

## Critical Islam and the Muslim Crisis: Z. Sardar's Double Critique of Western Modernity and Muslim Orthodoxy

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### ABSTRACT

Critical Islam is a Muslim discourse that fundamentally questions contemporary Muslim societies, traditions, and cultures in response to the crisis in Muslim societies, amidst the rise in violence, authoritarianism, and foreign military interventions. This school of thought represents a new development in Islamic thought and an attempt to overcome the problems posed by tradition and modernity. This article examined the British-Pakistani intellectual Ziauddin Sardar's views of critical Islam. My approach, which is based on intellectual history, places his arguments and theses in the context of the intellectual networks in which they originated as well as the developments that have taken place in the Muslim world over the last two centuries. One of the main findings, underlined here, is that Sardar offers an innovative and dual critique of the West and the Muslim tradition from an ethical and epistemic perspective. Additionally, the goal of his critical Islam is to change, pluralize, and end violence in the Muslim world. However, Sardar's project is elitist and lacks spiritual appeal for the great majority of Muslims. Therefore, it should be interpreted as an intellectual critical engagement with Islam and the West that emphasizes personal emancipation.

**Keywords:** *Critical Islam, Ziauddin Sardar, Double Critique, Western Modernity, Muslim Orthodoxy*

### Introduction

The modernist, reformist, and traditionalist schools of thought have mostly dominated Islamic thought for the past thirty years or so. The reformists try to reconcile tradition and modernity in some way, while the traditionalists view every matter through the prism of Muslim tradition and the modernists approach tradition through the prism of modernity. However, intellectual historians perceive layers and subtleties within the modernist school of thought. While some thinkers emphasize reason, which is the focus of enlightened Islam, others emphasize freedom, which is the main contribution of the so-called liberal Islam. Critical Islam, albeit it shares with enlightened and liberal Islam most of its premises, seeks to examine and reinterpret Islamic textual sources, as well as to directly adapt the ethical core of the founding scriptures into modern contexts without the need for centuries of dogmatic theology and rigid law (Mandaville, 2003).

The majority of critical Muslim intellectuals operate a single critique of the Muslim heritage, with a particular emphasis on critique of the Muslim scriptures, religious thought, theology, and law. Thinkers who offer a double critique of tradition and modernity are uncommon, and Z. Sardar is a major voice among these thinkers. As formulated by the Moroccan philosopher 'Abd

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al-Kabīr al-Khaṭībī, double critique, *naqd muzdawji*, is an approach to discredit any ideology or theology that asserts authenticity or absolute unity, questioning both Arab and Western cultures, destroying any notion of unity or universality. According to him, double critique entails drawing attention to the differences that exist in the Arab world on all levels, including those between societies, political wills, cultural norms, and international levels, all of which call for ongoing critical engagement (al-Khaṭībī, 1980; al-Khatibi, 2015; Sabih 2015). Therefore, double critique is the right to difference rather than identity, an idea that opens a whole range of possibilities.

The concept of critique itself is not free from its own paradigm of approaching phenomena and can become enmeshed in the history of religion and philosophy in the West (Asad, 2009). However, it can be a freeing tool from the discriminatory practice of Western critique as well as the traps of the Muslim tradition (or any other tradition that restricts questioning) (Mas, 2012). It is a mindset that challenges our thinking tools and what we take for granted. Therefore, critical Islam would be both a critical attitude toward the Western ways of analyzing Islam and reality that are imported from Western study of religions, as well as an interrogative attitude toward Islam as a tradition and reality molded by numerous influences.

## Methods

Sardar's critical discourse is a combination of philosophical and theological claims and arguments, rooted in the history of Islamic thought and post-modern philosophy, and some political claims, which are involved in social actions and liberation movements. For this reason, I utilized an intellectual history and sociology method that situates his arguments and theses within the framework of the intellectual networks in which they developed as well as the changes that have occurred in Muslim cultures over the past 200 years. I also stress Sardar's numerous settings, having lived in the West and the Muslim world, and seen significant limits on thought and freedom in both worlds. After reviewing the idea of critical Islam in academic and intellectual discourses, I examined Sardar's theses on what it means to be a critical Muslim. I conclude the article by evaluating his viewpoint on critique in terms of its resources and constraints.

