CHAPTER 8

Going Rogue on Islam

Derrida's Muslim Hauntology and Nationalism's Specters

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Abstract

In response to the contributions in this volume, this chapter analyzes the continued haunting of the supposedly secular and democratic nation-state by exclusivist ideologies. The nation-state, it contends, continues to be plagued by an exclusionary ideology based on race, ethnicity, and religion. Rather than democratic polities where citizens can adjudicate their differences, nation-states, especially in the present populist moment, are political entities where difference is violently suppressed.

Jacques Derrida, it might seem, would be a natural ally for those who oppose essentialist and static visions of nation-states and seek to challenge oppressive structures within them. His philosophy of deconstruction breaks down the seeming naturalness of categories that have been used to oppress and marginalize. Yet, this chapter shows how Derrida's political theology remains indebted to an exclusivist model of the nation-state. This is most clear, the chapter contends, in his engagement with Islam and the question of the political versus the theocratic. In uncritically accepting an account of Islam as theocratic and in its essence immutable, and Europe as secular and therefore open to change, Derrida replicates a division between Europe and Islam that both betrays his own philosophical program and obscures the violence necessary to maintaining this binary. Overcoming this exclusionary model of the nation-state, the author argues, requires a rethinking of the very meaning and structure of the nation-state in modernity.

In the first decades of the twenty-first century, nationalism in all its ugly forms is rearing its head across multiple continents. Most disturbingly, a toxic version is rife in several democratic societies of the global North and South. This, however, is not the first time nationalism exploded. Roughly two decades ago, just after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, historian Partha Chatterjee noted that political analysts were eager to claim that "the principal danger to world peace is now posed by the resurgence of nationalism in different parts of the world."[1] Chatterjee was critical of the predisposition of analysts to first deem something a "problem" before it could gain public and scholarly attention. Whether this early twenty-first-century wave of ethnocentric movements is an incarnation of older toxic and violent expressions of nationalism or something else, few would disagree that it disrupts global peace, and in some places it is the beginning of a dangerous moment in world history. This rather ominous form of nationalism now invades different shades of human bodies, ethnic and racial categories, religious traditions, and expressions of faith. Disentangling its myriad tentacles and dissecting its discursive and embodied expressions remains a challenge.

The reason dissecting nationalism is so challenging analytically is that in the twentieth century, nationalism was the

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feature of "victorious anticolonial struggles in Asia and Africa."[2] One of the many ironies of history is that during this period of emancipation from colonial rule "nationalism was generally considered one of Europe's most magnificent gifts to the rest of the world."[3] Anticolonial nationalist leaders of the global South adopted certain features of nationalism, but they also spoiled their records afterward when they undertook some of the most heinous and morally odious "ethnic politics" in distressing civil wars.[4] Today nationalist discourses in Europe, North America, and elsewhere similarly adopt some of the very toxic and dangerous features of nationalism's past. The new discursive practices of White nationalism are not shaped by "print-capitalism," as in Benedict Anderson's imagined communities, but rather fascist ideology. Social media and memes without any central editorial direction but clearly orchestrated as media campaigns are sponsored by a species of neoliberal capitalism that fuels these tendencies. Certain forms of White nationalism imagine the norms of the territory or earth they inhabit to be determined by a cosmology of Whiteness. Hence, when people of color cohabit or surge to become majorities, Whites or settlers view such a change as an alteration of the cosmic order, often inflected with religious overtones. Christian settler colonialists in South Africa and Jewish settlers in Israel exhibit a similar logic of combining territory and race or ethnicity, and then invert the negative appellation of "timeless natives" to themselves and thus deem themselves as "native" to their rhetorical advantage.[5]

This volume contains a cross section of ideas and analyses of nationalism in different contexts that are illuminating in multiple ways. I will try to build crosscutting conversations between some of the ideas shared by some contributors, especially in my engagement with the question of Islam in the context of western nationalism, since Islam is viewed as a major symbol that feeds raging White and other ethnocentric expressions of nationalism. Indeed, as I will show later, even ostensibly secular nationalist projects in the context of Europe and the United States rely on discrete theological disavowals that are in effect masked as "political disavowals" directed at the Muslim as "Other." The other feeder is, of course, race and the changing cultural and political demographics of North America and Europe. These shifts in effect exercise the anxieties of hegemonic White segments on both continents. Recent European and North American experiences have shown how once Jews were deemed the enemy, speedily the "Muslim problem," once the "Saracen problem," was added to that list of enemies.[6] It is thus unfortunate that avant-garde European intellectuals cultivate blind spots about these interrelated issues.

As a longtime reader of Derrida, I found elements of deconstructive modes of reading texts to be valuable. To go behind the veil of ideology and language was one useful way to understand how meaning is made by way of destabilizing orthodoxies and how politics animate texts. However, when I read Derrida's *Politics of Friendship*, there was something jarring in his warm and uncritical embrace of Carl Schmitt for me as a scholar of Islam. Surprising was the absence of any demurral on the part of Derrida to Carl Schmitt's key portrayal of the Turk and Islam as the political enemy. In the light of Derrida's subsequent reflections in *Rogues* on Islam, the text of *Politics of Friendship* serves as a distant trace. Perhaps in defense of Derrida, though it does not insulate him from critique, the theologian David Tracy offers some insight: "All texts, theirs and mine, are saturated with the ideologies of particular societies, the history of ambiguous effects of particular traditions, and the hidden agendas of the unconscious."[7] So not even the most self-reflexive deconstructionist thinkers can claim they have freed themselves from the unconscious ideological saturations of history and society, since both elements engulf them too as they write and speak. So it is with Derrida.

Exploring the question of nationalism in the context of religion and political theology, the Algerian thinker Mustapha Chérif's conversation with Derrida on Islam and Algeria provides me with an opportunity to think through what I deem to be unventilated and contentious assumptions in Derrida's haunted readings of Islam and Muslims coupled with his neglect of a careful study of the phenomena he comments on, namely, Islam and Muslims. I begin with Chérif's conversation with Derrida on the question of Islam and the notion of the theological. I then draw on the critical insights of the political theorists Anne Norton, Wendy Brown, and prominent political philosopher Fred R. Dallmayr to leaven the conversation in a bid to propose a different way, one of coexistence for Muslims in Europe in a democratic idiom. Proleptically, I announce that Derrida makes a claim of the impossibility of democracy in conversation with "Islam" that is animated by his reading of developments in Algeria in 1992, and this constitutes Derrida's hauntology with respect to Islam. Some of the themes explored in this chapter, I am delighted to note, also resonate with the views of authors of select chapters in this volume.

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In 2003, Derrida, the preeminent French philosopher, born in El-Biar, Algeria, left his Parisian hospital bed to speak at the final session of a colloquium, "Algeria-France: Tribute to the Great Figures of the Dialogue between Civilizations," held at the prestigious cultural site, the Institut du Monde Arabe in Paris on May 26–27. Derrida, famous for his captivating philosophy of deconstruction, engaged in conversation with the Algerian philosopher and scholar of Islam Mustapha Chérif from the University of Algiers, who is also a sometime visiting professor at the Collège de France in Paris.

This exchange is one crucial thread in my reading of the book-length essay *Islam and the West: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida*. I later mediate this conversational essay through the lens of an essay in Derrida's *Politics of Friendship* and *Rogues* to complete the circle, so to speak. I explore what resources Derrida and Chérif can both offer to help us visualize pathways out of the rigid conceptualization of society as necessarily taking the form of nations and nation-states. I am not calling for the immediate abolition of the nation-state (such calls will not be heeded, even if made sincerely!). However, as with other contributors in this volume, my goal is to diagnose the current deficits of the nation-state and the dangers of nationalism that occur within it. There may very well be emancipatory possibilities that mark "the political" within the nation-state context. These might be brought about by asking specific questions as to how one might transform the nation-state so that it might reflect more humane political ideals. However, my aim here is primarily diagnostic rather than constructive.

What Derrida means by the idea of "the political" is to free political reason from any metaphysical and theological relationship, and therefore it is synonymous with the secular and the democratic.[8] For Derrida and his interpreters, the metaphysical assumes the disavowal of time by creating an opposition between the temporal and the eternal and in deeming knowledge to be absolute.[9] Arguing that there is no "front between responsibility and irresponsibility" in the context of Abraham's sacrifice, Derrida frames what remains as "different orders of responsibility, different other orders: the religious and the ethical, the religious and the ethico-political, the theological and the political, the theologico-political, the theocratic and the ethico-political, and so on."[10] One should be alert to these binary sets that frame "the political" in different instances where one dimension, often the nontheological, is privileged.

