

# Jacques Derrida, Islam, and the West

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**Abstract:** Since 9/11, Islam has emerged as the new Other that threatens the world's peace and stability. Islam and the West are polarized and antagonized. They are viewed as monolithic and exclusive binaries. Islam is seen as the arch-enemy of the West and its human rights and cherished values. The Algerian-born French philosopher Jacques Derrida holds some Eurocentric views regarding Islam, which is not surprising in the case of a philosophy that is based on the extermination of all kinds of authority including religion. However, Derrida's perception of Islam as the Other of democracy is in sharp contrast with the main tenet of his philosophy which aims at deconstructing binaries and moving the margin to the center. This paper vindicates that Derrida shows some sympathetic attitudes towards Islam and that his philosophy can be used to debunk the Western myth that represents Islam as a violent, exotic, and destructive Other. Derrida's deconstruction theory makes it possible to deconstruct the polarity Islam/West and open dialogue between cultures.

**Keywords:** Deconstruction theory, Islam, the West, Jacques Derrida.

Since 9/11, Muslims have become despised people in the world that are torn into the binary opposition "Us" and "Them". This way of thinking in terms of binaries has been omnipresent in the West since Plato. Jacques Derrida, whose last years were marked by his engagement in politics, broke from Western metaphysics that is logocentric. Logos is a universal center, a transcendental signifier, and all signifieds refer to it. So, Derrida tries to deconstruct logocentrism and all attempts to establish a system of binaries. Giovanna Barradori suggests another alternative instead of US and Them polarity, and this is, according to him, "a characteristically deconstructive move aimed at displacing the traditional metaphysical tendency to rely on irreducible pairs" (*Philosophy in a time of terror* 151). One of the main aims of deconstruction theory is to deconstruct binary oppositions and blur boundaries that are constructed by Eurocentric and Manichean thinking. In his explanation of Jacques Derrida's deconstruction theory, Ahmad Achrafi states that "the aim of deconstruction is 'to overthrow the hierarchy' of dualism and the violent binary system of opposition which is at the foundation of philosophy [...] To deconstruct [...] is to reverse logocentrism, to displace the metaphysics of presence, and to overturn 'the imperialism of the logos'" (472). Deconstruction tries to deconstruct hierarchical dualism that is inherent in Western philosophy. It makes binaries fuse, and it paves the way for new voices to emerge. In Derrida's terms, opposites are already united; they depend on each other integrally.

Derrida believes that Westerners, the self-appointed defenders of democracy, are encumbered by the burden of spreading democracy in the Muslim world. Derrida states that people should assist those who are fighting for democracy. In "The Other of Democracy", Derrida maintains that "whoever, by hypothesis, considers him- or herself a friend of

democracy in the world and not only in his or her own country [...] the task would consist in doing everything possible to join forces with all those who, and first of all in the Islamic world, fight [...] for the secularization of the political (however ambiguous this secularization remains), for the emergence of a laic subjectivity”(33). So, for Derrida, the West is entitled to intervene wherever they feel democracy is lacking, especially in the Islamic world. The best examples are Iraq, Libya, and Afghanistan. Intervention in these countries has resulted in heinous crimes against humanity. A very important condition of democracy, according to Derrida, is secularization that is held dear in the West, but it is incompatible with the Islamic civilization. Derrida writes: “I believe that the democracy to come [...] assumes secularism, that is, both the detachment of the political from the theocratic and the theological [...] the secular space of the political and the religious space are not confused”(Islam and the West 50). Democracy, for Derrida, requires the secularization of the political and the public sphere. In other words, Derrida wants Muslims to share the Western principle of separating religion from politics. The West does not respect others’ specificities. Those who do not surrender to the Western values of secularism are utterly rejected as the enemies of democracy.

In his writings, especially in “Faith and Knowledge”, Derrida holds different views regarding Islam. In a context, he describes it as an alien to modernity. He also refers to it as the exploiter of technology. He sees it as unique. And, at times, he allies it with Judaism and opposes it to Christianity. Also, he views it as similar to both Christianity and Judaism. By and large, Derrida gives scant attention to Islam in his writings. But when he discusses it, his views are sometimes sympathetic but often Eurocentric.

In an international conference on religion, Derrida regrets the absence of Muslim scholars in such a very important discussion. He says:

No Muslim is among us, alas, even for this preliminary discussion, just at the moment when it is towards Islam, perhaps, that we ought to begin by turning our attention. No representative of other cults either. Not a single woman! We ought to take this into account; speaking on behalf of these mute witnesses without speaking for them in places of the, and drawing from this all sorts of consequences”(“Faith and Knowledge”43).

The conference was Eurocentric and exclusive of representatives from the Islamic world. These so-called mute witnesses could have been invited by Derrida. In this conference, Derrida depicts Islam as an inherently violent and primitive religion. It represents, in his words, “an archaic and ostensibly more savage radicalization of ‘religious violence’”(“Faith and Knowledge” 89). The event of 9/11, in particular, stirs a mad rush to describe Muslims as terrorists and Islam as a bloody and violent religion. The West’s grave mistake is to blame all Muslims for what some radicals do. In fact, the terrorist does not have any identity or religion. In a footnote to “Faith and Knowledge”, Derrida associates Islamic fundamentalism with primitivism. He says:

This is testified to by certain phenomena, at least, of "fundamentalism" or of "integrism," in particular in "Islamism," which represents today the most powerful example

of such fundamentalisms as measured by the scale of global demography. The most evident characteristics are too well known to dwell on (fanaticism, obscurantism, lethal violence, terrorism, oppression of women, etc.). But it is often forgotten that, notably in its ties to the Arab world, and through all the forms of brutal immunity and indemnificatory reactivity against a techno-economical modernity to which a long history prevents it from adapting, this "Islamism" also develops a radical critique of what ties democracy today, in its limits, in its concept and its effective power, to the market and to the tele-technoscientific reason that dominates it. (81).