## Critical Islam

Although several critical approaches to Islam can be identified, they can be grouped into two categories: approaches in which Islam is the object of critique and those in which Islam is the tool of criticism. The two methods are combined in Sardar's twofold critical methodology: some components of Islam are the object of criticism, which is Islam as traditionalist theology, law and practices. However, Sardar also criticizes the West using certain tools borrowed from Islamic spirituality and esthetics that were shaped in the Muslim past. Such sophisticated toolkit demands knowledge of Islamic tradition as well as of intellectual history in the West, which Sardar has command of both.

I begin with the first type of approach, since it has been the most dominant on the Arab-Muslim intellectual scene for half a century. The history of criticism of Islam in its foundations within modern Arab-Muslim thought can be divided into three major moments; the first moment is the publication of *Naqd al-fikr al-dīnī* (*Criticism of Religious Thought*) by the Syrian thinker Ṣādiq Jalāl al-'Aẓm in 1969, which earned him a trial in Lebanon. Al-'Aẓm criticised the Satan narrative in the Qur'an, the hypocrisy of religious authorities and belief in miracles, mainly, adopting a materialistic view of the world (al-'Aẓm, 1969). The second moment was the publication of two works in 1984: firstly, *Pour une critique de la raison islamique* (*A Critique of Islamic Reason*) by M. Arkoun, which called for the study of Muslim thought through religious anthropology and applied Islamology, criticizing the myths of Muslim consciousness and calling for historicisation in order to reconstruct Islam, and deconstruct its relationship to power, divine sovereignty and authority, the links between religion and society, and the crisis of Islam and secularization

(Arkoun, 1984); then, the publication in the same year of the first volume of *Naqd al-'aql al-'arabi* (*Critique of Arab Reason*) by M. 'Abid al-Jābirī, which is a critique of the formation of Arab reason since classical Islam by grammarians, Bedouins, jurist-theologians and mystics, who in his opinion prevented rationalism from taking root in classical Muslim thought (al-Jābirī, 1984). The third moment occurred with the publication of *Naqd al-khiṭāb al-dīnī* (*Criticism of Religious Discourse*) by Naṣr Ḥamid Zayd, A. in 1992, a critique of the tools of Muslim thought, including the unification between thought and religion, reducing phenomena to a single principle, relying on the authority of tradition and the *salaf*, dogmatic certainty and intellectual intransigence, neglecting the historical dimension and believing in divine sovereignty and the centrality of the religious text, which all stand as arguments in support of political, traditionalist, and official Islam (Zayd, A., 1992). Though the emphasis has switched to criticism of political Islam and the dismantling of its religious-political myths, these three pivotal periods continue to have an impact on critical Islamic thought.

Recently, some Muslim intellectuals, particularly in South Asia (Hussain, 2021; Ahmad, 2017), perceive Islam as a critique of inter- and intra-Muslim practices and discourses. The meaning and function of this criticism often remain ambiguous and, depending on the context, can in fact mean any critical discussion by Muslims. This type of criticism can be traced back to the reformist writings of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and especially to Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817-1898), and his view of Islam as an immanent critique of the West (Hussain, 2021). In Indonesia, through the voices of Abdurrahman Wahid, Moeslim Abdurrahman, and Mansour Fakih, critical Islam can create a paradigm for social transformation and liberation in specific situations (Abbas, 2018). Nurfazri and Irwansyah have more recently emphasized that critical thinking is an essential component of the Islamic intellectual legacy and is still required for the faith to interact with the contemporary world (Nurfazri and Irwansyah, 2024).

Within scholarly literature, critical Islam is understood as independent Islamic thought, or *ijtihād* (Shani, 2007); this discourse is also more inclined to contextualize and, to some extent, relativize doctrines and normative codes in order to promote a more skeptical and diverse understanding of Islam (Hoffmann, 2008). Critical Islam addresses as well the underlying causes of contemporary ethical, theological, legal, social, and political issues in the Muslim world by reforming the inherited pre-modern Muslim traditions in a comprehensive and methodical manner (Duderija, 2013). Mohammed Moussa argues that critical Islam is a critique of the Muslim tradition that entails resolving the obvious problematic connections between the past and present through interpretation. In particular, it fosters the critical rereading of the Qur'an and Prophetic traditions on the one hand, and accumulated exegeses on the other, as well as the critical application of jurisprudential norms, principles, and methodologies to seek God's will (Moussa, 2021). Critical Islam, in Rafique Wassan's perspective, is progressive and challenges the dominance of Islamist literalist dogmatism in Muslim religious discourse (Rafique Wassan, 2021, p. 851). Critical Islam, according to Muhammadong and Junaedi, is emancipatory and begins with a critical reflection and theorization of change as people are granted the freedom to express their ideals. Religious texts are utilized as a vehicle for emancipation, although emancipatory understandings arise from outside the text in the shape of human concerns that deconstruct and dismantle the texts (Muhammadong and Junaedi, 2021).