We should assess Derrida, to be fair, by his own standard, but the debate about the political has surpassed this metaphysical logic. Political reason in late modernity, Giorgio Agamben will tell us, is biopolitical. In other words, simple and natural life is now subject to the mechanisms and calculations of state power where the state is increasingly behaving in absolute ways or performing secular metaphysical gestures.[11] Many agree with Agamben and others that the neoliberal nation-state paradigm only increases impersonal and alienated relationships between citizens. Sometimes the idea of citizenship can become emptied of its values and be reduced to linguistic, racial, and/or identity markers denuded of community and meaningful coexistence. These are all valid observations and hence make the search beyond the nation-state framework more urgent. It is only by interrogating the secret link between "bare life" and the politics that govern modern political ideologies, which by my lights is a secular metaphysics, that the possibility of some form of emancipatory politics arises.

Democratic nation-states claim to preserve and enhance the freedom of the individual more than anything else. One of the central features of modernity is a new idea of freedom and a disenchanted relationship with nature, unknown to our predecessors in the annals of thought, where humans were embedded in a cosmic context. The modern notion of freedom promoted by democratic nation-states is a double-edged sword: we need it for our continued valuation of human life and yet it can also carry the bacilli of our undoing as a human community. A craving for freedom merely for the sake of resistance to government interference in one's life without an agenda for the common good often reveals freedom's ugly sides, as recent globalized conflicts, such as over the need to be vaccinated against the COVID-19 virus in the service of the public good, have demonstrated. Yet, democratic as well as autocratic nations have also invoked the concept of freedom to undertake imperial ventures and to vanquish political opponents. Here notions of individual freedom become entangled with the freedom of the nation-state on the international stage.

Agamben helpfully channels Foucault's sobering insight that the "modern Western state has integrated techniques of

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subjective individualization with procedures of objective totalization to an unprecedented degree."[12] For it was Foucault who drew attention to the totalization of the structures of modern power that occurred when a range of practices, including political practices, shifted from being subject to moral or legal judgments as good or bad (in terms of a law or a moral principle),[13] and instead were judged as "true or false." As Foucault put it, political practices became aligned to a "regime of truth" to form an "apparatus (*dispositif*) of knowledge-power that effectively marks out in reality that which does not exist and legitimately submits it to the division between true and false."[14] The modern political subject is placed in a political double-bind of both hyperindividualization and simultaneous subordination to modern biopower. The latter masquerades as truth and delegitimizes its antithesis as false.[15] I argue that we need to return to governmentality in politics where organized practices, inclusive of mentalities, rationalities (including practical reason), and a range of ethical and moral techniques in governing subjects ought to replace biopower.

Our disenchantment with aspects of modernity does, however, compel us to reach back to earlier knowledge resources where what we call "religion" was crucial to human social and political life. Democratic freedoms and democratic political orders proudly claim to host a new self that prizes exclusively the "human ego as the crucial and ultimately as the only secure and indubitable subject."[16] As Dallmayr notes, "Together with the stress on subjectivity, modern thought also relies centrally on human freedom—where freedom signifies no longer participation in a cosmic plan but rather independence from external bonds and autonomous authorship of all plans and initiatives."[17] In a cosmos-centered world, the "I" or "ego" was restricted to a surrounding context of disclosure. The cosmos or the heteronomous order to a large extent determined the measure of humans. Today we realize several problematic aspects of this heteronomous or cosmic order, but a context of entirely humanly constructed norms as the measure of humans also comes with its own challenges. In other words, political systems now are frameworks constructed by humans, and humans can also unmake those systems. Political orders in their nature and form are not sacrosanct. What is sacrosanct for moderns is to adhere to the order once sufficient agreement is reached so that the rules are uniformly applied and recognized. Politically modern humans invoke untrammeled notions of freedom, but there are more practical measures and matrices that decide the limits of what humans can do and might achieve. Religion and religious traditions have over time, and especially in the modern context, contested the political freedoms humans derived from secular philosophies, and often the two crossed swords. Still, the dialectical value that occurs when we engage both holds value. Foucault's and Agamben's critique of modernity and Dallmayr's reconstruction of the political serve as counterpoints or supplements to Derrida's very firm secular notion of the political.

Islam on the Mediterranean Stage

In his opening remarks, Chérif frames the image of Islam in the west as one of an ongoing and frustrating *ressentiment* or hostility. On his account, "Islam" as a synecdoche for a civilizational confrontation is fully entrapped by post-9/11 events, among them the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, the endless "war on terror" campaigns, and the securitization of the religion industry (especially of Islam and Muslims). These features, when coupled with the blithe disregard for human rights and civility in the policy postures of successive U.S. and European governments, make up the key elements of his framework. Chérif highlights the plight of Muslims in the world, but, specifically from his vantage point, those who live in the region of the Mediterranean where North Africa connects with southern Europe. He lists the plight of these communities as, first, resisting the injustice of the west, and second, resisting the "de-signification of the world."[18] By the latter he points to the fact that the symbolic and the spiritual in human life still retain their importance for these people. Since a range of Muslim majority societies offer "resistance to the decadence of modernity," the response of the west results in the stigmatization, as

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Chérif puts it, of "the eternal 'Saracen.'"[19] The "Saracen," which like the "eternal native" or "eternal Jew" in other contexts, is a stand-in for the "eternal Muslim" who becomes the target of western hate, both overt and covert, because he or she, it is alleged, opposes the very being of Euro-America's civilizational project and its standards of justice.[20] It is an opposition that inserts itself in every aspect of being in order to create an almost metaphysical otherness. The western media and some intellectuals, Chérif complains, "reject the right to be different, and claim to hold the truth in the name of scientific rationality and scientism."[21] To that Chérif insightfully adds: "One difficulty is the attitude of the West with entrenched ideas, which refuses to admit plurality, to really listen to the other, to recognize that there exist other, completely different ways to see the world—of a West that alarmingly seems to want to escape forward, while denying the deep crisis that is shaking it."[22] Chérif argues that it is not enough to question the dichotomy between east and west, to compare values, texts, and practices, or to create certain solidarity against the irrational.[23]

Derrida in his response confirms his rejection of categorizing cultures as developed versus undeveloped. "I agree with you," he addresses Chérif, "about the need to deconstruct the European intellectual construct of Islam." Then Derrida adds: "The so conventionally accepted contrast between Greeks, Jews, and Arabs must be challenged. We know very well that Arab thought and Greek thought intimately blended at a given historical moment and that one of the primary duties of our intellectual and philosophical memory is to rediscover that grafting, the reciprocal fertilization of the Greek, Arab, and the Jew. Spain comes to mind."[24] Derrida explains that his family probably came to North Africa from Spain where multiple modes of thinking blended. "One of our primary intellectual responsibilities today is to rediscover the sources and moments in which those currents, far from being in contrast, truly fertilized each other."[25] But all these words are perhaps a temporary reprieve since, as I will later show, Derrida's written (*écrit*) political philosophy in *Rogues* does not fully theorize this overtly compassionate and complex (phonocentric) voice of his; instead he had already gone in the opposite direction.

Chérif and Derrida share a commitment to "the principle of secularity" where, according to Chérif, it is "intrinsic to Islam, and this has been true since its origins."[26] Chérif projects secularity rather anachronistically onto the eighth-century birth of Islam as if the then notion of the "worldly" or the quotidian is the same as the modern idea of the secular today. To be charitable, he might have meant that the idea of the political in Islam is not theocratic, but rather value-centered, socially defined, and adaptive to change over time. This was the case for the caliphate model of governance, which demonstrated its adaptability over the centuries. Nevertheless, Chérif persists in critiquing the west for selectively applying the standard of democracy, and hence for being hypocritical when it comes to how it characterizes Arab/Muslim majority states and how it treats Muslim minorities in Europe. He uses the forum of dialogue with a distinguished French philosopher and an august audience to let them know that Arabs and Muslims especially are subject to double standards and "hypocritical political discourse." He highlights the deafening silence on the part of French intellectuals and the public alike when Arabs and Muslims discuss and contribute to the content and meaning of democracy. Often such efforts to expand the framework of an inclusive and blended form of democracy that includes the experiences of Muslim minorities are rebuffed. Chérif might possibly be speaking from his personal experiences in Europe. His is a more professorial complaint when compared to Houria Bouteldja's passionate plea and agenda for revolutionary love.[27]

In his opening remarks, Derrida wants the audience to know that he is speaking as an Algerian drawing on his personal history of being born in that country under French colonial rule, but he omits drawing attention to his Jewish Sephardi heritage that can be traced back to Muslim Spain or Andalus. The element of the protean and ambiguous cannot be suppressed in reading his text. "These are a few of the heartfelt things I want to tell you," Derrida says. "I want to speak here, today, as an Algerian, as an Algerian who became French at a given moment, lost his French citizenship, then recovered it. Of all the cultural wealth I have received, that I have inherited, my Algerian culture has sustained me the most. This is what I wanted to

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say in a testimony from the heart."[28] This is indeed a moving act of solidarity with his interlocutor, and one suspects the present and absent audiences whom he is addressing.