Derrida's view that Islamists are opposed to modernity and its technic-scientific aspects is not evident, because all fundamentalists now use these modern means to propagate their views and principles. But elsewhere, he avows that fundamentalists use the scientific and technological means which they revolt against. In the quote above, Derrida singles out Islamism as the most dangerous form of fundamentalism. He ignores Christian fundamentalism and Jewish fundamentalism, in particular, which resorted to ethnic and religious cleansing to found the state of Israel. Unfortunately, fundamentalism becomes a shibboleth of Islam despite the fact that radical Muslims do not represent true Muslims, because they have deviated from the teachings of the Qur'an. The terrorist acts that are carried out by Muslim fundamentalists are not legitimized by the Islamic law.

For Derrida, Islam is an impediment to the European process of secularization, and hence of democratization. In "Faith and Knowledge", Derrida states that

among the Abrahimic religions, among the 'fundamentalisms' or the 'integrisms' that are developing universally, for they are at work today in all religions, what, precisely, of Islam? [...] Everything that is hastily grouped under the reference to 'Islam' seems today to retain some sort of geopolitical or global prerogative, as a result of the nature of its physical violence, of certain of its declared violations of the democratic model and of international law (the 'Rushdie case' and among others-and the 'right to literature'), as a result of both the archaic and modern forms of its crimes 'in the name of religion,' as a result of its demographic dimensions, of its phallogocentric and theologico-political figures (45-46).

So, here, Derrida's view is biased as he focuses on one type of fundamentalism which he identifies as "Islam" and not "Islamism". He does not make any difference between Islam and Islamic fundamentalism. He sees Islam as opposed to the West's cherished values of reason, freedom, democracy, and modernity. For them, it poses an existential danger to the world.

Derrida's vehement criticism of Islam appears in other books like *The Trace of God* and *Politics of Friendships* which includes the imperative "not to deliver Europe over to Islam [...] The stakes would be saving the political as such, ensuring its survival in the face of another who would no longer even be a political enemy but an enemy of the political", one who "shares nothing of juridical and the political called European" (*Politics of Friendship* 89). According to Derrida, the intrusion of Islam into Europe would constitute a real threat,

because it is the antagonist of politics itself. His argument is that Islam is incompatible with the law and politics of Europe. Islam, for the Derrida, is not just the Other of democracy but also the Other of politics, a strange entity that is exotic to Europe. So, despite his attempt to deconstruct Eurocentrism, Derrida's view of Islam is Eurocentric. He endorses the Western view that all modes of government should melt in a single political system which is the Western one that is secular; hence, it is seen as sacra mount and true.

Derrida opines that Islam is the only religion that is resistant to democracy. In *Rogues*, he states:

Islam, or a certain Islam, would thus be the only religious or theocratic culture that can still, in fact or in principle, inspire and declare any resistance to democracy. If it does not resist what might be called a real or actual democratization, one whose reality may be more or less contested, it can at least resist the democratic principle, claim, or allegation, the legacy and old name of 'democracy' ("The Other of Democracy" 29).

Derrida is undecided whether it is Islam or a certain Islam that is opposed to democracy, but the quote affirms his view of Islam as a religion which is the arch-enemy of democracy.

Despite his rallying cries to deconstruct Eurocentrism, Derrida could not escape thinking in a Eurocentric way. He considers Islam as an independent religion that is separate from Christianity and Judaism. Derrida titles the third chapter of *Rogues* "The Other of Democracy". In this essay, he states that

the only and very few regimes, in the supposed modernity of this situation, that do not present themselves as democratic are those with a theocratic Muslim government. Not all of them, to be sure, but, let me underscore this, the only regimes that do not fashion themselves to be democratic, the only ones that do not present themselves as democratic, unless I am mistaken, are statutorily linked to the Muslim faith or creed(28-9).

So, for Derrida, Islam is the antagonist of democracy. He believes that democracy originally belongs to Europe and that it is embedded only in the Greco-Christian tradition. In the same essay, "The Other of Democracy", Derrida goes further to claim that a large number of Muslims make Islam a serious subject of investigation. This claim is reminiscent of Samuel Huntington's conspiracy theory of the clash of civilizations. He writes:

If one thus takes into account the link between the democratic and the demographic, if one counts, if one calculates and does the accounts, if one wants rationally to give an account, an explanation or a reason [ren- dre raison], and if one takes into account the fact that this Islam today accounts for a large number of people in the world, then this is perhaps, in the end, the greatest, if not the only, political issue of the future, the most urgent question of what remains to come for what is still called the political."(29).

For Derrida, a large population of Muslims, especially in the West, is very scaring because they will hinder the democratization process. In fact, Islam is seen as the sworn enemy of the West, an alternative to communism as a threat to Western civilization.

Following Derrida's logic of autoimmunity, democracy should suspend itself, or destroy a part of itself in order to protect itself. Autoimmunity is a biomedical phenomenon in which the individual's immune system attacks its cells; hence, it damages itself from within. Derrida borrows this term in order to refer to a threat to democracy that comes from within. Democracy, for him, sometimes risks destroying part of itself in order to be preserved. Derrida and Habermas explain the suspension of the democratic elections of the 1990s in Algeria in terms of what he calls autoimmunity; "Autoimmune conditions imply the spontaneous suicide of the defensive mechanism supposed to protect the organism from external aggression" ("Introduction" 20). So, autoimmunity means the violation of democracy in order to protect democracy from an imaginary threat. In accordance with Derrida's philosophy of autoimmunity, democracy in Algeria was attacked in order to preserve its survival. For Derrida, "Democracy has always been suicidal" ("The Other of Democracy" 33), because to "immunize itself, to protect itself against the aggressor (whether from within or without), democracy thus secreted its enemies on both sides of the front so that its only apparent options remained murder and suicide" ("The Other of Democracy" 35).