According to Soufi, critical Islam is the ability of jurists to think more widely and reevaluate their positions as part of *fiqh*, or legal discourse. To bolster their arguments and disprove those of their opponents, jurists used critical thinking techniques. He views the discussion of legal arguments, *munāzara*, as an Islamic ethical criticism, illustrating the connection between piety and knowledge in the context of the historic disagreements among Muslim jurists. This religious criticism makes the assumption that all Muslim legal schools required *ijtihād*, or independent legal reasoning, and that jurists found it exceptional that they could agree (Soufi, 2023). Hashas views critical Islam as distinct from both orthodox and ultra-orthodox Islam. For him, it is a

set of critical projects that develop forms of aspirations for true emancipation and renewal by intellectually engaging with the socio-political reality of the entire Arab-Islamic world. These projects prioritize equality, freedom, and ethics and are neither Islamist nor Islamic (Hashas, 2024). Thus, critical Islam encompasses both reformists and modernists. Elhinnawy contends that critical Islam is a progressive school of thought that is aimed at defeating Islamists who want to control the modern state and enforce divine law and the authority of religious scholars who advocate for a literal interpretation of religious texts (Elhinnawy, 2024). Sehlkoglou and Kurt envisage discussing the issue of critique inside Islam and modern Islamic thinking as part of the reexamination of non-western critique traditions (Sehlkoglou and Kurt, 2024). Islamic feminism, which was described as a form of feminism “often focused on the right to be different,” is also becoming more and more linked to critical Islam (Jarmer, 2024). Finally, Iqtidar asserts that interacting with various canons within the larger Islamic tradition will result in various interpretations of Islam and may be unique forums for critique (Iqtidar, 2024).

To set the stage for our investigation of Sardar’s critical Muslim discourse, I have so far examined scholarly works on critical Islam. Now let us review the most recent studies on Sardar’s thought in general. Sardar, Serra, and Jordan have highlighted Sardar’s concept of postnormal times and the chaotic situation of Muslim societies in postnormal times in terms of demography, climate, politics, economy, and science, emphasizing the intricate problems at hand and the potential solutions (Sardar, Serra and Jordan, 2019). Mohammad Shafiq and Naqeeb Hussain (2020) highlight Sardar’s initiative to reinterpret sharia as ethics and use *ijtihad* to advance religious freedom and create a fair and forward-thinking society. Abdelwahab El-Affendi explored Sardar’s transition from Islamism, in which he was an active member throughout his youth, to dissident and post-Islamism (El-Affendi, 2022). Chris Jones draws attention to Sardar’s postnormal theory, which emphasizes the need for more varied and optimistic postnormal futures as well as the complexity, paradoxes, and chaotic upheavals of our time (Jones, 2022). Thameem Ushama and Helal Uddin contend that for Sardar one cannot use the process of knowledge production to subjugate a specific civilization. Since knowledge integration is the best process for our evolving world, a comprehensive, varied, integrated, and universal strategy is required (Helal Uddin and Thameem Ushama, 2024). Sayful Islam and Md. Maruf Hasan emphasize Sardar’s appeal for Muslims to reject the Islamization of knowledge paradigm and adopt the integration of knowledge agenda as a cosmopolitan approach to Islamic revival (Maruf Hasan and Sayful Islam, 2024).

Despite highlighting important facets of Sardar’s work, these studies do not address his double criticism of Islamic orthodoxy and Western modernity or his own critical Muslim discourse. This essay is aimed at closing this gap in the literature. In the following, I will be discussing Ziauddin Sardar’s ideas on critical discourse on Islam while also trying to explore the possibilities and boundaries of his thought.

