

The Pantheistic Reading of Islam

Conflating the Transcendental Islamic with the Historical Muslimanic

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ABSTRACT

This article addresses the blurred boundaries between the normative Islam as a value reference and Muslims in history, who are relative beings in place and time that interact with the normative source of Islam. However, this confusion is not only occasionally observed in Western scholarship but it is also discernable in traditional Muslimanic literature. Therefore, it is necessary to establish the criteria by which we can distinguish between the actions of Muslims in history and the normative values of Islam that can be considered purely Islamic. So defining normative Islam and its source is an essential point of departure in order to avoid any epistemological obfuscation, namely, the pantheistic approach that equates transcendental Islam, which represents the absolute “What Ought” with relative history. However, I would recommend the use of the term Muslimanic as a solution to this terminological and cognitive perplexity.


KEYWORDS:

Pantheism; Islamic; Muslimanic; Normative; Transcendence.

القراءة الوثنية للإسلام

دمج الإسلامي المتعالي مع الإسلامي التاريخي



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الملخص:

تتناول هذه المقالة الحدود الضبابية بين الإسلام المعياري كمرجع للقيمة والمسلمين في التاريخ، وذلك بكونهم كائنات نسبية في المكان والزمان تتفاعل مع المصدر المعياري للإسلام. ومع ذلك، فإن هذا الارتباك لا يُلاحظ أحياناً في الدراسات الغربية فحسب، بل إنه واضح أيضاً في الأدبيات الإسلامية التقليدية. لذلك، من الضروري وضع المعايير التي يمكننا من خلالها التمييز بين أفعال المسلمين في التاريخ والقيم المعيارية للإسلام، والتي يمكن اعتبارها إسلامية خالصة. لذا فإن تعريف الإسلام المعياري ومصدره هو نقطة انطلاق أساسية لتجنب أي تشويش معرفي، لاسيما في المقاربة الوثنية التي تساوي بين الإسلام المتعالي، الذي يمثل المطلق، أي "ما يجب"، والتاريخ النسبي. ومع ذلك، نميل إلى استخدام مصطلح "المسلماني" Muslimanic كحل لتجاوز الحيرة المصطلحية والمعرفية.

الكلمات المفتاحية:

وحدة الوجود؛ إسلامي؛ مسلماني؛ معياري؛ تسامي.

I. INTRODUCTION¹

Both the Muslim tradition (Emic) and Western scholarship (Etic) have conflated transcendental Islamic with the historical “Muslimanic”. I propose using the term Muslimanic to describe the understandings, actions, and applications undertaken by Muslims as relative human beings who act within specific contexts of time and place. This term avoids entanglement with normative, transcendental Islam. In other words, there are blurred boundaries between the normative Islam, which serves as value-based reference, and Muslims in history, who are relative beings interacting with the normative source of Islam within their temporal and spatial realities. On the other hand, normative Islam encompasses the constituent moral *weltanschauung* that determines the purposes of the ontology of *tawhīd* in Islam.

However, few works in the existing literature have addressed this significant epistemological problem. This complex topic, however, has been explored by Shahab Ahmed in his posthumous monograph *What is Islam?* Moreover, Marshall Hodgson, the prominent American historian, coined the term Islamicate in his groundbreaking book *The Venture of Islam* to distinguish between Islam as a religion and the broader Muslim civilization.

Therefore, it is necessary to establish the criteria by which the actions of Muslims and the normative values of Islam can be deemed pure Islam. Defining normative Islam and its foundational source is an essential point of departure to avoid terminological and conceptual misrepresentation or, rather, obfuscation namely, the pantheistic approach that equates transcendental Islam, which represents the absolute “what ought”, with the relative human history, “what is”.

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Consequently, this article aims to coin the term Muslimanic as a solution to represent the actions of interpretation and application adopted by Muslims, derived from and inspired by normative Islam. The use of this term addresses numerous issues related to epistemology and linguistics. Furthermore, the term Muslimanic allows us to circumvent the pantheistic view of Islam, which disregards the ontological space between Muslims and Islam, and instead focuses on the relationship between the subject and the object, namely, how Muslims interact with the Islamic text in a given historical context. It is important to understand that the ontology of *tawhīd* in Islam is a crucial step in preventing the confusion between normative Islam and Muslims in history.