In his discussion of Islam which he thinks is antagonistic to democracy, reason, and philosophy, Derrida cites, as an example, the parliamentary elections in Algeria in 1992. These elections were the first multiparty and the only democratic elections in Algeria. Derrida describes the military coup not as anti-democratic but as an "interruption" whose aim was to save democracy from itself. For Derrida, the rule of the FIS could have led "democratically to the end of democracy" as "they decided to put an end to it themselves" They decided "to suspend, at least provisionally democracy *for its own good*, so as to take care of it, so as to immunize it against a much worse and very likely assault" ("The Other of Democracy" 33). Referring to the Algerian elections, Derrida writes: "When assured of a numerical majority, the worst enemies of democratic freedom can, by a plausible rhetorical simulacrum (and even the most fanatical Islamists do this on occasion), present themselves as staunch Democrats" ("The Other of Democracy" 34). The FIS was defeated by an undemocratic and authoritarian means. The elections were interrupted and suspended in January, and in February, the FIS party was banned by the ruling party which gained support from the West, especially France and the US. The FIS leaders were jailed and the Islamic newspapers were closed. In this regard, Samuel Weber comments: "Reacting to this election result, the FLN outlawed the FLN, imprisoned, tortured, and often tortured its leaders, adherents, and sympathizers" (112). The elections were suspended not because the FIS has proved to be opposed to democracy but for the simple reason that this party is an Islamic one. For those who adhere to the Western principle of democracy, all ills and wrongs are attributed to Islam that must scapegoated so that things will be straightened.

According to Derrida, the Algerian elections are an event that can be used "to illustrate the hypothesis of at least a certain Islam. And this Islam, this particular one and not Islam in general (if such a thing exists), would represent the only religious culture that would have resisted up until now a European (that is, Greco-Christian and glob a latinizing) process of secularization, and thus of democratization, and thus, in the strict sense, of politicization" (31). The ruling party was responsible for destabilizing peace. Their violation of democracy by

banning the winning party and annulling the elections stoke anger and violence, and it pushes the FIS party and its supporters to take revenge. To be sure, some Westerners ceased the opportunity to fuel this conflict.

Algerian elections of 1992 were broken off by the government, because the West and the government which was Western-oriented feared that the FIS's coming to power, though in a democratic way, would put an end to democracy. "The Algerian government and an important, while non-majority, part of the Algerian people (in the truth of people foreign to Algeria) thus preferred to put an end (to democracy) themselves. They sovereignly decided to suspend democracy, at least provisionally *for its own good* and in order to take care of it, to immunize it against the worse and more probable aggression"(Qtd in Samir Haddad, "Derrida and Democracy at Risk" 35). The Algerian government reacted in an anti-democratic way by ignoring the majority of voters. The suspension of the elections is thought to be for the sake of protecting democracy from an Islamic party which might be a danger to it. However, the government violates the democracy by trampling on people's will and their right to choose their representatives. The ruling party did not protect democracy, but they were responsible for very tragic events that bring tears to eyes. Annulling the results of the elections pushed supporters of the FIS to take up arms. The fierce conflict between the military and the FIS turned Algeria into a battlefield of bloody massacres known as the dark decade.

Though the FIS was suspended, the Algerian government has never been democratic. In this regard and in his comment on the highly undemocratic character of the FLN, John Esposito writes: "Although called the Democratic and the Popular Republic of Algeria, Algeria emerged as a populist-authoritarian state. It was ruled by successive autocratic FLN government"(Islam and Democracy 152)..John Esposito considers these elections as an utter failure of democracy. He writes: "One of the most dramatic failures of democratization in the early 1990s was in Algeria"(Islam and Democracy After 16). Though the Algerian government suspects the FIS of being undemocratic, the FLN government has always been attacked for being undemocratic in practice.

In fact, the decision to suspend or preserve the elections is at the hands of the government only, and this is in sharp contrast to democracy. In addition to that, the FIS's threat to democracy represents only the military governments' positions, which is not true, especially that it does not represent the position of the majority of people who opted for the Islamic Salvation Front. The government had no reasonable ground to worry that the FIS might put an end to democracy, especially that before the elections, the party gained the confidence of most Algerians. According to the Maghreb Report March/April 1993, "with few exceptions, the FIS did not impose the veil, ban public bathing, close bars, or prevent women from voting or working. They did pass more conservative regulations in areas that were amenable to such measures."(Qtd in Islam and Democracy 163). By opting for the FIS party, Algerians express their desire for a democratic government without dismissing their Islamic cultural identity. But the ruling party, the FLN, and the Francophone ruling elite wanted a secular democracy which resembles that of the colonizer. The FIS got the victory by democratic means. Thus, interrupting and suspending the democratic procedures is considered as a threat to democracy, especially that the victorious party has not proved to be a risk to democracy.

The Algerian scenario was repeated in Egypt where the democratically elected President Morsi was removed because of his Islamic party which did not prove to be undemocratic. In fact, democratic elections in the Arab-Islamic world are often interrupted.

Britain gave a very good lesson of democracy and how democratic elections should not be annulled though people's decision might not seem to be wise. In the Brexit vote, the British people voted to leave the European Union. Though quitting the UN would cause many national self-harms, damages, and lost opportunities, people's will was respected. Seemingly, Derrida's 'autoimmunity' is applied only in the Arab-Islamic world.

For Derrida, democracy requires secularism or the separation between politics and the religious life. In other words, religion must be a private matter that should not be displayed in public. Derrida states that the idea of

democracy implies a separation of state and religious power; that is, a radical secularism and a flawless tolerance that not only provide shelter for religious, cultural, and thus also cultural and linguistic communities against all terror – whether it states terror or not – but also protect the exercise of faith and, in this case, the freedom of discussion and interpretation of every religion. For example, and in the first place here: in Islam, the different readings of which, both exegetical and political, must be allowed to develop freely, and not only in Algeria. This is, moreover, the best response to the anti-Islamism tainted with racism to which a so-called Islamist violence, or violence that still dares to claim its roots in Islam, can give rise ('Taking Sides for Algeria' 122.).

Derrida's philosophy implies the distortion of the Koranic teachings and the reinterpretation of the Qur'an as if it is a literary text that is open to many readings. This view of Muslims' sacred book is adamantly rejected by the majority of Muslims.