### ***Ziauddin Sardar: An intellectual trajectory***

Critical Muslim is a think-tank of around ten Muslim thinkers in Great Britain led by Ziauddin Sardar, who edits the journal *Critical Muslim* and The Muslim Institute in London. The group’s approach to critical Islam is based on the principles of dialogue, innovation, questioning of traditionalist, modernist, fundamentalist, and apologetic currents in Islam, openness and plurality. In what follows, I propose to explore the career and some of the ideas of Z. Sardar’s background and some of his ideas, before discussing the broad outlines of the Critical Muslim project.

Ziauddin Sardar is a British-Pakistani academic, intellectual, and journalist who has contributed a number of original ideas to Muslim thought, particularly in relation to science, criticism, the future, and modernity. Sardar was born in 1951 in Dipalpur, Pakistan. In 1961, he moved with his parents to Hackney, East London. In 1969, he published *Zenith*, ‘a monthly magazine by and

for young Muslims in Britain'. In 1971, he was elected General Secretary of FOSIS (Federation of Student Islamic Societies). Between 1971 and 1974, he studied physics and information science at City University, London. In 1974, he worked on the creation of the 'Muslim Institute for Research and Planning' in London. In 1977, he published his first book, *Science, Technology and Development in the Muslim World*. In 1979, he published *The Future of Muslim Civilization*, the first scientific attempt to examine the potential future of Islamic societies. In 1981, he published *The Touch of Midas: Science, Values, and Environment in Islam and the West*. In 1983, he founded and coordinated a group of Muslim intellectuals who described themselves as 'the Ijmalis' (those who value beauty, *jamāl*). In 1984, he launched and edited the monthly *Inquiry*, a 'magazine of events and ideas'. In 1985, he presented 'Encounters with Islam', a series of programs for the BBC and set up the Centre for Policy and Future Studies at East-West University, Chicago. In 1994, he published *Muhammad for Beginners*, the first of seven books for beginners. In 1997, he organized the international Islamic conference 'Dawa and the Development of the Muslim World: A View of the Future' in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, and published his first critique of postmodernism with *Postmodernism and the Other: The New Imperialism of Western Culture*. In 1999, he became editor of *Futures*, the monthly journal of politics, planning and futures studies. In 2001, he became co-editor of *Third Text*, the fortnightly critical journal of visual art and culture. In 2002, he was appointed Professor of Postcolonial Studies in the School of Art Policy and Management at City University, London. In 2004, he published the first volume of his autobiography, *Desperately Seeking Paradise: Journeys of a Sceptical Muslim*. That same year, he gave the British Council's 70th anniversary lecture, *Beyond Difference: Cultural Relations in a New Century*, which introduced the notion of mutually assured diversity (MAD). In 2009, he was recruited by the UK government as a member of the Interim National Security Forum and relaunched the Muslim Institute in London. In 2010, he was appointed Professor of Law and Society at Middlesex University. In 2011, he published *Reading the Qur'an* and wrote 'Life of Mohammad', a series of three documentaries for the BBC. In 2012, he published and edited the quarterly *Critical Muslim*. In 2017, he worked on the 'Higher Education Reform' project for the International Institute of Islamic Thought and wrote the key paper on 'The Evolution from Islamisation to Knowledge Integration' (Sardar, 2018).

Sardar's intellectual trajectory has been marked by a double movement of closeness to and distance from Islam and the West. On the one hand, he has collaborated with Saudi Arabia as well as with the British and Malaysian governments, and has worked for the British media as well as Islamic actors close to the Muslim Brotherhood. On the other, he has maintained a critical intellectual distance from both Islam and the West. He took on the challenge of calling to resurrect or relaunch the dimensions of science, ethics, aesthetics, and critique that are currently lacking in the Muslim world. However, he also criticized imperialism and Western thought. Sardar makes an uncompromising assessment of the current state of Islam:

*What the fateful events of that day reveal, more than anything else, is the distance we have travelled away from the spirit and import of Islam. Far from being a liberating force, a kinetic social, cultural and intellectual dynamic for equality, justice and humane values, Islam seems to have acquired a pathological strain. Indeed, it seems to me that we have internalised all those historic and contemporary western representations of Islam and Muslims that have been demonising us for centuries. We now actually wear the garb, I have to confess, of the very demons that the west has been projecting on our collective personality (Inayatullah & Boxwell, 2003).*

