claimed hermeneutic accessibility of a created Qurʾān as a historical text (*naṣṣ*), that provided the inspiration, rather than the early Muslim philosophers.¹²⁴

Abu Zayd later saw contextualism as reductionist and increasingly emphasized the Qurʾān as a discourse, for which its contemporary readers must be theorized as interlocutors, rather than a text to be decoded.¹²⁵ He uses the term “humanistic hermeneutics” to refer to the generation of meaning through discursive interaction with the Qurʾān. In his *Rethinking the Qurʾān* (2004), he understands the word “humanistic” in two interconnected senses, both of which stand in opposition to “non-humanistic” hermeneutics. First, though the Qurʾān has a transcendent source, it is immanent insofar as its “vertical” descent as revelation in Arabic makes it accessible

through human language.¹²⁶ Second, it is meant to be engaged in a “horizontal” direction by all Muslims and not exclusively by specialists.¹²⁷

p. 35 In the last months of his life, Abu Zayd had begun to elaborate his ideas on the centrality of the audience in Quranic interpretation beyond his published works. He theorized that there must be a direct hermeneutic relationship between God and all creation. Unlike a human author who must write for an assumed future audience, God has the “ultimate hermeneutic position.” He thus directly communicates not only to the Prophet and his contemporaries, but to all future readers. Abu Zayd developed the concept of “addressals,” God’s communication with any person through the Qur’ān, which accounts for their life experiences and subjectivity. He proposed that such addressals cannot be used to generate obligations ↵ on others—they are limited to each individual. With addressals, Abu Zayd’s preoccupation with the Qur’ān’s historicity was not abandoned but rather expanded by his insight that God advances the hermeneutic horizon into the present. This sketch shows both that Abu Zayd continued to actively grapple with the question of Quranic hermeneutics up until the very end and that, even as his thinking moved in a postmodern direction, it remained grounded in a theology of divine transcendence.¹²⁸

Another reformist who turned from contextualism to postmodernism is Amina Wadud. Originally named Mary Teasley, Wadud was born in the United States in 1952 to an African-American Methodist family (her father was a minister). She faced adversity in her early years, including poverty, her mother leaving the family and a brief period of homelessness. She converted to Islam during her undergraduate studies at the University of Pennsylvania and received a doctorate in Arabic and Islamic studies from the University of Michigan in 1988. She taught at the International Islamic University in Malaysia until 1992 when she became a professor at the Virginia Commonwealth University back in the United States.¹²⁹ She retired in 2008, taking up a visiting professorship at the Gadjah Mada University in Indonesia.

Wadud’s book *Qur’an and Woman*, based on her doctoral dissertation, was first published in 1992 in Malaysia. Her primary objective is to reorient the metaphysical reading of gender in the Qur’ān toward equality under God: “the tawhidic paradigm.”¹³⁰ The first three main chapters examine woman in creation, the world, and the hereafter. Only in the last one does she address the controversies surrounding gendered rights and responsibilities.

In a methodological introduction, she explains her use of Fazlur Rahman’s contextualist hermeneutics to infer universal principles from particular verses.¹³¹ Yet Wadud’s thematic focus on the question of gender leads to refinements in Fazlur Rahman’s ideas. She argues that the Quranic address—an interest that she shares with Abu Zayd—is constrained by the grammatical structure of Arabic to binarily gendered language.¹³² She thus declares that in light of the Qur’ān’s own principle of gender equality, some seemingly gender-specific addresses should be understood as inclusive, while other texts taken as universal injunctions must be reread as specific to their context.

Wadud’s work has been extremely impactful in reformist discourses on the Qur’ān, as underscored by a 2012 festschrift, *A Jihad for Justice*. This reflects her activism: most famously leading a mixed-gender prayer in New York in 2005.¹³³ In a short retrospective paper, Wadud declares that this activism distinguishes her work from that of both Barlas and Aysha Hidayatullah: “They both engage in their lovely abstract debates from positions of privilege in the Western academy, and have little or no impact where it really matters.”¹³⁴

p. 36 But the claim to greater reformist influence would not justify Wadud’s inclusion in the present category. This comes from her postmodern turn in *Inside the Gender Jihad* (2006). Within this book, she explicitly revisits her earlier use of Fazlur Rahman’s contextualist hermeneutics, and while not repudiating it, argues that it must be supplemented by a search for transcendent divine guidance that, with the development of postmodernist readings, cannot ↵ be constrained within the limitations of texts.¹³⁵ This leads to her saying “no” to Q 4:34 as a permission for a man to strike his wife in the spirit of the divine message itself,¹³⁶ a move that has led to

critiques from both traditionalist and reformist perspectives.¹³⁷ Nevertheless, her rallying cry, “We are the makers of textual meaning,”¹³⁸ is a significant departure from the contextualist continuity of Barlas and, like the later ideas of Abu Zayd, a call to transform the text from a repository of divine meanings to a site for negotiating the human-divine relationship.

