Islamic Futures Studies in Futurists' Research: A Critical Analysis

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Abstract

Purpose: This article explores Islamic futures studies as a *liberatory intellectual project* rather than a new academic discipline. It aims to analyze and synthesize the conceptual frameworks proposed by prominent non-Iranian thinkers, particularly regarding how this project responds to the dual crisis in the Muslim world: "epistemological colonization" resulting in "used futures," and "internal intellectual stagnation" rooted in the closure of the gates of *ijtihād*.

Design / Methodology / Approach: Using an interpretivist paradigm and the method of thematic analysis, the study critically examines foundational texts and key works in the field. Through interpretive reading and thematic synthesis, it distills the core strategies and conceptual elements presented by leading scholars.

Findings: The analysis reveals that the liberatory project of Islamic futures studies is built upon a two-pronged strategy. The first is a critical movement toward the *decolonization of the mind*, facilitated by tools such as Causal Layered Analysis (CLA). The second is a constructive movement toward a *dynamic re-reading of tradition*, utilizing concepts such as transformation reform and the redefinition of *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah*. Together, these strategies aim to resist imposed futures and instead create "pluralistic" and justice-oriented futures.

Practical Implications: The approach encourages the formulation of alternative futures grounded in epistemic autonomy and renewed intellectual vitality. It also provides methodological guidance for scholars seeking to reconstruct future visions based on Islamic intellectual resources.

Originality / Value: The article highlights how this liberatory approach aspires to transcend inherited or externally imposed futures by generating diverse and justice-centered visions, such as a "Global Ummah" and "multi-civilizational worlds." Its contribution lies in synthesizing dispersed conceptual frameworks into a coherent model for Islamic futures studies as a transformative intellectual project.

Introduction

In recent decades, the discourse of "Islamic futures studies" has emerged as a critical and normative field of study within the international academic sphere. This intellectual current, reflected in the works of thinkers such as Ziauddin Sardar, Isma'il al-Faruqi, Sohail Inayatullah, Tariq Ramadan, and others, is an attempt to move beyond conventional futures studies and to present an alternative framework rooted in the Islamic worldview and epistemological tradition. However, within this endeavor, there is no single perception of the nature and purpose of this field. These perceptions exist on a spectrum: on one hand, there is the view that formulates Islamic futures studies as a "scientific discipline" with specific foundations and objectives for achieving "perennial peace," as seen in the works of Ikram Azam. On the other hand, there is an approach that sees it as more than a science, defining it as a "liberatory intellectual-political project" for analyzing and shaping the "future of the Muslim world." This second perspective, which is also the point of departure for this article, considers futures studies as a tool to confront the dual crisis that has enveloped the Muslim world.

The roots of this dual crisis can first be traced to an external challenge stemming from the epistemological hegemony of Western civilization. Postcolonial thinkers meticulously dissect the process of the "colonization of the future." They argue that the future has been transformed into an "occupied territory" (Sardar, 2003), a space where concepts like "development" have acted as a "Trojan horse" (Nandy, 1994) to impose the Western model as the only possible path to progress. This epistemological dominance, which Sardar (1999) traces back to Orientalism as a "deliberate misunderstanding," has resulted in the production of "used futures" (Inayatullah, 2008). These are futures that, in Sohail Inayatullah's terms, non-Western societies borrow without a deep understanding of their history and consequences, thereby diverting from their own path of authentic, indigenous development.

Alongside this external pressure, a paralyzing internal crisis has weakened the Muslim world's capacity for resistance and innovation. Thinkers like Mahdi Elmandjra (1992) and Isma'il al-Faruqi (1992) point with remarkable candor to the primary source of this decline: the closing of the "gate of *ijtihād*" in past centuries. This historical event gradually led to the dominance of a culture of imitation (*taqlīd*) and a fear of innovation, reducing Islam from a "world-affirming" religion that shapes history to a mere collection of legal rulings—a state of affairs that, in Sardar's (2003) view, has "removed agency and social responsibility from the shoulders of believers." This intellectual stagnation manifests as a "nostalgia for an

idealized past." Inayatullah (2005) identifies this phenomenon as the greatest obstacle to futurist thinking, as it, through the error of "misplaced concretism," substitutes creativity for shaping the future with attempts to literally reproduce the past.