Despite some of his strange views vis-à-vis Islam, Derrida tried to deconstruct the Manichean binary that structured the war on terror. He has alleviated fear from Islam by deconstructing the myth/meaning of 9/11 and showing its autoimmunity. In his discussion of 9/11, which is seen as a "major event", Derrida compares terrorism to autoimmunity, a term used to refer to the immune system attacking itself. Jacques Derrida states: "Immigrated, trained, prepared for their act in the United States by the United States, these *hijackers* incorporate, so to speak, two suicides in one: their own [...] but also the suicide of those who welcomed, armed, and trained them" ("Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicide" 95). The West, for Derrida, is contributing to its self-destruction, because "The United States and Europe, London and Berlin, are also sanctuaries, places of training or formation and information for all the 'terrorists of the world'" ("Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicide" 101). The US played a major role in the emergence of terrorism. During the cold war, they trained Al Qaeda and provided it with weapons to defeat the Soviet Union. So, the West is responsible for creating terrorism that attacks them. Examples include the creation of Al Qaeda and ISIS in which many Westerners were recruited. For Derrida, "The 'terrorists' are sometimes American citizens, and some of those of September II might have been; they received help in any case from American; they took American airplanes, took over the controls and took to the air in American airplanes, and took off from American airports" ("The Other of Democracy" 40).

Terrorists are now living in Europe and America, and they cannot, in fact, be considered as Others. Derrida points out that

Those called 'terrorists' are not, in this context, 'others,' absolute others whom we, as 'Westerners,' can no longer understand. We must not forget that they were often recruited, trained, and even armed, and for a long time, in various Western ways by a Western world that itself, in the course of its ancient as well as very recent history, invented the word, the techniques, and the "politics" of 'terrorism' ("Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicide" 115).

A terrorist is not qualified by his race, religion, and nationality, but rather by his deeds. Derrida states that the "United States, Israel, Wealthy nations, and colonial or imperialist powers are accused of practicing States terrorism and thus of being 'more terrorist' than the terrorists of whom they say they are the victims" ("Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicide" 107). The West practices terrorism by invading the other countries to civilize people or fight terrorism. This holy war on terror will further increase the hostility between Muslims and the West.

In her war on terrorism, the US uses violence to defend its principles of democracy. Thus, it violates the ideal that she is defending, and she becomes no different from the terrorists that she is fighting. According to Derrida, after 9/11,

we see an American administration, potentially followed by others in Europe and in the rest of the world, claiming that in the war it is waging against the "axis of evil," against the enemies of freedom and the assassins of democracy throughout the world, it must restrict within its country certain so-called democratic freedoms and the exercise of certain rights by, for example, increasing the powers of police investigations and interrogations without anyone, any Democrat, being really able to oppose such measures ("The Other of Democracy" 40).

In fact, the West's mission of spreading democracy and its war on terrorism has yielded opposite results and revealed its practice of terrorism. They committed heinous crimes in countries like Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan, and they do not care a fig for humans' lives and rights which they pretend to defend. Their slogans are "full of sound and fury, but they signify nothing". The invasion of countries to eliminate terrorism is a kind of colonialism and a violation of democracy, because people were against Western invasions and interventions. All Muslims are convinced that the aim of military interventions in some countries like Iraq is not meant to spread democracy and freedom but rather for geopolitical and economic interests. The Western definition of terrorism is very biased. For instance, 9/11 is considered as a grave historical event, while the attacks on Gaza are seen as no event as if Americans are more human than Gazans. In fact, the war on terrorism has widened the chasm between Muslims and the West.

Islamic fundamentalism is a kind of auto-immunity because radical Muslims violate the teachings of the Qur'an and the Prophet (PBBUH) in order to defend their principles. This auto-immunization of Islam is somehow similar to the auto-immunity of democracy.



According to Arthur Bradley, it is possible to say that "modern political Islamism represents the auto-immunization of Islam: Islam must surrender the goal of the ummatu-l-muslimin—must attack its immunity to the disease of secularism – precisely to preserve and sustain its life. For me, at least, the logic of autoimmunity not only clarifies the complex relation between Islam and Islamism but enables us to get a firmer critical purchase upon the process of secularization that is happening" ("The Theocracy to Come", *Politics to Come* 181). Arthur Bradley adds: "Just as Rogues describes the an 'aporia of democracy' which led the Algerian government to suspend democratic elections in democracy's own name—so we must also speak of a corresponding 'aporia of Islamism'—which compels Islamist parties like the FIS to embrace secularization in the name of building an anti-democratic Islamist state: each is forced to destroy some part of itself in order to give it a chance for a future" (182). In the same vein, Olivier Roy suggests that Islamism is enhancing and paving the way for secularization. In his words, "the in-depth secularization of Islam is being carried out by people who are denying the very concept of secularism." He adds that "Islam is experiencing secularization, but in the name of fundamentalism" (Qt in *Politics to Come* 181).

Deconstruction theory challenges the centrality of the logos, the center, and the metaphysics of presence. It is based on the belief that truth is socially constructed, and it seeks to invert the hierarchical value of the binary. M. A. R. Habib sees the Western ideal of democracy as logocentric. According to him, "[m]odern equivalents" to the logos "in Western society might be concepts such as freedom or democracy. All of these terms function as what Derrida calls 'transcendental signifieds,' or concepts invested with absolute authority, which places them beyond questioning or examination" ("Deconstruction and Islam"). Derrida hints at the imperfections of Western democracy, he encourages any criticism of Western systems and institutions. In his conversation with Mustapha Chérif, Derrida states: "it is your democratic right to criticize the insufficiencies, the contradictions, the imperfections of our systems. To exist in a democracy is to agree to challenge, to be challenged, to challenge the status quo, which is called democratic, in the name of democracy to come. This is why I always speak of democracy to come. Democracy is always to come" (43). For Derrida, a democratic system is supposed to give people the right to criticize the state of things including Western democracy that is considered as a perfect model.

In fact, democracy, in the West, is relative and not absolute. The West is not democratic in the others' view, because its democracy does not transcend its borders. In this regard, Derrida states: "I dare to dream of democracy that is not simply tied to a nation-state and to citizenship. And it is under these conditions that one can speak of a universal democracy, a democracy that is not only cosmopolitical but universal" (*Islam and the West* 44). Unfortunately, the West is democratic only within its borders, but outside, it violates the principles of democracy. In this context, Jacques Derrida writes: "What I call 'democracy to come' would go beyond the limits of cosmopolitanism, that is, of a world citizenship." ("Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicide" 130). The US and some Western countries have waged heinous wars against the Arab-Islamic countries, like Iraq, Libya, and Afghanistan, to kill millions of them in the name of democracy and human rights. The tortures of Abu Ghraib in Iraq are in sharp contrast with the democratic principles and practices that the West is preaching. The West's use of violence to impose democracy is utterly undemocratic. Furthermore, it is a violation of democracy to make decisions for others and to interfere in their socio-political system. Joining hands with those who are in the

vanguard of promoting democracy should be done in a peaceful way, because the end does not justify the means. Tzvetan Todorov concurs that “the violence of the means cancels the out the nobility of the ends. There are no humanitarian bombs or merciful wars: the populations who suffer them count the bodies and have no time for sublime rhetoric”(72-3). Todorov belies that the enemies of democracy are in the West; they are within and not without.