Thus, researchers should delimit the scope of their study, indicating whether they aim to study Muslims within the context of social, historical, and anthropological studies or within the framework of normative Islam (*Qur'ān-Sunnah*). to prevent the pantheistic reading of Islam, researchers should employ the appropriate adjective (Islamic/Muslimanic).

II. THE ONTOLOGY OF TAWHĪD: A TRANSCENDENTAL WELTANSCHAUUNG

The *Qur'ān* is the foundational text of Islam, whereas *tawhīd* represents the central theme of the *Qur'ānic* discourse. The ontology of the *Qur'ān* establishes coherent dualities between the relationships of God-Man and Man-Nature. This results in complex, intertwined ontological relationships between the absolute Creator, God, and his relative creatures, namely, Man and Nature. This can be described as the Ontology of *tawhīd*, which emphasizes the oneness of God and the multiplicity of His creatures in a coherent framework, maintaining a balance of connection and disconnection between the Creator and His creatures, Man and the Cosmos.¹ Furthermore, the interplay between the absolute unseen and the relative seen world occurs in an interactive relationship.² Islam, can be defined as an ethical, normative, absolute, transcendent worldview. The Islamic *tawhīd* does not accommodate pantheistic beliefs that eliminate the distinctions between the Creator and His creatures. Instead, *Qur'ānic* paradigm

¹ Helen Elizabeth Mesard, *Abdelwahab Elmessiri's Critique of Western Modernity and the Development of an Islamic Humanism*, (PhD diss., University of Virginia, 2013), p.ix.

² 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Misīrī, *al-lughah wa-l-majāz*, 1st ed. (Cairo: Dār al-shurūq, 2002), p.134.

offers a hospitable and expansive space. Consequently, Humankind is not in organic unity with nature. however, the ontology of the *Qur'ān* does not permit theological appropriation or determinism. Instead, it posits that humankind possesses capabilities of self-reformation and earth development within history, according to the divine pact. The evaluation and judgment of the human deeds will occur in the other world.¹ Therefore, my intention is to delineate the boundaries between the absolute creator, God, and the relative creatures, thereby providing a foundation for a precise definition of what is “Islamic” in a normative sense.

III. NORMATIVE ISLAM: WESTERN PANTHEISTIC READINGS

As previously mentioned, drawing on the borderline between Islam and Muslims is a crucial step to avoid conflating normative Islam, which is enshrined in the *Qur'ān* and the prophetic practical illustrations (Sunnah), with the diverse practices of Muslims shaped by their ethnic and cultural backgrounds. It is essential to distinguish how Muslims, as relative human beings in history, have understood, applied, and interacted with the normative text that embodies a cosmic worldview. Therefore, the adjective “Islamic” or the noun “Islam” is frequently misused not only in the context daily newspapers or media outlets such as: “Islamic terrorism”, “Islamic clergy,” or “Sunni/ Shiite Islam,” but also sometimes within academic discourse by both Muslim and Non-Muslim scholars.²

To illustrate, *the Encyclopedia of Islam*, officially published between 1913 and 1938, was originally titled *A Dictionary of the Geography, Ethnography, and Biography of the Muhammadan Peoples*. While the second title is somewhat misleading, as the objective of this

¹ Ibid.

² The classical Muslimanic jurisprudence confused between the Normative source: *Qur'ān* and *sunna*, as the practical illustration, with other invented tools such as: *'ijmā'*, *Qiyās*, *Istihsān*, *Istishāb*, etc, and these sources under the rubric of *uṣūl* reached to 49 elements, and all the aforementioned became the sources of *sharī'a*. However, this human understandings or endeavors were sanctified by later generations of *taqlīd* and considered part and parcel of Normative Islam. So, the Muslimanic *fiqh*, lost its dynamism through the interaction between the normative text *Qur'ān* and the alterable mundane realities. Hence, the Muslimanic *fiqh* has been in moribund since the first encounter with modernism in the late 18th century; it has failed to create a methodological and well-structured epistemological system that can solve contemporary issues. Moreover, it has been overwhelmed by the systems of modernism in all walks of life. *Talfīz* has become the only existing tool in hands of the contemporary Muslim Scholars to gloss the methodological plights of the Traditional *fiqh* that they are trained in.