In response to Chérif's question about democracy Derrida asserts that as a political order it is a "model without a model, that accepts its own historicity … which accepts its self-criticism, which accepts its perfectibility."[29] As encouragement to Chérif and in agreement with him, Derrida adds: "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 a democracy to come."[30] A dialogue about the nature of democracy, Derrida explains, can only occur "in the revelation of that democracy to come, whose occurrence and promise remain before us."[31] Ringing with messianic tones, Derrida proposes a new vision, that a democracy to come has to free itself from "the concept of autochthony, that is, the concept of being born on a land and belonging to it through birth, the concept of territory, the very concept of State."[32] This is all a very encouraging, if not an emancipatory, discourse. Derrida then advocates a democracy that is not simply tied to the nation-state and to citizenship. Cosmopolitanism is certainly respectable, but it is still associated with the notion of state and the *polis* as part of a nation-state and territoriality. The conversation Chérif hoped to pursue between east and west, Derrida suggests, can be explored through dialogue and exchange in discursive modalities that are not connected to the idea of a nation-state, citizenship, religion, language, and territoriality. Rather, it can be explored through something more ambitious, such as a democracy "to come," which is an expression that has become a hallmark of the philosophy of deconstruction. Language and religion can be recognized as part of the dialogue, but Derrida would concede that the task at hand that he advocates is somewhat different: translation. Translation of the language of the other in pursuit of a universal democracy. For this purpose, theorizing a new international law is Derrida's proposal to push the conversation beyond the limitations of the question of sovereignty and the nation-state.[33]

Regardless of the direction the dialogue takes, foremost on the mind of Chérif was modernity and secularization. For Chérif, though modernity is "inevitable," it is reasonable to have concerns about the direction of secularization. For this reason, he characterized it as "dehumanization, despiritualization, *de-signification.*"[34] Chérif asked Derrida whether he shared a concern about the "*removal of religion from life* or at the very least the end of morality as it had been bequeathed by monotheism, a situation that destroys ethics and identity?"[35] Despite the institutions of the developed world and its attachment to human rights, Chérif claims that the quest for the "just, the beautiful and the true" seems increasingly elusive.[36] In this spirit he asks Derrida to share his reflections on scientism, secularism/ laicism, and capitalism. And although these are all interesting questions, Derrida's remarks on the secular are the most relevant to my discussion.

Derrida, in his response to Chérif, articulates the democracy "to come" is part of his signature move of teleiopoeiesis, and assumes such a democratic future to be secular and embodied by secularism. What Derrida means by "secularism" is clear. He describes it as "both the detachment of the political from the theocratic and the theological, thus entailing a certain secularism of the political, while at the same time, encompassing freedom of worship in a completely consistent, coherent way, and absolute religious freedom guaranteed by the State, on the condition, obviously, that the secular space of the political and the religious space is not confused."[37] What is constructive in his response is his rare and implicit critique of the secular: "Today we need a concept of the secular that no longer has that sort of aggressive compulsion that it once had in France, in the

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moments of crisis between the State and religion. I believe 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."[38]

His overtures to religion and religious culture are heartening, but his antipathy toward the "theocratic" and the "theological" is not entirely decipherable, especially from within a deconstructive perspective. From a deconstructive perspective, neither the theological nor the secular are self-sufficient or natural kinds of constructs. Against the shadow of the "theological," the proverbial elephant in the room is clearly the Muslim citizen of France. Among these is especially the female Muslim citizen, whose body has been subject to extraordinary legislative regulation when it comes to wearing the headcover in government institutions, such as schools, and where women are forbidden to don the facecover (*niqb*) in public or don swimwear covering their bodies. Derrida does not name the female subject but does a fine pirouette around the issue. And based on Derrida's privileging of the secular, which I return to later, one must question whether he really differs substantively with radical secular French intellectuals and members of the public who take an uncompromising line against the veil and in favor of an uncompromising concept of French secularism (*laïcité*). Many of his views on Islam, as it will become evident later, stem from a sleight of hand where he implicitly casts Islam as a theocratic order or sometimes veils it as among the forces that are ranged against "the political," meaning the secular.

Many Muslim women express the decision to wear the veil as reflective of their commitment to the shara (the legal and ethical aspects of Islamic life). The moral subject of the shara is in part a heteronomous subject, obedient to the strictures of God, the Prophet, and the salvation or obedience practices (*dn*) of Islam. To be fair, Derrida at different moments frames the individual as "autonomous" but also as one who "himself or herself [to] his or her law, [is] a sovereign subject" and where the freedom of such a subject also "presupposes a certain heteronomy, that is, a certain acceptance of the law of the other."[39] One could assume here that a veiling Muslim woman or any faith-adhering individual could be a sovereign subject. Furthermore, we can assume that the "other" in question mentioned by Derrida is the state or the divine. But we should note that this sovereignty of the subject is a qualified sovereignty on the grounds of what Derrida says next. This, in turn, betrays some of his less clear, if not problematic, liberal dispositions.

Continuing his reflections on the sovereign subject in relation to his or her law, presumably the law of the state or the law of religion, and whatever signified he meant should not really matter, he does, however, state a qualification: "But this heteronomy does not presuppose servitude or subjection, and the religious community can very well organize itself as a religious community, in a lay space, without invading the lay space and while respecting the freedom of the individual."[40] Here heteronomy to the other is qualified by the freedom of the individual. In other words, Derrida sees limitations in absolute heteronomy. It is a qualified surrender to the "other" that he advocates. Logically, this is a contradiction in terms, even though I am aware that deconstruction revels in defeating customary logic and contradiction. But the very idea of heteronomy is antithetical to freedom, and Derrida does not make clear the relationship he sees between the two. In other domains, separate or away from those prescribed by the heteronomous "other" such as the state, the law, or God, he seems to be saying that there is a limited kind of freedom or a nonheteronomous space, where a specific kind of freedom could be configured and imagined but that would not be the liberal freedom Derrida cherishes.

Derrida's difficulty with religion becomes clear when he writes: "I have always had the tendency to resist religious communitarianism, that is, any form of gregarious community that oppresses the individual, that prevents the individual from acting as a nonreligious citizen."[41] One might ask why Derrida found it necessary to privilege freeing the endangered species of the nonreligious citizen from the pressures of communitarianism when there are so many more powerful subliminal forces—such as advertising and marketing—that completely denude the person of any individuality. Derrida claims that he is keen to strike a peaceful "connection" between the individual and the religious community, provided that the religious community is not oppressive, overwhelming, or repressive.[42]

The presumption he makes of an entity known as the religious community that is oppressive and repressive deserves attention. Religious communities do have deficits, and repression might be one of them, but these cannot be totalized as a presumption fostered by the entire religious community or the leaders and caretakers of a tradition. Without devaluing the total system, these repressive aspects can be isolated and addressed just as they can be in secular systems. Yet, in Derrida's mind

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and in the minds of so many secular intellectuals, it is telling when the oppressive nature of the nation-state is not only naturalized but also excused as part of the necessity of "the political," while the theocratic is treated as dangerous or antithetical to life itself. More striking even is that the rhetoric of oppression only arises in the context of a conversation that centers around the elephant in the room, the practice of Islam in France and the contestation between the complex and diverse Muslim community, on the one hand, and the French state and legal system and Europe, on the other.

Derrida's transgressive reading of politics as displayed elsewhere in his more philosophical meditations on the political fades from view in this context where he explicitly deals with Islam. In the context of Arabs and Muslims, the situation inexplicably paves the way for him to take a more pragmatic approach to the state. One is tempted to say that he purchases into the "metaphysics of presence," which deconstruction with muscular effort disavows. In other works, Derrida critiques the metaphysics of presence—which is both explicitly and implicitly forwarded in many of the works of "western" philosophy—because it assumes an unmediated claim to truth. Despite his critique of the sovereign nation-state and the questions he asks about its origins, especially the theological character of state sovereignty following Carl Schmitt, he becomes emphatic in his promotion of the secular, a move that then surprisingly leads him to declare that he is *not* opposed to the state. Under certain circumstances, he asserts, the state "may be the guarantor of secularity, or of the life of religious communities."[43] Derrida repeatedly reminds his audience that one should simultaneously question the sovereignty of the state and at the same time maintain a complex concept of "the political," meaning the secular democratic. What is stunning is the notable absence on Derrida's part of his critical deconstructive posture when it applies to the nature and function of the French state vis-à-vis Muslims and Arabs! The only consolation is his theoretical allusion to the "democracy to come."