The Future?

Predictions of the future are difficult, but I shall offer some comments on the current trajectory of the preceding five categories. The shortcomings of modernism are well known. Its optimism and rationalistic interpretations appear dated in the uncertain context of recent decades. But modernism toward the Qur’ān is likely to persist. Its ideas are widespread and often popular, especially among Muslim professionals, providing the most accessible reformist option for Muslims seeking guidance outside traditionalist and Salafī paradigms. As the examples of Asad and Shihab show, it continues to impact diverse global contexts.

The future for Islamism seems less certain. It is the only one of the five trends for which neither representative lived into the present century. Although Mawdūdī and Quṭb are still widely read, their exegetical methodologies do not seem to have been extended by a new generation. Moreover, shifting sociopolitical contexts and the use of their ideas to justify politically motivated violence have made their projects less credible to many Muslims.

Contextualism retains a better reputation, albeit as an intellectual position, rather than a popular movement. The foundational ideas of Fazlur Rahman have been especially refined in the Anglophone academic world, as well as the “Ankara school” in Turkey.¹³⁹ The animating concept of universalistic historicism, with renewed application of permanent ethical meanings, seems to provide a balance between revelation and adaptation to changing social conditions. As seen in Barlas, as well as Wadud’s early work, this method is flexible enough for application to varying themes.¹⁴⁰

Structuralism and post-structuralism have played a comparatively minor role in contemporary reformism but deserve study for introducing modern philosophical ideas. Though figures like Shaḥrūr and Arkoun have attracted attention in popular and academic circles, neither was able to produce a viable school of thought. Structuralism and post-structuralism appear alien to the Islamic tradition and struggle to escape the context of French philosophy. Experiments may continue in this vein but seem unlikely to flourish.

Nonetheless, post-structuralist ideas in the guise of postmodernism, and its aim to transcend interpretation of the Qur’ān as text to approach it as discourse, seem to have traction. This approach, in the later work of both Abu Zayd and Wadud, locates meaning in the reader’s conversation, even contestation, with the transcendent intent of God. New varieties ↵ of the postmodern are likely to proliferate and eventually require classification as separate categories. There is also the possibility of hybridity, in which postmodernist ideas are combined with elements of structuralism and contextualism or even put into dialogue with traditionalist discourses. Whatever emerges from these hermeneutic debates, which also connect to political and social disputes, the Qur’ān and its interpretation are certain to remain central to Islamic reformism.