This approach, which involves rethinking Islam as responsible for its own fate, breaks with the prevailing discourse in post-colonial and Islamist circles of Islam as the victim of the West. It places Islam as a religion within a vision of the world in which political and social structures, economic enterprises, science and technology, the environment, thought and law interact (Inayatullah & Boxwell, 2003). The challenge is not only to rethink the Muslim tradition, but also to have a vision of the future of Islam as a civilization different from both modernity and postmodernity (Inayatullah & Boxwell, 2003). In these respects, Sardar's thinking is similar to that

of the Algerian thinker Malek Bennabi (1905-1973), who considered the issues of Islam's decline and its rebirth as a civilization on the basis of internal factors relating to the management of time, human resources and territory, which make up the civilizational spirit (Seniguer, 2014). Sardar's thinking is also close to that of the Moroccan economist and futurologist Mahdi Elmandjra (1933-2014), particularly with regard to the future of Islam and science (Wan Zakaria, 2010).

### ***The Tenets of Critical Islam***

Sardar contends that a Muslim is by definition critical, as Islam does not demand blind acceptance of anything. It is possible to critically examine every aspect of Islam, including the existence of God. Islam positions itself as a creed that can be rationally justified. And one can be a Muslim only after considering and contemplating the "signs of God" as they appear in the material universe, the laws of nature, and individual encounters with the Divine do the faithful develop true faith (Sardar, 2007). Therefore, critical thinking and independent reasoning are part of what defines a Muslim, not the generally held view that one should submit to God as a passive recipient of knowledge and beliefs that have been passed down. This is similar to how Mu'tazila theologians and philosophers view religion and free will.

Z. Sardar argues that criticism and self-criticism are the engines of progress, yet they are avoided and proscribed in Muslim circles by appealing to the divine nature of Islamic law; this is because of authoritarianism, lack of social justice, and lack of peace (Sardar, 2008). It is therefore necessary first to explore the social and cultural causes of religious and political authoritarianism in the world of Islam, before looking for other causes. For Sardar, rethinking Islam can only be achieved through the reconstruction of Islamic civilization, by seeking the relevance of the religious sources of Islam in the contemporary context, and by accepting the principle of the permanent change of societies and norms (Wan Zakaria, 2010). Sardar believes that the essence of Islam is ethical and consists in living a renewed interpretive relationship with the Qur'an and the prophetic model as a symbol of moral values (Wan Zakaria, 2010).

With regard to the Qur'an, in 2011 Sardar published *Reading the Qur'an: The Contemporary Relevance of the Sacred Text of Islam*, which was a publishing success. Sardar's hermeneutical method revolves around three principles: ethics, critical engagement, and global hermeneutics of the text-context, borrowing heavily from Fazlur Rahman the Pakistani modernist thinker. To illustrate Sardar's method, I take his interpretation of the Qur'anic terms lawful (*ḥalāl*) and unlawful (*ḥarām*):

*Things change. What is 'good on earth' in one particular context may not be so good in another context. As such, good is not defined once and for all. It has to be constantly sought, re-established from context to context, through critical engagement. This is one of the most notable virtues of 'a community of the middle way': it adjusts to change, younger generations constantly question their fathers and forefathers, as society itself and our moral consciousness with it evolves and our understanding of what classifies as good changes. Goodness, therefore, is not a manifestation of outward forms: it 'does not consist in turning your face towards East or West'. The Qur'an stresses the principle that mere compliance with rituals, or external forms such as beard or dress, does not fulfill the requirements of piety. Beyond belief, goodness is based on certain virtues: on patience (those 'who are steadfast in misfortune, adversity and times of danger'), on integrity ('who keep pledges whenever they make them') and on gratitude ('who keep up the prayer'). (Sardar, 2011)*

This reading of the Qur'an is a criticism of traditionalism, which takes Qur'anic injunctions literally; Sardar, therefore, calls for a shift from literalism to hermeneutics and from religious law to ethics, by exploiting a Qur'anic principle of criticism of ancestor worship, a sin of which Quraysh, the Prophet's adversary, was guilty of according to the Qur'anic account. He proposes the idea of criticizing ancestors, which can take many forms depending on the situation but is always the antidote to ancestor worship among traditionalists of all stripes.