At the very instant of asserting the freedom or autonomy of the heteronomous subject, Derrida's rhetoric shifts from being an Algerian to being a European. How does he make this deft move? The "democracy to come" will allow us to question the sovereignty of the nation-state. But the outcome of this questioning will not be an ambivalent one, since it will surprisingly result in "the authentic secularization of the political, that is, the separation between the theocratic and the political."[44] Notice Derrida's constant use of the binary that pits the theocratic against the political. Sustaining binaries such as these is a cardinal sin in deconstruction, and Derrida's use of such a binary here is thus even more surprising. Here we need to observe that very subtly the naming of the "theocratic" is Derrida's reductionism and code word for Islam itself. Chérif is not alert to this move on the part of Derrida.

I am not alone in my observation of deconstruction's slippage in the wrong direction when it comes to engaging with Islam. Political theorist Wendy Brown has astutely questioned Derrida and other figures of the post-Marxist European Left in their identification of Islam with the theocratic: "How has the overtaking of Western political life by neoliberal rationality and by a figuring of Islam as theocratic produced a circling of the diverse wagons of this Left around an articulation of democracy that shores up the identification of the Euro-Atlantic world with civilization signified by individual freedom?"[45] I cannot improve on this eloquent and elegant encapsulation of the problem identified by Brown. I hope to have provided sufficient concrete examples to bolster her astute observation.

In dealing with the unnamed "Muslim question," one cannot help but notice that the founder of deconstruction, in this case, does less questioning and performs more decisively in favor of secularization. In Derrida's schema, secularization is deeply committed to sovereignty as the lynchpin of "the political." There are few instances where Derrida stakes out so unambiguous a claim as when he examines "the political." Contrary to his own theoretical strictures, Derrida has entrenched secularism's metaphysical suggestions while evacuating the metaphysics of theology. But the coup de grâce is in the very next line after he prophesizes that "the political" will be a more perfect secularization: "I believe that we must—here I am speaking as a Frenchman, a Westerner, a Western philosopher—I believe that what we must consider as our first task is to *ally* ourselves to that in the Arab and Muslim world which is trying to advance the idea of secularization of the idea of the political, the idea of a separation between the theocratic and the political—this both out of respect for the political and for democratization and out of respect for faith and religion."[46] The parallel respect for the political and the democratic, on the one hand, and the respect for faith and religion, on the other, is tautological at best, and either lacking in substance or a sleight of hand, at worst. Deconstruction's goal "to unsettle and shatter the original distinctions" as that unnamable play that challenges unitary structures and introduces heterodoxy sadly evaporates in the face of the theocratic/Islamic.[47]

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Derrida would argue that deconstruction is not a set of rules and that the outcomes of deconstructive readings and possibilities take time and do not usher in instant solutions.[48] But Derrida has repeatedly stated that deconstruction is interested in the impossible. Yes, indeed, deconstruction asks us to face the impossible so that from that specific struggle and experience it is possible to encounter emancipatory horizons in thought and experience. My interrogation goes like this: Why is the theological not subject to the impossible new possibilities? Why are readings of Islam not subject to such generosity? Why, in an elaborate mystification and masking, does Derrida so aggressively and fundamentally set up the binary opposition between the theocratic and the political, Islam versus the secular? So, to be clear, I am seeking a certain "possibility" for the theological/theocratic/Islam against Derrida's claim that the only way the political cosmos can be definitively split is only and almost exclusively through "the authentic secularization of the political, that is, the separation between the theocratic and the political."

Derrida's most effective and powerful contribution to philosophical thought has been to combat what he calls "the metaphysics of presence." It is the Derridean antidote to the history of western metaphysics to say with Nietzsche that truth is actually the history of metaphors and metonymies.[49] In other words, all the names related to principles, fundamentals, and such have always designated the constancy of a presence in terms such as "essence," "existence," "substance," "subject," "consciousness," "conscience," "God," and "man," among other concepts subject to radical questioning in deconstruction.[50] Ordinary language philosophy assumes that when we do not have the thing present, then we use the detour of signs on the assumption that the thing is present and that we can reappropriate it through our searching.[51] Derrida's counterconception is that the sign or a word defers that falsely assumed presence and engages that sign continuously without us ever attaining absolute knowledge of the thing itself. Why, then, would Islam and theology be any different? Why does Derrida in this instance claim to have absolute knowledge of these categories? I would defer to Michel de Certeau, who so aptly invites us to contemplate his words: "Truth is what [the hu]man silences through the very practice of language. Communication is always the metaphor of what it hides."[52]

Derrida Reading Islam

Derrida's negative view of the theological and the theocratic stems from his view of theology as an essential component of logocentrism that enframes itself as an authoritative and final "book," as opposed to his notion of ongoing writing that reflexively disrupts all discursivities along the lines of *différance*. I am asking this: Why couldn't the endless signification of possibilities result in the possibility that the theological and the theocratic also reach new possibilities that are not necessarily secular? Derrida might well object and respond by saying that deconstruction is not about the *possible*; deconstruction represents a force and desire to experience the impossible and to reach the other as the invention of the impossible. This then prompts the question: Why is the invention of the impossibility of the theocratic not also thinkable or in the realm of desire? Why is the impossibility of a theocratic order yet to come, one that is different from past theocratic and theological orders, not thinkable?[53] Why not theological and theocratic (im)possibilities, yet to come, in true Derridean fashion? Derrida does not entertain these possibilities and is wedded to the political theology of French *laïcité*, albeit with a few qualifications, as mentioned above. Nonetheless, the underlying political ontology of the secular remains undisturbed. Deconstruction is about questioning metaphysics, but it has cultivated its own metaphysics, namely, the metaphysics or absolute knowledge of the secular.[54]

One common understanding of deconstruction is that it is an endless process of questioning ideas and concepts and is consistent with the endless signification of words and concepts. "The signified always already functions as the signifier,"

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[55]

writes Derrida. If we treat democracy and secularity as a medicine, as Derrida does in his reading of Plato, then they act "as both remedy and poison," and they are introduced into the body of discourse with all its ambivalence.[56] Just as the secular can be both remedy and poison, similarly the theological and theocratic should in theory hold the same potential.

Deconstruction turns into a profoundly prescriptive moment at the Institut de Monde Arabe in May 2003. It is as if Derrida did not hear Chérif's pleas for both the need for religious morals and a different form and modality of the secular. Derrida's opening gesture was that he speaks here as an "Algerian." That expression could be a nostalgic reflection on his youth in Algeria and possibly appropriate for what one assumes to be an audience that is largely from an Arab background of North African heritage. Can this space of Algerianness turn into a platitude when the person of Jacques Derrida articulates a vision that is a veiled *mission civilasatrice*, where he invokes his status as a "Frenchman," a "Westerner," and a "Western philosopher" to make certain prescriptive pronouncements about the need to strictly separate the theocratic from the political? Echoes of Moses Mendelssohn ring loud.

Deconstruction insists that we are always speaking under erasure where the winning term, in this instance, the idea of the secular, ought to be displaced and put under pressure. To speak under erasure means to say that finality is always deferred. Yet, this move seemingly disappears in Derrida's discourse, and the possibilities of being French resolve into concreteness at the very point when he makes muscular pronouncements about the future of the political as secular and the banishment of the theological. One cannot disguise the implication that the banished theological is code for Islam in the French public square. Yet, the theologically Catholic is not banished from the public square nor is it subject to public discourse. Anyone aware of the known legislative restrictions against Islam, especially against Muslim women, cannot reach a different conclusion. To spell it out, the Muslim is the "other" of modern Frenchness. The repeated rhetorical bifurcation between the theological (Islam) as the antithesis of the secular is startling. It is startling because Derrida himself admits that the secular is "fundamentally theological" or that "sovereignty" has a "theological heritage." Such a binary move is either a gross pratfall or a deconstructive smokescreen to privilege the secular. If in the basics of deconstruction we are taught that a fixed outcome cannot be predicted, then neither can the end of the endless signification of ideas, concepts, and history be predicted. It does appear that Derrida's idea of both the secular and the theological has not been subject to critical scrutiny with the help of a decolonial lens.[57]

What if a democratic society prefers a theological, or aspects of a theological, order to be part of the political? In places such as Tunisia, Egypt, Sudan, and Pakistan it remains an aspiration. Why would an Indigenous African or Latin American polity that adopts a full-fledged pantheon of deities and a complex theocracy not be worth exploring rather than explaining away? The experiment with a version of Islamic democracy in post–Arab Spring Egypt in 2011 was quickly sundered by a military coup in 2013, and the surviving post–Arab Spring democratic experiment in Tunisia in 2021 suffered a setback. It is too early to judge Turkey's secular/Islamic hybrid experiment. Would such thought experiments, along with realized and materialized experiences, not be part of a democracy yet to come? Why is the European model of "the political" the only conceivable model?[58]

To further reinforce my case that Derrida insufficiently interrogates the secular and falls short of his own deconstructive prescriptions, let us examine his throwaway line about the 1992 elections in Algeria. Derrida briefly introduces the story of the aborted 1992 democratic elections in Algeria when the Islamists won the first round of the election and were poised to win the second round when the Algerian military capriciously canceled the elections. In his explanation Derrida takes a partisan line to a complex set of events. As Derrida put it, the military intervened on the pretext "of the threat of confiscation of democracy by the Islamist movement, when it was necessary, in Algeria, to suspend elections."[59] Most dispassionate observers will find Derrida's portrayal to be reductionist and deeply problematic. Upending a democratic process because of a predictable outcome of an Islamist victory made the military regime terminate the elections, and in the face of tremendous violence and upheaval, resulted in a seven-year civil war that claimed the lives of more than 200,000 Algerians, by conservative estimates. After touching this point, Derrida indicates that he does not wish to discuss this event further. But he was clearly willing to show his hand. Here the propping up of secular order brought the country no closer to a "democracy to come."