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Notes

- 1 Campanini, *The Qur'an*, 4.
- 2 Salafism can be defined as a pietist and scripturalist movement that aims to follow the beliefs and practices of the early generations of Muslims, usually as interpreted by Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328) and Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Wahhāb (d. 1792). The 'ulamā' is a general term for the Islamic scholarly class, which, though representing diverse schools of thought, is characterized by adherence to traditional pedagogies and authoritative texts.
- 3 Pink, *Muslim Qur'anic Interpretation Today*, 11–12.
- 4 See Saleh, "Contemporary *Tafsīr*," 698–701; Nayfar, *Al-Insān wa-l-qur'ān wajhan li-wajh*, 5–6. Nayfar also briefly discusses a modernist trend focused on literary analysis of the Qur'an, from which Amīn al-Khūlī and his wife 'Ā'isha 'Abd al-Raḥmān (Bint al-Shāṭi') are the most notable figures. As he acknowledges, this can be seen as a forerunner to postmodernism in the present chapter. See Saleh "Contemporary *Tafsīr*," 700. Also, note the continuity between Mūhammad Khalafallāh, a student of al-Khūlī, and Nasr Abu Zayd.
- 5 Shepard, "Islam and Ideology," 307.
- 6 Shepard, "Islam and Ideology," 311.
- 7 Baljon, *Reforms*, 70–71.
- 8 Siddiqi, "Religious Thought of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan," 300.
- 9 Baljon, *Reforms*, 72–74; and see Troll, *Sayyid Ahmad Khan*, 160–170.
- 10 Akhtar, "Evolution," 1014.
- 11 Wani, "An Overview," 44.
- 12 Mir, *Coherence*, 37–39.
- 13 Mir, *Coherence*, 85.
- 14 Sikand, *Bastions*, 84.
- 15 This was published in nine volumes as *Tadabburi-i-Qur'an* and was followed by two volumes of English translation by Mohammad Saleem Kayani.
- 16 Malik, *Islam in South Asia*, 579; Cuypers, *The Banquet*, 500–501.
- 17 Bourdeau, "Auguste Comte."
- 18 Wielandt, "Exegesis of the Qur'an"; Adams, *Islam and Modernism in Egypt*, 134–135.
- 19 Elshakry, "The Exegesis of Science," 501.
- 20 Ibn 'Āshūr, *Al-Tafsīr wa-rījāluḥu*, 174.
- 21 See, respectively, Lauzière, *The Making of Salafism*, 38–40, and Scharbrodt, "The Salafiyya and Sufism," 97.
- 22 Pink, *Muslim Qur'anic Interpretation Today*, 19.
- 23 'Abd al-Raḥīm, *Al-Imām Muḥammad 'Abduḥ*, 203–205.
- 24 Wielandt, "Exegesis of the Qur'an."
- 25 Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, 134–135.
- 26 McAuliffe, *Qur'anic Christians*, 79.
- 27 Ibn 'Āshūr, *Al-Tafsīr wa-rījāluḥu*, 185–186.
- 28 Pink, "Striving," 772; Elshakry, "The Exegesis of Science," 501.
- 29 'Abbās, *Al-Tafsīr*, 2:266–274.
- 30 Asad, *Principles*, ix–xi; also see Lawrence, *The Koran in English*, 69–70. A developed version of his political ideas is set out in his *The Principles of State and Government in Islam* (1961).
- 31 Asad, *Message*, x, n. 4.
- 32 Hofmann, "Muhammad Asad," 235.
- 33 Asad, *This Law of Ours*, 54–61.
- 34 T. Asad, "Muhammad Asad," 156.
- 35 Asad, *Message*, x.
- 36 Asad, *Message*, x. Asad's ideas reflect a theory of Quranic inimitability (*i'jāz*) articulated by 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī (d. 1078). Yet al-Jurjānī bases his case on a theory of language that alteration in the form of any text implies corresponding changes in meaning (Larkin, *The Theology of Meaning*, 54–55), whereas Asad appeals to Quranic exceptionalism. Some