It is within this context that this article, focusing on the perception of Islamic futures studies as a liberatory project, seeks to answer the following question: How do non-Iranian thinkers conceptualize and formulate Islamic futures studies as a liberatory intellectual project to overcome the dual crisis of internal stagnation and external colonization? Given the breadth of the field, this research delimits its scope to works written in or widely translated into English, to focus on the discourse that has taken shape in the international academic space. The central thesis of this article is that these thinkers view Islamic futures studies as a transformative project resting on two fundamental pillars: (1) a postcolonial critique and the decolonization of the mind and concepts, and (2) a dynamic and methodical re-reading of the Islamic tradition to activate its internal capacities. The present analysis will demonstrate that this intellectual current seeks to replace monolithic, imposed futures with "Multi Civilizational Futures" that are just and meaningful, inspired by an Islamic worldview, and shaped by Muslim societies themselves.

1. Literature Review

Futurist thinking among Muslim futurists has given rise to a rich and multi-faceted field of study. This article, focusing on the perspectives of non-Iranian futurists, deems it necessary, before categorizing the main intellectual currents, to first introduce the key figures of this domain and to address a fundamental question: What is these thinkers' essential perception of "Islamic futures studies" itself? Do they see it as an independent science, or do they merely address the future of the Muslim world?

The discourse of Islamic futures studies has been shaped by a group of thinkers, each approaching the field from a distinct perspective. Ziauddin Sardar, in works such as *The Future of Muslim Civilization* (1979) and *Islam, Postmodernism and Other Futures* (2003), has emphasized postcolonial critique and the necessity of epistemological reconstruction. Isma'il al-Faruqi, in his foundational book *Al-Tawhid* (1992), presents the Tawhidic worldview as the driving engine for civilizational renewal. Sohail Inayatullah, by developing methods like "Causal Layered Analysis" (1998), has provided practical tools for the decolonization of the future. Tariq Ramadan, in *Radical Reform* (2009), and Jasser Auda, in *Maqasid al-Shari'ah* (2008), have focused on methodological reconstruction in Islamic

jurisprudence and its principles. Sherman Jackson, in works like *The Third Resurrection* (2005), examines the issue of identity and agency from a theological and sociological standpoint, while Ikram Azam, in his book *Islam: Peaceful Social Change to the Future* (2004), has endeavored to codify this field as an academic discipline. A careful review of these thinkers' works reveals that their perception of the nature of Islamic futures studies is not uniform and can be seen on a spectrum:

a) **Islamic Futures Studies as an Academic Science/Discipline:** On one end of this spectrum are thinkers who consciously strive to establish Islamic futures studies as a scientific discipline. Ikram Azam, by distinguishing between "Islami Futurism" (as philosophy) and "Islami Futuristics" (as science), seeks to codify the field (Azam, 2004). Ziauddin Sardar, despite his strong critical dimension, is also one of the most serious theorists in this area. By presenting practical frameworks like the "Umrān Project" and methodological concepts such as "Institutionalized *Ijtihād*," he aims to found an indigenous and Islamic science of futurology (Sardar, 1988). Furthermore, Jasser Auda and Sohail Inayatullah, by providing systematic methodologies (Systems Theory and Causal Layered Analysis), are effectively building the tools of a scientific discipline that can be used to analyze any phenomenon from an Islamic perspective.

b) **Islamic Futures Studies as a Liberatory Project:** On the other end of the spectrum, Islamic futures studies is perceived as a critical and action-oriented project more than as a neutral science. This view, particularly prominent in the postcolonial thought of thinkers like Sardar and Ashis Nandy, regards the field as a tool for the "decolonization of the future" and for combating Western epistemological hegemony. In this perspective, the distinction between the "science of futures studies" and the "subject of the future of the Muslim world" is almost meaningless, because this science has emerged precisely for the liberation of the Muslim world and the shaping of its future. The goal is not merely to produce academic knowledge, but to "reclaim agency" and "shape the future." Al-Faruqi's "Islamization of Knowledge" project or Sherman Jackson's vision of the "Third Resurrection" also fit well within this category, as both are practical frameworks for transformation and liberation.

c) **Islamic Futures Studies as a Worldview in Action:** Perhaps the point of convergence for the two preceding views is that Islamic futures studies is rooted in a specific worldview. For example, in al-Faruqi's view, futures studies is nothing but the practical and

civilizational application of the "Monotheistic worldview." From this perspective, Islamic futures studies is not a separate science but the natural and necessary manifestation of a Muslim way of life in the contemporary world.

Therefore, it can be concluded that "Islamic futures studies," in the view of these thinkers, is a multi-faceted concept. The field is simultaneously an emerging science, a politico-cultural liberatory project, and a worldview in action. This article, while acknowledging this complexity, shows by categorizing the intellectual efforts of these thinkers into three main currents that the "liberatory project" aspect constitutes the point of departure and shared concern for most of them. In the following, these three intellectual currents will be discussed in detail.