However, Derrida nevertheless continues to frame this tragic political event, and lesser ones that played out in France, as events that should be faced with knowledge, responsibility, and science. And in the very next move he turns to the Gnostic and

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mystificatory when he observes that the imperative to act during such overwhelming events takes place in the "moment of responsibility" and "does not come out of knowledge." He continues: "It is a leap that must be made by each person wherever he or she is and in the unique situation in which he or she happens to be. Between knowledge and responsibility there is an abyss … but there are also moments of faith, in which a leap is made."[60] To my ears this sounds more like providing a justification for the leap made by the Algerian military, yet the near Islamist victory does not qualify in Derrida's mind as a leap but rather appears as an ominous turn to the abyss.

These problematic philosophical insights are strewn alongside some real constructive ideas, such as his proposal for a new international alliance that goes beyond citizenship and states. In one posture, Derrida adopts the position of antiglobalization without much comment. Still, this is a constructive proposal. But in the same breath Derrida also redeems the German philosopher Immanuel Kant's comments on the French Revolution as almost an abject lesson we should apply in the context of the aborted 1992 Algerian elections. Kant, he tells us, favored the Republic spawned by the French Revolution of 1793 but decried the Terror that followed in its wake. In other words, Kant taught us that a failed enterprise can be worthy and noble because even a failure can foretell or anticipate that "progress is possible, that a perfectibility is coming."[61] This will hardly be solace for those killed in the Terror or be a balm for the survivors and families of those who perished in the Algerian civil war of 1992. But I can be persuaded that those complex political realities can force us into paradoxical and contradictory stone-cold political and philosophical dilemmas and aporias. In dealing with complex historical situations and their lessons, Derrida sees a silver lining in quite dim situations. Yet, these lessons only apply to one side of the equation, the allegedly authoritarian secular side of the Algerian civil war of the 1990s. Nor, I might add, is the complex issue of Muslims in French democracy subject to any complex understanding; only the secular side enjoys this privilege. In a less charitable mood, one can say that when it comes to Islam and the Arabs, all the sophisticated deconstructive possibilities can be sacrificed at the altar of the secular political, and the French nation-state in particular.

Haunting Saracen Phantoms

Derrida's reading of political events in the context of his dialogue with Chérif was preceded by his equally problematic reading of the political theory that was in vogue in the decades prior to 2003. "The Phantom Friend Returning (in the Name of 'Democracy')" is a meditation on friendship drawing on Aristotle, Montaigne, and Nietzsche. This is followed by Derrida's reading of Carl Schmitt's now-famous notion of the political-theological as constituted by the friend–enemy relationship. In short, the very idea of "the political," according to Schmitt, requires that you need to have an enemy. Friendship can be spectral and actual, and it is always haunted by the specter of the enemy and enmity. Like in all concepts, the binary logics constitute the mutual imprecation and the haunting at work in language, culture, and politics. Through his reading of Schmitt's friend–enemy dichotomy, Derrida grapples with some profound questions for our time. My question is this: Is the friend–enemy polarity about the *order of the political*? In other words, does the binary decide the system of governance itself, its rules and norms? Or is the friend–enemy figuration drawing the boundary at the very idea of *the political* itself in contrast to the theological?[62] To repeat, what Derrida means by the idea of "the political" is an appeal to secular political reason or democratic reason. The death of the political occurs, he explains, when "a political crime could no longer be defined or distinguished from other sorts of crimes."[63] Then one's appeal to political reason becomes impossible.

Derrida is enamored by Schmitt's insightful and philological reading of "the political," which is a kind of philological and philosophical deconstruction avant la lettre that the German jurist and Catholic thinker undertook. He endorses Schmitt's distinction that the enemy (*hostis*) is always a public enemy; the enemy is not a hated foe and is always encountered in the context of war, thereby eliminating any context of personal hatred. The example Schmitt provides for his illustration of the friend–enemy division is the Ottoman Empire, that is, the Turks or the more familiar medieval word to identify Muslims, "the Saracens." Schmitt writes: "Never in the thousand-year struggle between Christians and Moslems did it occur to a Christian to surrender rather than defend Europe out of love toward the Saracens or Turks. The enemy in the political sense need not be hated personally, and in the private sphere only does it make sense to love one's enemy, that is one's adversary."[64] Not absent is Schmitt's explanation that the public enemy is the enemy of a collectivity of people, particularly "a whole nation." On this

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[65]

account, one should not love the enemies of "one's own people." Schmitt's analysis is historically flawed. One should immediately draw attention to the fact that the presence of a variety of Muslim political regimes and principalities prevailed in the Iberian Peninsula for nearly 700 years with instances of religious coexistence. This example should suffice to show that the enemy of Europe cannot be Muslim states, that is unless Schmitt does not consider Iberia to be part of Europe. Neither does Derrida, whose Jewish ancestors came from Muslim Spain to North Africa after the expulsion of both Jews in 1492 and Muslims in 1609–14, remember to remind Schmitt of his omission. Perhaps both Schmitt and Derrida betray their sense of what the "true Europe" is by not being alert to Europe as a complex historical space.

Derrida in his comment on Schmitt's above statement had this to say:

> We could say a great deal today.… Islam would remain an enemy even though we Europeans must love the Muslims as our neighbors. At a determining moment in the history of Europe, it was imperative not "to deliver Europe over to Islam" in the name of a universal Christianity. You are obliged, you will always have been obliged, to defend Europe against its other without confusing the genres, without confusing faith and politics, enmity and hostility, friendship and alliance or confusion.… *Indeed, strictly speaking, this would not be a war but a combat with the political at stake, a struggle for politics.… From then on the front of this opposition is difficult to place. It is no longer a thoroughly political front. In question would be a defensive operation destined to defend* the *political, beyond particular states or nations, beyond any geographical, ethnic or political continent. On the political side of this unusual front, 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—more precisely, a being radically alien to the political as such, supposing at least that, in its purported purity, it is not Europeanized and shares nothing of the tradition of the juridical and the political called European*. (italics mine)[66]

The first part of Derrida's above comment is unremarkable in that it aligns with Schmitt's view of the need to love your enemy privately and Derrida's advocacy of loving the Muslim neighbor. But the latter part of Derrida's comment is deeply problematic. First, Derrida completely conflates the political with the secular, but in other instances deems it complex. And it also seems that he had completely internalized the modern idea of politics as a practice and regime of truth instead of an art of governing and governmental activity. Second, Derrida seems to pay little attention to the fact that since Schmitt's postwar Europe, Muslims are no longer just neighbors in Europe. Now they are citizens of multiple European states. They might be deserving of "love" as neighbors as Derrida states, but more importantly they are *entitled* to citizenship rights that ought to consider all their complex history and culture. And yet by endorsing Schmitt's discourse of love for the Muslim, not as citizen, neighbor, or migrant, Muslims are implicitly still treated as the Saracen "other." All cultural entities in Europe are complex, but Derrida's notion of the political as filtered through Schmitt is unable to account for this fact. Sovereignty, in the case of Catholic Poles, Geneviève Zubrzycki points out elsewhere in this volume (chapter 5), requires that Jews be defined as outside the boundaries of Polishness in a very similar way that Muslims are defined as outside the boundaries of Frenchness or Europeanness and, in all likelihood, outside of Whiteness.