Encyclopedia was to examine the Muslim nations, rather than normative Islam in itself.¹ The first title adopted of a pantheistic approach, implying that Islam and Muslims are interchangeable. As a result, the Encyclopedia includes entries on prominent Muslim figures such as Abu-Hamid al Ghazālī or other historical personalities who contributed to Muslim intellectual history, rather than directly addressing Islam as a normative framework.²

In the same vein, Gustave E. Von Grunebaum (d.1972), the Austrian historian and orientalist, posits that “Hellenism provided the Muslim civilization with rationalized forms of thought, it taught Islam the art of systematization.”³ However, Grunebaum considered Islam and Muslims as unified entity, and Greek philosophy as the ultimate reference. Yet this is not the case in certain domains of the Muslimanic knowledge, such as *Ḥadīth*, *fiqh*, *Kalām* and *Uṣūl al-Fiqh*, particularly during the initial period preceding the translation of the Greek philosophy.

Fazlur Rḥaman Malik (d.1989), the distinguished Pakistani scholar and thinker, identified this problem in his book *Islam and Modernity*. Malik argues “The first essential step to relieve the vicious circle just mentioned is, for the Muslims, to distinguish clearly between normative Islam and historical Islam.”⁴ Nevertheless, I disagree with Fazlur Rahman’s use of the term ‘historical Islam’. I would propose the term ‘Muslimanic’ history or the history of Muslims, namely, the history of Muslims as human actors. otherwise the confusion between normative Islam and Muslims in history would persist.

Meanwhile, Marshall G.S. Hodgson (d.1968), the renowned American historian at the University of Chicago, observed the confusion between Islam as a religion and its civilizational reflections in the human history. To address this, he preferred the term Islamicate instead of Islam when referring to the broader Muslimanic civilization. Hodgson argues:

¹ Said F. Hassan and Abdullah Omran, “The Reception of the Brill Encyclopedia of Islam: An Egyptian Debate on the Credibility of Orientalism,” in *The Muslim Reception of European Orientalism: Reversing the Gaze*, eds. Susannah Heschel and Umar Ryad, (Routledge, 2019), 62.

² *Encyclopedia of Islam*, vol.2 (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 1042.

³ G.E. Von Grunebaum, *Islam: Essays in the Nature and Growth of a Cultural Tradition*, (United kingdom, London: Routledge, 1995), 314.

⁴ Fazlur Rahman Malik, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition*, (United states of America, Chicago: The University of Chicago press, 1982), 141.

In studying the history of Muslims, obviously, we need distinct terms for the religious tradition on the one hand and for more inclusive civilization on the other. Unfortunately, we have not had such terms in the past. The terms *Islam* and *Islamic* have often been used in both senses. But these two terms are clearly appropriate only to the realm of religion. If we speak in this work of Islamic art or literature, then, we will be referring to religious art literature within the traditions of Islamic faith, in the same sense as we refer to Christian art or literature. We will require a different term for the cultural traditions at large, when we are not restricting our reference to religion.”¹

Hodgson further explains that the various peoples among whom Islam has been predominant and who have shared in the distinct cultural traditions associated with it may collectively be referred to as *Islamdom*, forming a vast interrelated social nexus.²

Marshall Hodgson adds:

The civilization could have been given some other name than one derived from Islam; in fact, it has in some contexts, been referred to appropriately as the Perso-Arabic civilization, after two chief languages in which it has been carried. But because of the pre-eminent played in it by Islam and by Muslims, it has most commonly been called Islamic civilization. It will be convenient to retain such a usage here, only adding the double ending (-icate) to avoid an ambiguity that has proved all too common.³

In this regard, it is worth mentioning that Hodgson made a lucid observation; he rejected translating *Hadith* as “Islamic tradition,” considering it a cultural projection derived from Judeo-Christian lore. He argued that the denotation of “tradition” in English does not align with the meaning of *Hadith* in its original language and culture. thus, he claims:

The term Hadith has often been translated ‘tradition’, in the sense of the Latin tradition, something handed from one to another, used of certain alleged unwritten laws and teachings in Jewish and Christian theology. When scholars were Latinists and

¹ Marshall G.S. Hodgson, *The venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, Vol.1 (United States of America, Chicago: The University Chicago Press, 1977), 76.

² Ibid., 108.