Todorov considers populism, for instance, as a major enemy of democracy. He is very critical of xenophobia and Islamophobia. He finds that the Other who can be accepted in the West is the one who is stripped of his cultural and religious values. He maintains that “The secular individual we imagine here is an abstract being, devoid of cultural characteristics, even though culture is part of human nature”(159). The French version of democracy, for instance, requires the exclusion of Islam. This radical secularism is a real threat to democracy.

Many Western countries' laws against Muslim immigrants, including banning the veil, the burqa, or the burkini, vindicate the West's illusion of democracy and their intolerance with the other cultures. In a secular nation like France, for instance, Muslims are restricted because of what they believe and wear. Muslim women, in particular, are subject to misogyny, oppression, and religious discrimination. They are not even allowed to decide about their bodies. The burkini ban in many cities of France in August 2016 is sexist and racist. Freedom to act and think is central to democracy and this freedom should be given to all people without distinction. According to Todorov, in " democracy, at least in theory, all citizens have equal rights, all inhabitants are equal in dignity"(8). Banning the burkini shows France's resistance to the difference. While Muslim women tolerate Western women's lavish display of the flesh, Westerners do not tolerate the hijab, the burqa, or the burkini. Banning Islamic clothes is likely to stoke hatred, and secularism is likely to promote the "Us" and "Them" division.

The West which considers itself the epitome of democracy and human rights often prove the opposite by fueling hatred between cultures. Irresponsible free speech that is encouraged by the likes of Charlie Hebdo magazine promotes hatred and disunity. This free speech that aims at propagating stereotypes angered some radicals who killed some magazine cartoonists on 7 January 2015. Tzvetan Todorov argues that "a certain use of freedom can be a danger to democracy"(3). Charlie Hebdo's satirical magazine's caricatures that are insulting to the Prophet Mohammed (PBBUH) divides people into two groups. The first claims to be Charlie Hebdo while the second claims to represent the prophet of Islam. The responsible use of free speech is important to maintain peace between cultures. Llamooning a prophet, for example, is an act that is below morals and civilization. Thus, freedom of expression should respect what is held sacred in other cultures.

Derrida, who was very critical of Eurocentrism, admits that “since the very beginning of my work-and this would be ‘deconstruction’ itself-I have remained extremely critical with regard to European-ism or Eurocentrism [...] Deconstruction in general is an undertaking that many have considered, and rightly so, to be a gesture of suspicion with regard to all Eurocentrism”(Learning to Live Finally 40). Derrida is very opposed to globalization which is synonymous with Europeanisation and Americanisation. In other words, it seeks to reduce cultural differences and to universalize the Western one. Derrida states that

what is often termed *mondialisation* in French, or ‘globalization’ as the Americans call it, has been a universal Europeanization

through science and technology, and even those who oppose this Europeanization, even those who, through acts of terrorist violence, claim to oppose this violent Europeanization, this violent Americanization, do so most often using a certain technical, techno-scientific, sometimes techno-economic-scientific Europeanization [...] I believe we must again look at concepts thoroughly. First I believe that, paradoxically, globalization hasn't occurred. It is a false concept, often an alibi; never has the world been so unequal and so marginally shareable or shared (*Islam and the West* 62).

The West wants to eliminate differences and make the world unified economically, politically, and culturally. The West believes that there is only one civilization which is the Western one. Hence, those who do not live by the norms of the West are seen as savage and inferior. In a nutshell, the West wants the Arab-Islamic world to define democracy, freedom, and modernization in its terms. In fact, globalization is threatening to cultural diversity and richness. The blind ignorance and denial of other civilizations and the attempt to submerge the Others into a single exclusive culture result in fierce conflicts. For Derrida, globalization has not promoted understanding between people. It rather increased division, and it results in inequality, famine, misery, unemployment,..., etc. He writes:

In an age of so-called globalization, an age where it is in the interest of some to speak about globalization and celebrate its benefits, the disparities between human societies, the social and economic inequalities, have probably never been greater and more spectacular (for the spectacle is in fact more easily "globalizable") in the history of humanity. Though the discourse in favor of globalization insists on the transparency made possible by teletechnologies, the opening of borders and of markets, the leveling of playing fields and the equality of opportunity, there have never been in the history of humanity, in absolute numbers, so many inequalities, so many cases of malnutrition, ecological disaster, or rampant epidemic ("Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicide" 121)

Because it is a cultural and economic imperialism, globalization has failed to promote interaction, hospitality, peace, and justice. The West wants to democratize and modernize the West in its terms and ways. Hence, they ignore religious and cultural differences, and they even impose these values by force. Mustapha Chérif writes: "Apparently, today, modernity is not simply the secularization, which Derrida rightly recommends, but dehumanization, de-spiritualization, de-signification" (*Islam and the West* 49).

Derrida's version of democracy is in line with the Western model, because it prefers the dissociation of the religious and the political. In his view,

For whoever, by hypothesis, considers him-or herself a friend of Democracy in the world and not only in his or her own country (and we will later come to this cosmopolitical dimension of a universal democracy, perhaps even independent of the nation-state structure), the task would consist in doing

everything possible to join forces with all those who, and first of all in the Islamic world, fight not only for the secularization of the political (however ambiguous this secularization remains), for the emergence of a laic subjectivity (*Rogues*33).

The Western version of democracy does not fit in the Islamic world because of religious and cultural differences. It is worth mentioning that in the US, for instance, political discourses abound with religion. For instance, “God bless America” The war on terror was always described by George Bush as the war between good and evil. Referring to the Arab-Islamic countries and the US, Derrida says that “their political discourse is a religious discourse in its most dogmatic form”(*Islam and the West* 66).