Third, Schmitt's assumption that Derrida seems to endorse is that Europe will always have its other, and it seems that the father of deconstruction underwrites Schmitt's conception of the hostile Muslim other. Beyond that, Derrida reads Schmitt's friend–enemy polarity to signify a political combat over the very idea of "the political." In other words, the reasoning and rationality of politics that constitutes the political is war and hostility. "This is important for Schmitt," writes Derrida, "for whom war waged against a determinate enemy (*hostis*), a war or hostility that doesn't presuppose any hate, would be the condition of possibility of politics." Then he adds, that as Schmitt reminds us, "no Christian politics ever advised the West to love the Muslims who invaded Christian Europe."[67]

Furthermore, with respect to the political, why is the European model the only model worthy of consideration? Why is the idea of the political exclusively owned by Europe? Why would the Turks be such hostile foes? Is the implication that they have no sense of the political? For the sole reason of failing to own an idea of "the political," Islam falls outside the boundary of Europeanness, and here once again we can see resonances with Zubrzycki's discussion of similar features in the Polish context.

Fourth, Derrida and Schmitt lack the self-reflexivity that Arendt teaches us to adopt, namely, to look at history and the European experience in the aftermath of coloniality. If the Turks posed a threat to Europe historically, then did Europe not pose a threat to the rest of the world? Why is colonization seen as part of a privileged civilizing force? The Turks and multiple

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Muslim civilizations also viewed themselves as advancing some cause greater than themselves.

The stark absence of historical perspective on the part of both Schmitt and Derrida is breathtaking. For if anything, the Ottoman Empire, and the body of thought accumulated over centuries of Muslim intellectual and political history in other imperial forms, dedicated considerable effort and intellectual labor to the understanding of the political. Yet, even centuries of orientalist scholarship failed to edify Schmitt on Muslim political history, and Derrida makes no effort to familiarize himself with non-European political philosophies, least of all Islamic political philosophy. What Schmitt accomplishes more explicitly, and Derrida accomplishes via a mystifying political-theological reading, is this: a discursive move to effectively turn the "other" into a realm beyond the civilized. Once you can proclaim that the enemy has no political reason, only theological reason, then any kind of hostility can be legitimated, as post-9/11 Euro-American military adventures have demonstrated.[68] I do not believe Derrida ever contemplated this reading, but the inarticulate premises of his complex arguments amount to the charge I pose.[69]

This observation of mine finds resonance with Richard Amesbury's contribution to this volume (chapter 4), which identifies particular discursive registers of religion when it comes to marking out who is part of the political and who is not. As he shows, sovereignty, or the very foundation of the state, is often constructed on this fiction, as noted in Derrida's observations of the U.S. Constitution. As Amesbury demonstrates with regard to the cases of nationalism in the United States and Germany, I hope I have also convincingly shown how preeminent French intellectuals foster nationalism in a secular guise and in a broader Europe too, where the indigeneity of first peoples in North America and the Roma people in Europe are completely erased from the idea of the political and the notion of sovereignty.

Countless Republican proponents of the antiveil laws in France defended their position on the grounds that such measures were necessary to protect civilization. To oppose the veil is to defend Europe. To endorse blaspheming Islam and Muslim sacred personages is to defend Europe. Schmitt has cast long shadows on Europe's political imagination, and the fascination of the European Left with his ideas in combat with liberalism remains a puzzle, especially in the light of his exclusivist ideology and flirtation with Nazism. One must thus conclude that to defend Europe is to defend *the* political as conceived by Schmitt and Derrida. Both have laid out the discursive means to defend France, and by implication Europe, against all others. Europe remains the Freudian "father" that haunts a good number of European intellectuals politically. Regrettably, it is hard to see how Derrida is not excluded from this group of intellectuals. His reading of Europe versus the Turks/Saracens remains as teleological and essentialist as Schmitt's.

There is some noteworthy rhetoric that follows Derrida's endorsement of Schmitt that requires further interrogation. After endorsing Schmitt's position that the Turks are Europe's enemies whereas one's Muslim neighbors are one's friends, Derrida provides an intriguing comment. He amplifies the friend–enemy polarity as *the* element that sublimates Islam and Muslims and requires the defense of Europe. One wonders why. Here he advocates not only the defense of territorial Europe, but also Europe itself as a synecdoche for "the political"! In a philosophical key, Europe now signifies the political universally. The exact words Derrida uses are telling:

> Today more than ever such a reading should take into account the fact that all the concepts of this theory of right and of politics are European, as Schmitt himself admits. Defending Europe against Islam, here considered a non-European invader of Europe, is then more than a war among wars, more than a political war. Indeed, strictly speaking, this would not be a war but a combat with the political at stake, a struggle for politics. And this holds even if it is not necessarily a struggle for democracy.… From then on, the front of this opposition is difficult to place. It is no longer a thoroughly political front. In question would be a defensive operation destined to defend *the* political beyond particular states or nations, beyond any geographical, ethnic or political continent. On the political side of this unusual front, the stakes would be saving the political as such, ensuring its survival in the face of another who would no longer be a political enemy but an enemy of *the* political—more precisely, a being radically alien to the political as such.[70]

Without disagreeing with Schmitt, Derrida effectively inscribes multiple ontological boundaries to show the difference between Islam and Europe. The combat with Islam is configured as a struggle over the "the political." And there is more than a hint that Islam will remain an alien enemy of the political unless it assimilates to some degree with the European juridical and political tradition. Assenting to the latter is the passport for inclusion and to becoming European. What this invitation betrays is also an astonishing ignorance of the political discourses current among European Muslims for the past several decades. But what Derrida's meditation also conveys is that Europe's leading philosopher can take the liberty to make serious

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judgments on a sensitive topic affecting the lives of millions without making any effort to understand what the nature and debate of the political is among the communities about whom he is pontificating. In collapsing the distinction between the political (democracy) and the secular altogether, Derrida in effect reduces the political to the secular. This was Derrida's predisposition before September 11, 2001, when the United States was attacked by al-Qaida.

In 2003, a year before he died, Derrida published *Voyous: Deux essais sur la raison*, which was published in English in 2005 as *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*.[71] Derrida says about the context of the 1992 Algerian elections: "The electoral process under way in Algeria risked giving power, in accordance with perfectly legal means, to a likely majority that presented itself as essentially Islamic and Islamist and to which one attributed the intention, no doubt with good reason, of wanting to change the constitution and abolish the normal functioning of democracy or the very democratization assumed to be in progress."[72]

Derrida's summary conclusions on political Islam in Algeria resemble the views of the American political theorist Michael Walzer and his discussion of political Islam in that very country. Nader Hashemi's detailed analyses of Walzer's conclusions, I would argue, are equally applicable to Derrida, namely, that both of their conclusions are "ideologically biased, monochromatic, and distorted."[73] The opinions of the marginal extremist factions of Islamists were deployed and magnified to justify the actions of the Algerian military regime's cancellation of the democratic elections. The views of mainstream Islamist spokespersons were conveniently ignored. Derrida's summary analysis of the political developments in Algeria has all the hallmarks of the selective use of information and a pro-authoritarian-state bias despite the human cost to the Algerian people of at least 200,000 deaths, as Hashemi diagnosed the civil war in response to Walzer's claims. Both Derrida and Walzer prefer secular governance as the panacea for all political conflict, irrespective of history and culture. And they advocate the removal of religion or the theological from the political sphere. "The New World," writes Anne Norton in response to such narrow understanding of politics, "is not persuaded that people need to be stripped of their faith before they can govern themselves."[74]

Yet Derrida goes further. Algerian Islamism is "antidemocratic" and "this Islam, this particular one and not Islam in general (if such a thing exists)," he wrote, "would represent the only religious culture that would have resisted up until now a European (that is, Greco-Christian and globalatinizing) process of secularization, and thus of democratization, and thus, in the strict sense, of politicization."[75] The statement on its own with a dose of hermeneutic generosity would allow one to infer that he views Islamic cultures as resisting Greco-Christian notions of the political in a constructive observation, or otherwise that it is a muscular declamation and critique of Islam as perpetually manqué.

Even though Derrida strategically tries to bracket the Algerian event from Islam more generally, this distinction evaporates. In essentialist fashion, Derrida then attributes the failure of democracy or resistance to democracy in Islamic contexts to the fact that, historically, Islamic political philosophy did not know Aristotle's *Politics* and preferred Plato's philosopher-king or absolute monarch and "that goes hand in hand with the severe judgment brought against democracy."[76]

Norton, in her *On the Muslim Question*, relentlessly points out Derrida's utterly wrongheaded formulations on Islam and on the history of Muslim philosophy.[77] The pratfalls are embarrassing when Derrida says that it is a "rather troubling fact that Aristotle's *Politics*" was absent in the Muslim philosophical encounter with the Greek legacy.[78] Rebutting multiple claims, Norton writes: "Derrida managed three errors in one sentence: Aristotle was imported not to Islam from Europe, but to Europe from Islam in the period he cites; references to the *Politics* are present in Islamic philosophy of the period; and al-Farabi [an early Muslim political philosopher] not only takes more than the philosopher king from Plato, he moves Plato in a democratic direction. The substance of the errors here is less interesting than Derrida's willingness to construct Islam as antidemocratic based on what he himself calls his own ignorance."[79] Derrida's ejaculations on Islam here are a model display of chutzpah: writing about a crucial political-cultural phenomenon of contemporary life, namely, Islam and Muslims, without investing in

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any respectful scholarly labor, an observation that should make any fair and dispassionate reader cast a shadow on Derrida's judgment.