³ Ibid.

theologians and when it was considered proper to interpret an alien culture in its own terms, this usage prevailed. In English, however, the word ‘tradition’ implies not only a contrast to anything written, but anonymity and imprecision. The *hadith* reports, however, are not a matter of vague custom but of explicit statement, texts, and early records put into writing¹

Furthermore, it should be taken into account that the study of Islam in the secular Western academia is approached from an anthropological and historical perspectives. This is because the majority of the scholars are primarily trained in these disciplines, which emphasize a descriptive analysis of the Muslim tradition. In contrast, classical Muslim scholarship focused on the implementation of Islamic Sharia through a prescriptive methodology, aiming to resolve ethical, social and legal issues at play.

Therefore, it is evident that there is a conflation between Islam as a normative and absolute reference and Muslims as relative beings interacting with the normative text within specific times and places. This conflation is particularly apparent in the literature produced by Western scholars, especially in the field of Anthropology, which implies a pantheistic and material reading of Islam. For instance, Timothy P. Daniels states in his book, *Sharia Dynamics: Islamic Law and Sociopolitical Processes*, examines Sharia and political parties in Malaysia, as well as various understandings of Islamic Sharia. However, he has employs the term “Anthropology of Islam”, which, by implication, equates Muslim *fiqh* (understanding) with the transcendent Sharia or Islam itself. Consequently, Daniels concludes:

I examine Sharia dynamics in Malaysia through discussing the diverse ways in which political parties and non-governmental organizations have engaged with the Islamic discursive tradition, and creating multiple mixtures of Sharia conceptions with ideas and practices. Seeking to transcend the dichotomy of Islam/Islands in the anthropology of Islam...²

Even though the pantheistic projection is clearly observed, whereas Timothy Daniels conflates the Muslimanic tradition of *fiqh* with the Islamic *Shari‘ā* and erases the boundaries

¹ Hodgson, *The venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World*, 76.

² Timothy P. Daniels, *Sharia Dynamics: Islamic law and Socio-political Process*, (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 142.

between “what ought” and “what is”. Furthermore, Daniels considers the multiple understandings or the divergent opinions concerning Sharia as representing different types of Islam or “Islams”, as he terms it.

Meanwhile, Knut Vikor, the Norwegian historian, highlights the paradox in his distinguished book *Between God and the Sultan*, where he asserts that *Sharī‘ā* is not solely represented in the eternal revelation, but also it resides in the *fiqhi* literature produced by the Muslim scholars throughout the centuries, essentially what Muslims believe *Sharī‘ā* should be.¹ Be that as it may, Knut vikor’s conclusion demonstrates the entanglement of the divine, transcendent *Shari’a* with the relative human *fiqh*. As I will show later, the conflation has also been committed in the Muslimanic tradition. In the same vein, Sherman Jackson, in his recently published book: *The Islamic Secular*, argues that the bifurcation between *Shari’a* and *Fiqh* weakens the authority of Islamic law and opens the door to human manipulation. Jackson states: ” *Fiqh*, in other words, while constituting a good-faith attempt to apprehend God’s all-encompassing law, is not necessarily God’s law and need not always be deferred as such.”² On the contrary, I disagree with Jackson since the space between sharia as a normative meta-law or reference allows for the correction of *fiqhi* opinions made by the jurists, as has been demonstrated historically in the Muslim tradition.

Upon the foregoing, the epistemological distance between Islam and Muslims should provide a clear pathway for academics to determine whether they aim to study normative Islam, *Qur’ān* and *Sunnah*, or whether their interest lies in examining Muslims anthropologically, socially, politically and their historical development.³ The distinction will help in the adoption of appropriate terminology. The adjective *Islamic* is suited for describing the universal and normative values or injunctions of Islam, whereas *Muslimanic* aptly characterizes the actions, thoughts, and interpretations of Muslims as they manifest in history. Nevertheless, Shahab Ahmed has touches upon this theme, stating:

¹ Knut S. Vikor, *Between God and the Sultan: A History of Islamic Law*, (United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2005), 347

² Sherman Jackson, *The Islamic Secular*, (USA: Oxford University Press, 2024), 23.

³ Shahab Ahmed, *what is Islam: The Importance of Being Islamic*, (USA: Princeton University Press, 2016), 24.