In his critique of Islamist violence, Sardar urges people to start looking for light in order to break free from the confines of orthodox. The orthodox interpretation of the Qur'an and hadith is one such confinement. In his own words:

*The escape from Islamic orthodoxy begins with asking critical questions. Regarding the Qur'an, for example, we need to ask: Is every injunction in the Sacred Text universal? What in the Qur'an is contextual and thus merely historical? Is it a text to be consumed or interrogated? What are we to do with the 'difficult' verses – the one, for example, that allegedly allows men to beat their wives? Does all morality and knowledge converge towards the Qur'an or diverge from it? Is classical interpretation, which knew nothing of modern linguistic, interpretative theory and hermeneutics, eternal? Why can't we undertake a philosophical critique of the Qur'an, which has been applied to the Bible and the Old Testament, without affecting their integrity? And what's wrong with ordinary Muslims interpreting the Qur'an for themselves? (Sardar, 2016)*

Sardar interrogates the influence of orthodoxy in the Muslim world by posing rhetorical and critical questions. Although some intellectuals may find these questions obvious, it might be challenging to bring them up, let alone carry them out, in a Muslim setting. Therefore, using rhetorical questions is a means to avoid making a direct request for a critical analysis of the Qur'an. This actually shows the power of orthodox academics to interpret the Qur'an (and hadith as well), who claim the sole authority to do so and prohibit anyone from interpreting scripture differently. Traditionalist interpretations of the Qur'an are typically cited by authoritarian governments that utilize religious authority to justify their actions, as well as by extreme and fundamentalist perspectives of Islam. Therefore, critique—including critical interpretations of the Muslim scripture and Islamic law—is a means of escaping the cage of orthodoxy.

Additionally, Sardar criticizes Muslim intellectuals in modern Islamic movements for their inability to accept criticism, since most of them regard criticism of their work as a form of personal attack:

*As a result they either isolate their critics or seek revenge. When faced with arguments, the stock responses are: 'How can I be wrong? I have been working on this problem for ten years'; or 'You are not a jurist, an expert on the Shari'ah, or a specialist in the field; you do not know, I know'; or 'You are trying to discredit me and spread fitna (sedition, strife).'Admitting error is a virtue, a strength, not a weakness; this is how knowledge is advanced. Entrenching oneself in an increasingly untenable and irrational position, and defending one's weakness as a matter of honour, is destructive both for the individual concerned and for the contemporary Muslim scholarly tradition. Muh}asaba, criticism, and self-criticism, must become a cornerstone of Muslim intellectual endeavour (Inayatullah & Boxwell, 2003).*

Sardar's criticism is not confined to Islamist movements, but also applies to traditionalist 'ulamā' circles and Sufi brotherhoods, i.e. any milieu where criticism is deactivated in favor of the glorification of an ideology or a master, and where critical and analytical faculties and the use of the imagination disappear (Inayatullah & Boxwell, 2003). Such a tendency to suppress criticism is accompanied by another tendency to mobilize arguments out of authority and a penchant for dominating and controlling individuals and societies (Inayatullah & Boxwell, 2003).

Sardar claims that critique is a plan of action since the way Muslim cultures evaluate their current state and the steps they take to improve it will determine how they develop in the future. As he puts it:

*It is quite evident that the principles of Islamic futures are as much about the future as they are a critique of the existing Muslim thought. When the concerns of the future are brought to bear on contemporary situations a critique is always generated and the critique per se becomes a programme of action. The function of the principles of Islamic futures is to enable Muslim societies to creatively manage the four global features of our time: change, complexity, contradictions and conflicts (Sardar, 2006).*

Therefore, Sardar calls Muslims to adopt a new, modern interpretation of Islam that turns it from a reduced faith into an integrative worldview with a conceptual and ethical framework. Muslim nations must rebuild and change themselves into a vibrant, modern, international civilization—virtually piece by piece. Monolithic, puritanical, and isolationist inclinations must be restrained, pluralism and participation based on consultation and cooperative politics should be established (Sardar, 2006). Avoiding disputes and rivalries that have sapped Muslims' energy in the contemporary world is another aspect of self-criticism, in addition to embracing diversity, complexity and change, and creating societies that are consensual. One can observe how Muslim states and societies have been exhausted and worn out by both new and ancient conflicts of various kinds in the Muslim world that stretches from South Asia to North Africa. Although external powers may instigate or encourage these confrontations, Muslims themselves bear the ultimate duty for finding a solution to these conflicts.