1-1. First Current: Postcolonial Critique and Epistemological Deconstruction

The first and perhaps most fundamental intellectual current is an approach that traces the root of the current crisis not at the surface level, but deep within the epistemological and discursive structures of colonialism and Western modernity. The pioneers of this current are thinkers such as Ziauddin Sardar and Ashis Nandy, who have based their intellectual projects on the "deconstruction" of these mental structures. Sardar (1999), with his incisive analysis of "Orientalism," regards it not as a neutral scholarly inquiry, but as a "logic for confronting the challenge of Islam" and a tool for the mental and cultural subjugation of the East. He and his colleagues, in their foundational manifesto, *Barbaric Others*, by tracing the roots of this outlook to the biblical and classical Greek traditions, show how the West, by constructing an image of the "Other" as an inferior and irrational creature, has legitimized violence against it and pre-defined its future (Sardar, Nandy, & Davies, 1993).

Ashis Nandy (1987) deepens this critique with a sharp distinction between an "internal critique" and an "external critique" of modernity. Inspired by Gandhi, he proposes a radical external critique—one that attacks not only the flawed implementation of modernity, but the foundational values of the Enlightenment itself, especially "modern science," which he identifies as the "primary instrument of domination in our time" (Nandy, 1997). This penetrating and critical perspective is also sustained in Sardar's later analyses of the post-9/11 situation, where he employs concepts such as "Knowledgeable Ignorance" and the "Hamburger Syndrome" to describe the profound communication gap and the integrated nature of American power (Sardar & Davies, 2002).

However, this critical current does not stop at theoretical deconstruction; through the efforts of Sohail Inayatullah, it also extends to providing practical and methodological tools for the decolonization of the future. By coining the key concept of "used futures," Inayatullah eloquently demonstrates how non-Western societies unconsciously adopt development models that have already been tried and discarded by the West (Inayatullah, 2008). To counter this phenomenon, he introduces the tool of "Causal Layered Analysis" (CLA) as a method for penetrating the hidden discursive and mythical layers that shape the future (Inayatullah, 1998). In this way, Inayatullah adds a practical and methodological dimension for "transformative foresight" to the powerful theoretical critiques of Sardar and Nandy, paving the way to move beyond mere critique toward the active shaping of the future.

1-2. Second Current: Methodological Reform and a Return to Dynamic Sources

The second intellectual current, while fully accepting postcolonial critiques, holds the belief that the response to the crisis cannot be accomplished solely through a critique of the West. This current argues that the real key lies in a fundamental revision of the methodology for understanding religion and in reactivating the internal capacities of the Islamic tradition. This constructive outlook has crystallized into two main yet complementary branches: the theological-sociological branch and the fiqh-legal branch.

In the theological-sociological branch, Sherman Jackson holds a prominent position. In his profound work, *Islam and the Problem of Black Suffering*, he demonstrates how, through a creative re-reading of the treasury of classical theological schools (from the Mu'tazilites to the Ash'arites and Maturidis), one can provide authentic and meaningful answers to modern existential challenges, such as the problem of suffering, without the need to invent an entirely new theology (Jackson, 2009). He complements this approach in his book *Islam and the Black American* by presenting the inspiring vision of the "Third Resurrection." This vision is an identity-building project in which the Black American Muslim community, through the "appropriation" and mastery of the Islamic tradition, applies it to respond to the needs of its specific American context and liberates itself from dependency on the competing narratives of "Black Religion" or "Immigrant Islam" (Jackson, 2005).

In the fiqh-legal branch, Tariq Ramadan and Jasser Auda are considered leading figures. Ramadan (2009), by proposing the key concept of "transformation reform," calls for a shift from an adaptive and reactive

approach to an activist one, whose goal is not merely to conform to the world, but to change it based on Islamic ethics. His primary tool for this transformation is a revision of the principles of jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) itself and the elevation of the status of the "Book of the Universe" (i.e., scientific and social realities) to that of a source coequal with the "Book of Revelation." This bold perspective necessitates a shift in the center of gravity of authority, away from the monopoly of the "*'ulamā' al-nuṣūṣ*" (scholars of the text) toward an equal partnership with the "*'ulamā' al-wāqi'*" (scholars of reality). Jasser Auda (2008), through his intelligent application of "systems theory," redefines "*Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah*" as a dynamic and futurist legal philosophy. By moving beyond the traditional concept of "protection" toward concepts like "development" and "rights," and by distinguishing between variable "means" and constant "ends," he endows Islamic jurisprudence with extraordinary flexibility to confront the complex challenges of the future.