It is important to have an accurate and meaningful conceptualization of Islam as human and historical phenomenon because it matters how we use the word “*Islamic*” to identify, designate, characterize and constitute given phenomena. How and when we use the word *Islamic* is important because the act of naming is a meaningful act: the act of naming is an act of identification, designation, characterization, constitution, and valorization. In saying that something is *Islamic* we are necessarily identifying, designating, constituting, and valorizing that in terms of a norm that we believe we “know” to be Islam, or as a value that we assay on the basis of what we regard as sound method and criteria to be Islam.¹

On the other hand, some western researchers or writers fail to differentiate between *Islam* and *Muslims*. For instance, Christopher de Bellaigue claims, in his monograph *The Islamic Enlightenment: The Struggle between Faith and Reason, 1798 to Modern times* that:

Because almost four centuries after Gutenberg revolutionized intellectual and religious life in Europe with the invention of movable type, the printing press continued to be regarded by Islam as an unwelcome and alien innovation, and had not been admitted to general use.²

There is no normative Islamic text, i.e. the *Qur’ān* or the prophetic application of the *Sunnah* that explicitly prohibits the use of the printing press. However, the stagnant traditional scholars in the Ottoman Empire were concerned that the introduction of this new technology could potentially impact their educational system, which was based on memorization and the manual production of books. The transmission of knowledge, deeply rooted in the Muslimanic scholastic system, was perceived as a potential gateway for the manipulation of the *Qur’ānic* text. Consequently, the understanding and application of the classical scholars in the Ottoman era represented a significant barrier to the acceptance printing. Nevertheless, the printing houses were established in the Ottoman Empire just fifty years after Gutenberg’s invention. Moreover, it was permissible for Jews and other non-Muslim minorities to print texts in Hebrew and other

¹ Ibid., 123.

² Christopher De Bellaigue, *The Islamic Enlightenment: The Struggle Between Faith and Reason 1798 to Modern Times*, (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2017), 8.

languages.¹ Later, in 1726, Ottoman scholars issued a *fatwa* deeming printing and publishing books permissible, but this *fatwa* was confined to non-religious literature.² It is worth mentioning, that Richard W. Bulliet claimed that Muslims attempted to produce “print blocks” even four centuries before Gutenberg. These blocks, known as *trash*, were used for making amulets. However, they had not been developed as full-fledged technology capable of significantly altering the course of Muslim history.³

I would add one more example in this regard. Toby E. Huff, the American sociologist, has claimed in his renowned book, *The Rise of Early Modern Science: Islam, China and the West*, that Islam hampered the progress of the science of Anatomy as the Muslim jurists opposed the dissection of the human body.⁴ Hence, Toby Huff states, “I pointed out earlier that dissection was a forbidden practice in medieval and even early modern Islam.”⁵ Toby Huff has classified Islam periodically: early and medieval. however, he has not provided any textual evidence from a normative text. Moreover, the historical facts contradict his claim. Muslims scholars such *al-Razī*, *Ibn Sīnā* and *Ibn al-Quf* practiced dissection on human body. even though huff has mentions the scholar *Ibn al-Nafīs* (d.687AH), the *Shāf‘ī* scholar, and physician, who wrote *Sharḥ Tashrīḥ al-Qanun- of Ibn Sīnā*. But Huff insists” One could say that the Europeans, unlike Muslims, had in fact launched a program of empirical inquiry..... Conversely, postmortem examinations for forensic purposes in the Islamic world were said to be ‘Strictly forbidden’.”⁶

¹ Mohamed Ghaly, “The Interplay of Technology and Sacredness in Islam: Discussions of Muslim Scholars on Printing the Qur’an.” *Studies in Ethics, Law and Technology*, no. 3 (2), (January-2009): 1.

² Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Emergence of Islam: Classical Traditions in Contemporary Perspectives*, (USA: Fortress Press, 2012), 104.

³ Richard W. Bulliet, “Medieval Arabic Ṭarsh: a forgotten chapter in the history of Arabic printing”, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* no.107 (1987): 427.

⁴ Toby E.Huff, *The Rise of Early Modern Science: Islam, China and the West*, (USA: Cambridge University Press,2003), 193.

⁵ Ibid., 196.

⁶ Huff, *The Rise of Early Modern Science: Islam, China and the West*, 196.

IV. MUSLIMS IN HISTORY

Not all that occurred in the history of Muslims has been compatible with normative Islam. Therefore, the history of Muslims cannot be called the Islamic history because Islam does not merely represent the message of Muḥammad; it encompasses the ultra-historical ethical norms of transcendental monotheism (*tawhīd*) that were carried by various prophets and messengers throughout Human history i.e. Q. 2:285 “The Messenger believes in what has been sent down to him from his Lord, as do the faithful. They all believe in God, His angels, His scriptures, and His messengers. ‘We make no distinction between any of His messengers.’”