Derrida, who is called by Giovanna Borradori the “prophet of the oppressed, the undocumented, and the unseen”(*Islam and the West* viii) identifies Islam as a victim of Western oppression. In “Faith and Knowledge”, Derrida blames the Judaeo-Christian West which is waging a war against Islam. He says: “Wars of military intervention, led by the Judaeo-Christian West in the name of the best of causes (of international law, democracy, the sovereignty of peoples, of nations and of states, even of humanitarian imperatives), are they not also, from a certain side, wars of religion?”(“Faith and Knowledge”.63).In fact, the construction of European identity has always been at the cost of excluding Others. In the West, Islam represents the evil or the demon that must be exorcised. The Western myth that considers Islam as a violent religion that is opposed to democracy has been propagated by conspiracy theorists and Western media. Thus, Derrida calls for the need “to deconstruct the European intellectual construct of Islam”(*Islam and the West* 38).

Since deconstruction aims at questioning all identities and constructions, it is useful for deconstructing Western stereotypes of Islam. According to Habib, Islam, for the West, is a construct that embodies all the negative characteristics that are viewed as opposed to the Western values. In his words, Islam is “a mere construct, motivated ultimately not by objective inquiry but by imperial and colonial aims. We can see the same procedure operative today in many media portrayals of Islam”(“Deconstruction and Islam”). The sharp opposition has been erected between Islam and the West can be deconstructed by bridging the ontic gap between Islam and the West and debunking the Western myth that Islam is the arch-enemy of democracy and the West’s cherished human rights.

If in *Rogues*, Derrida describes Islam as the Other of democracy, elsewhere he rejects this opposition. Derrida groups Islam, Judaism, and Christianity together by referring to them as ‘monotheisms’, ‘Abrahamic revelations’, or ‘Abrahimicheritage’For Derrida, Islam belongs to the so\*called “the people of the Book.”

Derrida asserts the plurality of Islam. According to him, people should differentiate between Islam and Islamism;“Islam is not Islamism and we should never forget it, but the latter operates in the name of the former, and thus emerges the grave question of the name”(“Faith and Knowledge” 46). In fact, Islam of Al Qaeda and ISIS is not the true Islam that is practised by true Muslims. In this respect, Giovanna Borradori writes: “The project of reconciling Islam and the West presupposes that there is only one Islam and one West. By contrast, and this is perhaps the key argument of the book, there is plurality in the West as well as multiple Wests”(*Islam and the West* xv). If Tony Blair and Geroge W. Bush do not

represent Western liberal democracy, Osama Ben Laden and ISIS do not represent true Islam. In fact, war criminals, Tony Blair and George Bush are elected democratically. However, Muslims did not elect Al Qaeda and ISIL as their representatives. They all refuse to line up behind these terroristic groups. Though Derrida makes a good position in differentiating between Islam and Islamism, his call for rereading and reinterpreting the Qur'an, as has been done by intellectuals like Mohammed Arkoun, is something that is opposed to Islam, which does not accept variety and multiplicity.

Indeed, Islam is not antagonistic to freedom and democracy. It rejects all forms of injustice and dictatorship, and it is supportive of democratic forms of government. A very important study conducted by Robert Inglehart and Pippa Norris shows that Muslims are more supportive of democracy than non-Muslims. If Western democracy is secular, Muslims want Islam to be an integral part of democracy. Mustapha Chérif says: "We need freedom, modernity, and progress without losing our souls"(92). Because Islam calls for equality, freedom and justice, it is likely to promote democracy. Sanjeev Kumar H.M. writes: "It must also be noted here that classical Islam not only recommended rebellion against an impious leader, but also founded a conceptual foundation for the development of democracy. Concepts such as shura (consultative body), ijma (consensus) and maslah (utility) pointed to an affinity between Islam and democracy" ("Responding to Western Critiques" 589). In fact, Democracy is not evacuated from the Islamic milieu. The Arab Spring, for instance, is proof that the Arab-Islamic world is longing for democracy.

Derrida calls for the necessity of achieving a civilizational Concord in which Muslims, Christians, and Jews live together in peace. Derrida writes: "I believe that plurality is the very essence of civilization. By a plurality, I mean that alterity, the principle of differences and the respect for alterity, are the principles of civilization. Therefore, I don't imagine a homogeneous universal civilization; that would be the opposite of civilization" (*Islam and the West* 80). Civilization is the widest community where equality is evidently the most fundamental right. This civilization is supposed to include different people who belong to different cultures and have different worldviews. According to Derrida, a "civilization must be plural; it must ensure respect for the multiplicity of languages, cultures, beliefs, ways of life" (*Islam and the West* 81). A universal civilization is the embodiment of a crossover between Islamic and non-Islamic civilizations. It transcends radical, cultural, and religious barriers. According to Cherif, "Universal Civilization belongs to everyone and is owned by no one" (37). Civilization is pluralist, and it embraces all humans. Peaceful co-existence requires opening rooms for pluralism and multiculturalism. Stubborn rejection of difference leads to wars and conflicts which vindicate our failure as humans. According to Derrida and Habermas, "the essence of terror is not the physical elimination of whoever is perceived to be different but the eradication of difference in people, namely of their individuality" (*Philosophy in a time* 7). This applies to terrorists as well as to the West who wants to convert the Others to their style of life.

Mustapha Cherif's book refutes Samuel Huntington's clash of civilizations; "There is no inevitable confrontation nor intrinsic clash of civilization in their history [...] On the contrary Islam has participated in the emergence of the modern Western world; through its cultural and spiritual values, it is close to Judeo-Christian Greco-Roman ethics, norms, principles, regardless of the very real differences, divergences and uniqueness of each" Islam and the West (21). Civilizations do not clash; they are rather collaborative. The difference

between civilizations does not create any conflict. They rather make them fertilizing for each other. In this regard, Derrida writes: "I believe that one of our primary intellectual responsibilities today is to rediscover the sources and the moments in which those currents, far from being in contrast, truly fertilized each other" (*Islam and the West* 39). History has shown how different cultures can enrich and fertilize each other. Medieval Spain, for instance, witnessed an era of convivencia marked by the peaceful co-existence of Muslims, Christians, and Jews. Islam can play a key role in forging bonds of intimacy among people who belong to different cultures. So, difference rather than sameness is the main characteristic of civilization in which race, religion, and nationality do not matter.