1-3. Third Current: Founding the Paradigm and Visioning Civilizational Futures

The third current adopts a macro-level, civilizational approach, seeking to present foundational worldviews that can serve as the basis for the reconstruction of Islamic civilization in the twenty-first century. Isma'il al-Faruqi, in his classic work *Al-Tawhid*, introduces " *Monotheism* " not merely as a creed, but as the "first determining principle" and the master key to understanding all components of Islamic civilization. From his perspective, this Monotheistic worldview entails an "ethic of action" in which humanity, as the "vicegerent of God" (*Khalīfah*), is obligated to transform and cultivate the world (al-Faruqi, 1992). This inspiring project was later continued in the works of thinkers associated with the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) under the banner of the "Islamization of Knowledge."

Ikram Azam (2004), inspired by Iqbal Lahori, endeavored to codify "Islamic futures studies" as an independent academic discipline. By distinguishing between "Islamic Futures Studies" (as philosophy and vision) and "Islamic Foresight" (as science and application), he identifies the "Perennial Peace Paradigm" as the ultimate goal of this discipline. Mahdi Elmandjra (1992), as a professional futurist, takes a more practical approach; while offering a frank critique of the internal shortcomings of the Muslim world, he insists on the necessity of creating a "grand and inspiring vision" and relying on "indigenous development." Anwar Ibrahim, by proposing the idea of an "Asian Renaissance," calls for a future in which economic growth

is balanced with social justice and a meaningful return to the spiritual values of Asian traditions (as cited in Muzaffar, 1997).

2. Summary and Identification of the Research Gap

A review of these three intellectual currents clearly shows that although each of these thinkers and currents has been studied individually, there is a scarcity of research that comprehensively and systematically synthesizes these diverse perspectives into a coherent framework and charts an "intellectual roadmap" for Islamic futures studies from the viewpoint of non-Iranians. This article precisely seeks to fill this research gap and strives, through critical analysis and a combination of these views, to present an integrated, deep, and multi-dimensional picture of this liberatory intellectual project.

3. Research Methodology

From a philosophical perspective, this research is situated within the interpretivist paradigm, as its primary goal is to achieve a deep and interpretive understanding of the concepts, worldviews, and arguments of thinkers within a complex theoretical field. The research approach is inductive, meaning that we began by studying and analyzing data—namely, the texts and works of these thinkers—and gradually moved toward identifying patterns and presenting a conceptual framework. The main research strategy has been the documentary analysis of primary and secondary sources, and it follows a mono-method qualitative design. Within this framework, data were collected through a comprehensive library study and systematic note-taking (*fiches*) from key works of selected thinkers (purposive sampling).

For the analysis of textual data, the method of thematic analysis, as described by Braun and Clarke (2006), was employed. This method, due to its flexibility and high capacity for identifying patterns of meaning across a large and diverse dataset, is considered an ideal tool for synthesizing the perspectives of various thinkers. The analysis process involved the detailed coding of data, followed by the categorization of these codes into primary categories and themes. The results of this analysis, which led to the identification of three overarching themes as the main framework of the Islamic futures studies discourse, will be presented and discussed in detail in the next section.

4. Discussion

The thematic analysis of the data from this research reveals three main and inclusive themes that collectively form the intellectual framework of Islamic

futures studies from the perspective of non-Iranian thinkers. These themes, like three acts of a coherent narrative, are as follows:

1. **Diagnosis of the Dual Crisis: External Colonization and Internal Stagnation;** this theme is formed from categories such as "epistemological colonization" and "internal intellectual stagnation."

2. **Presentation of a Two-Pronged Strategy: Decolonization of the Mind and a Dynamic Re-reading of Tradition;** this theme includes the categories of "decolonization of the mind" and a "dynamic re-reading of tradition."

3. **Envisioning Pluralistic Futures for a Preferred Future;** this theme encompasses categories such as the "Global Ummah," "multi-civilizational worlds," and "God-centered futures."

In the following, these findings will be discussed and examined in detail to illuminate the various dimensions of this intellectual project.