Let us concentrate on the production of knowledge and science to demonstrate his double critique of the West and the Muslim world. On the one hand, the hubs of power, the intersection of the western governments, economics, industry, and popular culture, are where knowledge and science are created and modernity is developed and exported to the Muslim world (Sardar, 2006). Science practice in the West displays a “repulsive facade” of metaphysical trappings, violence and haughtiness of its technique, and the ideology of dominance and control that has come to define it (Sardar, 2006). On the other hand, in any attempt to rediscover Islamic science, it is necessary to reject the axioms of nature, the universe, time, and humanity as well as the objectives and course of western science and its methodology, which has made pointless reductionism, the objectification of nature, and the torture of animals its fundamental tenets. For instance, he believes that Islamic ethical principles, such as the notions of *istiṣlāḥ* (public interest) and refraining from waste (*‘ayā’*), aggression, oppression, or tyranny (*ẓulm*), are crucial for the advancement of science in the Muslim world (Sardar, 2006).

Therefore, in so-called Islamic states like Saudi Arabia, Iran, Sudan, and Pakistan, where the term “Islamic” is used to legitimize authoritarianism, blatant oppression, the repression of criticism and dissent, and state violence against the population, science cannot advance effectively. These and other Muslim regimes, at best, adopt the phony neutrality and value-freeness of Western science (Sardar, 2006). The dominant authoritarianism in the Muslim world hinders the advancement of science and knowledge by fostering absolutism and religious authority (Sardar, 2006). Even worse, authoritarianism and Western science are allies: When a phenomenon is objectified, it creates the mythical appearance of progress, and authoritarianism and flagrant injustice have been justified by this delusion (Sardar, 2006). For him, Western science has an innate propensity to support authoritarianism, serving as its ally: The justification of tyranny and dominance is sought in the field of science and the magical processes of objectification, the excesses of western civilization, racism and colonialism, sexism and class hate, and a host of other social issues caused by western culture are now ascribed to the fixed interaction of humanity's biological nature (Sardar, 2006). He argues that rather than being socially and politically determined, disparities in wealth and power, violence and aggression, competitiveness and xenophobia are simply being relegated to being the inevitable byproducts of biological evolution and the human DNA (Sardar, 2006).

His dual criticism is essentially ethical since it challenges the tenets and applications of science in both the West and the Muslim world. Similar in both realms, these foundations assert that they can investigate social and natural events in an objective manner, but in practice, scientists follow a set of biased assumptions. Since most scientific research is conducted based on dogmatic hypotheses, scientific practice needs to be criticized as well. For instance, the idea that human behavior is defined by biological elements has ramifications in both worlds, particularly in the way that power centers, from major corporations to religious fanatics, have used and abused science, escalating conflicts, imperialism, and violence. Here, ethics also have a

contextual significance. Instead of following a fictitious universal ideal of science and textbook science, science and research should consider the values and conditions that are specific to Muslim societies. In order to solve the actual issues facing a society within the parameters of its ideals, true science is practical, embracing the various facets of reality.

### **Ziauddin Sardar's Dual Critique of Islam and The West**

Sardar's ideas are deep and thought provoking, and influenced by both Western and Islamic traditions. His critical Islam does, however, have its limitations, even though it shows resources to address the current crisis in the Muslim world. We could identify three resources and three constraints in the discussion of his ideas above; let us start with the resources. Sardar first and foremost rejects traditionalism, official Islam, and political Islam without making any compromises. These are the most prevalent interpretations of Islam, and they are the ones that have caused, together with other internal and external factors, Muslim cultures to fail to successfully adapt to modernity. His suggested alternative is to appropriate the religious experience outside of Islamic traditions and orthodoxies while preserving the subject's morality, reason, and agency. Second, he criticized the imperialist West and its claims to supremacy and truth while remaining receptive to Western modernity, both as philosophy and technology. His dual critique of Western philosophy and the Muslim tradition is a rare accomplishment among Muslim intellectuals, the majority of whom either criticize the West or the Muslim heritage. Third, he historicizes Islam, looking to the text and its setting for moral guidance. His thoughts on the future of the Muslim world and the use of intellectual history tools, including scientific history, are exclusive to his school of thought.