If Cherif believes in "dialogue" and "mutual understanding", Derrida assumes that addressing the other entails both "connection" and "interruption" (*Islam and the West* 66). He even states that it is impossible to "rediscover a common memory" of humanity (*Islam and the West* 22). Though Derrida avows that it is difficult to reconcile the West and the East, he is very hopeful that peaceful co-existence might be achieved.

For Derrida, dialogue requires a kind of democracy that should not be cosmopolitical but universal. In other words, it should go beyond the restraints of citizenship and the nation-state. Derrida states:

Beyond all cosmopolitanism, there is a universal democracy, which goes well beyond citizenship and the nation-state. Therefore, I believe that if a dialogue is to be opened between what you call the West and the East, between the different cultural regions and the different religious regions of the world, if such an exchange is possible through words, through thoughts, and not through force, if such a dialogue and exchange are possible without resorting to force, they must occur on that horizon of a democracy to come, which is not connected to a nation-state, which is not connected to citizenship, to territoriality (*Islam and the West* 44).

Dialogue is possible by following a democracy that is not imposed by violence but one that is established in a peaceful way. This democracy as Derrida reiterates should be independent of the nation-state structure, transcending the boundaries of religion and culture.

Derrida criticizes autonomy that makes the subject indifferent to others' individuality and their right to be different. He writes: "I would be tempted to suggest that the freedom of such an individual also presupposes a certain heteronomy, that is, a certain acceptance of the law of the other" (*Islam and the West* 51). Subjectivism or Individualism makes the individual define himself as a subject who is supreme in himself; hence, he views others who are different from him as objects. In his conversation with Mustapha Cherif, Derrida states: "The world of which I speak is heterogeneous"

Approaching other cultures is likely to lift hatred and correct some misunderstandings about them. The clash of civilization might occur, because no efforts are made to decipher the cultural identity of the Other. Mustapha Cherif opines that "Ignorance is the primary cause of hatred. In the North and in the South, education has abandoned a common base; and we have seen a decrease in the study of the culture of the other" (*Islam and the West* 3). So, studying <http://jrsdjournal.wixsite.com/humanities-cultural>

others' culture is very important for increasing cultural dialogue. Getting in touch with other cultures is likely to appease fear and hatred between strangers and weave threads of trust. According to Derrida, people should have faith in each other in order to get connected. He states: "I cannot address the other, whoever he or she might be, regardless of his or her religion, language, culture, without asking that other to believe me and to trust me [...] One's relationship to the other, addressing the other, presupposes faith" (*Islam and the West* 57-8).

In his writings, Derrida discusses forgiveness and hospitality are likely to deconstruct the polarity West/Islam and enhance intercultural diversity and dialogue. Derrida criticizes Kant's conditioned hospitality, and he opposes it to what he calls "'unconditioned' or 'pure' hospitality, which is without conditions. It does not seek to identify the newcomer, even if he is not a citizen" ("Hospitality, Justice, and Responsibility" 70). In his book *Of Hospitality*, Derrida calls for an absolute and unconditioned hospitality. He states that "absolute hospitality requires that I open up my home and that I give not only to the foreigner, but to the absolute, unknown, anonymous other, and that I give place to them, that I let them come, that I let them arrive, and take place in the place I offer them, without asking them either reciprocity (entering into a pact) or even their names" (25). Hospitality requires opening our hearts and minds to the foreigner without limitations on their cultural and religious practices. Real hospitality is extended to the strangers who are not expected or invited. If one welcomes only those who are expected and known in advance, this is not hospitality for Derrida. According to him,

Pure and unconditional hospitality, hospitality itself, opens or is in advance open to someone who is neither expected nor invited, to whomever arrives as an absolutely foreign visitor, as a new arrival, nonidentifiable and unforeseeable, in short, wholly other. I would call this a hospitality of visitation rather than an invitation. ("Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic" 128-29).

After 9/11, Western countries become inhospitable to Muslims who are seen as a real threat to peace and security in the West. In the times of war, it becomes more urgent to accept others in one's home regardless of their identity and their differences. Derrida explains that

unconditional hospitality implies that you don't ask the other, the newcomer, the guest, to give anything back, or even to identify himself or herself. Even if the other deprives you of your mastery or your home, you have to accept this. It is terrible to accept this, but that is the condition of unconditional hospitality: that you give up the mastery of your space, your home, your nation. It is unbearable. If, however, there is pure hospitality it should be pushed to this extreme ("Hospitality, Justice, and Responsibility" 70).

For Derrida, hospitality involves welcoming the best and the worst people. Thus, the West is supposed to welcome the influx of refugees and immigrants without any conditions in spite of the danger that some of them might pose, Derrida states: "For unconditional hospitality to take place you have to accept the risk of the other coming and to destroy the

place, initiating a revolution, stealing everything, or killing everyone. That is the risk of pure hospitality and pure gift, because a pure gift might be terrible too" ("Hospitality, Justice, and Responsibility" 71). Fear of Muslims makes the West reluctant to offer hospitality to Muslims, and the laws of immigration become tough. Despite terrorism, the West should be very welcoming to others, because hospitality is likely to develop mutual acceptance and understanding among Christians, Muslims, and Jews. And it makes them live in peace and unity.

In *Acts of Religion*, Derrida speaks about the Arab-Islamic hospitality though "with shyness and prudence" (405) as he avows. He made a special reference to Hatim Al TA I who lived in the second half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D. This man, who was a poet, was very famous for generosity and hospitality. In his discussion of pre-Islamic hospitality, Derrida writes

I gave a three-year seminar on hospitality, in which I often refer not just to Christianity or to Judaism, but also to pre-Islamic culture. The hospitality which was required among nomadic communities was such that when someone lost his way in the desert, the nomadic communities should receive him, should offer him hospitality, for three days. For three days they had the obligation to feed him and look after him ("Hospitality, justice and responsibility" 71).