The specters that haunt Derrida are those figures whom he identifies as "the enemy of the political," "a being radically alien," those "not Europeanized" and who share nothing of the European political and juridical traditions. One reading suggests that Derrida's words are very categorical, and we should take him at his word. In other words, he is loading his discourse with ontological ballast, being and presence, the very antithesis of deconstruction. It seems that only the Muslims and the Arabs retain their authorizing presence as "substance/essence/existence (*ousia*)" contrary to everything we learned from grammatology.[80] In all other instances, Derrida challenges commanding fictions, such as the guiding notions of Platonic ideas and Hegelian teleology. Why does Derrida's revolutionary mode of reading and thinking remain active and compelling on matters related to one shore of the Mediterranean, but then allies with the metaphysics of presence at the shores on the African side of the Mediterranean, or in the slums of France that political scientist Gilles Kepel unflatteringly called the "Banlieue de la République"? Derrida's meditations on Islam remain, to my mind, inexplicable.[81] Islam is the ghost, or the specter, that haunts deconstruction and resists the Greco-Christian notions of the political.

If it is not clear by now, I am arguing that one of Europe's preeminent philosophers, Jacques Derrida, despite his other interventions of fragmenting sovereignty and softening secularity, is entirely committed to a secularized Christian political theology of Europe à la Schmitt on a universal scale. So, the question arises: Did Derrida the Algerian of Jewish heritage become assimilated to France to the extent that he has now colonized others with the weapons of French secularism, coded as "the political" in his theorization? If Algeria is emblematic of Arabs/Islam, then Derrida had for decades fostered ways to emasculate Algerians with his most stark ideological thinking.

If so, then one must also highlight the fact that the modern democratic order is not without boundaries, in other words, it is hosted in the nation-state. Democracy is captured and hosted within a political theology of Europeanness, meaning Christianness. Even if this Christianity is radically secularized, it nevertheless remains culturally Christian, as Zubrzycki points out. Given the ethnic nature of Polish identity, Zubrzycki adds, an abstract notion of civic identity or in my formulation as notions of governmentality, cannot be realized in such a nation-state since belonging itself is tied to a religious and ethnic identity that precludes others. Philosophically it remains within the European nationalist project. Here the nation represents the people, as Amesbury points out, and the people as White and culturally Christian/western. In the case of France, the idea of the people is symbolized by Europeanness ethnically and the idea of the political is symbolized by the secular. Hence, those who do not hail from European stock and are not committed to European ideas are in a lesser position. But it is Europeanness, a claim Derrida repeatedly makes, that forms the foundation of citizenship and belonging.

What French Republicans and the late pope Benedict at the time of the various controversies centered on Muslims in Europe all passionately share is a belief that Islam as a discursive political tradition must be prevented from any substantive participation in the existential and political order of Europe. This means not only by resisting the changing demographic complexion of Europe, but also by precluding Muslims from contributing to diversifying the epistemological and ontological dimensions of European life. Conversion to the secular and secularity is a prerequisite in the minds of many European leaders. In other words, the aim is to retain Europe, at any cost, as a secularized Christian space so that it does not become a multireligious and shared political and cultural space. Legal combat over the headcover and veil for Muslim women in France, the prohibition of the building of mosque minarets in Switzerland, and the struggles over multicultural education in the UK are all sublimations of the Battle of Lepanto of 1517, when the fleet of the Holy League defeated the Ottoman fleet and thus prevented the Ottomans from entering Italy. The acceptance of the headscarf, the veil, and minarets in the public space would have resulted in the acceptance of a difference, a Muslim difference, that would contaminate the ontology of the European space and complicate notions of Europeanness, all intolerable prospects to a good number of European intellectuals.

Conclusion

Dallmayr has engaged both Derrida and Schmitt in his scholarly writings and provided some of the most perceptive insights in countering Schmitt's notions of sovereignty and the friend–enemy distinction. His insights also carry implications for some of Derrida's political readings. For Schmitt "the primacy of sovereign power over all forms of public deliberation or civic cohesion," explains Dallmayr, is part of the twentieth century's neo-Hobbesianism.[82] Derrida too transposes the idea of sovereignty on the state and insists on its need, as both Wendy Brown and I show. For Derrida says: "And yet … it would be

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imprudent and hasty, in truth hardly reasonable, to oppose unconditionally, that is, head-on, a sovereignty that is itself unconditional and indivisible. One cannot combat, head-on, all sovereignty, sovereignty in general without threatening at the same time, beyond the nation-state figure of sovereignty, the classical principles of freedom and self-determination."[83] Here are dim echoes of Schmitt's overblown claim on sovereignty that beguiled so many twentieth-century and contemporary intellectuals: "Sovereign is he who decides on the exception."[84]

As Brown points out, Derrida wrests the unconditional from sovereignty, then channels the conditional to freedom, only to reinvent sovereignty as conditioned, divisible, and shared.[85] Unlike other European post-Marxists who think of sovereignty as outmoded and believe that it should be substituted with global justice, Derrida holds on to sovereignty. Brown reads Derrida as detaching freedom from the autonomous subject and detaching reason and faith from absolutism, but this is not the story Derrida tells in his conversation with Chérif with respect to the theological or theocratic subject. A certain amount of sovereignty underwrites his idea of individual freedom that lies at the heart of democracy, and hence Derrida's continuous rhetorical refrain that the religious subject must not be subordinate to the desires of the faith community, theological community, and those in authority. Yet, he does not edify us as to the limits of secular authority.

If Schmitt's friend–enemy distinction was not just a rhetorical formula but a criterion for war and peace, then, as Dallmayr puts it, "the enemy is someone who can be killed."[86] Political leaders and public intellectuals alike have deployed Schmitt for their own ends, as Dallmayr explains, and deepened the desire to "spread unlimited 'terror wars,' by the upsurge of a Manichean division of the world into friends and enemies, into supporters of Western-style 'freedom' and devotees of an infernal 'axis of evil.'"[87]

Schmitt-inspired barriers divide friend from enemy and deem impermissible and impossible any kind of epistemic *métissage* (mixing), which might otherwise foster modes of living that include rich experiences from various communities. If philosophy is *not going to be a critical discipline*, then these mental and existential barriers will result in the exclusion of the unfamiliar or the alien. Philosophy will *contribute* to the fears and phobias fueled by death and terrorism, one among which Dallmayr lists as Islamophobia.[88] Fear of Islamic strangers becomes manifest in battles over veils, burqas, or minarets. Learned discourses of "the political" inform both left-wing and right-wing European governments' efforts to propose legislation to regulate immigration, especially Muslim immigration, to Europe. The "zombie nationalism" that Jason Springs (chapter 2 herein) identifies in the United States finds its counterpart on display in Europe as "zombie secularism."

Framing the theocratic as the antithesis of the political, Derrida exceeds Schmitt in proclaiming that the "other," the Muslim other, has no concept of the political or, at best, politics manqué. Derrida deprived himself of intimate knowledge of Islamic juridical and political systems, and he regrettably lumped all Islamdom in a mystified European philosophy that devalues the unconditional and the theocratic. European anxiety to preserve the Euro-Christian or the Greco-Christian secular is often sustained against the "other," which once was and remains the Jew, but now that list also includes Muslims, migrants, Romani peoples, and Black Africans. When Derrida, as a leading philosopher of deconstruction who had once scandalized the profession of philosophy with his subversive ideas, cannot unshackle himself from some of the more prejudicial elements of the European imaginary and instead lauds it as something profound and unique, the intellectual future of political philosophy itself looks bleak.

Deconstruction might have been subversive, but it did not sufficiently decontaminate or decolonize itself from the bacilli of European supremacy that generations of European thinkers have entrenched and universalized as knowledge. The hope itself lies in decolonizing and critically evaluating as well as provincializing the universalized western intellectual tradition to save it from its own demons. Even the most sophisticated forms of philosophical thinking continue to disguise ethnonationalism as the logic of "the political." "For French Muslims," the noted Marxist writer Tariq Ali wrote while observing developments in twenty-first-century France, "there is a stench of Vichy in the air, with pollution levels highest in cities and regions dominated by the far right. Few are searching for antidotes to this poison, but some exist."[89] Vichy was the collaboration of a section of France with Nazism between 1940 and 1944 under Marshal Philippe Pétain before the Allied

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liberation of France. One had hoped that deconstruction and Marxist thinking could have been part of this antidote and part of the emancipatory narrative, but alas. Instead, French secularism, *laïcité*, has become weaponized by a multitude of philosophies from positivism to Marxism, to deconstruction, and to even more seemingly avant-garde philosophies today.