Finally, we found three limits in Sardar's critical Islam: 1) the lack of development of the spiritual dimension, even though we do come across snippets of poetry and Sufi concepts in his thought; 2) the critical approach he takes does not seem to appeal to theologians and the wider Muslim public. One wonders whether the elitist tone of critical Islam is exclusively destined to intellectuals, very much isolated from Muslim communities and societies. 3) In the current phase, Sardar's critical Islam fails to engage Islamic texts sufficiently and creatively (with the exception of his *Reading the Quran*).

Sardar's double critique should be distinguished from various Muslim critics of the West. For example, Merryl Wyn Davies's Islamization project starts with a critique of western civilization, which is a way to voice disagreement, difference, and dubiety as well as to learn about another civilization (Davis, 1991). Sardar does not separate his criticism of the West from his criticism of Muslim traditions and civilization. Ur-Rehman has criticized Sardar's work for essentializing and homogenizing Islam, and for being insufficiently critical of Islam while criticizing the West and reproducing the same binary structures of thought that it seeks to dislodge or subvert, and, being limited to the material and epistemic dominance of Western civilization over Islam (Ur-Rehman, 2002). However, Sardar's critical essays on Islam were neglected by the author, which limits this criticism. As for Wan Zakaria, he brought attention to Sardar's thesis that Islamic science is one of the primary tools for regenerating the Islamic civilization, which calls for conceptual examinations of the Islamic corpus of knowledge as found in the Qur'an and the Sunna and overcoming the lack of scientific culture and tradition in Muslim societies and creative engagement with religion and nature. Wan Zakaria also thinks Sardar raises important issues that transcend the concerns of the average Muslim. His ideas may in some way be marginalized in mainstream Muslim countries since such provocative thinking often lead to controversy and opposition in the mainstream Muslim discourses (Wan Zakaria, 2010). Other critical Muslim discourses and modernist thinkers in general suffer from the same fate as Sardar's ideas. Nonetheless, Muslim communities have changed in many ways, and awareness of the importance of critical thinking has been gradually increasing, even though openness to these discourses is gradual and takes time.

Since it challenges various realities and fields of knowledge that have dominated the last fifty years in the West and Muslim world, Sardar's twofold critique is distinctive. The problems of modernity, ecology and economy, the speed at which technology is developing, post-modernism, and post-normalcy all sparked his curiosity in the future, including Muslim futures. He was equally critical of Muslim societies as he was of the turmoil in Western civilization. Thus, it is impossible to separate his critique of the Muslim tradition in his Islamic studies from his cultural criticism. While he questions the ways in which alterity is portrayed in Western literature, art, the internet, media, imagination, Orientalism, postmodern philosophy, and culture, he also produced a daring reinterpretation of the Qur'an, a new rereading of traditions like the Muslim pilgrimage, and called to engage in discourse with Christians and learn from others in general, offered an ethical interpretation of Muhammad's life story, criticism of Islamist violence, advocacy for Muslim rights and freedoms in the West, active participation in social and political life, and encouragement of reform and skepticism. In sum, his double criticism follows critical theory in an attempt at emancipation through critique and social reform (Bohman, 2021). From this perspective, in order to achieve complete emancipation of Muslims, it is necessary to investigate Islamic ideologies and theologies as well as Western ideas and practices; all hegemonies that deny the emancipation of people should be questioned.

## Conclusion

Sardar is a British-Pakistani scholar, journalist, and philosopher who made numerous contributions to Islamic thought, especially concerning modernity, science, critique, and the future. Through a variety of thinking tools, he has blended Western modernism, Islamic history, and Asian traditions. The main finding of this study is his double critique of Western modernity and Muslim orthodoxy as a reflection of cosmopolitanism, interest in intellectual and social emancipation and ethics. Furthermore, his double critique encompasses both epistemological (how to learn about Islam, the West, and reality) and ethical (what to do with this knowledge) aspects. Additionally, his critical Islam is an action plan that attempts to pluralize, change, and free the Muslim world from violence and place a strong emphasis on ethical science and the postnormal future. As a research recommendation, we should, however, in spite of Sardar's perceptive interpretation of Muslim tradition and effective challenges of Western hegemony, take into consideration his elitist approach to Islam.

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