However, Maria Rosa Menocal, in her book *the Ornament of the world*, recognized this intertwining of normative Islam and Muslims in history. Menocal comments:

The Umayyads, the new dynasty that came to power, were both Arabs and Muslims, and they symbolized the original fusion of a cultural and especially a language with a revelation, a fusion that was the very soul of a new religion and civilization. The Umayyads’ Islam forged a new culture that added generously to the Arab foundation. Transplanting the heart of the empire out of the Arabian Peninsula and into Syria, which had its own mixed legacy, was the first significant step in creating the ill-understood, crucial distinction between things Arabs and things Islamic....¹

In the same vein, the understandings and applications of normative Islam, have been diverse in history. the divergent methodologies, cultural, milieus and ethnic background played an essential role of this complexity. Therefore, *Shahab Ahmed* (d.2015) has tackled this issue in his important book, “*What is Islam?*” where he emphasized that the thoughts of Muslims and their views of Islam should not be regarded as a part of normative Islam.

Since Muslims in history frequently violated the direct and the indirect injunctions of normative Islam, thus Shahab adds:

Muslims thought of themselves as Muslims and lived as Muslims in quite contrary ways. In other words, these words made Islam, though Islam, and lived Islam in quite contrary ways. These were societies in which Muslims who took *hikamt-al-ishrāq* and

¹Maria Rosa Menocal, *The Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews, Christians Created a culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain*, (USA: Back Bay Books, 2002), 29.

wuhdat al-wujūd as the means to the meaning of divine truth, and Muslims who condemned *hikmat-al ishrāq* and *wahdat al- wujūd* as rank heresy.¹

From this example, we can discern some immanent or pantheistic ideas that exist in certain strands of Muslimanic sufism. Consequently, the variant forms of understanding and practicing Islam repeatedly refutes the idea and the term of Islamic orthodoxy; there is only one normative Islam but there are different forms of comprehension. These include various streams of theological, Sufi and jurisprudential schools. Even within each school, there were differing views and opinions, as evidenced in the book of *Al- Mardāwī*, a prominent *Ḥanbalī* scholar (d.885A.H.), *Al- 'Inṣāf fī- Ma 'rifat al-Rājiḥ Min al-Khilāf 'Alā Mazhab al-Imām al-Mubajjal Aḥmmad b.Ḥanbal*, where several opinions on a single case were attributed to *Ibn Ḥanbal*.²

It is worth mentioning, that Muslim scholars even fell into the trap of confusion, though perhaps not during the first three centuries of the *Hijra*, as there is no evidence that a scholar labeled his book “Islamic.” For instance: *Imām Mālik* (D.189.H.), wrote his groundbreaking *al-Muwatta'ā*, and *al-shāf'ī* named his distinguished chef d'oeuvre *al-Risālā*. Thus, the *ijtihād* practiced by scholars was not part of Islam, but merely human toil. For instance when *Abu-ja'far al-Mansūr* ordered *Imām Mālik* to make *al- Muwaṭṭa'ā* as a legal code, *Imām Mālik* vehemently rejected the proposal, reinforcing the separation between normative *Sharī'ā* and *ijtihād* as established in the scholarship of early Muslim generations.³

V. USE AND ABUSE: THE ADJECTIVE ISLAMIC

The ages of civilizational decline witnessed a kind a pantheism or immanentism: Islam and Muslims were perceived as being of the same genre. This is evident in the magnum opus of history written by *al-Dhahabī* (D.748 AH.), a prominent hadith scholar and historian of the 8th century A.H titled *Tarīkh al-Islām*.⁴ As a result of the blow caused by the Crusades and the

¹ Shahab Ahmed, *What is Islam*, 118.

² 'Alā ' al-Dīn al- Mardāwī, *Al- 'Inṣāf fī- Ma 'rifat al-Rājiḥ Min- al-Khilāf 'Alā Mazhab al- 'Imām al-Mubajjal Aḥmmad Ibn Ḥanbal*, ed. Muḥammad Ḥāmid al-Fiḳī vol.1 (*Matba'at al-sunnah al Muḥammadiyyah*,1955), 433

³ Fathī Ḥassan Malkāwī, *Naḥw Ma 'rifah 'Islāmiyyah*, (Jordan: Amman IIIT, 2000), 38.