NOTES

I would like to acknowledge the generous and detailed feedback from Atalia Omer, Josh Lupo, Sam Kigar, and Ali A. Mian in preparing this chapter. Any errors are mine alone.

1.Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 3.

2.Ibid.

3.Ibid., 4.

4.Ibid., 3.

5.See Mahmood Mamdani, *Neither Settler nor Native: The Making and Unmaking of Permanent Minorities* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2020), 150. I have borrowed the idea of timeless natives from Mamdani and applied it to White nationalism. The colonizing logic of timeless natives was deployed to subdue Indigenous people in Africa and North America.

6.Gil Anidjar, *The Jew, the Arab: A History of the Enemy* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003).

7.David Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 62.

8.Richard Beardsworth, *Derrida & the Political* (London: Routledge, 1996), xiii.

9.Ibid.; see also Jonathan Rée, “Metaphor and Metaphysics: The End of Philosophy and Derrida,” *Radical Philosophy*, no. 38 (1984): 28–33.

10.Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Wills (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 70.

11.Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, ed. Werner Hamacher and David E. Wellberry, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 3.

12.Ibid., 5.

13.Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–1979*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2010), 18.

14.Ibid., 19.

15.Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 5.

16.Fred R. Dallmayr, “Farewell to Metaphysics: Nietzsche,” in *Critical Encounters: Between Philosophy and Politics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987), 13–38, at 18.

17.Ibid., 14.

18.Jacques Derrida, Mustapha Chérif, and Giovanna Borradori, *Islam and the West: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida*, trans. Teresa Lavender Fagan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 4.

19.Ibid.

20.Ibid.

21.Ibid., 3.

22.Ibid., 10.

23.Ibid., 8. Chérif here grapples with the question of unreason in faith traditions and the range of challenges faith traditions encounter in the modern age. In his words: “We must try to understand the ineffable, to understand why and how reason, on the one hand, and faith, on the other, experience such difficulties in describing metamorphoses, in facing them, in accepting them. It is true that faith, as an intuition, sensation, conviction, lives and grasps the signs, risks, movements of the world in an easy, simple and natural way; from that, when it gives itself the Open for a horizon, it enables the human being to maintain a stand, a dignity, an ethics, even if nothing guarantees happiness” (ibid.). The insightful dilemmas and aporias he posed were not sustained in the conversation with Derrida.

24.Ibid., 39.

25.Ibid.

26.Ibid., 5, 13.

27.Houria Bouteldja, *Whites, Jews, and Us: Toward a Politics of Revolutionary Love*, trans. Rachel Valinsky (South Pasadena, CA: Semiotext(e), 2017).

28.Derrida, Chérif, and Borradori, *Islam & the West*, 30.

29.Ibid., 42.

30.Ibid.

31.Ibid., 43.

32.Ibid.

33.Ibid., 45.

34.Ibid., 49 (italics in original).

35.Ibid., 48 (italics in original).

36.Ibid., 49.

37.Ibid., 50.

38.Ibid., 50–51.

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39.Ibid., 51.
40.Ibid.
41.Ibid.
42.Ibid., 51–52.
43.Ibid., 52.
44.Ibid., 53.
45.Wendy Brown, "Sovereign Hesitations," in *Derrida and the Time of the Political*, ed. Suzanne Guerlac and Pheng Cheah (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 114–32, at 116.
46.Derrida, Chérif, and Borradori, *Islam & the West*, 53–54. Italics in original.
47.Madan Sarup, *An Introductory Guide to Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), 34–35.
48.Jacques Derrida, "Psyche: Inventions of the Other," in *Reading De Man Reading*, ed. Lindsay Waters and Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 25–65, at 36: "The most rigorous deconstruction has never claimed to be … nor above all to be *possible*. And I would say that deconstruction loses nothing from admitting that it is impossible; also, that those who would rush to delight in that admission lose nothing from having to wait. For a deconstructive possibility would rather be a danger, the danger of becoming an available set of rule-governed procedures, methods, accessible approaches. The interest of deconstruction, of such force and desire as it may have, is a certain experience of the impossible … the experience of the other as the invention of the impossible, in other words, as the only possible invention" (emphasis original).
49.Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Translator's Preface," in Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), ix–lxxxvii, at xxi.
50.Ibid. "The formal essence of the signified is *presence*, and the privilege of its proximity to the logos as *phonè* is the privilege of presence" (Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 18) (emphasis original).
51.Simon Glendinning, *Derrida: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 76.
52.Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, trans. Tom Conley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 345.
53.Caputo among others sees a theological without the theocratic; see John D. Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997).
54.For the metaphysics of deconstruction, see Rée, "Metaphor and Metaphysics."
55.Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 7.
56.Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bas (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 70.
57.See Atalia Omer, "Decolonizing Religion and the Practice of Peace: Two Case Studies from the Postcolonial World," *Critical Research on Religion* 8, no. 3 (2020): 273–96; Santiago Slabodsky, "Not Every Radical Philosophy Is Decolonial," Contending Modernities, June 4, 2020, https://contendingmodernities.nd.edu/decoloniality/not-every-radical-philosophy-is-decolonial/.
58.See Michael Naas, "Derrida's *Laïcité*," *New Centennial Review* 7, no. 2 (2007): 21–42, at 38. Naas argues that Derrida has aligned himself with a notion of Europe that is both a space and a universalizing moment beyond space.
59.Derrida, Chérif, and Borradori, *Islam & the West*, 75.
60.Ibid., 75–76.
61.Ibid., 74.
62.Jacques Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, trans. George Collins (London: Verso, 1997), 83.
63.Ibid.
64.Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, exp. ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 29.
65.Ibid., 28 and 29.
66.Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, 89. Parentheses surrounding quotations here and below are in the original.
67.Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, 103.
68.Ebrahim Moosa, "Post 9/11: America Agonizes over Islam," in *Cambridge History of Religions in America*, Vol. 3, *1945 to the Present*, ed. Stephen J. Stein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 553–74.
69.I am not the only one to have observed Derrida's shortcomings in his analysis of Islam and Muslim culture; see Ahmad Achrati, "Deconstruction, Ethics and Islam," *Arabica* 53, no. 4 (October 2006): 472–510, at 504. Achrati writes: "For someone whose philosophy is about the rejection of the ethico-politics of ethnocentrism, Derrida's comments on the Arabo-Islamic hospitality surely come across as a postmodern variation on the very ethnocentrism which deconstruction is supposed to displace. In his treatment of the Arabo-Islamic hospitality, Derrida remains as Eurocentric as can be, preoccupied with the civic, the urban, the cosmopolitan and the national" (ibid.). He adds in conclusion: "As to Derrida's perspective on Islam and the Arabo-Islamic culture, one can only regret that deconstruction has shown itself to be, in Heidegger's words, 'insufficiently original'" (507).
70.Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, 89 (italics in original).
71.Jacques Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason* (Stanford, CA.: Stanford University Press, 2005).
72.Ibid., 31.
73.Nader Hashemi, "The Secular Bias and the Study of Religious Politics: On Michael Walzer and Political Islam (with Insights from John Esposito)," in *Overcoming Orientalism: Essays in Honor of John L. Esposito*, ed. Tamara Sonn (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 80.
74.Anne Norton, *On the Muslim Question*, coursebook ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), 121.
75.Derrida, *Rogues*, 31.
76.Ibid., 32.

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77.Norton, *On the Muslim Question*.

78.Derrida, *Rogues*, 31.

79.Norton, *On the Muslim Question*, 121.

80.Edward W. Said, “The Problem of Textuality: Two Exemplary Positions,” *Critical Inquiry* 4, no. 4 (1978): 673–714, at 692.

81.Colin Davis, “Hauntology, Spectres and Phantoms,” *French Studies* 59, no. 3 (2005): 373–79, at 378–79. See Alex Thomson, “Derrida’s *Rogues*: Islam and the Futures of Deconstruction,” in *Derrida: Negotiating the Legacy*, ed. Madeleine Fagan et al. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 66–79, where the challenge of fitting Islam into existing models of the politico-theological is discussed.

82.Fred R. Dallmayr, *Being in the World: Dialogue and Cosmopolis* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2013), 88.

83.Derrida, *Rogues*, 158.

84.Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 5.

85.Brown, “Sovereign Hesitations,” 115.

86.Dallmayr, *Being in the World*, 89.

87.Ibid.

88.Ibid., 90.

89.Tariq Ali, “Winged Words,” review of *Muhammad* by Maxime Rodinson, *London Review of Books* 43, no. 12 (2021): 14.

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