4-1. First Finding: Diagnosis of the Dual Crisis; External Colonization and Internal Stagnation

The point of departure and the cornerstone of the thought of all thinkers examined in this research is a precise, frank, and multi-dimensional diagnosis of the deep crisis that has engulfed the Muslim world in the contemporary era. They show that this crisis is not a mono-causal phenomenon but has a dual and intertwined nature: on one hand, an external challenge stemming from the hegemony and epistemological colonization of the West, and on the other hand, an internal challenge rooted in intellectual and structural stagnation. These two challenges, like the two blades of a pair of scissors, have severely weakened the agency and ability of Muslims to build an independent and desirable future.

a) **External Colonization: The Future as Occupied Territory:** At the external level, these thinkers view the future as an "occupied territory" (Sardar, 2003, p. 179). This occupation is more epistemological in nature than it is military or economic. Ziauddin Sardar and Ashis Nandy, as prominent representatives of postcolonial critique, argue that Western modernity, by presenting concepts like "development" and "progress" as universal and unilinear ideas, has effectively deprived other civilizations of their right to define the future based on their own indigenous values and worldviews. This process, which Sardar considers a direct result of the influence of "secularism" (Sardar, 1991), has in practice led to the devastation of traditional worldviews and social disintegration

in non-Western societies (Sardar, 2003). Nandy (1994), with a sharp and penetrating tone, calls this concept of "development" a "Trojan horse" and a "prostitute word" that continues colonialism under a new name. This epistemological colonization, rooted in "Orientalism" as a "deliberate misunderstanding" (Sardar, 2007), is reinforced in the contemporary era with new tools. Referring to the post-9/11 period, Sardar and Davies (2002) speak of the phenomenon of "Knowledgeable Ignorance": an institutionalized "mis-knowing" about Islam that stubbornly persists even in the face of contrary evidence and eliminates any possibility of dialogue for building a shared future.

The direct consequence of this epistemological colonization is the entrapment of Muslim societies in a phenomenon that Sohail Inayatullah (2008) calls "the used future." This concept eloquently describes a situation in which non-Western societies unconsciously adopt models and images of the future that have been designed, experienced, and even discarded by the West. This happens not only due to media dominance but also because of the colonization of "imagination" itself. When science fiction stories, films, and futures studies theories are predominantly products of the West (Milojevic & Inayatullah, 2003), the ability of other societies to envision different futures rooted in their own cultural metaphors and myths (such as the Islamic metaphor "Trust in God, but tie your camel") is severely limited (Inayatullah, 1998).

b) **Internal Stagnation: The Crisis of Agency and Nostalgia for the Past:** Simultaneously with this external pressure, a paralyzing internal crisis has weakened the Muslim world's capacity for resistance and innovation. Isma'il al-Faruqi (1992), in the introduction to his work, describes the Muslim Ummah with shocking frankness as the "unhappiest ummah in modern times," afflicted by disunity, impotence, and neglect of its primary mission. He and other thinkers like Mahdi Elmandjra (1992) diagnose the main root of this decline in the closing of the "gate of *ijtihād*" in the tenth and eleventh centuries (AH). That historical event gradually led to the dominance of a culture of imitation (*taqlīd*), a fear of innovation, and consequently, an inability to interpret Islam in connection with the needs of contemporary society (Sardar, 2003).

This intellectual stagnation manifests itself in two destructive phenomena. First, the reduction of Islam to *fiqh* (jurisprudence),

which, in Sardar's (2003) words, has "removed agency and social responsibility from the shoulders of believers" and reduced religion to a set of individual rulings. Second, nostalgia for an idealized past. Inayatullah (2005) identifies this phenomenon as the greatest obstacle to futurist thinking in the Muslim world, because, through the "error of misplaced concretism," it defines progress as a literal return to the era of the Rightly Guided Caliphs. He quotes El-Affendi (1991) to point out that in such a view, there is no need to create a Utopia, because "the perfect world has already existed," and the main issue is simply "to regain that state." This view of the past, as Sherman Jackson (2009) aptly demonstrates in the context of the Black American community, strips religion of its ability to provide meaningful theological responses to historical suffering and new challenges, exposing it to the risk of dysfunction.

Therefore, the first and most important finding of this research is that Islamic futures studies, from the perspective of these thinkers, begin with a "precise and dual formulation of the problem." Instead of offering simplistic solutions, they first dissect this complex crisis and show that any project for building the future must simultaneously fight on two fronts: the epistemological colonization from without that constrains imagination, and the intellectual stagnation from within that paralyzes agency. This comprehensive diagnosis is the cornerstone of all the strategies and visions that will be presented hereafter.

