

The New Voices of Islam—Reforming Politics and Modernity—A Reader.  
Edited by Mehran Kamrava.  
I B Tauris 2006.

This is a book which anyone who believes that the Islamic world is universally as it appears to be in news footage from Baghdad or Al-Amara, or that all Muslims think the same as the extremist mullahs of Iran or the Bekaa Valley, needs to read.

Mehran Kamrava, Professor of Political Science at Cal State University, has brought together the writings of thirteen other influential Islamic thinkers which express what we in the West would call a 'moderate' Islamic voice. The editor's introduction is vital for setting everything in context, explaining much-used and often misunderstood terminology and making the point that 'noise ought not to be confused with dominance, and neither should relative silence be seen as irrelevance'. (p.2)

Subjects tackled include Islam and Democracy, Freedom of Religion and Belief, Pluralism in Muslim Societies, the Struggle for Women's Rights, and Muslim Women and Fundamentalism. The quality of the essays overall is extremely high but that by Mohsen Kadivar on Freedom of Religion and Belief in Islam is quite superb, and should be very widely read and debated.

This is a most valuable contribution to the debate that needs to take place within Islam as well as between Islam and those of other faiths on achieving a meaningful and respectful modus vivendi.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh