



*WAḤDAT AL-WUJŪD* IN LATER SUFISM: AN  
ANNOTATED TRANSLATION AND CRITICAL  
COMMENTARY OF *AL-NĀBULSĪ'S ĪDĀḤ AL-MAQṢŪD*

BY

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## ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the treatise of "*Īdāh al-maqṣūd min maʿnā Waḥdat al-Wujūd*" written by a Damascene scholar, ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulī (1641-1731). This treatise is considered as one of the best written apology on the doctrine of *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* (Unity of Existence) that echoed by many previous Sufis. The study consists of three main parts: verification, translation, and commentary. The verification part begins with a comparative and analytic study of the five texts of the treatise (three manuscripts and two published texts). It aims at three things. One, to discover the quantity of modifications occurred in these texts. Two, to rectify errors mentioned in the texts. And three, to produce a new and better text for this treatise. As for the translation, it is an endeavor to convert the text from its original language, which is Arabic, into English coupled with commentary on numerous issues such as deducing fact, translation on figures, critique, explanation, etc. Through this research, many important results are unveiled. First, many modifications occurred in the published texts simply because its verifier failed to refer to the original manuscript of the treatise. Second, many mistakes are detected in this treatise, some are linguistic while other related to its content. Third, based on historical study on political, social, and religious condition of al-Nābulī's era, it is clear that the main motivation for him to release this treatise is due to the wide-spreading injustice toward *taṣawwuf* and the actual practice of *Waḥdat al-Wujūd*. Forth, al-Nābulī believed that Unity of Existence is *tawḥīd* in essence, therefore the disagreement on this subject is in fact literal. At last, there are still many manuscripts of this treatise stored in libraries and individual collections around the world. Therefore, it is recommended for the future researcher to consult and to look at the rest of these manuscripts so that an accurate text of the treatise can be produced.

## ملخص البحث

تركز هذه الدراسة على رسالة "إيضاح المقصود من معنى وحدة الوجود" للشيخ عبد الغنى النابلسي. هذه الرسالة تعتبر من أحسن المؤلفات في الدفاع عن مذهب وحدة الوجود الذي دعا إليه كثير من المصوفين القدماء. وهذه الدراسة تتكون من ثلاثة أقسام رئيسية هي: التحقيق والترجمة والتعليق. فعملية التحقيق تبدأ بالدراسة المقارنة التحليلية الخمسة نصوص (ثلاث مخطوطات ونسختان مطبوعتان). وهي تهدف إلى ثلاثة أمور: أولاً، كشف مقدار التغييرات التي وقعت في هذه النصوص الخمسة. ثانياً، تصويب الأخطاء الواردة فيها. و ثالثاً، تقديم نص جديد أقرب إلى التحقيق لهذه الرسالة. أما الترجمة فهي عبارة عن محاولة نقل هذه الرسالة من لغتها الأصلية، وهي العربية، إلى الإنجليزية، مقرونة بالتعليقات لعديد من الأمور المذكورة كالاستدلال وترجمة الأشخاص والنقد والشرح وغير ذلك. فتبين من خلال هذا البحث أمور مهمة: أولها، قد وقعت تغييرات كثيرة في النص الرسالة المطبوعة. وذلك لأن المحقق لم يرجع إلى مخطوطة الرسالة الأصلية عند التحقيق. ثانيها، أن في هذه الرسالة أخطاء كثيرة بعضها لغوية والأخرى مضمونية. ثالثها، من خلال الدراسة التاريخية للحالة السياسية والاجتماعية والدينية في عصر النابلسي، اتضح أن الباعث الأساسي له في اطلاق هذه الرسالة هو انتشار الظلم على التصوف وتطبيق وحدة الوجود. رابعها، اعتقد النابلسي أن وحدة الوجود هي التوحيد، وأن الخلاف فيها لفظي. وأخيراً، لا ريب أن مخطوطة هذه الرسالة كثيرة، و لذلك على الباحث المستقبل أن يتطلع ويستشير إلى بقية هذه المخطوطات كي يحصل على إنتاج أحسن نص لهذه الرسالة.

## APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion it conformed to acceptable standard of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Master of Art (Philosophy, Theology, Ethics, and Contemporary Issues).

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Supervisor

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conformed to acceptable standard of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Master of Art (Philosophy, Theology, Ethics, and Contemporary Issues).

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Civilization (ISTAC)

## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the findings of this study are the product of my research effort. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degree at IIUM or any other institution.

AhyaUlumiddin

Signature.....

Date.....

INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA

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*With love and respect*

*Bapak, Mama, Kakak, Abang, Nabilah, Alim, the big family of Garuda IV,*

*and my best friends*

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract .....	ii
Abstract in Arabic .....	iii
Approval Page.....	iv
Declaration Page .....	v
Copyright Page.....	vi
Dedication .....	vii
Acknowledgement .....	viii
Table of Transliteration.....	xi
<b>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Background of the Study.....	1
1.2 Statement of the Problems .....	10
1.3 Research Questions .....	12
1.4 Objective of the Study.....	13
1.5 Research Methodology.....	14
1.6 Research Scope .....	14
1.7 Literature Review .....	15
<b>CHAPTER TWO: SEVENTEENTH TO EIGHTEENTH CENTURY OF OTTOMAN EMPIRE: SOCIO-POLITICAL CONDITION, SUFISM, AND REFORM MOVEMENTS .....</b>	<b>20</b>
2.1 Introduction.....	20
2.2 The Ottoman Empire: Socio-Political Condition .....	21
2.3 Sufism between Originality and Deviation.....	28
2.3 The Emergence of Reform Movement: Examining Kadizadeli's Reform Agenda and Conflict .....	38
<b>CHAPTER THREE: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS AND COMPARISON OF THE İDĀḤ AL-MAQŞŪD MIN MA'NĀ WAḤDAT AL-WUJŪD'S TEXTS.48</b>	<b>48</b>
3.1 Description of the Text.....	48
3.1.1 Manuscript.....	48
3.1.2 Published Text .....	50
3.2 The significance of the Text.....	52
3.3 Methodology .....	54
3.4 The Critical Analysis and Comparison of the Text.....	55
3.1.1 Introduction .....	55
3.1.2 The Critical Analysis and Comparison of the Text.....	57
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: AN ANNOTATED TRANSLATION AND COMMENTARY OF İDĀḤ AL-MAQŞŪD MIN MA'NĀ WAḤDAT AL- WUJŪD .....</b>	<b>72</b>

<b>CONCLUSION</b> .....	<b>95</b>
Textual verification of the treatise .....	95
Content analysis of the treatise .....	97
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b> .....	<b>100</b>
APPENDIX I .....	109
APPENDIX II .....	110
APPENDIX III .....	118
APPENDIX IV .....	119
APPENDIX V .....	120

## TABLE OF TRANSLITERATION

ARAB		LATIN	ARAB		LATIN
ء	=	'	ض	=	ḍ
ب	=	B	ط	=	ṭ
ت	=	T	ظ	=	ẓ
ث	=	Th	ع	=	'
ج	=	J	غ	=	gh
ح	=	ḥ	ف	=	f
خ	=	Kh	ق	=	q
د	=	D	ك	=	k
ذ	=	Dh	ل	=	l
ر	=	R	م	=	m
ز	=	z	ن	=	n
س	=	s	هـ	=	h
ش	=	sh	و	=	w
ص	=	ṣ	ى	=	y

<u>Vowel</u>	<u>Long Vowel</u>	<u>Examples</u>
اَ = a	آ = ā	أَرْكَانٌ = <i>arkān</i>
إِ = i	إِي = ī	سَبِيلٌ = <i>sabīl</i>
أُ = u	أُو = ū	بُيُوتٌ = <i>buyūt</i>

All the rules related to Arabic transliteration entertained in this study referred to *The IIUM Thesis/Dissertation Manual* published in 2011 by Centre for Postgraduate Studies, International Islamic University of Malaysia.

# CHAPTER ONE

## 1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

*"The common people and the ignorant are dominated by the accidental, which is manyness and plurality, while the elect -the men of knowledge- are dominated by the root, which is Waḥdat al-Wujūd. He who remains with the root does not undergo transferal transformation; he remains fixed in his knowledge and his realization. But he who stays with the branch undergoes transformation and transferal; things become many in his eyes, so he forgest and becomes negligent and ignorant."*<sup>1</sup>

*"Know that when you hear us speak of the Unity of Being, you should not assume that we are speaking of it according to what the people of ignorance, obstinacy, misguidance, and dismissal believe in. When we speak of it, we clearly distinguish between the unity of wujūd (being) and the multiplicity of mawjūd (a particular being)."*<sup>2</sup>

*Waḥdat al-Wujūd*<sup>3</sup> was, and still is, among the most controversial and influential discourse that appeared throughout the timeline of the Islamic history.<sup>4</sup> The confusing constitution of the concept in which the subjective interpretations of the Sufi masters are commonly employed, has largely invited Muslim scholars, especially the Jurists, the Theologians, and even the Sufis, to enter into the deep-tricky abyss of extreme debate. As the bitter consequences, the seed of fanaticism gradually grew up and undermined the Islamic intellectual tradition. It widely spread across the Muslim world, transformed itself into a wild virus that quickly contaminated the mind and the attitude of the Islamic society. Thus, in the later day, it is responsible for the

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<sup>1</sup>Ibn Sabʿīn, *Rasāʾil Ibn Sabʿīn* (Cairo: al-Muʾassasah al-Miṣriyyah li al-Taʾlīf wa al-Anbāʾ, 1965), 194.

<sup>2</sup>Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulī, *Al-Wujūd al-Ḥaqq wa al-Khiṭāb al-Ṣidq* (Damascus: IʾInstitut Francais dʾEtudes Arabes de Demas, 1985), 15.

<sup>3</sup>William C. Chittick, *The Sufi path of knowledge: Ibn ʿArabī's metaphysic of imagination* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 80 and 94-6.

<sup>4</sup>In many discussions, the doctrine of Unity of Existence is always related to the external source of Islam. Many authors believe that it is an adoptive idea derived from Ibn Sinā and Neo-Platonism intellectual heritage that then Islamized and used as fundamental doctrine in Sufism. Therefore, the doctrine is not Islamic in origin and because of that, it is considered as a pure innovation (*bidʿah*). See ʿAlī Sāmī al-Nasṣhār, *Nashʾat al-fikr al-falsafī fī al-Islām* (Cairo: Dār al-Salām, 2008), 3:1179-1180.

emergence of “mutual accusation of apostasy”<sup>5</sup> within the rolling episodes of the Islamic history.

Scholars have been long disagreeing on the period wherein the doctrine of *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* firstly emerged. Many believe it goes back to the 12<sup>th</sup> century propagated by prominent Sufi Master Ibn ʿArabī.<sup>6</sup> Based on this superficial speculation, for centuries, the Sufi’s adversaries have formulated their intense criticisms toward the doctrine. They assume that not only the doctrine is a new invention that has no existence in the past, but it is also fully pregnant with heretic features and pantheistic tendency that constitute its structural conceptualization. Therefore, the stamp of “condemned innovation” (*al-bidʿah al-malʿūnah*) is an unavoidable brand attached to the doctrine.<sup>7</sup> Despite the fact that this speculation has found a large number of proponents, yet, as the matter of fact, it was constructed on the basis of shallow conjectures that provide unsound evidences. That is because if anyone willingly strains his nerves to look deeper into the outstretched scenario of Ibn ʿArabī’s storyline, it is crystal clear, that instead of him, it was Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Kunāwī, his step-son and direct disciple, who firstly introduced the term within the corpus of his writings.<sup>8</sup> Yet, in al-Kunāwī case, *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* has not functioned as a

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<sup>5</sup> Muḥammad Quṭb, in this regard, strictly argues that the crux of this social problem is rooted in the ignorance of the people. Henceforth, any methods used to eradicate such crisis will not hit the positive result unless the process of learning and education is massively encouraged. He further outspokenly asserts, “A Muslim should not accuse his Muslim brother of apostasy even if his inner side is pregnant with hypocrisy. For Allah is more than sufficient to be the judge of their deed.” See Muḥammad Quṭb, *Wāqīʿunā al-muʿāṣir* (Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 2008), 418-432.

<sup>6</sup> Richard C. Martin(ed). *Encyclopedia of Islam and Muslim world* (USA: Macmillan and Thomson Learning, 2004), 1: 333; ʿAbd al-Qādir Aḥmad ʿAṭāʾ, *al-Taṣawwuf al-Islāmī bayna al-aṣālah wa al-iqtibās ft ʿaṣri al-Nābulṣī* (Beirut: Dār al-Jayl, 1987), 345.

<sup>7</sup> The anti-Sufi scholars often stamped a label of "speculative Sufis" to the proponents of *Waḥdat al-Wujūd*. This label shows an indication that in fact this group of Sufis has a closer affiliation to philosophical ideas, especially Aristotle and Neo-Platonism, rather than the essential teachings of Islam. See Toby Mayer, “Theology and Sufism,” *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, edited by Tim Winter (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 274-280.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 277; William C. Chittick strongly proposes that Kunāwī’s employment of the term is not without reason. In some cases, the term functions as the overall summary of long explanation of the

technical term.<sup>9</sup> On the contrary, the phraseology of *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* has actually originated from the Andalusian Sufi philosopher, Ibn Sabʿīn,<sup>10</sup> Ibn ʿArabī's contemporary scholar, who credited a new religious movement at that time. Sabʿīn argued for a true pantheistic model of oneness in which "there is no real basis for the distinction between the existence of God and of everything else."<sup>11</sup> So far, one may suspect that not only the terminological attachment of *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* on Ibn ʿArabī is totally incorrect, but the pantheistic propensity in which the phrase is pregnant with is provably far from Ibn ʿArabī's essential idea. On the contrary, it more appropriately applies to the misunderstanding of Ibn ʿArabī's position on the concept of "oneness" and "existence" portrayed in his *Fuṣūṣ* and *Futūḥāt*.

In contrast to the previous notion that attributes *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* to Ibn ʿArabī, the Sufis, and particularly the believers of *Waḥdat al-Wujūd*, persistently maintain the legal transmission of the doctrine directly from the Prophet himself.<sup>12</sup>

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doctrine. However, it also bears another possibility. Since Ibn ʿArabī is not the only Kunāwī's spring of knowledge, and his espousal to philosophy is undeniable, considering that he is among the apprentices of the great philosopher Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, therefore the door for other speculations is widely opened. One of them is probably the terminological adaption of *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* used by Kunāwī was the result of external influence, specifically philosophical ideas which were inspired from al-Ṭūsī. See William Chittick, "Rumi and *Waḥdat al-Wujūd*," *Poetry and Mysticism in Islam: The heritage of Rūmī*, edited by Amin Banani, Richard Houannisian, and George Sabagh (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 71-85.

<sup>9</sup> Chittick in his investigation on the history of *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* phraseology suggests that, instead of Kunāwī, the first direct member of Ibn ʿArabī school to employ *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* as technical term is Saʿīd al-Dīn Farghānī (d. 695/1296). See William C. Chittick, "Ibn ʿArabī," *History of Islamic Philosophy*, edited by Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 1:505.

<sup>10</sup> Ibn Sabʿīn was a follower of the Shūzī Sufi way founded by al-Shūzī of Seville. This was a continuation of the school founded by Ibn Masarraḥ, which was especially influential among the Sufis in Andalusia who had a philosophical tendency. See Abu al-Wafā' al-Tāftazānī and Oliver Leaman, "Ibn Sabʿīn," *History of Islamic philosophy*, edited by Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 1:347.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> There are many Qur'anic verses and prophetic traditions that often quoted by the Sufi regarding this doctrine. The example from the Qur'an, "He is the First and the Last, the Ascendant and the Intimate, and He is, of all things, Knowing" [57:3], "Everyone upon the earth will perish, And there will remain the Face of your Lord, Owner of Majesty and Honor." [55: 26-27], "There is no deity except Him. Everything will be destroyed except His Face" [28:88]; and from the prophetic traditions, [He said, "First of all, there was nothing but Allah] see Muḥammad ibn Ismāʿīl al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Pakistan: Kazi Publication, 1979) 4: 278.. This prophetic tradition appears frequently in the book of

Like a nucleus in the structural body of an atom, this doctrine also occupies a core position in the mystical religious worldview of Sufis. In this sense, *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* is counted as an ideal and profound interpretation of *tawḥīd* wherein the essential message of revelation and prophecy are finally confluence.<sup>13</sup> In Sufi's perspective, the pure meaning of *tawḥīd* is completely unobtainable unless the Muslim has respectively passed through the gate of “*Fanā*” and “*Baqā*”. In other words, for a servant to obtain the true meaning of *tawḥīd*, he must firstly free himself from all kinds of *shirk* (Associating anything with Allah). That is, by the means of self-purification (*tathīr/tazkiyat al-naḥs*), which constitutes the basic element of self-annihilation (*fanā*), in order to change over to the more sublime station, the *fanā al-fanā* (extinction of extinction), or usually called *al-baqā* (subsistence), where the servant endures the test of maintaining his purified-self while undergoing the complex necessities of worldly life.<sup>14</sup>

Pages of historical records have witnessed the long epic of argumentation over the legality of *Waḥdat al-Wujūd*. The extremity of aggressive attack launched by Ibn Taymiyyah upon Ibn ʿArabī played a significant role in the outbreak of the everlasting battle of pro-anti *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* scholars.<sup>15</sup> Ibn ʿAṭāʾillāh,<sup>16</sup> who lived in the same

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Sufi with an explanation that tells, "and He is now as He was" means that He is beyond the influence of time, He remains in His state of absoluteness and oneness as before the act of creation took place.

<sup>13</sup> ʿAbd al-Qādir Aḥmad ʿAṭāʾ, 346-7.

<sup>14</sup> Al-Nābulṣī strictly asserts that the self-annihilation (*fanā*) must transform, necessarily, to subsistence (*baqā*). *Fana* alone is ultimately far from sufficient to grasp the comprehensive meaning of *tawḥīd*. Likewise, the *fanā* that ends up with *ittiḥād* (God-man unification) or *ḥulūl* (God-man incarnation) is no way nearer to the light of Islamic guidance, thus fundamentally it is not the nature of *fanā* in Islam. See ʿAbd al-Qādir Aḥmad ʿAṭāʾ, 352.

<sup>15</sup> For further reading on Ibn Taymiyyah's critics see Ibn Taymiyyah, *Jāmiʿ rasāʾil* (Jeddah: Dār al-Madanī, 1984) 1: 104-7, 162-7.

<sup>16</sup> ʿAbd al-Wahhāb ibn Aḥmad al-Shaʿrānī, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1997), 312; ʿAbd al-Wahhāb ibn ʿAlī al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-shāfiʿiyyah al-kubrā* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Kutub al-ʿArabiyyah, 1990) 9: 1297-8; Yūsuf ibn Ismāʿīl al-Nabhānī, *Jāmiʿ karamāt al-auliyyāʾ* (Beirut: al-Maktabah al-Shaʿniyyah, 1978), 1: 525; ʿAbd al-Hayy ibn al-ʿImād al-Hanbalī, *Sadharāt al-dhahab fī akhbār min dhahab* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, n.d) 6:19-20; Ibn Hajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *al-Durar al-kāminah fī aʿyān al-miʾah al-thāminah* (Cairo: Umm al-Qurāʾ, n.d) 1: 291-2.

period with *Shaykh al-Islām*, immediately argued against his contemporary fellow's critics directed toward Ibn ʿArabī.<sup>17</sup> In the later period, an Egyptian scholar namely, Burhān al-Dīn al-Biqāʿī, blasted off a full scale assault on the Shaykh in his monumental book *Tanbīh al-Ghabī ilā takfīr Ibn ʿArabī* (Warning the idiot to Ibn ʿArabī's infidelity).<sup>18</sup> However, it soon found an immediate reply from his countryman scholar, Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī. In his apologetic work entitled *Tanbīh al-Ghabī fī tabri'ati (tanzīh) Ibn ʿArabī* (Alerting the idiot on the innocence of Ibn ʿArabī),<sup>19</sup> al-Suyūṭī overthrew all accusations made by al-Biqāʿī. Although it has been presented brilliantly, it is believed that al-Suyūṭī's apology cannot relax the spasm between the two conflicting sides. In fact, Ibrāhīm al-Ḥalabī, the descendant of al-Biqāʿī, quickly responded in disagreement with Suyuti's advocacy. He sent forth a book *Tasfīh al-Ghabī fī tanzīh Ibn ʿArabī* (Stultifying the idiot on exculpating Ibn ʿArabī)<sup>20</sup> which later encountered acute criticisms from Ibrāhīm al-Kūrānī, a distinguished Kurdish scholar of the seventeenth century.<sup>21</sup>

Generally speaking, scholars' attitude toward *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* can be classified into three categories: The supporter, the disputant, and the silent.<sup>22</sup> The first two groups frequently color the atmosphere of the doctrine's discourses. The first and the second can also be divided into two groups: the blind imitation (*Muqallid*) and the

<sup>17</sup> Ṭablāwī Maḥmūd Saʿad, *al-Tasawwuf fī turāth Ibn Taymiyyah* (n.p: al-Hay'ah al-Miṣriyyah al-ʿĀmmah li al-Kitāb, 1983), 96.

<sup>18</sup> Burhān al-Dīn al-Biqāʿī, *Tanbīh al-Ghabī ilā takfīr Ibn ʿArabī* (Riyadh: Ri'āṣah Idārah al-Buḥūth wa al-Iftā', 1995).

<sup>19</sup> Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *Tanbīh al-Ghabī fī tabri'ati Ibn ʿArabī* (Tokyo University: Daiber Collection catalogued as Ms.156 [1422]).

<sup>20</sup> Ibrāhīm ibn Muḥammad al-Ḥalabī, *Tasfīh al-Ghabī fī tanzīh Ibn ʿArabī* (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārij, 2008).

<sup>21</sup> Ibrāhīm al-Kūrānī, *Rasā'il fī Waḥdat al-Wujūd* (Cairo: Maktabah al-Thaqāfah, 2007).

<sup>22</sup> Al-Nābulṣī divides scholarly viewpoints on Sufism and *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* into four categories: the refuter (*al-Munkirūn*), the silent (*al-Sākitūn*), the believer of the doctrine (*al-Mu'taqidūn*), and the possessor of experience (*al-dhā'iqūn*). However, since the third and the fourth shares the same stance of approval, I purposely fuse both under general term "the supporter" to make a clear distinction among the three. Hence, the discussion on the scholarly stances on the subject can be taken easily. ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulṣī, *Al-Wujūd al-Ḥaqq wa al-Khiṭāb al-Ṣidq*, 277-289.

knower (*al-ʿālim*). The earlier brings harm more than the latter. This is due to the absence of several principle characteristics that is rooted deeply in the personality of the latter as the spirit of objectivity, the profound understanding of *mā yuʿlamu min al-dīn bi al-ḍarūrah* (the essential teachings of Islam), *Fiqh al-Munāzarah* (the art of debate), and *Fiqh al-khilāf* (the art of differing).

The blind imitation group, which was composed from the pseudo-Sufi masters and the apocryphal-deceptive scholars, was the one responsible for the intellectual chaos within the Islamic society.<sup>23</sup> Like an infectious parasite that gnaws the antibody, the misleading sermons of their preachers paralyze the immune function of the faith, causing total disruption in the personality of individuals. Usually, most of the infected victims turn into stone-headed imitators who neither have the quality of objective perception nor do they possess a standard degree of toleration. As a result, the Islamic intellectual tradition, which once colored the horizon of the world's academic hierarchy, suffered tragic backwardness in the later period, especially in the 17<sup>th</sup> -18<sup>th</sup> centuries where the productivity of Muslim scholars is largely reducible to verification routine (*taḥqīq*).<sup>24</sup> Such a rotten characteristic has invited many criticisms from mainstream scholars, including the Sufis. Ibn ʿArabī, in his *Futūḥāt*, has adamantly declared his disagreement with both parties. He harshly criticized the pseudo Sufis maintaining that all mystical practices that have no basis in *Sharīʿah* or not constructed wholly on the legal foundation of *Sharīʿah* is an absolute falsehood

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<sup>23</sup> Muḥammad ʿAlī ʿAbd al-Zāhīr al-Witrī, *Mukhtaṣar al-Wujūd wa mir'āt al-shuhūd : Fawā'id jalīlah takshīfu ʿan ma'nā Waḥdat al-Wujūd wa masā'il qalīlah tuqarribu aṣḥā mā dhahaba ilayhi ahl ʿirfān wa al-shuhūd* (Tokyo University Library: Daiber Collection catalogued as Ms.44 [1207]), 36-7.

<sup>24</sup> Khaled El-Rouayheb, "Opening the gate of verification: The forgotten Arab-Islamic florescence of the 17<sup>th</sup> century", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 38, No. 2 (May, 2006): 263-281.

(*Bāṭil*). For this reason, he called people to return and tautly embrace the fundamental sources of Islam (al-Qur'an and al-Hadīth).<sup>25</sup>

One of the most valuable teachings of the Qur'an is that history will continue to repeat itself. Usually, the threat will come covered with new furs while its essence remains the same. In this sense, the primary task of a Muslim, before seeking new solutions, is to look for and develop the existing one, presented in the revelation (al-Qur'an and prophetic traditions) and the heritage of previous scholars, that is compatible with the demands of the challenging times.<sup>26</sup>

The problem of *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* appeared more complex in the late 17<sup>th</sup> and at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. The luxuriantly growing Sufi path,<sup>27</sup> the socio-political condition of the Ottoman Empire,<sup>28</sup> and the emergence of reform movements<sup>29</sup> all have contributed together in the making of polemical issue within the Islamic society. Consequently, for ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulī, who lived in such a tremendous predicament, to develop an effective cure for such complicated illnesses was never been a simple task to be formulated alone.

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<sup>25</sup> Zakī Sālīm, *al-Ittijāh al-naqdī ʿinda Ibn ʿArabī* (Cairo: al-Maktabah al-Sūfī, 2005), 144-185.

<sup>26</sup> Al-Qur'an 12: 111 "There was certainly in their stories a lesson for those of understanding..." and 7:176 "...So relate the stories that perhaps they will give thought."

<sup>27</sup> Elizabeth Sirriyeh narrated the reform movement from within the body of Sufism, particularly the Naqshabandi, has brought a significant impact to the sustainability of the teaching of the orthodox Sufi which might triggered an internal clash. The institutional marriage among the paths has also contributed more characteristic in the nuance of Sufi order. Nevertheless, not all unifications was considerably successful, more even anomalously misled and caused more confusion to its followers. See Elizabeth Sirriyeh, *Sufi visionary of Ottoman Damascus: ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulī, 1641-1731* (New York: Routledge Curzon, 2005), 49-56.

<sup>28</sup> The perpetual war activity, internal political affair, the armed forces rebellion against legal ruler, the spreading of superstition and heresy etc, have transfused 'paradigm bacteria' that caused massive destruction on society's worldview system. See ʿAbd al-Qādir Aḥmad ʿAṭā', 27-60.

<sup>29</sup> Embarking from deep anxiety caused by deflections of religious teaching, Kadizadi Mehmed (d. 1635) launched a denouncement upon Sufis reflected in various activities which culminated in the establishment of Kadizadeli movement. They virulently developed an anti-Sufi campaigns in Istanbul and Anatolia. Their relay race, in the later period, was replaced by reform movement led by Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb that centralized in Arabian gulf. See Elizabeth Sirriyeh, 8-9 & 45-6.

The social-religious conditions of the people where al-Nābulṣī dwelled were not as positive as that of "the middle age" of Islam. As the intellectual and spiritual decay was getting wider, the deflection of religious teachings, which were sometimes motivated by certain irreligious interest, has massively penetrated almost all strata of society.<sup>30</sup> The religious practices, on the other hand, were largely executed excessively beyond the legal boundary of *Sharī'ah*.<sup>31</sup> Such terrible crisis was not only the typical characteristic of the Sufis' confederate of the time, but it also generally applied to the belief system and the practical application of the masses. In this regard, the discussion of *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* has broadly gained a mushrooming interest from the ordinary people. If in the past the doctrine was familiar only to the ear of some notable Sufis and scholars, its surrounding debates were mostly presented in the academic manner and with obvious intention of obtaining the truth, in Nābulṣī's period the condition was completely upside down.<sup>32</sup>

During this period, *Waḥdat al-Wujūd*, that became an exclusive 'consumption' of scholars in the past, found a large number of 'consumers' from the various ranks of society. The mass, who had a limited knowledge and a shallow understanding of the fundamental religious teachings, immediately concurred with the dazzling preachment of the doctrine's envoys. Ironically, the tauhidic nature of the doctrine, that characterized the practical application of the precursor Sufi masters, shifted significantly to be mere pantheistic, due to fatal misunderstanding and inadequate knowledge of Islam.<sup>33</sup> Even worse, this corrupt interpretation of the doctrine was predominantly considered the truest and the highest purpose of the Islamic divine

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<sup>30</sup>Madeline Zilfi. "The Kadizadeli: Discordant Revivalism in Seventeenth-Century Istanbul," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, vol. 45, No.4 (1986): 251.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 252.

<sup>32</sup>cAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulṣī, *al-Wujūd al-Ḥaqq wa al-Khiṭāb al-Ṣidq*, 247-261.

<sup>33</sup>cAbd al-Qādir Aḥmad 'Aṭā', 56-60.

message.<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, another group of people arose as the blind antagonist. Against the previously mentioned group, this specific movement will always find the way to allege *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* as infidelity and heresy no matter whether it was right or wrong. Such movement reached its apogee in the time of al-Nābulṣī where it established the more systematic activities by means of political penetration. In its climax, the group's movement encountered a massive transformation that made a controversial image especially by the onset of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. During this period, the focus of their aggression shifted dramatically. If formerly the offence took place only between the astray Sufis and their contenders, at this particular time the attacks were broadened, covering all features of Sufism and the institution of Sufism in general.

Undoubtedly, this ironic situation lit up the anxiety from the bottom of al-Nābulṣī's heart. He carefully examined the case, critically analyzed every variable, and objectively reconsidered the legal-intellectual opinions of the previous scholars regarding the issue of *Waḥdat al-Wujūd*. Finally, after enduring various distresses and hardships, he came to the conclusion that the disagreement covering the discussion of *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* was not essential at all, rather it is only dissension of literal interpretation of the term.<sup>35</sup> Such affirmation was intelligently discussed and extensively elaborated in some of his major works such as *al-Wujūd al-Ḥaqq wa al-Khiṭāb al-Ṣidq* (The True Being and the true disquisition), *al-Faṭḥ al-Rabbānī wa al-Fayḍ al-Raḥmānī* (The divine disclosure and the merciful emanation), and *al-Wujūd wa mir'āt al-shuhūd* (The Being and the mirror of divine witnessing) which later was summarized in short treatise, and become the main subject of this research, the *Īdāḥ*

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<sup>34</sup>cAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulṣī, *al-Wujūd al-Ḥaqq wa al-Khiṭāb al-Ṣidq*, 249-250.

<sup>35</sup>cAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulṣī, *Īdāḥ al-maqṣūd min ma'nanā Waḥdat al-Wujūd*. (Damascus: Matba'at al-ʿIlm, 1965), 9.

*al-Maqṣūd Min maʿnā Waḥdat al-Wujūd*(clarifying the intended meaning of *Waḥdat al-Wujūd*).

The treatise presents a general, but not a shallow, apologetic advocacy on the nature of *Waḥdat al-Wujūd*. Although it consists of only 15 pages (in manuscript form), al-Nābulṣī has systematically discussed the subject and brilliantly countered the alleged accusations upon the doctrine and its supporters from the prominent Sufi masters like Ibn ʿArabī and Ibn al-Farīd in the second. In the last part of the treatise, al-Nābulṣī has denounced the pseudo Sufis, the believers of incarnation (*ḥulūl*) and union (*ittiḥād*), for their ignorance and shallow understanding of the necessary knowledge of Islam. For this reason, he endorsed the exoteric scholar's condemnation upon them.

## **1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEMS**

The Unity of Existence (*Waḥdat al-Wujūd*) is a pivotal concept within the discourses of Sufism. Nevertheless, it is not unanimously agreed upon. On the contrary, a number of scholars, especially the followers of Ibn Taymiyyah, have launched thousand arrows of fierce criticisms toward the concept, assuming that it has trespassed the boundary of faith which leads to "spiritual treachery". However, many still prefer to be loyal defenders of the doctrine. They consider the anti-doctrine's censure has exceeded the limit and needs to be corrected. But as time passes, their efforts seem to encounter a deadlock. Therefore, the harder the advocacy the rougher the counterattack.

The biggest problem faced by the doctrine's proponents was the inability to satisfy the exoteric scholars (*ʿUlamāʾ al-Rusūm*)<sup>36</sup> in presenting the doctrine's elaboration through the standard procedure of *Sharīʿah* (in general meaning). The classical explanation of the doctrine covered only the primordial perspective of Sufis' spiritual experiences. Therefore, it looks more philosophical and speculative in nature rather than being constructed on the fundamental sources of Islam (al-Qurʾān and al-Ḥadīth). However, in the beginning of the eighteenth century, many works have been done by some prominent Sufi masters in order to reconcile the doctrine's explanation with the underlying features of *Sharīʿah* and al-Nābulī was one of the most important figures to be highlighted in this sense. Numerous works have been brilliantly produced in his attempt to reconcile, and his treatise *Īdāh al-maqṣūd min maʿnā Waḥdat al-Wujūd* is amongst the most noticeable of all.

The treatise has been rewritten and published by *Maṭbaʿat al-ʿIlm* Damascus in 1969, which was presented and verified by ʿIzzah Ḥaṣriyyah. It also has been translated into French by Slimane Rezki in 2012. Nevertheless, after critically comparing the printed text and its manuscript, it is discovered that the ʿIzzah version of the text has endured many mistakes, some of them, are somehow serious. Unfortunately, the French translation of the text, which came later, seemingly referred to the corrupt text, the ʿIzzah's text, as its premier source. Hence, it is far from accurate. Furthermore, the specific and profound study of the treatise is never done before and the treatise's version for the English language is not available up to now. Therefore this study will not only shed more light on the subject of the Unity of

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<sup>36</sup> The term of "exoteric scholars" (*ʿUlamāʾ al-Rusūm*) is often used by al-Nābulī in his explanation of the doctrine *Waḥdat al-Wujūd*. It simply indicates to the group of scholars who tend to be literalist in addressing religious issues and problems. In some cases, al-Nābulī also employ the term *ʿUlamāʾ al-Zāhir* as its synonym.

Existence, particularly on its development in the late 17<sup>th</sup> and the early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, but it also provides a better understanding of al-Nābulṣī's model of *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* as well as the historical background that indirectly effected his works.

Besides, al-Nābulṣī is considered as the toughest proponent of *Waḥdat al-Wujūd*, together with some other names such as Ibrāhīm al-Kūrānī and al-Qushāshī. The link that intertwines this doctrine's hero is strongly connected. It is reflected in the body of scholarly network that stretches from the east to the west covering all regions of Islamic territory. In this respect, the network can also be traced back to individuals of Nusantara scholarship, considering that many of them were the direct apprentices of *Waḥdat al-Wujūd*'s champions such as ʿAbd al-Raūf al-Sinkīlī, Yūsuf al-Makassarī, etc. However, because the studies on al-Nābulṣī are very rare, and his contribution in shaping the worldview of the Sufi is seldom discussed, his endeavor seems to be insignificant, especially studies that relate to the scholars of Nusantara archipelago. Therefore, it is hoped that this study can help the future researchers to observe the significance of Nābulṣī's influence in intellectual arena, especially that relates to scholars of Nusantara.

### **1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

Based on the treatise:

1. What is "existence" according to the Sufis and the Theologians? And how does al-Nābulṣī harmonize the differences, and provide a satisfactory explanation for both?
2. What does the Sufi really mean by "Unity of Existence"? What differentiates between the Sufi's concept of Unity of Existence and pantheism? And what is the solution offered by al-Nābulṣī in this regard?