4-2. Second Finding: A Two-Pronged Strategy; Decolonization of the Mind and a Dynamic Re-reading of Tradition

After a precise and multi-dimensional diagnosis of the crisis, the thinkers under consideration present strategies that are equally comprehensive and two-pronged. They have correctly understood that a one-dimensional solution, whether purely critical or purely intra-religious, will be incapable of confronting this complex crisis. Therefore, their proposed strategy rests on a simultaneous and coordinated movement on two fronts: on one hand, the decolonization of the mind and of dominant concepts as a critical and liberatory project, and on the other hand, a creative and methodical re-reading of the Islamic tradition to activate its internal capacities as a constructive and identity-building project. These two strategies are not only not contradictory but are vital complements to each other; without the

realization of both, any attempt at future-making will end in either passivity before the West or in isolation and regression.

a) **Decolonization of the Mind and the Future: A Critical and Liberatory Project:** The first and most necessary step on this path is a deep intellectual project to liberate the Muslim mind from colonial epistemological frameworks. These thinkers go beyond superficial political or economic critiques to target the epistemological roots of Western dominance. Ashis Nandy (1987), emphasizing that colonialism at its core is the "organized suppression of the cultural life of the people," concludes that the "reaffirmation of cultural traditions" must be at the heart of any anti-colonial struggle. This means reclaiming the "categories used by the victims" and challenging modern specialism. By presenting the concept of "critical traditionalism," he shows us a path that seeks neither a dogmatic defense of the past nor its museum building, but rather a creative reinterpretation of traditions to respond to today's challenges.

Sohail Inayatullah takes this critical project beyond the purely theoretical realm by providing practical methodological tools. The "Causal Layered Analysis" (CLA) method, which he developed, helps analysts to move beyond the surface of everyday phenomena and short-term solutions (the litany) and to penetrate deeper layers, namely systemic causes, discourses/worldviews, and ultimately, the unconscious myths and metaphors that shape social reality (Inayatullah, 1998). He also, by distinguishing between "strategic foresight" (which is based on competition) and "transformative foresight" (which emphasizes the transformation of self and other), proposes a process for questioning the official and assumed future (Inayatullah & Sweeney, 2020).

Sherman Jackson also offers a practical strategy for marginalized communities with the concept of "appropriation." Appropriation means "the taking on of a set of non-native ideas or doctrines in one's own existential or ideological struggle" (Jackson, 2005, p. 28). This process allows the Black American Muslim community to redefine Islam based on their historical and existential needs, without completely surrendering to the cultural authority of "Immigrant Islam." Together, these approaches form a coherent plan of action for the "decolonization of the future" and the reclaiming of the fundamental right to imagination, conceptual definition, and future narration.

b) **A Dynamic Re-reading of Tradition: A Constructive and Identity-Building Project:** The second prong of this strategy, which is no less vital than the first, is an affirmative and constructive project to return to authentic Islamic sources and reactivate their dynamic capacities. By reopening the "gate of *ijtihād*" in an institutionalized and systematic manner (Sardar, 1988), these thinkers seek to breathe new life into the body of Islamic thought.

Isma'il al-Faruqi (1992), by returning to the most fundamental principle of Islam, transforms "monotheism" *(Tawhid)* from an abstract theological creed into an active worldview and an "ethic of action." In this view, monotheism entails that humanity, as the "vicegerent of God" (*Khalīfah*), takes on the responsibility of "transforming creation" to realize the divine pattern. This perspective liberates Islam from any fatalism and isolationism and turns it into a "world-affirming" religion in which building history and cultivating the world is a sacred religious duty.

Tariq Ramadan (2009) takes this re-reading project to its peak by presenting the concept of "Transformation Reform." By distinguishing between "fixed principles" (*thābit*) and "variable aspects" (*mutaghayyir*), he argues that faithfulness to Islam requires constant reform and "renewal" (*tajdīd*) in understanding its variable aspects. The pinnacle of his theory is the introduction of the "Book of the Universe" as a source of knowledge coequal with the "Book of Revelation" (The Text). This means that empirical and human sciences are no longer merely auxiliary tools for understanding the text, but have themselves become an "independent and complementary source for deriving law and ethics." This revolutionary approach opens the way for an entirely new *ijtihād* whose goal is not just to adapt to the world, but to change it based on a comprehensive Islamic ethic.

In the same vein, Jasser Auda (2008), by employing "systems theory," redefines "*Maqāṣid al-Sharī‘ah*" as the legal philosophy of an open and dynamic system capable of interacting with changing realities and of "self-renewal." By intelligently distinguishing between variable "means" and constant "ends," as well as elevating the concept of *‘urf* (custom) to "cognitive culture" and the worldview of the jurist, he grants Shari'ah extraordinary flexibility to confront future transformations. Sherman Jackson (2009), by referring to the rich treasury of classical theological schools, also shows how concepts like "authority" (*ikhtiyār*) in the Mu'tazilite view or

"wisdom" (*ḥikmah*) in the Maturidi perspective can, respectively, provide a powerful theological basis for "active resistance" against injustice and "resilience in the face of suffering." Ikram Azam (2004) also, by redefining "*Jihād*" as the "unrelenting effort in peace and for peace," transforms it into a tool for creative and peaceful social change.