⁴ In certain instances, there are 28 legal opinions attributed to *Ibn Ḥanbal* on just one case.

Mongol invasions, which respectively impacted the Muslim world for approximately two centuries (1099- 1291), Muslim civilization strove to preserve its intellectual tradition, which had been produced during the first five centuries. Consequently, an inclination towards military and defensive mobilization prevailed and dominated over any critical élan, leading subsequent generations to focus on preserving and writing of commentaries on the works of their ancestors. However, neither a critical nor an analytical approach was undertaken to reflect on the quality and efficiency of this huge intellectual product of an incomplete and aborted civilizational venture, nor the underlying methodologies that had been based upon it.¹ Therefore, regurgitation was the mainstream and persisted until the advent of the western modernity.

The same phenomenon exacerbated in the 20th century where terms such as: Islamism, political Islam, Islamists appeared in an environment of civilizational crisis. The post-colonial, modern nation-states in the Muslim world failed to achieve any genuine progress on several scales: Economic, political, and social. In response, Muslims employed the adjective “Islamic,” for instance, Islamic banking, Islamic finance; Islamic schools etc.² This *mélange* of terms played the role of a placebo effect, conceal grave methodological and epistemological crisis. Over the last two centuries, Muslims adopted western systems but failed to reach the same level of the Western success in good governance, scientific and technological development or social welfare. Consequently, contemporary Muslims have attempted to draw on the classical Muslimanic tradition as a gesture of reclaiming their original identity. However, they too have failed due to the lack of a systematic, methodological, creative, and critical analysis to the historical intellectual lore of the forefathers. Moreover, Muslim scholars, trained in classical institutions have not devised new methods for engaging with the normative Islamic text directly and independently, in order to find new solutions or answers in a historical context dominated by foreign, secular, and post-modernist epistemologies.

By the same token, Sherman Jackson has addressed the misuse of the adjective *Islamic* in a subtle manner, and he has discussing the terminological overlap between *Muslim* and *Islamic*.³

¹ H. Floris Cohen, *How Modern Science Came into the World: Four Civilizations, One 17th-Century Breakthrough*, 65, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), 65-65.

² Shahab Ahmed, *What is Islam*, 427.

³ Sherman Jackson, *The Secular Islamic*, 76.

Nevertheless, he has preferred to use the word *Muslim* as an indicator to individual behavior, which represents “what is”. Meanwhile, the term *Islamic* denotes “what ought”, so Jackson states” This is why it is easier to speak of ‘Muslim adultery’ ‘Muslim murder’ than it is to speak of ‘Islamic adultery’ or ‘Islamic murder’.”¹ Furthermore, Sherman Jackson has suggested that the term *Islamic* is a normative reference, is tied to serving God and piety.² Additionally, Sherman Jackson noticed the pre-modern Muslims did not use frequently the term *Islamic*.³

However, sometimes the adjective *Islamic* is used as hegemonic tool to promote false universals, Jackson observers:

I articulated a position that was undeniably hostile toward the use of the adjective *Islamic*. In *Islamic Law and the State*, I wrote of “the hegemonic rise of the broad and imprecise Arabic neologism, ‘*islāmī*,’ and its English equivalent, ‘*Islamic*,’ both of which impute religious provenance and authority to ideas and institutions of little to no relationship to the sources of Islam.”⁴

As previously mentioned, the adjective *Islamic* has been misused by the contemporary generation of Muslims.

VI. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it is of a paramount importance to understand that the ontology of *tawhīd* in Islam is a crucial step to prevent the confusion between normative Islam and Muslims in history. The confusion is one of the primary causes of erroneous terminology and misconceptions. Therefore, the term *Muslimanic* should be used to describe the understandings, actions and the applications undertaken by Muslims as relative human beings who act in time and place, in order to avoid any entanglement with normative, transcendental Islam. Nevertheless, such confusion has already existed in both of the classical Muslim literature, particularly in later generations and in modern Western academia. Furthermore, the researchers should delimit the scope of their study, whether they aim to study Muslims within the context of the social,

¹ Ibid.

² Ibid.,77

³ Ibid.,79

⁴ Ibid., 77

historical, and anthropological studies, or within the framework of normative Islam (*Qur'ān-Sunnah*). Therefore, they shall opt for the adequate adjective (*Islamic/Muslimanic*) accordingly, to avoid the pantheistic misrepresentations of Islam.

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