In fact, Islam is a hospitable religion. It asks Muslims to be kind and welcoming to others. In *Acts of Religion*, Derrida draws attention to Islam, the monotheism "about which even the most ignorant know that it too has always presented itself—perhaps even more than Judaism and Christianity—as a religion, an ethics, and a culture of hospitality" (365).. Algeria gave a very good example of how to extend hospitality to others. Helen Cixous describes Derrida's longing for the Algerian Islamic culture which made him feel shrouded in an exceptional and genuine sense of hospitality. Cixous writes:

[The black years were] the troubled and turbulent time of texts of vigilant friendship such as *Partipris Pour L'Algerie* (Taking a stand for Algeria)[and] of his great seminar on L'hospitalité, or as he would say, L'hostipitalité. The epigraphs of those seminars remind us of this feature specific to Islam, the duty of Hospitality. Philosophy and recent memory from an alliance here, for if there is an experience missing from French culture, it is surely that of Hospitality. And the Algerian children that we once were retained their nostalgia for the welcoming reception of the Algerians (Qt in Savannah Kate Whiting 133).

Like Hospitality, forgiveness is very essential for the politics of reconciliation. For Derrida, wherever forgiveness appears, it is embedded in a religious heritage, which Derrida defines as Ahrahamic 'to bring together Judaism, the Christianities, and the Islams' ("On Forgiveness" 34). Forgiveness is important for preventing never-ending cycles of violence and vengeance. It is likely to heal wounds and help reconstruct the shattered relationships.

True forgiveness is that which forgives the unforgivable. According to Derrida, forgiveness is possible "only where it seems to be impossible, before the un-forgivable, and possible only when grappling with the im-possible" ("To forgive the unforgivable" 35). For



Derrida, tolerance originates in the Christian world, and it is a Christian virtue. In his words, tolerance is “a Christian virtue, or for that matter a *Catholic* virtue”(161). What the quote implies is that tolerance does not exist in Islam or Judaism. Tolerance, according to him, is “always on the side of the ‘reason of the strongest, where ‘might is right’; it is a supplementary mark of sovereignty, the good face of sovereignty”(127). In “Faith and Knowledge”, Derrida says:

For the concept of tolerance strictosensu, belongs first of all to a sort of Christian domesticity. It is, I mean behind this name, a secret of the Christian community. It was printed, emitted, transmitted and circulated in the name of the Christian faith and would hardly be without relation to the rise, it too Christian of what Kant calls ‘reflecting faith’-and of pure morality as that which is distinctively Christian. The lesson of tolerance was, first of all, an exemplary lesson that the Christian deemed himself alone capable of giving to the world (59).

In fact, tolerance is not only a Christian virtue; it is also inherent in Islam. When Omar entered Jerusalem, for instance, he did not do any harm to Christians. He respects them and allows them to practice their religion. In Islam, there is no compulsion. God the Almighty says: "No compulsion is there in Islam"(2:256). Tolerance, in Islam, is also clear when the prophet Mohammed (PBBUH) says to the polytheists: "To you your religion, and to me mine"(109:6). God also says: "And for his saying: ‘My Lord, surely there are people who believe not’ yet pardon them and say: ‘Peace’ soon they will know"(43:88-89). In Islam, people are asked to be merciful not just with other human beings but also with animals and nature.

Derrida calls for religious tolerance. According to him, “the religion of the other must be recognized and respected, as well as his mother tongue”(Islam and the West 45). Derrida insists on the necessity of religious tolerance, especially in an age that is characterized by secularism and religious decadence. He states: “I believe that the secular today must be more rigorous with itself, more tolerant toward religious cultures and toward the possibility for religious practices to exist freely, unequivocally, and without confusion” (Islam and the West 51). Unfortunately, secularism in the West holds dear, and it becomes the real enemy of peace and democracy. In fact, secular extremists are worse than religious extremists. Both of them need a culture of tolerance.

For Derrida, true religious people are not fundamentalists. They are more likely to accept and permit Others’ religious beliefs. He writes: “I am persuaded that authentic believers, those who are truly Jewish, Christian, or Muslim, those who are truly living their religious beliefs and not simply endorsing the dogma of those religions, are more ready to understand the religion of the other and to accede to that faith, whose universal structure I have just described, than others”(Islam and the West 58).

Derrida makes friendship central to his discussion of the concept of the political. Derrida discusses the possibility of “a friendship without hearth [...] a friendship without presence, without resemblance, without affinity, without analogy”(Politics of Friendship 154). Westerners might forge bonds of friendship with Muslims. This friendship is not necessarily based on symmetry and sameness; it might occur despite dissymmetry and difference. In fact, there are few things that divide us, but many things draw us together.

Thus, we should insulate ourselves from the demand that everyone must take sides in a pitched struggle of “Us” against “Them”. This conflict is always converted into a morality play. If one is right, then the other has to be wrong. The “Us” and “Them” mentality has to be changed by transcending one’s tribe and remaining on a universal plane.

## Conclusion

As the paper has shown, Derrida views Islam with ambivalence. He is unable to decide whether Islam is a friend or an enemy in our age that is marked by violence and the utter violation of human rights. Derrida views Islam as a major impediment to democracy, which he believes can be achieved only through secularism. Derrida’s version of democracy, which shows his limited knowledge about Islam, is Western. Hence, it is too difficult to apply in the Islamic world. Though he considers Islam as the enemy of democracy, Derrida expresses his sympathetic views towards it in some of his writings that draw a distinction between Islam and Islamism. As the paper has shown, Derrida’s ideas might open new avenues for reconciling the erstwhile rigid polarity East/West. For Derrida, Muslims and the West, who are descendants of the Abrahimic tradition, can live in peace, because civilization has never been a monolithic and exclusive entity. It is diverse, and it is based on difference and multiplicity. Derrida calls for religious tolerance, and he believes that Muslims and the West can live in togetherness. His ideas might open new avenues for reconciling the erstwhile rigid polarity East/West. For Derrida, the process of reconciliation is made possible through hospitality, forgiveness, tolerance, and friendship.

Derrida’s writings are efforts by a pied noir to do justice to both Muslims and the West by trying to hold tenaciously to the middle ground despite its disappearance from the political and intellectual worlds. He always dreamt of a democratic world that is based on equality and devoid of discrimination and borders.

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