- scholars writing in Arabic have held that the Qurʾān is translatable, though they have tended to live in a milieu in which other languages are widely used by Muslims, for instance in Persianate Central Asia. See Zadeh, *Vernacular*, 290.
- 37 Asad, *Message*, ix–x; Hofmann, “Muhammad Asad,” 234–235.
- 38 Asad, *Message*, ix.
- 39 Iqbal, “‘Abdullah Yūsuf ‘Alī & Muḥammad Asad,” 115; Hofmann, “Muhammad Asad,” 242. Bruce Lawrence also places emphasis on the transliteration underneath the Arabic script within *The Message of the Qurʾān*: “as if to entice the reader, even one who knows no Arabic, to engage with the sounds of the text. . . .” Lawrence, *The Koran in English*, 72. But this feature did not come from Asad—it was added by Ahmed Moustafa in the Book Foundation’s 2003 publication and subsequent editions.
- 40 Iqbal, “‘Abdullah Yūsuf ‘Alī & Muḥammad Asad,” 109.
- 41 Asad, *Message*, 1135–1136.
- 42 Hofmann, “Muhammad Asad,” 245.
- 43 Asad, *Message*, 555, n. 77.
- 44 Asad, *Message*, 209, n. 66.
- 45 The Spanish (2005) and German (2009) translations were produced by the Book Foundation, which mentions that other languages, for instance French, Chinese, and Japanese, may be forthcoming. See <https://www.thebook.org/our-projects.html>, accessed November 9, 2020. The Turkish translation appeared in 1996 and has had an impact on Turkish academic theologians, such as Talip Özdeş, who cites Asad’s rejection of intra-Quranic abrogation. Pink, *Muslim Qurʾānic Interpretation Today*, 148–149.
- 46 Ikhwan, “Interpreting the Qurʾān,” 212, 215.
- 47 Ikhwan, *An Indonesian Initiative*, 37.
- 48 Assyaukanie, “Islamic Reform,” 130–131.
- 49 Abdullah, Arifin and Ahmad, “The Influence of Egyptian Reformists,” 2.
- 50 Pink, *Muslim Qurʾānic Interpretation Today*, 40–41.
- 51 Pink, *Muslim Qurʾānic Interpretation Today*, 45–47.
- 52 Amin and Kusmana, “Purposive Exegesis,” 71.
- 53 Ikhwan, *An Indonesian Initiative*, 51–52.
- 54 Amin and Kusmana, “Purposive Exegesis,” 70.
- 55 Ikhwan, *An Indonesian Initiative*, 59–61.
- 56 Ikhwan, *An Indonesian Initiative*, 62–63.
- 57 Amin and Kusmana, “Purposive Exegesis,” 77.
- 58 Campanini, *The Qurʾan*, 91.
- 59 Nasr, *Mawdūdī*, 12–13. Whereas Mawdūdī’s Urdu literary abilities are not in doubt, Hartung suggests that he may have exaggerated his mastery of Arabic to boost his scholarly credentials. For this claim, he relies on the inconclusive evidence that Mawdūdī’s early translations of Arabic are not extant and he was assisted in producing Arabic translations of his works. See Hartung, *A System of Life*, 14–15, 60, n. 27.
- 60 Jackson, *Mawlana Mawdūdī*, 48–49.
- 61 Mir, “Some Features,” 236–238.
- 62 Mawdūdī, *Towards Understanding the Qurʾān*, 4.
- 63 Mawdūdī, *Towards Understanding the Qurʾān*, 24–27.
- 64 Osman, “Mawdūdī’s Contribution,” 474–475.
- 65 Jackson, *Mawlana Mawdūdī*, 109.
- 66 Adams, “‘Abū’l-‘Alā Mawdūdī’s *Tafhīm al-Qurʾān*,” 315–316.
- 67 Jackson, *Mawlana Mawdūdī*, 111.
- 68 Hartung, *A System of Life*, 85, 87.
- 69 Hartung, *A System of Life*, 89.
- 70 Tareen, “South Asian,” 250.
- 71 Pink, *Muslim Qurʾānic Interpretation Today*, 185.
- 72 Duvall, *Islamist Occidentalism*, 29–30, 36–39.
- 73 Calvert, *Sayyid Qutb*, 186–187.
- 74 Campanini, *The Qurʾan*, 92.
- 75 Osborne, “Feeling the words,” 2–3; Pink, *Muslim Qurʾānic Interpretation Today*, 182–183.
- 76 Shepard, “Doctrine of ‘Jāhiliyya,’” 523.
- 77 Shepard, “Doctrine of ‘Jāhiliyya,’” 524–535.
- 78 Campanini, *The Qurʾan*, 92–94.
- 79 Quṭb, *Fi ḏilāl al-qurʾān*, 1:16–17.