In conclusion, the second finding of this research clearly shows that the strategy proposed by these thinkers is a dual and coordinated one. From their perspective, Islamic futures studies requires both a "critical gaze outward" to break free from epistemological dominance and a "constructive gaze inward" to revive intellectual and spiritual dynamism. These two movements are the two wings of a bird, without either of which flight toward an independent and desirable future is impossible. This approach, in the words of Sardar (1988), is the only way that can transform the "stagnant pool" of Islamic civilization into a dynamic and life-giving stream.

4-3. Third Finding: Envisioning Pluralistic Futures for a Preferred Future; From the Global Ummah to Multi-Civilizational Worlds

After diagnosing the crisis and presenting two-pronged strategies, these thinkers proceed to envision "preferred futures." A noteworthy point that indicates the intellectual maturity of this current is the absence of a single, uniform blueprint for the future. The preferred future, in the view of these thinkers, is not an abstract and pre-determined utopia, but rather a set of "Futures" (Sardar, 2011) that are shaped based on shared principles and values but with different structures and manifestations. These visions can be analyzed on two levels: first, their shared ethical and social foundations, and second, the diverse political and civilizational structures they propose.

   a) **The Shared Ethical and Social Foundations of the Preferred Future:** Despite differences in the final structure, all the visions presented are built upon a set of shared values and ethical foundations. The first and most important principle is justice. Anwar Ibrahim (as cited in Muzaffar, 1997), in explaining the "Asian Renaissance," explicitly declares that economic growth must always be balanced with a profound concern for social justice and equity. This concern for justice is elevated to the concept of Liberation in Tariq Ramadan's (2009) "transformation reform" project, meaning that the ultimate goal of Islamic ethics is not just individual improvement, but the struggle against oppressive structures and the

liberation of all human beings. This call for justice is rooted in the "world-affirming" worldview of al-Faruqi (1992), who considers building a just order in this world a religious duty for humanity and establishes an unbreakable link between "knowledge and justice" (Sardar, 1988).

The second shared principle is peace and coexistence. Ikram Azam (2004), by presenting the "Perennial Peace Paradigm" as the ultimate goal of Islamic futures studies and redefining "*Jihād al-Akbar*" as "creative, co-creative peaceful coexistence," places this principle at the core of his vision. This perspective stands in direct opposition to extremist and violent narratives of Islam and emphasizes the peaceful nature of the Islamic message.

The third foundation is human dignity and active agency. All these thinkers envision a preferred future as one in which humanity, as the "vicegerent of God" (*Khalīfah*) (al-Faruqi, 1992), possesses inherent dignity and has the necessary agency to shape its own destiny. This emphasis on agency stands against any form of fatalism or determinism and transforms the human being into a "The Human Change Agent", who bears the moral and spiritual responsibility to improve the world (Azam, 2004). This view is also reflected in Sherman Jackson's (2009) critique of "secular Human-centered "; he seeks a "God-centered" future in which the struggle for justice is not in opposition to faith, but is precisely founded upon it.

b) **Diverse Political and Civilizational Structures of the Future:** Upon the foundation of these shared values, different thinkers chart different political and civilizational structures for the future, which demonstrates the dynamism and flexibility of this intellectual current. Isma'il al-Faruqi (1992), with a macro and universal perspective, puts forward the vision of a "Global Ummah." This Ummah is a transnational social order based not on race or geography, but on an ideology and a shared commitment to Tawhid, with the ultimate goal of establishing "Pax Islamica" (Islamic Peace). This political structure is a "Nomocracy" or the rule of divine law, not a theocracy.

In contrast to this universal view, thinkers like Sherman Jackson and Tariq Ramadan focus on building concrete and indigenous identities in specific contexts. Jackson (2005), by presenting the vision of the "Third Resurrection," seeks to build a "self-authenticating" and autonomous Black American Muslim

community in America—a community that, while remaining faithful to the global Islamic tradition, "appropriates" it to respond to the needs of its specific context. Tariq Ramadan (1999), by moving beyond the classical division of *dār al-islām* and *dār al-ḥarb*, proposes the concept of "dār al-shahādah" (the land of testimony) as a model for the future of Muslims in the West. In this model, Muslims become active citizens who, through their constructive presence, bear witness to the ethical and spiritual values of Islam in Western societies.

On another level, Ziauddin Sardar and Sohail Inayatullah, with a postcolonial perspective, go beyond a single, unified future and propose the vision of "Multi-civilizational Futures" (Sardar, 2003). This view holds that the preferred future is one in which different civilizations emerge and coexist with their own criteria and values. Inayatullah's (2005) preferred scenario for the Muslim world, namely "The Virtuous Spiral," is a manifestation of this same view: a future in which Islam, while preserving its identity, enters into a dialogue with modernity, builds its own alternative science (Sardar, 1989), and achieves a post-postmodern society that is balanced both spiritually and materially. This vision is perfectly aligned with the view of Ashis Nandy (1989), who sees the future of humanity as dependent on the "recovery of the other selves of cultures" and on hearing the voices of the margins (the shamans).

In conclusion, the third finding shows that the preferred future in the view of these thinkers is not a one-dimensional utopia. Rather, it is a set of pluralistic possibilities, all of which are based on the shared foundations of justice, peace, and human dignity, but which recognize diversity and variety in their civilizational and political manifestations. This vision seeks not to impose a single model on the world, but to create a space for the peaceful coexistence of "pluralistic futures"—futures that, in the words of the Holy Qur'an cited by Ikram Azam (2004, p. 11), belong to the God-conscious and the pious.

4-4. Final Conclusion

This research, conducted to analyze and synthesize the perspectives of prominent non-Iranian thinkers on Islamic futures studies, concludes that this intellectual current is a profoundly critical, methodical, and liberatory intellectual project that seeks to reclaim agency and the right to self-determination for the Muslim world. In response to the main research

question, it can be said that these thinkers conceptualize Islamic futures studies not as a technical exercise in predicting the future, but as a "transformative project" resting on two main pillars: (1) a postcolonial criticism and the decolonization of dominant concepts, and (2) a dynamic and methodical re-reading of the Islamic tradition.

The present analysis has shown that the starting point of this project is a precise diagnosis of the dual crisis that has enveloped the Muslim world: on one hand, the "epistemological colonization" by the West that has turned the future into an "occupied territory" (Sardar, 2003), and on the other hand, an "internal intellectual stagnation" resulting from the closing of the gate of *ijtihād* and the prevalence of nostalgia for the past (Elmandjra, 2005; Inayatullah, 2005). In confronting this crisis, these thinkers present a two-pronged strategy. On one hand, they use critical postcolonial tools to "deconstruct" imposed concepts and decolonize the mind (Nandy, 1987), and on the other hand, through a creative return to tradition, they activate the dynamic capacities of concepts such as *Tawhid* (al-Faruqi, 1992), *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* (Auda, 2008), and theology (*kalām*) (Jackson, 2009) for shaping the future. This dual approach, which culminates in Tariq Ramadan's (2009) concept of "transformation reform," prevents falling into the trap of West-toxification or regression.

Ultimately, the preferred vision of these thinkers is not a monolithic and pre-determined future, but a world based on "pluralistic futures." These futures, although diverse in their political and civilizational structures (from al-Faruqi's Global Ummah to Ramadan's *dār al-shahādah* and Sardar's multi-civilizational worlds), are all founded on the shared ethical foundations of justice, peace, and human dignity. Therefore, Islamic futures studies in this school of thought is not an escape from the present or a return to the past, but rather a responsible and courageous engagement with the complexities of the contemporary world to create a future that is both faithful to revelatory principles and responsive to the needs of humanity today and tomorrow.

5. Suggestions for Future Research

Given the findings and limitations of this research, the following suggestions for future studies are presented:

1. **Conducting Comparative Studies:** It is suggested that comparative research be conducted between the views of these non-Iranian thinkers and prominent Iranian thinkers in the field of futurist thought, to examine the points of convergence, divergence, and the possibilities for dialogue between these two intellectual domains.

2. **Expanding Linguistic and Geographical Scope:** Conducting research that focuses on thinkers from other linguistic spheres (especially Arabic and French) could significantly help to complete the picture presented in this article. Examining the thoughts of thinkers from North Africa or Indonesia could add new dimensions to this discussion.

3. **Applied and Case-Study Research:** It is suggested that research with a practical approach be undertaken to examine how the theoretical frameworks presented by these thinkers (such as Causal Layered Analysis or transformation reform) can be applied in cultural, educational, and economic policymaking in Muslim countries. A case study of a social movement or a reformist institution inspired by these ideas could be very insightful.

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