- 80 Nettler, "A Modern Islamic Confession," 114.
- 81 Quṭb, *Fi zilāl al-qurʾān*, 1:13.
- 82 Pink, *Muslim Qurʾānic Interpretation Today*, 184–185. Jihādī-Salafism is an analytical construct used for Salafis who emphasize violent struggle against disbelievers as an obligation, though the cogency of the term has been questioned. See Lauzière, *The Making of Salafism*, 9.
- 83 Saeed, "Some Reflections," 222. Contextualism could perhaps more accurately be termed "universalist historicism" due to its use of historical methods to retrieve universal meaning from a text—the Qurʾān—that is simultaneously time-bound and transcendent. For reflections on "historicist universalism" with respect to feminism, see Kong, "Feminism and Historicist Universalism," 55–56.
- 84 Rahman, *Prophecy in Islam*, 38.
- 85 Rahman, *Islam*, 33.
- 86 Rahman, *Islam*, 33; also see Rahman, *Major Themes*, 85.
- 87 Rahman, *Major Themes*, xvi–xx.
- 88 Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*, 8; Körner, *Revisionist Koran Hermeneutics*, 115.
- 89 Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*, 2–5.
- 90 Harvey, "Qurʾānic Values," 157–158, 162.
- 91 See <https://www.ithaca.edu/faculty/abarlas>, accessed November 26, 2020.
- 92 Hidayatullah, *Feminist Edges*, 14–15.
- 93 Barlas, "Engaging Islamic Feminism," 21–23.
- 94 Barlas, "Believing Women," 22.
- 95 Barlas, "Amina Wadud's Hermeneutics of the Qurʾān," 102–103.
- 96 Barlas, *Believing Women*, 2nd ed., 26.
- 97 Barlas, *Believing Women*, 2nd ed., 242–243.
- 98 Barlas, *Believing Women*, 2nd ed., 249–250.
- 99 Barlas, "Believing Women," 188–189.
- 100 Barlas, "Reading the Word," 65.
- 101 Christmann, *The Qurʾān*, xix–xx.
- 102 Clark, "The Shaḥrūr Phenomenon," 337; Christmann, *The Qurʾān*, xxvii.
- 103 Browsers, "Shahrur's Reformation," 446–447.
- 104 Christmann, *The Qurʾān*, xxxiii–xxxv.
- 105 See Shaḥrūr, *Al-Kitāb*, 55–57; Christmann, *The Qurʾān*, 123–31; Campanini, *The Qurʾān*, 89.
- 106 Christmann, *The Qurʾān*, 486.
- 107 Shaḥrūr, *Al-Kitāb*, 44.
- 108 Christmann, *The Qurʾān*, 191.
- 109 Shaḥrūr, *Al-Kitāb*, 453–466.
- 110 Arkoun, "The Notion of Revelation," 71–72.
- 111 Arkoun, "The Notion of Revelation," 75–77.
- 112 Arkoun, *Islam*, 112–113.
- 113 Arkoun, *Islam*, 81.
- 114 Arkoun, *Islam*, 20–21; Günther, "Mohammed Arkoun," 147–148.
- 115 Campanini, *The Qurʾān*, 49–50.
- 116 Günther, "Mohammed Arkoun," 136–138.
- 117 Van Ess, Review of Mohammed Arkoun, 237–238.
- 118 Pink, *Muslim Qurʾānic Interpretation Today*, 290.
- 119 Kermani, "From revelation to interpretation," 169–171.
- 120 Abu Zayd, *Naqd*, 206. Translation in Abu Zayd, *Critique*, 241.
- 121 Abu Zayd, "The Dilemma," 8–9.
- 122 Enayat, *Islam and Secularism*, 45–47.
- 123 Abu Zayd, *Naqd*, 144; Sukidi, "Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd," 207. Abu Zayd's theories of communication in the Qurʾān in the 1980s and 1990s were also indebted to the semiotic tradition. Kermani, "From Revelation to Interpretation," 172–173.
- 124 Abu Zayd, *Naqd*, 206.
- 125 Abu Zayd, *Rethinking*, 9–10.
- 126 Abu Zayd, *Rethinking*, 8–9.
- 127 Abu Zayd, *Rethinking*, 62–63.
- 128 For these remarks, I draw with gratitude on the notes and recollections of Arnold Yasin Mol, who spent many hours with Naṣr Abu Zayd during his final year of life.

- 129 Barlas, "Amina Wadud's Hermeneutics of the Qur'an," 98–101.
- 130 Wadud, *Gender Jihad*, 24–32. She approaches the question of race in a similar way. See Rahemtulla, *Qur'an of the Oppressed*, 142–144.
- 131 Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman*, 3–4.
- 132 Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman*, 4–7.
- 133 Ali, Hammer and Silvers, *A Jihad for Justice*, 253–258.
- 134 Wadud, "Can One Critique Cancel All Previous Efforts?," 131.
- 135 Wadud, *Gender Jihad*, 193, 196–197.
- 136 Wadud, *Gender Jihad*, 204.
- 137 Jalajel, *Women and Leadership*, 5; Hidayatullah, *Feminist Edges*, 176.
- 138 Wadud, *Gender Jihad*, 204.
- 139 The constraints of this chapter have not made it possible to write more on this latter development. For a summary, see Harvey, "Qur'anic Values," 163–164.
- 140 See the present author's *The Qur'an and the Just Society* (2018) for a broadly contextualist study of Quranic principles of justice.